

XI. INTANGIBLE AND DIGITAL FORMATS AS EXPRESSIVE MEANS FOR GENDER NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY ART. INCORPORATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Xesqui Castañer López (University of Valencia -Spain-)

The new art history arises, from an interdisciplinary view, theoretical and practical embodiment issues related with contemporary art and its inclusion and development in college. At the same time, gender studies have been incorporated into the development of postgraduate curriculum, placing value on the art work of women, continuing the contestation to the canon already started in the twentieth century. These gender discourses have assumed new technologies as the most versatile media format with unlimited field for image dissemination. Consequently, in the context of globalization, the intangible and digital formats have become priority means when developing feminist and post-feminist theories in the arts. These speeches, located on the theory and practice of postmodernism, focus on queer, postcolonial and eco-feminist ideas.

The choice of the audiovisual media is due to the fact that, from the beginning, they seem to be critical tools where space and time converge. In this regard, Giulia Colaizzi states that, in a globalized world, the feminist study of image is very important in a society where the media are the most powerful tool to control social imaginary (Colaizzi, 2007), and it is in this speech where new technologies, particularly video, are established as the best means for creating female images. From the nineties, the video has become a prime location for the work of some artists who have investigated the possibilities to build new forms of identity, desire and claim (Lamb, 2009, p. 144). The video acts as a space of symbolic representation of the world and feminism has used this support to develop a new type of digital writing (Irigaray, 1985, p. 73).

An important part of videographic work of female artists has served to reverse subjectivities and demystify or imbalance the roles established for

gender. At the same time, it has become as a new way to de-construct an imaginary in which, historically, silenced experiences have been projected.

1. Queer Theory and identity issues

The queer theory (QT) rejects the classification of individuals into universal categories like ‘homosexual’, ‘heterosexual’, ‘man’ or ‘woman’, ‘transsexualism’ or ‘transvestism’, arguing that they hide a huge number of cultural variations, none of which is more critical or natural than the others. Against the classical concept of gender, which distinguished the socially acceptable ‘heterosexual’ condition (in English straight) from the ‘anomalous’ (queer), queer theory states that all social identities are equally anomalous.

One of the achievements of feminist studies of the twenty-first century has been to deconstruct and denaturalize gender divisions (McDowell, 2000, pp. 35-36). Theories about the flowing and changing nature of body and self, have led to the conclusion that the physical characteristics of body and gender representation are not necessarily consistent. Since the sixties Goffman suggests that social behavior is a set of spatially varying representations, but is it from the nineties that the writings of Judith Butler refer to *performative gender*. Following this author, in contemporary societies gender identities are representations that repeat certain acts within a regime of imposed heterosexuality (Butler, 2006). At the same time, the identity had to conquer space in the public and in the private spheres (Karsten & Meertens, 1991-92 pp. 181-193).

This methodological approach has been developed by some female artists from different points of view. Virginia Villaplana since 1998 addresses queer activism speech in a project entitled *Double Stage, gender, feminism and DIY*. Belonging to that project are two papers, one titled *Backfeed* (1998)¹ and another one, *Double Stage* (2004)². The latter is a documentary essay which addresses ‘the masculine in the woman’ through a transsexual who describes before the camera his sex change from woman to man. In parallel, the drag queen action of Myriam Marzouk concludes by showing two different ways of constructing gender.

¹ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=606>. Retrieved May 7, 2013.

² <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=607>. Retrieved May 7, 2013.

Cecilia Barriga (Concepcion, Chile, 1957), in *The Path of Moses* (2004)³ tackles the issue of the individual and of the identity forced by the consumer society. As she herself says:

"The Path of Moses, 2003, is a documentary that portraits a character. It shows the transition that a person goes through from a male to a female identity in search for a model that suits his emotional needs. From certain queer postulates, a bit hackneyed in recent times, this documentary is a reflection on the issue of gender and transgender categories as constantly changing." (Barriga, 2004, p.43.

In this work she aims to demonstrate that gender itself is a cultural construct and transgender condition is in permanent transformation. The change from woman to man implies a third sex and creates new models of relationship, but at the same time, generates rejection in other affective spheres. The leading role, who speaks in the first person, discusses his decisions with his transsexual friends that are in process of changing.

