“MUJERES QUE SE VISUALIZAN”: (EN)GENDERING ARCHIVES AND
REGIMES OF MEDIA AND VISUALITY IN POST-1968 MEXICO

by

Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the fundamental role played by a group of artists and feminist activists including Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández, Mónica Mayer, and Pola Weiss in developing and transforming regimes of media and visuality in post-1968 Mexico. It considers this process as indicative of larger and potential transformations in historically constituted fields of power and knowledge in the context of the emergence of new wave feminisms and the broad shift in Mexican intellectual sectors away from an exclusive emphasis on literate-print culture and towards an embrace of audiovisual communications.

Throughout this dissertation, the concept of visual letradas is developed to describe women who by the second half of the twentieth century became more openly concerned with performing and recording audiovisual information about how their bodies were visually construed and politicized. Using recently opened archives of the Mexican secret services as well as photographic documentation on feminist demonstrations, oral testimonies, interviews, videos, performances, and films, this study shows how visual letradas transformed intellectual spheres of influence previously conceptualized as privileged masculine territory, the space of the letrado. The term visual letradas is also used to map out how the increased participation of women in Mexico’s mediascapes shaped the emergence of competing political subjectivities that posited the female body, gender difference, and sexual violence at the forefront of public debates during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Moreover, in contrast to the closed disciplinary focus and national parameters that have characterized the twentieth-century Mexican historiography of feminisms, media, art, and women’s history, this dissertation emphasizes the interconnections between these fields by focusing on three main categories—the city, the archive, and the media. By bringing an interdisciplinary, local, and transnational lens to bear on these categories and by showing how visual letradas appropriated them as key spheres of action, this project narrates how normative representations of the female body (visually and in formal politics) were contested throughout Mexico City and how, in turn, such challenges affected and effected politics.
PREFACE

Dr. William E. French, Dr. Alejandra Bronfman, and Dr. Jessica Stites-Mor supervised this work.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAMVAC        Centro de Apoyo a Mujeres Violadas
CCC           Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica
CONACULTA     Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes
CONACITE I    Corporacion Nacional Cinematografica de Trabajadores y Estado I
CONACITE II   Corporacion Nacional Cinematografica de Trabajadores y Estado II
CONACINE      Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica
CM            Colectivo de Mujeres
CMF           Coalición de Mujeres Feministas
CUEC          Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos
FNALIDM       Frente Nacional por la Liberación y Los Derechos de las Mujeres
IBERO         Universidad Iberoamericana de México
ISI           Import Substitution Industrialization
IWY           International Women’s Year Celebration
LF            Lucha Feminista
MAM           Museo de Arte Moderno
MAS           Mujeres en Acción Solidaria
MFM           Movimiento Feminista Mexicano
MLM           Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer
MNM           Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres
PAN           Partido de Acción Nacional
PCM           Partido Comunista Mexicano
PRI           Partido de la Revolución Institucional
PRT           Partido Revolucionario Troskista
STUNAM        Sindicato de Trabajadores de la UNAM
TGP           Taller de Gráfica Popular
UNAM          Universidad Autónoma de México
UNMM          Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas
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INTRODUCTION
THE OUTLINE OF THE VISUAL LETRADAS

“The events surrounding a historian and in which [s]he takes part will underlie his presentation like a text written with invisible ink.”

The first time I saw El Tendedero (The Clothesline, 1978), a participatory installation piece by Mónica Mayer (b. Mexico City, 1954), was as part of the international survey of feminist art, WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2009. At that time I didn’t read it as an archive, but I did notice that it was the only artwork by a Mexican artist included in the worldwide survey of feminist art. It was then that I was beginning my research on 1970s Mexico, a narrowly studied period in modern Mexican history. It is a decade that has, until recently, been undermined by the histories of 1968 and Mexico’s economic transformation in the 1980s, or has been conceived either in laudatory or disparaging terms, due mostly to interpretations of president’s Luis Echeverría’s estilo personal de gobernar, a violent populist strategy to legitimize himself and the ruling party (Partido de la Revolución Institucional, PRI) after

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3 In the catalogue other mentions of feminist art in Mexico include a list of artists who participated in an exhibition held as part of “El Primer Simposio Mexicano Centroamericano de Investigaciones sobre la Mujer” held at the Mexican Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico City from November 7-30, 1977, and an invitation to the art exhibit of Mexican women artists held in Berlin in 1981. Other Latin American artists who produced work in the region included in the exhibition were: Sonia Andrade, Iole de Freitas and Lygia Clark from Brazil, Marta Minujín from Argentina and, Cecilia Vicuña and Catalina Parra from Chile, see WACK!, 473 and 488.
their involvement in the 1968 student massacre.\(^4\) I was particularly interested in exploring the conjunctures that were unraveled by Echeverría’s reforms in the cultural sector, beyond the feuds between intellectuals and artists who opposed or supported his policies.\(^5\)

At the time, I was researching Los Grupos, a diverse assemblage of artist collectives that attempted to rearticulate the relationship between visual arts and politics by taking art to the streets, establishing art collectives and experimenting with non-traditional aesthetic languages (performances, installations, street happenings, graffiti, everyday objects, video, and super8 film). In recent years Los Grupos’ work has come to the attention of some scholars who are revising assessments of the rise of collectivism after 1945 and others who are arguing for including Latin American art in the international histories of conceptual art practices and who, as a result, are revising and recuperating post-1968 Mexican visual culture.\(^6\) As part of my research, I...

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\(^5\)The links between intellectuals and artists and the Mexican state has a long history. For a review on the ties between intellectuals and the government after 1968 see Jaime Sánchez Susarrey, *El Debate Político e Intelectual en México* (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, 1993).

interviewed Mónica Mayer for the first time in the summer of 2009. Through our conversations something that I was beginning to suspect became apparent: even in the context of the recent academic interest in revising post-1960 Mexican visual culture and Los Grupos’ work, the legacies of Mexican feminism in the visual arts has been mostly ignored not only by art historians but by feminist scholars who were more interested in narrating the political successes and failures of the movement. Besides commenting on this issue and discussing her work and that of Los Grupos, what really caught my attention was Mayer’s interest in and commitment to protecting artist archives and archival practices, growing concerns of various artists and academics whom I was also interviewing at the time.


7 There are several studies that trace the political legacies of 1970s feminism but fail to analyze the aesthetic qualities of the movement and to contextualize the networks of artistic exchange that were forged through them in relation to the rise of collectivism and conceptual art practices that were taking place in art circles in Mexico City as elsewhere. For the first and most well known study on new wave feminist collectives see Ana Lau Jaiven, *Nueva Ola del Feminismo en México. Conciencia y acción de Lucha de las mujeres* (Editorial Planeta; Mexico City, 1987). For a study that traces the transformation from consciousness-raising groups into formal politics in the last three decades of the twentieth century see Martha Zapata Galindo, "Feminist Movements in Mexico from Consciousness-Raising Groups to Transnational Networks" in Maria Luisa Feminas and Amy A. Oliver, *Feminist Philosophy in Latin America and Spain*. (Amsterdam, New York, 2007), 1-15. For a recent trend of published collection of essays that opens up the spectrum of feminism to include film, music, new media and visual arts see Nora Ninive García, Márgara Millán, and Cynthia Pech *Cartografías del feminismo mexicano, 1970-2000* (Col. Narvarte Poniente, Benito Juárez, DF: UACM, Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2007) and Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda, *Feminismo en México: revisión histórico-crítica del siglo que termina* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género, 2002).

8 In the summer of 2009 many artists and academics gathered to discuss the condition of artists archives in Mexico through a series of roundtable panels organized as part of the exhibition of Arte (no es)
Mayer introduced me to Ana Victoria Jiménez’s archive, a photographic and ephemera collection of 1970s feminist activism and art in Mexico City. While studying Jiménez’s archive, I took notice of the role that 1970s feminist collectives had in giving rise to distinct networks of women artists and creative practices that explored and politicized conceptions of the female body. These women’s practices and collaborations constituted experiments with different media and aesthetic languages (music, publications, street theater and demonstrations, film, photography and television broadcasting). I realized that these experimentations were not only political due to the feminist demands that drove them, but also because their practices entailed explorations across disciplines and through networks that challenged the parameters of the nation, Latin American solidarity and artistic collectives as they were defined at the time. Rather than taking a narrow anti-Western stance or third-world vs. first world framework characteristic of many attempts at collectivism at the time, these feminists built relations with non-Latin American feminists and through those relations affected and effected local politics. Their practices produced creative cross-fertilizations and interconnections between various fields and, in doing so, they questioned disciplinary boundaries and genres and perhaps, most importantly, as I will discuss, historical metanarratives that defined the production of knowledge in the fields of feminism, media and art.

Among the early participants in feminist collectives were Ana Victoria Jiménez (b. Mexico City, 1941), then a member and militant of the Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas (UNMM), and Rosa Martha Fernández (b. Mexico City, 1942), an emerging film director who established the feminist film collective Colectivo Cine Mujer (1975-1985). Ana Victoria Jiménez began to participate in feminist demonstrations as early as 1971, when Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (MAS) organized a march towards the Mother's Monument on March 9 to demand a change in the ways mass media manipulated Mother's Day celebrations and objectified women. From that moment onwards, Jiménez took her camera and began to document these demonstrations. She also preserved pamphlets, graphics and posters that, along with her photographs and documentation of her artwork, now constitute a valuable, if only recently recognized, visual archive of the history of the feminist movement and of post-1968 Mexico.

In 1975 Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez found themselves collaborating in Fernandez’s Colectivo Cine-Mujer. From 1975 to 1985, Colectivo Cine-Mujer produced more than six films on issues affecting women including abortion, rape and prostitution. To raise consciousness on these issues, the early films of Cine-Mujer produced under Fernández’s direction combined conventions of documentary film (interviews, testimonials and archival footage including Jiménez’s photographs) with a fictional narrative. By fusing documentary and fictional cinematic strategies to address
the ways in which the female body was the site of political, sexual and cultural violence, these films also work as records of a potential archive of feminist demands, women’s living conditions and alternative modes of representing them.

Fernández decided to study film after her experience with *Cooperativa de Cine Marginal* (1971-1975) an earlier film collective that produced super-8 films, which served as communication tools between different worker unions across the country. Super-8 offered these collectives the ability to produce films independently (without a crew and with almost no budget) —a flexibility that would also be afforded by video later on. By then Fernández was already a university professor of psychology at *Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México* (UNAM). She became politically active a few years earlier after witnessing the 1968 movement in Paris as a psychology student. She was then introduced to feminists’ activism while studying television production in Japan in 1972. Upon her return to Mexico, and parallel to her participation with *Cooperativa de Cine Marginal*, she participated in various feminist collectives including *Cine Mujer* as well as small feminist consciousness raising groups (*pequeños grupos de Mujeres*). In 1980 Fernández left Cine-Mujer and volunteered with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua where she produced television programs for women and children and directed movies until her return to México in 1984. Years later, as director of TV

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13 Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with the author.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.
UNAM (1989-1994), she negotiated the establishment of an archive of Pola Weiss’s videos at TV UNAM.16

By the mid seventies Pola Weiss (b. Mexico City 1947-1990) was beginning to produce her first videos.17 Weiss graduated with degrees in political science and communications from UNAM in 1975, with the first thesis produced in video in Mexico. In it, she proposed the use of video in the production of television programming outside the commercial parameters that defined Mexican television at the time.18 As a student and later an instructor in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at UNAM, Weiss wrote scripts and directed documentaries for television.19 While she championed television as an artistic medium, by 1977 she had complemented her work in television with a search for alternative and artistic uses of video. From 1977 until she took her own life in 1990, she produced more than 38 videos (only 38 are catalogued for public viewing), through her own production company artTV.20 Throughout her career she established an embodied relation with the video camera. Her escuincla (daughter in nahuatl) as she called her video camera became both an extension of her own body and a confidante. Part of her oeuvre dealt with intimate events of her life; in other

16 In October of 2012 a more comprehensive archive of Pola Weiss that contains personal documents was opened to the public at Arkehia the center of documentataion at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC). Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with the author; and electronic correspondence with Edna Torres, November 26, 2012.

17 According to many, Weiss was the first Mexican video-artist. Sarah Minter, interview with the author, unpublished, August 6, 2010, Mexico City; Edna Torres Ramos, El Video Arte en México. El caso de Pola Weiss, Bachelor’s Degree Thesis, (UNAM: Ciudad de México, 1997); and Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with auhtor.

18 Pola Weiss, “Diseño para una unidad de producción de material didactico en video tape” Bachelors Degree Thesis for the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, UNAM, December, 1975.

19 Edna Torres Ramos, El Video Arte en México.

20 I will discuss the state of her archives on chapter nine of this document. Ibid.
video productions, Weiss experimented with *videodanza* (video dance). Weiss’s *videodanza* performances were live events in which her *escuincla* recorded and broadcast her movements while video signals were transmitted live to spectators. Through such performances, Weiss fractured the boundaries between object and subject of representation. But Weiss’s blurring of the subject and object of representation went beyond breaking with the construction of women as the object of the male gaze. Her video explorations point to a search for an embodied being—or what she labeled the cosmic man—a sensorial being that further complicated dominant regimes of visuality that separate the act of viewing from other sensorial experiences.\(^{21}\)

While during her lifetime she complained of not being recognized, Weiss participated in numerous video festivals and exhibitions abroad and established conversations with leading international video artists.

In the spring of 1978 Mayer and Weiss were among the five female artists who participated in the *Nuevas Tendencias* February Biennale held at Mexico City’s Museum of Modern Art (MAM).\(^{22}\) Mónica Mayer presented the installation El Tendedero for the first time, and Pola Weiss presented two videos, *Somos Mujeres* (6 min, 1978) and *Mujer-Ciudad-Mujer* (19 min, 1978).\(^{23}\) While all the fifty-nine pieces in the show

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\(^{21}\) Juan Garibay Mora, “El Video Arte, Superación de la Caja Idiota para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual” in *Excélsior*, sección E, 1, August 14, 1982

\(^{22}\) Out of the 59 artists participating in the show, thirty-three of the artists were based or born in Mexico and the rest were from other parts of the world. Magali Lara, Mónica Mayer, Pola Weiss, Silvia Naranjo and Jesús Rodríguez were the only women included in the show. See *Salon 77 Bienal de Febrero Nuevas Tendencias* (Mexico: INBA, 1978); and See Mathias Goeritz, “Palabra Sincera” in *Museo de Arte Moderno, Salon 77, Nuevas Tendencias: Bienal de Febrero Nuevas Tendencias* (Mexico: INBA, 1978).

\(^{23}\) *Somos Mujeres*. VHS, n. 1. directed by Pola Weiss, assistant: Magda Hernández (Mexico City: artTV, 1979); *Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad*, VHS n. 1 directed by Pola Weiss, music by Carlos Guerrero; assistant: Magda Hernández, model: Vivian Blackmore, music by metrofonía (Kitizia Weiss). Unless otherwise stated
addressed the effects of urban development in people’s lives, the work of Weiss and Mayer stood out due to their focus on the female body. By foregrounding the female body Mayer and Weiss addressed how urban changes were deeply implicated in the production of sexualized, gendered and racialized corporealities.

Mayer’s El Tendedero consisted of more than eight hundred small pink papers hung at somewhat regular intervals, fastened by cloth pins to a series of yarns. The lines of yarn were tied to a wooden frame. The wooden frame created a structure that resembled a clothesline, the place where women, traditionally, hung clothes to dry after washing them. On each piece of paper Mayer wrote the phrase: “as a woman, what I most dislike of the city is...” (Como mujer lo que más me disgusta de la ciudad es...) and distributed them among more than eight hundred women around Mexico City and asked them to write a response. Then she attached the papers to the clothesline to create El Tendedero. During its exhibition at Mexico City’s Museum of Modern Art, many other women also wrote their thoughts on the pink pieces of paper. The responses ranged from feeling threatened to being called names such as mamacita or getting a nalgada (spank on the bum) (Fig. 1).

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24 Monica Mayer, interview with the author, unpublished, September 5, 2009, Mexico City.
25 Ibid.
By placing a clothesline in an art gallery and exhibiting the ways in which women's experience of urban space was mediated through their bodies in highly gendered and sexualized terms, El Tendedero transgressed the divide between the public and the private. Mayer's installation transformed a traditionally female domestic space into a public space. In doing so, it mapped out encounters, conceptions and desires between bodies as they were experienced through urban space that made the personal political. Through these encounters, the female body emerged as one that was threatened and only ascribed value in sexual terms. Moreover, by mapping these encounters and placing the female body as a site of mediation where cultural, political and sexual violence were both produced and experienced in relation to the city, El Tendedero makes a comment about how the politics of gender present in every day life
situations transgress the boundaries between the private and the public as well as the personal and the political. In doing so, El Tendedero speaks about the centrality of the body in the production of urban space. It affirmed that the city is, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, “one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality.” 26

At the time this piece was exhibited in Mexico, Mayer was about to begin her studies at the Feminist Studio Workshop of the Women’s Building in Los Angeles, California (WAB). 27 Upon her return to Mexico in 1981, Mayer began to promote the development of feminist art in Mexico. She taught feminist art courses, established Polvo de Gallina Negra (PGN), a feminist art collective with fellow artist Maris Bustamante, and she also promoted the establishment of other feminist artist groups. Among them was the short-lived feminist visual art collective Tlacuilas y Retrateras (1984- dates) in which Ana Victoria Jiménez was an active member. During this time, Ana Victoria Jiménez continued photographing feminist demonstrations and experimenting with photography as a form of personal expression. 28

Parallel to all these activities Mónica Mayer began to develop a twin interest in the archive—a concern for keeping and recording information as well as for exploring the limits of what could be considered an archive that was already present in El

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27 Before going to LA, she had participated in various feminist demonstrations in Mexico City organized by Movimiento Feminista Mexicano (MFM) and had collaborated with Colectivo Cine Mujer. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author, unpublished, 5 August 2009 and 23 July 2012. Besides several courses taken at the Women’s Building in LA that were part of the Feminist Studio Workshop, Mayer obtained a Masters degree in sociology of art from Goddard University. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
Tendedero. Like Colectivo Cine Mujer's films, El Tendedero also works as a kind of archive. Formally, El Tendedero resembles one of the most ancient practices of filing important things. As Sven Spieker recalls "hanging or stringing up objects to a rope was one of the first forms of filing." Even nowadays, many agree that archives come into being "when several documents that share a common subject are combined by either physically tying them together in a binder of some sort or grouping them as a loose collection." Most interesting and in light of recent scholarship on the nature of archive, El Tendedero interrogates and furthers the notion of an archive through the kind of information it seeks to record and how it does so. By explicitly proposing to gather information about the ways in which sexual difference was constructed and experienced through the streets of Mexico City, Mayer's archive records and represents embodied emotions and encounters as they take place in, and are mediated through, an urban space. The body is thus unveiled as a crucial component in the production of urban space and how in turn the city produces sexed and gendered corporealiess.

Similar to Mayer's installation, Pola Weiss's videos Somos Mujeres and Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad, shown at the February Biennial, also addressed the production of

30 Ibid., 24.
31 While different ways of reading archives that lead to understandings about how masculinity and femininity are culturally construed at different points in time has been the subject of debate of many historians for a long period of time. For instance Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1987). I am referring to a more recent interest in an explicit practice of recording and making archives about sexual encounters, gender relations and feelings which has also been the subject of several art exhibitions. For instance see Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers, *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive* (Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center Bildmuseet University, 2009) and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
gendered, classed and racialized corporealties in relation to an urban space. More importantly, her videos work as an archive of sorts that consists of keeping audio-visual records on how daily experiences are inscribed onto the female body.

In *Somos Mujeres* the camera moves between psychedelic dissolves, modern buildings such as *La Torre Latino Americana*, and poor women begging on the streets with children in arms. The soundtrack mixes dialogues in indigenous languages with the weeping sounds of women and children crying. At some point in the video we see the women throw things at Weiss’s camera. Weiss’s incorporation of feedback (the women’s responses) speaks to her overall interest in exploring the alternative uses of video and television broadcasting as media that could reactivate the viewer through different visual strategies. It also, quite literally, reflects on class differences and competing perceptions of public and private space.

In *Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad*, Weiss weaves two narratives by intermixing images of a naked female body with urban scenes. The first narrative represents the changing rhythms of a day in the city, from eve to dawn. The second narrative uses the female body as an allegory for urban decay, reinforced by the irruption of Weiss’s voice stating: "*No hay agua porque tengo seca la boca [...] no, no hay agua, agua no fluye no corre, ciudad te hundes y nos hundimos contigo*" (There is no water because I have a dry mouth, [...] there is no water, the water is not running, city you are drowning and we are all drowning with you). Throughout the video we see frontal images of a naked

33 *Somos Mujeres*, VHS no. 1
34 *Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad*, VHS no. 1 directed by Pola Weiss (México: arTV, 1978).
35 Ibid.
female body that dances with undulating movements and exposed breasts to an upbeat music (Fig. 2).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 2.** Pola Weiss, “Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad,” 1978. Courtesy of Fondo Pola Weiss, ARKEHIA, UNAM.

Weiss's use of the nude female body was what most captivated attention. Mónica Mayer recalls that when she saw the video thirty years ago she was surprised because it showed “a real woman, with scars and cellulite” and “frontal shots of [the] pubic area.”³⁷ “It was a female body seen by a woman,” Mayer recalled.³⁸

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Unlike Fernández, Jiménez and Mayer, Weiss was never a militant of any feminist collective. However, her work can be read as an expression of feminist concerns due to her approach to video making and her interest in exploring alternative ways of representing the female body. Her practice was in meaningful dialogue with the work of other feminist minded artists who, like her, experimented with video technologies in other places around the world.39 In the Mexican context, however, Weiss’s experiments with video technology and performance were not only novel but, like Fernández, Jiménez and Mayer’s work, showed an interest in archival technologies. Weiss, like Mayer, expanded the notion of an archive by using video as medium to keep a record of her life, but also as documentation of her performance—a use that was already prevalent within art circles all over the world.40

Beginning in 2009, in the midst of a growing concern for recuperating the memory and practices of activists and artists active in 1960s and 1970s, Mayer convened a group of scholars and artists to classify and digitize Jiménez’s archive and, on March 2011, Jiménez’s archive was donated to the library of a private university. 41 It was through the reading of this archive that I began to map out the relations between these four women and the importance of 1970s feminism as an influence on their work.

38 Ibid.

39 As I will discuss on chapter 9 of this dissertation Pola Weiss was influenced by Shigeko Kubota and Carolee Schneemann and she meaningfully participated in transnational artistic networks of video production.


By producing visual and material records of female bodies, these four artists took on the task of producing and keeping visual representations and statistical information about how gendered, classed, racialized and sexed corporealities were produced in relation to the urban landscape. In doing so their works constructed a different range of archives from which alternative histories could emerge, and spoke to changing and emerging regimes of media and visuality in which normative representations of the female body —both aesthetically and in formal politics— were being contested.

The development of these new regimes of media and visuality were influenced by as they helped give shape to three important shifts within the Mexican intellectual sector of the second half of the twentieth century. First, was the broad shift away from an exclusive emphasis on literate-print culture and towards an embrace of audiovisual communications; second, the increased participation of women in the public sphere; and, third, the re-emergence of the feminist movement that gave rise to diverse political sensibilities. These three changes were indicative of larger and potential transformations in historically constituted fields of power and knowledge.\footnote{These shifts are described in Néstor García Canclini, \textit{Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity}. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and Jean Franco, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), although neither specifically points to the emergence of new feminism as being a factor that influenced such shifts.}

Within this framework, in this dissertation I explore how the visual and embodied manifestations of Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss challenged established structures of power and knowledge and the ways in which their practices opened up avenues of expression to different forms of political subjectivities. I locate
and investigate their practices in relation to diverse local and transnational networks of women artists and activists that had a crucial role in developing new, and contesting old, regimes of media and visuality through the use of audiovisual and performative practices deeply informed by distinct feminist sensibilities. To do so, I trace the development of what I call the visual letrada, women who by the second half of the twentieth century became more openly concerned with performing and recording audiovisual information about how their bodies were visually construed and politicized. I use the term to point to an increased participation of women in intellectual spheres of influence previously conceptualized as privileged masculine territory, the space of the letrado. In this sense, the practices of the visual letrada also point to crucial transformations in the conceptualization of archives and the writing of history in Mexico.

To trace the development of the visual letrada during the 1970s, this dissertation follows the exchanges that these four visual letradas forged with other

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43 As both Roberto González Echevarría and Angel Rama argue, letrados were men who commanded the written word and wielded power in Latin America since the colonial period. Letrados were magistrates, notaries, scribes and state-appointed historians (cronistas) who generated, wrote and filed legal and historical documents. Letrados’ power influenced the writing of history. In contrast to Rama’s emphasis on the written word David Brading, Serge Gruzinsky and, most recently Tom Cummins and Joanne Rappaport, have argued that image-makers have played an important role in the construction of myths of tradition and power even before the Spanish conquest and explored the notion of literacy as including the visual and the alphabetic. While Rama recognizes that the Mexican Revolution set in motion a series of ruptures that would begin to alter the role of the letrado in Latin America, for Nestor García Canclini and Jean Franco a complete shift takes place with the advent of television and audio-visual technologies. See Angel Rama, The Lettered City (Duke University Press, 1996); Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and archive: a theory of Latin American narrative (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Serge Gruzinsky, Images at War. Mexico from Colombus to Blade Runner (1492-2019). (Duke, 2001); Jean Franco, The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City. Latin America in the Cold War; Néstor García Canclini, Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity. Jeremy Adelman, “Latin American Longues Durées” in Latin American Research Review, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2004), 223-237; and Joanne Rapport and Tom Cummins. Beyond the Lettered City Indigenous Literacies in the Andes. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

44 I discuss the relation of the letrado with the writing of history and the keeping of archives in Mexico in the following section of this study.
similarly-minded artists and activists. To do so, I conducted interviews with three of the living artists, as well as other activists, academics and artists who were active during the 1970s. I also considered the writings (published and unpublished) of these four artists and some of their contemporaries and examined personal and institutional archives as well as films, photographs, videos, performances, conferences proceedings, newspaper and magazine articles.

This study moves back and forth in time non-continuously between 1971 and 2011 to reconstruct the relations and collaborations between two generations of visual letradas. Fernández, Jiménez, Weiss and Mayer represent two generations of visual letradas that crucially shaped regimes of media and visuality with a shared but quite distinct feminist sensibility. I locate them within a larger context that includes networks of artistic production inside and outside of Mexico and consider exchanges in diverse regimes of media, particularly photography, film, television broadcasting, video art, street performances and demonstrations. By locating their interventions as part of a transnational network of women artists who sought political change through art in light of international battles for women’s rights, I historicize their role in the production of new regimes of media and visuality in which gender and sexual difference became the subject matter and the matter of contention. These women played a significant role in articulating new spatial and visual configurations where sexual and gender difference could be enunciated in the decades to follow.

45 Throughout this work I follow Joan Wallach Scott and Judith Butler’s observations on the relation/difference between the categories of sex and gender. First, I understand gender and sex as discursive categories that have a history. Secondly, I understand gender to mean the social and cultural structures that produce the meanings and knowledge about how masculinity and femininity are mutually constituted. Thirdly, I use sexual difference to indicate that gender is a social and cultural construction
In a broad sense this dissertation can be read as a cultural history of post 1968 Mexico City, seen through the practices and collaborations of Rosa Martha Fernández, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Pola Weiss and Mónica Mayer and the cultural legacies of 1970s feminist collectives. Alternatively, it can also be read as a history of media and artistic practices that engaged with the mostly unrecognized influence of diverse feminisms within these fields and within Mexican history and international metanarratives of art history, disciplines in which the presence of Mexican feminisms are almost completely disregarded. By discussing how the films, photos, performances and videos of these four visual letradas disrupted normative conceptions of the female body my dissertation demonstrates how their works located the body as a site of social, political, and cultural violence. These conceptions engaged with a reconfiguration of political and gendered subjectivities that gained prominence in Mexico after 1968 and both influenced and shaped local and transnational events. The practices of these visual letradas not only made inroads in the fields of art and politics (in the formal sense) but by taking charge of creating their own representations they built their own archives that takes place and is internalized through sexed bodies. When I use these two categories I am considering the materiality of the body not as biological determinacy, but rather to indicate the ways in which embodied and sensorial subjectivities play an equally important role in the production of sexual and gendered difference, as do the particular social and cultural structures through which this process happens. At times, I use the category of “sex” when my sources do so. Gender as a category to indicate sexual difference began to be used more widely in Mexico, as elsewhere, in the 1990s. See Joan Wallach Scott, "Algunas reflexiones adicionales sobre género y política" in Género e Historia (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica y UACM, 2008), 245-269; and Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (New York: Routledge, 2004). For a review on the reception of these theorists in Mexico and a historical account on the emergence of gender as disciplinary field of study see Marta Lamas, "Género: Algunas Precisiones Conceptuales y Teóricas" in Feminismo. Transmisiones y Retransmisiones (México: Editorial Santillana, 2006), 91-114; María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, "Imagined Communities: Women’s History and the History of Gender in Mexico" Journal of Women’s History [serial online]. Spring 2007; 19(1): 200-205; and Elena Urrutía Estudios sobre las Mujeres y las relaciones de Género en México: Aportes desde diversas disciplinas. (México: El Colegio de México, 2002).
and in doing so they proposed new ways of challenging hierarchies and methods of knowledge production. This dissertation investigates how their work, practices and associations disrupt, question and criticize hegemonic visual representations and historical metanarratives. In seeking to propose alternative points of departure from which historical narratives about this period can be written I also acknowledge why some histories are privileged while others are silenced at distinct periods of time.

Feminizing the letrado sphere of influence

In Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, keeping files, creating archives, and writing history have all been conceptualized as masculine territory. Since the colonial period, as both Roberto González Echevarría and Angel Rama argue, letrados—men who commanded the written word—have wielded power in Latin America. Letrados were magistrates, notaries, scribes and state-appointed historians (cronistas) who generated, wrote and filed legal and historical documents. Letrados’ power influenced the writing of history. For González Echevarría, the connections between Latin America, the writing of history, the archive and letrados are fundamental. He argues that since Latin America “existed as a legal document before it was physically discovered,” its origins are in the archive. For Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis, the gendered and exclusionary aspects that bind the writing of history and the archive in Mexico are evidenced, for example, in historical narratives of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Most

46 See Angel Rama, The Lettered City; Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and archive: a theory of Latin American narrative; Serge Gruzinsky, Images at War. Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner; Jean Franco, The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City. Latin America in the Cold War; Néstor García Canclini, Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity; Jeremy Adelman, "Latin American Longues Durées“ and Joanne Rapport and Tom Cummins. Beyond the Lettered City Indigenous Literacies in the Andes.

47 Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and Archive, 46.
dominant narratives of the revolution, argues Monsiváis, are written according to a patriarchal doctrine positioning history as an exclusive masculine territory in which “neither power nor violence nor indubitable valor nor historic lucidity are women’s issues.” 48

Nonetheless, despite the letrados’ power, one cannot assume their reach or authority was all encompassing. The documents they produced as well as their practices were highly mediated events where a multitude of desires, values, and power relations converged. 49 Moreover, their sphere of influence was not limited to the writing of documents but also included image-makers, as scholars such as Serge Grusinzky and, more recently, Tom Cummins and Joanne Rappaport, have argued. 50 However, the identities and practices of the letrados, as well as most public spheres of influence—formal politics and definitions of citizenship—were conceptualized in gendered terms, as principally masculine. 51


49 For a discussion on the various negotiations and actors that had a say in the production of documents in Colonial Peru see Kathryn Burns, Into the Archive. Writing and Power in Colonial Peru (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

50 In contrast to Rama’s and Echevarría’s emphasis on the written word David Brading, Serge Gruzinsky and, most recently Tom Cummins and Joanne Rappaport, have argued that image-makers have played an important role in the construction of myths of tradition and power even before the Spanish conquest and explored the notion of literacy as including the visual and the alphabetic. See Serge Gruzinsky, Images at War. Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019); Joanne Rapport and Tom Cummins. Beyond the Lettered City Indigenous Literacies in the Andes; and Jeremy Adelman, “Latin American Longues Durées.”

51 The bibliography on the gendering of citizenship in Mexico is extensive. For summary on changing conceptions of citizenship as an ideal male citizen from Independence to post-1968 see Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein's "Introduction" in Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012) 1-21.
In tracing the development of the visual letrada through the practices and different political subjectivities of Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss, I do not suggest that women did not participate or engage in the letrados’s sphere before the 1970s or that they refrained from attempts to destabilize the exclusive masculine nature of the overall patriarchal structures that drove Mexican political, social and cultural structures up to that time. On the contrary, this project builds on the histories of women and feminisms of 20th century Mexico. In it, I endeavor to trace the continuities and ruptures of a process that began in the post revolutionary period—or even earlier—that feminized the spheres of influence of the letrados.

The first phrase in the title of this project, *Mujeres que se visualizan*, points to the ruptures and the continuities with earlier forms of feminism and women’s activism. It makes reference to known phrases such as *Mujeres que se movilizan* and *Mujeres que se organizan* that have been used to discuss the early twentieth century women’s movement which focused on the suffragist cause. Mujeres que se visualizan points to a shift in the ways women would represent, conceptualize and politicize their bodies in response to the particular context of Mexico City, with both national and transnational ramifications and connections, and particularly framed within the reemergence of new wave feminisms, the hosting of the First United Nation’s Women’s Year Conference.

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52 The bibliography on this topic is very broad but I am particularly thinking on the work by Esperanza Tuñón Pablos, Julia Tuñón, Carmen Ramos Escandón, Anne Rubenstein, Jocelyn Olcott, María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, Andrea Noble, Gabriela Cano, Mary Kay Vaughan, Ageeth Silus, among others who have written work on various women activists and artists, on early 20th century feminisms and a wide range of practices that contested fixed definitions of what feminine and femininity meant in post-revolutionary Mexico, as well as how several urban and rural women contested and destabilized the patriarchal structures of Mexico political, social and cultural landscape.

53 An example of this trend is the book by Esperanza Tuñón Pablos from which I took the reference. Esperanza Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres que se organizan: el frente único pro derechos de la mujer, 1935-1938* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992).
(Mexico City, 1975) and important reforms granting Mexican women equality (on paper, 1974). These transformations also included key shifts in the Mexican intellectual sector, and the increased influence of broadcast media and participation of women in such industries. Equally important, however, were the increased public visibility of gay and lesbian urban activists and of diverse generations of political actors who were radicalized by the events of 1968 and the reverberations of the Cuban and Central American Revolutions along with the many transnational networks they fostered.54

By feminizing the sphere of influence of the letrado I do not point to a practice that corresponds to those who define themselves as women or as feminine, as if such an identity existed in the singular. Rather feminizing points to a process whereby the geographies of Mexico City, in this case, became stages of contestation for many countercultural movements that sought justice and a change in the patriarchal structures of power.55 These movements sought to effect social change and contest


55 Building on French feminist thought and the writings of Deluze and Guattari, Nelly Richard discusses feminization as a process that breaks down the barriers of biological determinism and symbolic roles, that is feminization as a process is seen as practice of continued contestation. To conceptualize this process others have used the term "queer", while I understand the postulates of queer theory as powerful mechanism to undue the binary structures of masculine and feminine and to acknowledge the multiple and non-monolithic ways in which gender and sexuality are lived and experienced and reinvented on a daily basis, I rather use feminization to describe a process of change in the urban geographies of Mexico in the context of the re-emergence of feminism and the discussions brought on by various international debates on women’s issues and most importantly to acknowledge the politics on which the subjects of this study engaged with. See Nelly Richard, Masculine/Feminine. Practices of Difference(s) (Duke University
hegemonic structures and institutions, that is, systems of knowledge and power considered as masculine territories that both women and men were equally implicated in sustaining and reproducing.

In locating the practices of Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss as meaningful players in this ongoing process of feminization, my aim is to discuss how the space in which these women enacted their interventions was feminized through diverse practices that were equally implicated in developing a space where gender and sexual difference could be enunciated. These spaces were not, however, without symbolic or physical violence.

Archival Frameworks

The practices of Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss developed at two distinct but interconnected moments that transformed the ways in which archives were conceived in Mexico, with larger and potential repercussions to the writing of history. First, their emergence coincided with a momentous time for international women’s rights battles and in the midst of a violent decade in which the Latin American region wrestled with the devastating consequences of the Cold War. Second, the history of these practices resurfaced four decades later when the adoption of neoliberal economics and democratization treatises in Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, began to transform the role that the state had in managing valuable cultural and historical property, including archives. This second moment also coincided with worldwide transformations in patrimonial and archival discourses that challenged the power that

Press, 2004) 21-28; and for a study that argues for a “queering” perspective on the same era see Rafael de la Dehesa, Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil sexual rights movements in emerging democracies.
dominant social structures and institutions had in determining and controlling what is considered patrimony and what counts as an archive. From unearthing the remains and records of the victims of military dictatorships and state repression to feminists demands over the inclusion of women in narratives of the era, the consequences of the Cold War and new wave feminisms continue to challenge the ways Latin American historians think about post-1968. These two events continue to trouble discussions and explorations of what counts as an archive, what is considered patrimony of the nation and who has the right to determine which events are worth commemorating and how.

