A Cyber(space) of Their Own: Female Iberian and Latin American Artists and Writers of the Digital. A Transatlantic Analysis from Identity (De)Construction, Political Dissidence and Activism, to the Posthuman

by

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ABSTRACT

As a result of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, works can be distributed and viewed at a global scale with the simple click of the mouse. One can even visit entire museums and virtually walk through their collections without having to leave one's own seat. Furthermore, new software, programs, and digital tools facilitate and make possible the ability to experiment and create one's art in ways that were previously unimaginable or even unheard of. This is also true with the dissemination of one's art and the visibility of contemporary artists who create works pertaining to the digital realm. However, the availability, usage, and training associated with such technologies do not come without its own implications and drawbacks. Unfortunately, there exists a great disparity not only with access and availability of the Internet at a global level, but also a digital divide, which indicates that the technologies and sciences are "gendered"—for instance, the male majority in STEM professions and fields of study. When considering the Humanities, specifically the genre of contemporary art and literature, women's marginalization is witnessed there too, as distinguished canonical works belong to predominantly Caucasian, Anglo-Saxon men. In the digital age then, Iberian and Latin American women writers and artists face the challenge of visibility and recognition in two territories—technology and contemporary artistic creation—dominated by men. This study gathers contemporary female artists of digital works originating from North America, the Caribbean, South America, and Spain who utilize a wide variety of tools to conduct and create their artwork. The artists and authors analyzed in this project include: Teresa Serrano (México, D.F. 1936-), Adriana Calatayud (México, D.F. 1967-), Ana Mendieta (Havana, 1948-1985), Maritza Molina (Havana), Yasmín S.

Portales Machado (Havana, 1980-), María María Acha-Kutscher (Lima, 1968-), Praba Pilar (Colombia), María Cañas (Seville, 1972-), and Pilar Albarracín (Arcena, Huelva 1968-), with the objective of investigating the manner in which digital tools are being used by these women artists and writers for the purpose visibility, identity (de)construction, as spaces of resistance, and to explore how those messages are transmitted and transformed through digital mediums.

DEDICATION

I dedicated my dissertation work to my family, with deep and eternal gratitude to my parents Priscilla and John for being my biggest supporters during my undergraduate career and subsequent years in graduate school. I could not have accomplished what I have, nor had so many wonderful experiences without either of you. I love you both very much. To my brothers John and Chris, thank you for always being there. To my Noriega family, a special thanks for your constant positivity, encouragement, and unwavering support.

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INTRODUCTION

Women writers and artist of digital works can be considered doubly marginalized, as women are excluded from the "literary canon" based on their gender, and those who create digital works often receive the brunt of negative empirical judgment regarding the value of such productions—digital literature and/or art is often marginalized and reduced to the label of "pop-culture" production rather than "high" cultural production. In a collection of interviews published in Spain in 2014 by Roberto Valencia entitled *Todos somos autores y público*, several of the most well-known and prestigious Spanish theorists and writers[1] gathered together to dialogue with one another with respect to the realm of contemporary creation in Spain. What is disconcerting is that not one woman was included in that conversation. However, a woman, more specifically theorist Isabelle Touton, does write the introduction to the collection. Ironically, Touton dedicates a good portion of her introduction to address the fact that women's artistic creation is cast aside and lingers in the periphery of exalted male works:

> La proporción de mujeres presentes en los manuales escolares de historia o literatura, entre los directores del cine contemporáneo (Flotats 2012), entre los artistas expuestos en museos, o entre los escritores simbólicamente consagrados o premiados—de 32 Premios Nacionales de

[1] These include: Javier Calvo, Juan Cárdenas, Jordi Carrión, Jordi Costa, Miguel Espigado, Agustín Fernández Mallo, Eloy Fernández Porta, Manuel Vilas, among many others.

> Narrativa, dos fueron dados a mujeres y un solo premio Nacional de Ensayo sobre 33 (Cabré 2011)—, oscila entre un 0% y un 20%.[2] (19)

Isabelle Touton goes on to add that within the entire Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, only 4% of the work exhibited there belong to women. Add to that, the fact that of the listed 25 best Spanish novels from the past 25 years according to critics from the *El Mundo* newspaper, only one book on that list was written by a woman.[3] After presenting these troublesome statistics, Touton puts the following poignant question in bold, "¿Esto es el panorama real de la literatura del siglo XX? ¿Sin voces femeninas?" [Is this the real panorama of twentieth century literature? Without feminine voices?] (19). If women are excluded as such from the print canon, they most certainly are discounted from the "canon" of electronic literature and art.

Fig. 1 *Estamos aquí* Artistic Action by Artist Yolanda Domínguez on Feb. 21, 2018

[2] (I must note here that every translation provided in this prospectus is mine unless otherwise noted). The proportion of women present in literature and history textbooks, amongst the directors of contemporary cinema, amongst the artists exhibited in museums, or amongst the symbolically acclaimed or awarded writers—of the 32 National Narrative Awards, two were given to women and only one [woman] a National Essay prize out of 33—, oscillates between 0% and 20%.

[3] That woman was Almudena Grandes, her novel, *El corazón helado* (2014) was ranked number 20 of 25 (Touton 19).

In an artistic demonstration on February 21st 2018, visual artist Yolanda Domínguez protested these such troubling statistics. During the annual ARCO (la Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo) art fair in Madrid, it was glaringly obvious that the works of male contemporary artists greatly outnumbered those produced by female artists. Of all the works exhibited at the fair in 2018, only 5% were signed to Spanish female artists, and the year prior only 25% total pertained to women. As a sign of protest, Yolanda Domínguez encouraged her female colleagues from various art collectives such as MAV, La Caja de Pandora, Blanco, Negro y Magenta, Empoderarte, and Clásicas y Modernas to wear a geolocation symbols similar to what one sees on *Google* maps on their heads ("We Are Here") (fig. 1). The act was titled *Estamos aquí* or "We Are Here", and the image projected by the sea of women walking amidst patrons of the fair demonstrated the following sentiment: "although our work may not be displayed on the walls of this exhibition, we are here. We do exist. Our work is valid and deserving of recognition just as the work of our male colleagues is". According to Domínguez's portfolio of the demonstration, "The action reached a great impact in Spanish media, featuring in the main TV channels and newspapers, such as *TVE1*, *La Sexta*, *El País*, *ABC*, *El Español* y *El Huffington Post*" ("We Are Here"). While many media outlets picked up on and disseminated ARCO artistic act, the artist provides further information regarding gender bias and artists' exhibition of their works, which is still prevalent today:

- 6 out of 10 Fine Arts students are women but 7 out of 10 art awards are given to men.
- 80% of directors in Spanish museums are men.

- According to the Luxembourg University, female art sells 47% cheaper than male.
- The rate of women's solo shows at MoMA, Whitney, Guggenheim, MOCA and LACMA is under 20%.
- The feminist activism collective Guerrilla Girls exposed that "less than 5% of the artists in the modern art sections of the Met Museuum of New York are women, but 85% of the nudes are female."
- According to UNESCO, only 34% of the Culture ministers and 31% of the Programming. ("We Are Here")

Clearly, much more work needs to be done to incorporate women within the art world, not only at the level of being an artist and having their works presented in exhibitions and museums at an equal rate as those of their male counterparts, but also in their representation in roles within cultural institutions at an administrative level.

Further complicating the issue of acceptance in the art and literary world, is the notion of visibility of their work and access to digital tools and hardware due to what is called the global "digital divide". The term is defined by author Rowen Cullen as:

> [T]he gap that exists in most countries between those with ready access to the tools of information and communication technologies and the knowledge that they provide access to, and those without such access or skills. This gap may be because of socio-economic, geographical, educational, attitudinal, or generational factors, or it may be through physical disabilities. (2)

Research presented by organizations such as the ITU, the "State of Connectivity" research (conducted by Facebook), and The Pew Research Center concerned with statistics regarding Internet access and affordability, all concur that less than half of the world has Internet and there continues to be a digital divide not only amidst developing and developed nations, but also between usage and access of men and women (Poushter 1). According to the ITU's estimates, the figures "suggest that women are 11% less likely than men to use the Internet on a global basis" ("State of Connectivity" 15).

In regards to the machine itself, it too has been gendered since its inception. As theorist Grant D. Taylor highlights in his book, *When the Machine Made Art: The Troubled History of Computer Art* (2014), within the history of the computer and its use there has been a constant push and pull of gender hierarchy. He claims that it is no mystery that "the gender politics of twentieth-century science and technology, especially in engineering […] is traditionally associated with men and masculinist ideology". Taylor goes onto explain in detail the history of how the fields of engineering, computer science, and technology are patriarchal territories:

> [C]omputer culture, which emerged from engineering and militaristic domains, privileged masculinity. Computer programming, which interestingly has been the domain of women before and during the war, became increasingly male-oriented in the 1950s as its prestige as a challenging and intellectual endeavor grew. Women had been seminal in the development of the electronic computer. Even prior to World War II, women were responsible for manually calculating complex firing tables required for ballistic weaponry-they were in effect "human computers."

> […] Since the 1940s, programming had been largely a female occupation […] The male engineer, conversely, was the 'planner' whose role was deemed more analytical. In the professional hierarchy, the male was associated with technical mastery and intellectual analysis, while the female role of programmer was associated with rudimentary manual labor, even if the business of programming was a highly demanding ability, requiring various creative and analytical skills. In the late 1960s, however, programing would become stereotypically a masculine endeavor. ("Virtual Resistance")

As theorist Judy Wajcman aptly summarizes, "Women's profound alienation from technology is accounted for in terms of the historical and cultural construction of technology as masculine" (*Feminism* 22). Unfortunately, these same attitudes towards women and their role in technology are still replicated to this day. Only in the past few decades have important contributors to the fields of science, technology, and computing been included and written into the history books.[4] As Claire L. Evans explains in her book *Broad Band: The Untold Story of the Women Who Made the Internet* (2018):

[4] Figures such as: Ada Lovelace (considered the very first computer programmer), Grace Hopper (who worked on the Mark I the precursor of modern computers was also the designer of a compiler tool, and coined the term "bug" when things went technically awry with the machines she was working on), the ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) six (which included: Betty Jean Jennings, Betty Snyder, Kay McNulty, Ruth Lichterman, Marlyn Wescoff, and Grace Hopper (Evans 42). The six programmed the very first all-electronic programmable computer which did not yet have a programming language. The women were only provided diagrams of the structure with which they used as a starting point to learn the machine from the inside out. The machine itself had been a secret project during WWII that helped calculate ballistics trajectories in a matter of seconds. However, the women were never recognized during a famous press release in 1946, which only recognized men on the project), as well as Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson and Katherine Jonson who were African American women that were instrumental in assuring that astronaut John Glenn's spacecraft successfully arrived to the moon, were pioneers in the early history of what would eventually become the commercial computers

> Women turn up at the beginning of every important wave in technology. We're not ancillary; we're central, often hiding in plain sight […] Before a new field developed its authorities, and long before there was money to be made, women experimented with new technologies and pushed them beyond their design. Again and again, women did the jobs nobody thought were important, until they were. Even computer programming was initially passed off onto the girls hired to patch cables and nothing more until the cables became patterns, and the patterns became language, and suddenly programming was something worth mastering. (4)

Given such dire statistics and historical predisposition of technology and the computer being regarded as a predominantly masculine field, women's access and use of the Internet, and the lack of the presence of female artists in contemporary art museums, we must turn to the present situation of artists of digital works and where they can be found, and furthermore how their work can be accessed by the public. Those artists or authors of digital works that have achieved recognition within this field have seemingly only been able to obtain visibility primarily by means of self-promotion on social media and blogs, and several can be found within a marginal amount of websites that dedicate themselves to collecting (in the form of databases) experimental art and digital writings generated by women such as: *Mujer nodo*, *el MMAVE* (*Museo de mujeres de artes visuales en España*), *M-arte y cultura visual*, *MMM* (*Mujeres mirando mujeres*), *Arte*

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we see today. However, their visibility and recognition within the field of computing had been pushed not only to the margins of engineering and computing development, but history itself for reasons of gender and in some cases (as those of Dorothy Vaughn, Mary Jackson and Katherine Jonson) racial discrimination (Evans 42 & 237; Britannica; "Hidden Figures").

contra la violencia de género, *AWA* (*Advancing Women Artists Foundation*), and *FemLink-Art: The International Video-Artists Collective.*[5] These very sites have been vital in the selection process of which artists will be analyzed in this study, because it has been very difficult to find (specifically) *updated* or *current* collections representing female contemporary artists and writers creating digital works. This research will be important and innovative as currently I have been unable to find any other study that analyzes digital works from a transatlantic perspective—in other words, includes artists and writers of both Iberian and Latin American origin—and who utilize a large spectrum of tools to facilitate in the creation of their work, from video, to digitally manipulated photography via computer software, to social media platforms.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to analyze a wide variety of Iberian and Latin American female artists of digital works; in particular, works that are created with the aid of digital tools such as software and video recordings, not solely works produced on the Internet. In conducting this research, I will investigate what is being created (whether it be videoart, net.art, text-based, pieces that devote themselves to experimentation with sound, digital still image(s), or any combination of all of these), and how it is being created, such as what tools, platforms, or software is used. In regards to the content, I consider the themes presented in select works by each artist and examine how they represent gender, gender issues, the body, and identity construction[6] in order to answer

[5] Interestingly, the majority of these websites (databases) are commissioned by organizations from Spain. At the time this prospectus was not able to find a Latin American-based site dedicated to solely Latin American female artists of digital works.

[6] I am also considering (apart from gender construction) identity in terms of nation and in some cases race in a globalized context.

the following: To what extent does embodiment and/or disembodiment play a role in the artist/author's work? What does that "look like" or how does it manifest when using technology? In the context of a globalized world, I demonstrate how gender and identity are affected by technology.

Methods and Procedure

The first step in the procedure of my research was to do an environmental scan of what artists were "out there" on the Internet and investigate the databases or webpages in which they were located. I then went to the artist's personal website (if it was provided) and read or viewed samples of their artwork. From there, I chose the artists and writers whose work interested me, sorting them geographically first by country, then region. I then analyzed the content by means of visual and textual analysis and then researched the process of its creation (i.e., tools). I determined the themes in the selected works, provided relevant background on political, social, and or cultural context in which that work was created and how these elements are being represented in the work. I then considered to what extent technology is able to or does alter the representation of the piece's theme (such as the human body, identity construction, and/or gender violence).

My research for this dissertation was comprised of a variety of methods including: observation, interviews with artists when possible, and, visual and textual analysis of the works of the selected artists. It required studying not only the aspect (in some cases) of being and working "online," but also of digital tools being utilized and the art piece itself in question. That which is "offline"[7] was also considered. I am referring to the "offline"

[7] I am citing theorist Radhika Gajjala's usage of the term "offline", which she uses to distinguish women's negotiation of identities online vs offline in her book *Cyberfeminism 2.0* (1-2).

environment in that I took into consideration of the political, social, and historical context reflected in each work that is analyzed.

Limitations

Unfortunately, I have already discovered several limitations or obstacles while putting together my research. In the repositories or databases that I have found for Spanish-speaking digital artists, links provided to artists' personal sites or blogs may be either broken or abandoned (in the sense that the artist has not updated her site or made posts). This can be frustrating when trying to find a description about the piece, or see the actual video or still image with which one is working.

In other cases, I have found that there is a still-image of some pieces I wanted to investigate, but the actual video or performance is not available. I can only assume that this was by choice of the artist or his or her manager and the art is protected under copyright law. This was actually the case with artist Pilar Albarracín's video performance *Musical Dancing Spanish Dolls* (2001). The video is not available for viewing on her website nor on open-access video sites such as *Youtube.* I was only able to see the video as it was projected in an Interview conducted by the Spanish cultural program *Metropolis* on RTV.es. If this is the case with other artists, I may be limited to using a specific work (different than what I initially had in mind) for analysis in my research.

I am aware that there are many Spanish and Latin American female digital artists on the Internet, and it's somewhat of a paradox because they can be so hard to find. I have chosen the artists that will be analyzed in this dissertation because they were "easier" to find (within databases or appeared right away on the Google search engine) and consequently the most visible. The fact of the matter is that they must be "found" and

then deemed worthy or talented enough to be included in these pre-existing databases by those who manage the site. Of course all databases, archives, and even written anthologies that have ever been curated and created are completely subjective and formulated based on the criteria and judgment of another.

Dissertation Chapters

I have divided my chapters according to the geographic origin of the artist(s) and writer(s) and finding a theme that is present in each of their artworks or writings. In this way, I present the cultural, social, and political environments in which each artist created her piece(s). I focus on each individual artist/author and select several examples of their work, and by proceeding one-by-one (in terms of the individual case of each artist) discuss the content of their work, conduct my analysis and discuss the tools that were used to make the work as well as the prior knowledge/education of the artist that contributed to their ability to use those tools.

This dissertation begins with the geographic region of North America in which the works of the Mexican artists Teresa Serrano (México, D.F. 1936-) and Adriana Calatayud (México, D.F. 1967-) are analyzed. **Teresa Serrano** has composed and created a wide range of art including: painting, sculpture, drawings, installations, and audiovisual art. Many of her works such as the videos *Ritual* (2000), *The Other Room* (2001), and *La piñata* (2003) depict themes of domestic violence (as is the case of the first two videos listed) and femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. However, the works analyzed in this chapter include *Barro de belleza* (1998) and *Efecto Camaleón* (2004) where the artist addresses female identity construction in the era of globalization in her video performances (Aizpuru 106). Within the work of **Adriana Calatayud**, one sees an

entirely different notion of identity construction and representation, as her works "Altas: estrategias alegóricas de un nuevo anatomista" (2005-2010),[8] depict the female form as a cyborg by means of the intervention of medical technologies. This aforementioned collection consists not of video, but still images (in many cases photographs) manipulated by computer software. The works by both artists investigate the transformation of the self either by medical means (specifically plastic surgery) or the use of fashion and beauty products.

Chapter three assesses the notion of identity, preservation of cultural heritage, and communication and artistic production from the diaspora within the filmed performances by Ana Mendieta (Havana, 1948-1985), the photography of Maritza Molina (Havana) and the content of the entries within the personal blog and social media platform Twitter composed by Yasmín S. Portales Machado (Havana, 1980-). **Ana Mendieta** was a Cuban artist interested in performance art, the creation of land art, film, and video. During her artistic career she did not shy away from working with a variety of mediums (chicken blood, plants, and so forth), and was a self-proclaimed feminist. The work *Butterfly* (1975) is a performance that was only recently restored by the Ana Mendieta Estate which archives and preserves her artwork, and is considered an intermedial performance provided the innovative manner in which the artist filmed and later manipulated the

[8] It must be noted that several different dates for this collection are provided on Calatayud's website. On the main page of her website, when selecting from the drop-down menu "Obras/Works", the collection "Atlas" is indicated as including works from 2005-2010. However, once one clicks on the link to this collection, the latest date provided for the subdivision of works in their respective collections ("Constructo", "El cuerpo perfecto", "De-Figuraciones") is 2009. Within other location within the website, in particular Calatayud's own reflections on her work, the collection is said to span from 2005-2008. For the purpose of introducing the broader collection "Atlas" in this analysis, I will use the dates 2005-2010 as it encompasses all and any "later works" Calatayud may have included within the "Atlas" collection.

video. The piece demonstrates Ana Mendieta's hybrid identity, given her biographical circumstances, where she was forced to abandon her Cuban homeland as an adolescent and assimilate to American culture. **Maritza Molina,** of Cuban origin and creating art from the diaspora in Miami Florida, creates "vignettes" of her performances which are captured by photography. Her piece *Memory Line* (2005) explores the possibility of being able to capture and preserve memories on film, in particular as a means to maintain one's connection to cultural heritage. **Yasmín S. Portales Machado** is a Cuban blogger, a Twitter user, as well as an activist and journalist. In her own personal blog, and in her bio she writes: "Vivir en Cuba y ser Queer ha sido elección. Mi vida es un fino equilibrio entre el ejercicio de la maternidad, el feminismo y el marxismo crítico".[9] Her work is particularly interesting, as she is an Afro-Cuban woman who openly defines herself as queer, as well as a feminist. She frequently updates the Proyecto Arcoíris (Project Rainbow) website, which was the first independent Cuban site for LGBTQ bloggers: "Arco Iris was born from the underground of Cuban social media and is a space for bloggers whose opinions don't adhere to the official political agenda." The organization is at times at odds with CENEX (Cuban National Center for Sex Education) which also promotes LBGTQ rights, but Arco Iris disagrees with some of CENEX's ideologies as it: "does not celebrate international Gay Pride Day because it considers the event a capitalist and imperialistic celebration" (Drake). Unlike CENEX, bloggers of Arco Iris find that it is extremely important to align with the international LBGTQ community. Within articles and posts written by Portales from the island as well as the United States where she has

[9] "Living in Cuba and being queer has been a choice. My life is a fine balance between the exercise of being a mother, a feminist and a critical Marxist".

moved to pursue a Masters degree,[10] she describes the negotiation of a queer and feminist identity as well as the importance of social media platforms maintaining a sense of community amidst LGBTQ Cubans and the present situation of these individuals on the island. Included in this chapter is a corpus analysis of the blogger's tweets, which is undertaken in order to investigate and compare the thematic content in her blog vs. Twitter account.

Chapter four explores a transatlantic analysis of the works denoting activism and/or the deconstruction of local cultural imaginaries of the South American artists María María Acha-Kutscher (Lima, 1968-) and Praba Pilar (Colombia), and the Spanish artists María Cañas (Seville, 1972-) and Pilar Albarracín (Arcena, Huelva 1968-). **María María Acha-Kutscher** is a Peruvian feminist visual artist. Her main focus or subject is women and their "struggles for emancipation, and equality, and the cultural construction of femininity" ("Bio: María María Acha-Kutscher"). Her continuously growing collection *Indignadas* (2012-present), consists of collecting photos of women in the act of protest for social and feminist movements from around the world including: 15M (Spain), Occupy Wall Street (NYC), […] Femen, Pussy Riot, SlutWalk, [and] Alfombra Roja (Red Carpet, Peru)" and most recently Ni Una Menos, and changing those photos into digitally engineered drawings that are later put onto tarps and hung in public spaces ("Women Working for Women/ Indignadas"). For her collection *Women Working for Women*/*Made in Latin America* (2014-2015), Acha-Kutscher made digital portraits of Latin American women who'd made great strides in "traditionally male –dominated

[10] As of the end of 2018, Portales has obtained her Masters degree and moved to Northwestern University where she is currently pursuing her doctorate degree.

career fields" and placed those photos again in public spaces such as the subway in Mexico City ("Women Working for Women/Made in Latin America"). Her work is exemplary of what some theorists indicate is a new genre of art known as *artivism*, which incites the viewer of the art piece to take action and support the cause depicted in the work. The main focus of **Praba Pilar**'s art is live performance. However, she also produced videos and digital art during the trajectory of her artistic career. Presently Pilar admits that the way in which she investigates and formulates her works is deeply rooted in cyberfeminism. Her project *Cyber.labia* (2005), which is a book in pdf format, is emblematic of her most recent works that address the subject of the relationship between women and technology from a feminist position. This project consists of interviews between the artist and theorists and intellectuals such as Anne Balsamo, Sheila Davis, Paulina Borsook y Art McGee (Taylor 52).

La archivera de Sevilla,[11] **María Cañas**, was born in Seville in 1972, and currently still resides and works in her hometown. She is an experimental artist of digital media whose work consists of found footage, photo collage, short film, and an online project on her personal webpage *Animalariotv.com*. Similar to the great variety of genres of her art, she has also given herself a wider range of nicknames that exemplify the versatility of her artistic work: "Videoguerrillera, ciberyonki, hacker cultural, la doctora Frankenstein, la archivera de Sevilla, o una saqueadora de íconos,"[12] these not only represent the wide spectrum of material that she has produced, but also the fact that she invents new terms, or as in the majority of cases, forges together two that are pre-existing

[11] The archivist of Seville
[12] Videoguerrillera, cyber junkie, cultural hacker, doctor Frankenstein, the archivist of Seville, or a plunderer of icons.

to be able to express the significance of her art (Rondón). Two of her works in particular, *Holy Thriller* (2011) and *La cosa vuestra* (2018), address the constructions of gender and identity from the perspective of globalization, focusing on the imaginary of Spain in regards to its celebrations and religious rituals such as La Semana Santa (the local) and the San Fermines festival in Pamplona that is reconfigured with multimedia, specifically by means of pop culture, at a global level. Themes of violence, and in particular gender violence are explored in *La cosa vuestra*. **Pilar Albarracín,** like Cañas, is also from the region of Andalusia and has produced numerous installations, photographs, hand-made objects, and drawings. Her most well-known works are her video-performances in which she is the central figure. Within these works, Albarracín addresses the proposal of a re-reading of Andalusian folklore "cuyos tópicos han sido utilizado desde la época franquista como representativos de toda España"[13] ("Pilar Albarracín"). In this way, the artist questions and combats the pre-established identities of this nationalist imaginary in a humorous manner. Examples of such video-performances include *Tortilla a la española* (1999) and *Musical Dancing Spanish Dolls* (2001). However, she also addresses the matter of the repercussions of war as well as gender violence in her group performance at the Musée Picasso in Paris entitled *En la piel del otro* (2018).

I have chosen this corpus of artist because they represent the diverse ways in which digital tools can be used to create and represent a wide spectrum of themes from political dissidence and activism, identity (de)construction, gender violence, to the projection of queer identities. What Judy Wajcman wrote in her book *Feminism*

[13] whose clichés have been used since the period of the Franco dictatorship as a representative of the entirety of Spain.

Confronts Technology (1991) nearly thirty ago still rings true today: “technology is not simply the product of rational technical imperatives. Rather, political choices are embedded in the very design and selection of technology” (22). The political, social, and cultural context in which each artist in this study has generated their work is very different, yet politics of power and gender are deeply engrained in each and every work. For this reason, I have divided the artists/writers by region in order to further investigate these elements and their role in the production of their respective artwork. Dividing the subjects by geographical location adds clearer structure and organization to this analysis.

CHAPTER 2

DESIRE, DESIGN, AND IDENTITY: TECHNOLOGIES OF RE/DECONSTRUCTION IN "EL CUERPO PERFECTO" (2006) BY ADRIANA CALATAYUD AND *BARRO DE BELLEZA* (1998) AND *EFECTO CAMALEÓN* (2004) BY TERESA SERRANO

> *Hacer uso de la tecnología para significar una nueva construcción del cuerpo, de la identidad y del sujeto nos ofrece nuevas formas de existir, de desear y de morir. Nuestra relación con las nuevas tecnologías de la imagen nos obliga a reconstruir una nueva identidad. Queramos o no, somos monstruos híbridos en busca de una identidad.*
> *Adriana Calatayud*[14]

Given the new possibilities of bettering our bodies and quality of life by means of medical procedures implementing innovative tools, what is considered as a "natural" human body is altered and even problematized (Balsamo 1). We are living in a posthuman age, and therefore we are posthuman beings.[15] As Donna Haraway, theorist of technoscience, feminism, and animal-human relations indicated in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1984), we are a fusion of biological and technological elements and as such, we should reject previously established notions of dualisms or boundaries that exist in modern day Western culture such as man/woman, human/machine, and animal/human. In the place of such essentialist ideologies, Haraway's essay promotes the consideration of a more fluid notion of identity by means of the metaphor of the cyborg, "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (291). The artwork of the Mexican artists Teresa Serrano (Mexico

[14] To make use of technology to indicate a new construction of the body, of identity, and of the subject offers us new forms of existing, desiring, and dying. Our relationship with new technologies of the image obligates us to reconstruct a new identity. Whether we like it or not, we are hybrid monsters in search of identity (Cordero).

[15] The posthuman "is the latest borderline figure in a long line of monsters, mutants and hybrids throughout ancient mythology, literature, science fiction and the biological sciences" (Toffoletti 91).

City 1936) and Adriana Calatayud (Mexico City 1967) explores themes of the transformation of the body, in particular the female form as a cyborg, within the context of globalized consumer culture. Theorist Heike Steinhoff declares in her text *Transforming Bodies: Makeovers and Monstrosities in American Culture* (2015) that cosmetic surgery in particular is the epitome of consumerist culture and is a unique and multifaceted intersection of "medicine, art, and consumerism […] and expresses in a heightened form the increasing medicalization of society and the simultaneous commodification of medicine and the body in contemporary [American] culture" (46). Both Serrano and Calatayud demonstrate within their respective works the facilitation of medical technologies as well as the employment of cosmetics and clothing that are utilized to reach a desired or more appealing physique. Certainly, as this analysis will demonstrate, such corporeal ideals are inscribed upon the female body given the aesthetic paradigms imposed upon them by a patriarchal culture.

Adriana Calatayud is a Mexican artist who currently lives and works in Mexico City. She received her degree from the UNAM (Universidad Nacional de México) in Graphic Arts from the College of Visual Arts ("Bio"). The majority of Calatayud's work explores the concept of the construction and deconstruction of identities within an epoch saturated by new technologies. Through the utilization of images of the hybrid identity of the cyborg and of female subjects undergoing cosmetic surgery, Calatayud not only demonstrates this very complex relationship with technology but also, in Calatayud's own words, how "mecanismos que de-construyen y re-definen la percepción de la

materialidad de la mujer y el efecto de esto en su vida"[16] ("Reflexión" 5). It must be noted that Calatayud's collection of digital images in "El cuerpo perfecto" (The Perfect Body) created between 2005-2006 is further sub-divided into the following three categories or collections: "Estereotipos" (Stereotypes), "Simetría y proporciones" (Symmetry and Proportions), and "Cirugía" (Surgery). For the purposes of this analysis, works will be selected from "Simetría y proporciones" and "Cirugía" to discuss just one of the possible forms of the modern or "everyday" cyborg[17] where bodies are embedded with and even constructed by technology, although it may not be evident at first glance. The artist's collections of digital images within "El cuerpo perfecto", which this work will first analyze, demonstrate how the body, as theorist Anne Balsamo states, is both a *product* and a *process*:

> '[T]he body' is a social, cultural, and historical production: production […] means both product and process. As a *product*, it is the material embodiment of ethnic, racial, and gender identities, as well as the staged performance of personal identity, of beauty, of health […] As a *process*, it is a way of knowing and marking the world, as well as a way of knowing and marking 'self'. (Balsamo 3)

The depictions of this particular type of cyborg presented by Calatayud are not of a figure found in science fiction, nor are they part of some dystopian future, but rather, they reflect the ability to transform one's body utilizing the latest medical technology through

[16] Mechanisms that deconstruct and redefine the perception of the materiality of women and the affect of this on their lives.
[17] Images were not taken from the collection "Estereotipos" as its focus was on female hairstyles and haircuts and not on the use of technologies to transform one's identity.

the process of cosmetic surgery. As theorist Heike Steinhoff affirms, "[P]ost-op bodies […] can be considered as hybrid bodies—cyborgs—constructed through an interaction of the organism with medical and media technologies" (83).

"El cuerpo perfecto" (2006) by Adriana Calatayud

The collection "El cuerpo perfecto" seemingly provides a visual parallel to that of Anne Balsamo's writing in her essay "On the Cutting Edge: Cosmetic Surgery and New Imaging Technologies" (1996). In this essay, Balsamo begins by highlighting the use of technologies developed in the 1980s that improved greatly the manner in which surgeons were able to visualize and work on the body of their patients:

> New medical imaging technologies such as laparoscopy and computer tomography (CT) make the body visible in such a way that its internal status can be assessed before it is laid bare or opened up surgically. Like the techniques that enable scientists to encode and 'read' genetic structures, these new visualization technologies transform the material body into a visual medium. (56)

Since the publication of Balsamo's work on plastic surgery, technology used for cosmetic surgery has greatly evolved, including much better computer assisted imaging, tissue engineering (using biomaterial that grafts onto the skin and promotes human cell growth), and 3D printing ("The Role of Technology in Cosmetic Surgery Advancements"). By using such technologies in the medical field, medical professionals are able to isolate the parts of bodies they wish to examine. In turn, these parts can be further isolated by function and by medium. In this way, "the material body comes to embody the

characteristics of technological images" (Balsamo 56). This is exactly what interests Calatayud, who expresses in an introduction to her collection that:

> la cirugía cosmética y las nuevas tecnologías de proyección, o 'de imagen', [toman] los estándares culturales de belleza como parámetros de definición y sus efectos en la conceptualización del género femenino, analizando los juicios estéticos de estereotipos, medidas, proporción, armonía y simetría que la cirugía plástica involucra en la construcción de la 'mujer ideal'.[18] ("Atlas" 3)

Theorist Carole Spitzack indicates that a process of mechanisms of control occur with the procedure of cosmetic surgery: inscription, surveillance, and confession. As Spitzack explains, "the physician's clinical eye functions as Foucault's medical gaze" and that this gaze is posited in "apparatuses of power and knowledge that constructs the female figure as pathological, excessive, unruly, and potentially threatening of the dominant order" (Balsamo 56). The parts of the female body, via the gaze, are broken down into fragmented portions and deemed as "inherently flawed and pathological" (Balsamo 56). From there, the woman then "internalizes a fragmented body image and accepts its 'flawed' identity, [and] each part of the body then becomes a site for the 'fixing' and of her physical abnormality" (Balsamo 56-7). As a result of this acceptance, according to Spitzack, it is considered as a type of confession (Balsamo 56-7). This reaffirms that the "cosmetic surgeon's gaze doesn't simply *medicalize* the female body, it

[18] Cosmetic surgery and new technologies of projection of "the image" take the cultural standards of beauty as parameters of definition and its effects on the conceptualization of the female gender, analyzing the judgments of aesthetics of stereotypes, dimensions, proportions, harmony and symmetry that plastic surgery involves in the construction of the 'ideal woman'.

actually redefines it as an object for technological reconstruction" (Balsamo 57). Michel Foucault's writings in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1976) discuss the mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex. He asserts that the medical profession has historically created the discourses that define "which bodies, activities, and behaviors are normal" (Pylypa 30). The medical institution ultimately holds a privileged position of power of scientific knowledge that classifies and categorizes normal and deviant behaviors. It also holds bodies under surveillance, so that they may be disciplined and regulated or corrected accordingly (Foucault, *History* 103-5).

One of the primary or main reasons that these patients, the majority of whom are women,[19] seek to undergo cosmetic surgery is due to the fact that they feel as though something about their body is inherently flawed, defective, or undesirable and wish to fix it. They are being proactive and are exercising agency[20] in their mission to change that flawed body part. By doing so, the procedure produces a boost in their self-confidence, may allow them to advance their position in the work place,[21] and ultimately put them on the path to leading a much happier life. It is these aspirations and the patient's assumption that their lives will change for the better, if not drastically, if they can obtain the physique

[19] According to statistics provided by *The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* the latest statistics available, for the year of 2016, indicate that: 8,810,717 women had some kind of aesthetic cosmetic surgery, or 84.6% of the total surgeries. Meanwhile, only 1,606,653 men had undergone a procedure, or 15.4% of the total surgeries conducted in 2016 ("The International Study on Aesthetic/Cosmetic Procedures").

[20] The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* distinguishes agency in the broadest and simplest of terms as: "an agent is a being with the capacity to act, and 'agency' denotes the exercise or manifestation of this capacity" (Schlosser).

[21] In the case of South Korea particularly, there are "strict rules about women's appearance in the workplace". When applying for a job, candidates are required to provide a headshot. Employers "scrutinize especially are the looks of the applicants—in search for physical attractiveness—in addition to their professional qualifications" (Stone).

they desire. After extensive ethnographic studies within the community of aesthetic surgery, and having spoken with female patients advocating for surgical transformations, theorist Kathy Davis observes that:

> Cosmetic surgery was an intervention in identity. It enabled them to reduce the distance between the internal and external so that others could see them as they saw themselves […] as agents who, by remaking their bodies, remade their lives as well […] cosmetic surgery was a way for them to take control over circumstances over which they previously had no control […] these women even regarded their decision to have cosmetic surgery as an oppositional act: something they did for themselves, often at great risk and in the face of considerable resistance from others. (Davis, "My Body" 460)

As the previous testimony would suggest, the medical practice of cosmetic surgery is unique, as one sees a role reversal in the interaction between doctor/surgeon and patient: it is the patient who approaches the doctor and explains what is afflicting them, the aspect of the body that is making them suffer. Conversely, the doctor cannot "see" what is ailing the individual, yet uses their medical knowledge to alleviate the "pain and suffering"—in this case, the affliction is in reality, mental—and fix the flawed portion of the patient's body (Davis, *Reshaping* 2).

However, it is not only the gaze of the surgeon that contributes to feelings of deficiency in individuals who are otherwise healthy,[22] society's notions of the standards

[22] It is important to note that here I am speaking of aesthetic cosmetic surgery, and not reconstructive surgery needed as the result of a trauma or disease. As Balsamo indicates: "There are two main fields of plastic surgery. Whereas *reconstructive* surgery works to repair

of beauty or the ideal image of the female body are constantly barraging the public via the media. It is through the process of cosmetic surgery conducted on the material body of women that renders the corporeal into a cultural signification "where we can examine the literal and material reproduction of ideals of beauty" (Balsamo 13). There is great tension in regards to how cosmetic procedures are viewed. For some, it is considered an act of agency and liberation for the female subject, taking action to alleviate the internal anguish or discomfort they feel in regards to their outward appearance. Conversely, it can be considered as an act of complacency with the "norm" or an extreme desire to conform, since "[t]he act of having cosmetic surgery involves going along with the dictates of the beauty system, but also refusal—refusal to suffer beyond a certain point" (Davis, "My Body" 463).