BARRIGA. Picture 1



Cecilia Barriga. Moses Road, © artist

In Fluss (2007)⁴, takes up the issue of sexual identity, in this case, focusing on female homosexuality. Through the story of two women that have been together for thirty years and that are bathing in a river, she makes

³ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=696>. Retrieved May 12, 2013.

⁴ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=699>. Retrieved May 12, 2013.

a journey through their lives together, their experiences and also their fears for the demise of one of them.

Helena Cabello (Paris, 1963) and Ana Carceller (Madrid 1964), formed since the nineties the Cabello/Carceller team to build a context of dialogue and discussion of common concerns. In their projects they use video, photography, writing, drawing, sound or ambience creating to convey to the viewer an environment that challenges, from a critical perspective, hegemonic modes of representation. From here they have developed interdisciplinary ways of work (Aliaga, 2008 p. 104-107).

The body of their work refers to a moving image, specifically a video titled *A Kiss* (1996)⁵ in which appears the sum of two anonymous forms that love each other (Kristeva, 1995). This oeuvre is crucial to understanding their later work. The proximity of the camera achieves the disintegration and dissolution of individuals' identity, of which only their faces are shown and, thereby, hampering their definition. This piece has a transgressive intention, not too explicit, but highly allusive to the issue of identity (Gras Balaguer, 1999).

Within the same theme, *Buns* (1996)⁶, in black and white and without any sound, shows both artists eating a cream pastry on camera in a globalized and neutral setting. Their enrollment in conceptual art is manifested in the linguistic performativity and the performance they complete in front of the camera.

Handling instructions (2004)⁷, is a kind of catalog of gestures and poses that are considered masculine, but in this case, performed by a woman. It raises the issue of masculinity as a cultural construction, subject to a set of rules that everyone identifies.

2. Postcolonialism. Postfeminism.

The new gender discourses have relocated in the context of globalization in stances of questioning and opposition. That dissent has one of its origins in theories and positioning arising from postcolonial orientations (Carrera, 2009), just as Sara Suleri has pointed out (Suleri, 1989,

⁵ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=573>. Retrieved June 4, 2013.

⁶ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=574>. Retrieved June 4, 2013.

⁷ <http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=575>. Retrieved June 4, 2013.

p. 75). Postcolonialism is nothing but the questioning of the representation of the 'other' (postcolonial) by the colonial subject (Adriansen, 1999, p. 56).

Originally, postcolonial theory has important precursors such as Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 1961, p. 56) and the authors of the Parisian blackness from the beginning of the twentieth century, but during the decades it was fed on basic theories that incorporate principles such as hegemony (Gramsci) and dialogism (Bakhtin), later to merge with the theoretical principles of deconstructivism/poststructuralism from Foucault's philosophy. The public recognition comes from the writings of three authors from the Third World but living in the USA: Palestinian Edward Said and Indians Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

While all these authors performed a thorough analysis of colonialism from what we now call 'subaltern positions', neither addresses categories such as sex and sexuality. It is from the feminist theories and practices that a new vision of colonality is made, especially by African and indigenous female descent who, from their subalternity, have a critical and transformative discourse.

Postcolonialism and feminism have common concepts used for analysis and de/construction of the dominant metanarratives. They share the position of otherness with regard to the latter and, therefore, the position of 'other', colonized or female. The implicit hierarchy in binomial self/other becomes the aim and the instrument of analysis of these practices (Johnson-Odin, 1991, p. 316). In line with this, Linda Hutcheon highlights three common goals for both postmodernism and postcolonialism: de/construction of subjectivity, de/construction of history and finally, future project for social transformation (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 156).

Female creators of other cultures, different to the Western world, have worked to expose situations or to focus on the empowerment of women as protagonists in their destination countries, where colonization has wreaked havoc. And it is in this line where women have contributed with their feminist proposals for a new vision of the colonial/postcolonial (Bahati Kuumba, 1994 p. 96).