In Mexico, the first moment was initially swayed by the populist policies of president Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976). Echeverría’s administration began with a nation wide campaign for democratization known as *apertura democrática*, a strategy aimed at siding with disenfranchised and defiant sectors of the population in order to redeem his popularity and that of the ruling party, both severely damaged after the massacre of students in Mexico City in 1968. In order to do so he implemented a series of wide ranging reforms that targeted economic, political and cultural sectors including crafting an image of himself as an international third world ambassador.56 The hosting of the first United Nations International Women’s Year Celebration (IWY) in Mexico City in 1975 played an important role in supporting such goals. Equally important was the campaign to extend full rights of citizenship and social equality to the female population in 1974. However, at the same time, he continued to support a system of surveillance to spy on activists and leaders of diverse left-wing organizations.

He continued to use violence to dispel demonstrations on the streets of Mexico City and brutally suppressed rural and urban radical activity in the rest of the country. As in previous years, agents working for the Mexican bureaus of secret intelligence (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, DFS and Dirección Federal de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, DFIPS) infiltrated social movements and persistently kidnapped and tortured several people. 57 Records of these activities, along with daily reports on all kinds of suspicious gatherings, were dutifully kept as part of the activities of these two organizations. 58 It is not surprising, then, that a group of government agents and infiltrators followed several feminist activists, keeping detailed records and photographs of their daily activities.

Four decades later in time, in 2002, the second moment is a result of the promises of Mexico’s democratic transition. After a long civic battle, public access to documentation of Mexico’s 1970s Dirty War and 1968 student movement was tacitly granted as some DFS and DGIPS files were declassified and transferred to Mexico’s National Archives (Archivo General de la Nación, AGN). 59 The records documenting feminist activism are now filed in the same boxes in the AGN and possibly were included in the transfer.

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58 At the time I consulted them, the files of the DGIPS were locate at Archivo General de La Nación, Galeria 2.

59 Ibid. In 2002 after la long debate involving many interested parties, the Vicente Fox administration transferred the archives of DFS and DGIPS to the AGN as part of the development of a new law that regarding the freedom of information, La Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información (LTAI).
The narrative of this project has been woven by means of reading these two archives both together and against each other at these two different points in time. First, at the time of their creation and, second, at the time of their institutionalization, in the case of Jiménez, and their declassification, in the case of the files in the AGN. The purpose of this double reading is to tease out the challenges they pose to each other and the different archival practices they represent, as well as to foreground the shifts in the handling of cultural patrimony that their changing treatment helps illustrate.

If the promises of wider accessibility and preservation are fulfilled, the donation of Jiménez’s archive to Universidad Iberoamericana de la Ciudad de México (IBERO) represents a major undertaking not only for the recovery of the historical memory of the feminist movement but also for the recent quest to preserve artists’ and photographic archives, which, unlike Jiménez’s archives, have not found a host institution or private funds for their conservation. Equally significant, the institutionalization of Jiménez’s archive through a private institution points to a shift in the management of cultural patrimony, from an exclusively state endeavor to a private

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60 In regards to Mexico’s photographic patrimony a greater emphasis on its conservation, classification and storage has been taking place since the establishment of Sistema Nacional de Fototecas (SINAFO) in 1993. The SINAFO coordinates approximately 20 photographic archives across the country from the central branch of the Fototeca Nacional in Pachuca, established in 1976 with the institutionalization of Casasola’s archive. The content of these photographic archives is mainly focused on visual records that have a relation to national interests, such as the Mexican Revolution or previously consecrated artists. In contrast to the attention to certain photographic archives, the archives of artists working in the 1960s and 1970s have received little attention from the government. For a discussion of the SINAFO see Rosa Casanova and Adriana Konzevik, Luces sobre México: Cátalogo selectivo de la Fototeca Nacional del INAH (México DF: CNCA/INAH/ Editorial RM, 2006).
or mixed one, a transformation that took place in Mexico during the last three decades of the twentieth century.  

This shift in the management of cultural patrimony has developed in tandem with a worldwide transformation in patrimonial discourses that have expanded in their range of focus to include the conservation of intangible patrimonies. Such intangible patrimonies or practices have raised questions regarding methods of preservation and practices of knowledge transfer from generation to generation.  

New ways of thinking and defining intangible patrimonies tend to be mostly directed to indigenous and popular oral and performative practices. In Mexico such patrimonies include, for example, indigenous dances and celebrations like the Day of the Dead and musical tradition such as Mariachi. The work of many conceptual and performance artists working in the 1960s-1980s or their personal archives are not

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61 In Mexico, federal archives, like the ones managed by SINAFO are considered patrimony of the nation and are protected under the federal law of monumentos y zonas arqueológicos, artísticos e históricos (1972). In general, the president has the exclusive power to make patrimonial designations, however, everyone invokes patrimonial languages to defend and negotiate the protection of their wealth and histories at the local, regional, national and transnational level. The shift towards privatization has also opened the possibility of transferring archives outside the country. Although this was a practice already in place, the sentiments, remuneration and legality about this practice have changed in the last three decades. Despite what many see as a neocolonial strategy on the part of the private sector (national and transnational) to embezzle valuable cultural property, several artists interviewed told me that given the state of disrepair of some archives and the lack of interest from national authorities they wouldn’t think twice in selling their archives to a foreign institution. Felipe Ehrenberg’s archive was sold to the Special Collections Library at Stanford University in 2000 and since then many other artists are looking and hoping for similar offers. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author; Maris Bustamante, interview with the author, unpublished, 6 August, 2012; Victor Muñoz interview with the author, 1 September, 2010 and Felipe Ehrenberg, interview with the author, unpublished 13 April, 2011. For more on Felipe Ehrenberg’s archive see D. Vanessa Kam “Archives as Art: The Accumulations of Felipe Ehrenberg and Lynn Hershman Lesson” in Imprint, 26 (1), winter, 2008, 5-16.


considered a part of these intangible patrimonies despite their ephemeral qualities, and until recently, are just beginning to be recognized as part of the artistic patrimony of the nation.  

The struggles for the preservation of their artistic archives as well as artists’ engagement with the notion of the archive has added another line of inquiry to patrimonial discussions, one that not only relates to methods of documentation and preservation but also to the creation and conceptualization of archives. If artists, like Mayer, consider archives as works of art, how does this conception redefine the archive? How does an artist’s archive circulate and relate to the art market economy? And, moreover, how is an artist’s archive different from any other archive? Such questions came to mind through conversations with Mayer and in the context of several initiatives regarding the recuperation of artist archives that took place in Mexico City between 2009 and 2011. Equally influential were debates regarding the protection of cultural patrimony brought about the privatization of culture beginning in 1989 and the

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64 By ephemeral qualities I mean that the artwork that these artists produced was not easily preserved. It included performances, street happenings, self-made books, zines, or ideas and discussions printed in napkins or send via post to a colleague. Even though some of these works were recorded using tape recorders, photographic or film cameras, or filed away in personal archives (documents that now constitute their artist archives) their ephemerality also resides in the lack of interest and mechanisms for preserving such works in contrast to more traditional works of art such as sculpture or a painting for which a system of collecting, classification, restoration and preservation is mostly in place.

65 While arguably artists have always been in dialogue with the archive in the modernist sense that their work is either a break with the previous archive or a continuation, in recent years visual artists have more consciously question the archive as way to probe questions of identity, memory and the power structures that underpin historical narratives. For a review of recent engagements with the archive see Charles Merewether, The Archive (London: Whitechapel, 2006); Okwui Enwezor, Archive Fever–Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art (International Center for Phtography, Steidl: New York, 2007); Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers, Lost and Found: Queering the Archive and Sven Spieker, The Big Archive: art from bureaucracy.
granting of public access to post-1968 archives as part of Mexico's transition to democracy during the latter decades of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{66}

Parallel to the challenges that the expansion of patrimonial discourses and the work of conceptual and performance artists brought to notions of the archive, scholars and critics have also questioned and reexamined the definition and constitution of the archive, a process that has been labeled the "archival turn."\textsuperscript{67} As a result of this turn, historians no longer consider archival sources as transparent collections of documents waiting to be interpreted. They now approach archives through different modes of reading that allow them to uncover silenced voices, untangle hierarchies of historical production and scrutinize gender biases in archival practices.\textsuperscript{68} Likewise, performance and queer theorists are expanding the notion of the archive to include embodied practices as powerful and valid archival mechanisms in the process of knowledge transfer from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{69} They use the notion of the ephemeral to explore the feelings and experiences lodged within things and remains of lived

\textsuperscript{66} In a previous project I investigated how legislation on cultural patrimony changed as Mexico opened up the cultural sector to foreign and private ownership during the last three decades of the twentieth century see Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, \textit{Art and Possibility from nationalism to neoliberalism.} MA Thesis, Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, University of British Columbia, 2007.

\textsuperscript{67} Stoler uses this term to refer to the process of re-conceptualization of archives and archival practices that began to take prominence in various academic circles by mid twentieth century. Ana Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance: On the Content in the Form" in Hamilton, \textit{Refiguring the Archive} (Cape Town, South Africa: David Phillip, 2002), 83-100.


experiences. And further, in an attempt to “queer the archive,” others are interrogating the ways in which the traditional archives condemn feelings and sexual experiences that are not easily documented.\textsuperscript{70} These diverse configurations of the archive have played a critical role in helping to disentangling the dominant structures that have helped determine the process of historical production and in questioning the authority of those who claim dominance in determining what is historically valuable.

This project builds on this literature and uses it as a framework to think through how the practices and artworks of Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss function as archives within the particular contexts of Mexico’s debates on cultural patrimony and archival practices. Moreover, in proposing to think of these artists as visual letradas, this project explores how their practices speak to a shift in the ways in which the letrado tradition has been closely connected to both the writing of history and the recording of information.

The archive and its particular relation with the letrado tradition in Mexico are the frameworks that drive the narrative of this dissertation. Throughout this project, I attend to contested meanings of what an archive is as well as what its function may be. I use the archive as a category, a concept, a practice, a media, and a collection of varied objects rather than as a site where documents no longer in use are kept. As a category of analysis, the archive determines the parameters of the historical narrative; as a concept, it disrupts and regulates the terms of historical discourses; as practice, archival activity is a performative and gendered act that shapes a sense of self that

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{70} Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers, Lost and Found: Queering the Archive, 11; and Ann Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.}
involves multiple temporalities. As collections of objects, archives are no longer to be seen as being kept in vaults exclusively reserved for researchers, but rather as things that circulate and that are exhibited, curated and, in some cases, transformed into art works. As media the archive points to the inscriptive qualities of the human body and recording technologies such as film, video, and photography. Traditionally film and photography have been discussed as archival technologies due to their ability to record time and to create a direct reference to their subject’s existence, producing images that could be considered indexes of a past.71 In the context of the development of technologies such as video and television broadcasting and following more recent ways of conceptualizing archives, this dissertation includes performance and urban landscape as archival technologies. Like other technologies these media deal with and organize practices, experiences and things through time and across space. Drawing from the work by Michelle S. Smith, Antoinette Burton and Deborah Poole, among others, this dissertation proposes to read the work of these four women as archives in relation to other archives and to archival practices that emerged at the same time in order to restore their power, explore the mechanisms that allowed for their exclusion and, most of all, explore the challenges they pose to one another and the competing claims they make.72


Feminism as keyword

Feminism is a complex subject, since it is a social movement, a position and a theoretical framework. Throughout this work I use feminism as a keyword, in Raymond Williams' sense. Keywords, for Williams, are words of a different kind that cannot be easily defined by dictionaries because they involve complex interconnections, ideas and values that change over time and across space.73 I adopt this approach primarily because three of the four artists define themselves as feminists, albeit in very different terms and, secondly, because their practices took place in the context of transnational new wave feminist movements. In addition to the ways my subjects of study engaged with feminism, I do follow a feminist approach in the sense that I take feminism to be a critical form of inquiry that is engaged with the exploration of the ways subjects take on, perform, and/or project gendered and sexual identities and the ways in which gender plays a role in the production and reproduction of power relations.74 In particular, I am interested in advances in feminist theory that interrogate how structures of power and hierarchies of difference are produced and reproduced through visual images and embodied practices.75

The reception and production of feminist art theory as well as the existence of a feminist art movement in the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico has been a


75 Ibid.
matter of constant debate.\textsuperscript{76} While in other areas of the humanities feminist theory and gender studies have been adopted as crucial frameworks of analysis, this has not been the case in the field of art history and art criticism.\textsuperscript{77} Only in recent revisionist publications of the histories of post-1968 feminism, have visual artists and art historians been included.\textsuperscript{78}

This project addresses some of the issues that have led to these exclusions and debates. But rather than drawing conclusions about the existence of a feminist art movement, my purpose is to map how the categories "women's art" and "feminist art" have been deployed and contested to tease out the patriarchal structures that ruled art institutions and dictated the parameters of art making in 1970s Mexico and how these categories were used as exclusionary mechanisms by different actors across disciplines, even by self-identified feminists. I also seek to interrogate why the aesthetic legacies of the early 1970s feminist movement have not been regarded as part of the overabundance of narratives and genealogies that discuss twentieth century Mexican art movements as meaningful political practices —either of contestation or as

\textsuperscript{76} Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz, "Introducción" in Crítica Feminista, 5-13; For a 1970s debate amongst Mexican art critics, art historians and artist see "Mujeres /Arte/ Feminidad," Artes Visuales, No. 9, Spring 1976. For a study that traces the emergence of a feminist art movement in the 1980s see Araceli Barbosa Arte Feminista en los Ochentas en México. Una perspectiva de Genero (México, DF: Casa Juan Pablos Cuernavaca, Morelos. Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 2008).

\textsuperscript{77} There are several art historians and art critics as well as other scholars that have engaged recuperating the work of women artists as well as writing critical analysis from a gender perspective such as Raquel Tibol, Eli Bartra, Araceli Barbosa, Margara Millán, Lorena Zamora, Karen Cordero and Inda Sáenz, to name a few. Similarly some artists self-identified as feminists have engaged in writing their own histories such as Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante and Magali Lara. See Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz, "Introducción."

\textsuperscript{78} For recent publications that include essays on visual arts, art history, music, theater, film and new media see Nora Ninive García, Márgara Millán, and Cynthia Pech Cartografías del feminismo mexicano, 1970-2000 and Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda, Feminismo en México: revisión histórico-crítica del siglo que termina; and for a publication that includes essays on feminist film and press see María Ileana García Gossio, Mujeres y Sociedad en el México Contemporáneo: nombrar lo innombrable. (México DF: H. Cámara de Diputados, LIX legislatura, Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2004).
mechanisms of symbolic support for hegemonic groups (including the political militancy of artists as appealing traits). 79

Feminism(s), art, social movements and media as categories of exclusion

Most histories of new wave feminisms in Mexico concentrate on articulating the histories of feminism through an appraisal of its successes and failures in formal politics — particularly at passing legislation on abortion or ending violence against women, still crucial and unresolved issues in Mexican society. 80 These studies trace the linear development of new wave feminism from its beginnings as small consciousness-raising groups to the building of national coalitions and NGOs. 81 These studies cite three major factors that prevented 1970s feminisms from becoming a more politically meaningful social movement. First, the failure at building significant coalitions with women’s popular movements and women workers’ organizations, despite this being a driving force of the movement in the eyes of many of the early activists. 82 Like these early activists, scholars who study urban social movements also tend to focus on the failures of new wave feminisms in building meaningful coalitions with urban popular

79 I am referring to the tradition of linking art with politics that became dominant in Mexican intellectual circles after the 1910 Revolution, particularly the careers and work of the artists associated with the Mexican Mural Movement, but more specifically to the articulation and validation of the militancy and work of many of the 1970s collectives known as Los Grupos as Art.

80 For some examples of these narratives see Martha Zapata Galindo, “Feminist Movements in Mexico from Consciousness-Raising Groups to Transnational Networks; Marta Lamas, Feminismo. Transmisiones y Retransmisiones; Esperanza Tuñon, Mujeres en Escena: De la Tramoya al Protagonismo (1982-1994) (México: PUEG, UNAM, 1997); and Eli Bartra, Anna Maria Fernández Poncela, Ana Lau Jaiven and Angeles Mastroetta, Feminismo en México, ayer y hoy (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2000).

81 Ibid.

movements. Second, the reliance of many of the activists on an essentialized and victimizing discourse that deployed the category of women as universal is understood as a source of dispute between activists, not unlike criticism of the heterosexual-white female focus of early second wave feminisms in other parts of the world. Third, the focus on abortion and sexual rights in the context of a mostly conservative and Catholic society, as well as the quest for being autonomous from the state, are seen as important obstacles that prevented the building of wider political coalitions in the early 1970s.

These narratives are not surprising in the context of a highly unequal society in which the number of pressing concerns appeared to outweigh a movement initiated by urban middle-class and professional women who had resolved many of their primary necessities. However, class stigma along with Left and New Left dominance over the definition of what counted as social justice were—and continue to be—mechanisms constantly deployed to silence and undermine feminist demands (as if such demands existed as separate from the needs of all social actors). Combined with the dominant perception that feminism was an imported imperialist ideology, these class-based left-wing discourses have obscured the legacies of feminisms in Mexico. Moreover, they

83 For instance, a collection of essays edited by Escobar and Álvarez proposed to look at Latin American social movements after 1968 in more cultural terms, however, the essays included in them continued to focus on the failures of new wave feminists to draw meaningful connecting lines with lower-income women or locate its political and cultural relevance in the 1980s, giving more prominence to what they call urban popular movements (UPMs). See Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Álvarez, The Making of Social Movement’s in Latin America. Identity, Strategy and Democracy and Sonia E. Álvarez, Evelina Dagnino, Arturo Escobar, Cultures of Politics Politics of Culture.
84 Marta Lamas, Feminismo, 13.
85 Ibid. 15; and Martha Zapata Galindo, Feminist Movements.
86 The Mexican Communist Party (PCM) accused many activists of being agents of American imperialism. Later on a group of feminist activist built a coalition with PCM to present a proposal of a law on decriminalization of abortion to Congress. For more on perceptions about new wave feminists see Marta Lamas, Feminismo, 19; on the role of the Mexican Communist Party in training women activists in
have silenced the ways in which early feminists’ protest created links between diverse forms of state violence and repression including sexual and reproductive rights, public gay battering and urban gentrification.

The focus on the overall formal political legacies of the movement—based on failures and successes—while extremely useful, has collaborated in silencing the wider cultural legacies of 1970s feminisms. This narrow focus reproduces hierarchical systems of knowledge production that have disregarded the power of feminist interventions as an alternative aesthetic of resistance despite the long tradition of politically-laden aesthetic practices within Mexican history.

During the early 1970s a strong emphasis on developing a feminist cultural critique was advocated by a number of activists. For instance, parallel to the first feminist demonstration in 1971, many activists were publishing feminist analyses in established cultural magazines such as Siempre! In 1975, the same year that Cine Mujer began to produce films, the collective La Revuelta began to publish a journal dealing with topics such as abortion, sexuality and prostitution. In 1976 Margarita García Flores and Alaíde Foppa established Fem, a feminist magazine that set out to


87 See for example Rosa Martha Fernández, “La Mujer Mexicana y la conciencia de la opresión” in La Cultura en México, Siempre! Jul-Sept, 1972, x-xi.

88 La Revuelta was a feminist collective established by Bertha Hiriart, Eli Bartra, María Brumm, Chela Cervantes, Bea Faith, Lucero González, Dominique Guillement and Ángeles Necoechea. At first they began to publish their own bulletin and later on they publish a column called El Traspatrio, in the newspaper Uno Mas Uno. See Eli Bartra et al, La Revuelta. Reflexiones, testimonios y reportajes de Mujeres en México, 1975-1983; Eli Bartra, interview with the author, unpublished, 30 July 2011, Mexic City and 6 January, 2013, New Orleans.
interrogate women’s condition from different perspectives. That same year Foppa, along with Elena Urrutia, began to host *Foro de La Mujer* a radio program to discuss women’s issues. In 1977 there were more than 20 self-identified feminists writing for diverse publications with nation-wide distribution. Studies that explore the cultural legacies of the movement in the publishing industry, radio, tv, film and literature have been written yet they seldom link these practices with debates occurring concurrently in the visual arts. To date, there are no studies that explore the street performances or the interdisciplinary aspects of the movement as politically meaningful acts in and of themselves. Most feminist scholarship has developed around issues of human and labor rights, legislation, health, population issues and the role of feminism in developing women and gender studies in Mexico.

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89 *FEM* was established with the purpose of developing an alternative option to the commercial women magazines such as *Cosmopolitan, Vanidades* and *Kena* that promoted consumerism and the culture for the stay home mom that always looks beautiful and ready for her husband. See Genoveva Flores Quintero, “Prensa Feminista: 30 años de batallas por el espacio público” in María Ileana García Gossio, *Mujeres y Sociedad en el México Contemporáneo: Nombrar lo Inombrable*, 203-231.

90 Ibid. In 1977 *La Coalición de Mujeres Feministas* will begin to publish the magazine *Cihuatl* and a few years later, the state network radio educación produced *La Causa de la Mujeres* and state owned TV channel 13 produced the program *A Brazo Partido*. Ibid.

91 Ibid.


93 Both Eli Bartra and Marta Lamas have developed important careers as feminist scholars but seldom have they written on the cultural legacies of the street performances by *La Revuelta* in the case of Eli Bartra, or the music and performance group *Las Leonas* in the case of Marta Lamas. See Eli Bartra, interview with the author.

94 While recent studies tend to include essays on cultural aspects this are minor in comparison to other topics. See Cartografías del feminismo mexicano, 1970-2000; Feminismo en México: revisión histórico-crítica del siglo que termina; and Sociedad en el Mexico Contemporáneo: nombrar lo inombrable. For assessments on the role of new wave feminism in academia see Dora Cardaci, Mary
I seek to challenge, build on and provide an alternative to these narratives that focus on failures and successes of feminists movements by tracing the networks of artistic exchange and by analyzing the aesthetic interventions of a variegated group of urban middle-class women as meaningful political practices in and of themselves. Through a careful reading of the reports filed by DFS and DIPS agents on feminist activities I trace the diversity of networks and coalitions that 1970s feminist collectives wove together with many different social and artistic political movements. Moreover, by drawing connecting lines to an earlier and longer tradition of women activists I question fixed definitions of the category of class that have curtailed the legacies of these groups of women and propose to see 1970s Mexican new wave feminisms as a more porous and open practice than is conventionally understood. This project builds on recent studies and discussions in which a concern for developing a more open and inclusive debate about the existence of feminisms (in the plural) is being contemplated.95

Gender as category of analysis

Generations of scholars who approach women’s history via the category of gender as postulated by Joan Wallach Scott, that is, as a broad category that considers how femininity and masculinity are mutually constituted, have made tremendous progress

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Goldsmith and Lorena Parada Ampudia "Los Programas y Centros de Estudios de la Mujer y de Género en México" in Griselda Castañeda, Feminismo en México, 247-261.

95 For current debates on the existence of diverse feminisms see “Conferencia sobre los cuarenta años del feminismo en México, 2011”. Organized by Marta Lamas and Marta Acevedo, May 11, 2011, México City and for a feminist framework of analysis see for example Marta Lamas, Miradas Feministas sobre las Mexicanas del Siglo XX (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007). For two recent publications that include essays on feminist theater, music, new media and visual arts see Nora Ninive García, Márbara Millán, and Cynthia Pech Cartografías del feminismo mexicano, 1970-2000 and Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda, Feminismo en México: revisión histórico-critica del siglo que termina.
in producing more nuanced accounts of the history of women in 20th century Mexico and Latin America. My project, in dialogue with these studies, uses the category of gender as a lens to explore systems of power relations that cut across issues of class, race and ethnicity to reproduce oppression at all levels of society. It focuses particularly on how hierarchies of difference were established and undone by visual discourses and embodied practices.

I use gender as a category of analysis to discuss how the work of Fernández, Jiménez, Weiss and Mayer, as well as the collective practices of feminist groups, destabilized the masculine nature of the structures that ruled art institutions and defined the parameters of art making, visual representation and politics. Gender is also used as a lens to understand how their practices disrupted fixed definitions of women, femininity and feminism. This project considers women, men, femininity and masculinity not as monolithic concepts but as contested and fluid categories of analysis that change over time.

Most recent studies on gender consider cultural practices and are also critical of the category of woman; however, they seldom take into account the contributions of visual artists. In Mexico, these accounts are mostly left to art historians or art critics.

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who commonly guard the boundaries of their discipline with suspicion and who have been slow in adopting a feminist framework of analysis. The reasons for this indifference result from three interconnected points: first, due to the Mexican historical tradition that situates art as a symbolic mechanism that legitimizes the power of hegemonic groups and intellectual circles that have close relations to these groups; second, due to the patriarchal structures that have defined art institutions and art making in Mexico; and, third, to the adoption of a social history of art framework. This indifference also has to do with stigmas surrounding feminism; many scholars still regard it as a radical dogma rather than a critical tool of inquiry. In addition, the position taken by artists themselves in adopting or rejecting feminist stands (as many feared that their work would be rejected if based on feminist stereotypes) have also been important factors preventing the adoption of a feminist framework of analysis with in art history.

Despite the fact that these tendencies have dominated the discipline of art history, descriptive biographies on the work of women artists that attempt to integrate

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99 Ibid. In the mid 1970s through the incorporation of race, class and ethnicity as categories of analysis, several art historians directed their research towards the legitimization of Latin American Art when discussions about its existence began to be more prevalent in Mexico as elsewhere in the Latin American region. Later on in the 1990s these discussions were framed through the questioning of the relation between centers and peripheries of art making. For an introduction to this debates see the summary of the symposium organized in Austin University in Texas on the topic of Latin American art in 1976 by Mexican based Plural magazine and Excélsior newspaper see Artes Visuales, Num 10, Verano-Summer 1976.

100 Ibid, and Mónica Mayer interview, Maris Bustamante interview, Carla Rippey interview and Magali Lara interview; Mónica Mayer, Rosa chillante: mujeres y performance en México.
them into the narratives of Mexican and international art history abound.\textsuperscript{101} More recently, a number of analytical art historical studies that use the category of gender have been published in Mexico.\textsuperscript{102} However, until recently, art historians have disregarded the history of the 1970s. Hence the participation of women, which tends to be less visible, has been in complete disregard.\textsuperscript{103} Similarly, the role of women in the history of new media, particularly in video in Mexico, is yet to become a substantial field of inquiry.\textsuperscript{104} Comprehensive studies on the history of women’s film and women filmmakers exist; however, they remain constrained within disciplinary boundaries.\textsuperscript{105} Feminist studies on audiovisual media tend to focus on how feminine stereotypes are represented and do not consider questions of distribution, circulation and production.\textsuperscript{106} To this date, an inclusive study of the history of video art in Mexico has not been published. In terms of the history of television broadcasting, the most prevalent narratives are either descriptive or are framed within a conception of

\textsuperscript{101} See for example the number of biographies, exhibitions and catalogues that incorporate the work of Frida Kahlo, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Tina Modotti, María Izquierdo, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, to name a few, within the histories of Mexican and international art history.


\textsuperscript{103} The publication and the exhibition by Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Median "La Era de la Discrepancia" in 2007 as well as an already growing global interest for recuperating the conceptual practices of Latin American artists spurred an interest in 1970s Mexican art practices period. See Olivier Debrouse La Era de la Discrepancia.

\textsuperscript{104} For an exhibition that shows a recent interest for the exploring the history of media through an interdisciplinary focus see Karla Jasso and Tania Aedo exhibit "(Ready) Media: Hacia una arqueología de los medios y la invención en México" at Laboratorio de Arte Alameda, Mexico City, 2010.

\textsuperscript{105} Millán, Margara, Derivas de un cine femenino (PUEG, UNAM: Ciudad de Mexico, 1999); Elissa Rashkin, Women Filmmakers in Mexico: The Country of Which We Dream (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{106} Marisa Belasteguigoitia, "El Cuerpo y La Voz" in Feminismo en México, 416-427.
television as an ideological tool and do not consider experimental and critical uses of this technology or experimental networks outside the parameters of the nation. 107 This dissertation builds on narratives that use the category of gender to trace the histories of art and media through an interdisciplinary perspective.

At a transnational level, the feminist collectives as well as Fernández, Jiménez, Mayer and Weiss were in dialogue with visual and embodied practices that manifested an overall interest in dismantling the dominant structures of visual representation and the international emergence of feminist art. 108 Their practices speak to the inquiries of several scholars who, in the early 1970s, began to study how the production, distribution and reception of visual images created and reproduced patriarchal power relations. These arguments had a stake in discrediting the disciplinary and hierarchical boundaries of art historical discourses that, until then, were proprietary in the study of how images produced meanings. 109 I posit that, through their practices, Fernández, Jiménez, Weiss and Mayer were meaningful players in these transnational debates.

This dissertation, then, contextualizes the production of these four women within the 1970s global landscape and looks at their practices as interrogations of how the representation of sexual and gender difference was performed through visual, performative and archival practices. Rather than imposing theory on their work, I

107 Fátima Fernández Christlieb, Los medios de difusión masiva en México (México: J. Pablos, 1982); Raúl Trejo Delarbe, Televisa, Quinto Poder (México: Claves Lationamericanas, 1985); Fernando Mejía Barquera, La industria de la radio y la televisión y la política del estado mexicano. (México, D.F.: Fundación Manuel Buendía, 1989); an exception to this trend has been the work of Jesús Martín Barbero.


109 Amelia Jones, The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader.
consider their practices as forms of theoretical and political expression in and of themselves and that are in meaningful dialogue with transnational debates. These four women did not produce work inside a Latin American or Mexican vacuum, as their works have, if at all, mostly been framed. They were in dialogue with and participating in various networks that traversed different geographies, as much as they were affected by, and effected, local issues.

Similarly, the street demonstrations led by feminist collectives produced and represented diverse and competing ways of embodying femininity. By walking through the streets of Mexico City, staging theatrical farces, and carrying banners demanding their rights to legal and safe abortions they positioned the female body as the site of articulation for political, sexual and cultural violence, but also as a site of mediation and encounters. As their images and bodies circulated through various media, the female body was politicized. Through this process their practices produced new spatial configurations of sexual difference that envisioned places where difference could exist.

In sum, this study aims to contribute to several academic initiatives: first, to the recent attention paid to the documentation of experimental and conceptual practices in Latin America, 1960s -1980s; second, it joins several efforts to develop a more inclusive cartography of feminisms, including visual and embodied practices; third, to contribute to studies that include a gendered approach to cultural practices; and finally, to bring these academic initiatives together following the insights of visual culture studies that have undone disciplinary and hierarchical boundaries and opened up the ways in which
images produced meanings.\textsuperscript{110} My project accounts for the participation of women as crucial actors in the search for new visual languages, embodied practices, networks of exchange inside and outside the national framework and links with social movements. More broadly, this dissertation also seeks to contribute to the cultural history of post-1968 Mexico, particularly to the recent work of scholars that revise existing interpretations as new archives are being opened to the public.\textsuperscript{111}

Structure

This study is divided into three sections. In the first section, entitled “Feminizing the City,” I set out to trace the social, political and cultural context that gave rise to the visual letrada. This section is divided into three chapters that I conceptualize as three interconnected maps of Mexico City. These maps frame the ways in which urban space is crucial in the production of sexualized, gendered and racialized bodies and, in turn, how bodies shape the urban landscape. In Chapter One “The Official City,” I discuss a series of reforms targeting women’s juridical standing and changing roles including family planning campaigns in order to show how these state-led initiatives marginalized feminists’s demands but also opened up avenues for the discussion of such demands. In order to provide a broad context of the situation that visual letradas faced within the field of visual arts I review a series of discussions regarding the


\textsuperscript{111} See for example new frameworks of analysis in particular as they relate to a revision of Echeverrismo, the 1968 student movement, the histories of urban and popular guerrilla, public health and indigenous politics in the second half of twentieth century Mexico. See Amelia M. Kiddle, and María L. O. Muñoza, Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Gabriela Soto Laveaga, Jungle Laboratories: Mexican Peasants, National Projects, and the Making of the Pill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Alex Aviña, "Insurgent Guerrero: Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas and the Guerrilla Challenge to Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1960-1968" Ph.D Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009.
condition of women visual artists in Mexico through state-led initiatives and also consider the connections between feminist collectives and the emergence of a supposedly independent movement of art collectives known as Los Grupos. Most of these art collectives refused to include women's rights in their political aims. In Chapter Two, “The Media City,” I discuss Echeverría's efforts at reforming the television broadcasting and film industries in the face of growing private intervention — particularly in television — and increasing international interest in giving women access to decision-making posts in broadcasting media industries in the context of the IWY celebration. In Chapter Three, “The Embodied City,” I discuss feminist-led initiatives that flowed through alternative means of communication such as demonstrations, street plays and spontaneous gatherings, flyers, banners, periodicals and objects constructed for the demonstrations. I reconstruct several feminist demonstrations and street plays through the recently-opened archives of the Mexican Secret Service and show how these feminist performances collaborated in the production of an embodied archive that protested established discourses that wielded control over the meanings and representations of women's bodies and behaviors while at the same time leaving important remains throughout Mexico City streets.

In the following section, “The Archival practices of a visual letrada,” I introduce and discuss the archive and archival practices of Ana Victoria Jiménez. In Chapter Four, “The Archival and Political Practices of a Visual Letrada,” I give an overview of Jiménez's wide-ranging career in order to offer a sense of her relation to her archive and of her feminist militancy. Throughout the chapter I trace Jiménez’s self-fashioning as an archival persona, one that is conscious of the importance of documenting her
activities as a political practice in itself. This persona emerges in two different but interconnected moments: first, at the performative moment of the creation of her collection and, second, at the moment of the self-reflexive understanding of her collections as an archive. In Chapter Five, "Secret Documents and Feminist Practices," I read Jiménez's visual archive against and along the intelligence reports filed by state agents on feminist demonstrations to explore the intersections, interruptions and the challenges they pose to one another. I discuss how both archives—intelligence reports and Jiménez's archive—provide valuable information on the activities of feminist activists that are usually not available (or not read) in the historical records. In Chapter Six, "Performing Feminist Art: Tlacuilas y Retrateras and la Fiesta de Quinceaños," I focus on Mónica Mayer's and Ana Victoria Jiménez's engagement in the establishment of a feminist art movement. In particular, I discuss the performance "La Fiesta de Quinceaños" by the feminist collective Tlacuilas y Retrateras established in 1984 by Jiménez along other artist and academics to provide yet another perspective on Jiménez's feminist militancy and relation to her archival practice.

And, finally, in the last section of this work, entitled “The visual letradas protest the archive,” I closely examine how the practices of Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández and Pola Weiss challenged dominant definitions of what constituted politically committed art or a political engagement in the arts. I describe how their practices contested dominant visual regimes and actively participated in the development of alternative regimes of media and visuality. In Chapter Seven, “Interrupting Photographic Traditions: The photographs of Ana Victoria Jiménez,” I locate Jiménez’s photographic practice and way of seeing as an alternative to two
genres of photography that were revitalized in the 1970s. First, that of ethnographic photography, particularly as it was practiced by photographers such as Graciela Iturbide, and, second, within the emergence of photojournalist and documentary photography in Mexico and throughout Latin America. Such a contextualization enables me to discuss how her way of seeing was not considered within these dominant regimes of visuality. In Chapter Eight, “¿Cosas de Mujeres?”: Feminist collaborations in 1970s Mexico City, “I discuss the collaborations of Ana Victoria Jiménez and Mónica Mayer in the films that Rosa Martha Fernández directed as part of Colectivo Cine Mujer. I trace the ways in which their collaborations with Cine Mujer shaped their feminist militancy towards a political practice with an interest in questioning women's living conditions through the arts. I also explore how Cine Mujer's production destabilized normative constructions used to define parameters of politically committed art and how these two films directed by Fernández and produced by Cine Mujer provided an alternative to dominant conventions of representation. And finally, in Chapter Nine, “extraPOLAting, interPOLAting and POLArizing the archive: The videos of POLA Weiss,” I discuss some of the ways in which Weiss's practice altered Mexican regimes of visuality and collaborated in the development of video as a communicative and artistic media. I locate Weiss's practices as part of a transnational network of people — artists, dancers, musicians and technology aficionados — interested in the potential of video and television broadcasting as a medium of artistic expression rather than as a commercial media of communication. Following this discussion, I address how Weiss's video production not only broke with dominant ways of seeing and representing the female body, but also championed video production and television broadcasting as
media that could develop an awareness for embodied forms of perceptions. Her eccentric approach perhaps, at times, idealistic, represented a political engagement that anticipated relations between self and technology that would become prevalent in the decades to follow.
SECTION 1.