The notion of the ideal body is anchored in "aesthetic judgments of proportion, harmony, and symmetry" (Balsamo 58). What is compelling about such aesthetic judgments is how we have reached such calculations of perfection. Balsamo acknowledges that some medical textbooks "strongly encourages plastic surgeons to acquire some familiarity with classical art theory so that they are better prepared to 'judge human form in three dimensions, evaluate all aspects of deformity, visualize the finished product, and plan the approach that will produce an optimal result'" (58). Other more common approaches to evaluate and scrutinize the body and its proportions include the fields of anthropometry and human osteology (58). As a digital artist, Calatayud mimics this very notion of codifying the human form (in particular the female face and body) in

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catastrophic, congenital, or cancer-damage deformities, *cosmetic* or aesthetic surgery is associated with the restoration of health, normalcy, and physical function, cosmetic surgery is said to improve self-esteem, social status, and sometimes even professional standing" (58).

several of her pieces belonging to the collection “Símetría y proporciones”. In particular, the image below demonstrates the “graphing” of the human face fragmented into smaller parts so, one would assume, the problem area can be addressed appropriately and look “natural” according to the proportions of the female subject’s face (fig. 2).

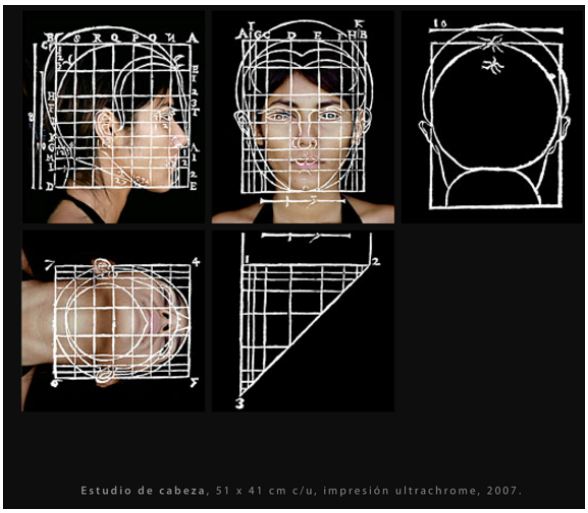

Fig. 2 *Estudio de cabeza*[23] (2007)

The image of the graph—that is superimposed over the face of the model—originates from images created by the German painter of the Renaissance period, Albrecht Dürer, and his book *Four Books on Human Proportion* (1528). Calatayud indicates that she was interested in exploring “a partir de cánones clásicos, hechos para describir el cuerpo, donde el ideal clásico de belleza era el hombre, inmutable y perfecto, y la belleza era identificada con el placer producido por la contemplación”,[24] and for this reason, used Dürer’s drawings by incorporating them into her own digital works (“Atlas” 3). It is

[23] Study of a Head
[24] Based on classical canons, made to describe the body, where the classical ideal of beauty was man, unchanging and perfect, and beauty was identified with the pleasure produced by means of contemplation.

intriguing to note that this particular subject seems to be comprised of European facial features or traits, and the thick white lines of the graph along with the lighting in the digital photo seems to have washed away any notable indications of her race. Karen Cordero confirms that:

> La imposición de los esquemas gráficas de Dürer sobre las fotografías de Calatayud, donde se resalta su blancura, […] su carácter lineal, geometrizante y conceptual […] pone en evidencia no sólo la cualidad normativa y cientifizante de la concepción del cuerpo ideal, sino su imposibilidad, su existencia precisamente como ideal transcultural inalcanzable.[25] (Cordero)

Calatayud's image accompanied by Cordero's interpretation of the collection "El cuerpo perfecto" aptly indicates that the notion of the "ideal face" according to classical preconceptions is racially biased, as it favors the Caucasian body as the model of "beauty and perfection". Such declarations are not so far-fetched in the context of cosmetic surgeries today, as Balsamo points out that some surgeons are "mindful of keloid formation and hyperpigmented scarring, [and therefore] routinely reject black patients"[26] (61). Unfortunately, there are no statistics or scholarly articles available that address the rejection rate of patients of color in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts.

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[25] The imposition of the graphic diagram of Dürer over Calatayud's photographs, where the whiteness is emphasized, […] and lineal character, geometrizing and conceptual […] reveals not only the normative and scientification of the concept of the ideal body, but also its improbability, its precise existence as an unobtainable transcultural ideal.

[26] A keloid is defined as a "as a benign growth of dense fibrous tissue developing from an abnormal healing response to a cutaneous injury, extending beyond the original borders of the wound or inflammatory response. Clinically, they are firm nodules, which can be skin colored [or] hypopigmented" (Robles).

However, a large number of medical articles have been published regarding keloid appearance in ethnic groups, potential treatments to reduce or remove their appearance, and potential techniques to prevent the formation of scarring in patients post-surgery. According to the article titled "Keloids: Pathogenesis, Clinical Features, and Management", "Although keloids have been documented in virtually all major ethnic groups, they are most commonly seen in individuals of African, Asian, and, to a lesser degree, Hispanic and Mediterranean descent. Dark-skinned individuals form keloids 15 times more frequently than do their lighter-skinned counterparts" (Chike-Obi). Furthermore, "In both black and Hispanic populations, the incidence of keloid formation is as high as 16%, with higher frequencies during puberty and pregnancy" (Chike-Obi). The same research indicates that there is a slightly higher predominance of keloids affecting women (Chike-Obi). Though the exact cause of keloid scarring is unknown, it certainly has a higher occurrence in those who have a preexisting genetic disposition to the condition, which is observed in the patient's family history—such information is extremely important for the patient to disclose to the surgeon during the procedural consultation phase. Fortunately, due to medical advancements and the growth in popularity of surgical cosmetic procedures in communities of people of color, surgeons have discovered ways to minimize the occurrence or frequency with which one would see keloid scarring in patients (Wimalawansa).[27] Plastic surgeons build their reputation on satisfied customers who have medically refashioned their bodies, and in many cases these

[27] Techniques to avoid the formation and appearance of keloid and hypertrophic scarring include: being aware of tension lines in the skin (when deciding where to make incisions), amount of blood supply that is reaching the operation site, and the materials used for the sutures of the wound (Son).

consumers intend to look as "completely natural" as though they had never had any work done. Therefore, the "ideal" or "desirable body" is not only one that can be "fixed", but also has little to no risk of complication when operated on, and ultimately shows little to no traces of ever having been manipulated.

It has been disputed and even considered very reductionist to say that in our globalized society, Western notions of beauty are considered the ideal shape or form of the female body that prevail. There have been several recent investigative reports, such as that published by Sam Dolnick in 2011, indicating that patients "get tucks and tweaks that are carefully tailored to their cultural preferences and ideals of beauty" ("Ethnic"). Members of ethnic communities claim that they are not trying to erase characteristics or markers of their culture or race, but use plastic surgery as a means of further embracing them. As theorist Victoria Pitts-Taylor indicates, new "ethnically-appropriate" cosmetic surgery that is particularly popular in the US, "aims to create ethnically specific surgeries to meet growing consumer demand for non-Anglicizing procedures. No longer are bodies whitened; instead, cosmetic surgeries are being planned to 'help' a person to express her ethnic identity" (166). Such is the case with the desire to embrace and enhance voluptuous curves in Latin cultures, or the change in the shape of the jaw or double eye-lid surgery in Korea, which is considered a product of the K-pop cultural phenomenon in the country (Stone). In Mexico in particular, as can be seen in the full-bodied image of a Latina model with the Dürer sketch emphasizing or enlarging of the buttocks and breasts (fig. 3), the following procedures are most prevalent according to the most recent ISAP (the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) statistics from 2016 per body

region: Liposuction (Body and Extremities: 69,445), [28] Breast Augmentation (Breast: 62,206). Eyelid Surgery (Head and Face: 54,608 surgeries), Rhinoplasty (Head and Face: 45,278), and Abdominoplasty (Body and Extremities: 38,121).

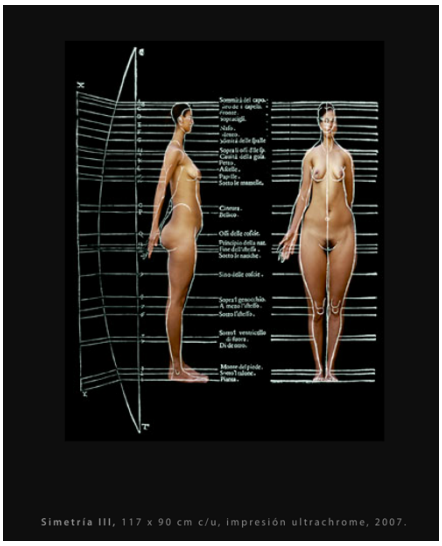

Fig. 3 *Simetría III* (2007)

The statistics indicate that Mexico is ranked in fourth place on an international scale in regards to the amount of Face & Head Procedures and Breast surgeries conducted, and third in Body and Extremity procedures worldwide. In the ranking of countries in total amount of cosmetic surgeries, Mexico is in fifth place at 923,243 procedures (3.9% of the world-wide total), ahead of any other Spanish speaking country, including Colombia where plastic surgery is also prevalent ("The International Study on Aesthetic/Cosmetic Procedures").[29] Each country, as the statistics show, has a particular preference in regards

[28] Buttock augmentation-fat transfer was tallied at a total of 30,131 operations in 2016 in the Body and Extremities category as one of the most popular procedures to undergo ("The International Study on Aesthetic/Cosmetic Procedures").

[29] It is important to note, as well be highlighted later in this analysis, that these statistics come from the "leading body for board-certified aesthetic plastic surgeons" known as ISAPS (Guest). It does not indicate if the statistics only include those surgeons who are members of the

to what portion of the body is more frequently modified. Therefore, rather than obliterating diversity, as some feminist critics indicate, "we must be prepared to think beyond eugenics and homogenization to biocapital's interest in proliferating new bodies, interests, and desires" (Pitts-Taylor 166).

Beauty standards are contingent upon culture context and are certainly temporal—some traits regarding the ideal body type or shape come and go like fashion trends. Aesthetic intervention given particular ideals or standards of beauty can be considered an action that has been normalized within our global society. The concept of normalization according to Freud is a contradictory historical process:

> [B]y which developmental standards for populations are deployed to measure and enforce conformity at the same times as they generate modes of individuality. Normalization, on this view, both *constrains* (by compelling compliance with the norm) at the same times as it *enables* (by making certain forms of subjectivity possible), and indeed these two functions cannot be separated. (Heyes 17)

Therefore, the normalization of aesthetic refashioning of the body sets the standard or *constraint* for what is acceptable and expected in regards to the concept of beauty, and cosmetic surgery *enables* one to reconstruct the self within specific cultural tastes or parameters.

Today, the female body undergoing cosmetic surgery is not merely remodeled as a token of cultural signification, but it is also commodified and classed. As Kathy Davis

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organization. It is quite evident that these numbers certainly do not account for black market cosmetic surgery procedures.

suggests, "[T]he patient is a consumer and, like the consumers of other products, free to choose any treatment, provided it can be paid for. The body is no longer simply a dysfunctional object requiring medical intervention, but a commodity" (Davis, *Reshaping* 17). Joanne Finkelstein affirms that in this sense, the body is similar to that of "a car, a refrigerator, a house—which can be continuously upgraded and modified in accordance with new interests and greater resources" (87). The opportunity to be able to fix oneself becomes more "affordable", it is a monetary investment, but at the same time it is certainly only available for those that have the economic resources—not everyone can afford to pay the steep prices for cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery seems to have generated a polarized pool of consumers interested in aesthetic procedures. For those that have money, the market of international medical tourism is booming, particularly for customers of the first world who want to travel to Mexico or South America to fix themselves at a much cheaper price and in luxurious private clinics or spas. However, for those living in these second or third world nations, the black market of cosmetic surgery has opened up, where procedures are not regulated at the same medical and/or ethical standards as those that belong to nations of the first world. In April of 2017 the NPR show *Radio Ambulante* published a podcast titled *¿Esto es normal?* that investigated such horrifying accounts of malpractice resulting in deaths and deformed bodies, particularly in Colombia.[30] Many individuals performing the surgeries are not surgeons, have no medical qualifications, and/or no medical training whatsoever. Toxic chemicals are being injected into patients' bodies that are extremely hazardous to one's health, such as

[30] According to statistics provided by *Radio Ambulante*, Colombia holds the 7th position worldwide in regards to the amount of surgical aesthetic procedures worldwide. The US holds the first position, followed by Brazil, South Korea, India, Mexico and then Germany (De Beauvoir).

cooking oil purchased at the local supermarket. According to a graphic provided by *Radio Ambulante*, as many as 24 women in 2016 in Colombia alone have died due to surgical complications from such shoddy operations (De Beauvoir). This certainly demonstrates how, unfortunately, there are individuals willing to prey upon the desperation and desire of others, and they take advantage of, or literally "cash in" on those looking to modify or improve their physique.

The establishment of the notion of the ideal body and the desire to obtain it is by no means a new concept—modern day medical technologies have merely exceeded prior limitations or boundaries regarding how one is able to sculpt the body. As Calatayud's photos pertaining to the work *Torturas voluntarias*[31] demonstrate, a wide variety of technologies—in the sense of objects and tools —were utilized to reconstruct or redesign the female body (fig. 4).

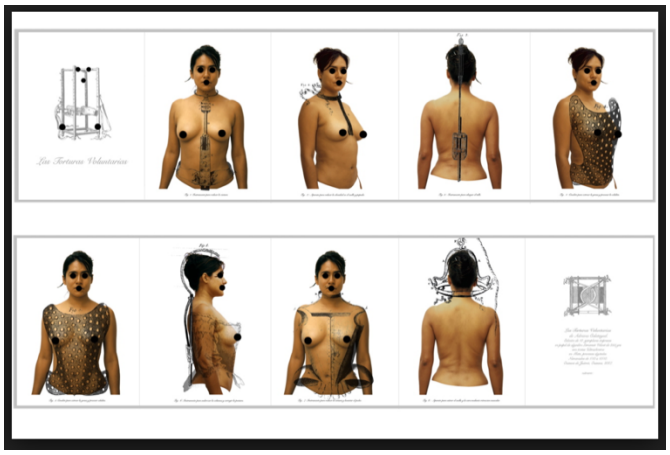

Fig. 4 *Torturas voluntarias* (2007)

This digital image takes illustrations from antique medical booklets in order to depict, "las torturas que hacemos todos para inscribirnos en una sociedad" (Fundación). The

[31] *Voluntary Tortures*

drawings, as Calatayud explains in a video about this particular piece, belong to illustrations from, roughly, the year 1772 of the treatment of rickets[32] and of malformations found in children caused by the disease (Fundación). The artist took the drawings and through the process of remediation,[33] refashioned the objects in conjunction with the digital image of the female body, thus generating a new meaning "dentro de las torturas contemporáneas que hacemos"[34] (Fundación). These images, given their new context, portray "un instrumento para reducir la cintura, un aparato para reducir la obesidad en el cuello [y la] papada, [uno] que sirve para alargar la talle, un coselete para extraer la grasa y prevenir la celulitis"[35] (Fundación). Finally, the packaging of the booklet that holds all of these digital images is contained within a postpartum girdle, thus providing yet another example of such tools that are used to modify the female body (fig. 5).

[32] Rickets is "the softening and weakening of bones in children, usually because of an extreme and prolonged vitamin D deficiency". In some extreme cases, it can cause severe skeletal deformities and cause the individual to fail to grow ("Rickets"). The disease is seen in individuals who are malnourished and lack exposure to sunlight. Poverty certainly plays a factor in its development.

[33] Jay David Bolter y Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999) define remediation as "'an older medium is highlighted and represented in [a] digital [format] without apparent irony or critique […] the computer is offered as a new means of gaining access to these older materials, as if the content of the older media could simply be poured into the new one […] According to their theory of remediation, even the most faithful conversion of an analog object into digital form inevitably entails fundamental alteration" (Hammond 71).

[34] within [the context] of contemporary tortures that we do.

[35] An instrument to make one's waist smaller, an apparatus to reduce the obesity in the neck [and the] double chin, [one] that serves as a manner to stretch one's height, a corset to extract fat and prevent cellulite.

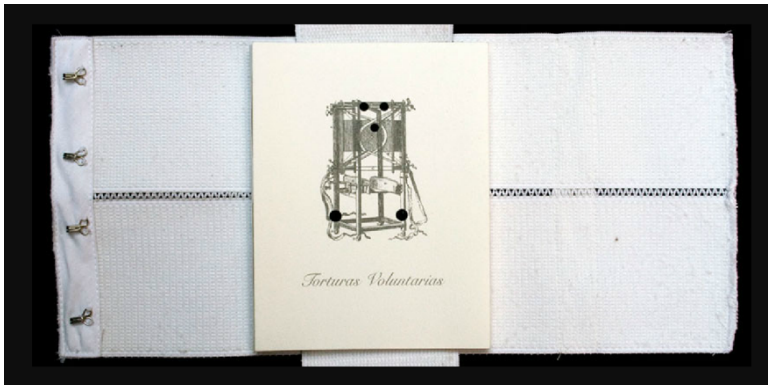

Fig. 5 Packaging of *Torturas voluntarias*

Although the illustrations pertain to a medical manual from 1772, one can easily draw a parallel to practices of female fashion that began to appear in the 19th century, particularly in the Victorian Era. During this time period, one saw the marking of the female body as "the other" and, in doing so, they called the "attention to sites of 'otherness' such as the breasts, waist, buttocks and hips which have been exaggerated by corsets, bustles and bras" (King 34). Practices such as these could be conceived as "voluntary tortures" given that they literally disfigured the female body not only externally but internally as well.[36] Michel Foucault's writing on torture, is appropriate to highlight when analyzing female practices of identity modification as a form of torture, since it must "mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy" (Foucault 34). In this way, as theorist Angela King notes, the female figure begins to "[embody] all that man fears and despises yet desires—finds fitting 'punishment' in clothing that draws erotic attention to the body by simultaneously constraining and 'correcting' it" (King 34).

[36] Theorist Angela King specifically points to "internal organ displacement caused by the 19th century corset in particular" (34).

Susan Bordo observes that the corset in particular "served as an emblem of the power of culture to impose its designs on the female body" (143). One could certainly say that in the same respect and in a modern day context, images of what is considered "beautiful" that are being projected by media also design and encode the female body. After all, one has certainly seen an evolution in the methods used to reconstruct one's identity, as the work of Catalayud demonstrates, yet the pressures of society and the notion of what an ideal female figure should be still remain. This can clearly be seen in the following image belonging to the collection "Cirugía" (fig. 6), which depicts the face of a young woman—evidently a portrait photo of a female model—that has semitransparent digital illustrations inscribed on its surface.

Fig. 6 *Dientes artificiales, reemplazo de nariz y suturado de heridas*[37] (2008)

In this pre and post operation side-by-side photo,[38] it would appear that the woman is wearing a French Renaissance hood that covers her hair. One would surmise that the

[37] Artificial teeth, replacement of nose and the suture of wounds.
[38] Surgeons use this media to show the patient his or her physical transformation. Such photos are also often utilized in marketing or promotional contexts to attract future clients and convince individuals that dramatic metamorphoses do occur and are obtainable for a fee.

photo on the left is the “before” or pre-op photo, where the subject has disjointed and dark colored teeth while the nose, extremely large in its proportions, is being unsewn from its position. To the right, within the post-op photo, the artist has placed a drawing on the model’s left cheek that seems to indicate that internally the teeth have been aligned and the wounds have been stitched up. The nose protrudes further out from the subject’s face than the previous appendage, and beneath it a moustache is brandished. The image seems to project a satirical message that demonstrates the manner in which ideologies of beauty have been inscribed and impressed upon the female form for centuries. Furthermore, the masculine nose on the post-op female face can be considered a parody of the conventional standards of beauty. It could also be interpreted as a type of cultural transparency, an “uncovering” or “un-obscuring” of the patriarchal/masculine ideals that underpin notions of ideal beauty. A scarring, or aftermath demonstrating, perhaps, that cosmetic surgeries mean to hide, but ultimately cannot. From fashion to cosmetic surgery, whatever the lasted taste or fad may be, women are confronted with a barrage of pressures from society to correct their imperfections and conform to specific ideals of what is beautiful. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that such practices encourage and even emphasize a biological sexual difference, as certain attributes and features are associated with the masculine physique (such as the moustache and proportions of the “new nose” in the image) and others with the female form. One can also certainly note how the image mimics that of a paper doll; the female form is dressed and undressed, as well as anatomically mixed and matched. This suggests that the woman is passive, and does not or cannot protest, even when such transformations generated by the manipulator are outrageous or ridiculous.

***Barro de belleza* (1998) by Teresa Serrano**

Teresa Serrano (México D.F. 1936) has generated a wide assortment of multidisciplinary works in the more than forty years of her career as an artist; such mediums of her work include painting, drawing, sculpture, installations, and audiovisual works (Museo 7). Serrano focuses on the theme of gender, and in particular, women and their current situation within society and a variety of sociocultural and sociohistorical spheres. By means of her artworks, the artist addresses a large array of subjects that range from gender violence to the construction of one's identity in the context of a patriarchal and misogynistic world. As the theorist Margarita Aizpuru summarizes, Serrano:

> Fija su mirada escrutadora y crítica feminista en cómo se ejerce el poder y el control sobre los individuos, y en particular sobre las mujeres, a veces de forma más explícita y otras de manera más sutil y psicológica; en los problemas existenciales de las mujeres actuales, así como en la presentación de las mismas en distintos contextos y ámbitos culturales.[39] (25)

The two pieces chosen for analysis in this chapter focus upon female identity, its construction, as well as its manipulation by means of cosmetics and fashion within the global society of consumerism. These constructions point toward the role of technology and its potential as well as influence upon the construction and performance of self.

[39] She fixes her scrutinizing gaze and feminist critique on how one exercises power and control over individuals, and in particular over women, sometimes in a more explicit manner and in other ways in a more subtle and psychological manner; on the existential problems of modern-day women as in the presentation of self in distinct contexts and cultural spheres.

The video installation piece *Barro de belleza* (1998) was created for the Bienal Barro de América in Caracas and São Paulo where the theme or subject of the exhibition was mud or clay ("BB"). As Serrano explains in a description that accompanies this performance online:

> Clay has always been associated with craftsmanship, manual labor, to the act of fashioning something with our hands. In this sense, my intention was to subvert codes of medium-specificity as well as the processes usually implied by the use of clay in order to make an installation that inserted this material in the context of industrial and mechanical production. ("BB")

The viewer can note the neon colors in the background from the very beginning of video clip, and the lower resolution of the picture quality which mimics a cheesy and cheap production that hawks goods to television viewers, much like the North American *QVC* channel. Serrano indicates that she took clay and packaged it in order to convert it into a 'commodity', and describes the atmosphere of the video as being "set it up in an appropriate glass display accompanied by a "promotional" video, to produce an installation that brings to mind the cosmetic display counters in department stores" ("BB"). Throughout the duration of the roughly nineteen minute long segment, the viewer is seemingly placed behind the protagonist who is seated at the center of the frame in a chair before a vanity mirror and table. The viewer witnesses a woman—who happens to be none other than the artist herself—gazing into the mirror as Frank Sinatra music plays in the background (fig. 7).

Fig. 7 Teresa Serrano Looking Into Mirror, with Clay Cosmetic Product at Her Side

She slowly reaches into the bucket of dark clay at her side, applying the material first to her face and then arms and face (fig. 8).

Fig. 8 Teresa Serrano Applying Clay to Her Face and Arms

After a minute of application, the shot freezes and slowly flips from front to back so that the model is shown once again in the center of the frame as she was previously, but this time she is clean. The spectator observes the artist in her original gazing position,

however now her own face has been replaced by a celebrity icon, the first being that of Sophia Loren and one of the last is that of Madonna (fig. 9).

Fig. 9 The Desired Finished Product: To Look Youthful and Physically Appealing

The video continues to play in a loop, where the models repeatedly put on the clay over and over again, each imagining a different youthful, beautiful, and famous celebrity in the mirror whose face replaces their own at the end of their cosmetic application. The photos of the celebrities that are hastily attached to the models faces suggest not only how the "Beauty Mud" will make its wearer more attractive, but in a way that is artificial and or fictitious. Curiously, the video does not show just women in the performance, which includes Serrano and another blonde woman, yet it also depicts two men; both of whom are seemingly close to middle-age (fig. 10).

Fig. 10 Men Too Believe in the Health Benefits and Youthful Look from Cosmetics

The process repeats twice per actor throughout the video, and while all of the actors view themselves as beautiful, youthful, and successful versions of themselves adhering to the same representations of their biological sex (the older women have pictured themselves as female celebrities), the last transformation projects an individual who possesses a queer identity. After applying mud all of his body, the man looks into the mirror and pictures himself as a woman (fig. 11).

Fig. 11 The Last Transformation Shows an Actor Representing a Queer Individual

Serrano explains that the message of the piece "is at the same time an irony on the ever-increasing desire to retain youth and put a halt, even if temporary, to the body's natural aging process, a desire that is perhaps born of the expectations placed on modernity's promises of technological and scientific advance" ("BB"). It is Serrano's opinion, and that which she also expresses through her video installation, that "[h]emos vuelto a esa época de Grecia, donde si nacías feo te tiraban al barranco; si no cumples con los patrones de belleza te sientes feo, es hedonismo puro"[40] (Sierra). The use of clay would propose yet another interpretation, that we are able to mold ourselves, our bodies and thus our identities, like clay and come to embody those desires that we imagine when we look in the mirror. Clay or mud also has a religious connotation. According to

[40] We have returned to that era in Greece, where if you were born ugly they threw you off a cliff; if you don't comply with the standards of beauty you feel ugly, it is pure hedonism.

passages in the Koran, the Bible,[41] and Greek mythology, there have been suggestions that man's origins are found in clay. In fact, an article published in the British newspaper *The Daily Mail* in 2013 titled "Was the Bible RIGHT about the origins of life? Scientists believe that we may have had our beginnings in CLAY" suggests that scientists have claimed that such a theory may not be so far from the truth, as "clay is a breeding ground for chemicals which it 'absorbs like a sponge' and eventually leads to proteins and DNA forming" ("Was the Bible RIGHT"). We can all find our origin in clay, however some clay/bodies (as Serrano's performance implies) are better than others.

Although Serrano's work does not show her models going under the knife and submitting themselves to the surgical procedures of cosmetic surgery, she aptly points out that cosmetics offer the same kind of promises of eternal youth and a "better self" if one simply invests their time and money. And while the actions of the models visually demonstrate how they, and you too, can look as gorgeous as your favorite celebrity, the Frank Sinatra song playing in the video's background serves as a subliminal message to draw in the viewer/potential customer. The title of the song is "Young at Heart", and its original lyrics begin by stating: "Fairy tales can come true/ It can happen to you if you're young at heart…" ("Frank Sinatra"). However, Serrano manipulated the audio of the song

[41] There are several references to clay in the Bible. The first can be found in Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Yet another can be found in Isaiah 64:8: "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." And finally, in the passage of John 9: 6-7 NIV, the Bible refers to the use of clay or mud in a miracle that Jesus preformed to cure a man of his blindness, "After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing."

and lyrics so that the Sinatra now exclaims "Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you … if you are among the users of Beauty Mud" in order to advertise the product ("BB"). As Jean Baudrillard's work in *The Consumer Society* (1970) would attest, the object (in this case Beauty Mud) is no longer a stand-alone entity, but rather "a chain of signifiers" (27). It signifies a fantasy of not only perennial youth and beauty, but also one's ultimate goal: happiness. Consumption, he indicates, "is governed by a form of *magical thinking;* daily life is governed by a mentality based on miraculous thinking, a primitive mentality, in so far as it has been defined as being based on a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts" or in this case, "the omnipotence of signs" (32).

Theorist Mike Featherstone indicates that consumer culture "latches onto the prevalent self-preservationist conception of the body, which encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay […] and combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression" (75-6). Featherstone expresses two pathological attributes that contribute to consumer culture: 'calculating hedonism'[42] and narcissism. The strength of consumer culture, he explains, "comes from its ability to harness and channel genuine bodily needs and desires, albeit that it presents them within a form which makes their realization dubious. The desire for health, longevity, sexual fulfillment, youth, and beauty represents a reified entrapment of transhistorical human longings within distorted forms" (98-9). He goes on to say that consumer culture works on two broad levels, the first being that "it provides a

[42] Term attributed to theorist Russell Jacoby (1980, p.63) and cited in Mike Firestone's essay "The Body in Consumer Culture" (2001, p. 92), it indicates that in order to achieve the ideal or desired body one must be meticulous and self-disciplined, and also "be a 'good consumer' [which] requires self-gratification" (Maguire 70).

multiplicity of images designed to stimulate needs and desires" (98). The promotional video of "Beauty Mud" targets both the male and female demographic, and tempts middle-aged bodies to embrace a more "youthful look" by incorporating, in this context, an internationally recognizable pop-culture imaginary representing "eternal youth".[43] The second level at which consumer culture operates "is based on and helps to change the material arrangements of social space and hence the nature of social interactions" (98). Social space is also vital in the process, as it provides an environment for the display of the body and social interactions; such spaces include, but are not exclusive to "new shopping centers, the beach, the modern pub" (98). Since the publication of Featherstone's work, one could also add cyberspace to this list, in particular social media networks (notably Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram), where quite often our "corporeal presence" is exploited through the digital images we share (eg. selfies) and personal information we spew forth via our personal profiles and postings in order to gain acceptance, likes, and followers.

It has been drummed into the minds of members of this globalized consumer society that the body, much like the beauty products that are purchased, the surgical procedures that some undertake, and the exercise equipment that is acquired to care for it, is in itself a commodity. Since the seventeenth century, as Bordo suggests, the body has been referred to as a machine. "Body maintenance", a term associated with the aforementioned acts, "indicates the popularity of the machine metaphor for the body.

[43] Perhaps it is no coincidence that Madonna is one such figure that appears in the video performance *Barro de belleza*. As Susan Bordo observes in her essay "Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture", the pop star "[is] the ultimate resistant transformation" given her toned physique and flawless features which have been maintained since middle-age and beyond as a result of an extensive diet and exercise regime in the later years of her career (121).

Like cars and other consumer goods, bodies require servicing, regular care, and attention to preserve maximum efficiency" (Featherstone 88). Yet the idea of the maintenance of one's "image" or performance is not simply restricted to the flesh. As the artist's next work will demonstrate, clothing also constitutes a commodity that provides both liberating results and restrictive roles in regards to women's many subjectivities.

Efecto Camaleón (2004) by Teresa Serrano

Efecto Camaleón is an audiovisual artwork that consists of 2,300 photographs that were edited in animation format utilizing the technique known as stop-motion. The video is three minutes in length and the narrative begins with the image of an Asian woman dressed in traditional costume, which resembles that of the Geisha makeup and kimono (fig. 12).

Fig. 12 Image of Female Subject in Traditional Dress from the Far East

As the video progresses, its protagonist undresses (fig. 13), removes her makeup, cuts her hair, and continuously changes her clothing until she represents a much more contemporary and conservatively dressed woman (fig. 14).

Fig. 13 Image of Female Subject Disrobed, No Makeup, and Shorter Hair

Fig. 14 Image of Female Subject Dressed in Conservative Business Suit

Her third and last fashion change is much more radical—the protagonist cuts her hair in an even shorter asymmetrical style, puts on distressed jeans, and dons dark colored makeup. The camera zooms in on her tattoos and piercings that her body now displays. The last image of the video leaves the spectator with a protagonist who is completely transformed and dressed alternatively—perhaps in punk clothing—sitting in a chair smoking a cigarette (fig. 15). This evolution of transformations demonstrates a temporal

progression, where the image of the geisha represents an older fashion of dress from the past, while the punk image is much more modern and juvenile.

Fig. 15 The Last Transformation of the Main Protagonist, Now a Punk Rocker

Throughout the duration of the entire video there is neither sound nor music, with the exception of various sound effects: when scissors are used to cut the protagonist's hair, when the zipper is pulled up on a skirt, when she takes off her high heels, and finally in the last photo where the protagonist laughs. As the title of the video indicates, the female subject undergoes a chameleon-like process of transformation where the woman dismantles and is therefore liberated from "cliché roles" in order to represent a plurality or prism of identities that are constructed by new behaviors and attitudes (Aizpuru 106). Simultaneously, the work demonstrates how the female gender identity is a complex product of hybridizations due to the process of "superposicion[es] y acumulacion[es] de otras identidades, culturales, sociales, raciales [y] sexuales"[44] (106). One can clearly note

[44] Superimpositions and accumulations of other cultural, societal, racial, and sexual identities.

that the expression of the model in the video, according to Aizpuru, transforms from a serious and indifferent attitude to one that is cheerful and lively, as if she were celebrating the liberation of rigid identity roles (106).

However, one can also consider a subtle and alternative reading to this narrative, which points out that these changes and amplifications of identity insinuate the fundamental role that technology plays in the process of the construction of identity, given that marketing is disseminated through the television and internet on a global scale. As a consequence of globalization, it has been argued that Occidental paradigms of beauty and fashion extended to other regions of the world. International consumers reach such Occidental "ideals" by means of cosmetics and/or cosmetic surgery. For example, in India makeup is sold in order to pale the skin tone, or give the appearance of paler skin of its wearer, because it is considered much more attractive and Western. In many other Asian countries, the eyes are operated upon so that they appear much larger and wider, once again, giving a much more Western physique (Aizpuru 107). Such surgeries are said to result in the homogenization of bodies that perpetuate sexual stereotypes (Wajcman 80). Consequently, the body is converted into an object that can be manipulated, controlled, and essentially dominated in this modern day era of technology (Rogers 125). These factors indicate that technology and the messages that it carries and distributes along with it are inscribed on the body as signs of hierarchical power and sexual division, which mold political and social order. With good reason, material feminist theorists such as Cynthia Cockburn (1999) and Judy Wajcman (2006) associate technology with the masculine desire to control, transform and manipulate nature, and in effect, woman (Nayar 116).

Conclusions

The cyborg in this case, or rather, the hybrid representations within the collection created by Adriana Calatayud and the video installation performances by Teresa Serrano, demonstrate that the notion of the cyborg does not have to be that of a fantastical sci-fi representation of "the other". Common practices such as cosmetic surgeries that are becoming normalized in our society illustrate the unique and complex relationship that the human body has with modern technology, and how it is considered hybrid. As this analysis has shown, the beings in "El cuerpo perfecto" can be considered hybrid or "other" since these bodies are embedded with foreign chemicals, examined and opened up by machines, and literally encoded by algorithms and equations to find the "best symmetry" to achieve the ideal representation of the self. While Serrano's videos *Barro de belleza* and *Efecto Camaleón* demonstrate that the best way to achieve one's "best self" is through modification by means of the use of commodities such as cosmetics (composed of natural elements and chemicals alike that are spread on and over, or even kneaded into the body) and clothing.[45] The images that accompany the notion of the perfect body and style are projected by mass media, which are absorbed and accepted as the "norm" by our hedonistic and narcissistic global society. As the artist has exhibited, such commodities can be simultaneously liberating and restrictive, perhaps even oppressive, in the process of performing of self.

While several of these particular images of the "other" align with Donna Haraway's explanation of the hybrid being in "A Cyborg Manifesto" which breaks down

[45] Clay is certainly not a chemical in itself, however it was repackaged and advertised as a cosmetic in Serrano's video.

the dichotomy of human/machine, it is compelling to also recognize that cyborgs like Calatayud's artwork in the realm of popular culture fail to upend such binaries or dichotomies that Haraway herself advocates for. Theorist Samantha Holland observes that "despite [Haraway's] […] arguments that cyborgs are androgynous entities that render gender boundaries meaningless, this is effectively irrelevant when we look at *actual* cyborg texts" (19). These *actual* cyborgs being represented exist beyond the realms of the text and are women who, by means of medical technologies, are undergoing cosmetic surgeries to manipulate their identities; for this reason, the subjects in Adriana Calatayud's and Teresa Serrano's artistic representations of individuals endorsing images in the media by complying with consumer culture are clearly sexed bodies. Judy Wajcman supports Holland's claims by adding that:

> Visual representations of the cyborg in Hollywood science fiction films rarely challenge traditional, Western stereotypes of gendered or racial bodily difference […] Cybernetic theories of postmodernity tend to ignore the extent to which the cyborg image has already been culturally appropriated in popular forms. As Anne Balsamo argues in her analysis of film and literature, 'the dominant representation of cyborgs reinserts us into dominant ideology by reaffirming bourgeois notions of human, machine and femininity'. (95)

It becomes very apparent that another dichotomy is created rather than upheaved with these artistic representations—that of *she*/*it*. *She* as a form that is adhering to cultural standards of what the female sex is, and what a female "should" look like considering specific physical traits that serve as boundaries and demarcations between female and

male. *It* as the composition of this form denoted as the other, which is a hybrid encoded, embedded, and manipulated by technology. In a posthuman age where the boundaries of identity are being blurred by innovations in the sciences and in medicine, it becomes apparent that it is difficult to move beyond the practice of establishing Cartesian dualisms. Yet the cyborg metaphor is not meant to solve problems of identity and subvert essentialist binaries, it serves as a valuable symbol that encourages its viewer to question our seemingly rigid and stable selves, the notion of embodiment, our identities, and our corporeal boundaries.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNOLOGIES OF DIASPORA IN THE WORKS OF CUBAN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE ARTISTS ANA MENDIETA, MARTIZA MOLINA, AND BLOGGER YASMÍN S. PORTALES MACHADO

Technology has not only affected the way in which we construct or deconstruct identity by medical means, but also the ways in which we interact, network, and communicate with others. This chapter focuses on the affordances of technology, in particular "old media" and "new" or "polymedia",[46] as a tool to express the condition of displacement and diaspora in the case of multigenerational Cuban-American female performance/visual artists Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) and Maritza Molina (1970s),[47] as well as the Cuban blogger Yasmín S. Portales Machado (1980). These women have used technology as a way of not only performing one's condition of exile but also recuperating their past and cultural identity, as is the case of Ana Mendieta and Maritza Molina, while Yasmin S. Portales Machado has used social media platforms such as her personal blog, Twitter account, and Facebook profile as a voice of social activism and advocacy for queer Cubans still living on the island by building community and camaraderie with these marginalized individuals in cyberspace. Despite the fact that each of these Cuban expatriates' work does not necessarily share commonalities regarding their mediums or

[46] Daniel Miller indicates that migrants currently living in the diaspora are discovering that, upon having the economic means to pay for computer equipment and/or phone connection, "their relationship to media is entirely transformed […] [they] have a plethora of different media available to them from social networking sites, with YouTube, with blogging, Web cam, text messaging and with those infrastructures we so easily and so quickly take for granted, such as search engines" ("Preface: Mediating a Restless World").