In Africa, video as media finds many obstacles to be similar to the Western development. However, despite the difficulties, there are artists like Tobi Ayedadjou, originally from Benin, located in Tunisia, that is elaborating her speeches in this format. In a place like Benin, video art cannot be practiced due to the lack of basic materials such as a camera or tripod. For this reason, she has moved to Tunisia and has formed a team of video artists

to promote the medium in Africa. Tobi is a self-taught artist, but with a brilliant sense of creation. She understands the video as the end of a process that goes through photography, installation and video installation. She travels thousands of miles to shows to orthodox artists that it is possible to work in video without having a proper training.

In her creative process the weight of her story is always present, as well as her everyday life as an African woman which is, in her own words, a sad and dark life, always under the authority of men.

In 2011 she produces three videos in which she filmed her feet while testing her camera and her new lens. At the same time, the sound of a Sydney Pollack's film, titled *The Clearing*, can be heard on television. This performance turned into different videos by chance, edited without any manipulation of image and sound.

In 2012 she works on two short pieces with clear messages about the everyday life. *L'espace entre (d) eux* shows the relationships established in a domestic act, which consists in folding the laundry at home on Saturdays and Sundays (Zabel, 2001, p. 22)

She has also done performances, like the one titled *Curiosity*, that revolves around the inhabitants of Jeptur, consisting of a ritual in which she showcases and offers her hair to be touched or to pour water on it. The people that approach and feel the texture of her hair show an unprecedented curiosity. In *Shé Wèrè*, two living sculptures in semi-freedom reveal our transgression drive. They appear randomly on the streets, they come and go. They wear a kind of straitjacket. In Yoruba 'shé wèrè' means crazy and this performance is a call for disorder that brings into question the codes of social space.

TOBI AYEDADJOU. Picture 2



Tobi Ayedadjou. Were Shé © artist

In Muslim countries, the artistic activity of women becomes impossible and that is why they are forced to deliver their speech outside their own country. Most of the artists are exiles from geographic areas where Islam implies all kinds of obstacles to artistic creation. The videographic production of Nazan Azeri (Turkish) has a militant stance against cultural and religious violence suffered by women in the Arab world. Her thematic approach focuses on concepts such as ‘crawling things’, ‘what covers and what cannot be covered’, nature-space relationship or power of woman-body. This is closely linked to a critical and resistant attitude against garments like burqa, niqab or chador, that involve a religious imposition, aimed at eliminating feelings of desire, sexuality and freedom for women and, at the same time, visualizing the patriarchal power of male (Solans, 2013 p. 8). In *A Day* (2001), she reflects on the situation of women in the domestic sphere. A mother sitting at the table undertakes a conversation with a doll, emphasizing the role of mother and the solitude in the household. In *Dream Roles* (2002), a female figure lying on the floor and covered with a white dress is blended in with nature as a space of freedom. In *Dragging* (2004) she drags two black and white garments, thus illustrating the heads and tails of submission. Finally, in *Uncovered* (2010), she clears out a closet that was full of men's suits and, one by one, she drag them across the street to the woods near town where she hangs them from the trees, freeing herself from the patriarchal authority represented in male attire⁸.

NAZAN AZERI. Picture 3



Nazan Azeri. Uncovered, © artist

In the Latin American context bipolarity occurs within the colonial discourse and postcolonialism coexists with the neo-imperialism. This has

⁸ Nazan Azeri's videos are available at: <http://www.nazanazeri.com.tr/videolar.aspx?lang=1>. Retrieved October 3, 2013.

meant that in the context of globalization, the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘settler’ are not equivalent to center and margins. The center is dim and dislocated under the influence of the media and margins no longer focus on a defined territory, but have been extended to all types of peripheries. In the case of Latin America, neo-imperialism does not come only from USA, but also from Europe and Asia, which places the region in a new position of marginality. Nevertheless, this has led to feminist approaches by Chicano and African descent. In this context, authors like Lélia González reflect on the concept of *amefricanity* and denounce latinity as a new form of eurocentrism (Curiel, 2007, p. 99). In this case, the *amefricanity* is understood as a historical process of resistance like the indigenous feminism. Racist and sexist patriarchal relations are questioned, as well as the customs of their own communities that continue to maintain the subordination of women. And it is in that critical line where the work of the Mexican artists falls within and their speech has repeatedly focused on problems such as indigenism or the border.