FEMINIZING THE CITY

In the summer of 1975, a tune by urban troubadour Oscar Chávez was heard on radio stations and performed live at peñas throughout Mexico City. In a style that mixed the traditional Mexican corrido with the trendy Nueva Canción de Protesta (Latin American Protest Song), Chávez popularized the highlights of the first United Nation’s International Women’s Year conference (IWY) celebrated in Mexico City from 19 June - 2 July:

Junio de 75, en México, no te asombres,
se juntaron mil señoras para hablar mal de los hombres(…)
Vinieron de todo el mundo y proclamaron que es gacho
que hayan mujeres sin rumbo que sigan queriendo al macho.
Presidente del Congreso fue el procurador Pauyada,
le dijeron: "Como es hombre, nos preside una tostada."
(coro) Liberación absoluta es meta de la mujer,
pero aquello de que hablamos... que no lo dejen de hacer,
aunque sea por favor... aunque sea por honor...
aunque sea con dolor... aunque sea por calor... aunque sea por amor.
La de la UNESCO atacó a los escritores latinos,
les dijo que eran cobardes y de paso comodinos.
Luego la viuda de Allende hizo una cosa muy buena
porque pidió que expulsaran la Delegación Chilena(…)
Lesbianismo, poligamia, aborto y prostitución,
fueron tratados pidiendo nomás legalización.
Mucho elogiaron a Indira, a Golda y a Isabelita,
damas muy bien liberadas aunque también, mandaditas (…)
Como eran damas decentes sólo ellas son liberadas
y a mis paisanas de plano nunca les dieron entrada.
Así, dejaron muy frías a mujeres guerrilleras,
costureras y marías, asaltantes y placeras (…)
Don’t be surprised, on June of 75, a thousand women gathered in Mexico City to speak badly about men.
They came from all over the world to proclaim that it is unfortunate that there are still women without purpose in life that continue to praise the macho.
The women told the president of the congress,
general solicitor Mr. Pauyada, because you are a man you won’t preside

112 Oscar Chávez and José de La Vega, “Junio de 75” popular song. All translations, unless otherwise stated are mine. Thanks to Pablo Piccato for directing me to this song.
over our congress.

(Chorus) Absolute freedom is a woman's goal, but please do not stop
doing that what we spoke about... even if it is only as a favor or with
pain... to preserve honor or keep appearances... to satisfy sexual desires
or even without will or love (…)

Then, Allende’s widow did a very good thing, she asked for the expulsion
of the Chilean delegation (…)
The women demanded the legalization of lesbianism, polygamy, abortion
and prostitution (…)

They praised Indira, Golda and Isabelita,
all liberated women but also very pushy.
Because they were decent ladies, only they were considered liberated,
and the entrance to the congress was denied to my poor fellow
countrywomen.
Guerilla fighters, seamstress, farm workers, prostitutes, beggars and
petty thieves were all left out in the cold.

Besides recounting the top events of the conference in various verses, the song
spoke about an alteration to the soundscapes of the city brought by the convergence of
hundreds of foreign women who gathered to speak ill of men. But certainly by 1975, the
chatter of 1200 delegates attending the UN’s IWY celebration and 4000 more
participating in the parallel non-governmental forum, La Tribuna de La Mujer,113 was
not the only thing altering Mexico City’s mediascapes.114 In preparation for the UN's

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113 The NGO forum was a parallel three-day conference organized by NGOs and open to the public.
It was the third UN conference that had a parallel NGO meeting and according to many it signaled a turning
point in international activism, organizing and governance that created opportunities for marginalized
groups. The official agenda of the forum was established by consultative NGOs and topics discussed
centered on education, training, nutrition, healthcare, promoting artisanal production, the shape that
feminism would take in the coming years, and also the objectives of the UN’s Women’s Decade (1975-
1985) which was launched at the conference. Besides this established agenda, the smaller non-
consultative NGOs pushed the still controversial issues of sexuality through informal gatherings and
participant-initiated sessions. See “International Women’s Year World Conference” Documents. (UNIFO
Microfiche Edition Publishers: Brok, NY, 1975); and Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret:
Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women’s Year Conference” in Gender & History,
Vol. 22, No.3, November 2010, 733-754.

114 Mediascapes is a neologism coined by Arjun Appadurai that refers to “both to the distribution
of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television
stations, and film production studios).” For Appaudurai mediascapes tend to be “image-centered,
narrative based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience them is a series
of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined
lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.” In this work I use the term mediascapes to
refer to the messages that flow through all kinds of media (not only imaged based) that elicit embodied
responses from the audience shaping in turn their sense of self and place and as a crucial element that
constitutes one of the cultural geographies of Mexico City. See Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large.
IWY celebration the government of president Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1971-1976) secured equal rights legislation for women in 1974 through the modification of article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, thus marking an important milestone in the achievement of the yet to be accomplished gender equity. The reforms were put in place after a series of hearings between government officials and representatives of several women's organizations including members of various feminist collectives.¹¹⁵ During that time in Mexico, as elsewhere, a renewed feminist movement was burgeoning. As early as 1971 a group of professionals, students and militants from left-leaning organizations had begun to organize lively street demonstrations throughout Mexico City to demand the end of discrimination against women at all levels of society and their right to self-determination including sexual freedoms.¹¹⁶ They established small consciousness-raising groups, joined women's workers movements across the country, organized conferences, hosted radio shows and published articles discussing the emergence of new wave feminism elsewhere inviting Mexican women to join their cause.¹¹⁷ The broadcast and live performance of Chavez’s song was one of the many creative expressions carried out throughout the decade in response to the attention brought to

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¹¹⁵ For a discussion and review of this meetings see Elvira Sánchez Navarro " Liberación Femenina en el Senado" in Crucero, September 20, 1974. AGN, DFIPS Caja 1634B Generalidades 1965-1985, 867; and various articles in Siempre!, Num. 114, Octubre 30, 1974.


¹¹⁷ Not all studies on the history of new wave feminism in Mexico account for the involvement of feminist activists with worker groups in the early stages of the movement. For accounts that do so see Marta Acevedo, Marta Lamas and Ana Luisa Liguri, " México: Una bolsita de Cal por dos de Arena" in 10 Años de Periodismo Feminista (México: Editorial Planeta, 1988), 111-148; Roció González Alvarado, "El espíritu de una época"; and interview Interview with Rosa Martha Fernández.
women's issues by the hosting of UN's IWY celebration, the demands of a new generation feminist activists and government reforms targeting women's rights.

In this section, I trace how the urban space of Mexico City was feminized by means of a series of independent as well as government-led practices and creative expressions (such as Chavez’s song) that placed women's bodies and rights on the agenda for public debate. These practices transformed the geographies of the region by opening up spaces where competing configurations of gender and sexual difference could exist; however, these changes were not without violence. In order to map out how the process of feminization took place, I discuss the proliferation of different but intersected practices that give shape to as they interconnected the diverse cultural and spatial geographies that coexisted and shaped Mexico City during the 1970s. I discuss a range of discourses and practices that contested, produced and reproduced existing and new relations in which women’s bodies (both tangibly and discursively) became the focal point.

My objective in this section is twofold. First, I set out the social, political and cultural context that gave rise to the visual letrada, a concept I develop throughout this dissertation to refer to a new generation of women who were more openly concerned with performing and recording audio-visual information about how their bodies were construed and politicized in relation to urban space. I discuss the ways in which visual letradas actively participated in the development and transformation of new and existing practices.

118 Thinking in spatial terms allows for the acknowledgement of a range of simultaneous events and discourses that give rise to multiple geographies avoiding narratives whose categories of analysis rely on plotting linear progress, dependency and/or totality. On thinking spatially versus temporally see Doreen Massey, "Imagining Globalization: Power Geometries of Time-Space" in Avtar Brah, Mat J. Hickman, eds., Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization (New York: St. Martin Press, 1999), 27-44; and Marsha Meskimmon, "Chronology through Cartography: Mapping Feminist Art Globally" in Cornelia H. Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, 323-336. For a study on the multitude of imaginaries that converge and shape Mexico City see Nestor Garcia Canclini, Imaginarios Urbanos (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1997).
existing regimes of media and visuality as they took shape and helped shape Mexico City’s geographies. I am concerned with the ways in which a diverse range of visual letradas participated in the development of interconnected and competing geographies of the city as a result of their increased participation in the public sphere. While women in Mexico have fought for women’s rights and Mexican women artists have portrayed and interrogated normative gender roles since early twentieth century— and before—the role of Mexican women was radically altered following World War II. By 1955, after gaining their right to vote and be elected to office, Mexican women held posts as ambassadors, magistrates and high-level bureaucrats. By the time new wave feminists began to demonstrate in the streets of Mexico City, the government had already set out a family planning media campaign to promote the use of birth control methods. In combination with the advent of new audiovisual technologies and advances in the broadcasting industry, these events unleashed a sexual revolution that not only granted independence for some women but also altered the ways female bodies were construed and represented in public discourse. New avenues of expression were opened up for women to express diverse and competing political subjectivities including conflicting visual representations of female bodies. In this context visual letradas took on the task of producing and keeping visual representations of their bodies in order to construct a different range of visual and performative archives from which alternative histories could emerge.

Second, I contextualize the activities of Mexico City based feminist collectives as part of a wide range of countercultural practices that played a role in transforming urban space in Mexico City in the latter half of the twentieth century. By mapping out the network of practices and processes of exchange between various feminist activists
with art collectives and other political organizations, I propose alternative cartographies of Mexico City in which feminist activism becomes a key, but not exclusive, player in transforming the cultural geographies of Mexico City. The purpose, then, is not only to recover the history of the practices of feminist collectives but also to trace their connections with a myriad of countercultural activities that contributed to feminizing the city.

This section is divided into three chapters that I conceptualize as three interconnected maps of Mexico City. These maps frame the ways in which urban space is crucial to the production of sexualized, gendered and racialized bodies and, in turn, how bodies shape the urban landscape. The first two maps are made by social and discursive interactions that flow through official and institutional means such as state reforms and government sponsored events as well as messages and creative expressions that flowed through private and academic media outlets. In the first map, the official city, I discuss a series of reforms targeting women’s juridical standing and changing roles including family planning campaigns in order to show how these state led initiatives marginalized feminists’ demands but also opened up avenues for discussion of such demands. The official map of the city begins with president Luis Echeverría Álvarez’s administration (1970-1976). Yet his policies responded to and were a continuation of issues that had begun decades earlier. The contours of the

\[119\] Many of Echeverría’s reforms were a continuation of initiatives of previous administrations. One of the most controversial efforts was his attempt at nationalizing television broadcasting. Efforts at regulating the industry had begun during the administration of president López Mateos (1958-1964). Other examples include for instance, the legislation on cultural patrimony that begun with José López Portillo, Secretario de Patrimonio, under the administration of president Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) who lead discussions over the ownership and definition of cultural patrimony with numerous intellectuals, academics and professionals, following ideas that Agustín Yañez had drafted yeas prior as the head of the secretary of public education under López Mateos administration. The results of such inquires took shape under Echeverría’s administration when revisions to La Ley Federal sobre Monumentos y Zonas Arqueologicas, Artisticas e Historicas, took effect on May 2, 1972 and are still current. Other examples
official city, however, do not end with Echeverría’s administration; some of its outlines, while faded, continue to have visibility in the present. Others, such as the active participation of Rosa Martha Fernández, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Mónica Mayer and Pola Weiss in shaping discourses on women’s bodies as they flowed through different media and the urban landscape, have been mostly silenced by the dominant historical narratives of the era. In order to provide a broad context of the situation that visual letradas faced within the field of visual arts I review a series of discussions regarding the condition of women visual artists in Mexico through state led initiatives and also consider the connections between feminist collectives and the emergence of a supposedly independent movement of art collectives known as Los Grupos. Most of these art collectives denied the inclusion of women’s rights in their political aims.

In the second map (chapter), the media city, I discuss Echeverría’s efforts at reforming the television broadcasting and film industries in the face of growing private intervention — particularly in television— and increasing international interest in giving women access to decision-making posts in broadcasting media industries in the context of the IWY celebration. Particular attention is given to the ways in which private and state owned channels were more receptive to the inclusion of women as news anchors, reporters and producers. I also discuss the production of feminist films and feminist directors in the context of reforms in the film industry and a movement of independent politically committed film. While neither was receptive to feminist demands, they opened up opportunities for the development of female film directors and all female film collectives. In these two first maps (chapters) the state becomes a

include the establishment of El Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) on December 29, 1970. See AGN, Galería 3, Luis Echeverría Alvarez (LEA), Caja 761 "INAH"; Caja 734 "Ley Federal de Patrimonio" and "Obstaculos a la Ley Federal"; Caja 735 "Síntesis de Comentarios a la Ley Federal de Patrimonio Cultural".
crucial actor and broker of feminist demands, however, it is the access and control of media industries—particularly film and television—over which visual letradas, the state and the private sectors would compete. It is through this battle for access and control of diverse media from which alternative representations of female bodies and roles for women would emerge.

In contrast, the third map (chapter) I trace out in this section emerges from the streets of Mexico City via feminist-led initiatives that flowed through alternative means of communication such as demonstrations, street plays and spontaneous gatherings, flyers, banners, periodicals and objects constructed for the demonstrations. All these acts constitute what I call the embodied city. By walking through the streets of Mexico City and staging theatrical farces using humor to criticize the status quo in order to demand legal and safe abortions, the criminalization of sexual violence, and the right to decide over the representation of their bodies (both visually and in formal politics), these women and those who joined them produced diverse and competing ways of embodying femininity and masculinity. These performances made the body the site of articulation for political, sexual and cultural violence. And, by politicizing the body, these events produced new spatial configurations of gender and sexual difference that envisioned a place where difference could exist, even if this process was not without violence. In doing so they transgressed normative gendered divisions of public and private space and, in turn, transformed the geographies of Mexico City. In addition, by turning public monuments into stages of enunciation they not only altered the cultural memory attached to such landmarks but left a mark on their audiences. In effect, through their performances they invited passersby to interrogate their own lives and imagine different ways of engaging, conceptualizing and visualizing the terms of public
civic life and sense of community. These performances collaborated in the production of an embodied archive that protested established discourses that wielded control over the meanings and representations of women's bodies and behaviors while at the same time leaving important remains throughout Mexico City streets.

I conceptualize the city as a work in progress. Writing in the 1960s, in the midst of worldwide urban unrest, to which the residents of Mexico City were no strangers, Henri Lefebvre defined cities as *ouvers* (works of art), spatial and social products of human relations and works of appropriation on the part of their residents, rather than static entities produced by urban plans imposed upon them from above. However, while Lefebvre's productive and processual understanding of cities is crucial to the process to which I refer to as feminizing the city, I understand this process through the work of feminists scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz, Doreen Massey, Nelly Richard, Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis who have argued for the gendered, embodied and performative dimensions of social relations that are crucial to understanding the production of space and the sense of self, place and Other. Hence, I conceptualize the

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120 For a work that looks at worker's demonstrations as performances where social agents enact contestation and in the process, negotiate community see Kirk W. Fuoss *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).

121 Performance theorists such as Diana Taylor have successfully argued for the recognition of embodied practices as meaningful sources of knowledge transmission. However, rather than drawing from Taylor who is invested in differentiating the *archive* (a house of documents and things) and the *repertoire* (as embodied practices) I follow the work of Rebecca Schneider and José Esteban Muñoz and conceptualize the archive as another way of performance. Oral accounts, archival documents, photographs, pamphlets, public monuments and newspaper clippings compose the archive that I draw from. These things are not static; they are in dialogue and constantly contesting, reinterpreting and excluding each other. The archive is made of translations and mistranslations between different media, material, practices and slippages of memory. See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains*; and José Esteban Muñoz, *Ephemera as Evidence*.


multiple human and material interactions that shape the urban space of Mexico City — and in turn are shaped by it — as gendered and embodied experiences. These interactions (including those mediated by and through audiovisual communications) shape a sense of place, self and Other which are always in flux and not limited to national or geographic boundaries. The city, while located in a particular topography, exists and is simultaneously produced outside its physical dimension through the movement of peoples, objects and ideas. Therefore, the process of feminization of Mexico City that I map out in this section takes place on multiple levels or spatial geographies; it flows through different media outlets, practices and discourses and across diverse local, national and transnational networks.

Equally crucial to the transformation in the geographies of Mexico City that I map in this section was the widespread critique to the dominant patriarchal structures of power that ruled Mexican society. Not explicitly voiced in feminist terms, this critique was not only performed by feminist activists or those who define themselves as women. It was also the product of a widespread dissatisfaction expressed by the mobilization of students, artists, intellectuals and worker organizations that had become politicized by worldwide events such as the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975). In Mexico, the implementation of an economic model that only benefited a minority of the population and a hardline style of government that violently repressed or coopted any kind of opposition fed a sense of dissatisfaction amongst many youth propelling a countercultural movement and a series of student led demonstrations culminating in the massacre of students in 1968. Consequently, the

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feminization of urban space that I discuss in this section consists of a process whereby the geographies of Mexico City became stages of contestation for many oppositional movements that sought social justice amidst a widespread social and political crisis. These movements sought to effect social change and contest hegemonic structures and institutions, that is, systems of knowledge and power considered to be masculine practices and discourses that both women and men were equally implicated in sustaining and reproducing.124

A preamble: the battle for the city

By the time president Luis Echeverría Álvarez took office Mexico City was already considered one of the world’s mega-cities with a population estimated at eight million.125 The city’s growth and development had started in the 1940s, as the Mexican government turned to the right of the political spectrum and the capital began to enjoy economic growth due to the adoption of the Import-Substitution-Industrialization model (ISI).126 Between the 1940s and 1960s Mexico City more than doubled its size and became the showcase of the country’s economic growth. Changes in population were accompanied by a large investment in urban infrastructure —expressways, tunnels, overpasses, subway systems and concrete housing projects— aimed at turning the 19th century Haussmann urban plan into a city more in tune with an international modernist model.

The spoils of the economic development acquired symbolic recognition as Mexico City was elected to host important international events—the signing of the

124 Nelly Richard, Masculine/Feminine. Practices of Difference(s), 22.
125 By the 1970s, Mexico City and Sao Paolo were considered the only mega-cities in the Latin American region. Nestor García Canclini, Imaginarios Urbanos, 74.
126 For a history of Mexico City during the twentieth century see Diane E. Davis, Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
Tlatelolco Treaty (1968), the Olympic Games (1968) and FIFA’s World Cup (1970). The hosting of international events was an opportunity to invest in urban infrastructure while at the same time such infrastructure showcased the modern standards of living of Mexico City residents. However, not all the population benefited from such standards of living. Rather, all these public works altered the social fabric of the city. Many neighborhoods were bulldozed to give way to overpasses and a network of interlocking freeways made vehicle traffic the priority over the majority of pedestrians who needed to learn how to navigate the recently inaugurated subway system (1967-69). At the same time, rural to urban migration caused serious over-crowding and a growth in slums and illegal settlements. A lack of employment accelerated male patterns of migration that altered the traditional arrangement of the Mexican family. More and more urban women became the sole providers for their families, many living in poverty and turning to informal work (prostitution, begging or domestic work).

All these changes prompted adaptations in the ways that Mexicans kept informed and connected. By then, broadcast media — television in particular— became an important tool for keeping the public informed. Advances in broadcasting technology such as satellite networks (1968) and the use of video (1970) expanded the reach and the velocity through which information could be transmitted via television broadcasting. Within the following decades, the Mexican government launched a series of reforms targeting television broadcasting and the film industry in order to exert

\[\text{127} \text{ Ibid.}\]

\[\text{128} \text{ For a study that looks at the ways in which television programming, particularly the news, was received by Mexican audiences and the power struggles between television executives, government officials and audiences see Celeste González de Bustamante, “Muy Buenas Noches” Mexico, Television and the Cold War (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).} \]
control of over the production, distribution and consumption of such media, its audiences and the growth of private investment in the television industry in particular.

In Mexico, as elsewhere, the growth of broadcast media during the second half of twentieth century was consistent with the development of capitalism in the world but also responded to more local concerns. On the one hand, the growth of consumer culture required the use of broadcasting media to promote products on a massive scale and, on the other, the Mexican government sought to use this media to incorporate a mostly illiterate society into a national project in crucial need of renovation. According to some reports, between 1950 and 1970 the number of television sets throughout the country soared from 100 receivers to 4.5 million. Even though the majority of viewers lived in Mexico City, television stations had been established in twenty-nine states (Estados) by the end of the 1960s. A fundamental part of the renovation of the national project was a change in the government’s pronatalist polices. In order to align the country with international standards that encouraged population control as a condition for development, by 1974 the Mexican government launched a media campaign promoting birth control methods. Advances in broadcasting media were crucial to such a campaign. Another important change in broadcast media was the increased participation of women in the industry. In tune with one of the resolutions of the UN’s IWY celebration that promoted the appointment of women in decision-making

129 According to the same report the number of households in 1970 amounted to 9.9 million. Celeste González de Bustamante, “Muy Buenas Noches” Mexico, Television and the Cold War, 181-182.

130 During the 1960s demographic growth became a problem for developing nations and in 1973 a law that prohibited the use of contraceptives was removed from the Código Sanitario and a new law that demanded the decrease of population growth was established. The state went on to promote the use of contraceptives and chastity while criminalizing abortion. This double standard was one of the issues that 1970s feminist collectives protested against. Elsa S. Guevara Villaseñor, “Las Políticas Públicas de Salud” in Gutierrez Castañeda (ed), Feminismo en México: revisión histórico-critica del siglo que termina, 374-399; and Gabriela Soto Laveaga, Jungle Laboratories: Mexican Peasants, National Projects, and the Making of the Pill.
posts in the media industry, the recently established state-owned television Canal 13 (1972) fostered the participation of women as an anchors and producers. By then the private sector counted several female reporters and producers. In combination, the growth of broadcast media and changes in pronatalist policies collaborated in altering the traditional gender roles espoused by the 1920s national building project. The increased participation of women in television broadcasting and as film directors arguably inspired many women to rethink their options in life and also developed new regimes of media and visuality.

During the 1970s, reforms in the film and television industries not only supported Mexican government needs and aligned with international patterns, they also accelerated transformations within Mexico City's intellectual sectors. In turn, these changes opened up spaces of expression for the kind of emerging visual letradas that this study focuses on. By then Mexican intellectual sectors were already marked by a shift from an exclusive emphasis on literate-print culture toward an embrace of the audiovisual communication media of the era (television, video and film) and the increased participation of women in the public sphere. The growing importance of audiovisual communications would require further adaptations on the part of this

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131 One of the outcomes of IWY was to raise public consciousness with respect to the changing roles of women in society and in particularly to transform the ways in which the media tended to reinforce traditional attitudes and portrayals of women that were both degrading and humiliating. Resolution 181 stated "women should be appointed in greater numbers in media management decision-making and other capacities, as editors, columnists, reporters, producers and the like, and should encourage the critical review, within the media, of the image of women projected." See "Actions Taken by the Conference, Women and Media" in International Women's Year World Conference Documents, 32 -36; ; For an analysis of the media campaigns launched to promote family planning during Luis Echeverría and López Portillo's administration see Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let's Become Fewer": Soap Operas, The Pill and Population Campaigns, 1976-1986" in Sexuality Research and Social Policy Journal, September 2007, vol. 4, no. 3., 19-33.

132 See Nestor Garcia Candini's Hybrid Cultures; Jean Franco The Rise and Fall of the Letter City; and Jean Franco, "What's left of the intelligentsia? The uncertain Future of the Printed Word" in Critical Passions. Selected Essays (Durham; Duke University Press, 1999), 198.
sector, which was also confronted with the increased participation of the private sector and independent academic institutions in cultural matters.\textsuperscript{133} State reforms in the cultural sector and broadcasting industry led to the opening of media spaces from which various visual letradas launched divergent conceptions of women’s bodies.

By the time transnational new wave feminism made Mexico City the stage of its demands, the dreams of turning the city into a model of modernity had been seriously shattered. The ISI model began to show signs of exhaustion and so did the city. Reports and studies warning of a series of catastrophes awaiting the city if population growth and construction development was not halted flooded the media.\textsuperscript{134} The dreams of progress and modernization were shattered principally by the violent attack against students unleashed on Mexico City streets.

In effect, on October 2, 1968, just days before the inauguration of the Olympic Games, government forces massacred hundreds of protesting students in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, located just north of the city’s downtown district. The site also happened to host a leading modernist housing complex project, Nonoalco-Tlatelolco.\textsuperscript{135} The killings turned the flagship model of modernization into a site of violence and bloodshed.\textsuperscript{136} The attacks against students revealed the amount of violence that the ruling party, Partido de la Revolución Institucional (PRI), was willing to unleash in order to preserve the status quo and made visible a political and social crisis that had been

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} For instance see J.N. Rosales "LLevense la Capital a otro lado pero ya!" published in Siempre! No.1106, September 1974.
\textsuperscript{135} The housing project was commissioned by president Miguel Alemán in 1949 and inaugurated in 1964. Mario Pani, a leading Mexican architect that followed the international modernist style, designed the housing project.
\textsuperscript{136} For a discussion of the role that the architecture of the housing project played in the 1968 student massacre see Rubén Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s" in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (ed) Collectivism after Modernism. 165-192.
\end{flushright}
brewing all over the country in the past decades.\textsuperscript{137} The Tlatelolco massacre unleashed a crisis that represented an overall disaffection with the dominant social, political, and cultural structures that ruled Mexican society, which were symbolically embodied and put into practice by the Mexican government. Three years later, on June 10, 1971, a second attack against students by the paramilitary group \textit{Los Halcones} (The Falcons), known as the Corpus Christi massacre, sent Mexico City residents a reminder of the continued state of violence in which they were living. The Corpus Christi massacre resulted in the killing of several students near the entrance of a subway station altering the symbolic meaning of the recently inaugurated line 2 of the transit system (1970) and turning the \textit{Normal} subway station into a site of remembrance for the killings rather than a signifier of progress. These two events significantly altered the meanings attached to material symbols of modernity and progress. They unveiled the shallowness of the PRI’s inclusive revolutionary rhetoric and converted the already contested streets of Mexico City into a battleground, as a growing number of political and civil organizations, grassroots movements and feminists collectives made it the site from which they would enunciate their demands, in spite of fears of repression. As I will discuss throughout this section, state bureaucracies, government institutions, private media conglomerates, independent academic departments as well as myriad grassroots and political organizations would become active players within this battle for symbolic presence throughout Mexico City streets.

While information about the killings of students did not flow freely through official media channels, the residents of Mexico City shared information about these

\textsuperscript{137} For a recent work on state violence prior to and after the massacre of students in 1968 see Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo (eds) \textit{Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico. Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982} (New York: Routledge, 2012).
events through street theater, graphics, graffiti and billboards produced by several students and activists. At the time a renewed interest in collectivism was emerging in Mexico, as elsewhere, and many students who had participated in the protests of 1968 or had links with other counterculture movements began to establish art collectives. Filmmakers, writers, visual artists, protest singers, feminist, gay and lesbian activists, as well as rock musicians established a wide range of different collectives and initiatives seeking aesthetic and political freedom of expression. Confronted with massive urban changes (including overpopulation, bulldozed neighborhoods, and pollution) and the memories of their experiences in the student movement, the majority of these collectives made Mexico City the stage, the media and the content of many of their expressions. Some of these collectives aimed at building alternative links with existing and emerging oppositional political groups and forces while attacking official

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138 The emergence of collectivism was influenced by the New Left but also had deep roots within Mexican artistic, intellectual and political circles. For a discussion on post-war collectivism see Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (ed) Collectivism after Modernism. For a case study on collectivism in Mexico see Rubén Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s" in Collectivism after Modernism, 165-192. For a discussion of the reception of the New Left in Latin America see Eric Zolov, "Expanding our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old to a New Left in Latin America" in A Contracorriente, Vol. 5, No.2, Winter 2008, 47-73. Even before the events of 1968 Mexico City was the site of a vibrant counterculture movement that sought to renew and/or contest the relationship between art and politics. These countercultural movements are mostly conceptualized in terms of La Onda, a literal or music movement chronicled by writers José Agustín and Margo Glantz. Crucial to my project is to explore the existence of a wider countercultural movement one that includes the activities of feminist collectives more meaningfully. For more on countercultural movements see Margo Glanz Onda y escritura en México: Jóvenes de 20 a 33 (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1971); José Agustín, La Contraculturra en México: La Historia y el significado de los rebeldes sin causa, los jipitecas, los punks y las bandas (México: Grijalbo, 1996); Eric Zolov, Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture; Cynthia Steele, Politics, Gender, and the Mexican Novel, 1968-1988 (University of Texas, 1992). For a study that chronicles the countercultural movements from a visual culture and art historical perspective see Oliver Debroise, La Era de la Discrepancia.

139 For instance, reflecting on Mexico City’s growing population, the art collective Suma (1976) developed a series of visual icons that represented all characters in the city (the bureaucrat, the unemployed, the migrant, the beggar, the construction worker, etc...) and used them to paint urban murals (graffiti) on the streets of Mexico City. Similarly, members of Grupo Mira (1977) after having participated in the production of graphics for the 1968 student movement began to produce a series of print portfolios entitled Comunicados Gráficos in which they addressed urban problems faced by rural migrants such as lack of health, sanitary services and unemployment. See Fondo “Grupo de los Setentas,” Centro Nacional de Investigación, documentación e información de artes plásticas, (CENIDIAP); Alvaro Vazquez Mantecón, Fondo Los Grupos, video recordings, Museo Carillo Gil, Mexico City, 1994; and Cristina Hijar, Siete Grupos de Artistas Visuales de los Setentas.
cultural institutions and experimenting with different media and aesthetic languages. Performative practices such as street happenings or theatrical plays were renewed as one of the most subversive means to reach wider audiences, build coalitions and demand civil rights. Yet other artists and intellectuals located themselves within president Echeverría’s third worldist platform by joining his cabinet or embracing Latin American protest music to counter the imperialistic influence of English rock music. These variegated series of movements sought to effect social change and contest established structures of power and institutions. However, the majority of these collectives did not build meaningful links with the feminist movement, despite the collaboration of many feminists with various art collectives. Feminism, in the early 1970s, was and sometimes still is, perceived by many, in Mexico and elsewhere in the

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140 Examples of these practices include: Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed*, the Chicano Farm Worker’s Theater or Colombia’s Teatro Experimental de Cali. However, these kinds of performative practices were not exclusive to left-leaning movements nor to theater and drama circles. *Performance* is a broad and loaded term that can be used to describe ritual, dance, parades, carnival or all kinds of public appearances as well as to determine measurements of behavior and/or as a practice to conceptualize the social production and iteration of gender as Judith Butler has used it. On the other hand, the histories of performative traditions in Latin America date back to before the Conquest and have been used to elicit and affirm political affiliations by those in power as well as those countering them. Hence, performance is an ambiguous and loaded term that does not translate easy into Spanish. In Mexico the term is mostly used to refer to the visual arts, but even within that field many conceive of the term as a form of cognitive colonization by Anglo-academy. Many artists prefer the term “acciones plásticas” or “formas PIAS,” a term coined by Maris Bustamante. For a review of performances in Latin America since the Conquest see Diana Taylor and Sarah J Townsend, (eds), *Stages of Conflict. A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985) and Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

141 While the popularity of Latin American protest song during those years cannot be attributed to Echeverría’s anti-imperialistic stand, many have argued for the ways in which Echeverría’s embrace of Latin American protest folk song worked to support his policies, however, like any other cultural expression it also work to counter them. For an example of the many intellectuals that worked with Echeverría’s third worldist projects consider for instance the number of academics affiliated to Centro de Estudios Económico y Sociales del Tercer Mundo (CEESTEM) like art historian Ida Rodríguez Pamprolini and politician and scholar Adolfo Aguilar Zinser. See AGN, LEA, Caja 571, Acervo 111, “Universidad del Tercer Mundo”; and Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture.*
Latin American region, as an imported imperialist ideology and a distraction from more pressing social injustices afflicting Latin American as a region.\footnote{142}

In the context of the geopolitical pressures of the Cold War in the 1970s, the IWY celebration also served as an outlet for the alleged and stated antagonisms between "first world" feminists or, as Oscar Chavez puts it, between those decent ladies considered as liberated (mujeres liberadas) in contrast to Chávez's compatriots who were denied entrance to the celebration and were left out in the cold. Certainly, the IWY celebration served as a stage for voicing a multitude of interests including pitching feminism as an imported imperialist ideology that placed emphasis on women's sexual liberation including the legalization of abortion, the open discussion of lesbianism and the rights of prostitutes over other concerns like poverty, health and access to education.\footnote{143} The open discussion of sexual rights shocked not only the mostly conservative Catholic sectors of the Mexican population but also many on the left side of the political spectrum who preferred that women's issues could continue to be framed

\footnote{142}{For a discussion on the antagonisms and differences between feminists that support social development versus those who support or include sexual rights as integral to development policies see Ara Wilson, "The Transnational Geography of Human Rights," in Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights, ed. Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 257-58; and "NGOs as Erotic Sites," in Queering Development, ed. A. Lind and S. Bergeron (forthcoming). For a case study of the alleged confrontations between first world feminists and third world feminists, in particular the alleged confrontation between Betty Friedan and Domitila de Chungara see Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year Conference.”}

\footnote{143}{According to several activists, the word "lesbianism" was used for the first time in national media outlets in the context of IWY celebration when Nancy Cárdenas, gay activist and play writer, submitted a declaration on the subject of Mexican lesbianism to conference coordinators. For a first-hand memoire of the events, see Claudia Hinojosa, Gritos y Susurros in Gutierrez Castañeda (ed), Feminismo en México, 173-187. For a discussion about the responses to fears of lesbianism and the tensions between third world and first world attendees to the IWY conference, see Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year Conference”.}
under the banner of class struggle rather than through the sexual and self-
determination emphasis espoused by some feminists.144

Some verses of Chávez’s song clearly represent the humorous and sometimes
demeaning reception that feminist demands encountered in Mexico. According to the
chorus, as long as women continued to have sexual relations with men, no matter under
what circumstances (as a favor or with pain, to preserve honor/keep appearances, to
satisfy desires and even without will or love), women could go on organizing and
demanding whatever they wanted. The chorus of the song served as a humorous outlet
for the threats to Mexican traditions and social mores unleashed by discussions about
women’s sexual liberation, including lesbianism, in the context of the IWY’s celebration
and the re-emergence of the feminist movement in Mexico. The song sarcastically
reflects on the value given to women’s bodies and self-determination at a time when
initiatives, official and non-official, transnational and national, had raised such topics as
urgently in need of public debate.

In spite of such reception and antagonisms, the hosting of the IWY conference
and the parallel NGO forum was a political juncture that strengthened competing
feminist agendas and political interests in Mexico, as elsewhere.145 As the city prepared
to host the IWY and NGO forum, members of at least three collectives active at the time
decided to organize a counter-congress and boycott the UN conference and the forum
because they were in disagreement with the top-down, capitalist approach of such
events. The counter-congress took place at a theater in Coyoacan, a neighborhood

144 Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 United
Nations International Women’s Year Conference.”
145 Ana Lau Jaiven, La Nueva Ola del Feminismo en México; and Ana Lau Jaiven and Gisela Espinosa
Damián, Un Fantasma recorre el siglo. Luchas feministas en México 1910-2010.
located in the southern part of the city.\textsuperscript{146} Meanwhile, the main events of the IYW celebration took place in the building of Foreign Affairs located in Tlatelolco, the site of the 1968 student massacre (Fig. 3).

\textsuperscript{146} According to Marta Lamas the countercongress was held at the theater Eleuterio Méndez. See Marta Lamas, Feminismo. Transmisiones y Retransmisiones, 17.
Figure 3. Map of Downtown Mexico City, courtesy of the author.
Numbers indicate the location of feminist demonstrations 1971-1979.
For illustration purposes only.
From these two different locations (one unofficial, represented by the counter-congress's location, and one official, represented by the Tlatelolco buildings) and the interstices between them, different approaches to women's rights, feminism and political solidarity were launched placing women's issues on the agenda of public debate in the decades to follow.

One of the ways in which these different approaches were expressed was through the organization of street demonstrations, a practice that new wave feminists had used since 1971, but that was intensified in the aftermath of the IWY celebration. Hence, just as the repression of students in the streets of Mexico City began to alter the cultural memory attached to symbols of progress and diverse art collectives began to critique urban development and state cultural policy by taking art to the streets in order to counter hegemonic discourses and build alliances with other political organizations, so did various feminist collectives. By demanding their right to decide over their bodies and denouncing violence against women, feminist activists proposed another way to engage with politics. They placed the personal at the center of public debates. By doing so, they altered and proposed different ways of experiencing and producing civic engagement in a highly contested urban landscape.
CHAPTER 1

Map one: The official city

Echeverría’s administration began with a nation-wide campaign for democratization known as apertura democrática (democratic opening). It aimed at siding with disenfranchised and defiant sectors of the population in order to redeem his popularity and that of the ruling party, as both had been severely damaged after the 1968 student massacre. In order to do so, the president implemented a series of reforms that targeted economic, political and cultural sectors in hopes of crafting an image of himself as an international third world ambassador. The hosting of the IWY celebration as well as the already mentioned campaign to extend full rights of citizenship and social equality to women played an important role in supporting such a goal.