[47] The artists birthdate is not publically available, however in the article "This Ain't No Dinner Party" she does indicate she was 10 years old when she moved to the United States (specifically Miami) in the mid 80s.

tools of expression, each artist does exhibit a unique characteristic or aspect of, as author Andrea O'Reilly Herrera indicates, "the collective and shifting idea of what constitutes a Cuban identity and diaspora" by means of the use of multimedia (193). This chapter investigates the multifaceted role that technology plays in the lives and works of two Cuban artists and one blogger who belong to three distinct waves of migration from the Caribbean island, and as a result are creating their works from the diaspora.

The Cuban Diaspora

The purpose of outlining the historical context of each particular wave of Cuban immigration to the United States is to highlight the unique circumstances by which Mendieta, Molina, and Portales are generating their work. These circumstances, memories, and even traumas play a fundamental role in what is expressed in their artwork and writings, as will be demonstrated in this essay. Of foremost importance is to explain the selection of the term "diaspora" as the lens from which this analysis regards these artists and blogger, respectively, and why this concept in particular was chosen to identify them. Sophia A. McClennen's book, *The Dialects of Exile* (2004), distinguishes three important terms and their corresponding etymologies related to the movement, voluntary or otherwise, from one's homeland. She begins with the term "exile" indicating that it:

> [O]riginates from the Latin 'exilium,' where the prefix 'ex' means 'out' and the root 'solum' refers to 'ground, land, or soil.' The Latin 'exilium' is also thought to relate to the Latin verb 'salire', 'to leap or spring'. Already within the Latin etymology of the term we find the contradictory notions of exile as a movement forward and also a forceful separation. (14-15)

Whereas exile "typically refers to one who has been forced to leave one's country",[48] *expatriate*[49] would "suggest a separation that is voluntary" (McClennen 15). Both terms are rooted in the political and ethical spheres, but not within the realm of legal domain, which is the case of the label *refugee*. Its Latin root refugiare means to "flee, run away, escape" (15). It is a relatively new phenomenon, as postcolonial theorist Edward Said explains, "Refugees…are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word 'refugee' has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring immediate international assistance, whereas 'exile' carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality" (166). Refugee also "refers to a necessary territorial displacement", and as a result relates to *diaspora* (McClennen 15). *Diaspora*'s etymology is Greek in origin, stemming from diaspeirein, meaning: "'to spread about' where 'dia' means 'apart' and 'speirein' means 'to sow or scatter'" (McClennen 15). While *diaspora* is most commonly associated with circumstances faced by the Jewish people exiled from Babylonia in the sixth century B.C. and as a result were living outside of Israel, it has "been expanded in current usage to signify beyond the Jewish community" (McClennen 15). It is for these reasons that I am inclined to use the syntagm "writing and creating from a place of *diaspora*" when referring to these women as it "often describes the dispersion of an originally unified entity and is applied to cultural markers, like language and social practices, that were at one time geographically concentrated and are now deterritorialized" (McClennen 15).

[48] Yet, as McClennen observes, "dictionary definitions often include voluntary absence from the homeland" (15).
[49] Where *patria* means "native land" or "fatherland" (McClennen 15).

To further understand the notion of *diaspora*, particularly within the Cuban context, blogger Yasmín S. Portales indicates that "[I]n Cuba, since 1959, migration acquired political connotations which have led to the coinage of the term "diaspora" to describe people who have, legally or illegally, left the country in the last 52 years" ("Female" 254). Upon starting with this definition of *diaspora*, she goes onto say that it is not possible for one to understand the Cuban diaspora without at least knowing the following historical events and thus, context of mass migration away from the island:

> 1) dictator Fulgencio Batista fled the country on 1 January 1959, after being defeated by the 'Movimiento 26 de Julio' guerrilla and allied political groups; the leader of the rebel group was Fidel Castro Ruiz; 2) since 1960, the United States has tried by all means, including military attempts, like the case of the Bay of Pigs, to overthrow the Cuban government, which threw Havana into the arms of Moscow; 3) The US *Cuban Adjustment Act* grants residences to any citizen of the Island who reaches the U.S. coasts; it stimulates illegal migration and political manipulation. ("Female" 254)

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the first wave of migration occurred between 1959-62, following the rise of Fidel Castro and "[t]he initial exodus primarily consisted of upper and upper-middle class families in professional and managerial occupations" ("Cubans in the United States" 2). The exodus of 14,000 unaccompanied minors from Cuba, the very same which Ana Mendieta and her sister belonged, would

fall within this first wave of migrants given that she arrived in 1961.[50] The second wave of migration, which took place between 1965 and 1974, "featured orderly departure programs administered by the U.S. and Cuban governments. The so-called 'freedom flights' brought middle and working-class Cubans to the United States" ("Cubans in the United States" 2). The third wave, according to the Pew Hispanic Center's research regarding an overview of Cuban migration, "began in 1980 with the Mariel boatlift, a chaotic exodus that was in many ways distinct from previous migrations. The *Marielitos*, as they are known, came from virtually every segment of Cuban society, including the poor" (2). Finally, the fourth wave, which encompasses the current movement of migrants, "began after the collapse of Communism in 1989 and the tightening of the embargo in 1992. It includes *balseros,* or rafters, who float to Florida abroad improvised vessels as well as the beneficiaries of a special visa lottery system the two governments agreed to implement in 1994" ("Cubans" 2). Some scholars and researchers break down the four aforementioned waves of Cuban-United States migration into five distinct categories rather than four. The Migration Policy Institute agrees that the third wave is indeed the Mariel exodus, but then goes on to indicate that the *Balsero* Crisis of 1994 is its own distinct wave of migration: "The fourth migrant wave began during the 'Special Period in Peacetime,' the official euphemism for Cuba's prolonged economic crisis after

[50] Jorge J. E Gracia further explains the sociohistorical and political environment of the first mass migration movement from Cuba, indicating that: "The first [wave] to leave the island were associates of the dictator Fulgencio Batista, government people who lost their jobs and were afraid of reprisals for their actions under the dictatorship […] The expropriation of property by the revolutionary government and the increasing assaults on the private sector prompted members of these groups to leave the island. The exodus accelerated after the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the declaration of Cuba as Marxist-Leninist state, when it became clear that the political situation in Cuba was not going to change in the foreseeable future" (177).

the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (and subsequent drop in financial support for Cuba)" (Duany). As a result of the significant blow that the Cuban economy suffered, emigration was seemingly encouraged to relieve pressures of the economic downturn, "plunging living standards, rising social tensions, and unmet demands for political reform" (Duany). The fifth wave is known as the "The Post-Soviet Exodus, 1995–2017" and according to Jorge Duany of the Migration Policy Institute, "has been the longest and largest wave of Cuban migration, with nearly 650,000 admitted to the United States between 1995 and 2015." The majority of Cuban nationals coming to the United States belonged "primarily from the lower and middle rungs of the labor force, especially unskilled, semiskilled, and service workers" and arrived to the U.S. via air, land, and sea (Duany). This group would include individuals with and without immigrant visas.

In 1995 President Bill Clinton initiated a critical immigration policy that would affect the future of the *balseros* fleeing the island and in particular, the Castro regime. Known as "wet foot, dry foot", the policy would allow Cuban nationals who reached U.S. soil to become legal permanent residents after a year had elapsed after their arrival (Gomez). Along with this policy, Clinton and his administration implemented policies "such as intercepting, detaining, and repatriating the Cuban rafters […] the policy made Cubans on boats and rafts without visas subject to return upon interception, for the first time since 1959" (Duany). Circumstances would change once again, when twenty-two years later on January 13, 2017, relations would begin to thaw between Cuba and the United States. The Obama administration put an end to the "wet foot, dry foot" policy, eliminating the preferential treatment that had been granted to Cuban migrants for so

many years (Duany). The policy was retracted for several reasons, including the fact that most *balseros* were leaving not necessarily to flee political persecution, but rather to pursue better economic opportunities in the United States (Gomez). Given these circumstances, it was the notion of the Obama administration that Cuban migrants should then be treated the same as migrants from any other foreign country coming to the United States seeking a better quality of life.[51] This has certainly caused difficulties for thousands of Cubans already on their way to the United States, many of whom opted to take "the longer route" from Ecuador and traveling by train, plane, and on foot all the way to the Mexico-US border before crossing. They have been stopped quite literally in their tracks from being able to continue to the U.S. and are no longer permitted to seek immediate refuge and eventually permanent residence.[52]

Ana Mendieta

> "For the last twelve years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence, I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out from the womb (Nature)… My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source… In essence my works are the reactivation of primeval beliefs at work within the human psyche"—Ana Mendieta

Ana Mendieta was born in 1948 in Havana, Cuba, into an upper middle-class household and was the second oldest of Ignacio and Raquel Oti Mendieta's three children

[51] While the "wet foot, dry foot" policy intended to deter *balseros* from coming to the U.S., Cuban migrants have sought out alternative manners to reach the States: "In recent years, more Cubans have taken advantage of laws that allow them to travel to Ecuador, where thousands have started the long, dangerous land voyage across Venezuela, Central America and Mexico to reach the southwest border." (https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/01/12/obama-ends-wet-foot-dry-foot-policy-cubans/96505172/)

[52] Episode 31 "The Long Road" and Episode 32 "The End of the Journey" of the NPR show *Radio Ambulante* provide a report along with testimony of Cuban migrants on their journey from Ecuador to the United States, and the complicated repercussions and consequences upon the termination of the "wet foot, dry foot" policy (Trelles).

(Rush 17). Mendieta's father "was an attorney, her grandfather a physician, and her great-uncle was president of Cuba in the 1930s"[53] (DeCosta-Willis 240-41). Ignacio Mendieta was eventually made an assistant in the postrevolutionary Ministry of State in 1959 (Rush 17). However, his support of the revolution and Marxist politics waned as it became clear that he and his family's socioeconomic position in Cuban society at that time would be eliminated (Blocker 52). Furthermore, the Mendietas were devout Catholics, yet another ideology and institution that Castro and his regime opposed. Given these circumstances and his discontent, Ignacio would soon become involved in counterrevolutionary activities. In order to shield his young daughters Raquel and Ana from the continuously growing political unrest on the island, he decided to send both girls to the United States via Operación Pedro Pan, a program launched by a Catholic priest in Miami that would eventually transport 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children to the United States (Rush 17).[54] When both Raquel (15 years old) and Ana (12 years old) arrived in the U.S. in 1961, they did not remain in Miami, the site of a large Spanish speaking community with

[53] Olga Viso details how Mendieta's paternal side was not the only familial branch that contained famous or affluent members of Cuba's political and social history: "Ana's maternal great grandfather, Genral Carlos María de Rojas Cruzat (1862-1945), had been the Mambí general in command of the revolutionary force of Cárdenas—the Mambíses, backed by the United States, were primarily responsible for the liberation of Cuba from Spanish rule—during the Spanish-American War (1895-1898), which led to Cuba's independence […] General Rojas's brother, Oscar María de Rojas Cruzat (1862-1921), established the second museum of Cuban history and culture founded on the island, an institution that now bears its founder's name, The Museo General Oscar de Rojas" (36).

[54] Jorge J. E Gracia describes in further detail why Cuban children were sent abroad during this time: "These youngsters were sent to the United States through the auspices of the Catholic Church for various reasons: fear of their removal to the Soviet Union, fear of having them grow up in an antireligious environment, fear that their exit would be denied if the parents waited to emigrate, and fear that they would have to suffer deprivation under the increasing shortages of goods. By this time the revolutionary government had abolished private religious education and had expelled all priests, nun, and members of religious orders who were not Cuban citizens" (177).

which they could identify culturally and linguistically. Instead, they were sent to live in Iowa, where they were moved eight times amidst an array of foster homes and institutions within the first two years living in a foreign country in which they spoke very little of the language (Frank). While they had each other and were never separated, the Mendieta sisters faced discrimination growing up within a predominantly white community.[55] It was not possible for their mother Raquel Oti Mendieta to join her children until 1966, and while she was able to reconnect with her daughters, her husband was jailed in Cuba for treason until 1979. That same year, Ignacio Mendieta moved to the United States to be with his wife and daughters, dying several years later in 1983 (Rush 17).

Ana Mendieta would go on to study in the Intermedia Studies program[56] at the University of Iowa, under the famous artist Hans Breder (known for his work in the fields of performance, intermedia, sculpture and video art), who was not only her mentor, but would later become her lover. Much of Mendieta's work can be categorized as pertaining to the visual arts or performance art, body work, film, photography, and earth works. Laura Wertheim Joseph's essay "Unfinished Processes: Going Back and Reeling Forward

[55] Jane Blocker explains that upon being sent to the Midwest, Ana and her sister Raquel faced discrimination, "The girl's color, which was darker than that of most Iowans, who were of predominantly Northern European ancestry, made them increasingly the targets of racism" (53). The artist suffered a cultural shock that quite literally turned her world upside down, and for this reason it is important to note "no sólo la raza, sino también la clase social influyeron en la experiencia traumática que Mendieta vivió a su llegada a los Estados Unidos. Mendieta pertenecía a una familia pudiente en Cuba mientras que en el país de acogida se la situó en la escala más baja" [not only her race, but also her social class were influential in the traumatic experience that Mendieta lived upon her arrival in the United States. Mendieta belonged to an affluent family in Cuba while in her country of refuge situated her on the lowest [social] scale] (69).

[56] The Intermedia program was later renamed the Multimedia program in 1970 (Viso 138).

in Ana Mendieta's Films" (2015) describes the rich and evolving trajectory of her work: "In the early 1980s, her practice moved away from ephemeral sculptural works and actions—and the making of related photographs and films—and turned instead toward the creation of object-based sculptures that did not involve photography or film" (183). It is clear that the artist was keen to experiment with a variety of mediums and aesthetics, and did not allow geographical boundaries to deter her, as she was eager to become an American citizen[57] in order to have more opportunities to travel and cultivate her work abroad. Upon obtaining U.S. citizenship in 1970, Mendieta began to travel extensively, including:

> [m]ore than eleven trips to foreign countries. In 1971, she traveled on an archaeological expedition to San Juan Teotihuacán, Mexico. In 1973, 1974, 1976, and 1978, she went with the University of Iowa Summer Multi-Media Program to Oaxaca, Mexico. In 1976, she traveled as a student around Europe. In 1980 and 1981, she returned to Cuba and, on her second visit, remained for a month to complete a series of carvings in the caves of Jaruco Park outside Havana. Finally, between 1983 and 1985,

[57] In her book *Where is Ana Mendieta?* (1999), Jane Blocker explains Ana's eagerness to become a U.S. citizen. Not because the U.S. necessarily felt like "home" but rather because of the mobility an American passport offered and the rights that came with citizenship: "After Ana's mother arrived in the United States, her one goal was to obtain her husband's release from prison. As Cuban citizens, she and her children had few rights and could not petition the U.S. government for help in the matter, so she was determined to become a legal citizen. After Ana and Raquel's experiences of abandonment, betrayal, disregard, incarceration, and racism in the United States, they were not especially anxious to declare their allegiance to it. Raquel in particular could not bear the idea, but she was convinced by Ana that they should apply for citizenship. Ana's rationale was that they would never allowed to do anything freely or travel anywhere openly with only a Cuban passport. Ana told her sister, 'I want to travel.' It is ironic that, for Ana Mendieta, becoming a U.S. citizen was her only way of escaping what she felt was her incarceration in the United States" (54).

> she traveled between Rome and the United Sates after having been awarded a fellowship at the prestigious Rome Academy. (Blocker 92)

Mendieta's career was on the rise, as she was steadily gaining recognition for her work within the New York City artistic community. However, her life would be cut short on September 8th, 1985 at the age of thirty-six; Mendieta fell to death from the window of her thirty-fourth story New York City apartment building at 300 Mercer Street in Greenwich Village which she shared with her husband—famous minimalist artist Carl Andre. Robert Kantz's book *Naked by the Window* (1990) provides a lengthy account of the events of Mendieta's tragic and suspicious death, where it is assumed that Mendieta was pushed or thrown out of the window during an argument based upon her exaggerated fear of heights and the testimony of neighbors and witnesses on the street below having heard a loud dispute and screaming prior to the artist's fall. Although Andre was indicted, he was acquitted twice on these charges and continues to live in the same apartment where Mendieta's life and blossoming career abruptly ended.

Despite her early death, Mendieta has left a lasting impression and expansive artistic legacy for performance and visual artists that succeeded her. Within the last 30 years of her death, her work has become even more recognized. An article published by Guelda Voien in 2015 entitled "The Remarkable Story of a Rebel Artist, Her Mysterious Death and Cult Resurgence" indicates that:

> [A] powerful cult is growing around photographer and filmmaker Ana Mendieta. Famous for some years mostly for the way she died, and forgotten for many more, her works are being rediscovered, exhibited around the U.S. and are climbing at auction. In the 1980s, if you could

> find a Mendieta, it was maybe $2,000 […] Now the median price for a Mendieta is $40,000 to $50,000 […] and one hit a record of $200,000.

August Uribe, Worldwide Co-Head of Contemporary Art at Phillips auction house, is quoted in Voien's article as saying that he speculates that the value of her work has greatly increased because "'there is a renewed or new interest in the work of women artists [overall] […] It's also because of the 'globalization and internationalization' of the art world […] But with Mendieta specifically, it's 'the quality of the work […] [a]nd her story'" (Voien). Artists such as Tania Bruguera, Carolee Schneeman, Marina Gutierrez, Nancy Spero, Juan Sánchez, and even Maritza Molina—whose work will be analyzed later in this chapter—have recreated many of her performances (Weiss 53-58). Yet, Mendieta's work has not just influenced those living abroad in exile or those who were her acquaintances prior to her death; she is also an inspiration to Cuban artists living on the island. In particular, the artists' collective Galeria DUPP ("desde una pedagogía pragmática"), initiated the very first "Ana Mendieta Performance Festival" in 1998 in Havana, and yet another in 1999. She was and continues to be an extremely significant figure, as Olga M. Viso points out in her book, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985:* "Mendieta remains the only Cuban expatriate artist living and working in the United States to have been granted travel opportunities, access, and recognition by the Cuban government in official artistic contexts" (131).

This portion of the analysis is not meant to merely recount the unique circumstances and environment in which Ana Mendieta spent her formative years. It also serves as an important foundation to explain themes of loss, trauma, biculturalism, and exile found within Ana Mendieta's work. As Uribe indicated, Mendieta's "story" is

indispensable when considering her artwork. Much has been written regarding Mendieta's *Silueta Series* (1973-1980), which one could argue are the artist's most acclaimed pieces. Yet more recently—as of 2011—her films, of which she produced 104 total and were transferred to a digital format, restored to their original aesthetic and quality, and then archived, have been of particular interest to critics and theorists alike (Cecilia Mendieta 177). One of such filmed performances that was discovered upon examining the film reels that she left behind was entitled *Butterfly* (1975). In this piece, Mendieta is standing still and naked with the exception of a set of feathered wings protruding from her back. It is a silent recording, which is shot with a video camera on a tripod directly facing Ana, where vibrant colors appear and change as they wash over the artist's body and the plain background behind her (fig. 16).

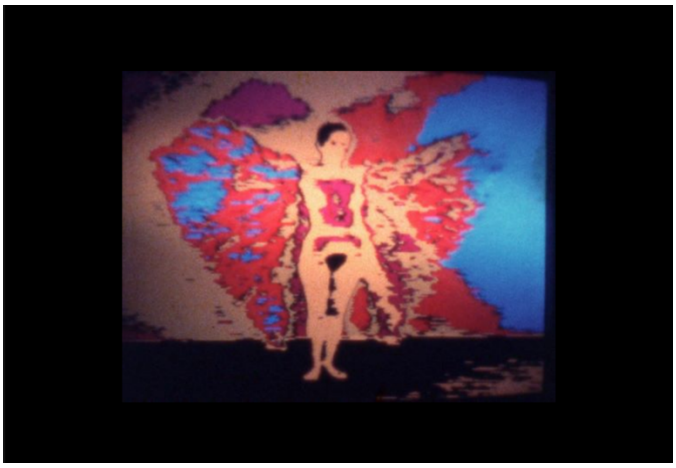

Fig. 16 Still from the video *Butterfly* (1975)

According to Alex Kittle's blog post, "Exhibitions: 'Permission to Be Global/Prácticas Globales' at MFA Boston": "Mendieta's *Butterfly* is a subtle reflection on her early childhood in Cuba, before she was 'rescued' by the United States and sent to be raised in Iowa. This video self-portrait echoes a photograph of the artist dressed as a butterfly

when she was 5." Mendieta herself has been quoted as saying, "In my work I am in a sense reliving my heritage. My sources are memories, images, experiences, and beliefs that have left their mark in me" (qtd. in Viso 36). The childhood photo to which Kittle was referring was coincidentally recently published online on the Galerie LeLong's (which houses the Ana Mendieta Estate) Facebook account (fig. 17). Certainly, one can see how this happy memory has been translated into this striking digital multimedia artwork.

Fig. 17 A Young Ana Mendieta Dressed as a Butterfly in Her Native Cuba

This piece in particular is deemed "experimental" due to the technique which the artist used during video processing to achieve her aesthetic of the intensely mutating colors. Laura Wertheim Joseph explains that, after Ana filmed herself:

> She then input the footage into a 16-channel video processor, which she used to assign vibrant colors to the light-reflecting objects within the image field. Over the course of the video, she assigned different colors to different levels of brightness. The resulting image is posterized […] [and] it displays a wide range of bright colors. (228)

Furthermore, there was yet another layer to its creation, as Ana then "filmed the manipulated video off the monitor using a Super 8 camera" (228). Wertheim Joseph and Raquel Cecilia Mendieta's essays on Ana Mendieta's films explain that Super 8 film was utilized at that time due to its availability, the cameras were user-friendly, and it was relatively cheap to buy the film (Cecilia Mendieta 170-71; Wertheim Joseph 228). Using Super 8 was considered somewhat of an avant-garde tool since at that time artists such as "Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Gordon Matta-Clark, Dennis Oppenheim, and Andy Warhol, among many others, used the 8mm formats as a medium to record performances and create works on film" (Cecilia Mendieta 171).

Mendieta's experimental *Butterfly* piece can be further categorized as an *intermedial performance*.[58] While Chapter three of this investigation will expand much more upon the concept of "intermediality", for the purposes of understanding the term "intermedial performance" in this chapter, I will briefly define it here as per theorist Dick Higgin's explanation as "[the way] in which the materials of various more established art forms are 'conceptually fused' rather than mere[ly] juxtaposed" (McGill 43). As previously mentioned, the artist filmed herself, and fed the footage through a 16-channel video processor to assign extreme saturation to the colors in the film when played back again, essentially creating a third and final layered rendition of the performance. We could consider this layer of video, that which is created when Mendieta places the video

[58] Maria Shchelokova indicates that: "From 1960 to the end of the twentieth century there was a proliferation of the use of media projections in theater, dance, and performance art, using both screens and video monitors. The relative cheapness and ease of use of video technologies have led many artists to study possibilities for the integration of visual media in their live performances, as well as to create independent works of video art" (18).

over the original film through the processor, as a rudimentary[59] form of *mapping*. Mapping, which is also known by the terms *projection mapping* or *video mapping*, is a technique where images and video are superimposed over three-dimensional objects. But rather than images being superimposed on the artist's body via a projector during the performance, a layer of the video has been manipulated during the production and editing process of the original film.

An intermedial performance calls attention to how each component of media interacts and thus redefines one another (Groot Nibbelink 220). As theorists Lieseth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx indicate:

> [I]ntermediality in performance often refers explicitly to the media themselves. This entails both references to concrete media objects staged within the live performance, as the remediation of specific medial aspects such as framing strategies, spectatorial address, cultural codes and so on. In the staging of media, conventions are often played with, whether the goal is to tease the spectator or to show the construction of (the effects of) media. (225)

The *Butterfly* performance thus becomes much more complex, as "an intermedial performance invites the active participation of the spectator to decode, reconfigure, and interpret the media included in the performance" (Groot Nibbelink 225). Mendieta's body

[59] I consider this technique of mapping rudimentary provided that contemporary application of the mapping technique can be much more precise provided the ability to utilize computer programming. Programming can take into account the exact measurements of the object's surface so that the video or images projected onto the object only cover or appear at a particular time and for a certain duration and/or on a particular area or portion at the artist's discretion.

becomes an interface[60] of data since it is the site where there is an interaction between the corporeal and media technology as the light saturation plays across the artist's body. As a result, one can note an interaction between a variety of different sign systems simultaneously present in this piece: the body itself as media (and therefore a medium in the performance), the saturation of color that moves across the body (appearing via the layer of the 16-channel video processor), and the reference to her childhood photo (a medium outside the context of this film) that Mendieta recreates also becomes another sign in this work.

One can clearly see that upon taking into account the childhood photograph and comparing it alongside this video, Mendieta is mediating not only a personal memory but also the collective memory of Cuban diaspora utilizing once again, symbols related to and stemming from nature as she did so often in the majority of her artwork. Author John Perreault shares his observations and own interpretation of this piece by indicating that: "Because of its life cycle, the butterfly is often used as a symbol of resurrection or of the soul, or both simultaneously—or of transformation" (45). One could also consider, apart from being an emblem of metamorphosis, that the butterfly represents a transient and migratory creature that even crosses international borders. Such is the case of the Monarch Butterfly, which can journey up to 3,000 miles in order to escape the cold winter months in the United States and Canada to settle in Mexico; they later return to the north when the climate is suitable for them to inhabit their particular territory or environment ("Migration and Overwintering").

[60] The Miriam Webster dictionary defines interface as "the place at which independent and often unrelated systems meet and act on or communicate with each other" ("Inerface").

Although Mendieta did not necessarily leave the island of her own accord (it was the decision of her parents), she would later become an American citizen and was able to later return to the island when she was invited by the Cuban government to exhibit her art. If we were to place Mendieta's work within a different historical context, and had she migrated to the United States under different circumstances (in particular during the Mariel boatlift crisis in the 1980s), the butterfly metaphor would be much more telling and add yet another layer to the meaning of this performance. When many Cuban citizens opted to willingly defect and leave for the United States, the disdain towards these particular individuals was certainly understood as the pro revolutionary inhabitants of the island referred to them as *gusanos* or worms (Emanuel). Yet this particular term would later be used in a phrase that, though once again containing a degree of contempt, indicated that upon leaving the *gusanos* were able to find themselves in much better and stable circumstances in the United States, essentially transforming themselves into *mariposas* or butterflies. The dissidents who migrated to the United States were able to improve, if not drastically, their quality of life upon leaving the island. "Los gusanos se convirtieron/se transformaron en mariposas",[61] the Cubans who stayed behind on the island began to say, making reference to those who had left, risking life and limb in order to pursue a better life and could afford to return to Cuba and visit, and as a consequence were able to patronize "hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and stores as tourists and using dollars, which were banned for Cubans at home" (Cervantes-Rodríguez 173).

Ultimately, one can draw a parallel of the butterfly and Ana Mendieta's own journeys between Latin America, North America, and eventually Europe, as Dolores

[61] The worms have transformed into butterflies.

Alcaide Ramírez illustrates: "A través de su obra, se observa la falta de un hogar estable, de una nación precisa, puesto que las identidades de Mendieta nunca se paran en un mismo lugar durante mucho tiempo, viajan constantemente, confundiendo las fronteras y borrando los límites"[62] (75). It is for this reason that Alcaide Ramírez disagrees with Jane Blocker's theory of Mendieta being anchored in exile, as she debates along with theorist Emma Pérez that there is an emphasis in "el movimiento entre destinos como manera más eficaz de subvertir los límites de las identidades […] lo que encontramos en Ana Mendieta [es]: ese deseo de estar en constante movimiento, de no dejarse atrapar en una sola identidad, lo cual significa a veces el vivir en una constante contradicción"[63] (71). While Alcaide Ramírez disagrees with Blocker's perspective on the notion of exile as a fixed "place" or "state" from which Mendieta creates her work, she does acknowledge Blocker's observation that Mendieta identifies with nature and more specifically, the "earth", in order to undermine and circumvent the notion that the self belongs to a specific geographical location and therefore, a fixed identity: "She can make exile home. By reaching for her roots in the earth and not in country, she can claim an identity anywhere. Her imagined community crosses all territories, escapes all border guards, can be found anywhere on the planet, is tied neither to language nor to race" (Blocker 78). Ultimately, and in the same manner, Alcaide Ramírez adds the following commentary, and concludes the difficulty of "placing" Mendieta:

[62] Throughout her work, one observes the lack of a stable home, of a precise nation, given that Mendieta's identities never stop in the same place for long, they constantly travel, confusing borders and erasing boundaries.

[63] The movement between destinations as a more effective manner of subverting the limits of identities […] what we find in Ana Mendieta [is]: that desire of being in constant movement, of not allowing herself to be trapped in on identity, which sometimes means living in constant contradiction.

> [T]ampoco sus obras pueden ser confinadas a una determinada nación basada en un espacio geográfico específico ni histórico. La falta de fronteras hace que la obra de Mendieta se sitúe siempre en el espacio intersticial donde es posible el cuestionamiento de naciones estáticas, no sólo de nación (cuya geografía está en constante movimiento para esta artista) sino también de género y raza.[64] (75)

Theorist Irit Rogoff discusses Mendieta's art in her book *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (2000), indicating that the substance of her work is an: "'abnegation of all forms of boundaries.' By oscillating constantly between margin and center, First and Third World conditions, the ancestral past and present, Mendieta 'articulated visually, different balances between universality and specificity'" (Viso 30).[65] It is here that Rogoff alludes to "'deterritorialization,' a concept drawn from contemporary and feminist theory, to describe the 'displacement of identities, persons, or meanings that is endemic to the postmodern world system'" as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Viso 30).[66]

In the piece *Butterfly,* and as in all of Mendieta's performances, her body becomes a site of identity negotiations. As Clara Escoda Agustí explains, the corporeal "becomes the site where differences, understood as clashes, collisions, fusions, and confrontations between two or more cultures, meet and are validated in the process of

[64] Neither can her works be confined to a determined nation based on a specific nor historical space. The lack of borders makes Mendieta's work be forever situated in the intersectional space where the questioning of static nations, not only of the nation (whose geography is in constant movement), but also of gender and race is possible.
[65] Here Olga Viso paraphrases a concept presented by Irit Rogoff in her book *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (2000) (130-31).
[66] Viso is once again paraphrasing Irit Rogoff (128).

negotiating her own identity out of the given social relations and discursive formations of power" (296). The alternating colors that glide over and saturate the artist's skin not only demonstrate Mendieta's ability and desire to experiment with the new technologies and film making processes at her disposal, but also one could argue, symbolize instability, interrogation, and malleability as opposed to the notion of a monolithic national, racial, and cultural identity. The kaleidoscope of colors in her performance may indeed represent that of Cuba's and the artist's own mestizo cultural history and evolving present. Many Cubans were forced to leave the island due to political turmoil and find themselves living abroad in a foreign land. Such an interpretation would not be considered a stretch of the imagination, as Howard Oransky reaffirms that:

> Mendieta's work grew out of her own experience and a larger collective experience, which included the dislocations characteristic of the modern era: personal, cultural, and political displacement; the loss of connection and continuity with one's individual and collective past; and the pressures to conform and assimilate within a foreign environment, language, and value system. (10)

Certainly, much has been written about Ana Mendieta's work, in particular the films of her performances and photographs of her body-work. Her pieces set the precedent for those who have followed her, and she was a pioneer in her art. She anchored herself within a hybrid identity, fusing nature, the human body, and traversing borders by underpinning the notion of pertaining to one fixed geographical space. Olga M. Viso summarizes the essence of Mendieta's performance, indicating that it acts "as a metaphorical, and at times a metaphysical agent between the ancestral past and present,

between memory and history, biology and society, sculpture and performance, nation and culture, human drives and social discourses" (134). While her nature work was ephemeral—as mentioned, her pieces were comprised of materials found at the site or within the environment of her performances and thus its remnants were eventually washed away by the elements or reclaimed by nature—the technology used to capture the artist's images and movements froze those moments in time and are the only remaining testimony of those original performances. As Iraida H. López explains:

> Mendieta's art, made outdoors in nature, using the elements it exhaustibly supplies, was tied to a specific time and place. It was meant to be transient. Nonetheless, the artist documented her site-specific art zealously and consistently through the use of still and video cameras, which furnished the imperishable image. The action is left behind, in the past, but the technology conserves it for the future, thus safeguarding the survival of memory as well as the ad libitum reproduction of the image. (111)

After the tedious and timely process of transposing, preserving, and archiving all of her aunt's films once the technology had advanced and "stabilized" so as not to damage the original film, Raquel Cecilia Mendieta reflected that, "Technology, like history, is ever changing. Although the visual content of Mendieta's films themselves will never change, the screening formats through which we experience the works have. New technology allows for new discoveries and experiences that can carry on to future generations" (181). In fact, Raquel Cecilia Mendieta goes into depth in her essay entitled "Uncovering Ana: The Rebirth of Mendieta's Filmworks" regarding the multiple steps taken to transfer all of Ana Mendieta's films from analog to digital format. In 2001, Raquelín Mendieta

(Ana's older sister) took several of the artist's films to begin converting her works to Digital Betacam via a lab in Los Angeles (169). Preserving Ana's films was a tedious and costly experience, and the Raquel Cecilia Mendieta indicates that the Mendieta family had to wait for the right moment and until the technology was stabilized to convert the materials. The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection took advantage of new 2K digital scanning technology, indicating that "With the advent of the digital revolution in the 1990s, what was once analog video was replaced with digital formats such as DVCAM, DVCPRO, and then Digital Betacam prosumer and professional marketplace" (172). The artist's niece continues to indicate that digital copies have special archival properties, since the quality of the video when transferred from analog to digital can be copied infinitely without losing any picture quality, and the "image should remain in the same condition as it was when first recorded" (172). However, there are certainly some challenges with digital transfer and it does not guarantee permanent conservation of digital materials, such as hard drives that contain the media assets failing, and instances where bits of the video drop out or skip (172). It is quite clear that there are challenges that may arise when carrying out this process, and that ultimately preservation comes with risks. Therefore, it was important to wait for the most cost-effective option and for media to stabilize to contain the media. In 2010, more of Ana's films were transferred using the same process used for the first films transferred in 2001, but instead they used the Y-front Ursa Diamond and updated DaVinci 888 color correction software in 2011 (173). Raquel Cecilia states that there is no point to scan "Mendieta's Super 8 films to anything higher than 2k; the camera lenses she used did not have good optics, the registration created softer images, and the film itself has slowly deteriorated with time"

(174). Every film was scanned at the highest resolution possible, and fortunately the only element that is changing are the platforms used for the film screenings, as the Estate indicates that "now we are creating HD sub-masters of the films, which will be made into Blu-rays, but in the near future the 2k master scans could be available via less costly projection options" (174).

Ignacio Mendieta, Ana's brother, initially took inventory of Ana's films in 1987. However, several of the films were not labeled. When Ana Mendieta's niece began to sort through the tapes, she gradually uncovered works that had perhaps not been viewed by anyone apart from the artist herself. These pieces, and many more are just being discovered. As Laura Wertheim Joseph's essay "Unfinished Processes: Going Back and Reeling Forward in Ana Mendieta's Films" suggests, it is in part due to the conversion of Ana Mendieta's films and correctly organizing and labeling them that new works are being uncovered. Wertheim Joseph explains that Ignacio Mendieta had found eighty-two reels of film placed in a box belonging to his sister's personal effects with no particular consistent system to catalogue the contents: "Some of these were marked with dates, descriptions, and locations in his sister's hand, some bore only impartial information (a date without a descriptive title, a location without a date, etc.), and still others were entirely unmarked" (187). Ignacio did his best to provide a detailed and coherent system of organization by indicating a descriptive title, followed by location and date (when available), and finally in which pieces his sister appeared nude by adding an "N" to the label (187-88).[67] As a result, when archivists of the collection went to review the

[67] The artist's mother, being very religious, was appalled to hear that there were videos where her daughter appeared nude. She asked her son Ignacio to destroy these films to keep Ana's

materials it was hard to distinguish which organizational system one should utilize when approaching and analyzing the work, that of the artist's or Ignacio's. By the year 2013, the Estate realized the confusion and the discrepancies regarding not the titles of the works, but the films themselves (188). On one occasion, Ignacio had thought that there were two films of the same performance when one was a dupe of the original, as was the case with reels labeled *Creek* and "Bad (milky) 1st take" by the artist. In this particular case, one of the reels had never been exhibited since the numbering provided by Ignacio presented the assumption that "Mendieta had attempted two consecutive albeit very similar takes of the work because she was dissatisfied with the first 'Bad (milky)' version" (188). Added to this confusion, was the fact that there are some performances that are assumed to have been compiled by Ignacio as they "failed to meet the temporal demands of Super 8 film, either by running longer or shorter than three minutes" (195). But as Wertheim Joseph goes on to explain, the films were not meant to be watched consecutively or in a particular chronological order, rather they were meant to be separate and stand-alone pieces. To further complicate matters, there were instances where the artist "did not always splice together separate reels that captured one work" (195). It has become evident that properly documenting and even viewing Ana's work has become an arduous task, but it has not been in vain. Due to the efforts of scholars working with collection, as of 2014, after the untangling and reorganization of Mendieta's films, scholars and curators now have access to all the works including those that had never been seen (193). While it has been argued that Ana's films have been thoroughly studied,

reputation intact, but rather than eradicating the films he simply wrote "N" on the labels and set them aside in the collect (Wertheim Joseph 187).