Mexico is the Latin American country where video has become the most used narrative format by artists to write their feminist speeches, relating to images of the ‘other’ (Minter, 2008, p. 163). As Mária Mellán says, it is a very flexible and suitable medium for displaying introspection and feminine creation, which makes it an artistic tool for constructing images (Mellán, 1996, p. 3).

The history of Mexican feminist video goes back to the seventies, in the context of debates and strategies, as well as social and political activism of that era. Cynthia Pech (Pech, 2006, p. 78) has reflected on how poststructuralist feminist theory has contributed to the discussion of recovery of the female experience as a political space. Currently there are many women videographers in Mexico, committed to creating from different positions, but not all of them do it from a gender perspective. However, video is a very suitable means for the feminist practice, understood as a set of critical and reflective speeches about the condition of the real woman. Women represent themselves from an introspective and intimate proposals of their closer reality. In this sense, video is construed as space, place, time and text where women dare to see themselves and to be seen. It is the medium of political expression for displaying the invisible women.

The video is definitely the means in which the exploration of the feminine postcolonial has found a suitable place to continue the experimentation that occurred before in other media. According to Ana Sedeño:

"This appreciation has also taken place in the development of the Mexican videography creation, with a twofold reason, if you consider that the concept identity is at stake. The country and its wealth of ethnicities and identities is another concept at stake. The country and its wealth of ethnicities and identities together with femininity as a way of being in the world has generated enriching video works, at a time that hybridization is one of the most powerful cultural engine" (Sedeño, 2006, p. 34) .

In this line of discourse is inscribed Pilar Rodríguez's work (1962). She explores the idea of poetic experience of displacement and woman-border relations. Her most outstanding videos are *The idea we inhabit* (1990) and *She is border* (1995). In these works converge both Chicano culture as well as the female vision of chicanity. *The idea we inhabit*, reflects on the situation of the Chicano women being always stuck at home. Through poems she questions loneliness and identity of a divided woman, as a woman and as Chicano. In the same line is *She is border*, although, in this case, the uprooting and displacement are displayed on a woman split in two (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 23-78)

RODRIGUEZ, PILAR Picture 4.



Pilar Rodriguez. She is the border © artist

3. Feminism and ecofeminism

In 1974 Françoise D'Eaubonne published *Feminism or Death*, analyzing the causes of social and environmental crisis and blaming modernity and Western patriarchal man as responsible for this crisis. In this work she retrieves the patriarchal identification woman-nature, but to give it a new meaning. In that same relation the origins of eco-feminism fall within as well as in their theoretical arguments, located in the writings of Barbara Holland-Cunz and Alicia Puleo, although both go further and support the plurality of the theory and eco-feminist practice (Holland-Cunz , 1996; Puleo, 2011).

There are so many eco-feminism and eco-feminist theories. Thus we can speak of radical or biologicistic eco-feminism. It comes from the radical difference feminism and is the starting point of environmental theories about women and nature. The authors of this group are American and criticize patriarchy as a form of oppression. They intend to restore matriarchy, thus, rejecting the premises of liberal feminism and getting closer to a gynocentric vision.

The Southern eco-feminism derives from cultural feminism, but instead of strengthening matriarchy against patriarchy (surpassing, therefore, the grounds of the dualistic domination), it rather aims to achieve equal rights between men and women, through the recognition of differences. It does not attempt to override the biological, social and cultural differences, but to seek complementarity and interdependence.

The aim of socialist eco-feminism is to destroy the dualisms culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, spirit/matter and promote a new, non-dualistic and fragmentary feminist scientific methodology.

The main feature of Liberation Theology eco-feminism is the accusation leveled at patriarchy of exercising a spiritual power. It proposes a deconstruction of the theological model to reconstruct a new model of eco-feminist theology.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE DIFFERENT ECO-FEMINISMS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES. Picture 5

Classification of the different eco-feminists and their representatives. Source: Author of this paper.