On the economic and political front, Echeverría broke the unstated pact between the private sector and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) by promoting economic nationalism through supporting the establishment of numerous parastatal industries. By expropriating more than 35,000 hectares of commercial agricultural land and redistributing more than 25,000 hectares in northern Mexico, he earned the belligerency of commercial agricultural leaders. In addition, his 1975 edition of libros de texto gratuitos (public text books) enraged the Catholic Church and conservative


sectors of the population. Moreover, prominent private art collectors turned to smuggling valuable pieces of art in order to avoid their expropriation due to his campaign to build a registry of valuable material culture and reforms to laws that protected the cultural patrimony of the nation. These actions, along with the kidnappings and assassinations of prominent industry leaders by emerging guerrilla groups, convinced many businessmen to join the opposition.

At the same time, Echeverría tried to appease the Left through different means, such as tacitly allowing the establishment of worker unions, attempting to start a dialogue with university students, welcoming refugees from Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Nicaragua, releasing political prisoners, and adopting a foreign diplomacy rhetoric against the imperialist forces of the United States that favored Third Worldism. Furthermore, by welcoming young functionaries to his cabinet, he attempted to craft a youthful image for the party and for himself—an image more aligned with 1930's Cardenismo rather than with the immediate generations of PRI presidents who had turned to the right side of the political spectrum since the mid 1940s. However, at the same time, he continued to support a system of surveillance to spy on activists and leaders of left-wing urban and rural organizations including feminist activists, thus


150 During Echeverría’s administration a new federal law for the protection of cultural patrimony, La Ley Federal de Monumentos Históricos Arqueológicos y Artísticos (1972) was finally crafted to stop the ransacking of cultural objects. Echeverría also ordered the purchase of several private art collections and established the center for the restoration and preservation of mural art. He purchased the art collections of Dr. Alvar Carrillo Gil, photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo; various etchings by José Guadalupe Posada. For more information of the art market and collection practices during Echeverría see: Christine Frérot, El Mercado del arte en México, 1950-1976; Ana Gardner, El Poder del Coleccionismo de arte: Alvar Carrillo Gil. (México DF; UNAM, 2009). For more on cultural patrimony see Enrique Florescano, El Patrimonio Cultural de México (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993)

151 Schmidt, The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency.

152 Ibid.
sustaining the traditional use of violence and repressive tactics to dispel public gatherings and demonstrations on the streets of Mexico City and elsewhere in the country. 153

These seemingly contradictory strategies would characterize his time in office. His democratic opening functioned as a strategy of co-optation following the hegemonic impulses of the ruling party (PRI), which played an important role in the development of what many have labeled “a schizoid political culture” 154 throughout the twentieth century. In Echeverría’s case, the schizoid nature of his policies became even more pronounced as he aimed to appease all sectors of the population, particularly those on the Left, while covertly engaging in a Dirty War to eliminate urban and rural unrest. Nonetheless, some of his reforms — particularly in the cultural sector and women’s rights— led to the establishment of governmental institutions and to the opening of discussions, that would, to a large degree, establish the terms of debate in the decades to follow.

Controlling women’s bodies: gender equity and family planning

The renewed interest in woman’s issues that took place in Mexico City during the 1970s was due to several factors particular to the country but also consistent with international developments in the field of women’s rights, population and

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153 For instance, records of a system of surveillance towards women activists and organizers in the 1960s begin in 1965, a year after the Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas was established. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Dirección de Seguridad Pública (DFS), Caja 1634-B, exp. 7-11, 1 November, 1965 - 2 March, 1979, Caja 1697-C, exp 10-13, 1977-1981. For more information on social repression in the second half of twentieth century see Dolores Térvizo, Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Adela Cedillo and Fernando Herrera (eds) Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War 1964-1982; and for the histories of the secret services in Mexico see Sergio Aguayo, La Charola.

154 Alan Knight uses this phrase to explain how "Mexicans" endorsed the democratic and reformist goals of the 1910 Revolution, but they took a cynical view of políticos whose policies contradicted those goals. See Alan Knight, "The Revolution is Dead Viva la Revolución" in LASA FORUM, Fall 2010; volume XLI; issue 4, 18-21.
development. Even before the IWY celebration and the re-emergence of the feminist movement, the increased enrollment of women in universities and their participation in social protests as well as a state campaign that promoted the use of contraceptives and chastity intensified the development of a critical mass awareness of the gender inequalities in Mexican society. These included the existence of double standards in state discourse with regards to women’s bodies and sexuality that, on the one hand, promoted family planning and, on the other hand, criminalized abortion. Hence, within the contours of the official city competing women’s roles began to emerge as the Mexican government aligned itself with international policies regarding population growth and women’s rights forcing a change in the traditional role conferred on women by the state and the Catholic Church — that of the loving mother often represented as the Virgin of Guadalupe, but always as the bearer of fertility in charge of populating and protecting the nation. In turn, family planning media campaigns that promoted the use of contraceptives and a more active role for women as mothers as well as reforms to the Mexican Constitution targeting women’s rights constituted an important political juncture for the strengthening of emergent feminist collectives.

The feminist collectives active in Mexico City in the 1970s were roughly divided into two ideological currents: liberal feminists, represented by such organizations as Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (MAS, 1971), and Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres (MNM, 1972); and social feminists, represented by La Revuelta (1976), Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer (MLM, 1976), Lucha Feminista (LF, 1976), Colectivo de Mujeres

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(1976) and Coalición de Mujeres Feministas (CMF, 1977). Despite these distinct ideological tendencies, two trends of feminism, what some have labeled as feminism of equity and feminism of difference, influenced the establishment and drove the demands of these collectives. The first trend demanded the equality of women in relation to men under the law in all spheres of economic, sexual and political life. The second trend emphasized the existence of sexual difference and the ways in which this difference acted as the source of inequality. All these groups identified violence against women and the decriminalization of abortion as their main concerns.

The year prior to the IWY celebration, president Echeverría’s government organized a series of hearings to launch a package of reforms to expand the rights of the female portion of the population who had obtained the right to vote in national elections in 1953. In these meetings members of some of the emerging feminist collectives voiced their opposition to the UN conference and Echeverría’s reforms, despite the fact that some governmental proposals did echo their demands. In general terms, feminist activists were in disagreement with the capitalist orientation of development that the conference espoused and understood the reforms to be symbolic gestures on the part of the government in order to gain legitimacy. Some activists were

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158 Ibid.

159 Ibid; Carmen Ramos Escandón, “Women’s Movements, Feminism and Mexican Politics”, 207 and Marta Lamas, *Feminismo en México*, 16.


concerned about the lack of consideration of women’s voices and the top-down approach in crafting such reforms. While several activists collaborated with the government, many others distrusted it and sought to be completely autonomous from the state, a strand of feminism that would be labeled *feminismo autónomo* (autonomous feminism). 162

The series of reforms proposed by Echeverría’s government integrated some feminist demands with a more conservative perspective. However, Congress did not pass most of them. The reforms included a plan for free distribution of contraceptives; the decriminalization of abortion; the removal of the term divorcee in women’s official documents; the elimination of the use of the preposition “de” (from, indicating belonging to) added to the last name of all married Mexican women; and the withdrawal of Melchor Ocampo’s epistle from the civil matrimony contract.163 Ocampo’s letter, written in the 1850s, describes women and men’s character and their respective roles in marriage. In the letter, a woman is expected to render obedience to her husband as an essential trait of the feminine character.

La mujer, cuyas principales dotes son la abnegación, la belleza, la compasión, la perspicacia y la ternura, debe dar y dará al marido obediencia, agradó y asistencia, consuelo y consejo, tratándolo siempre con la veneración que se debe a la persona que nos apoya y nos defiende, y con la delicadeza de quien no quiere exasperar la parte brusca, irritable y dura de sí mismo, propia de su carácter. 164

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162 Ibid., and Marta Lamas *Feminismo en México.*

163 Melchor Ocampo’s epistle has been read out loud and printed in the civil matrimony contract since 1859 as part of the reforms lead by president Benito Juárez. In 1974 several feminist collectives demanded the removal of Melchor Ocampo’s letter from the civil matrimony contract. Since then every March 8, discussions of its removal arise in the context of women’s day celebration. In 2007 the Mexican Senate began to ask state governors to remove the poem from the civil matrimony contract. See Ana Lau Jaiven, *La Nueva Ola*, 108; and Miguel Angel de Alba "Las Feministas Pedirán a LEA que se suprima la epístola de Melchor Ocampo" in *El Heraldo de Mexico*, June 3, 1975, AGN, DFIPS, Caja 1634-B Generalidades 1965-1981, Exp. 867, 186; and for current debates see ”Pide Senado a estos sustituir epístola de Melchor Ocampo" *El Universal*, 2 May, 2007; and ”Se eliminará la epístola de Melchor Ocampo del DF" *La Jornada*, March 7, 2013.

A woman, whose principal qualities are obedience, beauty, compassion, good judgment and tenderness has to give and should be committed to render obedience, kindness, assistance, counsel and comfort to her husband, the person who vehemently supports and defends her, with the care and sensibility of someone who does not wish to exasperate the brusque, irritable and harsh part of him, qualities deemed appropriate to his character.

In turn, a man is expected to use his sexual qualities, defined by his strength and bravery, to provide protection, food and direction to his woman, the most delicate, sensitive and refined creature.

This letter and its performative qualities, that is, its inclusion in the civil matrimony contract and its recitation during the civil ceremony, symbolizes and dictates the still current heteronormative roles for males and females sanctioned by Mexican liberal reformists since the nineteenth century. Similarly, the reforms to article 4 (the only reform passed by Congress) granted men and women equality on paper but continued to frame it through the prescriptive gender roles established in Ocampo’s letter. Article 4 of the Constitution begins by stating that men and women have equal juridical rights: “el varón y la mujer son iguales ante la ley” (women and men are equal

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165 Ibid.
before the law).  

It also gives individuals the right to choose how many children to rear:

_toda persona tiene derecho a decidir de manera libre, responsable e informada sobre el número y el espaciamiento de sus hijos._

Each individual has the right to freely choose how many children to have and the time difference between each pregnancy; this decision should be done in an informed and educated manner.

Despite this discursive freedom of choice, the article does not mention how it should be enacted and still entrusted women to be solely responsible for the family:

_“ésta protegerá la organización y el desarrollo de la familia”_ (woman shall protect the organization and development of the family). Thus the article effectively excluded men from day-to-day family responsibilities and continued to dictate appropriate masculine and feminine values. The wording of the article expresses the difficulties that aspirations for gender equity posed to the as yet unchanged traditional heteronormative gender roles, which exclude men from any role in rearing children and endowing women with all the responsibility. In spite of this, many feminists understood the modification to article 4 as an opportunity to demand the decriminalization of abortion as a way to exercise their right to freely decide how many children to have.

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166 The reforms were passed by congress on 31 December, 1974. "Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos", _Diario Oficial de la Federación_, Capítulo 1 de los Derechos Humanos y sus Garantías.

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

169 A group called _La Insurgencia Nacional de Mujeres_ proposed among other things that the article should clearly indicate that freedom to decide how many children should include the freedom of choice in matters of abortion. Another important issue was the modification of public school text to portray the historical role of women in relation to the predominance of male heroes. See “La iniciativa es un primer paso a la emancipación femenina. Proponene importantes medidas complementarias” in _El Dia_, 26 de Septiembre 1974.
By 1977, the core demands of feminist activists had evolved into three principal issues: 1) voluntary motherhood (signaling the right to sexual education, use of contraceptives and legal abortion), 2) the end of sexual violence and 3) the right to self-determination. In 1979, in the context of president José López Portillo’s (1976-1982) political reform that allowed the legalization of various left-leaning political parties, the Frente Nacional por la Liberación y Los Derechos de las Mujeres (FNALIDM, 1979), an alliance that united feminist collectives with leftist political parties, elaborated a project on voluntary motherhood legislation that revisited the issue and would present it to Congress by the end of the year. However, neither their demands nor their legislative proposal were well received by a mostly Catholic and conservative society ruled through patriarchal social, political and cultural structures.

Between 1971 and 1982 just as feminist collectives demanded the decriminalization of abortion, the government launched a national media campaign (through televised soap operas, radio, ads, short films, and posters) that promoted family planning. This vision was consistent with international policies that considered population growth as an impediment to development. The campaigns also responded to a shift in the Mexican government’s pronatalist policy to one that

170 Marta Lamas, Feminismo Transmisiones y Retransmisiones, 16; and "Por una Maternidad Libre y Gratuita" (flyer) AGN, IPS, Box 1634B Generalidades 1965-1985, 867.


172 Martha Zapata Galindo, Feminist Movements in Mexico.

173 The most well known product of this campaign was the soap opera Acompañame (1977) produced by Televisa under the direction of Miguel Sávido. For an analysis of the media campaigns see Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let’s Become Fewer".

174 Beginning with the UN’s 1965 International Conference on Population and Development in Belgrade population growth is considered as a global problem and population control programs are encouraged. See Elsa S. Guevara Villaseñor, ”Las Políticas Publicas de Salud".
supported family planning and contraceptive use. These campaigns effectively transferred the authority to determine how many children a couple could and should have from a religious platform to one governed by the dictates of the state.\textsuperscript{175} At this time, family planning was indispensable in the face of soaring population growth, particularly in Mexico City, due to the centralized model of development that attracted migrants from all over the country to the capital. While these campaigns promoted the more active participation of women, for the emergent generation of feminists the population campaigns revealed the government’s double standards on sexuality which, on the one hand, promoted the use of contraceptives and chastity while, on the other hand, criminalized abortion.\textsuperscript{176} Equally, this new power of decision bestowed upon women was not well received by the male population that, according to reports, complained about the emphasis on women’s control over family matters and urged a change toward a couple’s choice.\textsuperscript{177}

Despite these criticisms, these state sponsored media campaigns proposed alternatives to previous conceptions of women’s bodies and reproductive capacities from a signifier of fertility and a loving and virginal mother, to a body that needed to exercise sexual restraint and/or accept contraceptive methods (the Pill or intrauterine devices) in face of newly acquired civic responsibilities and national goals.\textsuperscript{178} Such

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175} Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let’s Become Fewer", 23.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Elsa S. Guevara Villaseñor, "Las Políticas Publicas de Salud" in Griselda Gutierrez Castañeda, \textit{Feminismo en México}.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Soto Laveaga notes that earlier campaign emphasis on women "Señora, usted decide si sale embarazada" (1976) were changed to "Family Plannings: It’s a couple choice" by 1978. See Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let’s Become Fewer", 25.
\item \textsuperscript{178} "According to information supplied by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, of the 2.6 million women of a certain fertile age who had sought treatment by the end of 1974, a total of 521,007 had accepted a form of family planning. Of these, 60% were using intrauterine devices, 25% were using oral contraceptives, 14% were using spermicidal, and 1% had surgery". Porras, A. \textit{Estudios de planificación familiar} [Family planning studies] (Mexico: Consejo Nacional de Población, 1975) cited in Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let’s Become Fewer," 23
\end{itemize}
responsibilities placed women's bodies at the center of a renewed modernization project that continued to entrust females with an important patriotic role, that of controlling population growth. Moreover, advances in birth control methods opened up the female reproductive system for public scrutiny. This public discussion about female sexuality through audio-visual technology (media campaigns) resonated, as I will discuss, with the explorations of the visual letradas and important changes in archetypical feminine roles portrayed in national films.\textsuperscript{179} However, this official discourse on women's reproductive system granted very limited political self-determination (difficult access to birth control methods and forced sterilization) to those who embodied a female body and, when it did so, it became a source of public indignation for the male population.\textsuperscript{180} The caveat here is that while indeed family planning should be a couple's choice, at the time (and still) those who define themselves as women have less legal, social and cultural rights and resources than those who define themselves as men in matters of reproduction rights.

\textit{La mujer en el arte or feminist art?}

As part of the cultural events of the IWY celebration three collective art exhibitions to extol women's creativity were organized by Echeverría's government in Mexico City, including La Mujer en la Plástica at the Palacio de Bellas Artes; La Mujer Como Creadora y Tema de Arte at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM); and Pintoras y Escultoras at the Polyforum de Arte Siqueiros.\textsuperscript{181} Many others were organized in different parts of the


\textsuperscript{180} Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Let's Become Fewer," 25.

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{La mujer en la plástica} was held at El Palacio de Bellas Artes during July and August 1975. \textit{La mujer como creadora y tema de arte} was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in June, 1975. In this exhibit 36 men participated along renowned Mexican women artists from various generations with work that depicted women as an object of representation. In August the show \textit{Pintoras y Escultoras en México} was
These women only exhibitions were not well received by many but they encouraged discussions on the conditions of Mexican women’s art and whether or not feminist art even existed in Mexico. For instance, while these exhibitions appeared to endow women with an equal participation in the arts, Mónica Mayer argues that the majority of participants were men; women were mostly the predominant subject matter rather than active participants. Moreover, the works and the curatorial objectives of these exhibitions were not concerned with questioning how images represented women. Consequently, various artists refused to participate. Renowned art critics voiced their disagreement at the objectives of these exhibits, which they perceived as prejudiced since boosting women’s creativity was, for many of them, an act of discrimination in and of itself as creativity is not gender biased. Yet, for others, this series of exhibitions, which showcased the work of more than 80 women artists from various generations, gave women great visibility by encouraging their recognition as protagonists of the Mexican artistic tradition.

Following these events, a year later in 1976, the most important government-sponsored art magazine in Mexico City, *Artes Visuales*, published a number dedicated to discussing the participation of women in the arts entitled “Women, Art and

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182 Art exhibitions extolling women’s creativity were organized all over the country in the context of IWY year. See “Arte en la Provincia” in *Excelsior*, Saturday, June 21, 1975.

183 *La mujer como creadora y tema de arte* was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in June, 1975. In this exhibit 36 men participated along renowned Mexican women artists from various generations with work that depicted women as an object of representation. In August the show *Pintoras y Escultoras en México* was held at *El Poliforum Siqueiros* and included 46 female artists. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.


185 Ibid.
Femininity.” The issue included a debate between Mexican artists and art critics regarding the relevance of being labeled a woman artist along with essays by prominent North American feminists. On the whole, the magazine introduced American contemporary feminist art practices to a Mexican audience.

Art historians, artists and critics responded to a series of questions posed by Carla Stellweg, editor of the magazine. The questions revolved around the relative nonexistence of women artists in comparison to the dominance of women as art historians and critics; on whether formal feminine qualities existed in the works of women artists; and on whether a critique of women’s conditions was present in works of art made by women.

While the objective of these questions was not to arrive at definite conclusions, but rather, to begin a discussion about the conditions of women artists in Mexico, they revealed the positions of leading intellectuals in the field. Most of the respondents agreed that artistic expression and creativity were universal and as such it was ludicrous to think that artistic expression had gender. Moreover, the development of style or the acknowledgment of the existence of a movement based solely on supposedly feminine qualities was not received with enthusiasm. For art critic Teresa del Conde feminine and masculine qualities in a work of art were not exclusive to the artist’s sex. For Conde masculinity and femininity were not fixed notions but rather a matter of degrees: “lo femenino y lo masculino son cosas de grado.”

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186 Museo de Arte Moderno, Artes Visuales. Una Seleccion Facsimilar: En Homenaje a Fernando Gamboa. (Mexico; CONACULTA, Museo de Arte Moderno, 2010) and “Mujeres /Arte/ Feminidad,” Artes Visuales, No. 9, Spring 1976.
187 The publication of this issue prompted Mónica Mayer to pursue feminist art studies at the Women’s Building in Los Angeles. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
188 “Mujeres /Arte/ Feminidad,” Artes Visuales, No. 9, Spring 1976.
189 Ibid, 18.
time, gender was not a category of analysis in fashion and mostly used interchangeably with sex, an interesting acknowledgment on how gender could be a matter of choice and a social construct seems to be at work in del Conde’s statement; however, her article fails to propose a critique of the dominant art system or the role she played as an art critic in maintaining its status quo. By failing to do so, she ignored the ways in which the work of women artists and critics was and is embedded in a social context in which notions of race, gender and class are questions that affect the value of a work of art or a career.

From a social art perspective, art historian Ida Rodríguez Prampolini placed emphasis on the root of the problem: the patriarchal and capitalist socioeconomic system that had turned art into a commodity.\textsuperscript{190} For her there was no use in speaking of a feminine and masculine problem without a change in social structures. With regards to feminine formal qualities in works of art, painters Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo were discussed through their affiliation with surrealism, a style that, according to Rita Eder, provided them more expressive freedoms with which to explore their subjectivities.\textsuperscript{191}

The difficult conditions that women faced in the art world or the role of art critics and historians in reproducing the patriarchal workings of the system were seldom directly addressed except for two notable contributions (interestingly, these contributions were done by artists and not critics). Ángela Gurría (b. 1929), a well-known sculptor, wrote about her fears and insecurities as she began to win prizes with her sculptures. Gurría described how critics and judges were surprised to learn that she

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{191} “Antología de una multientrevista” in Artes Visuales, No.9, 1976, 21-25.
was a woman when she showed up to pick up her prizes. Since she signed her sculptures as “A. Gurría” it was difficult to know whether she was male or female. Concurrently, fellow sculptor and art promoter Helen Escobedo (1934-2010) shared the ways in which she was able to divide her activities as mother, wife, artist and art manager in a successful manner suggesting that sexism existed in the eye of the beholder. While both sculptors were firmly against the idea of a feminine aesthetic, they addressed some of the difficulties that they encountered as women working in the arts, which was one of the chief concerns not only of those in Mexico but also of the then emergent feminist art movement around the world.

An interesting counterpoint to the views by leading Mexican artists and critics was provided by feminist US artists and critics, including Judy Chicago, Arlene Raven, Lucy Lippard and Charlotte Moser, also published in the issue of Artes Visuales. Their articles talked about the importance of developing an alternative corpus of theory and practice to the dominant cultural system and the role that art critics played in privileging men or women artists; they also presented several feminist art initiatives such as the establishment of the Women’s Art Building in Los Angeles and discussed the reception of several controversial feminist works.

192 Ibid, 21-22.
193 Ibid. The testimonies of Gurría and Escobedo are interesting since, as sculptors, they probably had to deal with the most masculine and closed field of production in the Mexican arts.
194 In 1971 Shapiro and Chicago established a feminist art program at the University of California in Valencia. The program was an all female environment with the purpose of promoting and supporting women’s creative development. See: “Zora entrevista a Judy Chicago y Arlene Raven” in Artes Visuales, No.9, 25-29; Lucy Lippard, “¿Porque separar el arte femenino?” in Artes Visuales, No.9, 1976, 31-36; Charlotte Mosser, “El Mundo Interior y Exterior del Movimiento Artístico Femenino” in Artes Visuales, No.9, 37-42.
195 The Women’s Art building in Los Angeles was established in 1973 as a result of the several years of feminist activity within the art world. It was a non-profit education and public art center focused on showcasing women’s art and developing art education programs with a gender focus. It espoused the dynamics of the ‘small group’ that consisted in establishing a space in which a collective discussion regarding women issues would take place and then a discussion of how to best represent visually would follow. Priority was given to content rather than to form, technique or discipline. It became one of the
This was by no means the first time that US feminist ideas were discussed in the Mexican media. In fact, many feminist scholars agree that the starting point of new wave feminism in Mexico was an article by Marta Acevedo published in the cultural magazine *Siempre!* in 1970. This article was a landmark in the discussion of feminist ideas in the Mexican media. In the article, Acevedo discussed issues debated by US feminists. According to Ana Lau Jaiven, the article caused such a stir that it resulted in the establishment of the first feminist group informed by North American and European feminist ideas, but with a sense of the particular realities of the Mexican context. This group became *Mujeres en Acción Solidaria* (MAS) and organized its first meeting at the Mother’s Monument in 1971 in an attempt to challenge the ways mass media represented motherhood.

One of the underlying differences between US and Mexican contributions to the issue of Artes Visuales was an awareness of how notions of class and economic access played a crucial role in the Mexican artistic scene. While not all the Mexican contributors discussed it, Maria Eugenia Vargas de Stavenhagen and Carla Stellweg both made note of it. Stellweg discussed how most recognized women artists up to that point in Mexico had a foreign last name (non-Spanish) or came from an upper class family and how this situation played a crucial role in smoothing the difficulties encountered in major centers of feminist art activity of the world and women from Mexico, Canada, Holland and Switzerland besides the United States studied there. It closed in 1991. One of the most controversial episodes dealing with feminist art took place in 1974, when Lynda Benglis appeared wearing only a pair of sunglasses with a giant latex dildo between her thighs in an ad for art magazine Art Forum advertising her upcoming show at a New York Gallery. The ad led to furious reactions from the editorial board of the magazine, which complained that the ad turned them into “prostitutes.” During the 1960s, the US based art magazine Art Forum played a crucial role in the US art market by bolstering prices and promoting the careers of a particular group of male artists. For more on the Women's Art Building see <http://womansbuilding.org/> accessed on May 12, 2011. For Lynda Benglis see Amy Newman Changing: *ArtForum* 1962-1974 (New York; Soho Press, 2002).


gaining access to and reproducing the dominant workings of the art system. For her part, Stavenhagen recounted how, in the traditional division of labor, the production of crafts had been mostly relegated to campesinas or indigenous communities. Despite the crucial role that crafts played in the development of high arts in Mexico, both as an aesthetic language and in the development of an artistic personae, the division between high and popular arts played a key part in casting the fields of cultural production in gendered terms, where high arts were usually a male activity while crafts were mostly a feminine one.

Most Mexican contributors to this issue of Artes Visuales acknowledged their position of privilege but did not recognize their role in reproducing the patriarchal workings of the art world. As many have noted, class-based analysis trumped the adoption of gender-based perspectives in Latin American until the late 1990s. This situation was not different in the art world where social art history and formalist analysis took precedence until recently.

Reforming the visual arts

Besides promoting women’s art, during his administration president Echeverría aggressively courted visual artists and intellectuals provoking enormous tensions in the cultural arena. These tensions would have important repercussions in transforming the

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198 Carla Stellweg, Artes Visuales, No. 9, 2.
199 Maria Eugenia Vargas de Stavenhagen, in Artes Visuales, No. 9, 6-7.
201 For a current condition of the state of Mexican feminist criticism in the arts see Karen Cordero e Inda Sáenz “introduction” in Crítica feminista en la Teoría e Historia del Arte, 5-16. Other recent Mexican publications on art and gender include Araceli Barbosa, Arte feminista en los ochenta en México: una perspectiva de género; Gladys Villegas M., La imagen femenina en artistas mexicanas contemporáneas: una perspectiva no androcéntrica. (Xalapa, Ver., México: Universidad Veracruzana, 2006); Laura García S., M-D1: desbordamientos de un periferia femenina. (México, D.F.: Sociedad Dokins, para los nuevas prácticas artísticas, 2008); Mónica Mayer, Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y performance en México.
role of the state in managing visual arts and material culture. For instance, by enforcing regulation on the ownership of valuable objects and artworks Echeverría’s reforms on cultural patrimony put a strain on the incipient development of a private art market in Mexico. To counter such regulations Echeverría courted visual artists by establishing the prestigious award Premio Nacional de Ciencias y Artes and a program that allowed the payment of taxes with art work. He also rehabilitated the estranged muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros with the inauguration of Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros. But most importantly he assured the artistic community that in Mexico official art did not exist and manifested his support for freedom of expression:

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la \text{ recreación intelectual no es objeto de consignas que emanen del Estado ni de presiones económicas. No se persigue a nadie. La libertad de expresión pública está autorizada para aquel que desee hacer conocer sus opiniones filosóficas, científicas, políticas o económicas.}\]

Intellectual creation is not a product of state ideology nor of economic pressures. No one is persecuted. Freedom of public expression is authorized to everyone who wishes to express philosophical, scientific, economical or political opinions.

This message was partially directed to an emergent generation of artists who had been radicalized by the 1968 student movement and that by 1973 began to establish art collectives and build links with diverse political organizations, later known as Los Grupos movement. These art collectives were varied in their composition (and

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203 David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), one of the three iconic figures of Mexican Muralism, was thrown in jail in 1959 for supporting a rail worker’s union strike and for his known opposition to the Mexican government. He was released in 1964 and soon after began working on the series of murals that constituted the Polyforum commissioned by the entrepreneur Manuel Suárez. The inauguration of the Polyforum Siqueiros in 1971 marked the welcoming back of Siqueiros into the official records of Mexican Art History.


205 As students of La Esmeralda or San Carlos (the two main art schools in Mexico City, the former belonging to the Secretary of Education, SEP, and the latter to the National University, UNAM), many students had organized the production of graphics for demonstrations, and taught other students on the use of reproduction technologies such as photocopies, mimeographs and stencils in order to facilitate the dissemination and production of information about the movement. This was a collective experience of
included visual artists, writers, film makers, play writers, communication experts, photographers) and had different approaches to aesthetic languages, ideas about collective experience and political militancy. They began to experiment with different technologies and aesthetic languages to contest traditional materials, values, venues and tactics of art. Many collectives embraced the use of photocopies, text, radio, and television. They also staged street actions and other kinds of ephemeral practices like street poetry.

Something that distinguished them from previous attempts of bringing art to everyday life and bringing everyday life to art was their regional and international focus. They were no longer concerned with a national framework, or in making art to construct a national identity, as were previous art movements. Some collectives promoted involvement with worker unions, community-based organization and urban neighborhoods while others abandoned the adherence to Left-wing class struggle radicalism for identity politics and yet others assumed a contemptuous approach with a mocking attitude against overtly political militancy and art institutions. 206 By addressing themes such as migration, police violence and state repression, many of these collectives aimed at confronting passersby with the violence of urban life and providing alternative means of communication in the face of mainstream media distortions. 207 According to some of its members, they were no longer interested in becoming famous individual artists. They preferred to be called “cultural workers” and

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206 Fondo “Grupo de los Setentas,” Centro Nacional de Investigación, documentación e información de artes plásticas, (CENIDIAP); Alvaro Vazquez Mantecón, Fondo Los Grupos, video recordings; and Cristina Hijar, Siete Grupos de Artistas Visuales de los Setentas; and Ruben Gallo “The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s.”

207 Ibid
attempted to change the parameters of art making while building links with local and international communities interested in social change. While several women, including some feminist activists, participated in such collectives, the recognition of women’s labor and living conditions, her depiction as a sexual object and her overall discrimination were not at the center of their demands. As they privileged a political perspective of class struggle, women’s issues were seen as secondary problems.

Overall, these self-defined cultural workers sought to position themselves as a block of resistance and change that would ultimately affect the mainstream parameters of art making, even though this meant changing the process from within the system. For instance, they participated in exhibitions sponsored by state institutions or sought economic support from them. In fact, the majority of Los Grupos collectives followed what Alberto Híjar, one of their ideologues, called affectar todo el proceso — a constant negotiation and confrontation with the state rather than adopting an oppositional strategy that negated its existence.

208 Ibid.
209 Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
210 Most studies on Los Grupos emphasize their quest for autonomy from state cultural institutions. Through my research I found out that while this aim drove their practices many, if not all, forged their careers through state institutions or through UNAM’s cultural platforms or a combination of both. A more thorough understanding of what this mythical "autonomy" entails is needed and a much more complex theorization of the differences or similarities with previous forms of "institutional critique" or search for autonomy in Mexico is also needed in order to contextualize and understand the practices of Los Grupos.

211 Several of collectives that belonged to Los Grupos movement had exhibitions in state art venues, including the gallery José María Velasco located in Tepito and Palacio de Bellas Artes. The other institutional venue that supported the emerging generation of artist in the 1970 was UNAM. Helen Escobedo was the curator of Museo Universitario de Arte y Ciencias (MUAC) and through such venue provided exhibition spaces for Los Grupos as well as international exhibitions of conceptual art. Guillermina Guadarrama, interview with the author, unpublished, August 26, 2009, CENIDIAP, Mexico City; and Guadarrama and Carlos Martínez "Una Galería de Arte en Tepito" in Abrevian Videos vol 1 (Mexico City; CENIDIAP, INBA, 2007)

212 In 1977 several Mexican art collectives’ members of Los Grupos participated in the X Bienial of Jóvenes en París with support of INBA. I asked Híjar, member of Taller de Investigación Plástica (TIP) and a staunching critic and victim of Echeverría’s dirty war, to explain their participation and the hostilities between Los Grupos and state institutions that sponsored their participation. He said "no llegamos al
This type of collaboration or relationship with state institutions is perhaps not surprising within the Mexican environment. The state has had a pivotal role in supporting the arts since the end of the 1910 Revolution. It is also not surprising that art making and politics should be intertwined. Although most of the time Art and Politics have been told as two separate stories in mainstream art history, in Mexico the legacy of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors (1922) and the political and aesthetic militancy of David Alfaro Siqueiros (and other of his and her contemporaries) has led in the opposite direction. Given this situation, to negate the existence of the state in cultural matters in Mexico, particularly in the visual arts, was almost impossible and also not completely desirable. Effectively cutting links to state institutions and bureaucracies could potentially hinder an artist’s rise to fame.

Following a post-revolutionary tradition, the state controlled —sometimes tacitly— a great number of art venues in which various artists and intellectuals held positions of power that allowed for significant career opportunities for many members of Los Grupos despite their attempts at being autonomous from state-sponsored institutions and bureaucracies and their denial of any individual career aspirations.

In sum, within the porous boundaries of the official city competing women’s roles and conceptualizations of the female body began to emerge as the Mexican

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213 The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors was part of the wealth of worker movements that emerged at the end of the official armed conflict in Mexico in the 1920s. They launched their manifesto against the candidacy of Plutarco Elias Calles. It was the first time in Mexico that artists and intellectuals established a syndicate of workers to conflate aesthetic and social action. The most known legacy of this group of artist was the magazine El Machete. Members of this Syndicate included: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Fermín Revueltas, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Germán Cueto and Carlos Merida, among many others. Alberto Hijar, Frentes, Coaliciones y Talleres. Grupos Visuales en Mexico en el Siglo XX. (México, D.F.: Casa Juan Pablos, Centro Cultural, 2007).
government aligned itself with international policies regarding population growth and women's rights. These policies forced a change in the traditional role conferred to women by the state and the Catholic Church. Family planning media campaigns and reforms to the Mexican Constitution targeting women's rights opened up the female body for public scrutiny as her traditional role as a fertile body was transformed to one that had to perform sexual restraint in order to control population growth. Such transformations in national discourse regarding female bodies and sexuality as well as women's roles in society constituted an important political juncture for the strengthening of emergent feminist collectives and competing feminist interest. The visual arts were not immune to these changes. Yet, while established and emerging groups with links to the official city did not open a space for feminist demands, the boundaries of the official city were, nonetheless, becoming increasingly defined by the reach of the media industries. And, in this, visual letradas would play a role. Just as Oscar Chavez's song altered the soundscapes of the city, visual letradas would, through television, film, on radio and in print, alter the mediascapes of the capital.
CHAPTER 2.

Map two: the media city

President Echeverría, aware of the significance that the promotion of cultural production had had in the construction of an image of national unity for national and international consumption in the past, fashioned himself as a populist leader by also supporting craft production and reviving Indigenismo. Media industries — particularly television and film — played a crucial role in such refashioning. Inspired by the 1930s post-Revolutionary and populist strategies of president Lázaro Cárdenas rather than by his immediate predecessors (Díaz Ordaz had promoted a cosmopolitan image of Mexico in preparation for the 1968 Olympics), Echeverría courted popular television and film actors to legitimize his populist schemes. For instance, during his campaign and his time in office, he hosted multiple Convivios Netamente Mexicanos (Truly Original Mexican Gatherings), massive events in which workers and campesinos mingled with popular media personalities like Cantinflas while they enjoyed mole poblano and listened to the never-ending discourses of a president wearing a Guayabera accompanied by his wife, María Esther Zuno, dressed as china poblana. The inclusion of Cantinflas in Echeverría’s truly Mexican gatherings signaled an awareness of the role that popular media personalities, and thus broadcasting media, had in distributing messages and influencing the development of national cohesion.

At the time, president Echeverría confronted a public polarized as to the role that the state should play in regulating and managing broadcasting media and the arts. Up until then, television and radio broadcasting, since their establishment, had been mostly in private hands whereas other cultural sectors, such as the visual arts, for example, had mostly been managed by state institutions. Film production, for its part,
had been managed through a combination of private and public investment in which the state played a mostly regulatory role.