Raquel Cecilia Mendieta and Laura Wertheim Joseph's essay suggest that there are more distinct and singular pieces yet to be uncovered provided the advances in technology to maintain, view, and merge outdated analog materials.

Ana Mendieta has been chosen as a point of departure for this chapter as her legacy and thus political stance, feminist ideology,[68] and digital/nature aesthetic have certainly paved the way for other performance artists and future social media bloggers, who are considered to be writing from a place of exile or displacement. Perhaps this particular analysis of the artwork of Ana Mendieta is not merely situated within the scope in which one can experiment and express oneself with and via digital media, but rather demonstrates its power and the capability for one to view and review, experience and/or (re)approach, and preserve memory that would otherwise be lost, quite literally, to the elements.

Maritza Molina

Maritza Molina is an artist who works primarily with photography, capturing her pieces "using a 4x5 largo-format Im camera as her main tool; as well as with drawing, performance, video, sound installation, and sculpture" (Molina). Born in Havana, Cuba,

[68] Ana Mendieta met Mary Beth Edelson, founding member of the A.I.R Gallery, in New York in 1976 (Viso 70). However, was not until 1978, that she would be voted into the A.I.R collective (Viso 73). The A.I.R, or Artists in Residence, was established in 1972 "as the first not-for-profit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States" ("History"). As a member of the organization, "Mendieta ran the reception desk, organized and installed exhibitions, and was a regular participant in panel discussions" (Viso 73). While working at A.I.R, the artist was also involved with the Heresies collective, which was a woman's journal established in 1977 (Viso 73). However, Mendieta would eventually distance herself from these organizations as she felt that she was excluded from the movement as a woman of color, and in particular being a woman from Latin America, writing in a catalogue essay that: "American Feminism as it stands is basically a white middle class movement…This exhibition points not necessarily to the injustice and incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being 'other'" (Ana Mendieta "Introduction").

in the early 1970s, Molina was raised in an environment that nurtured her artistic inclinations, and music in particular played a significant role in her life—her mother is an opera singer and her father a classical guitarist (Carvalho 6). Despite these positive aspects of her childhood, Molina's family endured harsh political backlash—what would later be described by the artist as traumatic—upon the Cuban authorities' discovery that the artist's father planned to leave the island along with his wife and children. As a result, the Molina's therefore lived under constant threat and persecution not only on behalf of the authorities but their neighbors as well. Such retaliatory actions, Acts of Repudiation or *actos de repudio* in Spanish, began in the year 1980 with the Mariel boatlift (Ojito). Amnesty International defines these *actos* as "government orchestrated demonstrations, usually carried out in front of the homes of government critics, and attended by government supporters, state officials and law enforcement agencies. Police are usually present, but fail to intervene to stop these assaults" ("Cuba"). Author Mette Louise Berg adds that they are also "organized by colleagues of neighbors of those intending to leave [Cuba] and included public shaming, vandalism and violence towards the would-be migrant and their property" (90). The Molinas even suffered house arrest, an experience that would leave a lasting stain on the memories of her childhood in Cuba, as the artist recounts to Denise Carvalho in her article entitled "A World in Reverse: The Work of Martiza Molina" (2008): "She recalls recurrent nightmares over the years in which she saw the faces of men outside her window and heard their voices screaming death threats to her father while they brutally pounded on the front door of the family home" (6). When she was ten years old, her family finally fled to Miami where she has lived since the mid-1980s (Marthell; Carvalho 6).

While Molina does not specify the circumstances under which herself and her family left Cuba, one could surmise that she belongs to the third of four distinct waves of large quantities of Cuban nationals who left the island looking for refuge. Unlike Ana Mendieta's circumstances of exile abroad in the Midwest of the United States, Molina was rather fortunate to have settled in Miami. Not only was the Molina family able to establish itself in a metropolis with a strong Latin American presence, they also integrated themselves into a large community of Cuban refugees and exiles. Despite being surrounded by individuals that spoke the same language and shared the same cultural heritage, as well as having her immediate family present in Miami, an adolescent Molina suffered immensely from culture shock, as Carvalho suggests that the artist was: "So shy that some thought her mute, the young Maritza, at a loss between malls and streets jammed with cars and people (polarities apparently too chaotic to swallow) struggled to adapt to the American lifestyle" (6). Molina would eventually find an emotional outlet in the visual arts, where she would go on to study at the Rhode Island School of Design and graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Fine and Studio Arts. In her biography located on her personal website, she writes that she has "[a] background in music, classical and Afro-Cuban dance and rhythm, theater, poetry, tongue-twisters, along with a passion for drawing and a curiosity for Renaissance Masters in[fl]uenced her creative senses, in addition to a layered history from her upbringing in Cuba" (Molina). One can see these experiences have certainly had a profound impact on the themes that appear in Molina's art. According to Carvalho, her artwork "draws from three main influences: the ambiguous relationship between family traditions, her ritualized connection to nature, and the traumatic experience suffered during her family's escape

from Cuba" (6). Upon reflecting on these influences, one can draw connections and parallels between Molina and Mendieta's work. In fact, Molina performed and subsequently photographed a piece entitled *Covered by Tradition* (2003) that was commissioned to pay homage to the late Latin American art icon (fig. 18).

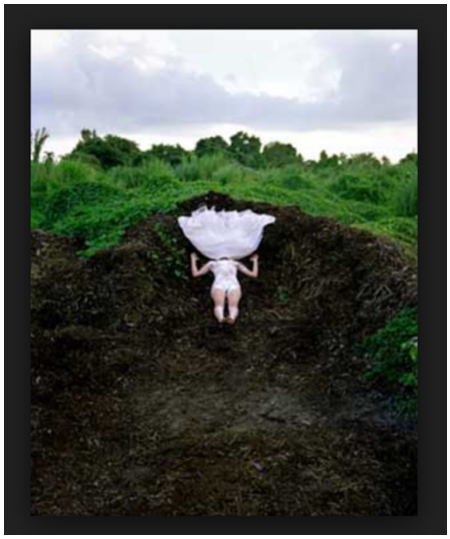

Fig. 18 *Covered by Tradition* (2003) by Molina Fig. 19 *Silueta de arena* (1978) by Mendieta

The location of her body lying in the earth with hands raised[69] is similar to that of a figure found in Mendieta's *Silueta Series* (fig. 19). Molina memorializes the spiritual connection that she has with her predecessor given that "Molina [specifically] chose Mendieta because both artists experienced the feeling of bicultural displacement" (Carvalho 7).

[69] Mary Jane Jacob indicates in her article "Ashé in the art of Ana Mendieta" (1996), "Hands were important part of Mendieta's imagery. Her silhouette is often seen with arms bent and hands raised in prayer, homage, invocation, or blessing. Mendieta believed that her energy went through her hands. She was fascinated by the fact that each person's hand is unique, and she felt that one's whole destiny is in the palm of one's hand" (196).

Molina clearly illustrates her memories of trauma, personal memory (upon having immigrated from Cuba to the United States as a child), and bicultural displacement in her photographic piece *Memory Line* (2005). In this piece, one can see that a woman (none other than Molina herself) is doubled over in a hanging position from a clothesline in what would presumably be a recreation of her backyard in Cuba, which is a lush green and overgrown with plants. Though difficult to distinguish because of the resolution of the accompanying photo, hanging next to the artist on the clothesline are: a rag doll, a house dress, a microphone, a guitar, a rifle, cooking pots, paper boats, and a broom (fig. 20). The composition of this particular photographic piece was quite unique given that Molina constructed the scene from scratch and did not digitally manipulate it, "To be able to hang herself from the clothing line, she consulted people in the circus to find the correct rope that would withstand her weight without slacking" (Carvalho 7). In this sense, as Molina herself suggests, her "photography process is much like a production set, where she sketches, researches, scouts, designs, builds, hand-makes props, directs and executes all aspects of her pieces" (Molina).

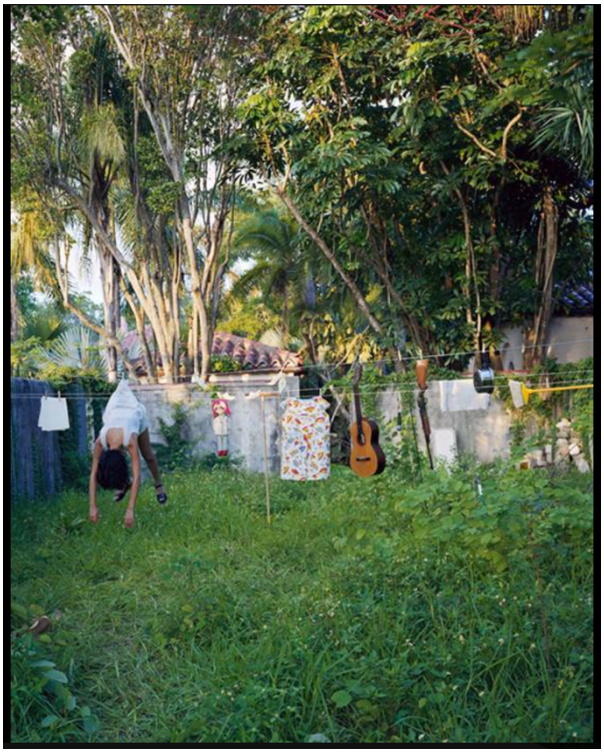

Fig. 20 *Memory Line* (2005)

The objects in the photo resonate with the artist and have important personal significance as they are directly related to her childhood in Cuba. As Molina herself has indicated, the "house dress [was] made by her grandmother, [the] microphone [refers] to her mother's opera singing, […] and [the] paper boats [represent those], which Molina and her sister sent down the stream at the curb in front of her house on rainy days" (Carvalho 7). The remaining objects include: a rag doll, which clearly represents the artist's childhood and innocence, perhaps once happier times. The cooking pots also have a positive connotation and one of comfort, of family members cooking in the home, gathering together and sharing a meal. The guitar embodies the artist's father who is a classical guitarist, and whose music filled the household. Finally, the rifle seems to counter these positive symbols, indicating the underlying political violence and unrest

that coexists amidst these positive memories. In Carvalho's interview with Molina, the artist indicates the specific connotations of these symbols in the photo, she reveals that the scene was inspired by a dream that she had about her homeland:

> the artists was flying to the backyard of her family's home in Cuba and landing on a clothing line from where she watched, with great joy, her father playing guitar and her grandmother sweeping the floor. In the dream, suddenly everyone starts to disappear, and Molina, gasping for air, fears that her past is gone. (7)

While Carvalho suggests that this is an "apparently playful and humorous piece" (7), upon taking into account the circumstances in which the scene was constructed, it is possible to note a twinge of heartache and panic upon being severed from one's cultural heritage and being forced to separate from family, and leave that life behind due to political persecution. Though Carvalho has a contrasting interpretation of the sentiment that the piece conveys, it does indeed reflect "the dualities between play and loss and the fragility and fragmentation of memory" (7).

Certainly, it is important to further consider the possibilities of photography and the photograph's relationship to memory and mediating memory. Philosopher Siegfried Kracauer indicates in his essay entitled "Photography" (1927) that:

> An individual retains memories because they are personally significant. Thus, they are organized according to a principle which is essentially different from the organizing principle of photography. Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory images retain what is given as only insorfar as it has significance. Since what is

> significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory images are at odds with photographic representations. From the latter's perspective, memory images appear to be fragments—but not only because photography does not encompass the meaning to which they refer and in relation to which they cease to be fragments. (50)

Memories are personally significant to the owner of a particular memory, and a memory is a fragmentation of the past. The owner of these memories organizes them in such a way by emphasizing details while forgetting others for variety of reasons known only to the bearer of the memory. Memories therefore are perceptions of a subjective nature and are truths as perceived by the individual who possess them. Conversely, a photograph captures a likeliness of an object or a place of a spatial or temporal continuum; in other words, it is a snapshot of a particular place and time from a fixed point of view.[70] A photograph can only be analyzed by the details of its composition: its color, the angles, its pixilation and/or clarity etc. Therefore, a photo is rendered virtually meaningless unless accompanied by a context and an explanation of its significance (the memory attached to it) when looked upon by the viewer. However, the photograph in itself cannot reveal "truth" like memory can. When we as viewers look at Molina's photograph—an image of a myriad of objects that would at first glance seemingly chosen at random—and

[70] Philosopher Walter Benjamin, who writes about photography and the "aura", also considered the authenticity or originality of an image, in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) adds that a photograph has a unique time and space in which it was created, and this is what gives the photograph its uniqueness (3). When we take an image and copy it via mechanical reproduction, we are taking that image out of its original time and space. As a result, the aura is diminished and the work depreciated.

come to understand that each item has a particular association and memory attached to it, and that overall the scene represents the desperate attempt to cling to those memories and in a sense eternize and her past as well as her cultural heritage, we understand the "truth" of the image. Photographs, Kracauer goes onto say in his essay, represent the fear of death, as we take a photo in the futile attempt to try and capture a significant moment, object, or person and immortalize it (59). Yet that significance is bound to be lost to oblivion once the bearer of the memory, the individual who provides meaning to the image, is gone.

In his book *How Society Remembers* (1989), author Paul Connerton indicates that there are two modes that designate how cultural memory functions, the "cognitive mode" and also "the performative mode". The cognitive mode is the process by which an individual withdraws into their past experiences of events and brings them forward into the present through the act of remembering. On the other hand, the "performative mode" consists of the commemorative acts that are carried out and thus bring about a sense of the past (102). One can clearly see how Molina utilizes both modes of cultural memory in the photograph of this piece to reflect and remediate a fusion of pleasant childhood memories along with the trauma of familial separation and forced migration abroad due to political strife in her country of origin. Her performance also merges her present to her past, and consolidates her connection and belonging to a wider community of Cuban-Americans in the diaspora that share similar experiences of displacement. As theorist van Dijck indicates, such memory work "invokes a complex set of recursive activities that shape our inner worlds, reconciling past and present, allowing us to make sense of the world around us, and constructing an idea of continuity between self and others" (5).

Essentially, it is through the act of Molina's performance that she is recognizing and confronting negative memories, and does so as a form of therapy. E. Ann Kaplan contends that while "Trauma can never be 'healed' in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being 'translated' via art" (19).

As Christine Lohmeier and Christian Pentzold's article "Making Mediated Memory Work: Cuban-Americans, Miami Media and the Doings of Diaspora Memories" (2014) suggests:

> Beyond such a generic relation to memory, the concept of mediated memory work refers to purposeful, memory-related practices that enact instantiations of personal or collective memories through a wide range of historically divergent and culturally heterogeneous practices, such as documenting, registering, capturing, saving, storing, anchoring, commemorating, reminiscing, recalling, evoking, celebrating, framing and eliminating the past. (779)

Lohmeier and Pentzold continue to say that this past is contemplated, evaluated, and debated discursively (779). The choice of the location of the act or performance of mediated memory is deliberate as well, as memories are firmly tied to places, monuments, and particular landscapes; the act of remembering in itself serves as to reconstruction of space (779). For this reason, the location of Molina's performance plays an important role in the reenactment from the dreams and memories of her youth, as the lush green environment where the shot was taken could be easily confused for the

vegetation found in the countryside of Cuba. Molina indicates that, "as a protagonist in her work, Maritza stages herself into diverse environments and landscapes, creating constructed realities that translate into visual metaphors" (Molina). Her physical positioning and gesturing toward the earth demonstrate the limbo in which the artist finds herself, as she is neither completely "here" or attached/belonging to the United States, and her homeland is slipping from her grasp, as it is posited in an ethereal reality or "there."

The role of media in mediated memory work is not to "just assist us to materialize and make accessible past events and experiences," however, "they are also pivotal in constituting the past *sui generis* as they define and shape how memory work can be done and render such remembering accountable and acceptable" (Lohmeier 780). The personal experiences of trauma and memory collide with that of the greater collective memory of Cuban-Americans migrants in Maritza Molina's *Memory Line* (2005). This is no more evident or accurately reflected upon than when Molina states in her own words within the biography of her personal website that her artwork:

> [I]s shaped by personal life experiences, an integral component in all of her work, and re[a]cts how she occupies the world, and how the world that surrounds her impacts her life […]. As a whole, her work touches upon personal and universal issues of humanity identity, the role of women and religion, freedom and our relationship with nature, and the quest for truth and meaning. Living in a duality of cultures, Cuban and American, and merging her individual thinking with traditional beliefs, her life is o[n]e rich with contradictions that fuel her work. (Molina)

Molina essentially exploits the possibilities of her chosen mediums (performance and photography), refashioning them in order to generate a piece that produces new meanings, which she creates by carefully choosing cultural artifacts and upon repurposing them in a carefully chosen environment, essentially creates a *mise-en-scène* where trauma (both personal and the collective experience of the Cuban migrant) meets childhood memory.

Yasmin S. Portales Machado

Yasmín S. Portales Machado is an Afro-Cuban blogger born in Havana, Cuba, in the year 1980 and is a social activist for the queer community who self identifies as queer as well as a feminist. She introduces herself in the aptly titled "Acerca de Yasmín" or "About Yasmín" portion of her blog at yasminsportales.wordpress.com by indicating: "Vivir en Cuba y ser Queer ha sido elección. Mi vida es un fino equilibrio entre el ejercicio de la maternidad, el feminismo y el marxismo critico"[71] ("Acerca de Yasmín"). According to her professional experience documented on the website *Directorio de afrocubanas*, she has been the editor of several academic journals such as *El apuntador* (2000) published in the Facultad de Artes Escénicas del Instituto Superior de Arte, a journalist for the cultural website Cubaliteraria, a writer for the news website *Havana Times*, and was a collaborator on the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX) between 2005-2006, where she helped maintain the website and produce the quarterly bulletin *Sexología al día*. In 2011 she helped establish *Proyecto Arcoiris* or Project

[71] Living in Cuba and being Queer has been a choice. My life is a fine balance between the exercise of maternity, feminism, and Marxist criticism.

Rainbow whose main objective is to fight against homophobia in Cuba ("Yasmín S. Portales Machado"). The organization declares that it believes that:

> [E]s necesario luchar, porque todavía hoy, en Cuba, es difícil salir a la calle cada día y vivir como personas no heterosexuales […] Defendemos el derecho de negarnos a mentir a nuestras familias, comunidades, colectivos de trabajo, amistades; defendemos también el respeto a aquellas personas heterosexuales que nos apoyan contra la homofobia cotidiana.[72] ("Quiénes")

Currently she manages not only her own personal blog, but is an active and avid user of the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. In the fall of 2016, the blogger left the island in order to pursue a Master's degree in Spanish at the University of Oregon,[73] where she continues to study the "expression of gender issues and dissident sexualities in Cuban science fiction and fantasy literature" (Portales, "Help").

Certainly, we must consider Portales's writings within the realm of geographical displacement, given that she has since moved to Oregon and writes and advocates for the LGBTQ community from abroad. In her article "Digital Diaspora" author Nydia Swaby acknowledges the fact that, "The 'virtual world' is ideally suited for connecting diasporas at the local and global level. It provides a forum to exchange ideas, debate, and mobilize

[72] It is necessary to fight, because still today, in Cuba, it is difficult to go out in public every day and live as non-heterosexuals […] We defend the right to refuse to lie to our families, communities, work groups, friends; we also defend the respect toward those heterosexual people that support us against everyday homophobia.

[73] When asking for economic support on her *GoFundMe* page in order to be able to obtain visas for herself and her small family and to fly to Eugene, Oregon (where the University of Oregon is located), Portales indicates that she obtained a BA in Theater Criticism in Cuba (Portales, "Help"). Since the composition of this chapter, Portales now resides in Illinois where she is a doctorate student at Northwestern University.

opinions (Rheingold, 1993), as well as support friendship and acceptance between strangers (Wellman, 1999), all of which aids in the cultivation of digital diasporas." Swaby highlights the fact that most "diasporas often use Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin to build online communities that support integration in host countries" indicating that such results are based on research provided by Diminescu, Jacomy, and Renault (2010). This is certainly the case of Portales's preference of digital expression, which seems to have shifted from the use of the blog—much more popular in Cuba, with their purpose ranging from the dissemination of news, propaganda and the reflection of Cuban reality for the outside world to see—and transitioned toward the use of social media networks.

In a recent interview conducted between the blogger/activist and myself, she discusses her introduction to the Internet, how she developed her technical skills, and how this trajectory would later bring her to be one of the most recognized bloggers on the island and who would eventually contribute to a wide variety of opinion columns and academic publications.[74] She begins by explaining that:

> Yo no elegí trabajar en internet, la internet fue una cosa que me ocurrió. Me encontré a un amigo de La Lenin[75] en una calle de la Habana Vieja en

[74] The question that I posed to Yasmín which generated this response was the following: "¿Cuáles fueron los factores que ayudaron al desenvolvimiento de su trabajo por medio del internet?" [What were the factors that helped the development of your work via the Internet?] (Personal Interview).

[75] Portales explained the significance of this school to me in a footnote that she added at the end of our email exchange: "La Lenin. Estudié allí de 1994 a 1997. Me casé con un graduado de La Lenin, más del 50% de mis amistades son de allí" (Personal Interview). [La Lenin. I studied there from 1994 to 1997. I got married to a graduate of La Lenin, [and] more than 50% of my friendships come from there]. The two links she includes regarding the school are the following: http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2018/02/21/vocacionales-la-lenin-tiempo-de-definiciones-fotos-y-videos/#.WpXbqKhubIU and http://cartasdesdecuba.com/educacion-dice-que-no-desaparece-la-lenin/ .

> el verano de 2001. Yo había dejado en "pausa" mi carrera en el Instituto Superior de Arte y simplemente vegetaba en esos meses. Mi amigo me dijo que, al menos, debía conseguir trabajo, así que procedió a recomendarme al director de Cubaliteraria, la editorial electrónica recién nacida para la que trabajaba. No por primera vez en mi vida, las redes de solidaridad queer me ayudaron: además de la recomendación de mi amigo, resultó que el secretario del director también era de La Lenin. Era un año menor que yo, pero nos conocíamos por la red informal de gente LGBT de la escuela. Este joven, era novio de un gran amigo del director y exprofesor mío, ese profesor fue llamado para comprobar mis referencias y apoyó mi entrada a Cubaliteraria.[76] (Personal Interview)

While Internet has become more accessible even for the average inhabitant of the island—the state-owned telecom company ETSECA opened approximately 237 paid public Wi-Fi hotspots since 2014 (Jacobs)—in 2001 Internet access was sparse and often only available to wealthy foreign tourists vacationing in luxury hotels. However, Portales indicates "Yo había visto la internet 'funcionar' en la CUJAE, la Facultad de Economía

[76] I did not choose to work on the Internet, the Internet was something that happened to me. I met a friend from *La Lenin* on the street in Old Havana in the summer of 2001. I had put my career at the Instituto Superior de Arte on "hold", and I was simply vegetating out those months. My friend told me that I should at least get a job, so he proceeded to recommend me to the director of *Cubaliteraria*, the recently created digital publishing company that I worked for. It would not be the last time in my life that, the networks of queer solidarity helped me: besides my friend's recommendation, it turned out that the director's secretary was also from *La Lenin*. He was a year younger than I, but we had met via the informal network of LGBT people from school. This young man was the boyfriend of a great friend of the director and previous professor of mine, that professor was called to verify my references and approved my start at *Cubaliteraria.*

de la Universidad de La Habana y en la Universidad de Ciencias Nucleares"[77] yet she did not have her own personal access until the summer of 2001 (Personal Interview). She holds fast to two facts that she has observed about the Internet over the years, sharing with me that "primero, casi todo está en la red de un modo u otro, pero no todo es gratis; segundo, la única protección para el usuario promedio está en la multitud, pero si los poderes deciden buscarte, te encontrarán"[78] (Personal Interview).

Her job at Cubaliteraria was simple, if not wonderfully vague, she remarks. She and her colleagues were to promote literature produced on the island via the Internet, without including any explicit political indicators. She affirmed that, "Nadie me enseñó hipertexto: yo "lo descubrí" por mi cuenta. Tampoco me enseñaron ética, menos mal que mi madre había sido estricta"[79] (Personal Interview). When she finally made the transition to speak about politics on the web, she had already had five years of experience navegating (between 2001-2006). In a humourous tone she observes that "había visto a Yahoo pasar de moda y a Google ascender (¡hasta se convirtió en verbo!), estuve en grupos de GeoCities, me hice una cuenta en Wikipedia, cree y abandoné una página de Myspace, y por eso fui muy escéptica con Facebook al principio"[80] (Personal Interview).

[77] I had seen the Internet 'work' in the CUJAE, the Economics Department at the University of Havana and in the University of Nuclear Sciences.
[78] First, almost everything is on the network in one way or another, but it is not free; second, the only protection for the average user is in the multitude, but if the powers that be decide to look for you, they will find you.
[79] No one taught me hypertext: I discovered it on my own. Nor did they teach me ethics, luckily my mother had been.
[80] I'd seen Yahoo go out of fashion, and Google rise in popularity (it even turned into a verb!), I was in GeoCities groups, I made a Wikipedia account, I created and abandoned a Myspace page, and for that reason I was very skeptical of Facebook at first.

Portales credits the web's unlimited access to information, now only out of reach by fingertips length, as having greatly widened her scope of reading. She became very much aware of the definition of the term queer and that it involves the exercise of writing without the reproduction of binary logic in Spanish and in English, of masculine studies, of lesbian feminism, of the philosophical implications of matrimony between two individuals of the same sex, and of the necessity to stop identifying transexuality as an illness. Furthermore, she states that she grew to be much more politically aware, noting that she now knows about "las vergüenzas de la izquierda y del falso progresismo de la derecha respecto a los asuntos de género"[81] (Personal Interview).

But certainly, with all this unbridled access to information, her family was seemingly skeptical and even worried about Yasmín's use of the Internet:

> [V]ivía en la realidad "desconectada" de Cuba donde no podías ni localizar un medicamento por teléfono. Mi familia me mantenía anclada a esa realidad "analógica" e impidió que tomase la burbuja del selecto grupo de intelectuales con correo electrónico y acceso a la red a través de instalaciones estatales o de sedes diplomáticas como la "nueva realidad". Esa otra parte de mi vida me impidió -me impide- imaginar a la internet como una panacea comunicativa o emancipadora.[82] (Personal Interview)

[81] I knew about the embarrassments of the left, and the false progressiveness of the right with respect to issues of gender.

[82] I lived in the "disconnected" reality of Cuba where you couldn't even find medication by calling on the telephone. My family kept me anchored in that "analogue" reality and prevented me from being part of the select group of intellectuals with emails addresses and access to the Web through State facilities or diplomatic headquarters as the "new reality". That other part of my life prevented me from imagining the Internet as an emancipatory and communicative cure.

Portales is certainly aware that she is privileged to be able to use the Internet, which is certainly not the case for many individuals world-wide despite living in a globalized society, "Yo s[é] que antes del ejercicio crítico de cualquier derecho está el acceso a ese derecho y, más importante aún, la garantía de la permanencia de ese derecho en el espacio social",[83] she begins by saying. And upon further reflection, notes that, "Para mí es igual con los anticonceptivos, el agua potable, la libertad de expresión o la internet. No son emancipadores si no son para todo el mundo, si solo alcanzan a una parte de la población devienen elementos que dividen a la sociedad, que refuerzan sus desigualdades preexistentes"[84] (Personal Interview).

Since her introduction to the World Wide Web by her friend and classmate, she would later be encouraged by the same friend, to create a blog about the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, join the Bloggers Cuba initiative, and as a result of enjoying the capability of disseminating information via the web and networking, would eventually go on to generate and manage her own personal blog as well as profiles in Facebook and Twitter. It is important to again emphasize that Portales certainly had an experience where it was easier for her to access the Internet in comparison to the everyday Cuban national, and it must be noted which particular sector of the population had been given such a privelege, which Portales herself sheds a light on in her book chapter entitled "Female Voices in Cuban Blogosphere: Did More than Just Support

[83] I know that before the critical exercise of any right is the access to that right, and the most important still, the guarantee of the permanence of that right in the social space.
[84] For me it's the same thing with contraceptives, drinking water, the freedom of expression on the Internet. They are not emancipatory if they are not available to everyone, if they only reach part of the population they become elements that divide society and reinforce preexistant inequalities.

Change?" (2014). She indicates that journalists and reporters were granted use of the Web and the equiptment to access it, stating that it began with the Union de Periodistas de Cuba (or UPEC) "from November 2005 when it offered 872 of its 1300 affiliates, 'press editors-reporters' packages of between 80 to 100 hours of navigation from home (combined with computer equipment of their own), at the cost of 1.30 dollars (Recio Silva 2006)" ("Female" 255).

The notion of blog and how it could greatly evolve and change the very notion of public journalism was of great interest on the island. While the very first blogs, emerging in 2005, were operated by Cuban journalists, from that year onward there were "independent" blogs that began to appear.[85] According to Portales, as of 2005, "the number of people with access to the network in Cuba increased steadily—legal, paralegal or downright illegal. Five years later, the degree of network penetration is 14% (Internet World Stats 2011), equivalent to 1.6 million users of the global network or national intranet services" ("Female" 255). For example, Yoani Sánchez's blog *Generación Y* had a great impact on the Cuban blogosphere, as the activist and journalist went as far as to openly criticize and challenge the government and its ideology on her blog by reflecting Cuban reality (255).

Regarding the phenomenon of the blogosphere, Portales indicates in her writing that Cuban blogs can be divided into two distinct categories: blogs of "insile" and "blogs of resistance". Portales credits writer Isabel Alba Duarte (2009) of having provided great insight to the term insile, suggesting that it "refers to the blogs of those who reside in

[85] Portales references the blog *Palabras robadas*, where its author would upload "homo-erotic stories".

Cuba and oppose the government" adding that "[t]he blogs of exile and insile can be contrasted to the 'Bloggers of the Revolution', called 'official' because of their hard line defense of Cuban identity with the current government" (255). In contrast, "blogs of resistance" refer to a small subdivision of bloggers from both inside and outside the island that typically refuse to take a political stance on their blogs, and either opt to discuss other topics in their work, or present political themes in an unbiased manner (256). If one were to categorize the personal blog of Portales, one would likely place her in the latter category, given that she writes about a wide variety of topics including her academic life in Oregon, movies and literature that she is currently interested in, but also about bigger issues of gender and human rights and equality for members of the LBGTQ community.

There are several blogs that belong to Portales and those that are still open and viewable to the public include: *¿Palabras robadas?*, *Bubusopía*, *En 2310 y 8225*, and *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio….* The blogs are listed chronologically in terms of their creation, as the first blog that Yasmín wrote in was *¿Palabras Robadas?* where the first post was published on September 1, 2005. *Bubusopía* is co-written with Rogelio M. Díaz Moreno (Yasmín's husband), and its first post was published October 20, 2006. Finally, the first post for *En 2310 y 8225* is May 2, 2007 and the posts for *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* began on May 13, 2015.

The content for each blog is quite distinct. It would seem that *¿Palabras robadas?*, contained within the Blogspot platform, is dedicated to Yasmín's short fictional writings (fig. 21). The subheading that appears beneath the blog's title remains

fixed atop every subsequent post that the reader selects to read within the blog. This script reads, "¿Qué es un fan fic?" with the following definition provided:

> Fanfiction (lit. ficción de fans), relatos de ficción escritos por fans de una película, novela, programa de TV, trabajo literario o dramático, donde se utilizan los personajes y situaciones del original y se desarrollan nuevos papeles para estos personajes. El slash es un género de fanfiction de temática homosexual. El término "slash" suele quedar reservado para las relaciones entre hombres; para las mujeres se emplea femslash, f/f slash o femmeslash. Aclarado el asunto: ¡Empieza el viaje![86] ("¿Qué es un fan fic?")

The author continues to explain with an advisory below the definition of fanfiction, indicating that: "All the publicly recognized characters are property of their respective authors. The original characters and stories are property of the author [meaning Yasmín]. No economic benefit is generated for this work, nor are the author's copyright rights [of the fanfiction] are of primary concern" ("¿Qué es un fan fic?").[87] Provided that the title of Yasmín's blog is *¿Palabras robadas?* ("Stolen Words?"), the content certainly corresponds, given that all the posts revolve around her creative writing within the genre of fan fiction.

[86] Fanfiction, fiction short stories written by movie, novel, or TV series fans. It can be a literary or theatrical piece, where characters and situations from the original work are used and new roles are developed for these characters. Slash is a genre of fan fiction with homosexual themes. The term "slash" tends to be reserved for relationships between men; for women femslash, f/f slash or femmeslash is used. Now that that has been clarified: Start the journey! (*¿Palabras robadas?*).
[87] This is my own translation of the original statement.

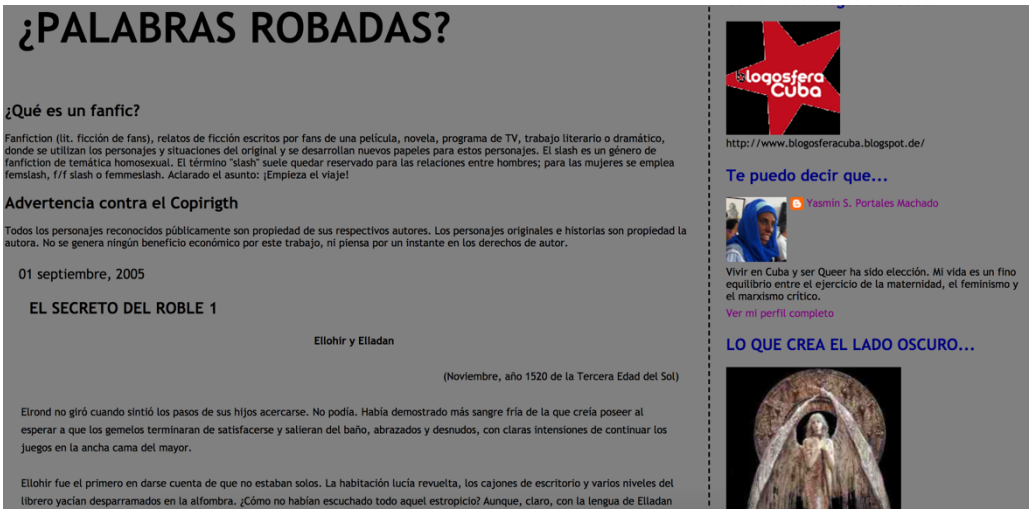

Fig. 21 First Blog Post Entry of *¿Palabras Robadas?*

The blog itself is structured and designed in a simple manner. As one can see in figure 21, every page is illuminated in a grey color. To the right are a list of several of the other blogs that belong to the author along with links, photos of Yasmín with friends and family, recommended websites dedicated to slash fan fiction, the embedded feeds of several Twitter accounts related to fan fiction (such as that of Harry Potter), and a list of the top four most read posts, and the posts archived by year (chronologically from most recent to oldest) in the form of a drop-down menu. The data analytics of the blog indicate that 24,563 people have visited the blog since its creation. The most recent and last post for the blog was written on July 15, 2014.

In the book *Narrar en la era de las blogoficciones* (2010) author Osvaldo Cleger explains that blogs are a framework of texts and electronic resources with three levels of expression. These three levels of expression include: 1) The principal level of expression consists of the blog entries or posts generated by the author; authors have absolute control of the content being published in these posts where they set the theme, rhetorical style,

and gives the blog a particular characteristic. 2) The second level of expression are the comments that a reader can choose to leave the author's post, and in this sense they become co-authors. 3) The third facet of expression are the hyperlinks that interconnect the posts in the blog; the links organize and structure the material in the blog as well as contribute to the virtual social interaction (247-48). Cleger goes on to point out the importance of the design of the blog and its accessibility to the reader also have an impact on the audience, its accessibility and aesthetic appeal can certainly draw in readers or repel them in an instant. In this respect, the aesthetic of the homepage and the content that initially appears to the reader is not only important but vital for continued readership (271). The design, theme, and navigation of the *¿Palabras robadas?* blog— along with the subsequent blogs that Portales created—are deliberately fixed to show not only the most recent posts, but also clearly display in the header the thematic selection of the blog and related embedded content (websites, Twitter users, and news articles) in the margins, and list of the most popular entries to attract those who may happen across the site.

The blog *Bubusopía* is a written collaboration between Portales and her husband Rogelio M. Díaz Moreno. The content of the blog is an interesting collage of a continuation of the fan fiction produced by Yasmín, along with reflections regarding Cuba, Latin American news and current events, and cultural events. On the right-hand side of the blog, both authors introduce themselves in the following manner, explaining who dedicates themselves to writing about a particular theme or topic. Rogelio M. Díaz Moreno indicates that he focuses on the topics of "science and awareness," writing that: "Soy físico nuclear de título, periodista y fotógrafo por estaciones. Para poner mi grano de arena en el conocimiento de las ciencias, su desarrollo y efectos en la vida humana

están estos reportajes agrupados bajo el nombre 'Divulgación Científica.'"[88] In comparison, Morales writes that "Me autotitulo feminista, marxista y no heterosexual, así que las noticias sobre el colectivo LGBT también tienen cabida aquí, por desgracia, están etiquetadas como "Derechos de Mujeres y gente LGBT," o sea, son reportajes de lucha. Date una vuelta y me darás la razón".[89] On the right side of the page, there is a "word cloud" visualization of the most commonly discussed topics in the blog, which is indicated by their font size (the bigger the words, the more frequently they are written about); the topics are also accompanied by the number of times the blog is tagged by that particular theme or topic (fig. 22).

Fig. 22 Word Cloud Visualization of Blog Topics (Right-Hand Side) in *Bubusopía*

[88] I hold a degree in nuclear physics, and I am a journalist and seasonal photographer. To add my two cents to scientific knowledge, and its effects on human life, these reports are grouped under the name "Scientific Dissemination".