ECOFEMINISMO RADICAL	ECOFEMINISMO DEL SUR	ECOFEMINISMO SOCIALISTA	ECOFEMINISMO DE LA TEOLOGÍA DE LA LIBERACIÓN	ECOFEMINISMO CONSTRUCTIVISTA
Mary Daly	Vandana Shiva	Mary Mellor	Ynestra King	Bina Agarwal
Susan Griffin	Maria Miles	Carolyn Merchant	Rosemay R. Ruerther	Val Plumwood
	Wangari Maathai	Evelyn Fox Keller		
		Ariel Kay Salich		
		Barbara Holland-Kunz		
		Irene Diamond		

Some researchers such as Bina Agarwal, Gesta Menon and Mira Burra, all of them Indian, and Val Plumwood (Australian), criticize, through the eco-constructivist feminism, some aspects of classic eco-feminism, primarily those of Vandana Shiva, qualified as essentialist. The female author that has mostly spoken about this issue is Bina Agarwal, who proposes a reformulation of eco-feminism and a name change: environmentalist feminism and ecologist feminism.

Others such as Karen Warren, have rather focused more on the causal relationships, indicating eight key points of relationship between feminism and the environment: historical-causal, conceptual, empirical- experimental, ethical, theoretical, political. Her main goal is to unite or articulate the general claims of the feminist movement and of the environmental movement in particular (Warren, 1996).

It is in this theoretical context in which the eco-artivism is inscribed, as a set of artistic practices that demonstrate a commitment to the preservation of the biosphere and claim a respectful attitude to the environment. This movement is based on the activist art that begins in the sixties and seventies, and lasts until the nineties. According to Gloria Orestein, the role of art is essential to the eco-feminism as a vehicle for accelerating change (Orestein, 2003).

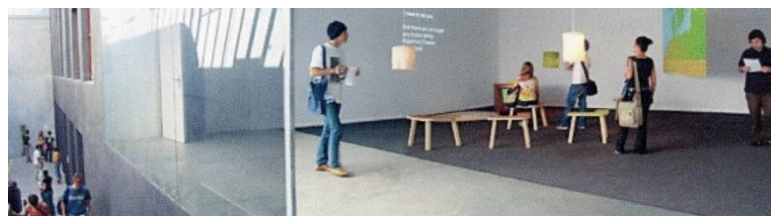
To Veronica Perales, a part of the artists practices are fundamentally procedural, performed in public spaces and using new technologies to assist

the maintenance of sustainable spaces. The way she works is based on strategies through collaborative projects involving the community. Some of these procedural practices are found in the work of Helen Mayer, Mierle Laderman, Ukeles, Bonnie Sherk, Patricia Johanson or Agnes Denes (Perales, 2010).

However, there are a number of projects, while still being collaborative, arise the idea of consumption in relation to natural resources. These projects are endowed with creative potential assumed by artists considered environmentalists. These projects include *Free Soil with FRUIT* (2005), consisting of a website where a map and a number of fruit wrappers are disseminated through the food chain. The wrapper contains information on a variety of issues related to food movements, transport and urban agriculture.

MILKproject (2004) with Esther Polak, shows how to produce food. She is also concerned about the path of food, so she traces by different means the route of Latvian cheese, the Rigamont, from Latvian farms to its consummation in Amsterdam. *MILKproject* proposes territorial investigations and performances through a specific exploration of the global economy. Comprised of representations of GPS coordinates, text and photographs, it forms a figure around an event that is, at the same time, integrated in a global and local space.

ESTHER POLAK. Picture 6



Esther Polak. Milkproject (2004) © artist

Carbon Portraits of Sherry Wiggins is an installation in which the audience is invited to calculate their CO₂ footprint by answering questions about the habits of energy consumption in their homes, trips by plane or car. This footprint CO₂ is the carbon portrait that Wiggins refers to in the title of her work. In the exhibition space, the artist arranged a composition including carbon portraits belonging to six people that are representative of the population, carbon portraits of Julia Roberts, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Leonardo DiCaprio, Wangari Maathai and some images that proposed solutions to the problem. Wiggins' work focuses on the exploration of social

justice and environmental and feminist issues. Her practice has to do with art as a process of transformation and as relational and dissemination tool.

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