By the end of the 1970s and as a result of a complicated series of political maneuverings and government reforms, three main actors were consolidated as promoters of broadcast media and the arts in Mexico City. The state, through existing government-sponsored cultural institutions like the Institute of Fine Arts (INBA, 1946) and established state-owned museum and galleries, had recently opened institutions such as television Canal 13 (1972); a series of parastatal companies that financed the production of films (CONACINE, CONACITE and CONACITE II, 1974-1975); as well as a film school (Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, CCC, 1975) and a national film archive (Cineteca Nacional, 1974). In 1973, the second actor, Televisa S.A de C.V., was consolidated as two private television broadcasting companies merged (Telesistema Mexicano and Television Independiente de México) to establish one of the largest and most influential media conglomerates on the American continent. And, finally, the third actor was Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM). Already by the 1970s UNAM was an established center in the production and promotion of culture in the capital city and an important site from where opposition to the government was articulated and student radicalism concocted. UNAM had a radio station (Radio UNAM, 1942), a film school (Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, 1963), several museums, galleries and theaters including Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes, and Casa del Lago and a closed network television production station, TV UNAM (1952), that began to broadcast on an open network in association with Televisa in 1976. All these spaces provided venues for aesthetic experimentation for the intellectual community, as well as for the emergent generations of visual letreadas.
Television broadcasting in 1970s Mexico

By the time Echeverría took office, several attempts to develop legislation to regulate the television sector had ended in backroom deals with private broadcasters in order to cover up footage that might prove the government’s responsibility in the 1968 student massacre.214 Echeverría set out to change the situation and early on in his campaign he declared plans to nationalize television broadcasting.215 This produced a media battle that polarized public opinion on the role of privately owned broadcasting and its mostly foreign, imperialistic and commercial programming that allegedly degraded the morals of the Mexican public.216 Cultural critics, government officials, business leaders and private citizens wrote numerous articles discussing the influence of television programming on children and youth. As elsewhere, debates over television's bad reputation as a technology that promoted laziness and hindered critical thinking (Monsivais' la caja idiota) were not novel, but in the early 1970s the publication of Para leer el Pato Donald, by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, a book that conceptualized television as a tool of US cultural imperialism, added a harsher tone to this criticism.217

214 Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, El Tigre. Emilio Azcarraga y su imperio Televisa (Mexico; Grijalbo, 2000); and Juan José Miró Vázquez, La Televisión y El Poder Político en México (México: Diana, 1997).

215 Juan José Miró Vázquez, La Televisión y El Poder Político en Mexico, 66.

216 As early as 1971 Echeverría’s government begins to revise the laws of Radio and Television broadcasting established in 1960. Debates over the educational purpose of television issue were abundantly addressed since the early beginnings of television broadcasting in Mexico. Already in 1957 Carlos Monsivais wrote a column for Excelsior titled "La Caja Idiota" that most famously would become a synonym for Televisa’s monopoly and its programming and an insurmountable paradigm for television studies in Mexico. See numerous press dippings in AGN, DFIPS, Caja 1339 B "Información General de los Estados"; Caja 1339A " Radio y Televisorion 1971"; Caja 1351B "Radio, TV y Prensa, 1972"; and Caja 1327A "Radio y Prena, 1975". For a history of educational television in Mexico see Perla Oliva Rodríguez, "La Televisión Educativa en México" in Apuntes para la historia de la Televisión en México, 309-335.

This conceptualization of television as an ideological tool of US imperialism became a useful justification to promote state interference in television programming; it also prompted public debates over the role of the state in cultural matters.\textsuperscript{218} For instance, an article published in \textit{El Universal} in 1971 accused \textit{Siempre en Domingo}, a contest and live musical show, and its host, Raúl Velasco, of being agents of a bad moral invasion that was penetrating Mexican homes.\textsuperscript{219} In December of that same year, Mario Bravo Ahuja, director or the ministry of Public Education (\textit{Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP}), asked the government to stop the broadcasting of \textit{Los Polivoces} and \textit{Los Beverly de Peralvillo}, popular comedy shows that were produced and broadcast, like \textit{Siempre en Domingo}, by privately-owned \textit{Telesistema Mexicano} (soon to be \textit{Televisa}, 1973).\textsuperscript{220}

Government officials supported state intervention in order to produce quality programming with the participation of intellectuals so as to avoid "official ideologies."\textsuperscript{221} Cultural critics and \textit{cronistas} such as Paco Ignacio Taibo and Luis Spota criticized Echeverría's double standard since, on the one hand, the government criticized private programming but, on the other hand, it didn't reinforce exiting quotas or finance the production of state programming. Instead, it continued to allow

\textsuperscript{218}The most well-known criticism of the interference of the state in cultural affairs is Octavio Paz, \textit{El Ogro Filantrópico: Historia y Política, 1971-1978} (México: Joaquín Mortiz Editores, 1979). Further, during his fifth presidential address Echeverría declared that the structures of INBA were no longer useful to the nation and launched a proposal to establish \textit{El Consejo Nacional de las Bellas Artes} (National Council for the Arts). His proposals were not well received by the intellectual sectors. For a review of debates ensued by such proposal see Carlos Monisváis, Hector Aguilar Camín and José Joaquín Blanco, "INBA, nada te debo INBA, nada te temo (notas sobre el estado y la política cultural) in \textit{La Cultura en México suplemento de Siempre!}, no. 691, May 7, 1975, vii–ix; and "Sobre el Consejo Nacional de las Artes", no. 691, May 7, 1975, xvi.

\textsuperscript{219} Others also blamed TV and Radio advertisements of alcohol as culprits of introducing bad habits to the Mexican population. José Montaño Oseguera, "Desastroza Invasión de Nuestros Hogares" \textit{El Universal}, November 29, 1971, AGN, DFIPS, Caja 1339A, 'Radio y Television'.

\textsuperscript{220} Lenorado Elias Calles, "La Televison una Necesidad Urgente", \textit{El Universal}, November 22, 1971, AGN, DFIPS, Caja 1339A, 'Radio y Television'.

\textsuperscript{221} Juan Cervera, "La TV y el Estado y El Estado y la TV" in \textit{Ovaciones}, January 11, 1972 in AGN, DIPS, Caja 1339B "Información General de los Estados".
unregulated use of broadcasting technology and the development of political alliances with private broadcasters. Others thought that rather than organizing shows for the aristocracies of Mexico City at *El Palacio de Bellas Artes* (the Palace of Fine Arts), INBA should produce cultural programming for television.

In fact, in 1947 when president Miguel Alemán established INBA, Carlos Chávez, its director, declared that one of the purposes of the institution was to produce cultural programming and use television as a broadcasting tool for national cultural productions. By the early 1970s it was clear that television had not fulfilled Chávez’s aspirations and that, to the contrary, the Alemán family had been instrumental in sustaining the commercial and private uses of the industry.

In 1970 Miguel Alemán Valdés, son of president Alemán, was hired by *Telesistema Mexicano* to establish and direct its news division after a falling out with the newspaper *Novedades*, up until then the main purveyor of news for the broadcasting company.

The establishment of *Telesistema Mexicano’s* (soon to be Televisa) news division was an important event that significantly transformed the mediascapes of the country.

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222 In 1969 the government of Díaz Ordaz had established *Red Federal de Televisión Mexicana*, a nation wide tv chain to produce public programming, and a quota of 12.5% of public programming in privately owned tv companies. According to many *Red Federal* never worked and the 12.5% was never reinforced. Luis Spota, "Picaporte" *El Heraldo de México*, January 2, 1972 ; Paco Ignacio Taibo "La Television y el Estado" *El Universal*, January 22, 1972, and "La Television Imaginada" in *El Universal* January 29, 1972 in AGN, DIPS, Caja 1339B "Información General de los Estados"; and Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *El Tigre*, 147.

223 Agustín Barrios Gomez, "La renuncia de Bueno".

224 In 1947 Chávez under instructions of president Alemán, send Salvador Novo and Guillermo González Camarena to study British, French and US television broadcasting models. It is well known that president Alemán followed and encouraged the private model of the United States rather than the state model of Britain. Perla Oliva Rodríguez, "La Televisión Educativa en México".


226 For an in depth analysis of Telesistema Mexicano’s news division and its relation with the state see Celeste González de Bustamante, "Muy Buenas Noches" *Mexico*. 99
at many levels. The production of news programming led to the consolidation of the most popular night prime time news program *24 Horas*, anchored by Jacobo Zabloudosky. It coincided with the transition from film to videotape that cut costs of production while facilitating the archiving—including the erasing—of news programs.227 Together with the advent of satellite communications, the use of video dramatically improved the speed and facilitated the transmission of live reports.228 In turn, the increased practice of live reporting opened up spaces for the participation of women as news reporters.229 But, most of all, the establishment of a news division, with the potential of becoming a threat to the government, ultimately turned into an important negotiating currency for lucrative arrangements that were beneficial for the government and for Televisa.

In this context and confronted with the looming merger of two independent broadcasting companies that would establish the media giant *Televisa S.A. de C.V* (1973), Echeverría began to propose reforms to existing broadcasting laws.230 In 1972

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227 Telesistema Mexicano used video technology to produce soap operas since the 1960 but it was not until the establishment of its news division that will begin to use it more widely. Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *El Tigre*, 79.

228 Satellite transmissions were inaugurated in Mexico with the broadcast of the 1968 Olympic games. Ibid, 142.

229 In 1950s not one female reporter had generated news content. In contrast, of the nine reporters who filed reports on September 15, 1970, at least four were women. Celeste González de Bustamante, "*Muy Buenas Noches*" *Mexico*, 200.

230 In 1972 the chamber of Deputies began to revise the existing Federal Law of Television and Radio. Amendments would be promulgated the following year on April 4 1973. Echeverría’s reforms on television broadcasting established classification scales for programming; aimed at reinforcing the already established 12.5% of state-produced content in exchange of tax revenue, and proposed to use a microwave network to bring radio and television to rural communities all over the country. They also demanded equilibrium between advertisement and programming: ads should not exceed 18% of transmission. The reforms also established a structure to look after the content of programming and according to some, during Echeverría’s administration there was practically no use of English language or Mexican offensive slang (*malas palabras*) on television. The reforms also included legislation that allowed political parties the use of 10 minutes or airtime every 15 days. See "Integró la Cámara de Diputados una Comisión Especial para revisar la Ley Federal Vigente de Radio y Television" in *Ovaciones*, July 18, 1972; and "La TV debe llegar a los pobres aunque no tengan capacidad de compra: SCT" in *El Sol de Mexico*, July 13 1972, in AGN,
Echeverría ordered the purchase of Canal 13, then owned by Francisco Aguirre. The company was located in downtown Mexico City on Mina Street in an area well known for its prostitution houses, *cantinas* and burlesque theaters such as *Teatro Blanquita* and the *King Kong* cabaret.231 The location of Canal 13 in such areas of the city contrasted with that of Televisa's studios in Chapultepec Avenue and San Angel, both prime locations in Mexico City (Fig. 1). Televisa's San Angel Studios filmed and produced soap operas and the Chapultepec venue, destroyed in the 1985 earthquake, was reserved for news programs. From these two different locations, Televisa's channels, with nation-wide broadcasting capacities and, Canal 13, with limited broadcasting capacities, launched mostly competing messages about the role of women in broadcasting and what cultural programming should look like. Canal 13 went on to produce a wide range of cultural and educational programming with the participation of renowned cronistas such as Carlos Monsiváis and Juan José Arreola.232 Soon after Televisa followed suit in order to win some leverage with regards to Echeverría's push for reforming the industry. And, as early as 1978, Televisa gained the support of the most respected Mexican intellectual of the time, Octavio Paz, who began to appear

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232 Canal 13 became the first state owned channel after twenty years of the establishment of television broadcasting technology in Mexico. Channel 11 existed since 1959, and while it was state owned and controlled by the Instituto Politécnico Nacional and thereby with very limited coverage in some areas of the metropolitan area of Mexico City. At the time of purchase Canal 13 only had coverage of 70% of the metropolitan area of Mexico City. By 1976 the channel begins to expand its broadcasting capacities reaching 383 cities in the country. Intellectuals that collaborated in Canal 13 programming included Juan José Arreola and Carlos Monsivais who appeared in several segments of the programs hosted by Jorge Saldaña, “Los Sábados con Saldaña”. Marta de La Lama y Felipe de La Lama, *El Canal 13: Vida Pasión y Obra. Apuntes para la Historia de la Television Publica en Mexico*. 

DFIPS, Caja 1604B "Generalidades 1974 a 1982", Exp 6-8; and Fernando Mejía Barquera "Television y Política" in *Apuntes hacia la historia de la television en México*.
regularly as part of its programming by the mid 1980s. However, perhaps one of the initial differences between Televisa and Canal 13 programming concerned the participation of women in broadcasting.

Women and television broadcasting in 1970s Mexico

By the 1970s the participation of women in television was mostly welcomed, but still posed some challenges for many women who aspired to work in the media. In a published memoir of people who worked at Canal 13, Laura Gámiz, also a presenter of La Barra Femenina and an anchor of the first all women news program, Las Doñas, on Canal 13, spoke about the resistance she encountered in this mostly male territory and the contradictory messages she received from her male colleagues who welcomed female participation but also felt threatened by it:

> el mundo de la locución en el Canal 13 siempre había sido de hombres. Algo flotaba en el ambiente como una sensación de intromisión, aunque el director apoyaba la creación de una planta de mujeres locutoras. Les causaba sorpresa, nos consideraban advenedizas, pero al mismo tiempo les daba gusto.

The role of anchoring in television programs had always been a masculine territory on Canal 13. Even though the directors supported the participation of women in broadcasting, something floated in the air, like a sense of intrusion. Our participation caused surprise to many, they considered us pushy, but at the same time they were pleased that we were there.

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233 Canal 13 and Televisa entered in a battle for the production of cultural programming a process chronicled by García Canclini through the example of the non-televised interview between Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz in 1978. Moreover, the two channels (and later on IMEVISION) would produce a generation of television personalities from all political spectrums, from Carmen Aristegui to Joaquín López Doriga, who still have influential personalities in Mexican media. For the exchange between Paz and Borges see García Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 101. For a list of the many personalities that passed through Canal 13, Televisa and IMEVISION, see de La Lama, El Canal 13.

234 For studies that look at the participation of women in Televisa see Celeste González de Bustamante, “Muy Buenas Noches” Mexico, Television and the Cold War and Sara Lovera “Feminismo y medios de comunicación” in Un Fantasma que recorre el siglo, 519-543.


236 Ibid.
The contradictory messages that Gámiz received from her male colleagues are also reflected in the title of the news show. *Las Doñas* refers to a group of older women whose marital status is unknown but who have certain social prestige. It is a multivalent and mostly derogatory term that refers to women who spend their time gossiping and preaching social norms. At the time a study on women and broadcasting indicated that viewers were ambivalent about females anchoring news shows. Viewers seemed to like female anchors because they appeared to be motherly and this made certain news content easier to deliver but, if there was something negative to report, female anchors could also appear to be scolding the audience. The title of *Las Doñas* played up on this ambivalence regarding the role of women as anchors, but also made a sarcastic reference that diminished the professionalism and the content of the news show.

Gámiz also recalls the attraction that women felt towards television, as many went to ask for jobs, but most of them had no education and could not speak properly; "they were only pretty looking", Gámiz reports. As both Lisa Gitelman and Christine Ehrick have argued, the performative and gender aspects of voice and speech were crucial elements that had shaped early twentieth century sound recording and radio broadcasting. Moreover, as Gitelman has also pointed out, new media —in this case

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237 Celeste González de Bustamante, "Muy Buenas Noches" Mexico, 200.
238 Ibid.
239 Marta de La Lama y Felipe de La Lama, El Canal 13: Vida Pasion y Obra, 5-6.
240 For a study that looks the history of radio in Argentina from a gendered perspective that considers practices of cross-dressing or radio transvestism (a man singing in a woman’s voice, or a woman adopting a man’s oratorical style) see Christine Ehrick, "Radio Transvestism and the Gendered Soundscape in Buenos Aires, 1930-1940s" in Alejandra Bronfman and Andrew Grant Wood, *Media, Sound & Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012) 18-36; For a study that looks at early sound recording technology in the US in particular and, media as subjects of historical inquiry more broadly from a perspective that considers not only producers and consumers but also the media’s materiality and its protocols see Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New. Media, History, and the Data of Culture.*
television broadcasting—emerges according to the practices of older media. According to Gámiz, many of those who aspired for a position in Canal 13 had had experiences in radio or in performance arts (theater), hence her emphasis on voice and ability to speak. However, despite the shared practices between media, in contrast to radio’s disembodied qualities that allowed separating the body’s aural and visual components, television broadcasts are a fully embodied performance. The overall audio-visual and visible performative qualities of television broadcasting offered women a different platform from which to explore different career options in which their physical looks would indeed play an important role. Within the following decades, as more women were appointed as news anchors or protagonists in telenovelas, television surpassed film and radio as the most powerful media through which female looks and fashion as well heteronormative gender roles were set out and contested while, in turn, the increased participation of women deeply shaped television broadcasting.

Despite Gamiz’s observations and her ambivalent reception on the part of male colleagues, in 1972 more than ten women began to work as presenters (anchorwomen) in Canal 13 and this number increased substantially across the industry in the following decades. Soon after, Canal 13 produced a series of programming devoted to women’s

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241 For Gitleman media are less points of "epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning." Lisa Gitleman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects" in Always Already New. Media, History, and the Data of Culture, 6 and 26.

242 The question of embodiment in media studies is a broad discussion with a long tradition. I tend to agree that all messages received are embodied in the sense that the receiver comprehends them with her full body regardless of the media used to transmit them. However, in this instance I do make a difference between radio and television due to the latter ability to disseminate images as well as sound. For discussion on radio as embodied see Christine Ehrick, "Radio Transvestism and the Gendered Soundscape in Buenos Aires, 1930-1940s"; and for a discussion on the disembodied qualities of voice see Kaja Silverman The Acoustic Mirror: The Female voice in psychoanalysis and cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1988).

243 Marta de La Lama y Felipe de La Lama, El Canal 13: Vida Pasion y Obra.
issues informed by a feminist perspective, such as *La Barra Femenina* and *A Brazo Partido* hosted by Marta de La Lama. De la Lama, a militant of the feminist collective MNM, went on to produce a series of programs that dealt with issues of gender and sexuality. By the mid 1980s Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante and Ana Victoria Jiménez participated in various editions of *A Brazo Partido* as well as other television programs produced by De La Lama to promote feminist art. For her part, De La Lama is not only credited with being the first woman to have appeared pregnant (full body shot) while conducting a program on national television but, in the 1990s, as the representative of the 1st District of Mexico City, she participated in the crafting of the first law against domestic violence in Mexico.

As mentioned earlier, Televisa also opened up its doors to women in broadcasting. In fact, many female reporters who joined the ranks of Canal 13 had been trained in private broadcasting media. This was the case of Patricia Berumen, who worked for *Telesistema Mexicano* and later produced programs that offered a space for discussion to feminist artists like Mónica Mayer. Many female reporters working for

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245 In 1979, the school of medicine at UNAM hosted the IV World Congress of Sexology and De La Lama was invited by a group of doctors to direct a program on sexology. The programs *Sex 7 y Sex o No Sex* began to air on channel 1. According to Claudia Hinojosa, a lesbian activists member of the collective *Lambda*, it was in the late 1970s when various feminist activists began to shed their heteronormative views on sex and accept a range of sexual practices available to women. Ibid; and Claudia Hinojosa "Gritos y Susurros" in Gutierrez Castañeda, *Feminismo en Mexico*, 178.

246 In 1987, Mónica Mayer and her two children were guests of *A Brazo Partido* to promote the performative action, *Madres!* by *Polvo de Gallina Negra* (PGN); a couple of months after Mayer produced a live performance in the same show and proposed a video sketch "*Un año de Madres: Las Madres tambien aman*" for de La Lama’s program on sexuality *Sex 7*. See "*Polvo de Gállina Curriculm Vitae*" in Mónica Mayer personal archive.

247 Roberto Rueda Monreal "Entrevista con Marta de la Lama. Una pionera del periodismo televisivo y política feminista."

the then *Telesistema Mexicano* are also credited with reporting events organized by new wave feminists in a mocking and defaming manner.249 Most of Televisa’s programming followed the official media discourse of the time that identified feminism as a threat to Mexican women.250 The majority of feminists agree that the lack of support and the mocking attitude they encountered in mainstream media outlets was one of the reasons that led them to open up their own spaces.251 However, despite its defaming views on feminism, Televisa produced the most popular Mexican female broadcaster. In 1974 Lolita Ayala began to co-anchor the evening prime time news program *24 Horas* along Jacobo Zabloudosky on Televisa’s channel 2.252 In 1987, she even hosted her own afternoon news program, *El Noticiero con Lolita Ayala*. Despite Ayala’s popularity and her important role in broadcasting, which perhaps inspired many women to reassess their career and life goals, she is also a symbol of Televisa’s well-known media distortions and conservative endorsement of women’s roles and social justice through corporate philanthropy.253 It was Guillermo Ochoa, anchor of Televisa’s most popular early morning news program, who opened a space for one of the most humorous and transgressive feminist performances in Mexico’s recent broadcasting history. In 1987, the self-declared feminist art collective, *Polvo de Gallina Negra*, established by Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante, appeared on Televisa’s *Nuestro Mundo* news set to

249 According to Sara Lovera, reporters working for Telesistema Mexicano and Televicentro including Rosa María Campos, Marcela Mendoza y Rita Ganen who regularly appeared in Jacobo Zabloudosky’s news program, followed official discourse against feminism. Sara Lovera, “Feminismo y medios de comunicación” in *Un Fantasma que recorre el siglo*, 529.  
250 Ibid.  
251 Ibid.  
artificially inseminate Ochoa and to transform him into a *Madre por un Día* (a mother for a day) (Fig. 4).254

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254 The performance was titled *Madre Por Un Dia Madre* and was part of the project *!Madres!* by the feminist collective established by Mayer and Bustamante called *Polvo de Gallina*. The project *!Madres!* which lasted almost two years and consisted of a series of events that explored the concept of motherhood. The project began when both artists were pregnant. It included a mail art project amongst the artistic community, a contest entitled *Una Carta a Mi Madre* in which the general public (Mexico city area) was invited to write a letter to their mother telling her everything they ever wish to tell her but hadn’t; a poetry reading; an exhibition by Mónica Mayer that explored the feminine archetypes in a romance novel; the birth of Bustamante’s second daughter, and finally their appearance in *Nuestro Mundo*. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
Nuestro Mundo aired on Univision, a network that reached audiences in the United States and some regions of Latin America and the process of making Ochoa pregnant turned the social order upside down and, through humor, invited his more than 200 million viewers to interrogate gender and sexual roles. In contrast, Ayala’s daily performance on television reinforced a female look and self-fashioning (her whiteness and moral standards) that spoke (and still does) to the racialization of beauty and the standards of permitted social behaviors that grant access to such coveted positions of power. For instance, every day Ayala’s desk was adorned with a fresh flower, a rose, symbolizing her femininity and delicate nature when delivering the daily news.

Echeverría’s reforms, alliances and animosities with Televisa did not appease public opinion; neither did the establishment of Canal 13. Likewise, Canal 13 was not the only space available for women in broadcasting. Still, the state owned channel did

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255 Madre Por Un Día, 1987 vhs, Mónica Mayer’s personal archive.
propose an alternative space to commercial television in Mexico. As the De La Lama experience suggests, state interference in television broadcasting opened up alternative spaces for the participation of women who slowly began to produce programming that discussed gender and sexuality issues in national broadcasting. In comparison, however, the welcoming of Bustamante and Mayer on Guillermo Ochoa’s program sheds some light on the creative freedoms allowed inside institutions and corporations that are ultimately composed and function through networks of social relations that, like the state, are not monolithic entities. So while Televisa’s productions and the corporation itself is one of the main bastions for the reproduction of conservative and mainstream views on gender relations in Mexico it is, also, on some rare occasions, a place of experimentation. Hence, by the mid-1980s both state and private television programs opened up spaces for the discussion of feminist art, gender and sexuality issues and for the presentation of different kinds of visual letradas.

**Video: from la caja idiota to la caja mágica.**

As debates over the role of television became prominent in the Mexican media, Pola Weiss began to explore both the experimental potential and non-commercial uses

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256 Canal 13 and Televisa entered in a battle for the production of cultural programming a process chronicled by Garcia Canclini through the example of the non-televised interview between Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz in 1978. Moreover, the two channels (and later on IMEVISION) would produce a generation of television personalities from all political spectrums, from Carmen Aristegui to Joaquín López Doriga, who still have influential personalities in Mexican media. For the exchange between Paz and Borges see García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 101. For a list of the many personalities that passed through Canal 13, Televsia and IMEVISION, see de La Lama, *El Canal 13*.

257 For more on the experience of women in Canal 13 see the testimonial of Laura Gámiz, Amanda Obregón and Dulce María Jiménez in Marta de La Lama y Felipe de La Lama, *El Canal 13*, 11-18.

258 Bustamante had appeared on Ochoa’s programming already in 1979 to announce her recently acquired copyright on the Taco, *La Patente del Taco*. She is also the sister of Andres Bustamante, a comedian best known as El Guiri Guiri, who in the 1970s worked for channel 11 and later on in IMMEVISION. In the 1970s she was a member of the art collective No Grupo. When I asked how she gained access to Ochoa, she explained that Ochoa called her after he read the print coverage of her work *El Patente del Taco*. Since then, they kept in contact and Ochoa was always eager to know what kind of work she was doing. For Bustamante the experience of appearing in Ochoa’s programs was an opportunity to put into practice her critique to the art establishment and goals of reaching wider and different audiences. See Maris Bustamente, interview with the author, unpublished, Mexico City, 10 August 2010.
of television broadcasting via the arrival of video, a relatively new technology in Mexico. In 1974 Pola Weiss, then a communication student and collaborator for both Canal 13 and Televisa, travelled to Europe to visit several broadcasting companies to research the artistic and experimental uses of television, including the BBC in England, VPRO in Holland, OFRATEME in France and RAI in Italy. In doing so she performed a trip that had already been accomplished in 1947 by writer Salvador Novo and Guillermo González Camarena, credited as the inventor of color televisión, under the orders of president Alemán to look for the best suitable model for television in Mexico. In 1970 Miguel Alemán Velasco undertook a similar trip under the orders of Emilio Azcarraga, director of Telesistema Mexicano (later on Televisa) to search for the best model of television news production. However, this time the research was entrusted to a woman, Pola Weiss. The model that she encountered was that of alternative uses of television broadcasting through the use of video technology. However, the model that she embraced, as I will discuss on Chapter 9 of this study, she found in New York in 1976, mostly through her own experimentation.

259 During the 1960s most video equipment was in the hands of private Television broadcasting companies and academic departments linked to UNAM. In the 1970s video equipment became available mostly through the black market, but it will only be in 1980s when it will be used more widely due to developments in the technology that made it more accessible and less expensive. The first video equipment arrived to Mexico in 1958 imported by Telesistema Mexicano (Ampex video recorder). In the early 1970s La Unidad de Televisión Educativa y Cultural de la UNAM also used video technology. Beginning in 1976 people in Mexico City could purchase videotapes, vcr's and video cameras on the black market and some electronic stores on the streets of Republica and El Salvador in downtown Mexico City. The prices ranged from 60,000 pesos in stores to 35 to 40,000 on the black market (fayuca). However, it would be until the mid 1980s when amateur video cameras became more accessible and more widely used. For more in the introduction of video technology to Mexico see Leticia Picazo Sánchez, Una década de Video en México. Dependencia extranjera y monopolies nacionales. (México; Editorial Trillas, 1991).

A year later, in 1975 Weiss proposed a project to investigate didactic uses of video in television for non-commercial purposes, a project that led her to obtain a bachelor’s degree in political science and communication. She argued that:

así como este orden visual ha sido utilizado para manipular la conciencia del hombre, así mismo este orden puede ser utilizado de manera opuesta, para desenajenarle, empleando los mismos medios de penetración ideológica, invirtiendo paulatinamente el sentido del mensaje, aprovechando al máximo el escaso margen que ofrecen algunas instituciones del sistema. 261

the visual order that has been mostly used to manipulate and alienate human consciousness, can be equally used in the opposite manner; to slowly invert the meaning of the messages by using the same means to eliminate the ideological alienation that such messages produce and by making an efficient use of the marginal spaces that are opened up by mainstream, academic and state media corporations.

While Weiss criticized the commercial and imperialistic uses of television, she also recognized the experimental and didactic capabilities that video could bring to television programming by working in collaboration with media corporations. A year later, through the establishment of her television production company artTV (1976) and her appointment as professor at the faculty of communication and journalism (1977), she began to champion alternative uses of video technology.262 For instance, Weiss supported and fought for the production of several video-theses.263 And, following the theories of Rudolph Arnheim, she argued for the recognition of audiovisual technology as a valid form of intellectual exploration vis–a–vis the

263 See for example Weiss comments to the thesis presented by Silvia Naranjo and Humberto Reyes in 1977 entitled “El Condicionamiento Mental a traves de las imagenes” Bachelors Degree Thesis for the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, UNAM, December, 1977.
predominance of the verbal and written focus of academia. Citing Arnheim she signed her approval of a thesis submitted in video:

"me vi abocada a afirmar que una persona que pinta, escribe, compone o danza (imagina o televisa) piensa con sus sentidos"

I advocate and affirm that a person who paints, writes, composes or dances (imagines or televises) thinks with all her senses.

Weiss's conceptualization of the social uses of video and of visual perception as a valid form of intellectual activity were in tune with the emergence of video art and theoretical developments on new technology elsewhere. The development of the hand held video camera (Sony Portapack) in the early 1960s had prompted the emergence of a network of international artists who began to experiment with the subversive potential of video technology and to advance the establishment of radical television collectives. As early as 1973, international video art exhibitions and festivals were being hosted in several Mexico City galleries. In 1973 the exhibition "Video Art Estética Visual," shown at the Museum of Modern Art and sponsored by the US embassy, introduced the work of various video innovators as well as several experimental television collectives active in the United States. In the essay for the exhibition Neil

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264 Arnheim applied the principles of Gestalt psychology to argue for visual perception as a form of thinking. Rudolph Arnheim, Visual Thinking (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

265 Silvia Naranjo and Humberto Reyes, El Condicionamiento Mental.


267 The exhibition took place from July 12 to August 12 and introduced the work of Stephen Beck and William Etra, both inventors of different video synthesizers. See Video Cinta de Vanguardia, VideoArt.
Hickey gave an account of the diverse ways in which independent artists, private foundations, universities, private and state owned television channels were fostering the experimentation of video and television broadcasting in the United States.\textsuperscript{268} In his review of the show, Juan Acha acknowledged the difficulty that video art posed to Latin American artists due to the high cost of the equipment but also noted that perhaps these kinds of experimentations could provide a solution to the commercial abuses of television broadcasting.\textsuperscript{269}

A year after, in 1974 Televisa hosted a conference to discuss the future of mass media communications with leading media theorist and philosophers including Marshall McLuhan and Umberto Eco.\textsuperscript{270} The conference was widely covered by the media and, besides introducing debates over the uses of television, the encounter also furthered the animosities between president Luis Echeverría and Televisa. Echeverría delivered a speech in which he made television and in particular private commercial television like Televisa responsible for distorting the moral values of Mexicans in favor of corporate interests.\textsuperscript{271} At the moment when both Televisa and Canal 13 were in competition to attract new talent and discussions over the future of the industry were the subject of public debate, the timing of both events cannot be taken lightly. Rather than reinforcing the perception that, due to the costs, Mexican publics and artists were not aware of debates and trends in international video art and/or media theory, these

\textsuperscript{268} Neil Hickey, "Notas Sobre el Video Subterranero" in \textit{Videocinta de Vanguardia}.

\textsuperscript{269} Juan Acha, “El arte del video tape encontra de la t.v.” in \textit{Diaroma Cultural de Excelsior} (n.d.); document number 000059; Fondo \textit{Margenes Conceptuales, La Era de la Discrepancia}; ARKEHIA, MUAC.

\textsuperscript{270} Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, \textit{El Tigre}, 196-197.

\textsuperscript{271} Lolita Ayala issued a response to Echeverría’s defamations by listing all the cultural and educational programs that aired and were produced by Televisa that was broadcasted to the nation via the news program \textit{24 Horas}. Ibid, 197.
two events—despite the particular interests that drove their organizers—introduced Mexico City-based artists to several experimental practices in video and broadcasting.

In spite of these antagonisms and competing interests, by the mid 1970s Mexico City was a node within a network of global discussions with regards to video and media theories, discussions that were equally sponsored by private and state institution as well as the UNAM. In 1977 Weiss participated in *IX Encuentro Internacional de Video* hosted at *Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil*, a joint state and privately-owned Mexico City venue, with a number of video artists from Canada, the US, Europe and South America. On the occasion of the *Encuentro*, Weiss also published an article in *Artes Visuales*, a state sponsored magazine. In *La TV TE VE* she argued for the consideration of video as an aesthetic language in and of itself and proposed artTV (experimental video programming broadcasted through television) as a way to distribute an alternative aesthetic and audiovisual language massively; by doing so, she proposed new parameters for thinking about television. Weiss also urged state cultural institutions to take video production more seriously. Some years later she would propose, as a counter to Monsivaís' *la caja idiota*, the *caja mágica*, a box that had the capacity to

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272 I will discuss this exhibition in the context of Weiss video production more fully on chapter 9 of this document. In 1977 the *IX Encuentro Internacional de Video* was hosted by *Museo Carrillo Gil* in Mexico City with the purpose of bringing video artists from South America, Europe, Asia and North America together. The Argentinian Jorge Glusberg organized it and the other Mexican video artist that participated was Miguel Ehrenberg. See *Artes Visuales*, no 17, Marzo-Mayo 1978.

273 *Artes Visuales* was a bilingual art magazine (English and Spanish) published in Mexico City by the Museum of Modern Art from 1973 to 1981 under the direction of Fernando Gamboa and Carla Stellweg. This magazine was the most important art publication of its time and played a crucial role in introducing international art movements and critics to Mexico City. It was also very criticized by the emergent generation of artists mainly for being the official art magazine of the state. Despite of this criticism the magazine made an effort to discuss the most important and critical issues of the moment including the condition of Latin American art, video art and performance art among others.

create different experiences that put human beings in touch with the "cosmic man," a sensorial being.  

Weiss’s experiments with video technology, along with the participation of feminist activists in Canal 13, began to shape two areas of action for the visual letrada: television broadcasting and video production. Moreover, Weiss provided a distinct view of televisual media from that espoused by leading Mexican leftist intellectuals such as Monsiváis. However, at the time, leading leftist intellectuals were not the only ones blind to Weiss’s views on video. Rather than seeing the potential of video as an art for the masses, many artists saw it, due to its cost, as a "lujosa bofetada para la mayoría de la población" (a luxurious slap in the face for the majorities).  

Video technology was expensive for most Mexicans. Moreover, the equipment was large and cumbersome and did not offer the portability or independence of super-8 film, for example. Unlike France or the US where feminist collectives used video technology as early as 1970, in Mexico this was not the case due to the high costs of the equipment and restrictive access to the technology. Weiss was able to pursue the use of video due to her connections with TV UNAM and Canal 13 as well as her middle class status that afforded her the means to invest and have access to such equipment. Some records indicate that while she was able to acquire her video equipment with the income she earned as a professor and her occasional work for the television industry, she always complained  

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275 Juan Garibay Mora, "El Video Arte, Superación de la Caja Idiota para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual"


277 It would be in the mid 1980s when amateur video cameras became more accessible and more widely used in Mexico. See Leticia Picazo Sánchez, Una década de Video en México. Dependencia extranjera y monopolios nacionales.

278 Stéphanie Jeanjean, "Disobidient Video in France in the 1970s: Video Production by Women’s Collectives" and Cecilia Dougherty, "Stories from a generation: Early video at the LA Woman’s Building".
about not being able to afford all the equipment she needed. It would not be until the 1980s when video technology replaced film partly because costs came down and video equipment became easier to manage. However, Weiss's early experiments as well as the series of international events organized in Mexico to discuss and exhibit new audiovisual technology located Mexico and Weiss as meaningful actors within an international geography of audiovisual experimentation; they position both as important additions to recent efforts at writing the history of the media as part of alternative cartographies and networks.

**Women behind the camera: competing approaches to politically committed film**

By the mid-1970s a vibrant experimental film movement was underway in Mexico, as elsewhere, that would offer another area of development for the visual letrada. At the same time, the mainstream film industry was in decay. Many saw the Mexican film industry as commercial, that is, “as empty, escapist and completely apart from the national entrails,” a situation that Echeverría used to promote the production of films that reflected the realities of the country. Recognizing the importance of film, President Echeverría, as part of his efforts to protect the cultural patrimony of the nation, established the Cineteca Nacional in 1974, a center for the preservation and exhibition of national films. To promote film production, Echeverría established a new film school, *El Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica*

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279 Salvador Mendíola and Hortensia Moreno et al, "El Ritual Amoroso de la Bruja Eléctrica"

280 For a review of Latin American cinema at the time see Martin, Michael T., *New Latin American Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).