[89] I label myself feminist, Marxist, and non-heterosexual, therefore the news about the LGBT group also have a place here, unfortunately, are labeled as "Women's rights and LGBT people", in other words, they are reports of struggle. Take a gander and you will agree with me.

According to this visualization, the most frequently discussed topics in this blog include: "ciencias sociales" (92 posts), "Cuba imaginada" (75 posts), "divulgación científica" (53 posts), "Rogelio" (51 posts), "derechos de mujeres y gente LGBT" (49 posts), and "política cultural" (47 posts). Certainly, one can note that topics covered by Yasmín's husband Rogelio are much more frequent in the blog overall, and one could surmise that he contributes more frequently than her.[90]

Of all four of the blogs that belong to Portales, *En 2310 y 8225* and *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio* are of particular interest to this analysis as they are written by Yasmín alone (and therefore only contain her voice), and contain posts on topics regarding the diversity of gender and sexual orientation within the Island and the struggle for equal rights. While the two blogs are not dedicated exclusively to these themes, it constitutes the majority of the blog's focus. Unlike the previous blogs, *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio* is the only one that is hosted on the website platform Wordpress. Its first posts originate from May 13, 2015. Since this date, the date of its creation, the blog has had 2,693 visits[91] and consists of 19 original posts.[92] There is an emphasis on the word original here given that it is evident that Yasmin S. Portales Machado moved the content from her previous blog, *En 2310 y 8225*, to the newer blog being hosted on Wordpress since she announces within a post titled "Me Mudo" ("I'm moving") on the blog *En 2310 y 8225* on May 13, 2015: "El nuevo blog se llama 'Mi vida es un fino equilibrio', no pude ponerle el mismo

[90] This blog is also hosted on Blogspot, but no posts have been contributed to it since November 17, 2016. Since that date 159,434 readers have visited the site (as checked on April 15, 2018).
[91] This total amount of visits was noted on April 15, 2018. There is a digital counter on the right-hand side of the blog, which tracks the total number of visits to the website. This number is constantly climbing, as it will count every instance a reader arrives at the page.
[92] There is a feature on the blogging platform that shows the data analytics of the page to its reader on the homepage, which includes the amount of visits since the blogs creation.

dominio que acá, pero quedó bastante cercano. Las nuevas actualizaciones llegarán por: https://yasminsportales.wordpress.com".[93] Though it is unclear why the blog was moved to a new platform, it could be that the Wordpress platform is less cumbersome to use than Blogspot, or simply that Portales felt like making a change to the blog's overall appearance that reflects the newest phase of her life studying in the United States (fig. 23).

Fig. 23 The Homepage of Portales's Blog *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…*

In fact, her most recent and subsequently last post is from November 19, 2016 where she writes about her daily life on campus indicating "Después de mi clase de Español 101, suelo caminar de vuelta a la oficina. Mientras vuelvo al refugio de Fr[ie]ndly Hall 30, pienso en cómo cumplir con mis lecturas, ejercicios y tareas de becaria. Prefiero pensar con banda sonora, así que Radio Pandora me acompaña"[94] ("Mi romance"). In any case,

[93] The new blog is called "Mi vida es un fino equilibrio", I cannot give it the same domain name as here, but it remains similar. The new updates will arrive by: https://yasminsportales.wordpress.com.

[94] After my Spanish 101 class, I tend to walk back to my office. While I return to the refuge of Friendly Hall 30, I think about how to complete my lectures, exercises, and homework. I prefer to listen to a soundtrack, and therefore, Pandora Radio accompanies me.

while the circumstances are unknown, Portales not only moved to a new domain name and blogging platform, she also took the anterior blog posts and their content and uploaded them into *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…*, though they are still available in *En 2310 y 8225*.

The *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* blog indicates[95] that there are four entries listed as "lo más leído" (the most read posts). Interestingly, it would seem that none of the most recent blog posts are considered the most "popular" or what readers gravitate toward. The first and most recent popular post was published on May 10th in the year 2015, which is before Portales states she is moving her blog to a new page in Wordpress. The title of the post is "LGBT nation and Otaku brotherhood in Cuba". A subheading beneath the blog post describes, in English, that the post contains "a study of two communities excluded from the Cuban national culture discourse" written by Yasmín S. Portales and Sheila Padrón Morales and presented at the Digital Diversity conference in Edmonton, Canada occurring from May 7-9 of 2015. Rather than the entry containing text about this matter, in its place is a powerpoint that the reader can download and view in its entirety. This is certainly a facet of writing online that is appealing to its users (in particular bloggers), as blogging theorist Osvaldo Cleger emphasizes that adding images, sound, and video to written text enriches the experience of reading since posts are not merely limited to text (14).

The powerpoint presentation highlights LGBT writers as well as Otakus (Japanese anime and Manga fans) that took advantage of the blogging platform Reflejos

[95] It is important to reiterate that this was the case as of April 15, 2018. Certainly, when there are additional readers accessing the site, one will see a different list of the top read blog entries on the left-hand side.

(http://cubava.cu), which was opened on September in 2013 and was especially appealing as its inscriptions were free ("LGBT nation"). It also was, according to Portales and Padrón: "the only space of online self-publication technically accessible from the all country" and would double in size in less than a year and encompass a variety of topics ("LGBT nation"). Both authors argue in their presentation that both the Otakus and LGBT community "are marginal subcultures in Cuban society, which is still strongly homophobic" ("LGBT nation"). The virtual space in the blogosphere offers a place for these marginalized individuals to connect with one another and is a platform for them to "defend their belonging to the 21st century Cuban culture" ("LGBT nation"). While it is uncertain how and when the facts were obtained, and furthermore who was interviewed, the presentation includes a graph that demonstrates the "advantages of blog use" (fig. 24). As one can see, the two primary advantages and attraction of blogging for the LGBT community on the Island include the promotion of the culture, and the fact that it serves as a virtual community space. As a secondary advantage, there is a tie between: access to the Interweb, the exchange of materials, and freedom of expression.

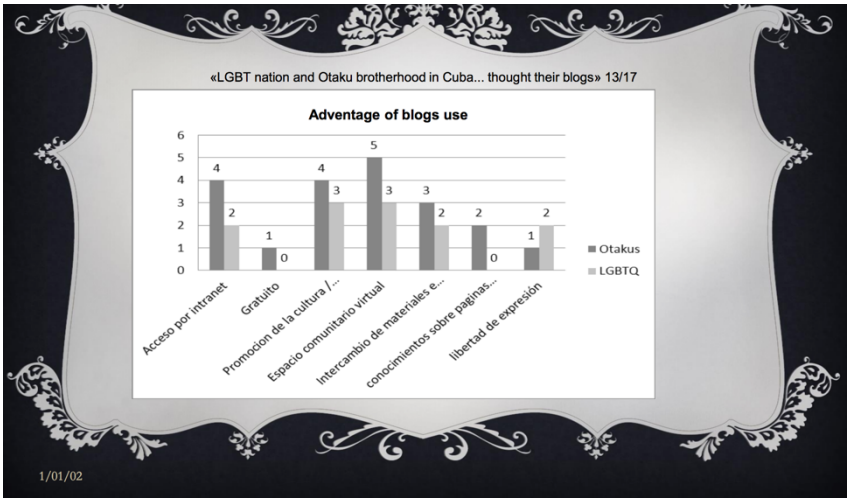

Fig. 24 A Graph in Portales's and Padrón's Conference Powerpoint

In fact this is not the only graph included, there are several that provide figures regarding: difficulties faced by the Otakus and LGBT authors in regards to internet access and how they are able to publish their work, if they feel discriminated against, and relations with the community.

The final three posts that are considered the most frequently read within the blog *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* once again stem from the original blog *En 2310 y 8225*. The post "Diversidades sexuales y ciudadanía 2" originates from June 22, 2008 and is the second entry in a series of personal inquiries and rhetorical questions that Portales poses regarding queer identity and homophobia. At the beginning of this particular text she writes the following:

> No entiendo por qué se llama *Lesbofobia*, leí y leí, esperando mi aparición, la aparición de las mujeres quiero decir, porque las lesbianas son mujeres, y yo soy mujer, así que hay cosas que nos unen –algunas otras cosas me unen a l@afrodescencdientes y otras más a l@s caribeñ@s–, una de ellas la discriminación de género. Bueno, llego al final y me entero de que estas páginas son solo un fragmento. No me conformo.[96] ("Diversidades sexuales 2")

One can certainly see that here Portales isn't necessarily writing for a particular audience, nor is she addressing her work to the reader. In this post it can be understood that she is

[96] I don't understand why it's called Lesbophobia, I read and read, waiting for my appearance, the appearance of women I mean, because lesbians are women, and I am a woman, therefore there are two things that unite us—some other things unite me to those of African decent and others to Caribbean peoples—, one of which is gender discrimination. Well, I'm arriving at the end and I am finding out that these pages are only a fragment. I don't give up.

writing within the stream of consciousness style, expressing what is on her mind in long-winded sentences, which then become short and determined as she tries to get a grasp on the reaction of aversion to those in the queer community.

In comparison, the blog post "Cuba a 50 años de la Revolución: Algo sobre sus mujeres"[97] written on January 3, 2009 is a post structured in a much more formal manner, as if it were an essay. The content provides the condition and roles of women from a sociohistorical and political context in Cuba, provides a bibliography of works cited in the text, and graphs demonstrating birth and abortion rates over the past 50 years on the Island. This post contrasts greatly in tone and content with the final of the last most popular blogs on the list from January 21, 2009 entitled "Auril 1: El álbum de fotos nace antes que la persona",[98] where Portales shares the sonograms and ultrasounds of her unborn child with her readers. Upon reviewing all four posts, one can see the wide variety of writing styles and topics that Portales encompasses in her blogs *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio* and *En 2310 y 8225.*

Within Portales's essay "Female Voices in the Blogosphere" (2014), the blogger classifies the content of her blog *En 2310 y 8225*—when it was still active—according to what she distinguishes as the four distinct categories of blogs that pertain to "a feminine perspective and a specific gender agenda" (257). These four groups or categories and blogs that encompass these particular characteristics include:

> 1) those that highlight the contribution of women in their working environments as Esther Borjes in mujeresderadio.wordpress.com; 2) those

[97] 50 Years Since the Cuban Revolution: There is Something about their Women"
[98] Auril 1: The photo album is born before the person

> that discuss sexual or reproductive health and family conflicts, exemplified in mujeresintimidades.glocip.cu by Aloyma Ravelo; 3) those that give testimony of everyday life in Cuba, in particular cufamilia.blogspot.com, a site that since 2005 maintains Marilú Hernández Guerrero (Tunas city) and musillatraviesa.blogcip.cu, where Yulia, from Santiago de Cuba, narrates the Hoffman syndrome. Finally, 4) those spaces of self-conscious feminism, where there is a debate on theory and practice of the struggle for equality of which we know three: *Letra con género* by Isabel Moya, *Negra cubana tenía que ser* by Sandra Alvarez and *En 2310 y 8225* by Yasmín S. Portales. ("Female Voices in the Blogosphere" 257)

The blogger, after labeling her own writing, goes on to describe its contents from a third-person perspective by concluding that:

> In her blog she criticizes the State's policy on gender and goes on to deconstruct the maternal experience. Marked by the rhythm of the author's life, the blog has changed name and profile a couple of times. The one constant in her life has been to leave evidence of her interests and conflicts in her life. This can be found in as day-dream stories, chronicles of political events or state reports. ("Female Voices in the Blogosphere" 257)

It was in the year 2008 that Portales's and Sandra Álvarez's blogs were embraced and integrated into the Bloggerscuba.com community. Her work resonates with many, and is a rich component that adds to the fabric of female voices in the Cuban blogosphere, where (as Yasmín cites Aguaya et al (2009)) "[in] a sample of 236 people […] for each

three Cuban bloggers there is a woman" (Bitacoras.com 2010). As a result of a high number of female bloggers, Portales points out the stats reported on Bitacoras.com from 2010, indicating that in Cuba "the digital gap by sex is slightly lower than that reported in the Hispanic world with just 22% of women blogging" ("Female Voices in the Blogosphere" 257).

Blogs are in a constant process of production and simultaneously, as Osvaldo Cleger points out, a "social project" since readers are able to interact with the text by leaving comments and as a result, help it to grow. The author of the blog has the ability to filter comments by allowing the reader to leave a response, or may even decide to erase their input; therefore ultimately having the final word in the way their text grows (269). Within Portales's blog *En 2310 y 8225* as well as the blog *Bubusopía* for which she is a co-author, there are rules established within the homepage regarding the act of leaving comments: "1) Los comentarios ofensivos serán borrados, 2) Los comentarios deben tener alguna relación con el tema del post, 3) Se agradecerá el aporte de argumentos con referencias para que podamos ampliar el debate"[99] (*Bubusopía* and *En 2310 y 8225*). Curiously, the only top post belonging to *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…/En 2310 y 8225* that had a comment from a reader was the entry where Portales shared her baby's sonograms and ultrasounds entitled "Auril 1: El álbum de fotos nace antes que la persona". A user named "Boris" writes to Yasmín: "Cosas de la virtualidad. Ahora los

[99] 1) Offensive comments will be erased, 2) The comments should be related to the subject of the post, 3) The contribution of arguments with references included will be greatly appreciated so that we can expand the debate.

álbumes comenzarán en el día D-180…"[100] on January 22, 2009. On June 5 of the same year, he writes once again "Buenísimo el album."[101]

However, the blogs have not "grown" or in other words have not been modified with the addition of new entries written by the author for several years. In the case of *¿Palabras robadas?* the last date that a post was published was on July 15, 2014. As mentioned previously, the content of *En 2310 y 8225* moved to the new blog *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* on May 13, 2015 so there have been no new entries there since that date. Finally, the last post for *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* was November 19, 2016 while *Bubusopía*'s last post was on November 17, 2016. Given that these blog texts are no longer active, they are considered to be "closed blogs." This designation is provided by Cleger, who defines the term in the following manner: "Un blog 'cerrado', esto es, que ya no sufre modificaciones, es casi equivalente a un hipertexto muerto. Por eso los blogs no actualizados dejan inmediatamente de ser leídos, de recibir 'visitas'. El blog es una forma de textualidad social, de proceso de creación que generalmente 'muere' en el momento de 'ser terminado'"[102] (269). While Portales's blogs are still open to the public and do still occasionally receive visits, they are considered "closed" as per Cleger's definition since they are no longer evolving; original posts are no longer being written by the author, nor are the entries receiving comments by its readers.

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[100] That's the virtual age. Now albums will begin on D-180…

[101] "Very good album" the reader writes. At the time of this post, the user changed their avatar name to "100% Gusano". One can tell that the user is the same, as they are using the same profile image.

[102] A "closed" blog, that is, a blog that no longer experiences modifications, is almost the equivalent of a dead hypertext. For this reason the blogs that are not updated are suddenly stopped being read and stop receiving "visits". The blog is a social text, in the process of creation that "dies" in the moment of being finished.

It would seem that the blogger has favored her Twitter and Facebook pages, given that Portales has not written in any of her blogs in several years; this certainly could also be due to the fact that she is dedicating her time to her studies and Twitter only allows 280 characters, which is more convenient for her, given the brevity of the posts and that the platform is more easily accessible on one's cellphone. Yasmín S. Portales's Twitter profile (fig. 25) indicates that she joined the social media network in February of 2013, and she chose the username @nimlothdecuba.[103] The profile also provides a brief bio that includes her interests, current location, day of birth, and a link to her blog *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio….* It is possible to delve deeper into the overall content of Yasmín tweets by utilizing the linguistic software AntConc, which provides a word list of the most frequently occurring terms in a corpus of texts. It can also provide a collocate analysis, which will show words to the right and left of the chosen word and in what context that term is used; it will also provide the complete message to contextualize a word that appears on the word list. The purpose of this research aims to discover and demonstrate the structural and discursive differences associated with Portales's blog *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* and Twitter account. The research questions that this analysis of social media (Twitter) data wishes to answer include: For what purpose does each of Yasmín's platforms serve? What are the most notable key words in Yasmín's tweets and collocates of each keyword?

[103] The username translates to "Nimloth from Cuba." Nimloth is a character, specifically an Elf-maid, from J. R. R. Tolkien's legendarium (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nimloth). This certainly reflects Portales's interest in science fiction and fantasy literature, and one could argue demonstrates a connection to her *¿Palabras robadas?* blog.

The comparative study of Yasmín's blog and Twitter account utilizes a combination of methods to execute and analyze the gathered data. These methods include social networking analysis; the software utilized to gather the data was Nodexl, and AntConc was used to sort through the texts and look for most frequent key words and collocates.

Fig. 25 Yasmín S. Portales's Twitter profile

It is important to note that there may be some risks/and or limitations upon approaching this data. The Nodexl pro software has a set API limit of 3,200 tweets that it can gather from a specific user. So while Yasmín happens to have roughly 8,000 tweets since she joined the platform in 2013, the software can only go back as far has her last 3,200 tweets.[104] The social networking data of the Yasmín S. Portales's account was scraped

[104] One can purchase software that world gather all 8,000 tweets, however this professional software is extremely expensive.

from Twitter on March 30, 2018.[105] After all the data pertaining to Yasmín's Twitter account was gathered, it was combined into the same .xsl sheet. The excel sheet was then arranged by sequencing numbers aligning with tweets, descending chronologically from the latest tweet on March 22, 2018 to the earliest tweet the software could gather from March 22, 2016. Within the Xcel software, the Visual Basic tool was used to convert the data into individual text files (.txt), which were dumped into a file on the desktop. The files of her tweets were then taken and the directory—the file where the texts were being held—was opened in AntConc. Utilizing a Spanish stop list, the program was ordered to look for the most frequently occurring words or terms in the entire corpus of tweets. Upon looking for collocates in relation to the most frequently occurring words that appeared in the corpus, T-1 score was selected within the software tool preferences.

When "filtering" the most frequently utilized words produced in the AntConc software, the output had to be carefully analyzed, as it is common to use shorthand in tweets. Therefore, when approaching frequent words that appeared in the data, a subjective judgment had to be made when determining whether or not several letters coupled together were shorthand or abbreviations for words in Spanish, and which were irrelevant. Furthermore, upon analyzing the Tweets, subjective decisions had to be chosen in regards to considering what most frequently appearing words and the collocates they yielded were the most interesting or intriguing to further analyze.

In regards to the findings of the linguistic analysis of AntConc, the results of the top 10 most frequent words in the corpus of the texts of Yasmín's Twitter account were

[105] At that time, the last tweet had been sent out on March 22, 2018. It must be noted that any tweets that have appeared after this date have not been accounted for in this analysis.

the following (fig. 26): 1.) rt (utilized 1,483 times), 2.) youtube (785), 3.) video (781), 4.) gust (743), 5.) cuba (483), 6.) lasa (287) 7.) norges (199), 8.) lrpbyzard (183), 9.) negracubana (180), and 10.) isbel (121).

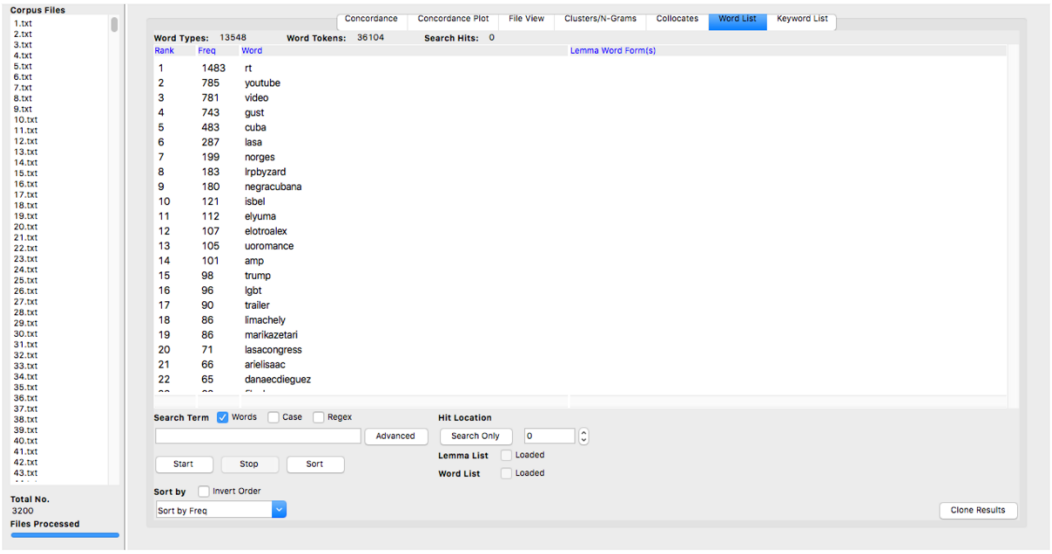

Fig. 26 AntConc Wordlist Results of Yasmín's Twitter Account

The letters "rt" are shorthand for "retweet", which is the action of reposting or forwarding a tweet from another user. Upon taking a step further and doing a collocate analysis of "rt" (to see the terms associated with the retweet), Yasmín most frequently forwards messages of the Twitter users: hulems, norges, ravsberg, lasacongress, and negracubana (which are the top 5 collocates associated with the term "rt"). The content of each username's profile is telling about Yasmín's interests. The username @HULEMS entitles their profile Hay1LesbianaEnMiSopa and in the description of the profile writes that this page serves as a "Web de información y entretenimiento para mujeres LGBT +."[106] The user @norges14 is also the seventh term ("norges") on the word list of most

[106] Web[site] of information and entertainment for LGBT + women.

frequently used words. The profile belongs to Norges Rodríguez, who writes from Santiago de Cuba/ Havana and indicates that he is an "Ingeniero en Telecomunicaciones y Electrónica. Bloguero y periodista. Coordinador de @yucabyte."[107] The profile @Ravsberg is that of Fernando Ravsberg, who is a public correspondent in Cuba and a graduate professor of international news and countries of the Southern Hemisphere at the Universidad del Complutense in Madrid; he also manages the blog Cartas de Cuba. Of the two remaining users that are most frequently associated with the term "rt" (in other words, whose content is most frequently retweeted by Yasmín) are @LASACONGRESS, which is the Twitter account of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA is the 6th most tweeted term of the word list), and @negracubana which is the account associated with the blog "Negra Cubana Tenía que Ser" written by Sandra Álvarez and also happens to be the 9th most tweeted term on the word list. The users pages are significant in relation to the word "retweet", as it shows that the majority of Yasmín's Twitter persona is dedicated to forwarding or emitting messages that align with her own political beliefs, academic interests, and causes that she supports—LGBTQ issues, equality, and human rights.

The second, third, and fourth and most tweeted words on the word list ("youtube", "video", and "gust" respectively) are all interrelated. It would seem that Yasmín connected her Youtube account to her Twitter, so anytime she "likes" a video on the video platform it appears on her Twitter page. One such example is from February 18, 2018 where the tweet is simply a link associated with a video related to the comic book

[107] Telecommunications and electronic engineer. Blogger and journalist. Coordinator of @yucabyte. Yuca Byte is a Cuban communicative project of Communication and Information Technologies and its impact on society.

heroes “The Avengers”: “Avengers vs Monstruos S1E02: https://t.co/MddXr9p9PO a través de @YouTube". Indeed, many of the videos that she retweets on her Twitter account are innocuous. The term “video” is associated with the term “gust” from the phrase “me gustó”[108] certainly related to the Youtube videos that Yasmín liked on the video platform. For example, on March 29, 2017 she tweets “Me gustó un video de @YouTube de @whatculture https://t.co/kUPqDwaJxz 9 Most Outrageous Friends.” The majority of these “liked” and subsequently retweeted video ultimately have to do with pop culture references.

The eighth word on the word list, of terms that are most frequently found in Portales’s messages are the usernames @lrpbyzard and the tenth on the list @Isbel_oc. Further investigation indicates that @lrpbyzard is Luis Rondón Paz. According to his profile, he is a blogger in Cuba who also publishes a diary on the Havana Times website, and is interested in topics such as DDHH (Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos),[109] literature, tech, and social media. On the other hand, @Isbel_oc identifies himself as Isbel Díaz Torres who is a Cuban ecologist, LGBT activist, anarchist, and poet. He writes/tweets from Havana, Cuba and also has his own blog.

Amidst the many usernames that make-up almost half of the wordlist, the fifth term on the frequently used word list is “Cuba.” Upon further investigation of collocates associated with “Cuba” are: “lasa” (the Latin American studies Association), norges (username of the Twitter profile belonging to Norges Rodriguez), lgbt, isbel (belonging

[108] The phrase translates to “I like”. Unfortunately, the AntConc software does not recognize accents, and assigns a variety of symbols or letters in their place. For this reason, only the “gust” portion of the word “gustó” was picked up when the software discovered the most frequently used words in Yasmín’s tweets.
[109] Human rights.

to the username @isbel_oc), and pardoyaima. The term "lgbt" associated with the term "Cuba" is used in a variety of contexts. It is used to draw attention to the LALISA2017 (Latin American, Latino/a, and Iberian Studies Association of the Pacific Northwest) and LASA2016 conference and panels/speakers discussing LGBT topics. In these messages, she tags users such as @norges14, @isbel_oc, and @pardoyaima.[110] For this reason, the terms "pardoyaima" and "isbel" are collocates of the word "Cuba". The majority of the tweets associating "Cuba" and "LGBT" together seem to be that of original content generated by Portales, rather than just retweets (which one can distinguish by the "rt:" initials at the beginning of the Twitter message).

In summary, with the assistance of the linguistic corpus analysis software AntConc it is possible to reach several conclusions regarding the use of Yasmín's Twitter account. It is also possible to uncover the purpose of each platform upon comparing the content of both the blogs and tweets. It would seem that the four blogs composed by Portales have much more original content as well as encompass a variety of different themes provided the purposes assigned to each (for example, *¿Palabras robadas?* is dedicated to Yasmín's fan fiction writings while *Mi vida es un fino equilibrio…* serves as a window into the blogger's academic and personal life in the United States). Given that the fundamental purpose of a blog is that its author writes original entries or posts (of any length), there is significantly higher amount of original content on the blogs. After the author publishes a blog, he or she determines if they will enable the addition of comments on each or any posts by its reader. As this analysis has shown, there has not been much

[110] An example of such a message is the following sent on April 15, 2017: "9am #LALISA2017 Jon Jaramillo: #ReinaldoArenas y relación de #Cuba con ciudadanía #LGBT @Isbel_oc @norges14 @danaecdieguez @papacitobach https://t.co/z6v7momsJC".

interaction between Portales and her readers, not even on the most popular blog posts belonging to *En 2310 y 8225*.

Contrary to the content of the blogs, Yasmín's Twitter account primarily consists of messages that stem from other users on the same platform that she retweets or forwards. The majority of these messages contain Youtube videos that Portales likes, since her Youtube account appears to be synched with her Twitter account (therefore, anytime she likes a video on Youtube it shows up on her Twitter profile). Several usernames, in particular @norges14, @lrpbyzard, @negracubana, and @isbel_oc frequently show up in her messages as she retweets these users' original tweets; often times, they tag one another repeatedly in these messages and therefore, the usernames show up frequently. This demonstrates that Yasmín's own political and academic interests align with those users given that she retweets them frequently. They may be personal colleagues or friends of hers, or merely individuals whose work and ideals she admires. In any case, these users in particular seem to share a close bond or network, since their avatars show up frequently via Portales's account. Apart from the majority of the messages containing usernames and Youtube videos, the subject of "Cuba" also appears frequently. Cuba emerges in association with once again, several usernames being tagged, but also in connection with the term "lgbt". In the majority of instances, the LGBT subject appears in reference to being mentioned or discussed at academic conferences (such as LASA) or forwarding links attached to news articles. So it seems, while the content of both Twitter and Yasmín's blogs at times overlaps (regarding LGBT

issues in particular), there is a disparity between how each platform is used.[111] It could be that, as was previously assumed, Portales has less time to write long posts and interact with her readers given her busy academic life, and therefore she uses Twitter to forward messages and articles she finds interesting by friends and colleagues. In this way, while she is not generating original content, she is still being "kept in the loop" regarding LGBT issues and current events in Cuba.

It is certainly true that the use of the World Wide Web has empowered the subjectivity of individuals of the diaspora and their communities in many ways. J. M. Brinkerhoff provides the example of social media networking sites, which she contends "offer a 'safe space' for participants' to negotiate their sense of self and express their hybrid identities to demarcate what it means to be a member of said diaspora" (Swaby).

It is true that within cyberspace or the virtual world, boundaries are much less restrictive if not non-existent:

> the individual is not bound by time and space anymore […] the new 'hyperspace' created by global communications makes impossible the positioning of the individual within the framework of traditional frontiers. The major missions of hypermodern times now are how to preserve the feeling of individuality in the crowd and how to develop opportunities for a free choice. (Stoyanova)

[111] It must be noted that at the time this chapter was being written, Yasmín´s Twitter content drastically changed, in particular between April 16-18, 2018. On these dates the blogger/activist attended the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality in Sweden. During this brief period Yasmín's tweets were focused on meeting other Cuban and Latin American activists as well as personal reflections and documentation (with video and photos) of what she witnessed at the international conference.

Once again, Portales stands out as a blogger and public Cuban figure from the rest of her contemporary Cuban blogger counterparts, given the content of her writing and perhaps even her physical appearance. The Cuban blogger does not seek anonymity online; she signs her own name and is quite literally "visible" on the Web, since her work is often accompanied by a photo (fig. 27).

Fig. 27 Yasmín S. Portales Machado's Facebook Profile Picture

Regarding her appearance, despite the fact that she wears a headscarf, she does not identify as Muslim. When writer June Fernández asked Portales why she wore the headscarf, the blogger initially responded: "Pues porque me da la gana."[112] However, she went on to explain that it began when she was studying in Quito, Ecuador, and she wore the scarf to protect her sensitive skin from the sun as the radiation from the rays was especially strong there. When she returned to Cuba, she wore the headscarf out of habit. She stopped using the scarf in 2010, but when she gave birth to her son she found it useful and practical, as she would use it when nursing the baby. The scarf now is a

[112] Well, because I feel like it

"fascinating ethnographic exercise" for her, "de desmontar cómo se visten las mujeres en Cuba, al ejercicio político de apoyar algo que me parece hermoso, algo en lo que las mujeres también están. Y de ahí devino el ejercicio político de decir: 'me visto como me da la gana'"[113] (Fernández).

It is evident that the Internet complicates and challenges notions of the modern nation-state and thus identity, and replaces "the rigid territorial nationalism with the notion of shifting and contests boundaries" (Scott and Marshall 155-56). The Internet certainly also changes the manner in which interaction takes place amongst individuals living in the diaspora and the way they communicate with their loved ones, community members, or even their audience at large that they left behind when physically moving to another country. Cyberspace affords synchronous communication with text-messages, video calls, and the option to generate a live-feed interaction amongst its users. Also available are asynchronous methods of communication, such as (but not limited to) email and blog posts. I was curious to know, provided that Portales now lives in the United States, how and if she is able to continue to communicate and support the Cuban LGBTQ community on the Island from a distance, from the diaspora, since she is such a prominent figure and human rights activist committed to continuing the fight for equality. The blogger reframed my initial question[114] in regards to helping and supporting ones'

[113] of demonstrating how women dress in Cuba, to the political exercise of supporting something that to me is beautiful, something that women are also in. And from there it became the political exercise of saying "I dress however I want".

[114] My initial question "¿Es posible ayudar a la comunidad (queer y cubana) desde la diáspora?" (Is it possible to help the queer and Cuban community from the diaspora?) in her opinion, was rather dangerously vague as she asked in return: "¿Ayudar cómo? Tu pregunta es peligrosa por vaga, peligrosa al punto de ponerme al borde del abismo neocolonialista" (Help how? Your question is dangerous because it is so vague, dangerous to the point of positioning myself on the

community from the diaspora by saying: "'¿Es posible para las personas queer cubanas en la diáspora ayudar a la comunidad queer cubana?'"[115] to which she responds "S[í], claro. Más que posible yo diría que es inevitable. Solo el hecho de mantener contacto e informar de otros modos de vida, otras perspectivas sobre el asunto de la orientación sexual y la identidad de género, ayuda, porque informa"[116] (Personal Interview). She once again modified this question, by posing the following inquiry: "'¿Es posible para activistas queer cubanas en la diáspora ayudar a la comunidad queer cubana?'"[117] Regarding this question, Portales suggests the following:

> S[í], claro. Más que posible yo diría que imprescindible. Si [no] hacemos eso ¿quiénes somos? Si [no] hacemos eso, yo diría que hemos dejado de ser activistas. La razón de ser del activista es activar al cuerpo social, sacudirlo. PERO no hay que dárselas de profeta o apóstol, sino trabajar con dos condiciones básicas en términos operativos: primero, hay que respetar los intereses y las necesidades que las mismas comunidades queer de la isla definan; segundo, recordar que quienes están en el terreno, asumen los riesgos y prueban la más amarga derrota son las comunidades queer de la isla. No estoy negando el derecho de la diáspora a intervenir en los destinos de la isla, pero s[í] me parece que estas dos condiciones

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border of the neocolonialist abyss). I can only assume that she initially interpreted my idea of help/support as possibly meaning sending economic funds to the island.

[115] Is it possible for queer Cuban individuals in the diaspora to help the queer Cuban community?

[116] Yes, of course. More than possible, I would say that it is inevitable. Just maintaining contact and informing others of other ways of life, other perspectives about matters of sexual orientation, gender identity, helps, because it informs.

[117] Is it possible for queer Cuban activists in the diaspora to help the queer Cuban community?

pueden prevenir el peligro del paternalismo antes mencionado.[118]

(Personal Interview)

Portales concludes her response to my inquiry by saying that "La candela de Cuba ocurre—mayormente—dentro de Cuba. Al migrar accedemos a cosas nuevas, pero perdemos, inevitablemente, otras"[119] (Personal Interview). So it would seem that while it is possible to write in blogs and from social media networking profiles in support, to collaborate, resist, and fight for the equality of one's community from the diaspora, the majority of change comes from within communities on the island. However, one should not minimalize the efforts that come from a place of diaspora, as solidarity for a cause such as human rights for the LGBTQ community from abroad adds to the the visibility of these issues and beckons the attention of citizens on a world-wide scale in our globalized society.

Ultimately, my final question was regarding Portales's plans for the future. I was curious to know if she would seek opportunities for work within academia in the United States after receiving her degree, or return to Cuba to continue to advocate for humanitarian causes amongst her people. She indicated that she would be staying in Oregon at least five more years to obtain her PhD. That would mean graduating in the

[118] Yes, of course. More than possible, I would say that it is essential. If we don't do that, who are we? If we don't do that, I would say that we have stopped being activists. The reason for being an activist is to simulate the social body, to shake it. BUT, one must not act as a prophet or apostle, but rather work with two basic conditions in operational terms: first, one must respect the interests and needs that the same queer communities of the island establish; second, remembering that those who are in the area, accept the risks and taste the most bitter defeat are the queer communities on the island. I am not denying the right of the diaspora to intervene in the fate of the island, but it does seem to me that these two conditions can prevent the danger of paternalism, as mentioned previously.

[119] The salvation of Cuba occurs, mainly, inside Cuba. Upon migrating we obtain new things, but we inevitably lose others.

summer of 2023. And after that? "No tengo idea" (I have no idea), she writes frankly. She goes on to say that, "En el escenario súper-feliz puedo regresar a Cuba. Me dedico a escribir—como Padura o Yoss—y con eso me alcanza para pagar el alquiler, mantener a mi hijo, ahorrar para irme de vacaciones una vez al año. Pero no lo veo muy realista."[120] Fundamentally, the fate of Cuba, its stability, and political circumstances play a big role in her future: "La culpa es de Cuba, claro. No puedo dejar de pensar en ella, pero no puedo predecir su futuro. Como parte de la diáspora cubana, mi futuro dependerá—mucho—de lo que ocurra en la isla en los próximos cinco años. ¡Qué tiempo para estar vivas! ¿Verdad?"[121]

Conclusions

There is a thought-provoking notion provided in the introduction of the book *Migration, Diaspora, and Information Technology in Global Societies* (2012) that indicates that new technologies, in particular the Internet, promote and reinforce diaspora. It is essentially a transient place, a no-man's land:

> The Internet equalizes natives and migrants in offering to both the same experience of virtual migration. Thus the Internet too has contributed to make the slogan 'we are all migrants' realistic, because all of us in the last twenty years—natives and migrants […]—have experienced at least the

[120] In the happiest scenario I can return to Cuba. I dedicate myself to writing, like Padua or Yoss, and by doing so I can pay the rent, support my son, save money to go on vacation once a year. But I don't think that that's very realistic.
[121] It's Cuba's fault, of course. I cannot stop thinking about [Cuba], but I cannot predict its future. As part of the Cuban diaspora, my future will very much depend on what occurs on the island in the next five years. What times we live in, right?!

> kind of migration that embodies the experience of our virtual displacement in the Web. (Fortunati)

This diasporic space allows us to connect to one another instantly, and compresses time and space simultaneously. Essentially no one "belongs" to this virtual world, in the sense that no one originates from that "space"; it is a simulated territory and we are but mere passers-by. As a zone that transcends traditional notions of borders, frontiers, of cartography itself, we as Internet users (or at least those who have access and use it) are truly all migrants in this virtual space.

Previous technologies and "old media" allowed (and continue to allow) individuals of the diaspora to express their condition of displacement and essentially their otherness. It is of utmost importance to note that, while technology has evolved, the existence of "old media" (such as photography, film, newspapers, letters) hasn't necessarily been superseded, but rather it lives alongside "polymedia"—social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or blogs (Miller). Of course along with these advancements and the availability of these applications and tools, one sees many complications, such as notions of expression and identity, which become much more complex, and can even subvert and challenge boundaries of the nation, of the self, of the body. What's more, one could argue that the existence of polymedia allows dispersed diasporic individuals to find communities online and therefore foster and experience a sense of belonging, which may even transcend the virtual world by encouraging encounters and developing networks of support in the off-line environment.