282 The Cineteca consisted of two film theaters, an exhibition space, a library and bookstore as well as specialized storage for film archiving and preservation. In 1982 the building including almost 99% of the film archive were destroyed due to a fire. See Magadalena Acosta, "Dos décadas del incendio en la Cineteca" in *La Jornada*, March 23, 2002.
(CCC) and re-established the Banco Cinematográfico, which he had directed in the past, to finance films through three companies CONACINE, CONACITE y CONACITE II. He also assigned his brother Rodolfo to be director of the Banco Cinematográfico and established a “package” mode of film production where the film workers postponed their salaries until they could receive the benefits when the movies prospered.283

During Echeverría’s tenure, films that addressed poverty, class inequality and social repression, as well as sagas involving national heroes were encouraged. The production of such films gave the impression that Echeverría’s government was open to criticism. For instance, Canoa (dir. Felipe Cazals, 1975) tells the story the massacre of students perpetrated by conservative and Catholic sectors of the population in the town of San Miguel de la Canoa in the state of Puebla on September 14, 1968. 284 At the same time that Canoa was produced and shown in theaters (in Mexico and the rest of the world) information about the massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968 and the recently perpetrated Corpus Christi Massacre in 1971 by the paramilitary group Los Halcones, under Echeverría’s command, were completely silenced. Disputes over Echeverría’s involvement in this event and the still present memory and unresolved disagreements over his responsibility in the student massacre in Tlatelolco in 1968 led to serious hostilities between UNAM students and Echeverría which had a high point in the famous stoning of Echeverría —with bricks and bottles— when he visited UNAM in 1975.285

283 John Mraz, Looking for Mexico, 206.
By allowing the production of films that appeared to be critical and establishing a new film school Echeverría also aimed to construct a platform for many young filmmakers and to silence the growth of independent cinema and super8 collectives that had strengthened in the aftermath of 1968. The majority of these independent filmmakers came from *El Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinemátograficos* (CUEC), a film school affiliated with UNAM established in 1963.\(^{286}\) As early as 1960 an independent new wave of Mexican cinema known as *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* had begun to appear.\(^{287}\) Influenced by French New Wave Cinema, *Nuevo Cine* films were preoccupied with aesthetic considerations rather than with following the official cinema style, one that portrayed an idyllic version of the social and economic realities of the country and censured issues of sexuality, or the more commercial and populist films of *lucha libre* and *comedias rancheras*.\(^{288}\) Another major influence for the development of *Nuevo Cine* was the need to reform the film industry, something that came to fruition with Echeverría’s presidency but had begun to take shape during the 1960s. One of the main concerns was the structure of the film industry unions, which denied the participation of young filmmakers.\(^{289}\) To this end, in 1963 Luis Echeverría, as president of the *Banco

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\(^{286}\) CUEC was established by Manuel González Casanova who had organized several seminars on independent cinema in which trend of Latin American and independent cinema were discussed. *El Grito* (dir. López Arechete, 1970) was the most well known experimental film which suffered censorship. It was a documentary of the 1968 student movement. See Millán, *Derivas de un Cine Femenino*, 106-109.


\(^{288}\) Ibid.

\(^{289}\) One of the main concerns was the structure of the film industry unions, in particular that of STPC, which was in charge of *Estudios Churubusco* and the production of long-features which denied the participation of young filmmakers. Márgara Millán, *Derivas de un Cine Femenino*. 
Cinematográfico organized the first competition of experimental film.\textsuperscript{290} Throughout the 1960s various competitions were organized and a particular emphasis on experimental films shot in super8 began to emerge.

After experiencing the censorship of many films shot about the 1968 student massacre, many independent and young filmmakers began to counter these government-led competitions and in 1971 a group of cultural promoters linked to the Committee of Cultural Provocation of the School of Economics at UNAM (\textit{El Comite de Agitación Cultural de La Escuela de Economía de la UNAM}) organized a super8 experimental film contest.\textsuperscript{291} From this contest two main groups emerged, \textit{El Taller de Cine Experimental}, that declared itself to be independent from the film industry, particularly as Echeverría began to promote films such as \textit{Canoa}, and \textit{La Cooperativa de Cine Marginal}, self-proclaimed as marginal and against the film industry, which its members saw as an instrument of the state.\textsuperscript{292} In tune with the international development of Octavio Getino and Fernando Solana’s "third cinema" and Julio García Espinoza’s "\textit{cine imperfecto}," los marginales sought to use film as a communication tool to raise consciousness about social issues rather than to produce works of art.\textsuperscript{293}

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\item \textsuperscript{290} Jose Carlos Mendez “Hacia un cine politico: La Cooperativa de Cine Marginal” in \textit{La Cultura en México, Siempre!}, July 19, 1972
\item \textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{292} In fact one of the emergent groups had launched a manifesto entitled \textit{Ocho Milimetros contra Ocho Millones} to critic the 8 million production of \textit{Zapata} (dir. Felipe Cazals, 1970) financed by Echeverría. Álvaro Vázquez Mantecón, "Contracultura e Ideología en los Inicios del Cine Mexicano en Super 8" \item \textsuperscript{293} For the reception of Third Cinema and Cine Imperfecto in Mexico see José Carlos Mendes, \textit{Hacia un Cine Político}; and interview with Rosa Martha Fernández and David Arriaga with the author. For a recent study on the legacies of Third Cinema in Argentina see Jessica Sites Mor, \textit{Transitional Cinema. Political Filmmaking and the Argentine Left since 1968} (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012). For its reception in Latin America see Ana M. López, Towards a "Third" and "Imperfect" Cinema: A Theoretical and Historical Study of Filmmaking in Latin America. Thesis (Ph. D., University of Iowa, 1986). For general information on "Third Cinema" and "Cine Imperfecto" see Michael T. Martin (ed), \textit{New Latin American Cinema. Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations . Volume I.} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).
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The resurgence of the labor movement and rural organizations was also an important influence for the emergence of various politically inclined film collectives such as La Cooperativa.\textsuperscript{294} By 1972 this collective had been approached by two unions \textit{(Sindicato de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana, STERM, and Movimiento Sindical Ferrocarilero, MSF)} and, soon after, they began to produce visual \textit{comunicados} that were used as communication tools between worker unions and student groups to help raise consciousness of each other’s struggles.\textsuperscript{295} These films were shown at university and high school gatherings all over the country but also at worker union facilities. Young filmmakers and members of La Cooperativa attempted to provide an alternative source of information in the face of Televisa’s distortions and known alliances with the state. A great number of the members of La Cooperativa studied at CUEC. Others came from various fields in the humanities or had working class backgrounds and learned filmmaking and political organizing through La Cooperativa.

In 1972 Rosa Martha Fernández worked as a camerawoman with La Cooperativa filming a national workers’ demonstration by \textit{Medalla de Oro}, a mostly female textile workers’ union that marched from the city of Monterrey to Mexico City to demand

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\item \textsuperscript{294} Other politically inclined film collectives were \textit{Taller de Cine Octubre} and \textit{Grupo Tesitmonio}. Márgara Millán, \textit{Derivas de un cine femenino}, 112.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Jose Carlos Mendez, \textit{Hacia un cine politico}.
\end{itemize}
better wages and job security. As the marchers arrived in Mexico City, Fernández was detained and imprisoned while filming the demonstration.

Fernández’s experience provides an example of the roles available to some women and how such roles were intersected by other social factors. While Fernández acknowledges the existence of sexist attitudes towards women and a politics that privileged class struggle over feminist concerns in La Cooperativa, she was empowered by the fact that she was already a university professor and her salary allowed her to finance some projects and personal needs of other members of La Cooperativa. In a sarcastic tone she told me: "mantuve a uno que otro que acabo siendo súper maestro de la universidad" (I ended up feeding many members who are now well-known UNAM academics). Fernández’s self-recognition as a main provider of La Cooperativa both reinforces and inverts some traits of the supposedly masculine and feminine character described in Ocampo’s epistle; however, it also aligns Fernández with the experiences of many lower class working mothers who had to work to sustain their families, an experience in the rise of professional women such as Fernández herself. According to Rosa Marta Fernández, La Cooperativa was a semillero, a group that planted the seeds of political action and commitment in many of its participants who are now leaders in

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296 Between 1971 and 1972 there where various mostly female textile worker unions from companies such as Hilos Cadena, Rivetex, Medalla de Oro, as well as other independent unions from the shoe manufacturing and seamstress industries who marched from various states to Mexico City to demand better wages and job security. See Marta Acevedo, Marta Lamas and Ana Luisa Liguori, "México una bolsita de Cal por dos de Arena"; and Rosa Marta Fernández, interview with the author.

297 Demetrio Vallejo, a labor activist, leader of the railroad worker's union in the 1950s and founder of the Mexican Worker's Party (PMT) negotiated her release. Interview with Rosa Martha Fernández.

298 Rosa Marta Fernández, interview with the author.

299 Ibid.
their own fields, including feminist scholars and artists, as her own career path attests.300

Inspired by her experience in La Cooperativa, Fernández enrolled in CUEC in 1974 and, a year later, she established an all-women film collective Colectivo Cine Mujer along with the Brazilian-born Beatriz Mira and other CUEC students. Several feminist activists collaborated with Cine Mujer film productions, including Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez, as well as many young filmmakers who went on to establish individual careers in Mexico and abroad.301 From 1975 to 1985 Cine Mujer produced more than ten films dealing with such subjects as abortion, domestic work, sexual violence and rape, issues that were still taboo for the majority of Mexicans.302 I discuss the films in Chapter 8 of this dissertation; it is sufficient to say for at this point that Colectivo Cine-Mujer was the first collective of its kind in Mexico and their independent way of working was also meant as a criticism of the film industry itself.303

Colectivo Cine-Mujer developed a team of women who tackled all aspects of the film industry including production, content and distribution. Their films were shown through alternative networks of distribution and in marginal spaces such as women’s collectives around the country, university and high school forums and at informal

300 Ibid. Other members of La Cooperativa included Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Gabriel Retes and Armando Bartra.

301 A whole generation of women filmmakers collaborated in Cine-Mujer including for example María Novaro and Sonia Fritz, who moved to Puerto Rico to produce feminist films in the late 1980s. See Sonia Fritz testimony in "Annemarie Maier, Cine Mujer. Individualismo y Colectividad" in Lo Personal es Político: Feminismo y Documental (España, Gobierno de Navarra:Instituto Navarro de las Artes Audiovisuales y la Cinematografía, 2011), 100-132; and Elissa J. Rashkin, Women Filmmakers in Mexico: The Country of Which We Dream.


303 See Margará Millan, Derivas de un cine en femenino; and Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with the author.
gatherings, but also through established venues. In spite of the scathing reviews of their productions by the film establishment, in 1978 *Cosas de Mujeres* (dir. Rosa Martha Fernández, 1975-1978) was nominated for an *Ariel*. The collective also developed its own mechanisms of distribution in collaboration with UNAM and through the establishment of an independent distributor, ZAFRA. Not only did their films break with taboos in terms of content and production, but they also disrupted cinematic and generic conventions through which women had previously been represented.

During the 1970s the participation of women in the film industry had increased substantially. According to Márgara Millán, in 1970 there were around 24 women studying film at CUEC as opposed to two in the 1960s. By the mid 1980s, the majority of students at both film schools, CCC and CUEC, were women. In the early 1980s there were only two women recognized for their work as film directors, Matilde Landeta (1913-1999) and Marcela Fernández Violante (1941), a member of the first generation of film students at CUEC (1964). Fernández Violante produced her first feature film *De todos modos Juan te llamas* (1975), a critique of the Cristero War and the coming to power of the PRI, then controversial topics, under the auspices of UNAM and

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304 Márgara Millán, *Derivas de un Cine Femenino*, 115; and Rosa Martha Fernández, interview.

305 Ibid.

306 Earlier independent movements had already begun to contest normative gender roles. Movies like *Tajimara* (dir. Juan José Gurrola, 1965) represented sexual roles in a different light. Women appeared as having their own individual will and they no longer followed traditional representations as mothers, matriarchs or sexual objects. Moreover, an interest for showcasing women working within the state film industry also emerged in the context of the 1975 IWY. As I will discuss, a retrospective of the work Matilde Landeta, one of the first female directors working in Mexico from 1940-1950s, was organized and initiated her revival. At the same time, the work of director Marcela Fernández Violante began to take more prominence in the state sanctioned film industry. In this context *Cine-Mujer* can be seen as one of the many ways in which some visual and generic conventions of femininity began to be challenged through film. For more on Fernández Violante and Matilde Landeta see Jorge Ayala Blanco, *La Condicion del Cine Mexicano*; Elissa J. Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico* and Margara Millán, *Derivas de un cine femenino*; For a work that traces a break on the dual role of mother/prostitute in the 1970s Mexican film whether directed by male or females see Charles Ramirez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*.


308 Ibid.
Echeverría’s democratic opening. Matilde Landeta’s official recognition began in 1975, in the context of the UN’s IWY celebration when the recently opened Cineteca Nacional organized a series of film showings directed by women that included Landeta’s movies. Fernández Violante’s film practice (and Landeta’s career to a lesser extent) represent one of two distinct models opened for the participation of women in cinema and the production of politically committed films during the 1970s. Fernández Violante responded to a practice that, while espousing a political stance sanctioned by the government’s interests, managed to offer an alternative narrative on the role of the Catholic Church and the state. By proposing an alternative approach to politically committed film production, Colectivo Cine Mujer represents another model that was opened to the participation of women in cinema. Growing out of independent Latin American and Mexican practices of politically committed film, their audiovisual productions politicized the female body and, by doing so, broke with conventional forms of representation to propose an alternative approach to film production.

_La mujer liberada_

As Colectivo Cine Mujer began to film Cosas de Mujeres and Landeta’s work was being shown at Cineteca Nacional, the Mexican media also turned its attention to women’s issues. In preparation for UN’s IWY celebration the recently established Televisa organized a meeting with European and North American feminists that produced a series of exchanges with Mexican activists. During the IWY, Canal 13, already a state-

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309 For an analysis of Landeta’s and Fernández Violante’s films see Margara Millan, _Derivas de un cine femenino_.
310 Ibid, 99.
311 Ana Lau Jaiven, 108.
owned channel, broadcast a synthesis of the discussions that were taking place as part of the IWY every Saturday at 10:30 pm.312

Concurrently, the national press ran extensive coverage of the celebration and of parallel activities that showcased women's issues across the country. While many of the articles praised the event, many others criticized it as a political smoke screen that relegated the resolution of women's demands to a secondary level. One of the main criticisms, as Oscar Chávez's song tell us, centered on the designation of Pedro Ojeda Paullada as the president of the conference, a man who, at the time, also happened to be the Procurador General de la República (Attorney General) of president Luis Echeverría's cabinet. For Betty Friedan, feminist author and U.S. delegate, his designation was the kind of incongruity to be expected from “la tierra del machismo”.313 This criticism, as well as an extensive exposition of women's demands and feminist agendas, was already being addressed months prior to the event through well-established newspaper columns devoted to the discussion of women's issues, written by prominent members of various Mexican feminist collectives, including Rosa Martha Fernández.314

In La Mujer Mexicana y la Conciencia de la Opresión, an article published in the cultural supplement La Cultura en México in 1972, Fernández spoke about how the subordinate condition of Mexican women cut across class differences.315 She argued that, due to the dominant patriarchal structure that ruled over Mexican society which

313 Abelardo Villegas, “El Tutelaje Masculino. La Protesta Feminista” Excelsior, Lunes 23 de Junio 1975, pg.7-A
314 Rosa Martha Fernández interview with the author.
rendered the distinctions between women and men as biological and natural rather than as cultural constructs, women were subordinate to men across social classes. To back up her arguments she analyzed several advertisements that essentialized women's roles as submissive mothers and wives. In the same issue of La Cultura en México, Marta Acevedo and Cristina Laurel published an article on the origins of sexism in Mexico entitled Sobre el Sexismo Mexicano.316 These articles were framed by an array of advertisements that supported women's liberation, such as one sponsored by the Comisión Federal de Electricidad arguing that modern women owed their existence to electricity or an advertisement by Latino Americana de Cosméticos, a cosmetic company, that promoted women's liberation by prompting women to join their door-to-door sales team as a way to escape from family chores and responsibilities.317 According to Rosa Martha Fernández, the emergence of these feminist voices was welcomed by the intellectual elites, who were proud of finally acquiring a feminist discourse in Mexico.318 However, she also perceived this welcome as a form of cooptation that took the political edge away from the movement:

La intelectualidad de la izquierda estaban muy contentos de tener a sus feministas (sic). Como que les falta tener a sus feministas y se dieron cuenta que ya las tenían. Esto en parte favoreció, pero en parte también afectó mucho porque nos convertimos en sus consentidas y en cierta forma eso se convirtió en una forma de cooptación y la lucha ya no era tan combativa.319

Most leftist intellectuals were happy to have feminists. It seems that they realized that they needed to have some and suddenly they realized they had them. This situation favored the movement but because we

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316 Marta Acevedo "Sobre el Sexismo Mexicano. 1 Primeras Consideraciones" and Cristina Laurell "Sobre el Sexismo Mexicano. 2 La Ofensiva Patriarcal de la Mujer" in La Cultura en México, Siempre, no.563, July-December 1972, vii-x.i
317 Ibid.
318 Rosa Martha Fernández interview with the author.
319 Ibid.
became their “pets”, it tamed our struggles and ultimately was a kind of cooptation.

Another example of this mixed reception of feminism is palpable in sarcastic comments and humorous editorials about the IWY’s conference and women’s demands that flooded the media. These humorous responses reveal another layer of tensions provoked by the international event and the activities of feminist activists. In "El día de la invasión: La Mujer liberada," Jorge Ibargüengoitia describes his conversation with a taxi driver who shockingly recounts a conversation that he overheard between two conference delegates. One of the delegates said to the other that the use of the preposition “de” commonly added to the last name of married Mexican women indicated “property of.” Surprised by this interpretation the taxi driver told Ibargüengoitia:

¡Hágame el favor!, cuando todos sabemos que el ‘de’ en el apellido es lo único que hace honrada a una mujer. Es señal que ya escogió su vida, formó un hogar y es madre de una familia.  
For goodness’ sake! We all know that the preposition "of" used in the last name of a married woman is what gives her honor. It means that she already chosen her life, made a home and is a devoted mother to her family.

In fact, the removal of the preposition was one of the demands made by several of the Mexican feminist collectives and also part of Echeverría’s proposals.

Ibargüengoitia’s story (whether fictional or not) shows how both the IWY and the activities of feminist collectives, sometimes described as elitist endeavors without much of a popular following, powerfully transgressed the mores of common citizens. Most tellingly, the anecdote points to the important role that honor, always defined in terms of a women’s proper sexual behavior and a social virtue that only acquires value in

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320 Jorge Ibargüengoitia, “El día de la invasion. La mujer liberada” in Excelsior, 24, June, 1975, 7-A.
321 Ibid.
relation to masculinity, has had in defining gender relations in Mexico since the colonial period.  

In the aftermath of the IWY, the already significant participation of feminist writers in the press increased as various independent feminist publishing initiatives were launched, including La Revuelta (1976-1978), Cihuatl (1977) and Fem (1976-2005), the last of which would become one of the most influential feminist publications in Latin America. By 1976 there were more than 20 feminist activists working for established journals and newspapers and at least one radio program devoted to the discussion of women’s rights: Foro de la Mujer, hosted by Alaíde Foppa (also director of FEM magazine) through UNAM radio.

In sum, the media city provided a varied and rich platform from which visual letradas proposed alternative and competing roles for women and visual representations of female bodies. If by the end of the 1950s Mexican women held posts as ambassadors, magistrates, and high-level bureaucrats, during the 1970s women began to have more prominent roles as film directors, news-anchors and television producers. In these roles they powerfully influenced a transformation and development of new and existing regimes of media and visuality. In tune with feminists elsewhere who criticized the ways in which broadcasting media and film objectified

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322 The bibliography on this question is extensive. For a study on the concept of honor in Colonial Latin America see Johnson, Lyman L., and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera. The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); and for a study on honor in Modern Latin America see Sueann, Caulfield, Sarah C. Chambers, and Lara Putnam. Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin America (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

323 Sara Lovera, “Feminismo y Medios de Comunicación”, 529.

324 For instance Marta Lamas for El Universal, Angeles Mastreta for Últimas Noticias de Excelsior, Antonieta Rascón for Excelsiúr y Esperanza Brito for Novedades. Elena Urrutía El Sol, Sara Lovera, El Día. See Genoveva Flores Quintero, "Prensa Feminista 30 años de batallas por el espacio público."

325 In 1979, Griselda Álvarez Ponce de León, became the first women to be elected as a state governor. She was governor of the state of Colima from 1979-1983.
women's bodies, feminist activists in Mexico established independent media outlets and collectives. Yet others worked in mainstream media as well as in academic and governmental media outlets.

State and private media channels provided platforms of experimentation from which competing political female subjectivities emerged throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Martha De la Lama a feminist militant and anchor for feminist-minded television programming working for Canal 13, and Lolita Ayala an anchor for Televisa’s media distortions and manipulations, represent the two most opposite examples of the kinds of visual letradas that were fostered throughout these years. In between and outside the models that De La Lama and Ayala represent, interdisciplinary generations of media savvy visual letradas encountered each other and played a crucial role in feminizing the media city. Complicating the models established by De La Lama and Ayala is Guillermo Ochoa, a male anchor for Televisa who opened up his international newscast show to Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante’s experimental and transgressive televisual performances. Ochoa provides an example of the multiple actors and institutions as well as the important role that humour would play (which I will discuss at length in the following section) in opening up spaces for visual letradas in the media city. Pola Weiss offered yet another kind of visual letrada model. Like Mayer and Bustamante, Weiss also sought to use television as an artistic platform. In proposing a different framework to think about the uses of video and television broadcasting outside the dominant ideological battles that cast them as commercial and imperialistic technologies and collaborating both in state and private broadcasting institutions as well as working independently, Weiss forged a new avenue for political and artistic engagement in the media that would be influential in the decades to follow.
The film industry also provided an important stage for feminist minded visual letradas. Echeverría’s reforms to the film industry fostered the participation of women as film directors and, together with important international and national developments, promoted, in part, the establishment of Colectivo Cine Mujer. Cine Mujer was an important platform for the experimentation with distinct forms of representation and different parameter of politics in the arts. The politics espoused by the early films of Cine Mujer directed by Rosa Martha Fernández's were not in tune with the politically committed film traditions practiced in the Latin American region at the time. Hence, Fernández’s career path, much like Ana Victoria Jiménez’s path which I discuss in Section Two, are examples of the transformation in the political stands of some visual letradas who, like them, adapted their class-based politics for a perspective that incorporated women’s sexual and reproductive rights. In particular, Fernández’s career as filmmaker, activist and writer provides an important and poignant example of the kinds of interdisciplinary practices in which visual letradas engaged.
CHAPTER 3.

Map Three: the embodied city

On May 9, 1971, a group of 15 women gathered at the Monument to Mothers located in Jardín del Arte in Parque Sullivan, at the crossing of Reforma and Insurgentes Avenues in Mexico City (Fig. 3). They carried banners and distributed flyers and balloons with the question: "Somos Madres ¿Y qué más?" (We are mothers and what else?) printed on them (Fig. 5).

![Figure 5. "Protesta contra el mito de la madre" (1971) left
"Somos madres ¿y qué más?" (1971) right.
Courtesy of Ana Victoria Jiménez.](image)

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326 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author; and Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with the author.
The gathering was inspired by an article written by journalist Marta Acevedo published in *Siempre!* in September, 1970.\(^{327}\) In it, Acevedo described the experiences and tactics of the women’s movement in San Francisco, California, and rallied Latin American women to analyze their social condition and realize their creative potential:

> falta que cada mujer tome conciencia de sus potencialidades y demuestre su capacidad creadora no solo en la maternidad sino en todos los actos de su vida.\(^{328}\)

what’s needed is that each woman should become aware of her potential and demonstrate her creative capacity not only in maternity but in every act of her life.

After reading the article, Antonieta Rascón and Antonieta Zapiaín, also journalists, joined Acevedo and began to search for other women who, like them, would be interested in exploring the living conditions of Mexican women.\(^{329}\) They organized small meetings and interviewed various women about their experiences as mothers. They were joined by Nancy Cárdenas, a lesbian activist and theater director, Amparo Ochoa, a folk singer, and Elena Poniatowska, writer and journalist, as well as by some militants of the *Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas* (UNMM) including Ana Victoria Jiménez.\(^{330}\)

The idea of meeting at the Mother’s monument came about at the small gatherings organized by Acevedo, Zapiaín and Rascón. Their objective was to question women’s social roles and the ways mass media manipulated mother’s day celebrations and objectified women. These women were aware of the historical relation between the

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327 Marta Acevedo, “Nuestro Sueño esta en Escarpado Lugar.”

328 Ibid.

329 Marta Acevedo “ Lo volvería a elegir”in *Debate Feminista*, vol 786, October 1995, 4-15.

330 The UNMM was established in 1964 in order to unite a wide range of women organizations mostly affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party and the International Democratic Federation of Women. Ana Victoria Jiménez and Francisca Reyes Castellanos, *Sembradoras de Futuros. Memoria de la Unión Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas*, 111-165; and Marta Acevedo “ Lo volvería a elegir.”
institutionalization of Mother's Day as a national celebration in Mexico, on the one hand, and the fight for women's rights, on the other hand, and sought to rekindle this historical consciousness in the wake of a renewed international feminist movement and president Echeverría's democratic opening. The history of Mother's Day celebration in Mexico started in 1922, at a time when the recently established Revolutionary government of Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) embarked on major cultural and educational reforms; Mother's Day was established as a national holiday to discredit and silence the feminist movement that had emerged in the southern states of the country.331 Like elsewhere, these early feminists demanded suffrage rights, but they were also discussing birth control and the incorporation of sexual education in public school programs, two highly controversial issues that were not well received by conservative sectors of the population.332 The outrage caused by these discussions spilled to the national level and, to counter the assault to proper feminine values posed by them, journalist Rafael Alducín, then head of the newspaper Excelsior, launched a nation-wide campaign to establish Mother's Day.333 The Revolutionary government and the nation in general warmly received the proposal and, since then, Mother's Day has been celebrated every May 10th.

331 For a detailed discussion on the relation of the establishment of Mother's Day celebration and 1920s feminism see Marta Acevedo "10 de Mayo..." in Gutiérrez Castañeda, Feminismo en México, 39-51; and Carlos Martínez Asad in Marta Lamas and Marta Acevedo, 40 Años de Feminismo en México, Conferencia del feminismo en México, May 4, 2012, Mexico City, audio recordings.

332 Women feminists' leagues began to emerge in the states of Yucatán and Tabasco during the first decades of the 20th Century. In Yucatán the governments of Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) and Felipe Carillo Puerto (1922-1924) opened spaces for the discussion of women's emancipation. In 1916 a group of feminists organized the First Feminist Congress in 1916 and in its aftermath several feminist organizations were establishes (ligas feministas). In 1922 a manual of sexual education written by an American feminist nurse, Margaret Sanger, began to circulate through Yucatan's print media and schools, as part of a program of sexual education causing the outrage of many conservative sectors of the population. The discussion reached the federal level and was widely discussed in the newspaper Excelsior at a national level. Marta Acevedo "10 de Mayo..."

333 The reference to "propaganda grotesca" is in response to Margaret Sanger's bulletin. Ibid.
Like the institutionalization of Mother's Day, the construction of the Mother's monument, several years later, coincided with important political events and urban developments that placed women's role as mothers at the forefront of Mexico's modernization project. In 1948, at a time when the Catholic Church and state sought to reconcile with each other after a succession of revolutionary socialist and anti-Catholic administrations, the newspaper *Excelsior*, along with several Mexico City governmental institutions launched a call for proposals to construct a monument to honor Mexican Mothers. The monument, designed by architect José Villagrán and sculptor Luis Ortiz Monasterio, both representatives of the Mexican modernist school in their respective disciplines, was inaugurated in 1949 by president Miguel Alemán (1946-1952). During Alemán's tenure, as the PRI began to shed its socialist revolutionary rhetoric for a more conservative tone and to embrace capitalism, Mexico embarked on a modernization program financed in part as a result of the changing economic environment after World War II and the adoption of ISI. Part of this modernization program was visibly reflected in the architecture and urban planning of Mexico City where a considerable urban transformation took place led by the modernist urban designs of a new generation of architects. These architects embraced the use of concrete and the construction of high-density *multifamiliares* (housing complexes). The construction of the Mother's Monument was part of this modernization program whereby neighborhoods developed under Porfirio Díaz's tenure (1870-1910) following the French style architecture favored during his regime —such as Colonia San Rafael where the Mother's Monument is located— were transformed through the international modernist designs of Mario J. Pani, Luis Barragán and Mathias Goeritz.
The Mother’s monument consists of three sculptures carved in stone, with the central figure consisting of a woman with a long dress and a rebozo carrying a baby in her arms (Fig. 6). The central figure is meant to embody female values and representations that both the Mexican state and the Catholic Church traditionally conferred on women: la madre patria, the working mother and the indigenous virgin, representations that are constantly mobilized and promoted by various sectors of the population and the government in time of social crisis. The other two smaller figures that frame the central figure are a sculpture of a man in a writing position and a woman with a cornhusk on her hand, symbolizing education and fertility, two pillars of Mexico’s modernization project (Fig. 7). Under the central figure there is a plaque that reads: “A la que nos amó antes de conocernos” (to the one who loved us before knowing us) (Fig. 8).
Figure 6. "Mother's monument," public domain.
Figure 7. (2011). "Mother's monument." Detail views of main sculpture. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 8. (2011)."Mother’s monument." Detail of the plaque. Courtesy of the author.
Soon after its construction, the Mother's Monument became part of an official series of monuments located near and along the Reforma Avenue corridor, a place where official ceremonies take place and proper civic values are constantly re-inscribed and performed. Parque Sullivan and the Mother's Monument became popular gathering sites for all kinds of people. The park became known for its weekend art market, hence its popular name *Jardín del Arte* (art garden). The Mother's Monument became a cherished landmark nation-wide due to its popularization through hit movies like *Víctimas del Pecado* (Dir. Emilio, El Indio, Fernández, 1951). The appearance of the Mother's Monument in this and other movies served to propagate sanctioned feminine roles and to popularize the Monument as a national site in honor both of motherhood and as a shrine of redemption for fallen women, in the case of *Víctimas del Pecado*.334

The new generation of feminists that emerged in the 1970s contested both the cultural history and the sanctioned conceptions of motherhood embodied by both the monument and the Mother's Day celebration. By staging demonstrations at the Mother's Monument on Mother's Day, new wave feminists turned both into sites of enunciation enabling a process of change whereby the histories and meanings of the monument and the celebration would be continuously contested. In doing so, feminist activists actively collaborated in transforming the geographies of the city coinciding with another wave of urban transformations that took place in the area —the

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construction of two major transit networks and of high rises located in Tlatelolco, the latter becoming symbols of state repression rather than progress. As Acevedo, Rascón and Zapiaín recruited other women for their meeting, fears of gathering in public spaces in Mexico City were still present after the student massacre in 1968. In order to secure their safety they solicited permission from the authorities for congregating at the monument. Despite the fact that their petition was denied, which only added to the dread of many, fifteen women decided to show up to distribute flyers and propaganda. As it turned out, the denial of the permit to congregate at the Mother's Monument was caused not by a prohibition of public gatherings but because the monument was already booked for another event. Their meeting coincided with a delegation of candidates from the show Señorita México who had brought an offering to the monument in honor of all Mexican mothers. As a television crew filmed the performance of the señoritas, members of what would become the first feminist collective Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (MAS) took advantage of the situation and also spoke to the cameras. In the gathering the group grew from 15 to 150 and, as Marta Acevedo recalls, this was the first time the demands of this new generation of feminists were broadcast on national television.

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335 During the 1970s, Colonia San Rafael underwent major transformations due to the construction of Line 2 of the subway system and Circuito Interior, a major car thoroughfare, prompting many families to abandon the once middle class neighborhood and turning it into a predominantly commercial zone. Between 1960-1965 a series of high density housing projects, multifamiliares, known as Nonoalco-Tlatelolco were constructed at the Tlatelolco plaza, the site of the student massacre in 1968.

336 Nancy Cárdenas, theater director, and Amparo Ochoa, popular singer and song writer were in charge of organizing the music and theater performances of the meeting, however, neither one, showed up because they felt that the denial of the permit had to do still with the wave of repression unleashed after 1968. Marta Acevedo “Lo volvería a elegir.”

337 Antonieta Rascón, 40 años del Feminismo en Mexico.

338 Ana Lau Jaiven, 76-100; Ana Victoria Jiménez interview; Alba Elena Ávila G. “Maternidad Elegida: Recuerdos, ficciones y olvidos del movimiento feminista” in Cartografías del Feminismo, 247.
A year later, on June 1972, another more surreptitious event was organized at the entrance of Metro Insurgentes to protest against the Father’s day celebration.\footnote{There are different accounts of the date of this event, as happening in June 1971 or June 1972. Father’s Day celebration in Mexico is held on the third Sunday of the month of June hence according to Ana Victoria Jiménez in 1971 the meeting at Insurgentes Avenue took place 2 weeks after the Corpus Christi Massacre. See Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview by the author.} The Insurgentes subway station was inaugurated by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in 1969 and is located at the Insurgentes roundabout at the crossings of Chapultepec and Insurgentes Avenues (Fig.3). The modernist architectural design of the metro station by architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez represents the bell that father Miguel Hidalgo rang when he called the Insurgentes Army to fight for the independence from Spain in 1810.

This time, members of MAS constructed a torso of a man out of papier–mâché and hung it like a piñata at the entrance of the metro station for all passersby to see (Fig. 9). The figure was decorated with phrases alluding to fatherhood and its role in sustaining traditional masculine and feminine roles: Padre: ¡Libérate, liberando a tu mujer!, ¡Vale la pena ser padre, pero no vale ser madre! (Father: free yourself, by liberating your woman!; It is worth being a father but not a mother!) (Fig. 10). At a time when patriarchal values were being simultaneously attacked and violently reinforced in the streets of Mexico City, this group of women had the audacity to mock how historical symbols of masculinity and patriarchal values had not only silenced women's participation in History but also how normative gendered constructions were rallied around as signifiers of moral and civic behavior. The Insurgentes Metro Station —in and of itself a symbol of Mexico's path towards modernization and progress— honors symbols of patriotic masculinity (father Hidalgo, his bell and his army) that are constantly mobilized to sustain a patriarchal pantheon of historical heroes and civic mores. The papier-mâche man hung at the entrance of the metro station in
representation of the Father (Hidalgo, the father of Independent Mexico) was also deployed as a reminder of how a violent patriarchal state had turned the symbols of modernization into sites of violence. It accomplished this by serving as a gruesome reminder of the bodies of those students who had been killed during the Corpus Christi (June 10, 1971) and Tlatelolco massacres. However, simultaneously, as a trunk with no limbs, the piñata of a man, the Father, was represented as a dismembered body no longer able to mobilize its extremities in the face of an emergent civil society that would take to the streets in greater numbers to criticize the patriarchal order of things and, in doing so, explore new ways of imagining and experiencing an embodied citizenship.340

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340 The literature on embodied citizenship is extensive and the term is used interchangeably with cultural citizenship, mostly discussed as a broad range of everyday life activities through which diverse communities claim a space in society and eventually their rights. Citizenship is thus conceptualized as a process rather than as a legal category or a government issued document. Due to the importance that modern cities play in many Latin American countries, urban space is an important, if not the main site where diverse communities congregate to enunciate distinct and competing claims to citizenship. For recent studies that look at public performances, filmmaking and spontaneous forms of violence as claims to embodied citizenship in the Latin American region see Daniel M. Goldstein, Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Leslie L. Marsh, Brazilian Women’s Filmmaking. From Dictatorship to Democracy. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); and Emily Klein, “Spectacular Citizenship: Staging Latina Resistance through Urban Performances of Pain” in Frontiers: Journal of Women Studies, Vol 32, No.1 (2011), 102-12. For a recent study that looks at diverse public performances practices and how the modern city is implicated in producing forms of civic engagement see Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, eds., The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics and Everyday Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
Figure 9. Ana Victoria Jiménez, (1972). "Father's day demonstration." Insurgentes metro station, Mexico City. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 10. Ana Victoria Jiménez, (1972). "Father's day demonstration." Detail. Insurgentes metro station, Mexico City. Courtesy of the artist.
The two events organized by MAS, as with many public performances of dissent, formed part of a broad range of everyday life practices through which urban dwellers experienced the city. Such performances leave a mark on their audiences and actively shape a sense of self as embodied: gendered, racialized, sexualized and differentiated via social class. Hence, by embodied citizenship I refer to the ways in which public performances of dissent invite passersby and their audiences to imagine change and the terms through which change can be articulated while enabling the negotiation of competing ideas of community. Ultimately, public performances are in and of themselves claims to citizenship.

At stake for Mexican feminist activists during the 1970s was to bring issues of the private sphere into the public in order to articulate political claims that would ultimately redefine their status as citizens. These claims were based on both the discursive and material status of their bodies. Their multifaceted practices tackled both embodied encounters and the terms through which their bodies were discursively constructed by laws, social mores and images. The relation between the discursive and material status of their bodies was conceptualized as interconnected and dialogically produced, not as two separate realms. As Elizabeth Grosz has argued, the body is not only "a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves and skeletal structure, which are given a cohesive unity and form through the physical and social inscription of the body’s surface" but also "a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering and long term administration."\(^{341}\) The body becomes a human body when it is defined by "the limits of experience and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other and, ultimately, the Other (the language-and

\(^{341}\) Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 104.
rule-governed social order)."\(^\text{342}\) Moreover and useful for understanding the ways feminists' claims to an embodied citizenship surfaced and were shaped as they helped shaped urban space are also the ways in which Grosz understands the dialogical relation between the city and the body. For Grosz "the city provides the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies," what she refers to as an interface.\(^\text{343}\) The urban landscape is, according to Grosz, "the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced."\(^\text{344}\)

These two first meetings organized by MAS, along with Acevedo's article, were the catalysts for the emergence of what some have labelled as second wave feminism or neofeminismo in Mexico.\(^\text{345}\) In addition, these two events were also key moments in a wider process of transformation that began decades earlier: a process through which patriarchal values and established structures of power began to be questioned and attacked by Mexican civil society. This process responded to generational shifts and political and social transformations happening all over the world but were also particular to the Mexican context. Within this local context, the reemergence of feminism and, in particular, the presence of feminist militants in the streets of Mexico City, would play a crucial role in proposing alternative models of an embodied and engaged citizen. This engaged citizen followed a long tradition of street performances (protest, strikes, street art, picket lines). By placing emphasis on women's right to their

\(^{342}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{343}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{344}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{345}\text{For many new wave feminism indicates a continuation with formal political demands and legal equity such as the suffragist demands, in contrast neofeminismo is a neologism that indicates a new set of demands based on the rights of women to decide over the bodies. For debates with regards to the naming of 1970s feminism see Eli Bartra, “Tres décadas de neofeminismo en México” in Ana Lau Jaiven, Anna M. Fernández Poncela and Eli Bartra, Feminismo en México, Ayer y Hoy, 45-81.}\)
own bodies, this claim to citizenship differentiated itself from this tradition. In doing so, the performative practices of second wave feminists made visible the ways gender and sexuality intersected and served as crucial aspects of any claims to citizenship.

*La (re)cámara de diputados*: the personal turns political

In the aftermath of these two initial meetings organized by MAS, as Antonieta Rascón recalls, feminists were courted from all sides of the political spectrum.346 Concurrently, some established media outlets like *Siempre!* opened a space for this new generation of feminists to voice their opinions.347 By the end of 1972 another collective, the *Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres* (MNM), was established by Esperanza Brito de Martí along with other women working in broadcasting and print media industries such as Martha de la Lama. Ana Victoria Jiménez also joined this group.

Within the following decades, as differences of opinion between activists led to the establishment of other collectives, the founding members of MAS and MNM became the most-well known feminist activists in Mexico.348 While some activists participated

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346 Antonieta Rascón, *40 años de feminismo*.

347 Another important that further inspired many to join consciousness-raising small groups was a meeting held in 1972 on the occasion of Susan Sontag’s visit to Mexico City and Cuernavaca to participate in various public discussions and dialogues with leading male intellectuals of the Mexican Left. Sontag discussed women’s liberation and US feminism with Carlos Monivais, Tomas Segovia and Juan José Arreola. See Elena Urrutia "Una Búsqueda de identidad y sus derroteros" in Roland Forgues, *Mujer, creación y problemas de identidad en América Latina* (Mérida, Venezuela: Universidad de los Andes, Consejo de Publicaciones, 1999) 426-432.

348 During the early 1970s MAS was well known in Mexico City and in other regions of the country. Several members of MAS decided to join women’s workers struggles in the textile industry developing in other states (*Rivetex* and *Hilos Cadena* in Morelos and *Medalla de Oro* in Monterrey). Others began to organize conferences in other regions of the country including Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Morelia, Guanajuato, Jalapa and Chihuahua. Yet other members published articles in national media, organized conferences and established the project *Casa de la Mujer*, a short-lived daycare and support group for feminist militants and working women in Mexico City. Soon differences of opinion and strategy (particularly about the kind of relation the collectives should have with governmental institutions) emerged amongst its members and, in 1974, a small group of women who separated from MAS established *Movimiento de la Liberación de la Mujer* (MLM). As their demands became more centered in the legalization of abortion and criminalization of sexual and domestic violence, many venues that were initially opened, in particular, political and labor organizations, were not so welcoming to their demands. In contrast to some members of MAS and MLM, members of MNM would work more closely with governmental institutions to promote reforms. See Marta Acevedo, Marta Lamas and Ana Luisa Liguri,
in both collectives, the main difference between the two resided in their members’ willingness to collaborate or not collaborate with the state and over whether or not to integrate other women’s movements into their collective efforts. As their demands became more centered on the legalization of abortion and criminalization of sexual and domestic violence, many venues that were initially opened, in particular, political and labor organizations, were not so welcoming.349 The decision to collaborate or not with the government would become a contentious issue amongst feminist activists. This difference would, to a large extent, shape the development of the feminist movement and the ways its histories have been written. However, rather than tracing the histories of alliances and antagonisms between activists I concentrate on their joint efforts and the effects of their practices that led to the feminization of the urban space.

In the context of Echeverría's program of reforms and the looming celebration of IWY, several members of MAS and MNM worked as consultants for government agencies to discuss reforms to the Civic Code and Labor Laws of the Mexican Constitution resulting in further polarization amongst feminists and between feminists and the government since, as mentioned earlier, most of their demands were not passed by Congress. 350 However, the media coverage of the meetings between women’s organizations with members of Congress and Mario Moya Placencia, Secretary of


349 Antonieta Rascón, 40 Años de Feminismo.

350 See MAS,(Dulce Maria Pascual, Rocío Peraza, Antonieta Rascón and Rosalinda Tovar),"Un Punto de Vista Sobre las Reformas a los articulos 4 y 5 de la constitucion. Hacia la dualidad”; and "Hoy de las 10:35 a las 13:25 horas, con una audiencia de 200 mujeres se llevó acabo el Segundo día de audiencias públicas, en el salon de actos de la gran commission."
Interior, shed light on the ways the presence of women demanding their right to self representation altered Mexico cityscapes. Moreover, as Michael Warner points out, the media attention to feminist activity called certain publics into being. That is, "media and their publics coevolve". In conjunction with the increased presence of women in the streets, the media attention given to women's issues during this decade developed publics that were both receptive and critical to feminist demands and creating spaces for the emergence of counter publics.

On October 30, 1974, the cover of the magazine *Siempre!* was illustrated by a mostly black and white cartoon of the façade of the Chamber of Deputies, then located on the corner of Donceles and Allende Streets in the historic downtown of Mexico City (Fig. 3). On the cover, the left side of the façade of the building is depicted as being taken over by a group of colorful women including a woman with an Afro hair style, a posh lady, an oversized indigenous woman with no front teeth, a white short-haired woman with intellectual glasses and a well-endowed female wearing only underwear (Fig. 11). The group of women carried on their shoulders a heavily-built woman wearing only panties and bra. The heavy woman is depicted placing a sign with the letter "RE" printed on top of the entrance sign of the Chamber of Deputies, transforming "La Cámara de Diputados" into "La Recámara de Diputados." The illustration sarcastically played off of official media views that rendered feminist militants as a small group of unattractive angry women who were a threat to the majority of Mexican women. But the cartoon on the cover of *Siempre!* also anticipated the mass presence

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353 Sara Lovera, "Feminismo y medios de comunicación" in *Un Fantasma que recorre el siglo*. 
of women about to take over the streets of Mexico City during the IWY celebration and its aftermath.

The IWY celebration prompted the establishment of more feminist collectives and their return to the streets, hence the illustration which, although in a sarcastic and
demeaning tone, rightly points to a transformation of urban space in Mexico City. Moreover, by turning the sacred temple of the deputies into a bedroom (a recámara), the cartoonist depicted an ongoing process of change in the urban space of the capital city predicting a transformation of the terms of debate with regards to women's rights that effectively placed topics deemed as private at the center of the public agenda. The cámara was feminized as it was turned into a recámara and, through this process, the masculine temple of law would be opened to discussions on sexual and domestic violence, gender equity and sexual difference and other themes that, while still taboo and treated with high doses of sarcasm and violence, would become more openly discussed in the decades to follow.

Fed-up women and beauty pageants: unacknowledged legacies in mexican theater and performance

In the aftermath of the IWY celebration and in spite the differences amongst feminists, more collectives, broader coalitions and exchanges with feminists from other nations were established. In 1975, several members of MLM decided to establish La Revuelta, with the purpose of communicating their demands to wider audiences through different means. In order to do so, members of La Revuelta would concentrate their efforts on the publication of a periodical by the same name (1976-1978) and on the organization of street theater performances. As a result feminist demonstrations became livelier as many other militants also began to perform songs during their gatherings.354

On May 10, 1976 more than fifty women gathered around the Mother's Monument in Mexico City singing in chorus:

354 Most famously were the performances of Las Leonas, a group of music lead by Marta Lamas. Amparo Ochoa also performed in various feminist events. Interview with Ana Victoria Jiménez and various document in AGN, DFIPS, "Caja 1634-B Generalidades 1965-1981"
ya estamos hartas de tanto abortar, corriendo el riesgo de que nos puedan matar, nuestro cuerpo es nuestra propiedad y por eso juntas vamos a luchar.  

we are fed up of having illegal abortion that put our health in risk, our body is our property and thus together we will fight to defend our rights.

At the monument the women staged a theatrical farce entitled “Women’s Oppression” (La Opresión de la Mujer) that ridiculed how the military, the Catholic Church, the government and the advertisement industry oppressed women by dictating supposedly proper feminine values, virtues and looks. According to a newspaper report the audience included several passersby and members of the Mexican Party of Art Workers (Partido Mexicano de Los Trabajadores del Arte) who joined in the singing and watched the play attentively along with fifty female university students who were reported to be wearing jeans and shirts without brassieres.

Members of La Revuelta carried several large cartoon figures representing a soldier, a priest, a drunk man, an adman, a politician, an intellectual and a hippie, while another woman lay on the floor in protest against the male archetypes represented by the cartoon figures (Fig.12).

From her prone position, the woman denounced in a high-pitched voice (shouting) through a loud speaker how each male figure oppressed the female portion of the population.


356 “Las Liberadas se burlan de la madre Abnegada ante el Monumento a la Madre”, El Universal, 10 May, 1976 in (AGN), (IPS), Box 1634-B, Generalidades, file 8, 207-208.

357 Ibid. It is not clear if it actually refers to the Alianza de Trabajadores del Arte who might have joined, Heberto Castillo’s Partido Mexicano de Trabajadores or to the Partido Mexicano de Trabajadores.

358 “Las Liberadas se burlan de la madre Abnegada ante el Monumento a la Madre”

359 Ibid.
In this performance masculine and feminine roles were essentialized. The use of stereotypical roles was an expedient melodramatic resource that allowed feminist activists to elicit an immediate response from the audience with the least amount of information.\textsuperscript{360} By placing those stereotypical icons of masculinity and femininity in an urban public setting, feminist militants invited their audiences to imagine new ways not only of engaging in civic life but also of interrogating established gender roles. While a woman in a lying down position represents the feminine role, a role that could potentially reinforce passivity, the act of shouting and denouncing avoids the pitfalls of

\textsuperscript{360} At the time, feminist's activist elsewhere also resorted to agitprop strategies to communicate their demands via street plays or spontaneous street events. Agitprop has its origin in the Russian avant-garde, Jan Cohen Cruz defines agitprop as one of the many approaches to street theater that attempts to mobilize people around partisan points of view that have been simplified to capture by passers' attention directly or by way of the media. See Jan Cohen-Cruz, ed., "Introduction" in Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology. (London: Routledge, 1998) 4-5.
victimhood. The voice of the woman is the main character in the play. It is a voice that enunciates and articulates forms of oppression in public. Moreover, as we can see from the images, the woman also seen to be standing and even moving in a self-assured manner in between the characters (Fig. 13) The play thus encouraged passersby to enact and demand their rights and to interrogate whether they understood traditional gender roles as forms of oppression.

**Figure 13.** Ana Victoria Jiménez (1976). "La opresión de la mujer" (women in between the military and the priest). La Revuelta, mother’s monument, Mexico City. Courtesy of the artist.
The song ¡Estamos Hartas! (We are fed up, Stiamo Stuffi in Italian) was written by Italian feminists and had arrived in Mexico via exchanges and the travels of several activists. In Mexico ¡Estamos Hartas! was re-performed on several occasions throughout the seventies and, in the process, would be adapted to the local context. Just as, in 1971, the article by Marta Acevedo describing the experiences of US feminists had been an inspiration for the establishment of small conscious-raising groups and feminist collectives, the influx of Italian feminist experiences and practices injected new energy into the Mexican movement.

Also in 1976 a coalition of more than four collectives including La Revuelta joined forces to establish Coalición de Mujeres Feministas (CMF). CMF organized yearly campaigns to raise awareness on abortion and promote its decriminalization (Jornadas Nacionales Sobre por el Aborto Libre y Gratuito, 1976-1979). The national campaigns to promote the decriminalization of abortion consisted of a variety of events including the presentation of books, films and publications authored by feminist militants.

Feminist militants were quite aware of the power of media. Many had careers as

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361 There are several accounts of how the Italian song arrived to Mexico and when it was performed for the first time. According to Marta Lamas and Dora Cardaci, the song was first performed on 8 March 1975 at a feminist even organized by MLM in Casa del Lago. According to photographs taken by Ana Victoria Jiménez published in a book by Eli Bartra the date of the staging at Casa del Lago took place in 1976. What they all agree in is that the song and the play were performed several times at diverse gatherings. Mexican feminists borrowed the concept of “maternidad voluntaria”(roughly translated as a freedom to decide the terms in which to become a mother) from the Italian feminist movement. See Eli Bartra, interview with the author, unpublished, Mexico City, July 30, 2011. For an account of the relation between Italian and Mexican feminism see Dora Cardaci and Marta Lamas “Dossier: El Feminismo en Italia” in Debate Feminista 1, no.2, (1990); 29-33.; and Marta Lamas, Política y Reproduccion. Aborto: La Frontera del Derecho a Decidir (Mexico: Plaza y Janes, 2001), 120.

362 Dora Cardacci and Marta Lamas, “Dossier: El Feminismo en Italia.”

363 Coalición de Mujeres Feministas was established on October 1976 by the initiative of three ex-militants of MLM, Lourdes Arizpe, Mireya Toto and Yan María Castro, then members of Movimiento Feminista Mexicano (MFM). They were joined by members of MNM including Esperanza Brito and Anílú Ellas; members of Colectivo La Revuelta including Eli Bartra, María Brumm, Chela Cervantes, Bea Faith, Lucero González, Dominique Guillemet, Berta Hiriart and Ángeles Necoechea, and members of Lesbos, the first lesbian collective. Rocío González Alvarado, “El Espíritu de una época” and Ana Lau Jaiven, Feminismo de la Nueva Ola. For more on the campaigns and their demands see Marta Lamas, Política y Reproduccion. Aborto: La Frontera del Derecho a Decidir.
journalists or broadcasters and, as discussed, since early 1971 had seized every opportunity to disseminate their demands through various media outlets and were also actively establishing their own platforms of expression.

During its first year of existence, CMF organized a series of events to raise awareness of their national campaign to demand the decriminalization of abortion. They organized gatherings at various venues in the city including el Auditorio de Recursos Minerales located at Niños Heroes Avenue and Casa del Lago, a venue linked to UNAM located in Chapultepec Park (Fig. 3). Their events were animated with different kinds of presentations and activities that show the interdisciplinary aspects not only of the meetings but also of the diverse activities in which the members of the collectives were involved. For instance, according to a report by agents of the DFIP, during a meeting on September 24, 1977, a book written Rocío Villagarcía, a journalist, and Patricia Berumen, television producer and reporter, was presented. In addition, two movies that dealt with abortion Tritste Alborada (dir. Odile Herrenschmidt) and Aborto Clandestino (dir. Rosa Martha Fernández, possibly Cosas de Mujeres) were shown.364 Later that year, CMF would begin to publish its own periodical Cihuat (1977) that was distributed freely during their events and demonstrations.365

By 1978, CMF’s demonstrations grew considerably. CMF members sought alliances with the gay and lesbian movements.366 They also began to seek more


365 "40 militantes del MNM por medio de pancartas hoy solicitaron frente a la camara de Diputados que se legisle sobre el aborto" in AGN, DFIPS, "Caja 1634-B Generalidades 1965-1981", Exp 7, Foja 867, 222.

366 Lesbos, was the first feminist collective established in Mexico City. They actively participated in the 1978 feminist demonstrations against Miss Universe. However lesbian involvement with 1970s feminist activist in Mexico can be traced to the establishment of MAS Nancy Cárdenas, a lesbian activist and theater director, participated in the collective. For a state report that details the collaboration of
meaningful alliances with workers’ unions and, as discussed below, to integrate open calls for social justice into their demands. Their claims would continue to center on the right to own their female bodies, however, their demands began to denounce other forms of oppression. In doing so, they continued to unveil the workings of social, cultural and political structures and practices that shaped bodies and dictated appropriate forms of civic conduct. By denouncing other forms of oppression they built relations with the plight and demands of other social groups and thus showed how these other demands intersected with those for women's rights.

The activity that attracted most media coverage and state-surveillance throughout 1978 was the organization of a series of demonstrations against the hosting of two beauty contests, Señorita México and Miss Universe, both events sponsored by Televisa in collaboration with state and regional governments. At the time, feminist activist all over the world were demonstrating against beauty pageants. Feminist demonstrations against beauty contests are regarded as an important aesthetic milestone in diverse historical narratives of performance and theater. For instance, demonstrations against Miss America and Miss Universe staged by US and UK based feminist collectives during 1968 to 1971 are considered the first stage in the
development of feminist theater in both countries. In contrast, histories of theater in Mexico and Latin American narratives of performance studies have seldom paid attention to the street plays and spontaneous performances carried out by Mexican feminist collectives at this time. As in the fields of the visual arts, film and photography, the legacies of feminists collectives within the disciplines of theater and/or performance have been not given sufficient attention, even though at the time, according to Katherine Nigro, a genre that could be labeled Mexican feminist theater was emerging. Surprisingly, performance scholars who look at the surge of Mexican

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369 Ibid.

370 The bibliography on women playwrights and the role of women in theater in Mexico is extensive. Most studies tend to focus on recognized playwrights and writers including the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) who many consider to be one of the first feminist writers in the region. Studies on twentieth century writers tend to focus on the work of Rosario Castellanos, Elena Garro, Carmen Bullosa and Sabina Berman and the postmodern performances of Jesús Rodríguez, Liliana Felipe and Astrid Hadad, to name the most studied. However important feminist activist throughout the 20th century wrote plays such as Amalia Castillo de Ledón’s Bajo el mismo techo (1929) or Bertha Hiriart (member of La Revuelta) and like the street plays of feminist collectives have nor received sufficient attention. See for example, Catherine Larson and Margarita Vargas. *Latin American Women Dramatists: Theater, Texts, and Theories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Yolanda Flores, *The Drama of Gender: Feminist Theater by Women of the Americas* (New York: P. Lang, 2000); and Beatriz J. Rizk, *Posmodernismo y teatro en América Latina: teorías y prácticas en el umbral del siglo XXI* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2001). For an example of readers on radical street performance that due mention important Latin American traditions such as Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed, 1970s Chilean performative practices, Argentinian Mother’s of La Plaza de Mayo, Teatro Campesino and the popular Carpa tradition in Mexico, but fails to mention any Latin American feminist influence or practice. See Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology.*

371 For instance, performance scholar Katherine Nigro considers El Eterno Femenino, a play by Rosario Castellanos first staged in 1976, as a liminal text that marks "a threshold between plays written by women about women’s problems mostly in a realistic manner to show how things are, to ones that dissect and deconstruct the institutions and social practices the make things the way they are, including their chosen medium, theater." The work of Rosario Castellanos was indeed an important inspiration for many Mexican feminists. In 1970 Castellanos published an article in *Excelsior* titled "La Liberación Aquí" describing the fiftieth celebrations of women’s suffrage in the US and is also credited as being influential in the development of new wave feminism. Nigro contends that one of the ways in which feminist plays deconstruct the medium of theater is precisely by attacking realism and a linear narrative. Feminist plays, argues Nigro, do so via various mechanisms such as the use of irony and humor. All the plays staged by feminist collectives that I had access to resorted to stereotypical representations of gender roles and male and female sexuality. That is, they showed "how things are (were)" according to essentialized perceptions; however, by taking the plays out on the street and addressing issues that were still highly controversial for the majority of Mexico city dwellers, feminist street plays could be read as attempts at deconstructing the medium of theater. See Katherine F. Nigro "Inventions and Transgressions: A fractured narrative on feminist theater" in Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas, eds. *Negotiating Performance: Gender and Sexuality in Latin/o America* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1994) 135-158; and for the influence of
feminist theater and queer performances in the 1990s such as the work of Jesús Rodríguez or Astrida Hadad, for example, have concentrated on established screenwriters or popular forms of performance such as carpa to contextualize their practices. This focus also erases the work of 1970s feminist collectives.372

The reasons for this neglect are multiple and intersected by many factors including an apparent lack of sources on these street plays. Most studies on theater rely on the existence of scripts, since plays are mostly studied as literary genre. Feminist street plays were ephemeral and spontaneous and to my knowledge there are no records of written scripts. However, as I will show, like other social movements that resorted to street plays to voice their demands, records exist in the form of photographs, oral testimonies from activists, newspaper articles and in the recently opened Mexican Secret Service archives containing detailed reports of DFIPS agents who were present at feminist street demonstrations. Throughout this chapter I use all these sources to reconstruct several feminist street plays; the DFIPS files are more fully discussed in chapter 5.

Another important factor that has precluded a deep engagement with feminist street plays resides in the ways they contested the definition of political street theater or public expressions of protest that were prevalent throughout the Latin American region at the time. The demands espoused by many feminist militants were perceived as being too closely related to those of “first world” feminists.373 This closeness makes

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Castellano’s in the Mexican feminist movement see Ana Lau Jaiven, “Emergencia y Trascendencia del Neofeminismo” in Un fantasma recorre el siglo, 158).

372 Ibid.

373 This was not only a perception Mexican feminist were influenced by various feminist communities. See for example the influence of the Italian feminist movement in the crafting of the proposal for the law of volunteer motherhood. See Dora Cardacci and Marta Lamas, “Dossier: El Feminismo en Italia.”
their street plays less relevant for those who seek to demonstrate a Latin
American/Mexican exception. Instead, I trace the ways in which ideas, peoples and
things travel and, in the process, are a response to and actively shape their local
contexts. Nonetheless, while the US women's movement and Italian feminism were
crucial influences for Mexican activists it would be a huge misrepresentation to negate
the many ways in which Mexican feminist activists actively located and enunciated their
demands in response to and through a meaningful relation with their local context.
Likewise, the stage strategies of feminist street plays, including their spontaneity, their
use of humor and irony, the lack of a linear narrative and their use of agitprop
strategies, positions them in close relation to several traditions of street
theater/performance in Mexico as elsewhere in Latin America, such as Augusto Boal's
_Theater of the Oppressed_. In particular, Boal's _image-theater_ is relevant due to its
connections with the Italian feminist movement and its emphasis on images created
through embodied practices. Boal's image–theater consists of several nonverbal
techniques in which participants express feelings, roles, attitudes, relationships and
abstract concepts through physical imagery, such as the cartoon figures used by
feminist activists to representing stereotypical male roles. At the time, the famous
Brazilian playwright and director spent time in France and Italy working with women
street theater groups. It is not clear whether Boal influenced the work of Mexican
feminist street plays, but Italian feminists did. Discussing feminist collectives' street
plays in the context of these two frameworks — the emergence of feminist theater in

374 For a discussion on Boal's image-theater and work with women theater groups see Jan Cohen-
Cruz and Mady Schutzman, "Theater of the Oppressed Workshops with Women. An interview with Augusto
Boal" in _TDR_, 34, no. 3, (Fall, 1990), 66-76.

375 Ibid.
Mexico and Boal’s *Image-Theater*— places these marginal feminist expressions at the intersection of important developments in the histories of performance and theater.

**Miss revolución**

Demonstrations against Miss Mexico and Miss Universe were scheduled to take place at various sites in Mexico City as well as in the state of Guerrero during the month of July. On May 28, 1978, more than 100 feminist militants gathered at *Auditorio Nacional* in Mexico City, located on Reforma Avenue (Fig. 3), to protest against the two beauty contests scheduled to take place a couple of months later in the town of Acapulco in the state of Guerrero. Feminist militants demanded that the 25 million and 50 million of pesos invested to finance these events, respectively, and sponsored by Televisa in partnership with governmental institutions, could be better used to develop jobs and social programs for women. They also carried banners that read: "*Ni Objeto Decorativo ni Sufrida Madre Abnegada*" (Not a decorative object nor a suffering, self-sacrificing mother) and demanded that sexual violence and the objectification of women be denounced and legally prosecuted.  

As elsewhere, their demands were directed against what they perceived to be the sexual objectification of the female body performed by such contests. A flyer printed by CMF distributed during the meeting defined the terms in which this objectification happened: 1) multinational corporations gain financial resources by exploiting female bodies; 2) the government utilizes such contests to distract the...
population from more urgent matters; and 3) patriarchal society uses of such contests to create rivalry between women who have to aspire to be the most beautiful in order to be liked and/or have worth.\textsuperscript{379} Mexican feminists didn’t consider how the participation in these contests could grant upward mobility to many of the contestants. Such a view was consistent with feminist criticism towards beauty contests elsewhere. Surprisingly the flyer printed by CMF did not define or attack the beauty standards espoused by such contests, which had been a historical source of contention in previous twentieth-century Mexican beauty pageant traditions.\textsuperscript{380} However, a DFIPS report does. In the report, a state informant writes that feminists were protesting against "un estilo gringo de belleza" a beauty model that, one suspects, fostered standards of beauty based on a light skin and slim female body.\textsuperscript{381} While perhaps not voiced in such terms, the report by state bureaucrats reflected on the views espoused by feminists during the demonstration, many of whom indeed considered the standards of beauty espoused by such contests as a mechanism that promoted aspirations for the majority of Mexican women that could not be fulfilled, not only in racialized terms but in terms of social stratification and privileged access to resources. The profiles of twelve of the thirty-two pageant participants from the organizing committee of Señorita Mexico 1978 found

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{380} For a work that discusses beauty contests in post revolutionary Mexico and the different standards of beauty espoused by contest geared to "Indians" and those geared to the middle classes see Rick A. López, "Ethnicizing the Nation. The India Bonita Contest of 1921" in Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-65; and Adriana Zavala’s "De Santa a India Bonita. Género, Raza y Modernidad en la Ciudad de México, 1921" in Maria Teresa Fernández Aceves, Susie Porter and Carmen Ramos Escandón, Orden Social e Identidad de Género. México Siglo XIX y XX (Guadalajara: UdeG, CIESAS, 2006), 149-188.

\textsuperscript{381} It is interesting to note how "gringa" here becomes a signifier for the US imperialist interest in the region, a discourse that was mobilized by many actors as way to defend "national" interests or attack private investment, as in the case of antagonisms between state and Televisa. As I have discussed previously it was also used to discredit the existence of Latin American feminists who would focus their demands on issues of sexuality. "Sin incidents aproximadamente 100 activistas de 5 organizaciones feministas, hoy efectuaron un mitin en la explanada del auditorio nacional en protesta por la realizacion del evento Señorita Mexico."
within the DFIPS records indicate that the young contestants were high school students between seventeen and twenty-one years of age who practiced ballet, tennis, art or swimming and enjoyed reading.\textsuperscript{362} Four of the twelve contestants had green or light eye color, seven had light or white skin tone, although only two, at least according to the report, had blond hair.\textsuperscript{383}

The demonstrations against beauty pageants marked an important shift in CMF strategies. Besides focusing on the objectification of the señoritas, feminist militants also distributed other flyers with information about the violence perpetrated against peasants in the state of Guerrero, including the rape and torture of various women. It was in this information where feminists defined an alternative beauty standard, one that regarded a woman’s beauty as a body without traces of violence.

At the time, the region of Guerrero was a site of state violence due to the presence and persecution of members of peasant guerrilla organizations.\textsuperscript{384} CMF members distributed flyers providing information about several military attacks and invasions perpetuated during the month of April against 14 ejidos in the state of Guerrero, where women had been tortured and raped.

\textit{En Guerrero, del 15 al 26 de abril el ejército abusó—hasta llegar al asesinato— de la población de catorce ejidos. Hubo abundante tortura y violación de mujeres. Ninguna justicia se ha hecho. Sin embargo el puerto de Acapulco se prepara para alojar la mascarada que servirá como escaparate ante el extranjero de lo que se pretende hacer creer que es este país [sic]: el mes de Julio tendrá lugar el concurso Miss Universo 1978. Mujeres con cuerpos esbeltos sin traza alguna de golpes, de rasgaduras, de mal trato físico, serán utilizadas por empresas nacionales y extranjeras}


\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{384} For more on the history of guerilla organizations and violence in the state of Guerrero see Alexander Aviña, "Seizing Hold of Memories in Moment of Danger: Guerrillas and Revolution in Guerrero, Mexico" in \textit{Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico} 40-59.
para producir dividendos y una imagen que sirva de verdadera tapadera a la vida verdadera, al trato real que se le da a la mujer en el estado de Guerrero, en México y en el resto del mundo.385

In April 15-26, the army abused and killed people in 14 ejidos in the state of Guerrero. Men were tortured and women were raped. Until now there has not been any justice. Nonetheless, the port of Acapulco is being prepared to host a mascaraed that would serve to showcase an image of this country: during the month of July the contest Miss Universe 1978 will be hosted in Acapulco. Women with slim bodies, with no traces of violence will be paraded in order to secure profits and to obscure and silence the real conditions that women in the state of Guerrero, in Mexico and around the world face every day.

CMF’s denunciation of state violence in Guerrero brought local relevance to the ways beauty contests objectified female bodies. By making a direct connection between divergent forms of oppression and cultures of violence towards female bodies, CMF reframed their highly politicized demands (decriminalization of abortion, domestic and sexual violence and media objectification of female bodies) in relation to more recognizable, yet not more visible, forms of violence and oppression. These connections allowed them to reach wider audiences and perhaps incite deeper associations between forms of oppression and the potential disruptions that their acts could represent. They not only demanded that their audiences bear witness to silenced practices of violence but, by making visible those connections, they also demanded some accountability from the structures of power that were invested in obscuring them.386

385 "Violencia en Guerrero" and "Miss Universo o La Obligacion de Ser Bellas" in AGN, DFIPS, Box 1634-B, Generalidades, Exp. 867, 14; 16.

386 Following the work of Elaine Scarry several performance theorist have argued for the ways in which performing trauma (making visible a personal or communal form of pain) makes visible the personal pain but also the mode of resistant citizenship to the structures of power that refuse to see them. Scarry argues that the ability to injure others comes from the inability to see them, to witness such injury. Hence performing trauma in urban public spaces makes obscured forms of violence visible and potentially has the power not only of curing trauma but promoting forms of participatory citizenship and practices of remembrance that are in themselves powerful means of demanding accountability. While CMF activists did not ground their performance on their personal pain, they used the pain of others to make visible divergent forms of oppression. On pain and trauma see Elaine Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons" in Carla Hesse and Robert Post, eds. Human Rights in Political Transition: Gettysburg to Bosnia
After several weeks of preparation CMF planned for a demonstration outside the Auditorio Nacional where Miss Universe swimsuit contest was scheduled to take place. In preparation for the gathering, CMF members continued to distribute flyers about violence in Guerrero and to show the links between it and the organization of the beauty pageants. They also planned an elaborate series of events including several meetings outside the offices of the Ministry of Tourism, a parade with *carros alegóricos* along Reforma Avenue, informal gatherings at a venue located in the Coyoacan neighborhood every Friday where several members of CMF performed theater plays for children and families and, on Sundays, they hosted a Film-Club.

As it turned out, the swimsuit contest was abruptly cancelled; in spite of the cancellation more than 120 people showed up at the demonstration, which took place on June 14, 1978 at the Auditorio Nacional and was heavily invigilated by security agents. During the demonstrations several women performed a theater farce in which they disguised themselves as Miss Mexico, Miss USA, Miss Italy and Miss India and performed domestic chores, like washing clothes in order to show how outside of the contest the beauty pageant contestants continued to be slaves to their domestic lives. They also carried banners that ironically played with the concept of

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387 "La Coalición de Mujeres Feministas, tiene programado un mitin para el próximo 9 de Julio en las afueras de la Secretaría de Turismo a fin de protestar por la celebración del certamen Miss Universo" in AGN, DFIPS, Box 1634-B, Generalidades, Exp. 867, 1-5.

388 "La Coalición de Mujeres Feministas se dedica a elaborar pancartas y propaganda que utilizara el 9 de Junio proximo durante el concurso Miss Universo" in AGN, DFIPS, Box 1634-B, Generalidades, Exp. 867, 19-22.

389 "El Auditorio Nacional, explanada, La Coalición de Mujeres Feministas efectuo un mitin en defense de ese sexo" in in AGN, DFIPS, Box 1634-B, Generalidades, Exp. 867, 1-5.

390 "El Auditorio Nacional, explanada, La Coalición de Mujeres Feministas efectuo un mitin en defense de ese sexo" in in AGN, DFIPS, Box 1634-B, Generalidades, Exp. 867, 19-22.
"Revolution," particular resonant in twentieth-century Mexico in reference to the 1910 Revolution and its unfulfilled promises symbolically embodied by the ruling party, the PRI.

Members of CMF proposed *Miss Revolución*, a new revolutionary standard of female beauty in which sexual pleasure was the main weapon, arguing that feminism was the only route for liberation and change.

*Mis Revolución un nuevo concepto de belleza, igualdad, justicia y trabajo para todas*; "*Somos Mujeres cuando sentimos el éxtasis del orgasmo sexual, la mujer armada jamás será violada*"; "*Abajo el espejo, arriba el fusil*"; "*Aborto libre y gratuito. Tomemos la palabra, tomemos la calle*, "*Feminismo significa Libertad*"; "*Feminismo significa Cambio*"; "*Feminismo es la lucha contra el sexismo en todos los terrenos; el jurídico, el cultural, el socio-económico.*391

Miss Revolution, a new concept of beauty, equity and justice and work for all; We are women when we feel the ecstasy of an orgasm, the armed woman will never be raped; Down with the mirror and long live the rifle; Free choice and economic support to perform abortions; Take charge of the word and take over the street; Feminism means freedom and change. Feminism is the fight against sexism in all terrains—the juridical, the cultural, the socio-economic.

Through the use of humor and irony, members of CMF questioned and subverted established definitions of highly gendered masculine concepts like *Revolución* (revolution) and *Fusil* (gun/firearm) while transforming Emiliano Zapata's famous phrase: *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom) into *Feminismo significa libertad* (Feminism means freedom). Mexican feminist activists inverted Mexico’s most recurrent cultural trope and myth of modern nation building—the Mexican Revolution—along with its pantheon of male heroes, tropes that powerfully haunt all narratives of Mexican 20th century History. In doing so *Miss Revolución* turned the social order upside down by making female sexual pleasure (defined in female terms)

391 Ibid.
the new definition of an engaged and revolutionary citizen. As others have argued, resorting to humor in public performances loosens the reins of the social order inviting spectators and passersby to step back from the normal rules of everyday life and interrogate their own roles within public civic life. 392

The use of humor as a transgressive public practice has a long history in Mexican popular performance traditions, but until the 1970s had yet to be adopted so publicly to demand gender and sexual reproductive rights. 393 Feminist-led street plays and demonstrations, such as the ones enacted by CMF activists, add an alternative and indeed revolutionary way in which Latin American women envisioned parameters of political engagement for the female population. In 1966 Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla wrote *La Fenomenología del Relajo* in which he conceptualized the act of *relajo* (goofing off or creating disorder) "as a negation of the required conduct" that "constitutes a position of dissent vis-à-vis the dominant values of the social whole." 394

Yolanda Broyles-González used the concept of *relajo* along with the Mexican *Carpa* tradition and Bakhtin’s *carnivalesque* to describe how the street performances of *Teatro Campesino* (1965–1980) used high dosages of humor to subvert the social order and create a sense of community amongst their audiences. 395 The multivalent meanings of *relajo* have also been used to understand the forms of cultural resistance that *Madres de La Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires, 1977) enact with their performances aimed at

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392 Diana Taylor "You Are Here" in *Drama Review*, No. 46, no.1 (2002); 149-169.

393 For a review of some traditional performance practices in Mexico see Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino. Theater in the Chicano Movement*.


395 In the 1960s Teatro Campesino originated in California as the theatrical branch of the United Farms Worker Association and it is closely related to the career of Luis Valdez, an important activist of the Chicano movement and also a playwright and filmmaker. Broyles-González study aims at understanding the role of women within Teatro Campesino in order to narrate a different history of the movement that does not center in Valdez’s career. Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*. 
exposing the crimes committed against their sons and daughters during Argentina’s Dirty War. 396 Unlike feminist-based demonstrations, the performances of these two groups (Las Madres and Teatro Campesino) have become canonical case studies in the field of Latin American performance studies in which the roles of women within Teatro Campesino and the use the archetypical role of motherhood by the Madres have been a source of constant debate.397 Feminist-led street plays and demonstrations neither obscure the participation of women, as in the case of Teatro Campesino, nor resort to the cultural archetype of motherhood, such as las Madres. In much the same way, Mexican feminists would begin to use relajo more frequently as way to reimagine what a new participatory (or revolutionary) women’s citizenship would look like, that is, as an embodied and engaged citizenship that would place women’s rights over their own bodies at the center of the agenda for public debate.