Ana Mendieta's work set a precedent; she was a pioneer in the realm of the art world of her time and arguably, continues to be. By using available media and

technology, as well as combining performances set in nature (in specific site-based geographical locations), she emulated the wide range of possibilities of expression where one cannot only represent the blurry boundaries of the self and nation but also provide a discourse that challenges dominant western epistemologies of identity and destabilizes the dichotomy of center/periphery.

Maritza Molina somewhat followed in Ana Mendieta's steps by choosing the element of location as an important feature in her work, but despite this commonality she expressed her own experiences and personal circumstances in her own particular way. By using digital photography and performance to mediate her memories and to address themes of trauma, she portrays the identity conflicts that one confronts upon growing up in a bicultural household as a Cuban-American woman.

Yasmín S. Portales Machado uses the Internet to advocate for equality and supports the queer Cuban community from the diaspora. ICTs have a fundamental role and provide a space for those living in the diaspora to immediately connect with others living in or experiencing similar circumstances of displacement, and quite often create a virtual network of support, as well as provide a platform to voice concerns and provoke change. Clearly, creating such virtual networks is contingent upon one's geographic location and socioeconomic status, as not everyone can financially afford to access the Internet or may not be in a location where it is readily available.

In placing these three distinct women of Cuban heritage in the same analysis, I have demonstrated the distinct ways in which one can express the condition of displacement through the use of technology and mediate their experiences upon being members of the Cuban diaspora. These artists and blogger were chosen not only because

they represent distinct waves of Cuban migration to the United States, but also as they express the struggles and search for balance regarding their bicultural identity (in the case of Mendieta and Molina), as well as voicing the concerns of one's community via the diaspora (as Portales does via her blog and social media accounts). Mendieta, Molina, and Portales' work demonstrates the ways in which technologies permit migrants to not only stay in contact with their communities of origin—in a literal and/or figurative manner—(Fortunati), but at the same time generate new discourse regarding (de)construction of the self.

CHAPTER 4

ARTIVISM: THE WORKS OF MARÍA MARÍA ACHA-KUTSCHER, PRABA PILAR, MARÍA CAÑAS, AND PILAR ALBARRACÍN

The Internet, and in particular social media networks, have facilitated the participation in and performance of activism on an international level, giving visibility and a platform to those fighting for causes that may have otherwise been silenced or swept under the rug. Furthermore, social media has made it possible for the "ordinary" or "every day" citizen with access to the World Wide Web to become an active participant and voice of change rather than passive viewers of events unfolding in the media. Theorist Peter Weibel indicates that participatory digital culture has given rise to global activism, which exists as "a consequence of both globalization and technological advances" having occurred as a result of two critical periods in history (23). The first defining period being the Industrial Revolution occurring in 1800, and the second taking place in 1900 during what he deems as the data-based information revolution. With digitation, he continues, there was a shift from alphabetic code to the numerical, which "laid the technical foundation for the personalization of the media and the global networking of individuals" (23). This transformation has been crucial, since "[i]n the age of the monopolistic mass media (a product of the industrial revolution) each person became a recipient and only later, in the age of social media (a product of the information revolution), a broadcaster or sender" (23).

As a consequence of global activism, "artivism" appeared and was a response to such a performative turn in the use of multimedia. Artivism is indeed a portmanteau, fusing together the terms "art" and "activism" and was coined by Tatiana Bazzichelli, an

Italian media researcher in 2001 (Weibel 57). According to the website Artivism.online, this particular genre of art utilizes "creativity to raise awareness, mobilise [sic], and inspire the spectator. Such indiscipline does not pretend to change the world through creation but has the conviction that change takes shape through individual acts and awareness and through inviting artistic reflection into the gestures of everyday life" ("What"). It is, as a result of advances in today's technology, "the twenty-first century's first new art form" according to Peter Weibel (23). The digital artworks of Latin American artists María María Acha-Kutscher and Praba Pilar, along with the performances of Spanish artists María Cañas and Pilar Albarracín, can be considered works of "artvism" given their discernible message of the denunciation of acts of gender violence presently occurring within their countries/regions of origin. As this analysis will show, their works call attention to the public regarding injustices and offenses aimed at women and aspire to appeal to viewers to demand political action and social change, while simultaneously bringing awareness to and dismantling gender and national stereotypes previously perpetuated by the media.

María María Acha-Kutscher

María María Acha-Kutscher was born in Lima, Peru in 1968, and is a feminist visual artist who now currently resides in Madrid, Spain. Although she resides in Europe, she indicates that she "works globally" given the extensive geographic focus and breadth of her work (Muñoz). Acha-Kutscher credits the paternal side of her family as to the reason she "inherited her cultural capital", explaining that "my father, [was] a filmmaker and photographer, my grandfather, [was] an art theorist, and my great-grandfather, [was] a theater theorist" (Madrid). Perhaps influenced by her personal and intimate connection

to the artworld, Acha-Kutscher studied fine arts in Lima's Pontifical Catholic University, but would put her artistic endeavors on hold and pursue a career in the advertising industry in Mexico City (manu.escrita). After ten years of working as an art director for advertising agencies, Acha-Kutscher ultimately moved to Madrid in 2001 and began to nurture her artistic endeavors that she had abandoned a decade earlier (Madrid).

In an article in *El País*, the artist indicates that from a young age she had experienced living in an environment entrenched in *machismo*, "En Latinoamérica, y más en los ochenta, una chica no podía ir sola a la calle. Aún hoy, el acoso es constante"[122] ("¿Y si la mujer?"). Sexist attitudes were reinforced by her professional experience in Mexico, where she encountered a significant pay gap between herself and male colleagues. These adversities "implantaron la semilla del feminismo en su interior"[123] and upon living in Spain she had a kind of revelation one evening: "Salí una noche sola a comprar cigarrillos y me sentí segura. Algo hizo clic en mi cabeza"[124] ("¿Y si la mujer?"). As a result of this strong emotional response to her new environment and self-awareness of being a woman in a man's world, coupled with previous hardships as a result of *machista* attitudes in Latin America, these circumstances certainly began to shape her perspective, artistic methodologies, and would become one of the central themes in her work: women and their fight for equal rights and visibility. Acha-Kutscher's website defines her artwork by stating that "The main focus of her work is woman. Her story, the struggles for emancipation equality, and the cultural construction of femininity" ("María

[122] In Latin America, and even more so in the eighties, a girl could not go out on the street alone. Even today, the harassment is constant.
[123] implanted within her the seed of feminism
[124] I went out one night alone to buy cigarettes and I felt safe. Something inside my head clicked.

María Acha-Kutscher"). One of the projects that serves and encapsulates this mission is entitled *Mujeres trabajando para mujeres* or "Women Working for Women".

"Women Working for Women" is subdivided into four series: *Visual Bios*, *Behind Him*, *Indignadas*, and *Made in Latin America*, each of which serve a particular purpose regarding women's issues. *Visual Bios* (2008-ongoing) is a collection dedicated to showcasing important cultural icons, activist groups, and political figures of women's rights movements throughout history and their contributions (such as: The Guerilla Girls, Pussy Riot, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Simone de Beauvoir). "Behind Him" (2012) focuses on famous heterosexual couples, and the female partners who are often considered to be overshadowed by their male counterparts (ex: Dora Maar and Pablo Picasso). *Made in Latin America* (2014-2015) consists of "digital portraits of Latin American women that have been created [sic] their own space in traditionally male-dominated careers" ("Women Working for Women/Made in Latin America"). These portraits were made by collaborating with the subject of the piece who submitted a photo and personal quote for Acha-Kutscher to then convert into a work of art. Female pioneers in this series includes professional Venezuelan racecar driver Milka Duno and Mexican boxer Jackie Nava ("Women Working for Women/Made in Latin America"). Finally, *Indignadas*[125] is officially the third installment of the project. *Indignadas*' inception occurred in 2008 with the first image from the 15M protest in Spain.[126] As María María Acha-Kutscher herself explains:

[125] Outraged women.
[126] The 15M protests, an anti-austerity movement, began in 2011 as a reaction to the failings of the political party in power (the PSOE) regarding the employment crisis that began in 2008. Public outcry began online and was spread through social media, eventually spilling over into the streets. Its culmination ended in mass protests in the Puerta del Sol (Lyne).

> [it is] a project for public spaces that recovers the women's historical memory through portraits of female personalities who have forged change and fought to improve the situation for our gender. The project also includes visual registers based on press images of the female participation in public protest. Each image is the result of an investigation in various archives that tells us a story of struggle that has brought important changes to the way we perceive gender and, consequently, to the history of humankind. ("Women Working for Women/About")

The artwork within "Women Working for Women" have a similar aesthetic throughout the four series, as all the pieces (the majority of which were photographs) take on a comic book-like form, essentially converting them into pieces that are a digital hybrid of realism and pop art. It becomes quite evident that upon taking Acha-Kutscher's previous professional livelihood, that her methods and artistic production were influenced by her career as an art director in advertising in Mexico City. As a result, she chose her aesthetic to get the general public's attention to notice the imagery in the artwork and make it visually appealing to the viewer, as if they were a consumer of its message. The artist explains:

> intento ser clara y concisa para poder dirigirme a cualquier audiencia independientemente de sus conocimientos de arte […] Para mí era imprescindible que el proyecto se exhibiese en espacios públicos, fuese gratis y form[ara] parte del flujo de la vida cotidiana de los habitantes de la ciudad. También era importante que la estética fuese popular y el material de impresión fuese barato y resistente a las inclemencias del

> tiempo: la lona, muy popular en las ciudades latinoamericanas, es usada constantemente en la comunicación citadina.[127] (López Menacho)

Yannicke Goris supports Acha-Kutscher's statement by indicating that: "In high-paced Western society, where there is an overload of information and images, getting a message across quickly and innovatively is more important than ever. In order to more effectively reach the public and influence change, eye-catching artwork is increasingly being used to attract attention" (Goris 15). According to journalist Javier López Menacho, Acha-Kutscher's hybrid digital portraits ultimately reflect the popularity and reclaiming of political posters from the 70's and are similar to those employed by Emory Douglas's political group the Black Panthers in the United States. However, media theorist Henry Jenkins contests that such images used in protest can be traced back a decade earlier to the protest movements of the 1960s, which "also tried to tap into the languages of popular culture—especially those of rock and comics—to create a counterculture" (2). Jenkins goes on to indicate that today's artwork used for the purpose of social activism is more than a nod to works of generations past, it is essentially an appropriation and continuation of a counterculture artform:

> [O]ne can see an ongoing process through which young people have refreshed and renewed the public's symbolic power as they fight for social justice; they often push back against inherited forms and search for new

[127] I try to be clear and concise to be able to address myself to any audience independent of their knowledge of art […] To me it was essential that the project was exhibited in public spaces, that it was free and formed part of the flow of everyday life of the inhabitants of the city. It was also important that the aesthetic was popular and that the printing material was cheap and resistant to inclement weather: canvas, very important in Latin American cities, is constantly used in urban communication.

> mechanisms for asserting their voice. Occupy, like other recent protest movements, tapped pop culture to express participants' collective identities and frame their critiques. Thus a more playful style of activism is emerging through this appropriative and transformative dimension of participatory culture. (2)

Ultimately, the theorist credits the recent work of Fred Turner (2008) and Aaron Delwiche (2013) regarding the current aesthetics of artivism, and conclude that "our current cyberculture [was] built on the foundations of the 1960s counterculture, giving rise to the rhetoric of digital revolution" (Jenkins 2).

It is compelling to consider that Acha-Kutscher has utilized the tools and techniques from her advertising career in Mexico City—a field that intends to depict and perpetuate the ideal "woman" and her image regarding beauty and her role in society—in the creation of her current artwork. These portraits by Acha-Kutscher however are challenging those perceptions and promoting an image of strength and resistance which is contrary to the docile woman that is often constrained to the private and domestic sphere. Essentially, the artist is reclaiming and appropriating the tools of an oppressive patriarchal society in order to use those to liberate female figures from stringent stereotypes. In this sense, Acha-Kutscher labels herself a feminist artist, stating in an interview that "I use the advertising methodology as a contribution to the search for a better status of women, so I call myself a feminist artist" (manu.escrita). Regarding the label of being a feminist visual artist, the artist defends defining herself in such a manner, and proudly bears this epithet when, according to Acha-Kutscher, many female artists shy

away from and are even afraid to call themselves feminists. This designation can have an adverse effect on their careers, she indicates, but notes that:

> (con esto no quiero decir que todas las mujeres artistas tienen que ser feministas). Pero en mi caso, el punto de partida en mi trabajo es la mujer vista desde una perspectiva feminista, por eso nunca tuve miedo de definirme como artista feminista, para mí era importante la reivindicación, de lo contrario no habría podido desarrollar mi obra con honestidad.[128] (López Menacho)

Despite welcoming the appellation of the term "feminist," Acha-Kutscher resists labeling herself as an "activist". In an interview with journalist Isis Madrid, the artist indicated that she did not consider herself an activist but did go onto say: "[…] I believe that art is a powerful political tool. I share the images of *Indignadas* on the Internet under a Creative Commons license, particularly to the activists portrayed, so that they can use them for their work. I would love it if they used my *Indignadas* images in the streets one day" (Madrid). She further clarifies that the term "activist" is determined by the press and that:

> mi contribución como artista opera a un nivel simbólico, en cuanto a que mi trabajo tiene que ver con la creación de nuevos imaginarios de la mujer […] Esta nueva imagen de la mujer está siendo creada por las mismas activistas, yo sólo las "inmortalizo" a través de mi obra. Y en el caso de la

[128] (with this I do not want to say that all women artists have to be feminists). But in my case, the basis of my work is woman seen from a feminist perspective, for this reason I was never afraid to define myself as a feminist artist, to me the recognition was important, otherwise I would not have been able to develop my work with honesty.

serie *Indignadas*, comparto las imágenes en Internet para contribuir a la expansión del trabajo que realizan las activistas."[129] (López Menacho).

Acha-Kutscher concludes by saying that "Las verdaderas activistas son las que salen a la calle y dan la cara, las que se enfrentan a los políticos y son arrestadas y maltratadas"[130] (Soares).

It is interesting to see that the artist diminishes her own role in the fight for gender equality, and even questions the validity of works of "artivism" upon shedding light on issues of gender violence in Latin America. Acha-Kutscher suggests that she adheres to the antiquated definition of "activist" as those that protest in the streets, and thus ignores the power of art as well as technology and social media in activism as it is known today. An example of a digital visual arts piece that served as an act of protest in the streets was "The Standing March" by French artist JR and American film director Darren Aronofsky. Due to the national state of emergency decree imposed by French authorities after the November 13th terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, curfews were instituted, and citizens were prohibited from gathering in mass groups (Goris 8-9). The 2015 Climate Conference would take place as planned weeks after the attacks, however those environmental groups that opposed the event were still not allowed to gather and express their discontent due to the constraints of the order of state of emergency. Given the restrictions on the ability to conduct a massive protest, as well as the sense of urgency the

[129] My contribution as an artist operates on a symbolic level, with regards to my work it has to do with the creation of new imaginaries of women […] This new image of woman is being created by the activists themselves, and I merely "immortalize" them through my work. And in the case of the *Indignadas* series, I share the images on the Internet to contribute to the expansion of the work that the activists realize.

[130] The true activists are those that go out to the street and face the consequences, those that confront politicians and are arrested and mistreated.

groups felt to have their voices heard, JR and Aronofsky created a video performance entitled “The Standing March”, which depicted the faces of over 500 people from around the globe. Throughout the duration of the video, the faces slowly rotate on the surface of the building they are projected on. The piece was projected on the façade of the Assemblée Nationale in Paris, and later appeared at other cultural and historical sites throughout the city such as the Louvre, the Pantheon, the Musée Picasso, and the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève during the COP21 conference (9). Even though there were no protesters that were physically in the streets, the art piece certainly made a statement and the protestors’ voices were heard by officials at the conference, passersby, and social media attention (9).

Art and the genre of “artivism” is an important tool, and an innovative means to protest, defend, and reclaim civic space when being physically present is hazardous or not possible. Yannicke Goris contends that “Especially in countries where freedom of expression is severely limited, art functions as an alternative function of communication; when demonstrations are banned, organizations shut down or media subjected to severe censorship, art is often the only possible instrument of protest” (14). Yet another example of art not only symbolizing but serving as an act of protest, as Goris indicates, are the Arpillera tapestries created by women in Chile during the Pinochet regime (14-17). These small tapestries depicted women’s experiences during the military regime, and atrocities committed by the Chilean authorities. As a result, they “became a record of Chile’s political history, giving expression to the voices silenced by the regime” (16). A majority of the artisanal crafts were illegally exported to Europe and North America where they were bought by Chilean exiles, human rights organizations, and NGOs who in turn sold

them to the public (16). In this way, the plight of Chilean citizens under the duress of the military dictatorship was able to be heard abroad.

The examples of "The Standing March" in France and the Arpillera tapestries of Chile demonstrate the ways in which protest does not necessarily have to be defined by individuals physically marching in the streets. Art cannot only supplement an individual or group's acts of political dissent, it can quite literally act as an alternative to a mass assembly of demonstrators. As Goris explains, "When freedom of expression is not under direct threat or limited, people still use art as an additional tool in their repertoire of available action, thereby expanding their scope, audience, and space" (14-15). Ultimately, while Acha-Kutscher does not label herself an activist since she does not physically march in the streets, she can still be characterized as such. One could consider her artwork as a material extension of herself and her beliefs, and serves to publicly support gender equality and denounces injustices, in particular gender violence.

The *Indignadas* series showcases the resistance of the global woman who combat against an array of stereotypes regarding race and social condition (López Menacho). Depicting the global plight and fight of women was a conscious choice of Acha-Kutscher, given that she is interested in the global image of the social mobilization of women, from a feminine perspective. When the artist began the collection *Women Working for Women*, she was unaware of a preexisting visual registry "on feminist, activist women, especially in developing countries" (Lindley). This motivated the artist further to generate an artistic collection that not only provided visibility to women and their political causes, but to transform the way in which we perceive gender and as a result, the history of humanity (López Menacho). Acha-Kutscher argues that:

> Historically, it's important to show that political actions and social changes were always made by women and men together. Women were always there but weren't always visible. This "erasure" of women's history that puts us aside from humankind's history is an exercise of patriarchal control. In addition, women have had a dual struggle—we fight for our rights and join the social and political struggles at the same time. Any initiative to make our history visible as women is essential and empowers us. (Madrid)

She believes that while "las luchas sociales varían de acuerdo a la zona del mundo […] la lucha política de las mujeres es la misma, la más urgente: la lucha contra la violencia contra las mujeres"[131] (López Menacho).

It can be argued that we are currently experiencing a "fourth wave" of feminism,[132] and a time that is quite empowering for women given the large array of feminist groups[133] currently protesting, and the potential of social media to disseminate the message of feminist struggles and ideals. Upon investigating women's activist groups, the academic Sarah Maske argues that while there is no such thing as "one global women's rights campaign," there are some principal similarities that are regarded as major issues of the feminist struggle (280). These issues include: The Protection of

[131] Social struggles vary according to the [particular] region of the world. The political struggle of women is the same, the most urgent: the fight against violence against women.
[132] Sarah Maske explains that "at present a fourth wave of feminism is nascent based on already won rights, which now no longer concerns itself primarily with the demand for the enforcement of fundamental rights—for example, the right to work—but first and foremost with fleshing out these rights, for instance, in the form of equal pay for equal work" (279).
[133] Acha-Kutscher sites groups such as "FEMEN, Pussy Riot, [and] SlutWalk" (Madrid). We can certainly add to this collection the recent #MeToo, #TimesUp, and Womens March movements occurring on a much more global scale.

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the adherence to basic civil rights, and the dissolution of rigid gender roles[134] (280-81). All these issues, according to Maske, converge and revolve around one central goal: "Through nonviolent resistance they want to secure the rights for women that women have so far been refused or that are still disregarded" (281). The strategies to obtaining this goal include and range from: "drawing attention, and actually putting the finger on problems, to the call for action in order to change the criticized situation" (281). To analyze the tactics of several contemporary feminist groups that disseminate their directives via the Internet, Maske provides methods found in Gene Sharp's book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973). One such method presented by Sharp is labeled as "The Methods of Nonviolent Protest and Persuasion", which includes "symbolic action," a strategy that Acha-Kutscher admits to employing and indicates is the purpose of her artwork. As Maske explains:

> An action can be seen as symbolic if it is not a targeted intervention in a system or procedure and does not directly demonstrate the desired changes, but instead publicizes the specific demands with the aid of various tools—banners, verbal slogans, music—which are either already symbolically charged per se or become so through being employed in protest. (284)

[134] Maske indicates that this particular issue, compared to the first two in the list, is "less tied to institutional decrees and agreements, is addressed particularly in highly developed industrial countries" and means "the stereotyped attribution of characteristics and outward features to women and men." For example, she explains: "the Commission on the Status of Women raises awareness on the consequences of these gender roles in the workplace, and criticizes the uneven distribution of the sexes in certain professions. Women frequently work in the social field in particular, in part unsalaried—for example, as caregivers to relatives—which can be traced back to the fact that in many societies they are seen as 'caretakers.' This means that these women have no opportunity to earn a livelihood and be independent" (281).

The "Women Working for Women" series *Indignadas* as well as "Made in America" are definite representations of "symbolic action" and the method's attributes.

In particular, the protest photo for the Latin American movement Ni una menos is a noteworthy work given its composition. The Ni una menos movement, which in English means "Not one woman less," began as a Twitter hashtag. It is now a mantra of protest against several troubling cases of violence, domestic violence, and sexual assault in Latin America and also demonstrates the recent spread of feminist activism in Latin American countries ("#NiUnaMenos: Not One"). The NiUnaMenos slogan that later became the hashtag, can be traced to a performance of literary readings in March of 2015 in front of the National Library in Argentina condemning femicides. Another protest on June 13th 2015 took place in front of the National Congress in Buenos Aires where 130,000 people were present. On October 9th 2016, a young 16-year-old girl named Lucía Pérez from Mar de la Plata (Argentina), was brutally assaulted and murdered. This sparked yet another wave of angry protests, and on October 19th women and men flooded into the streets of Argentina to protest. These protests were referred to as "Black Wednesday" as protesters were encouraged to wear black as a sign of mourning for the deaths of victims of gender violence. According to *NACLA*: "Reports found that in addition to at least 138 separate protests that took place in Argentina, there were 25 protests in Chile, seven in Bolivia, five in Mexico, two in Uruguay, two in Honduras, and others in the capital cities of Paraguay, Ecuador, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and beyond" ("#NiUnaMenos: Not One Woman").

Acha-Kutscher's Ni una menos portrait—when compared to the other pieces in this collection—is entirely filled with human subjects (fig. 28).

Fig. 28 Ni Una Menos el 13 de agosto en Lima, Perú

Acha-Kutscher explains that this image originates from a press image from Americatv and represents the "Marcha nacional del 13 de agosto de 2016 del movimiento ciudadano NI UNA MENOS, para rechazar la violencia contra la mujer y exigir al sistema de justicia sanciones justas contra los culpables"[135] ("Indignadas Latinoamérica"). The motivation of the protest was the case of Arlette Contreras who was brutally attacked by her ex-partner in a hotel in Ayacucho, Peru. The assault was captured by hotel cameras, but the accused was only ordered to serve a year of a suspended prison sentence for charges of attempted rape and femicide after having been intoxicated and flying into a jealous rage ("Indignadas Latinoamérica"). In the majority of Acha-Kutscher's works, the pieces consists of several or perhaps one individual in the forefront of the image, while the background is typically a solid bright color; in this sense, the spectator's attention remains on the figures in the piece and not on what is happening in the background. When looking at Acha-Kutscher's

[135] National march of the 13th of August of 2016 from the citizen's movement Ni Una Menos to reject violence against women [and] demands just sanctions from the justice system.

Ni una menos piece one immediately notes the great number of women's faces in the photo, the majority of whom are projecting a stern expression and appear to be looking in all directions. However, the spectator's eyes are initially drawn to two areas of the painting where two subjects are looking forward toward the spectator viewing the image. One of these subjects is a woman whose head cranes slightly over the rest of crowd, and her eyes seem to be looking forward and slightly downward. If one were to follow her gaze, it can be determined that she is looking toward an outstretched cellphone being held by an unidentified subject in the frame. The direction of her gaze is supported by the fact that the woman's face is reflected on the screen, demonstrating that the subject holding the phone is taking a photo of her. In a sense, the hands that appear in the center-right of the frame could be interpreted as those belonging to the spectator of Acha-Kutscher's image, and the individual who is thus taking a photo of the crowd. This art piece could certainly symbolize not only the dissemination of this feminist movement online, specifically on social media, but also the power of technology in the context of protests and social issues. Furthermore, it expresses feeling of empowerment, of not only documenting a poignant event but also being a part of it.

The viewer of this image is additionally drawn to the woman with the pale complexion, glasses, and short dirty-blonde hair who seems to be waving in the center-left of the photo. According to Acha-Kutscher, this is Nancy Lange, the wife of ex-president Pedro Pablo Kuczynsk ("Indignadas Latinoamérica"). Nancy Lange's presence in the image demonstrates the importance of gaining the attention of political leaders and having them participate in such demonstrations to enact and precipitate social change. In having the support of politicians, it sheds much more light upon and brings further clout to the

issue the public is fighting for. Finally, the colors in the portrait also have a special significance. While there is some light blue in the composition of the image (which represents the sheen on the subjects' hair or a jean jacket that someone is wearing), the majority of the color in the image is either pink or purple. Purple, the color that Nancy Lange is wearing for instance, has been associated with women's rights movements. According to Rose M. Garrity, the board president of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: "The women's suffrage movement utilized purple, white and gold in the early 1900s as those were the colors of the National Women's Party" ("The Color Purple"). Many wore the color lavender in the United States on July 9, 1978 during the march for equal rights in Washington D.C. Yet it now carries the connotation of domestic violence awareness. Garrity states that "Battered women chose purple as an evolution of the lavender from decades past […] It's seen as a color of royalty and is already associated with females anyway" ("The Color Purple"). Another version of the interpretation of the color purple "tiene que ver con el color violeta como resultado de la mezcla del rosa con el azul, los colores asociados comúnmente a los géneros femenino y masculino. La unión de ambos constituiría un símbolo de la igualdad entre el hombre y la mujer"[136] ("#NiUnaMenos: La Historia"). Activist Emmeline Pethick indicates that "El violeta, color de los soberanos, simboliza la sangre real que corre por las venas de cada luchadora por el derecho al voto, simboliza su conciencia de la libertad y la dignidad"[137] ("#NiUnaMenos: La Historia").

[136] Has to do with the color purple as a result of the mixing of pink and blue, the colors commonly associated with feminine and masculine gender. The union of both would construct a symbol of equality between man and woman.

[137] Purple, the color of sovereign rules, symbolizes the royal blood that runs through the veins of everyone fighter for the right to vote, it symbolizes their awareness of liberty and dignity.

The color pink is associated with the movement as well, as a result of a logo that was created by the joint effort of artists Romina Lerda and Romina Moi at the beginning of the Ni Una Menos movement in 2015 (fig. 29). Lerda designed the face of the woman in the logo, while Moi edited the figure of the woman into a black outline layered on top of a light pink background ("¿Quién?").

Fig. 29 Logo of the Ni Una Menos movement

One could conclude that the color pink was chosen due to its significance as being a gendered color which is affiliated with femininity in Western cultures ("Pink and Blue"). The logo thus influenced Ni Una Menos protestors and activists to choose pink (as seen on the Ni Una Menos headbands in Acha-Kutscher's image) and purple when demonstrating in the streets of Latin America.

One certainly notes the journalistic and historic register in the *Indignadas* series. In an interview with *Luchadoras TV*, María María Acha-Kutscher discusses the collection with the host of the channel:

> [*Indignadas* es] a la vez una obra de arte [y] hay una temporalidad, ¿no? […] eso es un poco el objetivo […] la misión [es] como tener ese doble juego, que se convierten en obras de arte atemporales, pero a la vez también registran nuestra historia como mujeres, [registran] nuestra historia política. Es a la vez inmediatez la grabación […] agarra la imagen y la lanza a su página web. Y continúa…. No cierra este proyecto. Va o sigue grabando las marchas.[138] (RompevientoTV)

However, one of the few series of the "Women Working for Women" collection that contains a limited number of images[139]—eight in total—that would be created by Acha-Kutscher was the series *Hecho en Latinoamérica* or "Made in Latin America". As previously mentioned in this analysis, the artist's objective is to create a positive image of young modern-day Latin American women who have found success and conquered within the domain of traditionally male dominated careers, and these art pieces are then strategically placed within the public domain: "The portraits were exhibited for three months in 14 stations of Mexico City's metro system, which sees a total of more than five

[138] [*Indignadas* is] at the same time a work of art [and] there is a temporality, right? […] that's a bit of the objective […] the mission [is] how to have that double play, that the works of art become atemporal, but at the same time they also register our history as women, [they register] our political history. At the same time the recording is immediate, the image is captured, and it is launched on her website. And it continues…the project does not close. It continues or goes along recording the marches.

[139] Acha-Kutscher explained does she does not plan to add anymore portraits to the "Hecho en Latinoamérica" series.

million passengers a day. The Government of the Mexican Federal District, the Women's Institute of Mexico City, and the Antimuseo collaborated to make this project possible" (Lindley) (fig. 30).

Fig. 30 *Made in Latin America* Portrait Displayed in a Subway Station in Mexico City

This particular project was unique for Acha-Kutscher, as it was the first time she collaborated directly with the protagonists of the portraits. The images carry the same "pop-art" aesthetic as the *Indignadas* series. However, these works indicate the name of the subject, the name of their career, and an inspirational phrase used by the protagonist stemming from either their own work or simply a motto that is important to them (fig. 31). The artist states "El objetivo del proyecto es mostrar una imagen nueva de lo que es la mujer latinoamericana y también muy empoderada y así como recuperando terreno masculino"[140] (RompevientoTV). The photo below is that of Colombian DJ and producer Ali Stone, who is one of the "youngest movie music composers in the world" according

[140] The objective of the project is to show a new image and one that is very empowering of what a Latin American woman is, and in this way recuperating masculine territory.

to the mini biography in the image ("Women Working for Women/Made in Latin America"). The accompanying phrase found in the speech bubble says, "To be a woman is to be a warrior and overcome the limits and stereotypes that society imposes upon us."

Fig. 31 Portrait of Ali Stone

While these portraits were transformed into works of art, they stem from the subjects they represent and present their voices without intervention or interpretation made by Acha-Kutscher.

When asked about the role of artivism, Acha-Kutscher suggests that "The intersection between art and activism is very interesting because it recognizes conflict—in this case, the defense of human rights—from another point of view. By creating images that appeal to our senses, to our subconscious, artists are witnesses of their time" ("Telling"). The artworks of the *Indignadas* series serve as a demonstration of current controversial events unfolding in Latin America and around the world, and these images are "witnesses" of injustices, challenging the patriarchal system and advocating for equality regarding issues of gender violence. Journalist Lori Soares Duarte recognizes

that "La lucha por la igualdad está más vigente que nunca, sobre todo porque las diferencias entre género son más que evidentes en todo el mundo. Aunque hay muchas diferencias que ya han sido conquistadas, estamos lejos de la equidad"[141]. She quotes Acha-Kutscher, who says "No creo que haya una sola mujer en el mundo que no sufra las consecuencias de vivir en un sistema patriarcal. Por eso es necesario incluir en el mundo la perspectiva de género"[142] (Soares). María María Acha-Kutscher's artwork certainly comes from a place of intersectional feminism, given that within her work she encompasses the experiences of women who not only hail from the Western world, "sino al ampliar su esfera de acción-visibilización a las realidades de mujeres y otras comunidades marginadas de todas las geografías, razas, géneros, clases sociales y orientación sexual"[143] (La Fata Morgana). Ultimately, the collection "Women Working for Women"—which encompasses *Indignadas* as well as *Hecho en Latinoamérica*—serves as a prime example as to how social media, along with the process of Acha-Kutscher's pieces being placed in public, are trying to bring further attention to marginalized voices. These are reoccurring issues that despite outrage and the outcries of the public continue to happen, so artists and activists need to keep pushing their work to promote social change. Taja Lindley concludes in quite a prophetic manner by stating that Acha-Kutscher's artwork and those artists like her are more important than

[141] The fight for equality is prevalent than ever, especially because the differences between gender are more than evident throughout the world. Even though there are many differences that have already been conquered, we are far from equality.
[142] I do not believe that there is one woman in the world that does not suffer the consequences of living in a patriarchal system. For that [reason] it is necessary to include the perspective of gender in the world.
[143] But also upon widening her sphere of action-visibilization to the realities of women and other marginalized communities of all geographies, races, genders, social classes and sexual orientations.

ever: “In a moment when the world is divided on critical social justice and human rights issues, art can serve as a bridge between the world we live in and the change we seek. Acha-Kutscher’s work gives us something to hold onto as we cross that bridge together”.

Praba Pilar

The work of the artist Praba Pilar, of Colombian origin, primarily consists of live performance. However, she has also produced videos and digital art throughout the trajectory of her artistic career. Originally, before being a solo artist, she was a member of the artistic group “Los Cybrids” (1999-2003) which was comprised of Pilar, John Jota Leaños and René Garcia. The group’s art critiqued new technologies from a cultural and racial perspective. However, these days Pilar has stressed that the manner in which she investigates and formulates her works has changed toward an approach founded in cyberfeminism.[144] Pilar’s Project entitled *Cyber.labia* (2005), which is a book in pdf format, is emblematic of her more recent works that spans the theme of the relationship between women and technology from a feminist position, which consists of interviews between the artist and the theorists and intellectuals Anne Balsamo, Sheila Davis, Paulina Borsook y Art McGee. The title itself, emphasized by Pilar in the beginning of her book, indicates that *Cyber.labia* is the unification of the two words “cyber” and “labia”, which according to the definitions provided by the Larousse dictionary means to say: “la facilidad de hablar con gracia con respecto a las redes informáticas de comunicación”.[145]

[144] As the theorist Claire Taylor indicates with respect to the works of Pilar, “[I]n her subsequent solo work Pilar has focused less specifically on issues of Latin(o) American cultural or ethnoracial identity—though she still describes herself on her website as ‘deeply rooted in Latino communities’—and instead focuses more on issues of cyberimperialism more broadly speaking, together with a nuanced, critical approach to cyberfeminist concerns” (52).

[145] The ease of speaking with grace with regards to computer networks

For English speakers one also notes the anatomical connotation in relation to women, which gives it a gynocentric tone (Taylor 52).[146] Even though each interview in her book focuses on a distinct theme according to the specialty and profession of her interviewee, in their entirety the interviews emphasize a reoccurring theme, which indicates that the possibilities of an egalitarian territory where one can overcome gender, race, class and essentially transcend the human body, are non-existent in the field of technology and territory of cyberspace. To reflect the themes that were discusses in the interviews, Praba Pilar created and provided seven digital images in total to accompany her text. Of the seven images, two of them will be analyzed to highlight the obstacles that women face in the field of technology and matters of the exploitation of bodies that the Internet makes possible and even facilitates.[147]

In her first interview with the theorist Anne Balsamo she speaks of the notion of the configuration of technology in terms of gender. Pilar begins by emphasizing that according to a study that "The Commission on the Status of Women" carried out in 2003, the majority of women that work in sectors of information technology had jobs where they received salaries that were much lower in comparison with their male counterparts and in general, women held less prestigious positions such as "data entry, call-handling,

[146] Claire Taylor considers that this title is a nod to feminist theorists who emphasize the importance of writing the body, in particular the French theorist, Luce Irigaray who wrote the manifesto entitled "When Lips Speak Together" (1985)" (52).

[147] Claire Taylor's essay entitled "Cartographic Imaginaries: Mapping Latin(o) America's Place in a World of Networked Digital Technologies" in the collection of essays *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* (2015) briefly analyzes each of the six photos in the Praba Pilar's book. This analysis that follows explains in a much more extensive manner (with the fact that the images reflect the content of the interviews) some of these observations that Taylor has already pointed out in two of these photos. These photos were chosen as they address the subject of gender in a much more direct manner than the other images in her book.

teleworking, customer service centers, or in electronics assembly plants working under sweat shop conditions" (Pilar 12). This means, and as Pilar herself points out in the introduction of *Cyber.labia* that the labor of women is much more devaluated and discounted. Furthermore, women are marginalized with respect to positions of power within the structures of management and production of technological appliances.[148] In the second interview that she has with Sheila Davis, the two theorists emphasize that some of these occupations are in third world countries. In this ensemble of occupations, women do not only create the machines in sweatshops, but they also disassemble them. It is rather common that Western countries export technological surplus for the purpose of recycling them to countries such as China, India, Pakistan and various other countries in Africa. However, many times the facilities in those countries do not have the resources to adequately handle the materials. This results in dangerous environments for its workers and has severe repercussions for their health (19). These circumstances are reflected in one of the images created by Pilar (fig. 32).

[148] Praba Pilar affirms that "Women are absent from both decision-making structures: from the boards and senior management of private IT companies; from the senior management and advisors of policy and regulatory organizations […] from technical standards setting organizations, industry and professional organizations such as the internet society, national policy and regulatory organization; and from international development organizations and agencies. Looking at the bigger picture, information technology greatly facilitates the transfer of goods, services and finance around the world, thereby facilitating globalization—a process that has been none too kind to women worldwide" (7-8).

Fig. 32 Image Entitled *Cyberlabia #4, digital print*

In the image, one can observe an Asian woman (one supposes that she originates from the Third World) hitting a technological object with some kind of tool. Behind her, one can see a large mountain of trash of technological detritus. Toward the bottom of the image one can see some type of green and red lines in a circular shape within a square that could represent an electronic web, demonstrating that this woman possesses a posthuman (globalized) body resulting from her interaction and relationship with technology. This manual labor that the image narrates affects the woman and her body in a particular manner that does not affect men in terms of congenital malformations and diverse types of cancer. One of the chemicals that is released upon burning the motherboards and microchips is extremely dangerous and accumulates in the fatty tissue of the body. For women, their breasts run the risk of becoming a site where such toxins reside. For pregnant women, this could mean the transfer of harmful toxins to the child by way of the mother's breastmilk (Pilar 20).

The third conversation with Paulina Borsook stresses the Internet as a medium of exploitation, specifically of gender. The image that proceeds the interview depicts a woman that seems to be dressed in a similar manner to that of a young adolescent—for example, her hair is styled into pigtails with barrettes. She is positioned in front of a man that is seated, with his penis in her hand, and it is very evident to the spectator that she is about to carry out a sexual act (fig. 33). Through the coloration of the images, the spectator can note that the race of the female's body does not correspond to that of the man (client/consumer), who is clearly Caucasian. In comparison, the resolution of the image regarding the woman is unclear in such a way that the woman could be Hispanic or Asian (Taylor 53). One could suppose that this is identity is purposely ambiguous in order to represent the exploited bodies of Third World women. The position of the map of the United States in the background behind the two figures connects to the woman to it via multiple white lines. This suggests, once again, that she belongs to the global network of the world-wide web. One could interpret this narration—according to the various aspects mentioned previously regarding this image—as a woman being filmed and later this media is shared through cyberspace (or in the form of a still photograph). Or, it could represent sex trafficking that is facilitated by the interconnectivity of the Internet, and as a consequence, demonstrates the locations where women have been brought, even though it is just an image, with the purpose of being sold to the highest bidder.

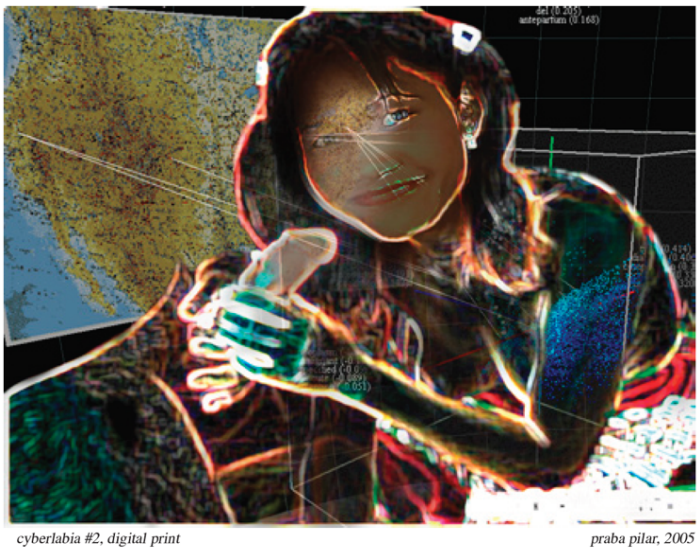

Fig. 33 Image Entitled *Cyberlabia #2, digital print*

The discussion that follows this explicit image discusses the role that the Internet has had in the diffusion of sexualized images, pornography, and even prostitution. The connectivity of the Internet on a global scale is often manipulated to buy and sell bodies. One can observe this on mail-order bride websites where Western men "purchase" impoverished women who hail from Third World countries (a marriage that many times makes them become slaves to the man who sponsored their journey to the West), websites featuring classified ads such as Craigslist and Backpage[149] where women and adolescents are prostituted, and webcam sites etc. As Praba Pilar affirms, cyberspace makes it much easier to recruit women from all around the world for prostitution (Pilar 29). As a response to Pilar, Borsook comments that "the age of consent varies from country to country, there is a global oversupply of young people, or children ready to be

[149] On the Backpage website there was once a subsection of ads dedicated to "adult services". In 2017 however, due to mounting legal pressure, multiple lawsuits, and sex trafficking investigations. Craigslist deleted their subsection of "adult services" listings in 2010 (Hawkins).

exploited and [there is] […] good technology" (29). As a consequence, she asks herself if the Internet is shedding light on some people's perverse tastes or inciting them. Sex trafficking is a big issue and women and children that are being taking advantage of are swept up through trafficking circuits, not only from city to city in the physical sense, but also through the computer circuits that support digital networks.

Lastly, the image of Praba Pilar are direct regarding the message that they want to express to their spectator: The Internet and technology are not so "liberating" as one had previously considered and even create and/or facilitate problems for women such as sex trafficking, health complications due to toxic waste, and the marginalization of women in the fields of Science and Technology.

Whether we like it or not, the presence of technology has had a significant impact and it continues having one; it is changing each and every aspect of our society, our interactions, actions, and behavior. The posthuman turn in the humanities began with so many desires and hopes that we, as hybrid beings, would defeat gender binaries and that we would transcend our bodies as a result of our interaction with technology. Unfortunately, and as Pilar's work in particular demonstrates, these hopes do not coincide with our reality. Many theories of the posthuman promote the notion of liberation upon emphasizing the disappearance of the body and with it its limitations. However, many feminists have pointed out that only a small portion of people would benefit from technology and, essentially, the act of "transcending" the boy that posthumanism emphasizes. In fact, it could be that the concept of transcendence that comes from the ideology of the European Enlightenment of the separation of the corporeal and the material of the ration, intellectual, and abstract mind is not advisable for "all" bodies

(Lupton 99-102). For this reason, Nayar indicates that:

> [T]ranscending the body for the white race is not the same for the African or Asian body, for whom rights, privileges and welfare depend on the body […] [nor does] transcendence of the body mean the same things for women as men […] [these] examples suggest that the material body of the minority, the queer, or the differently abled remains in one place and retains corporeal markers of identity while being able to experience a different order of reality via technology. This is a *reconfiguration* of the human rather than transcendence. (77-8)

In a similar manner, Praba Pilar proposes the implementation of the lenses of cyberfeminism to analyze matters of gender and the posthuman body within the context of a globalized world; it is a branch of feminism that "refuses the utopianist dreams of freedom and empowerment through disembodiment in virtual space typical of Euro-American cyberfeminism, and instead is much more attentive to issues of race and class as they affect different groups of women, both on-and offline" (Taylor 52). The introduction of her book *Cyber.labia* summarizes in a concise and effective manner the inequalities that one finds regarding the Internet and in this context of globalization:

> In much of the world, women lack access to literacy and education, making up nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate. One out of every two women in developing countries is illiterate. One needs basic literacy and basic numeracy in order to write or read emails, to navigate the Internet, or surf the World Wide Web. Women lack the time to learn and operate the equipment, and lack the money to pay for it, while they often are

> prevented access to community centers by cultural and social norms. Most women around the world don't speak the primary language of information technology: English. (Pilar 8)

As one can observe, the Internet does not surpass the prejudices of gender, class, race, and sexuality. In fact, technologies replicate the patriarchy as Anne Balsamo affirms, "patriarchy is not a technological phenomenon—patriarchy uses technology to reproduce itself" (Pilar 14). Praba Pilar's *Cyber.labia* images certainly reflect what theorist Peter Weibel indicates as the objective of or message behind some Net-art pieces and such negative consequences for such disenfranchised bodies, as these pieces: "[set] out to contribute to the recivilization of global media technology by criticizing the Internet's economic, social, and technological conditions and constraints" (Weibel 55).

While in some cases the Internet can serve as a space of self-expression and resistance, and including a platform for activism, it is necessary to reconsider and reevaluate the relationship between women and cybernetics. Essentially one must bring the corporeal and the material into the equation of posthumanism along with the reconfiguration of our concept of subjectivity and agency (Ağın 115; Nayar 77-8; Bush 6). In this way, one can employ the theory of posthumanism to be able to better recognize issues in a more profound manner that stem from interactions with technology that have negative consequences for the female body.

María Cañas

La Archivera de Sevilla, as María Cañas is often called, is an experimental artist (primarily) of digital media whose work ranges from *found footage*, photo collage, short films, to her online project *Animalariotv.com.* She currently resides and works in Seville,

Spain. Like her many forms of work, she also has given herself a plethora of titles or nicknames including: "Videoguerrillera, *Ciberyonki*, *Hacker* cultural, La doctora Frankenstein, La archivera de Sevilla, o una saqueadora de íconos",[150] which represent not only the vast material she has produced, but also reflects her personality—she is an eccentric individual who often invents new words or more often than not, forges together two existing terms in order to accurately express the significance of her art (Rondón). Such a mentality is reflected in her work, or rather, she takes previously existing media and approaches it in a surgical manner, she extracts, recycles, refashions, and ultimately readapts the material into a completely different context to convey a new message quite different from that which belonged to its predecessor. Academic articles that do currently exist on Cañas' work have the tendency to focus solely on the interpretation of the pieces that specifically consist of the images of women. The objective of these essays is the dismantling of archetypes and gender roles of women that still exist in the media culture of Western society, rather than the importance of the creative process itself and its significance upon the analysis of the piece. The exhibition *Risas en la oscuridad* [151] was on display in 2015 in Seville's Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo museum from June 19th until the 11th of October. The exhibit offered the wide array of Cañas' work from the beginning of her artistic career to her most recent productions to be viewed by the public. This work will discuss the process of remediation as well as the author's underlying commentary on obsolescence and the narrative of contemporary

[150] In English: "Video insurgent, Cyber junkie, cultural hacker, the Frankenstein doctor, the archivist of Seville. Or the plunderer of icons". It will be noted that all subsequent translations in this article are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[151] "Laughter in the Dark".

technocultural discourse that is ultimately projected by particular pieces that are displayed in her exhibit *Risas en la oscuridad*.

As mentioned, one of the prominent characteristics of Cañas' work is that of appropriation or recycling, as Elena Oroz comments in her essay "Eat my Meat! Inscripciones y reinscripciones de la feminidad de en la obra de María Cañas":

> A través de la apropiación y remontaje de materiales heterogéneos—desde películas de Hollywood hasta noticiarios de televisión, pasando por videos amateur extraídos de Youtube—sus obras interrumpen y dislocan los discursos mediáticos, generando formas alternativas de representación que le permiten, igualmente, cuestionar las identidades de género y nación.[152] (160)

This description of the artist's work highlights one particular aspect for which she is well known in the experimental and digital art community of Andalusia—*found footage* (Sedeño). Media theorist Jennifer Steetskamp provides the following definition of the art form:

> Being closely linked to the art historical notion of the *objet trouvé*, found footage describes a method of film (and video) making, according to which already existing material is recombined, re-edited and re-sampled to generate different contexts of meaning. The method as such could be as an exemplification of the *montage* principle, reflecting on the avant-gardist

[152] "Through appropriation and reassemblage of heterogeneous materials—from Hollywood films to the news on tv, going through amateur videos extracted from YouTube—her works interrupt and distort the mediated discourses, generating alternative forms of representation that permit her to, at the same time, question the identity of gender and nation".

> tradition of the *collage* (including the reference to Lautréamont's notorious pre-surrealist dictum) as well as on the technological conditions of filmmaking itself (and, more specifically, on certain traditions in the history of film). (336)

The theorist Oroz adds that for Cañas and many other creators, *found footage "*constituye una forma de reciclar el exceso de residuos audiovisuales de la sociedad de consumo. Además, no es sólo una forma más barata de realizar películas, sino que también se convierte en una forma de piratería mediática y en una alternativa y un reto al cine comercial"[153] (160).

The process of recycling *found footage* by combining media representing pop-culture in Cañas' video "Holy Thriller" also draws attention to the phenomenon of glocalization (global + local) that develops from a consolidation of commercialism and consumerism that technology permits. Glocalization, as theorist Barry Wellman defines, is "the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction" (11). Technology allows us to communicate and engage with one another like never before. In this way, the latest fashion trends, tv programs, music etc. are rapidly disseminated on a global scale. However, rather than simply homogenizing cultures as a result of products and ideologies pushed by Western capitalist cultures through technology, local identities merge their preferences with that which they adopt:

> The impact of globalization thus becomes, more plausibly, a matter of the *interplay* of an institutional-technological impetus towards globality with

[153] "It constitutes a form of recycling the excess of audiovisual remains of the consumerist society. Furthermore, it is not only a cheaper form of producing films, but rather it also converts into a form of media piracy and in an alternative and a challenge of commercial cinema".

> counterpoised 'localizing' forces. The drive towards 'globality' combines a logic of capitalist expansion with the rapid development of deterritorializing media and communications technologies. But this drive is opposed by various processes and practices expressing different orders of 'locality'. Amongst these we can count the cultural identity movements […] but also less formally organized expressions of identity, for example, those involved in local consumption preferences. And, on quite another level, we have to add the considerable cultural effort exercised by nation-states in binding their populations into another cultural- political order of local identification. (Howes 178-9)

One can certainly see such *interplay* that Howes refers to in Cañas's *Holy Thriller* video that occurs between the Spanish national cultural identity via the traditional celebration of the procession of *La Semana Santa* (locality) and international influence of the pop music of Michael Jackson (global). In this way, one witnesses the manner in which technology makes cultural boarders permeable.

This piece, among many other examples of her experimental work, brings to the forefront the distinguishing characteristic related to the creation process of all digital media artwork, which is remediation. Remediation as theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin explain in their book *Remediation* (1999) is: "the refashioning of material that has already been represented in another artistic medium" (45). The example of *found footage* serves also as a model of what is also deemed as "intermediality". The term intermediality was coined by Dick Higgins who defined it as "[the way] in which the materials of various more established art forms are 'conceptually fused' rather than

mere[ly] juxtaposed" (McGill 43). This definition of Higgins appeared in 1966, almost three decades before the digital era and the creation of the Internet. The author Asunción López-Varela Azcárate provides a more precise understanding of the term given that it incorporates the context of that which is digital. She defines intermediality as:

> El proceso de transformación de la información de formatos analógicos a forma- tos digitales y la mayor facilidad de estos últimos para incorporar datos en distintos modos perceptivos (texto, imagen, audio, video) […] es decir, el diálogo entre los antes distintos medios antes analógicos y que en la actualidad comparten un soporte digital común.[154] (95)

In their studies of remediation, theorists Bolter and Grusin highlight the manner in which "new mediums" such as the Internet look to erase the limitations of various mediums (photographs, video, etc.) through intermediality and the transparency and manner in which the mediums dialogue so that that the "original mediums" disappear and create an experience that is completely new for its spectator or user. In this sense, Cañas is trying to create, to an extent, an element of *hyperreality* with her work. Again, using the video of "Holy Thriller" as an example, she seamlessly edits together video images to the beat of music to achieve a certain degree of a verisimilar essence with the final product. In other words, the viewer momentarily forgets that a process of editing and convergence occurred to create the artwork, and it almost feels as though the "original" media was that way essentially and therefore not edited at all. Yet on the other hand, one can also

[154] The process of transformation of the information of analogue formats to digital formats and the greatest facility of the latter to incorporate in distinct perceptive modes (texts, images, audio, video) […] that's to say, the dialogue between these distinct mediums that before were analogue and that in actuality share a common digital platform.

consider that the artwork infers that Cañas is simultaneously trying to point out the uncanny juxtaposition of media, where it is quite obvious that two or more mediums do not belong together despite the manner in which the artist has edited them. She does this in order to generate a reaction from the viewer whether it provokes humor, playfulness, reflection, disgust etc. Whether it is a case of flawless editing or blatantly unusual convergences of mediums, the creation of such digital arts is a process of a series of precise and conscious decision-making. It is in fact more complex than the simple definition of remediation as was provided by Bolter and Grusin. As Katherine N. Hayles observes:

> [T]he [electronic] text exists in dispersed fashion even when it is confined to a single machine. There are data files, programs that call and process the files, hardware functionalities that interpret or compile the programs, and so on. It takes all of these together to produce the electronic text. Omit any of them, and the text literally cannot be produced. For this reason it would be more accurate to call an electronic text a *process* than an object'. (101)

Though of course these works are not "texts" in the traditional sense, Hayles observes and peels back fundamental layers of the artifacts that are digital artwork to accentuate the fact that it is such an elaborate process. In doing so, she is underlining the intricacy of its production, and the uniqueness of the process in comparison to other remediated works.

Cañas' most recent experimental film of *found footage* or "audiovisual" collage, that made its public debut on March 9, 2018 at the Punto de Vista Festival in Pamplona,

is entitled *La cosa vuestra* or "It's Your Thing" (Medina). The film, edited by Guille García, won the VII Proyecto X Films award in 2017. It consists of a montage of clips that compose a 40-minute-long "documentary" focusing on the San Fermin Festival in the city of Pamplona, Spain ("Histoire(s) du Cinéma Audiovisuels"). In an interview with *The Noticias de Navarra,* Cañas indicates that the piece was filmed the June before the San Fermin Festival; the annual celebration begins on July 6th and ends on July 14th (Oliveira Lizarribar). However, she states that from start to finish, the film took 15 months to complete (Cañas).[155] In her own words, the artist explains that the film is:

> un contenga multitud de las idiosincrasias de la cultura navarra. Porque creo yo que todo al final es lo mismo y el local está universal, y es una videoguerrilla transfronteriza y muy transnacional. Y es sobretodo una historia de la violencia, de la ultraviolencia, pero hasta la que uno mismo [se] hace, hasta caer beodo y cercano a la muerte hasta la violencia que se produce en estas fiestas […] todo el rollo de la cultura de la violación contra las mujeres y los animales, pero en vez de victimizar, [el filme] lo que hace es empoderar a través de la *risastencia*.[156] ("Festival Punto de Vista")

When asked why she made *La cosa vuestra*, she answers that "*La cosa vuestra* es una

[155] Cañas expressed that it "Fue un parto de 15 meses" or "a labor of 15 months" (the term "parto" here is used to convey labor as in the process of childbirth) (Cañas).
[156] A container of the multitude of idiosyncrasies of Navarran culture. Because I believe that in the end everything is the same and that the local is universal, and it is a transborder and very transnational *videoguerrilla*. And it is overall a story of violence, of the ultraviolence, but to the point that one is acting violently toward oneself, until one falls down drunk and is close to death to the violence that is produced in these celebrations […] the whole matter of the culture of violence against women and animals, but instead of [the film] victimizing, what it does is empower through *risastencia*.

videoguerrilla sobre la violencia y sobre el bálsamo del humor/amor ante el horror. La violencia que ejercen esas almas beodas anestesiadas o a salvajadas contra ellas mismas, la violencia contra las mujeres y animales…"[157] (Oliveira Lizarribar). She bluntly concludes that, "Porque si fuera por mí, yo me apearía de este mundo, que nosotros, humanos, estamos destruyendo, aunque en los niños y en los animales está la esperanza" (Oliveira Lizarribar).[158] The content of the film exposes the violence that the celebration perpetuates, and that it boasts debauchery and hedonism at the expense of taking advantage of the vulnerable: the bulls and women in attendance.

As Cañas indicates, she has not strayed far from the subject of regional celebrations, "Me interesan las delgadas líneas entre la religión y la fiesta; la hipocresía y la doble moral que siempre hay en las fiestas o la religión. Y la delgada línea entre bacanal, orgía, represión, agresión"[159] ("Histoire(s) du Cinéma Audiovisuels"). Though the bulk of her work focuses upon Andalusian folklore and observances, she has been able to deconstruct such an internationally known celebration in the Basque province due to meticulous research, explaining that: "Spain, Hispania… todos estos nacionalismos preservados, todos los mitos tópicos, las idiosincrasias en teoría "españolas": el cerdo ibérico, el toro…'La cosa vuestra' va de eso"[160] ("Histoire(s) du Cinéma Audiovisuels").

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[157] Even though I have focused on celebrations, *La cosa vuestra* is a *videoguerrilla* about violence and about the blasphemy of humor/love in the face of horror. The violence that those drunk anesthetized souls exercise or savage deeds against themselves, the violence against women and animals…

[158] Because if it were up to me, I would leave this world behind, that we, humans, are destroying, even though there is hope in children and animals.

[159] The fine lines between religion and celebration interest me; the hypocrisy and the double standards que always exists in celebrations or religion. And the fine line between wild party, orgy, repression, aggression.

[160] Spain, Hispania…all these preserved nationalisms, all the topical myths, the idiosyncrasies in theory "Spanish": the Iberian pig, the bull… *La cosa vuestra* is about that.

As a result, María Cañas is accustomed to deconstructing stereotypes that not only belong or pertain to particular autonomies of Spain, but those that aim to exemplify the Iberian nation as a whole.

To confront, combat, and reflect upon the horror and violence that is not only presented in the film but exhibited during the San Fermin festival, she uses humor. In doing so, she labels this *risastencia*—a kind of word play on the Spanish word *resistencia* (resistence), Cañas inserts the word "risas" or "laughter" to create a new term and concept. *Risastencia* "viene a ser el frente de los que entendemos el humor negro, naif, carnavalesco, de todos los colores... como una forma de resistencia popular"[161] (López). The artist continues by explaining, from a historic perspective that:

> Antes era el pan y circo de los romanos y después el fútbol y los toros de Franco. Algo de todo eso sigue allí. Pues nosotros lo enfrentamos desde el humor, desde los memes, desde el arte popular. Hay que defenderse del mundo a carcajadas, transformando la rabia en risa, aunque, al mismo tiempo, siempre con un sentido muy crítico y agitador.[162] (López)

Laughter, Cañas concludes, is a tool to confront social injustices and that "la risa es lo único que no nos pueden quitar"[163] ("Contemporary").

Specifically, the content of the material, oscillates between scenes of humor and the ridiculous to the dark, brutal, and even grotesque images of the festival. The opening

[161] It comes to be the front of what we understand [to be] dark humor, naïve, carnivalesque, of all color…a type of popular resistance.
[162] Before it was the "bread and circus" of the Romans and after soccer and bullfights of Franco. A part of that is still there. Well, we confront it from humor, from memes, from popular art. It is necessary to defend oneself from the world with laughter, transforming rage in laughter, even though, at the same time in a critical and proactive sense.
[163] Laugher is the only thing that they cannot take away from us.

of the film starts with an innocent tone, showing a young girl standing on a table and shrilly singing the *jota* "Navarra es un continente"[164] atop a chair in a busy restaurant. The scene frames the spirit of the film and several of the clips that follow it, establishing the regional pride and Navarran "folklore" or idiosyncrasies that Cañas herself had alluded to in interviews regarding the documentary. It also demonstrates a type of indoctrination of these children into the region's imaginaries and myths. The following clip transitions with the words "Mientras tanto en Moyo, Uganda" or "Meanwhile in Moyo, Uganda". The images show young Ugandan toddlers reenacting the ceremonies of the *Encierro*, with red scarves tied around their necks. They wonder around aimlessly, shaking their fists to the beat of the *Cántico de San Fermín* accompanying the images. The *cántico* or hymn playing in the background of this scene comes from the moment in the San Fermín festivals when men gather at the foot of the effigy of the patron Saint Fermín in Pamplona to ask for protection at the beginning of the festivities of the bull run. They point and shake a rolled-up newspaper at the statue and sing in unison: "A San Fermín pedimos/ por ser nuestro patrón/nos guíe en el encierro/ dándonos su bendición"[165] (García). Suddenly, the music playing in the video changes into an upbeat melody,[166] and children pop out of the schoolhouse in the background wearing cardboard masks of bulls to chase their classmates around trees and in the patio. These scenes show how these young toddlers are directed through the steps and mimicking the gestures of

[164] Navarra is a continent.
[165] The film *La cosa vuestra* provides subtitles in English. Therefore, the English translations provided in this chapter originate from those of the film. Here, the men are signing: "To San Fermín we ask/for being our patron/guide us in the *encierro*/giving us your blessing."
[166] The song that is playing in the background is "Fiesta" by the Irish band The Pogues. One would assume that this song playing was chosen incidentally, as it depicts rowdy partying in Spain with lyrics that intermingle unintelligible Spanish words and phrases.

the festival by what would assume are young adult European missionaries.[167] By being taught to replicate this religious ceremony abroad by white European missionaries, the scene seems to nod to the efforts of Spanish priests to convert the indigenous populations of the "New World". It also depicts the San Fermín Festival—or "Running of the Bulls" as it is commonly referred to—as a transnational and global phenomenon, which has become an iconic national representations of what foreigners associate with Spain and Spanish culture.

Shortly after the children fade away, the clip is replaced with a news report with the narrator describing the beginning of the religious aspect of the celebration, starting in the Cathedral of Pamplona. "San Fermín tiene un aspecto tanto sacro como profano",[168] the narrator states as the video shows the bishops in the Cathedral greeting the local government city officials, "Posteriormente, todos salen en procesión junto a la imagen de San Fermín por las calles de Pamplona. Anunciando no la llegada del único hijo de Dios, sino de la Diosa Lujuria que nos invita a la bacanal de sexo, drogas y alcohol"[169] (García). The narrator's description of the religious "purpose" behind the celebration and its reality, foretells the barrage of videoclips that follow and the discourse that unfolds throughout the rest of the documentary. There is a montage of proceeding clips that portray scenes of sanitation workers and local business owners gathering and sweeping up tons of trash (the majority of which are glass and plastic alcohol bottles), grotesque

[167] An article online about the children's home indicates that: "The Moyo babies' home operates on the values and principles of Christian charity" (https://www.westnileweb.com/news-a-analysis/moyo/moyo-babies-home-giving-hope-to-orphaned-children).
[168] San Fermín has two sides, sacred and secular.
[169] Later, everyone will march in procession through the streets of Pamplona alongside the image of San Fermín. Announcing not the arrival of God's only son, but of the goddess of Lust that invites us to the orgy of sex, drugs, and alcohol.

scenes of extremely intoxicated individuals drinking out of tennis shoes, while others are hunched over trash cans and vomit, inebriated tourists attempting outrageous stunts (jumping into trash cans naked as they are filmed by onlookers or sliding down a lubricated hill while also naked), and slurring words together as they are interviewed about festivities by local reporters. These are interspersed with the comments of the city's inhabitants about the utter mess that the San Fermín festivals generate and the fact they many people "half-drunk" or "completely drunk" can be found sleeping on the ground, benches, and/or in front of private businesses until late in the afternoon. While some of these clips can be comical, the viewer is shocked and even disturbed by contrasting images of the seedy and dark side of the celebration. For example, after seeing amusing moments of debauchery and a plethora of food, the scenes cut to a filthy bull ring. A reporter's voice is heard off screen saying the following: "Se acuerdan del menú del festín? Pues aquí están sus restos" as older Romani women and elderly men pick through the remnants, gathering leftovers in buckets, the narrator explains: "La necesidad aprieta y casi ahoga porque fíjense con lo que alimentarán a sus hijos […] es la otra cara de San Fermín"[170] (García). Such dark and troubling scenes imply or denotes *tremendismo*—an aesthetic movement from the 20th century attributed to "writers and painters in Spain who exaggerated the crudeness of life" ("La cosa nuestra").

After the transition of the news report, the film shifts to depict moments when giddy bull runners and spectators shake up red wine bottles, their traditional white ensemble becomes soaked in and turns red. As a man raises a bottle to dump over his

[170] Remember the menu of the feast? Well here we have the leftovers; hunger makes for desperation, just look at what they are going to feed their kids […] it's the other side of San Fermín.

head, the scene immediately and seamlessly cuts to a thick dark substance spilling down from above onto an individual. The camera zooms out, and it becomes clear that the audience is now viewing a PETA protest where a dozen protests hold buckets full of blood and stand nude in the plaza to protest the maltreatment and killing of the bulls. This then again, triggers a string of scenes of a bullfight, and then "barbaric" pagan rituals where the participants cover themselves in blood and dance around in the darkness with torches. The spectator perceives again and again the conflict between the support of the festival as a symbol of regional pride and "identity", and the destruction that the event has brought upon not only the city of Pamplona, but the stain it leaves on the country by perpetuating and celebrating violence and rape culture.

The film is the epitome of the notion of the "carnivalesque" that theorist Mikhail Bakhtin proposes in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1984). According to Bakhtin, the carnival celebrations can be traced back to the Middle Ages (218). The carnival offered "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" which "marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (Bernier-Cast 10). Theorist Karen Bernier-Cast cites Paul Duncum's work on the carnivalesque, who indicates that "the carnival had profound political undertones and celebrated all that was irrational, inane, violent, sexual and vulgar, during which time sexual norms and standards of modesty were discarded and the sensual aspects of the body took center stage" (Bernier-Cast 23; cit. en Duncum 39).

Established hierarchies and authorities are upended and challenged during events of the carnivalesque. However, unlike Bakhtin's observance that hierarchies are upended and temporarily "non-existent" in the carnival, within the San Fermin celebrations they

are preserved if not reinforced, magnified, and even exaggerated. The presence of the church and religious power is clearly there at the beginning of the ceremonies, with the procession, and the presence of local government when the hymn "Pobre de mí" is led by the current governor from the balcony of la Plaza Consistorial at midnight of July 14th to commemorate the end of the festivities. While such reinforcements of authority are seen at the beginning and end of the festivities, they are equally present during the unfolding of the celebration. The San Fermín festival continues to uphold patriarchal rituals and culture. Women were not allowed to run with the bulls like their counterparts until 1974, when the Spanish government lifted the law that prohibited female participation. However, in practice, municipal authorities continued to discourage if not entirely prevent them from partaking ("Quinta").

Fig. 34 La Pulga and La Melitona

Images of powerful and transgressive women pepper the clips of Cañas' film, such as that of two elderly women nicknamed "La Pulga" and "La Melitona" being interviewed by the host José María Iñigo on the program "Estudio abierto" in 1973 (Dolarcuellar) (fig.

34). Both women comment that they had been participating in the bull running in their town on of Cuéllar (in the province of Segovia) since they were young girls, and when "La Pulga" was asked if her husband participates by running in the *encierro* she says "él corre, pero en la taberna y los vasos de vino"[171] (García). Indeed, the majority of the individuals that run with the bulls are in fact male. Including the event that proceeds the day after the San Fermín festivals, known as *Los encierros de La Villavesa*, which has become a tradition in itself although the event happens during the 15th of July and is not typically part of the San Fermín celebration in the traditional sense. It is a run that is an alternative or parody of that which takes the week prior, an extension that takes place solely because no one wants the festivities to end. The *Villavesca* run takes place at eight o'clock in the morning when the *cántico de San Fermín* is sung to an individual dressed up as Saint Fermín, and then runners chase an individual on a bicycle down the streets to the bullring, some of whom are dressed in outrageous costumes. Cañas explains that: "antes corrían delante de un autobús de la Villavesa (el transporte urbano de Pamplona), pero hubo problemas y ahora ponen 'a un Induráin' en bicicleta, lo visten y corren delante de él". Curiously, she adds "Y allí no hay ni una mujer. Me he pasado mil horas en YouTube buscando mujeres en el encierro de la Villavesa y ahí no había ninguna"[172] (Medina).

There are other images of women that counter those of the men who appear to be at the center of attention during the festivities, who receive the connotation of being free-

[171] He runs, but in the tavern, in the wine glasses.
[172] "And there is no woman there. I have spent a thousand hours on YouTube looking for women in the Villavesa run and there were none." However, an article by *Euskal Irrati Telebista* indicates that 2018 was the first year that a woman represented the Saint Fermín during the *Villavesca* celebration ("Cientos").

spirited, brave, and strong. Such images as that of La Pulga and La Melonita appear alongside others where women try to enjoy the festival and reclaim the patriarchal space with their bodies. There is a sequence of clips of women showing their breasts, and in doing so, they become the center of attention of the—predominantly male—onlookers. As Cañas explains:"tú ves en conciertos en Alemania que las chicas enseñan sus pechos, empoderadas. Pero en ningún momento ningún tío les mete mano; eso es inviable en los Sanfermines"[173] (Medina). Showing one's body can be empowering and liberating, particularly when women do so on their own terms and by exercising their agency. However, during the San Fermín festival, women are frequently groped (fig. 35). As Marta Medina indicates, the celebration:

Fig. 35 Men Groping Women During the San Fermín Festival

apunta al refuerzo de los roles de género tradicionales que quedan más subrayados en este tipo de fiesta. El espacio público principal lo ocupan

[173] You see in concerts in Germany that the girls show their breasts, empowered. But in no moment does a man touch her; this is impossible in the San Fermín [festival].

> los hombres, en su mayoría. Los corredores se juegan la vida corriendo frente al toro. Valentía. Hombría. Las imágenes en las que las mujeres son el centro de atención corresponden a pechos desnudos sobre la multitud.[174] (Medina)

Rather than being an act of empowerment, the woman's body becomes an object of desire, the center of attention of the male gaze.

But certainly, what stands out in the clips are the marches and feminist protest against the San Fermín celebration, which has been scrutinized as promoting an atmosphere that promotes and even encourages violence against women (fig. 36).

Fig. 36 Fear is Going to Switch Sides: Feminist Self-Defense

One of the most recent and internationally publicized cases of assault was the attack on an 18-year-old adolescent from Madrid during the San Fermín festival of 2016 committed

[174] Indicates the reinforcement of traditional gender roles that remain emphasized in this type of celebration. Men occupy the main public space, in its majority. The runners risk their lives to run in front of the bull. Bravery. Manliness. The images in which women are the center of attention correspond to bare breasts above the crowd.

by a group of five friends in their late twenties from Seville who called themselves “La manada”. Comprising this group were a police office of the Guardia Civil and a soldier in the Spanish army. The five took advantage of the intoxicated young woman and took her into the basement of a residence where she was violated by each member of the group; the horrendous events were recorded on several of the men’s cell phones and then shared amongst their friends via the instant messenger app *Whatsapp*. The five then took the woman’s cell phone and abandoned her where the attack occurred. The perpetrators were taken to court, but on April 26th, 2018 the group was declared innocent of rape but guilty of sexual abuse and ordered to pay $61,000 dollars in compensation to the victim (“Spain”). The magistrates had ruled that the attack was sexual abuse since “the charge of sexual abuse differs from rape in that it does not involve violence or intimidation” (“Spain”). The prosecution claimed that based on the video evidence recorded by her attackers, and that “the victim maintained a "passive or neutral" attitude throughout the scene, keeping her eyes closed at all times” (“Spain”). There was an outcry not only in Spain, but also from abroad given the unjust verdict and that the actions of the men were not considered rape.

Cañas introduces the narrative of the infamous men by presenting a movie clip from the film *La trastienda* (1975) showing the protagonist Doctor Navarro speaking to a concerned mother. The doctor states: “Desgraciadamente vivimos en un mundo en el que las apariencias cuentan tanto como la verdad” (García). The scene then cuts to a photo of the five men on bicycles, beaming as they stand in front of the famous “Playa de la Concha” beach in the Basque city of San Sebastian. Shortly after, their disturbing *Whatsapp* conversation appears transposed on the screen, as though the audience were

looking at the phone being held-up in front of their eyes. Within the texts the men laugh, proud and boasting of their conquest, and state that there is video as proof. Part of the reason that Cañas dedicated this experimental film to the San Fermín festivals was precisely this case, and the façade that these men present to the world and how several of them hold positions of authority in society; in theory they should be the individuals upholding the law and even helping others in their time of need: "Lo más espeluznante es que ellos allí en su barrio, un barrio humilde, eran queridos y valorados. Uno de ellos ha llegado a ser guardia civil, y a guardia civil no llega cualquiera, porque hay unas pruebas. El otro, un militar. Perfectos de cara a la galería, y luego… ¿qué tienes tú en la cabeza para disfrutar violando y drogando?"[175] (Medina).

The scene then cuts to yet another infamous attempted assault and murder case that took place during the San Fermín festival of 2008. The clips that Cañas provides in her documentary summarize the case: Twenty-year-old nursing student Nagore Laffage meets twenty-seven-year-old, José Diego Yllanes Vizcay, medical resident studying Psychology at the University of Navarra. Laffage decided to accompany Yllanes to his apartment after a night of celebrating. However, the young woman did not want to engage in intercourse with Yllanes. Upon being rejected, he began to beat and forcibly disrobe the defendant. Medical reports showed she suffered 36 blows that fractured her skull and broke her jaw, but she was ultimately killed by Yllanes when he strangled her. He then took all of her personal effects (shown in the clip), tried but failed to dismember

[175] The most horrifying thing is that they are there in their neighborhood, a poor neighborhood, they were loved and appreciated. One of them had become a Civil Guard, and not just anyone can become a Civil Guard, because there are tests. The other, a soldier. Perfect faces to the gallery, and then…what is wrong with your mind that you enjoy raping and drugging?

her cadaver, and placed her remains in the woods where they were later found. The accused confessed and was proven guilty (Gabilondo). The scene ends with the screen going to black, and a woman's voice saying "SOS Navarra". The quality of recording is so difficult to make out that subtitles are provided. A very weak and quiet voice whispers "…muerta…" or "dead", to which the woman says "¿Perdón?" and then one hears "…me va a matar…"—he is going to kill me (García). These were, presumably, the last words of Nagore Laffage who was able to call the emergency services after being severely beaten by Yllanes; however, help never came.

This proceeding clip is a scene that demonstrates the reactions of protest from feminists regarding the gender violence that the San Fermín celebration brings with it. Beginning in 2017, feminist protests have occurred before the start of the festival known as the *chupinazo*, where women wearing all black and covering their faces, holding torches, chanting, and playing drums can be seen (fig. 37).

Fig. 37 San Fermín Feminist Protest

A young woman announces the following on a loud speaker, as the women that surround her lay on the ground to provide a visual of the consequences of gender violence in Spain: "Estamos aquí porque el año pasado se denunciaban en España una violación cada 8 horas, y en este año se denuncia una cada siete. Estamos aquí por las 91 mujeres asesinadas este año y por las 105 asesinadas el año pasado y por todo las demás. Por todas las mujeres que no nos creen: ¡Hermana, yo sí te creo!"[176] (García). There certainly noticed a surge in feminist marches and demonstrations after the La manada case, however time will tell how this law and the definition of rape will be treated and reformed in Spain's judicial system in the future.

The film ends on a compelling note, with a polyphony of discordant ululating rings as the title comes up, which later turn into screams. The sound reminds the viewer of a clip that played earlier in the film of a scene from the movie *Las brujas de Zugarramundi* (2013) by director Álex de la Iglesia. These images can be found halfway through the documentary, after pagan rituals are depicted, the subtitles "Somos las nietas de todas las brujas que nunca pudiste quemar"[177] flash across the screen (García). The clip demonstrates a witch holding a staff in her hand, the camera zooms out to show a crowd of cheering female witches shouting below in the venue of a cave. The leader silences the witches and shouts: "Los hombres nos tienen miedo porque sabemos la verdad. Dios es una mujer, y ellos no pueden soportarlo"[178] to which the women roar in agreement and lift

[176] We are here because last year in Spain a rape was reported every eight hours, and this year it's up to one every seven. We are here for the 91 women murdered this year and for the 105 murdered last year, and for all the others. For all the women whom nobody believes: Sister, I believe you!
[177] We are the granddaughters of all the witches you couldn't burn.
[178] Men are afraid of us because we know the truth. God is a woman, and then cannot stand it.

their fists in the air (García). Fast forwarding to the very end of the documentary, there is a message of acknowledgements as the ululating seems to increase in volume. It reads: "Agradecimientos a todos los homenajeados (no están todos lo que son, ni son todos los que están) que han hecho posible esta videoguerrilla y a las brujas que no pudisteis ni podréis quemar"[179] (García). Cañas had explained in an interview with Spain's *Radio 3* that the film served as "un homenaje a las brujas, a las mujeres libres rebeldes que […] no las mataron por brujas sino por listas, parlantes y ser trasgresoras"[180] ("El séptimo"). While *La cosa vuestra* depicts the dominance of the patriarchal space, in the context of the San Fermín festival and Western culture at large, it also serves as a rallying cry for women to reclaim that space and shows those that are currently doing so (the *chupinazo* protests) and those that have paved the way for women of the contemporary generation (such as La Pulga and la Melitona). Through marches, through banners, and through experimental works such as *La cosa vuestra* and its implementation of *risastencia*, women are depicted as strong individuals that have overcome so much as a marginalized community, yet still have much more to accomplish and must rely on transgressive acts to bring visibility to issues such as that of gender violence.

Pilar Albarracín

Pilar Albarracín is a predecessor of Cañas in the arena of the digital and experimental and both treat similar topics in regard to women, clichés, and Spanish

[179] Thanks to all the honorees, (some who should be here aren't, and others who shouldn't are), to everyone who has made this guerrilla-video possible, and to all the witches that you could not and won't be able to burn.
[180] A tribute to witches, to the free rebellious women that they did not kill for being witches, but for being smart, outspoken and transgressive.

cultural and national stereotypes.[181] Furthermore, both are from Andalusia— Pilar Albarracín is from the town of Aracena in the province of Huelva—and close with respect to their age given that Albarracín was born in 1968. However, amidst the many works that Albarracín has produced consists of installations, photographs, artisanal objects, and drawings, one could say that her most well-known works are her video performances in which she is the main protagonist. Within these works her objective is the proposition of a rereading of Andalusian folklore "cuyos tópicos han sido utilizado desde la época franquista como representativos de toda España"[182] ("Pilar Albarracín"). In this way, the artist questions and combats the pre-established identities of this nationalist and *machista* imaginary in a humoristic manner.

One of the most noteworthy video-performances that represents a rereading of one of the components of cultural identity of any nation is its gastronomy. One of the most famous or "typical" Spanish dishes, or rather the one that generally first comes to mind, is the Spanish omelet. Based on this notion of the omelet as a component of the traditional iconography of Spain, Albarracín begins her *Tortilla a la española* (1999) performance in a kitchen next to a carton of eggs. Step by step she begins to cook the famous dish, adding eggs to the frying pan on top of the stove. Suddenly, she diverts from the culinary process and takes out scissors with which she begins to cut her own red dress into pieces from the waist up to her neck and through her chest (fig. 38). She adds

[181] So far, Cañas did not indicate that Albarracín influenced her, even though the two have crossed paths upon having some of their works in the same museum.
[182] whose clichés have been used since the Franco era as representatives of the entire country of Spain.

the pieces to the frying pan along with the eggs, and cuts so much that eventually on can see a white brassier that she wears beneath her dress (fig. 39).

Fig. 38 Still Image from the Video-Performance “Tortilla a la española” (1999)

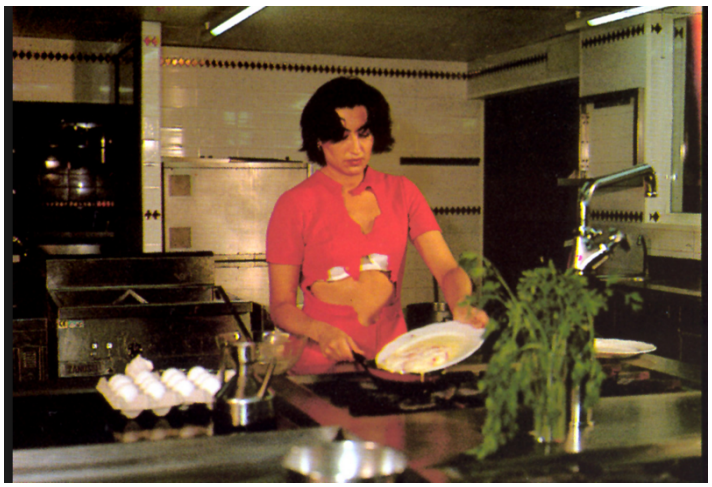

Fig. 39 Still Image (2) of the Video-Performance “Tortilla a la Española” (1999)

What beings as a trivial and “normal” act is interrupted with an action that could be considered violent, aggressive, and resolute. One could interpret this as a reaction to the frustration with domestic chores or how women are forced to occupy the private/domestic space. With her deliberate actions and reactions, she is subverting the

image of the docile and obedient woman, including that of the role of the middle-class woman and/or housewife (Yinghua 3). Also, the spectator questions to what extent Albarracín is going to cut herself. In other words, her actions make the spectator feel uneasy, anticipating that she will cut herself and add pieces of herself to the frying pan.[183] These red and yellow colors, the combination and their eventual reunion in the same pan, stemming from the red of Albarracín's dress and the yellow of the omelet, are the colors that comprise the Spanish flag. As a result, one could consider that the performance represents the embodying of the nation. This is understood as, according to theorist Alison Mountz: "moving beyond analyses of policy and structure, to the more fluid, daily, personal interactions that surround and disrupt these formal instruments of governance to locate political processes in a time and a place"[184] (Mountz 325-6). Furthermore, the presence of the omelet along with the actions of the frustrated woman give a special sociocultural significance to this rebellious action and a transgressive response to the Spanish narrative of the *ángel del hogar* y *la perfecta casada*[185]—the angel of the home and the perfect wife— that the Catholic Church and the Franco

[183] In her previous pieces, specifically: *Toilette* (1991), *S/T sangre en la calle* (1992) y *Lunares* (2004) Pilar Albarracín has used blood as a symbolic component in her performances. Therefore, it would not be surprising to the spectator if this video also included blood in these scenes of *La tortilla a la española*.

[184] Alison Mountz bases this definition upon those according to the theorists Gupta (1995), Heyman & Smart, (1999) y Hansen & Stepputat (2001).

[185] Theorist Sarah Leggott explains that the Catholic Church propagated the following: "Central to these constructions was the notion that women are predisposed to a life of domesticity and maternal devotion, with marriage and motherhood constituting the two key components of women's cultural identity. The effective management of the house was perceived to be the foremost task of the *perfecta casada*, a role that in the nineteenth century was attributed a degree of social status and was considered to be a duty of vital social importance" (31). At the same time, *el ángel del hogar* is characterized as: "The ideal woman is ultimately defined […] by the space which she occupies. The frontier of her existence as a virtuous woman begins and ends at her doorstep" (Aldarcara 27).

dictatorship advocated for, promoting the ideology of the ideal and perfect Spanish woman.

The video-performance *Musical Dancing Spanish Dolls* (2001) provides a humorous representation of Spanish culture, specifically flamenco dancing. The clip consists of four robotic wind-up dolls dressed as flamenco dancers. They move where they have been placed, shaking their hips, and some have their arms positioned above their heads to imitate the flamenco dance. As a result, a cacophony of flamenco music emerges—each figure seems to have its own *copla* that accompanies it, and they do not seem to be turned on all at the same time—along with the squealing of gears that come from the figures themselves. All the sudden, from the left-hand side of the screen another dancer of the same height and dress enters. However, one can tell that this is a real person, which turns out to be the artist herself. Even though she wears the same blank expression as the rest of the figurines and moves exactly like them, she cannot hide her human attributes: her eyes blink and her skin has a much more lively color and dimension in comparison with the dolls (fig. 40). It seems that the clip was produced with the help of a *green screen* and was later edited with computer software so that it seemed as though the artist was dancing amidst the group of dolls and was of the same height.

Fig. 40 Still Image of Video-Performance "Musical Dancing Spanish Dolls" (2001)

According to the theorist Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, flamenco is distinguished as "uno de los íconos y símbolos que […] tienen sus raíces Andalucía […] y que durante décadas ha contribuido al imaginario global con lo más fácilmente identificable de España: flamenco y toros"[186] (1). As a consequence of these globalized symbols, "se convierte en un ícono de representación de la mujer en la cultura visual"[187] (1). This video-performance demonstrates the way in which such icons and cultural symbols exude the appearance of a presumably heterogeneous culture, in this case specifically the image of the Spanish woman. Simultaneously, Albarracín mocks the tacky souvenirs that foreigners tend to look for and buy when they go on a trip to a particular country. Furthermore, the title of the piece is written in English to demonstrate a reflection on behalf of the artist who wants to reproduce the concept of the intent to sell an object and advertise it in a way—in this context in the English language—so that a much bigger and

[186] One of the icons and symbols that […] have their roots in Andalusia […] and that during decades has contributed to the global imaginary with the most identifiable of Spain: flamenco and bulls.
[187] it becomes an icon of representation of women in visual culture.

global audience or market of clients would arrive than if it were only written in Spanish. As a result, these symbols belong to a never-ending cycle: sometimes the countries themselves fabricate and later project such icons which tourists are accustomed to, and in turn, the foreigners believe that those really "represent" the population or nation that they visit, study in, etc. One could then read this digital work as a representation of the image of women being treated as merchandise. Even though this reading does not subvert the traditional discourses of Spanish women in a direct manner, the act of calling the attention of the spectator to these stereotypical constructions and ridiculing them questions their validity. This brings us—the viewers—to the understanding that such symbols project false notions of identity; considering this, one could say that Albarracín is successful in challenging and transgressing the discourses of cultural identity and female gender at a global level with her video-performance.

Albarracín's latest performance piece entitled *En la piel del otro* took place on April 26th, 2018 in the Musée Picasso in Paris, France to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the tragic events of the bombing of the small town of Guernica in the Basque region of Spain. The work involved a hundred women,[188] whose ages ranged from 18 to 80, laying in different positions (on the backs and sides) and wearing flamenco dresses of different colors ("Albarracín llena París"). All the women were strategically positioned at the entrance the museum as well as at the exit of the exhibition closest to the exit to the street ("'Guernica'"). The positioning of the performance participants made it difficult for visitors of the museum to move about the space, which

[188] Pilar Albarracín also participated alongside the women.

was done deliberately, given that anyone who "wishes to access the rooms and then leave them will be forced to walk over the bodies or to look for a space between them to move around. This action integrates the viewer into the work itself"[189] ("'Guernica'") (fig. 41).

Fig. 41 Participants in *En la piel del otro* (2018) at the Musée Picasso

[189] A parallel can be drawn between Albarracín and that of "Imponderabilia" (1977) by Marina Abramovich and Ulay ("'Guernica'").

Fig. 42 Performance of *En la piel del otro* (2018)

A filmed clip of the performance runs quickly over and above the women laying on the ground. The women lay silently, some with their eyes closed, others wide open as they stare blankly upward (fig. 42). There is no audio but the sound of a plane engine humming in the background as there is an "aerial" shot of the women in folkloric flamenco dresses. The choice of the flamenco dresses posits the female victims at a specific geographic location and the viewer makes the connection to the dress as a cultural symbol of Spain. Albarracín explained that the dresses serve as a representation of the skin but added that she wanted to show that while culture changes from country to country, "debajo de la piel somos todos iguales"[190] ("Albarracín llena París"). The participants not only represent the civilian casualties of the bombing of Guernica, the piece simultaneously "proposes a review of the historical and cultural role of women as a suffering machine" ("'Guernica'").

[190] Beneath our skin we are all the same

While the artist does agree that the act itself commemorates the bombing of Guernica, it also inevitably generates a unique experience for the spectator who upon seeing the women strewn about the floor "va a sentir algo vinculado a su propia experiencia y su memoria"[191] ("Albarracín llena París"). This particular performance piece is also significant for the participants, given that: "Muchas de las mujeres que participan están tomando esto como una especie de catarsis por sus historias personales"[192] ("Albarracín llena París"). The artist explains that many of the women performing in the piece "son segunda o tercera generación de inmigrantes…sea nietos, hijos…y hay un amor por España, por el país que tuvieron que dejar por motivos políticos por motivos económicos"[193] as a result of the Spanish Civil War that took place between 1936-1939 (Canalsur). As theorist Marcel Duchamp stated in a short lecture in 1957 entitled *The Creative Act*, "the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and this adds his contribution to the creative act" (cit. en Sanouillet 140). Duchamp reinforces that it is not just the task of the performer to generate meaning, the spectator also contributes to the artwork by making connections to their own experiences and the performance to produce its signification. Theorist Peter Weibel takes this very quote of Duchamp's, and applies it to that of art being a political act:

[191] Is going to feel something linked to their own experience and memory
[192] Many of the women that are participating are taking this as a type of catharsis due to their personal histories.
[193] They are second or third generation immigrants…whether [they are] grandchildren, children…and there is a love for Spain, for the country that they had to leave for political or economic reasons.

> The viewer morphs into an artist, the consumer into a producer, the viewer into a user who 'participates directly in the production of art. Art becomes a participator process, and the participation finally becomes part of the artwork itself. In this way, the model is set for politics. If art, hitherto solely the field of the artist's sovereign actions, becomes a participatory process that includes the viewer, then this should also count for other social processes. (Weibel 53)

We cannot only apply this commemorative act of that atrocities and trauma that occurred in Guernica, but it could certainly be reinterpreted as a visual message of gender violence; such gender violence currently occurring in Spain at regional festivals as well as high rates of domestic violence/intimate partner violence in the Iberian Peninsula.[194] But as the title indicates, *En la piel de otro*, we must understand that this is not just Spain's issue, or for that matter of one particular country. Gender-based violence is a global issue, and one that needs to be addressed and remedied. Albarracín's performance makes the spectator uncomfortable, having to walk over the bodies of a hundred women before leaving a cultural institution and continuing on with their everyday life. For many, gender-based violence may not be an issue that everyone is confronted with on a daily basis. However, and at the very least, the discomfort and confrontation of the issue has entered the minds of the performance's spectators; the hope is that such visibility will

[194] An article regarding the International Women's Day March indicated that "A total of 583 women were killed in Spain by their partner or former partner between 2008 and 2017" ("Women Take to the Streets").

generate action and motivate individuals to take a stand against violence and furthermore, change policies and provide services at a political and social level.

Conclusions

As the works of María María Acha-Kutscher, Praba Pilar, María Cañas, and Pilar Albarracín have shown, technology—in particular social media—facilitates and promotes social change regarding gender violence, since protests and artistic performances/artworks can reach individuals at a global level and at a much faster and further reaching manner when disseminated upon the internet. Theorist Peter Weibel argues that "Performance-based interventions by artist collectives and individuals combined with distribution through the mass media have shown how activists can make a real contribution to overcoming crisis situations by beings unequivocal about problematic conditions, often using artistic means to do so" (25). However, we must recognize that technologies are capable of simultaneously reinforcing negative images and may also go as far as to play a role in the victimization of those that are vulnerable, as seen in the images of laboring Third World Women in the *Cyber.labia* project of Praba Pilar, or the videoclips of the Sanfermines festivities and media that promotes violence against women and animals in the experimental film documentary *La cosa vuestra* by María Cañas.

One can place these works by all four artists within the genre of *artivism* as they incite the need for protest, promote social and political awareness to the spectator, and demonstrate how technology is able to make the problems that women are confronting in our society much more visible: sexual assault and harassment, sex trafficking, and gender violence. Each artist questions in her own particular manner established national and

gendered stereotypes in their performances and still-images: Acha-Kutscher provides examples of women who are successful and working in typically male dominated career fields, Pilar highlights the existence of gender gaps in STEM fields and questions the rationalization of denying women positions of power in such careers, Cañas supplies a variety of unconventional women who participate in celebratory activities that are designated as patriarchal spaces, and Albarracín fights against the image of Spain's idealized *ángel del hogar* portrayal of women. Weibel asserts and assures that performances and artworks such as these—those of artivism—do indeed make an impact, by indicating that:

> The practices of artistic performances and the participation of the audience, which have existed in art since the 1960s, are now making inroads into the sphere of politics. The expansion of the arts associated with the "exit from the image" has spelled its entry into politics. The participation of the audience in art has morphed into the participation of the citizens in the sphere of politics. Global activism not only relies on "classical" basic rights, such as freedom of assembly, or the instruments of direct democracy, such as citizen's initiatives, but also on artistic, performative practices. (25)

As Weibel has indicated, artivism is not necessarily a brand-new genre of art, yet it has had a larger capacity for political agitation and the most potential to lead to reform than ever before due to the affordances of the reach of the Internet and interconnectivity of Social Media networks.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has shown the manners in which artists of digital works have presented the spectrum of ways in which technology has affected the lives of women: 1) The physical sculpting of the body; 2) The ability to mediate memory and trauma as a result of migration as well as the ability to communicate from the diaspora; 3) the demonstration of the malleability of *identity* representation (whether it is that of national, political, gender, and even distinguishing what it means to be "human"); and 4) the affordability to disseminate messages of political or social plight and assembling support on an international level at incredible speeds. As theorist Marcus Michaelsen has indicated, "it can be argued that digital media predominantly fosters the beginnings of a 'counter hegemony,' that is, the critical questioning of dominant norms as well as the formation of alternative political ideas and communal solidarity within civil society" (395). Technology has pushed rigid boundaries of what has been established by society as "the norm" and what is possible regarding physical limitations and geographical boundaries.

The existence of technology has made extensive improvements, for example, to one's health conditions, and we have witnessed such fascinating new possibilities and advancements in the medical field in the past several decades such as bionic prosthetics that one can charge like mobile phones, the implementation of devices into the body allowing paralyzed individuals to begin to walk again, and special glasses that make it possible for those who are colorblind to see the full spectrum of colors. Such mechanical extensions or components being added to the body can be found in the theory of the

cyborg[195] : the joining of the human body and the machine thus making the human body a contemporary chimera of the biological and technological. As Jesús Alonso Burgos indicates in his book *Teoría e historia del hombre artificial: de autómatas, ciborgs, clones y otras criaturas* (2017), limitations and man's search to use tools (external) to better one's condition has been an inherent condition of humans, and as technologies have improved, we have been looking to harness those possibilities to improve ourselves:

> ya no se trataba de suplir las insuficiencias biológicas, sino de superar los límites biológicos. El cuerpo humano tiene una estructura concreta que impone límites a su actuación: dos piernas, dos brazos, dos ojos, etc.; y aunque las capacidades de estos miembros y órganos pueden ser mejoradas con disciplina y esfuerzo, sus posibilidades siempre son limitadas. Desde tiempo inmemorial, el hombre tecnológico […] ha buscado completar sus insuficiencias anatómicas mediante el uso de herramientas y máquinas (el martillo mejora la esfuerza de la mano, la rueda y el carro la velocidad y la resistencia deambulatoria, el arma la capacidad agresiva, el telescopio y el microscopio la vista, el radar la audición, etc.), pero las herramientas y las máquinas son exógenas, no están integradas en el cuerpo humano.[196] (274)

[195] These possibilities would also suggest or hint at the rhetoric of *transhumanism*, as defined by philosopher Max More as "a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology" (cit. in Pilsch 1). In this way, the human body is capable of reaching its full potential.

[196] It is no longer about making up for biological insufficiencies, but rather exceeding the biological limits. The human body has a concrete structure that imposes limits to its conduct: two legs, two arms, two eyes, etc.; and even though the capacities of these limbs and organs can be improved with discipline and effort, their possibilities are always limited. Since the dawn of time,

While the implementation of electronic devices embedded in the body or even "wearable technologies" encountered externally that monitor our activity are fusing the biological human body with machines,[197] Alonso Burgos goes on to reaffirm that the body is constantly being sculpted, but not just in terms of modern electronic technologies: "Esta nueva maleabilidad se encuentra en todas partes: en los tatuajes y los *piercings*, las señales indelebles de las marcas y las cicatrices, la aparición de redes neuronales y virales, la vida bacterial, las prótesis, los enchufes neuronales, una vasta cantidad de matrices errantes"[198] (278-79). Ultimately, as Donna Haraway states: "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (150).

In the Western consumer society one can improve their emotional condition (such as self-esteem) about their physical appearance through the use of cosmetic surgery under the notion that if one is dissatisfied with a particular physical feature or characteristic, it is possible to change, fix, and subsequently improve it. Such notions favor technopositivism, defined as "the philosophical belief that technology will always be able to solve any problem humanity needs to overcome" (Pilsch 23). Yet along with advances

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the technological man […] has looked to complete their anatomical insufficiencies by means of the use of tools and machines (the hammer improves the strength of the hand, the wheel and the cart speed ambulatory resistance, the weapon the aggressive capacity, the telescope and microscope sight, the radar hearing, etc.), but the tools and machines are exogenous, they are not integrated in the human body (274).

[197] The use of such wearable technologies (such as *fitbits* or any other accessory that employs applications to track one's physical activity, diet, sleep patterns etc.) pertain to the "quantified self-movement" defined as the belief "in which participants [in the movement] treat their bodies as data sets and attempt to optimize this data, responds to the transhuman perspective that the human is nothing more than an information pattern that happens to be currently instantiated in fleshy form"(Pilsch 4).

[198] This new malleability is found everywhere: in tattoos and piercings, the indelible signs of marks and scars, the appearance neural and viral networks, bacterial life, prosthesis, the neuro synapses, a vast quantity of wandering wombs (278-9).

in technology in the medical field and beyond, we must be aware that these new 'tools' come with certain caveats. Safe and accessible medical care, for example, can be costly to afford if not out of the question for many who are economically challenged. Certainly, this puts into question the capabilities of governing institutions to "keep up" with the rapidly evolving medical field and protect citizens from becoming victims of medical malpractice, or even the government's role in assuring that individuals do not "push the boundaries too far" regarding what adjustments can be made to the body, and in turn, of what is ethical.

Considering that technological advances in medicine such as CTs and 3D printing machines that transform the material body, as a consequence the corporeal self "comes to embody the characteristics of technological images" (Balsamo 56). Read in another manner, this statement surely applies when we think about the ways in which social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram and in particular, "selfie-culture" have become prevalent in Western consumer culture and society. The "ideal-self" is obtainable after several swipes and clicks, selecting filters and lighting that enhances one's best features and disguises those that are less flattering. Our "ideal-selves" are constantly perpetuated and disseminated on a global scale and alarming speeds. As Max Blue suggests, "Certainly the 'Ideal-I' is always a virtual, ephemeral, image, perhaps less today than before the first screens were placed in our palms and pockets. We have moved beyond the avatar. We have replaced the avatar with some more literal version of ourselves: the Ideal-I. We have fully become the avatar" ("The Selfie Stage"). It is interesting to consider how such social media and the technologies that support these platforms further complicate the idea of recognition and self-recognition and also

promote certain ideals of beauty. It raises the question—and would not doubt require further research to determine—as to whether or not the narcissism of "selfie culture" which promotes perfection and the ideal self, has given rise to more instances of cosmetic surgery.

The usage of fashion, beauty products, and surgery are central to the works of artists Teresa Serrano and Adriana Calatayud who attempt to generate a dialogue with the audience of their pieces, seeking that the spectator recognizes the evolution of standards of beauty within today's society to the extent where beauty paradigms can be considered outrageous and even physically torturous to obtain—as depicted in their work. Calatayud's work demonstrates how historical fashion trends and notions of beauty are often sewn into the contemporary, but not as a type of origin, rather as a type of supersession (replacing and/or making something obsolete) of the contemporary. The older patters of beauty supersede and take over from the contemporary, creating a type of cyborg hybrid, suggesting an emancipation from these older ideals is impossible. Serrano, on the contrary, in her videos alludes to a possible transformation of the self and yet simultaneously the possible liberation from rigid identity roles.

Digital media and technical tools can also be utilized to capture stories of trauma, migration, and diaspora and play an important role in being able to provide connections to memory, to preserve and question notions of identity, and ultimately communicate these ideas to other audiences. In the case of Maritza Molina's work, photography is utilized to capture her childhood memories. The objective of the photographer, as described by philosopher Siegfried Kracauer, is to eternalize a moment by capturing it on film (59). However, the image itself does not hold truths as an individual's

memories—while considered subjective—do. As Kracauer explains, a photograph viewed by anyone other than an individual that bears the memory associated with the image interprets its meaning at a purely surface level. The photograph captures the likeliness of a landscape, an object, or a subject which is attached to a specific time and place and can only be analyzed by the sum of its details (light composition, angles, clarity, and so forth) (57). However, the image will be rendered insignificant unless accompanied by some kind of explanation such as that of an oral history (50). Therefore, a photograph cannot capture "the truth" as a memory does, but rather a technological image is an abstraction of a moment captured in a specific time and place. Molina attempts to immortalize the memories of her life in Cuba via her performance/photographic piece, and in doing so she is demonstrating the involuntary discard of a cultural identity, as well as intimate moments once experienced from her childhood and that have since been internalized within the artist. However, these truths will eventually and inevitably be lost to time.

When viewing an intermedial performance piece, such as that of Ana Mendieta, the spectator is understandably overwhelmed by the sensory overload of the multiple layers of media. In Ana Mendieta's *Butterfly* piece, this overwhelming sensation is achieved by the need to "fill in the gaps" to uncover the work's meaning by recalling or retrieving the reference to the image of Mendieta as a child dressed as a butterfly in Cuba and keeping in mind the artist's migratory experience. Taking into account how Mendieta uses media to create a resignification of the body, we can understand *Butterfly* as a representation of the chaotic negotiation of identities—grasping onto one's cultural heritage while being thrust into another and forced to assimilate—and the use of digital

media and how it can be used to (de)construct identities. Theorist Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink suggests that intermedial performances challenge binary relationships:

> Clear-cut distinctions between unmediated/mediated, presence/absence, life/death, real/virtual, present/past, visible/invisible, subject/object, private/public become blurred. Therefore we prefer to see these word-pairs not as oppositions, but as constituting and constructing each other, operating as an "axis". It is at these axes that media relationships are established. Moreover in intermedial performance different axes are present at the same time, crossing each other, creating temporary "knots", and thereby intensifying the experience of dislocation or the perception of disjunctive media relationships. (221)

Mendieta's intermedial performance in the work *Butterfly* can also be interpreted as demonstrating the construction of otherness, a site of transformation at which the material (body) and (media) technology collide, as Nibbelink explains that through the use of digital media: "The performer extended with technology mutates in a kind of cyborg, raising questions about the boundaries between subject and object" (221). The archival work carried out by Mendieta's estate (primarily under the care of her immediate family) aims to preserve the artist and her work on topics of diaspora and memory from obsolescence. Her influence has certainly been noted across generations as seen by the homage that many performance and mixed media artists have paid to her decades after her sudden death—Molina being one such artist. As has been noted, "new" digital performances are still being uncovered in the estate's collection to this day.

Social-media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and even arguably the predecessor of these—the blog—have provided an instantaneous connection to others, despite rigid geopolitical boundaries. They become a platform to voice one's concerns, or to merely open up dialogue and chat with others about any subject imaginable. As theorist Graham Meikle has emphasized: "The personal relationships and experiences of the individual user take on a public quality, while more familiar forms of media content become the focus of personal communication that is visible to others. So social media can be understood by analyzing their uses and affordances in terms of *creativity*, *sharing*, and *visibility*" (374). An author or artist's ability to post their work online and connect with other intellectuals has become fundamental to their visibility and opened up the possibility of having a much wider audience and reception. Mendieta is the prime example of such circumstances; she is an early member or predecessor of the digital boom, and her work has been steadily disseminated and promoted online, exposing its timelessness in such a manner that she has become, arguably, even more relevant and well-known now than when she was creating her art. Other artists are seeing the power of the Internet as a way to advance their academic careers and fight for social justice or connect with family abroad and express their feelings of working in the diaspora.

While the Internet does expand and produce new opportunities to connect with others and voice one's opinion, we must not forget that cyberspace is not quite entirely a liberating virtual terrain or rather, platform. Essentially, our thoughts and opinions are not "owned" by us. As tech theorist Jaime Bartlett explains:

> Google, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and the rest have long ceased to be simply tech firms. They are also advertising companies.

> Around 90 per cent of Facebook and Google's revenue comes from selling adverts. The basis of practically the entire business of social media is the provision of free services in exchange for data, which the companies can then use to target us with adverts. (11)

Bartlett goes on to explain that social media sites such as Facebook have partnerships with "data brokers", and these "[have] information on over 500 million active consumers worldwide, with thousands of data points per person: things like age, race, sex, weight, height, marital status, education level, politics, buying habits, health worries and holidays, often scooped up from other shops and records" (18). It is important to further note Bartlett's analogy of the Internet being a modern-day panopticon. The panopticon was a structural model for prison surveillance suggested by philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century, where "all the inmates could potentially be observed by a single watchman-without any knowledge they were being watched" (26). Bartlett proposes that the modern-day panopticon is the Internet, since "everyone is both watching and being watched" (26). Consequently, he concludes, "This kind of permanent visibility and monitoring is a way to enforce conformity and docility. Being always under surveillance and knowing that the things you say are collected and shared creates a soft but constant self-censorship" (27). While not included in the work at present, this analysis could be further developed to include, treat, and delve into questions of data surveillance and notions of total freedom of sharing one's innermost thoughts. In particular the case of Yasmín S. Portales, one could further investigate the notion of self-censorship based on geographical circumstances to determine if her environment dictates

what she posts online (such as being in Cuba vs the United States, being on campus vs being outside of academia, etc.).

While on the topic of the suppression of self-expression, the institutional censorship of Acha-Kutscher's work in Peru speaks to the weight and power that artivism and social media can and do have in societal transformation. On July 15, 2018 the artist posted on her page that her exhibition INDIGNADAS/Latin America at the Open Gallery of the Municipality of Miraflores in Lima was cancelled. Acha-Kutscher was notified that the images were "tough" and those that worked at the gallery were concerned, stating that "we are in electoral period, we have to be careful with the contents of our proposals" (Acha-Kutscher). Naturally, she was outraged by this reaction and subsequent censorship, and responds to the opponents of her artwork in a profound manner:

> I ask to myself, do they call "tough images" women across Latin American region demonstrating for their rights? Tough? Tough is that during the government of Alberto Fujimori has carried out a policy of forced sterilization of women in rural areas, to reduce the indigenous population of Peru. Tough is that 10-year-old girls have been raped and left pregnant, and they are not allowed to have an abortion. Tough is that in recent years hundreds of women have been violated and killed by their partners or ex-partners. It is tough that every day there are femicides in all Latin America, that means, every year thousands of women have been murdered just because they are women. Tough are the feminization of poverty, sexual slavery and impunity in which women live. [sic] (Acha-Kutscher)

Acha-Kutscher's message is prophetic in that she is not only speaking of the content and subjects that appear in her works, but also topics of concern that are shared by and demonstrated within many of the works by the artists in this study. She ends her post by asking for support in the form of online protest carried through social media networks regarding this censorship, stating that "they are not only, censoring my artistic work, but they are silencing and hiding the voices of millions of women who fight, not only for our rights, but for our lives" (Acha-Kutscher). The following day, the gallery released an official apology online which Acha-Kutscher shared on her page. It stated that it was a comment taken out of context and made by a collaborator with the institution and was a personal opinion that did not reflect the beliefs or points of view of the gallery. Ultimately, on July 20th it was announced that the exhibition was rescheduled for a later date, and the artist was convinced it was because of the support of feminist collectives and online protest against artistic censorship (fig. 43).

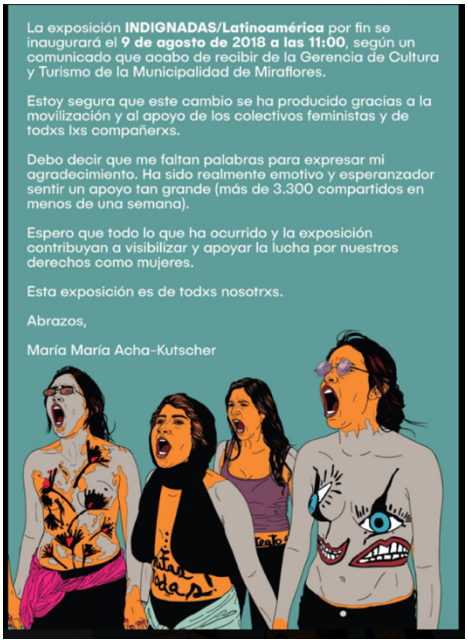

Fig. 43 Protest Against Censorship of Acha-Kutscher's Exhibition is a Success

When discussing the power of art and its capacity to challenge political institutions, theorist Marcus Michaelsen cites Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, emphasizing that:

> political change can only take place when dominant norms and power relations are questioned in alternative arenas of discourse, collective solidarities are formed, and ultimately new ideas for the future of society are drafted and implemented. Against the background of social and political conflicts, the media is an essential means of communication [and] thus become the object of a greater struggle for control and power. (385)

As Michaelsen indicates, it is indeed possible to incite institutional change, but only after individuals share values and ideals and rally together to fight for or against a particular cause (385). Media, traditional or otherwise, is a powerful tool to encourage and motivate people and can serve as the face of a movement, or in a contemporary sense the virtual channel by which individuals communicate to meet for protest in the offline world. Michaelsen continues by saying that "long before the spread of the Internet, dissidents, opposition groups, and social movements used so-called 'small media,' that is, flyers, magazines, or cassettes, to criticize the status quo and develop a culture of resistance" (385). Unlike small media, the Internet is certainly able to spread news and in turn gather people together to rally against or for a particular cause on an international level at alarming speeds accelerating the process of political and social change. The example of Acha-Kutscher's exhibition reinstatement reaffirms that artivism is effective, and that politicians can feel threatened by political awareness generated by artwork. Furthermore,

such works can provide transparency regarding the handling of social and political issues and can ultimately put a blemish on institutions and individuals in power.

It is certainly important to include in this analysis the distinction between activism and tactical media production. Tactical media production's origins began in the 1990's, one which was described early on by theorists David Garcia and Geert Lovink in 1997 in their work "The ABC of Tactical Media", that "Tactical Media are what happens when cheap 'do-it-yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture" (cit. in Kluitenberg 17). Since the 90's, the term has amassed a large spectrum of explanations, such as that of theorist Gregory Sholette who explains that the practice is "makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices –all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world" (cit. in "The Concept of Tactical Media"). The website *Tactical Media Files* prefers a more inclusive term, indicating that it is "a form of activism and artistic practice that took shape in the midst of a transition from primarily mass broadcasting environments towards settings increasingly characterized by media convergence and participatory cultures". Whether amateur or produced by trained artists, in her book *Tactical Media* (2009) Rita Raley contends that "'tactical media' is a mutable category that is not meant to be either fixed or exclusive. If there were one function or critical rationale that would produce a sense of categorical unity, it would be disturbance" (Raley 6).

Considering the definition of the term artivism and that of tactical media, could it be said that artivism and tactical media are one in the same? Could we then conclude that the artists analyzed in this last chapter—Pilar Albarracin, María Cañas, Praba Pilar, and María María Acha-Kutscher—are tactical media artists? I would argue that no, they are not. Theorist Axel Bruns indicates that that "[w]hat distinguishes productive engagement from merely disruptive culture jamming or tactical media is the existence of an overarching sense of purpose, of underlying aims, of longer-term goals—" (Bruns 255). While it is difficult if not to impossible to measure the long-term effects of artwork on its viewer, and the message's "effectiveness" in inciting change, as well as its sustainability, the work of Cañas, Albarracin, Pilar, and Acha-Kutscher do not carry an ephemeral message and the medium itself is sustained in museums, film festivals, and/or is archived on their personal websites. As noted by Acha-Kutscher's leading example of resisting censorship, the works of these other artists have left a legacy and a mark on the current issue of the epidemic of gender-violence. While their work is not necessarily "work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world" as indicated by Gary Sholette in his definition of tactical media, it certainly has created a "disturbance" both within the cultural institution of the arts and beyond, to where the streets and networked public meet.

Technology's influence on women and how they use it as a tool for empowerment and visibility of social issues has become more evident as seen by the wide variety of feminist collectives and movements in today's media including but limited to: #MeToo, #Womensmarch, #Yositecreo, and #Niunamenos. As theorist Peter Weibel contests:

> Art's individual Net activism has now become a social activity, thereby turning into one of the crucial preconditions of Net-assisted civil activism. The progressive personalization and mobilization of the new media, from PC to smartphone, has also contributed to the advancing individualization of politics, to the increased power held by individuals in the social life. Without the online social networks, gathering by thousands of individuals in public spaces would not have happened on the scale witnessed nor would they have had such a political impact. (56)

Technology has made it possible to move issues from the private space of the home, to cyberspace via one's computer or cell phone, to the public sphere as the works of these digital artists have shown. While the field of technology, and the "space" of cyberspace has been relegated to men, women have undoubtedly been able to carve out space for themselves. Though this analysis provides merely a small cross-section of contemporary digital writers and artists, it does provide a present glance at the spectrum of the affordability of technology and the Internet, its complications, and the possibilities of the future of technology and where these might take us.

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