Reading the plays of feminist collectives through the category of relajo in the aftermath of the student movement also shows how they transgressed its definition as masculine practice—at least when performed in the public domain. Jaime Pensado’s recent study on student revolt in Mexico (1956-1971) looks at how porristas (male-cheerleaders) used relajo (festive disorder) as a boundary marker between youth and adulthood as well as a strategy to shock political groups in search of opportunities to move up the political and social ladder. 398 Particularly relevant for this study is Pensado’s discussion of students’ festive parades at the beginning of the school year.

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396 The bibliography on Madres the Plaza de Mayo is extensive. For a recent study that frames their practices through the concept of relajo see Emily Klein “Staging Latina Performances of Pain” in Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, vol. 32, No.1, (2011) 102-124.
397 Ibid.
(novatadas) along Reforma Avenue (Paseo de los Perros). In such events young students cross-dressed as women to ridicule gender roles as part of their overall defiance towards what were considered national appropriate behaviors. In spite of the queer aspect to such performances, such celebrations rendered the use of relajo by young male students as an exclusively masculine sphere of action and a masculine right of passage. In this context, it is clear that the use of relajo in feminist performances not only turned the social order upside down in terms of their content, but also, and equally importantly, by publicly adopting relajo, a masculine practice, as part of their performances.

On the one hand, the quantity of reports found in DFIPS archives describing the preparation for demonstrations against Miss Universe and Miss Mexico, ranging from accounts of small gatherings for painting banners and crafting bulletins to biographies of many feminist activists, confirms to some degree that government agents were preoccupied by the possibility of a mass gathering that could place Guerrero's events in an international spotlight. On the other hand, it also points to the bureaucratic workings of the state and its need to produce enemies in order to justify state surveillance and violence. More importantly, it reveals another front of the battle over women's representation in which feminists activists, media conglomerates and state institutions were engaged and how these events unfolded in particular sites of the city as well as through diverse performative modalities.

In this battle, four distinct ways of representing the female body were pitched against each other: 1) Unattractive feminist bodies, such as the ones that were ridiculed

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399 Ibid. 95-96.
400 Ibid. 94.
on the cover of Siempre!; 2) A transgressive body such as Miss Revolución that made sexual pleasure not only her revolutionary weapon but the terms in which feminine citizenship should be defined; 3) the slim bodies and educated bodies of beauty pageants; and; 4) the tortured and raped bodies of peasant women from the state of Guerrero. These were by no means the only models of female bodies. In addition, and as mentioned earlier, at the same time, government institutions and Televisa collaborated in a media campaign promoting family planning. Simultaneously, Canal 13 was in the midst of expanding its broadcasting capabilities to the national level and programs that dealt with issues of sexuality and women's rights such as A Brazo Partido and La Barra Femenina would be aired all over there country. Moreover, after participating in the organization of both events in Acapulco, Televisa introduced a practice whereby the media conglomerate poached beauty pageant contestants in order to transform them into television soap opera stars (telenovelas) who set beauty standards and aspirations for many. 401

As in previous years, competing and divergent images and notions of female bodies circulated influencing public opinion over the role women played in society.402 Hence, during the 1970s, Mexican women were expected to perform sexual restraint in the name of progress rather than being fertile mothers; or, they could chose to defend their right to look as they pleased and even parade themselves with out bras on the streets while demanding their right to abortion and sexual freedom; or, they could be

401 Maribel Guardia, Miss Costa Rica would become one of Televisa's most sought after soap opera stars. Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, El Tigre, 437.

slim, wear high heels and perhaps dye their hair blond to aspire a place in Señorita Mexico. Those were the visible bodies. The other bodies—the ones that both mainstream media and the state were not willing to reveal—were those of battered, tortured and raped women. Through street demonstrations and the distribution of flyers, feminist activists collaborated in breaking with the invisibility of these and other silenced bodies. And, just like their Argentinian contemporaries, Mexican feminists would also resort to the cultural archetype of the mourning mother as another performative modality to further their struggle.

Fed-up women take over the mother’s Monument: fronts and artistic coalitions.

During the 1970s, all kinds of artistic coalitions that sought to place their work at the service of diverse social justice causes were being established all over the city. Many used similar aesthetic strategies as those used by feminist collectives like street theater, street demonstrations, and/or other forms of spontaneous improvisation. For instance, in 1978 several art collectives active in Mexico City joined forces and established Frente Mexicano de Trabajadores Culturales, FMTC (1978-1982) to develop relations and facilitate interactions with worker struggles all over the country and across Latin America with the specific aim of placing multidisciplinary aesthetic practices at their service.403 To that extent they developed manuals on how to create banners and paint murals, organized conferences, exhibitions and street theater plays, and participated in street demonstrations.404 Other coalitions established at the time included Centro Libre

403 Members of FMCT included Grupo MIRA, Grupo SUMA, Grupo TIP, Taller Cine Octubre, Grupo TAI, Grupo Proceso Pentagono, Grupo Germinal, El Táco de la Perra Brava, along many others. See “Declaración del Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura” February 5, 1978 in Fondo Los Grupos, Carpeta Frente de Los Trabajadores de la Cultura FMTC, CENIDIAP, Mexico DF.

404 One of the most well known event that FMCT organized was “America en la Mira” an international exhibition of print shown in Morelia, Puebla and Mexico City and a conference on Latinamerican culture and imperialism. See “Cartel Convocatoria America en la Mira” in Fondo Los Grupos, Carpeta Frente de Los Trabajadores de la Cultura FMTC, CENIDIAP, Mexico DF.
de Experimentacion Teatral y Artística, CLETA (1973-to present).\textsuperscript{405} CLETA staged plays at Casa del Lago and collaborated with various feminist street plays beginning in 1978 (Fig. 14 and 15).

\textbf{Figure 14.} Eli Bartra (1978) "Obra sobre el trabajo doméstico, la Pareja y el aborto" La Revuelta and CLETA performing at Casa del Lago, Mexico City. Courtesy of the artist.

\footnotemark[405]\textsuperscript{405} CLETA was established in 1973 by group of students from the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature (Filosofía y Letras) from UNAM. Many of who had participated in the 1968 and 1971 student movements. Their aim was to develop cultural activities in marginal zones of the city and support their demands for a better quality of life. Their central base in the 1970s was the cultural center Casa del Lago. For more on CLETA see: http://www.cleta.org/, accessed on January 28, 2013.
Figure 15. Eli Bartra (1978) "Obra sobre el trabajo doméstico, la Pareja y el aborto" La Revuelta and CLETA performing at Casa del Lago, Mexico City. Some of the participants included: Lucero González, Chela Cervantes y Dominique Guillemet. Courtesy of the artist.

In resonance with the establishment of other collective fronts, on March 8, 1979, *Frente Nacional por La Liberacion y Los Derechos de La Mujer* (FNALIDM) was established with members from several of the initial feminist collectives (CMF, MLN and *Lucha Feminista*) and members of the Mexican Communist Party and the Revolutionary Trotskyist Party (PRT), the Union of Workers from UNAM (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la UNAM, STUNAM), the Independent Union of Workers of *Colegio de Bachilleres* (SINTCB), the teachers’ Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio*) and UNMM (which later left as some gay and lesbian collectives joined FNALIDM).

One of the main objectives of FNALIDM was to elaborate a project on

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406 Rocío González Alvarado, "El espíritu de una de época"
voluntary motherhood legislation that revisited the previous objectives of CMF. By building alliances with various Left leaning organizations they would present their project to Congress by December of 1979. In order to raise awareness of such an endeavor, they organized a series of events in which they continued to forge links between different forms of oppression by using *relajo* and, just as in the case of the Argentinian mother's of La Plaza de Mayo, resorting to the cultural archetype of the mourning mother to raise awareness of their demands.

On 31 March, 1979, FNALIDM organized its first meeting outside the Chamber of Deputies in which 250 women gathered outside the building to demand the right for free and legal abortions in the context of events organized elsewhere as part of the International Day of Action. The lyrics of *¡Estamos Hartas!* were printed on a flyer entitled “*Estridencias y Desafines*” that was handed out to the public. The title of the flyer not only resonated with earlier Mexican avant-garde art movements, such as *Los Estridentistas* (1920) and *Los Hartos* (1960), but the lyrics of the song were transformed to attack Mexico’s ruling party. As the demonstrators began to march through the streets of downtown Mexico City and towards the Chamber of Deputies they sang: “yes, yes, yes, abort the PRI” (*sí sí abortemos al PRI*) and "look Hank González the streets are not yours" (*Ya viste Hank González no son tuyas las calles*).

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407 Report of the meeting organized by FNALDM held on 31 March, 1979 outside the chamber of deputies. (AGN), (IPS), Box 1634-B, Generalidades, file 9, 92-96.

408 *Los Estridentistas* was group of Mexican avant-garde writers who, inspired by Italian futurism they rebelled against established cultural institutions and established intellectuals. *Los Hartos* was group led by Mathias Goeritz and Jose Luis Cuevas who, in the early 1960s, sought also to criticize the art establishment and the definition of what was regarded as art by claiming themselves to be the fed-ups (*los hartos*). Alberto Hijar, *Frentes y Coaliciónes*.

409 Marta Lamas and Dora Cardaci, *Debate Feminista*, 1, no.2; Eli Bartra, interview with the author, unpublished, 30 July, 2011, Mexico City; and (AGN), (IPS), Box 1634-B, Generalidades, file 9, 126.
At the time Hank González was Mexico City’s mayor and several months prior to this demonstration he had ordered the removal of “Campamento 2 de Octubre,” a group of women who demanded justice after state officials had burned their illegal settlement on the outskirts of the city killing their sons and daughters while they went to work.  

The banners also made reference to the persecution and battering of gay men. Their banners and chants made further links between different forms of policing and state repression carried out on the streets of Mexico City.

\[
No solo los homosexuales son víctimas de las racias: por la eradicación de las redadas, alto a la represión policíaca.\]

Not only gay (men) are victims of persecution: we demand an end to all forms of policing (redadas) and an end to police repression.

In this demonstration feminist activists re-signified their demands by connecting them with other calls for justice: those of destitute mothers over their children’s burnt bodies and those of gay men. As mother’s from Campamento 2 de Octubre and gay activists demonstrated along with feminist activists, feminist-led demonstrations became the stage on which silenced violence against all kinds of bodies was denounced and made visible. In doing so, the feminist motto of making the personal political gained resonance by building links between private forms of violence and public expressions of state repression.

On May 10, 1979, around 200 women all dressed in black walked from El Angel de La Independencia and along Reforma Avenue towards the Mother’s Monument to mourn the death of women who had died due to abortions performed illegally. These

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410“Informe Marcha Mitin Hemicílo a Juárez, 9 Septiembre, 1980” in (AGN), (IPS), Box 1339A, 1971, file 36, 1-57.

411 Ibid.

412 Hilda Tapia López "Manifestación de Mujeres en pro de que se legalice el aborto" in El Día, May 11, 1979.
women carried a huge funeral wreath, which instead of being made of flowers was made of objects utilized to induce abortions: knitting needles, coat hangers, turkey feathers and natural herbs (Fig. 16). At the end of the march the funeral wreath was placed at the Mother's Monument (Fig. 17). In this case, and like the Argentinian Madres, feminist militants used the mother archetype to make their opinions heard but, unlike their Argentinian counterparts, they demanded the right to decide over the number of children to have and safe conditions as well as the infrastructure to ensure such rights. In an interview, Carmen Barajas Sandoval, member of MNM, told a newspaper journalist that 80% of women who performed clandestine abortions in Mexico City were married lower-class women, mothers of more than three children who placed their already established families at risk by undergoing abortions in unsafe and illegal circumstances. During the demonstration many activists also shared their own experiences with abortion and in doing so they gave passersby an opportunity to become witness to a "performance of trauma;" as a result, this performance created alternative spaces for cultural and civic engagement.413

413 Diana Taylor "You Are Here", 154.
Figure 16. Ana Victoria Jiménez (1979). "Mother’s day demonstration, May 10, 1979". Courtesy of the artist.

The reference to a funeral procession was a powerful performative modality that has a long tradition for Mexico City dwellers and could attract the curiosity of many passersby. However, this demonstration was also in dialogue with events taking place in the US. According to Ana Victoria Jiménez, the idea of constructing a funeral wreath was that of Lila Lucido de Mayer, Mónica Mayer’s mother and militant of the MNM. Ana Victoria Jiménez and Lila L. de Mayer met when both were militants of MNM (lead by Esperanza Brito de Marti) and then both had participated with the CMF and later with FNALDIM. Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez had also met at several demonstrations organized by CMF and by then had already collaborated with Colectivo Cine Mujer. At the time of the funeral wreath demonstration Mónica Mayer had already spent a year at the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Women’s Building in Los Angeles, California. Mayer had been exposed to the work of Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, both US based self-declared feminist artists, who had staged street performances and aestheticized media events to demand the end of violence against women and established Ariadne: A Social Art Network, a feminist group that integrated politics with aesthetics.414

The connections between US-based feminists and members of MNM had begun to be forged earlier that year, when Mexico City was placed on the map in one of the most iconic pieces of worldwide feminist art of which both Ana Victoria Jiménez and Lila Lucido de Mayer had been the main organizers. On February 14, 1979, Suzanne Lacy began a global project entitled International Dinner Party to honor her mentor, Judy Chicago, in the context of the first exhibition of Chicago’s Dinner Party at the San

414 Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
Francisco Museum of Modern (SF MOMA). Lacy’s international version of the *Dinner Party* consisted of hosting dinners, all on the same evening of Chicago’s opening, to honor women in their own region. At each dinner women collectively wrote a statement that was sent back to Lacy via telegram. At SF MOMA, Lacy marked each dinner with a red inverted triangle on a twenty-foot black and white map of the world. In Mexico City, a dinner was hosted at the house of Lilia Lucido de Mayer to honor Adelina Zendejas, Amalia Castillo Ledón, Elvira Trueba and Concha Michel, all important women in the post 1920 period who had fought for social causes or, as Jiménez would call them, “*nuestras madrinas*” (our godmothers) (Fig.18). This event passed, for the most part, almost unnoticed in Mexico City’s art circles, but began to draw connecting lines between different women and conceptions of art and feminism (Fig. 19).

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415 *Chicago’s Dinner Party*, an emblem of feminist art, is a collaborative installation that consists of a triangular dinner table that depicts place settings for 39 mythical and famous women with the purpose of celebrating traditional female accomplishments and the lives of women who have been left out of history. See <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home.php> accessed on April 20, 2011 and Amelia Jones and Laura Cottingham, *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996).


Figure 19. (1979) “Alaide Foppa, Ana Victoria Jiménez and Lila Lucido de Meyer and other guests.” Courtesy of Ana Victoria Jiménez.
Mónica Mayer would continue to foster relations between US feminist artists and a cohort of activists related to her mother and Ana Victoria Jiménez. By the end of the year, Mayer returned to Mexico City accompanied by three other American artists, Jo Goodwin, Denise Yarfitz and Florence Rosen, to develop her project Traducciones: Un Diálogo Internacional de Mujeres Artistas. The project consisted of generating dialogues and encounters between Mexican and US women artists and feminist collectives. The objective of the encounter was to share the information that she had learned at the Women’s Building and promote feminist art in Mexico. Jiménez was involved in organizing the meetings and events in Mexico.

The highlight of the event was a three-day meeting that took place in Cuernavaca at the house of Nancy Cárdenas. Seventy women from all over the country, including artists, feminists, activists and some women who had never been involved with feminism, attended the meeting. The encuentro was, in the words of Mayer, a very difficult experience. In a report of the encuentro that became a work of art authored by Mayer, she explained how Mexican attendees were disappointed and outraged by the format of the meeting. While the Mexican feminists expected a conference setting where different women’s committees would present their views, what they encountered was a kind of creative exploratory workshop to investigate the relation between art and politics (Fig. 20)

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417 Mónica Mayer, Traducciones: Un Dialogo Internacional de Mujeres Artistas, 1979, in Mónica Mayer’s personal archive.
418 Ibid.
419 Along with Jiménez, Lilia L. de Mayer (Mónica’s mother), Ana Victoria Jiménez, Yan Castro, Monical Kubli, Ester Zavala, Marcela Olabarrieta, Ana Cristina Zubillaga and Magali Lara also collaborated with the organization of the events.
420 Interview with Mónica Mayer.
421 Mónica Mayer, Traducciones: Un Dialogo Internacional de Mujeres Artistas, 1979, in Mónica Mayer’s personal archive.
The meeting exposed a crucial obstacle to the recognition of feminist art, that is, the disavowal of art as a political tool by most feminist militants. Art was understood by some militants as a set of traditional practices (mainly painting and sculpture) sanctioned by the art world. Many saw the art world as a bourgeois and patriarchal institution, in spite of the political connections that art had historically had in Mexico during the 20th century. While in other places feminist critics and artists took a strong stand in dismantling the patriarchal workings of the art world, feminist Mexican academics and militants preferred to dismiss this task altogether. Women artists created work that addressed their feminine condition, but not many criticized the ways in which the art world conditioned their careers as artists based on their gender.

422 Interview with Mónica Mayer
Likewise, few established art critics fully adopted a feminist critique towards the art world. A few exceptions were the already discussed issue of *Artes Visuales* where most of the contributors agreed that a feminine aesthetic per se did not exist and, while there was an acknowledgment of the ways in which dominant socio-cultural structures oppressed women, there was not a commitment to developing or differentiating a feminist art movement since art, for many of them, was gender neutral. While the efforts at developing stronger links between established aesthetic practices were not welcomed by the majority of feminist, their practices in themselves show how, as in previous years, multidisciplinary aesthetic practices and diverse performative modalities were strongly correlated and in dialogue with social causes. 1970s Mexican feminist demonstrations, which were aesthetically and symbolically charged, are part of this important national tradition and were also in crucial dialogue with transnational practices.

In sum, by the end of the decade, feminist demonstrations had changed. Their demands expanded as they identified the links between diverse cultures of violence and forms of oppression against all kinds of bodies. Mexican feminist demonstrations asked their publics to imagine what a new participatory (or revolutionary) embodied and gendered citizenship would look like.

The stage from where they enunciated these alternatives and the people who supported them had also changed and in the process they called different publics into being. In the course of a decade they had staged their performances at the most visible landmarks of Mexico City's downtown core. They met at the Mother’s Day monument, marched along Reforma Avenue, stopped at the Zócalo (*Plaza de la Constitución*), the *Monumento a la Revolución* and *Hemiciclo a Juárez*. They also attempted to build
alliances with other social movements. They launched a national campaign to raise awareness about abortion and proposed legal reforms to decriminalize it. Feminist activists opened a center for victims of rape (*Centro de Apoyo a Mujeres Violadas, CAMVAC, 1979*). Some activists developed networks outside the parameters of the nation, such as the networks with other feminist artists that Jiménez and Mayer attempted to forge. Others slowly shed their mistrust towards international organizations and did everything they could to advance their agendas; in order to do so they celebrated international days in favor of women’s reproductive rights and were keenly aware of international developments, using them as platforms for their local demands. In the process, the geographies of Mexico City were transformed as feminist demonstrations were joined by a number of other groups including homosexual and lesbian collectives, worker and university unions, as well as left-leaning political parties and other coalitions interested in demanding a broad range of civil rights as part of a more democratic political agenda that included sexual liberation and reproductive rights.

Feminist demonstrations not only left important remains throughout Mexico City streets but their practices were inscribed onto the urban landscape. In 1991 a group of women close to Esperanza Brito de Marti, founder of MNM, added a plaque with the phrase *por que su maternidad fue voluntaria* (because her maternity was product of her own will) (Fig. 21) to follow the initial phrase “to the one who loved

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423 Rocio González Alvarado ,”El Espíritu de una época”

424 The plaque was placed in solidarity to the backlash against a reform in favor of the decriminalization of abortion in the state of Chiapas presented to the Congress of that state by representatives of the PRI. The reform was never passed and none other then Samuel Ruiz, archbishop of Chiapas led a series of demonstrations in Tuxtla Gutiérrez against the feminists who promoted that law. In 1998 the plaque was officially put in place by the PRD administration led by Rosario Robles. Marta Lamas, ”Cuerpo y política: la batalla por despenalizar el aborto” in Ana Lau Jaiven and Gisela Espinoza Damian, *Un
us before we were born" (a la que nos amo antes de conocernos). By adding this plaque, which until now has been the source of constant struggle as it has been removed and replaced several times, feminist activists ensured not only that their history would have a place in the official pantheon of heroes that adorn the streets of Mexico City but that the processes of feminizing the city would be rendered visible.

Figure 21. (2011). "Mother's monument." Detail of the change in the plaque. Courtesy of the author.

Women's representation (visually and in formal politics) was a central concern for media conglomerates, governmental institutions, international organization and feminist activists during the 1970s. All these actors played a crucial role in the process of feminizing the cultural geographies of Mexico City. This process entailed a transformation of the urban landscapes that not only included a change in its physical

*Fantasma que recorre el siglo, 183-212; and Marta Lamas, Política y Reproducción. Aborto: la frontera del derecho a decidir, 190.*
aspect—like the change in the Mother’s monument plaque. It also required adaptations at various social levels and the adoption of new regimes of media and visuality. New publics that were both critical and receptive to feminists’ demands were created, as the presence of feminist activists in the streets of Mexico City questioned definitions and conceptions of citizenship and traditional gender roles. Media conglomerates, political parties and governmental bodies also turned to women's bodies (discursively and visually) as a means of achieving social, commercial and political standing. The development of new regimes of media and visuality responded to international and national transformations that positioned broadcast media —in particular television—as the most powerful means of communication. Equally central was the development of new modes of subjectivity set in motion by the increased participation of women in the public domain and, in particular, the participation of feminist activist in various social realms. By launching an attack against the juridical system, established art practices and institutions as well as through the establishment of alternative networks of communication and media practices, feminist activists uncovered the ways in which patriarchally dominant structures worked themselves into embodied regimes of media and visuality. In the following sections of this dissertation I explore how four visual letradas used different media to construct new modes of subjectivity to counter these dominant forms of creative production.
SECTION 2.

THE ARCHIVAL PRACTICES OF A VISUAL LETRADA

Ana Victoria Jiménez was among the fifteen women who participated in the first demonstration organized at the Mother’s Monument on May 9, 1971.425 From that moment on, she took her camera and began to document most of these demonstrations.426 She also preserved pamphlets, graphics and posters that, along with her photographs and documentation of her artwork, now constitute a valuable, but until recently, officially unrecognized visual archive of the history of the feminist movement and of post-1968 Mexico.

In 2009, a group of scholars and feminist artists began to "reactivate" Jiménez’s archive, known as the Memora Project.427 After some negotiations, on March 2011, Jiménez’s archive was donated to the library of the Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO) in Mexico City, a private academic institution. The art department of IBERO hosted an exhibition entitled Mujeres ¿y que más?: reactivando el archivo de Ana Victoria Jiménez to celebrate the transfer of Jiménez’s archive containing more than 3,000 photographs and 500 documents on new wave feminist activism and feminist art practices. This donation is a welcome and major undertaking, not only for the recovery of the historical memory of the feminist movement, but also for the recent quest to preserve artists’ and photographic archives, which, unlike Jiménez, have not been

425 Ana Victoria Jiménez interview with the author.
426 Ibid.
427 Mayer and Cordero speak of the project as a reactivation of the archive, that is to bring it back to public light. In the fall of 2009 when I met Mónica Mayer for the first time, she along with along with Karen Cordero Reiman, Paz Sastre, Lucia Cavalchini and Daniela Cruz had recently began to reactivate Jiménez archive in order to negotiate its transference to Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO). For more information of the exhibition see <http://archivoavj.com> accessed on April 5, 2011; Mónica Mayer, interview with the author; Karen Cordero, interview with the author, unpublished, September 3, 2010; and Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
successful in finding a host institution or private funds for their conservation. This concern for the archive has developed, in part, as a result of what some scholars refer to as the archival turn, a process of re-conceptualization of archives and archival practices that began to take prominence in various academic circles by the mid-twentieth century in order to reexamine the definition and constitution of the archive and its role in determining what counts as history. Equally significant, the institutionalization of this archive at a private institution points to a shift in the management of cultural patrimony, from an exclusively state endeavor to a private or mixed one; this transformation took place in Mexico during the last three decades of the twentieth century as the country transited towards a democratic political system and adopted neoliberal economic policies. While Jiménez does not consider herself an artist nor define herself as an academic or an archivist, in this section I locate Jiménez’s archive and archival practices in the midst of an interest in the archive that has developed in Mexico in recent years. This interest is framed by various interconnected discussions including those mentioned above and a particular interest in the recuperation the archives of artists working in the 1970s and 1980s and within the context of the recent public access to Mexican intelligence reports of the same period.

Chapter 4, ”The Archival and Political Practices of a Visual Letrada,” begins with a biographical sketch of Jiménez’s wide-ranging career in order to give a sense of how her feminist militancy, background as a graphic artist and interest in photography

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428 Such as the archive of Melquiades Herrera, member of No Grupo, whose documents and work are said to be abandoned inside a warehouse of Escuela Nacional de Artes Plástica (ENAP), or the archive of Adolfo Patiño, which is believed to be lost. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.

429 Ana Laura Stoler uses this term to refer to the process of re-conceptualization of archives and archival practices that began to take prominence in various academic circles by mid twentieth century particularly, but not exclusively, following Michel Foucault’s and Jacques Derrida’s engagement with the subject. Ana Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance: On the Content in the Form” in Hamilton, Refiguring the Archive, 83-100.
informs her archival practice. Throughout the chapter I trace Jiménez’s self-fashioning as an archival persona, one who is conscious of the importance of documenting her activities as a political practice in itself. This persona emerges at two different but interconnected moments: first, at the performative moment of the creation of her collection and, second, at the moment of her self-reflexive understanding of her collection as an archive. Through our conversations, Jiménez constructs such persona by resorting to different levels and patterns of narration that are drawn from her own life-experiences and framed by the potential of what her archive could offer to histories of feminism and women’s political activism as well as to her own sense of self in relation to these histories. Her engagement with the archive and her archival practices are worth following as a way to explore alternative routes and networks that provide new points of access to dominant narratives of new wave feminism and politically-committed art movements. What her archive and archival practice propose is a different narrative of the histories of new wave feminisms, that cast it as not an exclusive movement of middle class university educated women, but rather of women who, despite their backgrounds and education, were concerned and aware of how forms of oppression encompass economic, social and political conditions that are enacted through cultural and social practices that are gendered, sexualized and racialized. Particularly relevant for this discussion is the involvement of Mónica Mayer in the reactivation of Jiménez’s archive. Hence I also discuss how Mayer’s conceptualization of what constitutes an archive influenced the reactivation of Jiménez’s archive and, at the same time, how Mayer’s interest in the archive was influenced by Jiménez’s archival practice as well as her own feminist militancy.
In Chapter 5, "Secret Documents and Feminist Practices," I read Jiménez’s visual archive against and along the grain of the intelligence reports filed by state agents on feminist demonstrations to explore the intersections, interruptions and the challenges they pose to one another. I discuss how both bodies of texts—intelligence reports and Jiménez’s archive—provide valuable information on the activities of feminist activists that are usually not available (or not read) in the historical records including, for instance, descriptions of the street plays they performed in demonstrations; evidence of embodied encounters; and a sense of the publics they called into being. In particular, by reading the visual focus of Jiménez’s archive against the textual focus of the secret service’s archive, I contend that one of the things that surfaces is a demand for the right to see and to be seen: that is, the right of women to return the gaze, even that of state agents. And finally, in Chapter 6, "Performing Feminist Art: Tlacuilas y Retrateras and la Fiesta de Quinceaños," I focus on Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez’s engagement in the establishment of a feminist art movement. In particular, I discuss the performance "La Fiesta de Quinceaños" by the feminist collective Tlacuilas y Retrateras, established in 1984 by Jiménez along with other artist and academics to provide yet another perspective on Jiménez’s feminist militancy in relation to her archival practice.

In sum, throughout this section I establish Ana Victoria Jiménez as a visual letrada who was able to adapt and transform her early beginnings as a militant in organizations allied with socialist causes towards a militancy that understood how forms of oppression were enacted through social, political and cultural conditions that were gendered, racialized and sexualized. Jiménez’s career path provides a link between pre-1970s women’s political mobilizations and new wave feminist activism. Most importantly, her practices provide evidence as to how women’s demands were
played out through visual practices as well as against and in relation to established art and academic circles.
CHAPTER 4.

The archival and political awakenings of Ana Victoria Jiménez

I interviewed Jiménez at her home in Mexico City on various occasions during the summers of 2010 and 2011. I knew about her because she was a member of the short-lived artist collective, *Tlacuilas y Retrateras* (1983-1985), but it was through Mónica Mayer, a fellow feminist artist and activist and one of the instigators behind the Memora Project, that I learned about the existence of Jiménez’s collection and of her important role as a feminist activist. When I finally was able to arrange a meeting with Jiménez, I didn’t think anything of it. I thought I would visit, talk and go over folders of images and documents as I had done while consulting other personal archives. However, upon arriving at Jiménez’s place, I realized that her archive and her home were one and the same. Our conversations took place in her office, which seemed to be the living room, full of papers, books, boxes and filing cabinets. I sat on a chair near a doorway from where I could see her bedroom, also full of documents. During our conversations Jiménez showed me images on her computer monitor, magazine articles and books as if we were going through a family album.

In the course of my conversations and perhaps driven by Jiménez’s performance of a particular sense of self, her archival persona, I discovered myself attempting to classify Jiménez’s archive and her archival practice as either a *fama* or a *cronopio*. At first glance, Jiménez seemed to fits Cortázar’s description of a *cronopio*, those disordered beings who leave all their memories all over the house and, as they wander through their living room, pause to caress them and tell them “don’t hurt yourself, walk
carefully.”430 I thought Jiménez’s interest in collecting and keeping track of her feminist activism was incited by a nostalgic desire and a need to keep track of her daily life as a constant reminder of who she was. I read all the material that she was showing me as if they were mementos of her life, and they were. But as our conversations progressed, I changed my mind and thought that Jiménez’s preoccupation with making records and keeping documentation placed her closer to a fama.

Cortázar describes famas as those who carefully embalm their memories. First, they fix the memory with detail (pelos y señales), and then, once it is fixed, they proceed to wrap them from head to toe with a black blanket. Once the embalming procedure is done, they prop the memory against a wall and attach a little white note with details of the memory.431 As I began to learn of Jiménez’s political commitment to feminist causes I understood that an important part of her self-assigned duty was to keep a detailed record of all the activities in which she participated. Hence, in my mind, her conscious political commitment spoke of an awareness of the value of the documents and images she was keeping and classifying, thus aligning her more closely to a fama.

My conversations with Jiménez were framed by my interest in understanding her archival persona as a practice that gave continuity and connected her wide-ranging feminist militancy with her interests in photography and performance art. But also by Jiménez’s interest in making sense of her archive. The potential that her archive and life story could bring for constructing new wave feminisms as being more diverse than it has thought to be was of interest to both of us.432 Moreover, during the course of our

431 Ibid.
432 Most historical narratives on new wave feminisms in Mexico see the movement as the project of an exclusive group of university-educated women. This argument has been used (even by feminist
conversations Jiménez’s anecdotes pointed to an ongoing negotiation of sense of self through the deployment of diverse narrative patterns (romantic-epic, comedy-melodrama, tragedy, etc.) and levels of narration (expository and conversational) that allowed her to envision her archival practice as a performance of self in which diverse elements produced tension but also continuity and coherence. As Daniel James points out, in oral testimonies there are different patterns and levels of narration through which the interviewed negotiates a sense of self.433 James distinguishes two levels of narration that are produced in oral testimonies. The first one consists in the subject’s ability to resort to “a dominant narrative form of professional historical discourse, framing their narrative within the canons of expository narration.”434 Certainly Jiménez’s weathered experience as an independent publisher and editor of the UNMM, her wide-ranging political militancy and participation at IWY’s NGO forum along with her relations with activist, artists and academics, afforded her a deep understanding

themselves) as a way to downplay the influence that feminisms have had on Mexican culture in the last five decades. By defining feminisms as an exclusively upper middle-class movement, women’s popular movements are excluded from being labeled feminist; secondly, it strengthens the myth that feminism had the potential of breaking the tradition of labor and rural movements due to its sexual and gender demands which were seen as being under the influence of US capitalist and imperialistic interests; and, thirdly, it reinforces the view that sees its impact and historical relevance as minimal because, as a middle class movement, it was supposedly elitist. These discourses place the relevance of the feminist movement in a bind where, on the one hand, most of the history of Mexico is written through the lens of elite groups, and, on the other, academic focus on lower income social movements denies the place that a group of urban middle class women can play in historical discourses. Tracing the practices and activities of Jiménez shows how new wave feminism was more diverse than it has thought to be. For some examples of studies that characterize new wave feminism as the project of an exclusive group of university-educated women see: Ana Lau Jaiven, La Nueva Ola del Feminismo en México. Conciencia y acción de Lucha de las mujeres; Martha Zapata Galindo, "Feminist Movements in Mexico from Consciousness-Raising Groups to Transnational Networks; Marta Lamas, Feminismo. Transmisiones y Retransmisiones; and Eli Bartra, Anna María Fernández Poncela, Ana Lau Jaiven and Angeles Mastretta, Feminismo en México, ayer y hoy. The bibliography on new wave feminism and its convoluted relation with women’s popular movements is extensive. For a study that tries to link both movements see Alma Rosa Sánchez Olvera, El Feminismo en Mexicano ante el Movimiento Urbano Popular. Dos Expresiones de lucha de género (1970-1980) (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2002).


434 Ibid, 134.
and awareness of the existence of such canons. The second level, according to James, is composed of “a far more conversational narrative framed as personal experience, anecdotes and gossip” \(^{435}\) which was present throughout our conversations. As James goes on, these two levels of narration are first and foremost, framed by the nature of the relation established between interview and interviewer, their personal interests, their distinct social and cultural capitals, and “the power of the interviewee to negotiate the conditions under which communication takes place in the interview situation.”\(^{436}\) This negotiation also includes “the realization that there are things that are not understood due to the fact that one has experience the event and the other hasn’t.”\(^{437}\) Surely, in our conversations, Jiménez made use of these two levels of narrations as well as diverse patterns of narration to negotiate a sense of self and in so doing construct an archival persona in a manner, that, to some extent, fulfilled my own expectations.

Ana Victoria Jiménez (b. México D.F., 1941) came of political age in the 1960s when she became member of the National Union of Mexican Women (\textit{La Unión Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas, UNMM}), an alliance of women’s organizations, activists and workers’ unions, mostly affiliated with the Communist Party established in 1964.\(^{438}\) Before becoming a member of UNMM she had been a militant in the Communist Youth

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\(^{435}\) Ibid, 134.

\(^{436}\) Ibid, 139.

\(^{437}\) Ibid.

\(^{438}\) The National Union of Mexican Women (UNMM) was established by bringing together a wide range of women’s organizations, activists and workers unions, mostly affiliated with the Communist Party, from all over the country with the objective of establishing a democratic organization dedicated to organize and unite women’s organizations and promote the rights of women at all levels of society. It should also be noted that the Mexican Communist Party had long played an important role in mobilizing women. For a history of PCM and its role in mobilizing women see Jocelyn Olcott, \textit{Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico}. (Duke University Press, 2005). For a history of UNMM see Ana Victoria Jiménez and Francisca Reyes Castellanos, \textit{Sembradoras de Futuros. Memoria de la Unión Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas}. 111-165.
League and had been marginally involved in the 1968 student movement. As a member of the Communist League she was detained and arrested as part of a crackdown on radical activity undertaken by Mexico City police against members of the Communist Party, Central Campesina Independiente and Frente Electoral del Pueblo on April 14, 1965. From 1969-1970 Jiménez was the representative of UNMM at the International Democratic Federation of Women (FDIM) in Berlin and for a number of years collaborated in the production of the union’s bulletins. It was at this time that she began to collect graphic ephemera and to take photos of the demonstrations and events organized by the UNMM.

Jiménez’s activity as a collector of ephemera and her interest in photography developed in tandem with her militancy in the UNMM; its roots are also found in her career in the graphics industry. In the early 1960s she studied graphic arts at Union of Linotype Press Workers (El Sindicato de los Artistas Gráficos) and soon after she began to earn a living as a typesetter in a print shop. At first, graphic material interested Jiménez for purely aesthetic reasons. She told me: “I only began to keep the posters that I liked for their aesthetic qualities” (guardé los carteles por que me interesaban, porque estaban bonitos). She was interested in collecting graphic material as inspiration for

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439 Interview with Ana Victoria Jiménez.
441 Sembradoras de Futuros, 171.
442 She also worked at a linotype press shop, where her job was to make sure there were no typos in the slugs, the assembled line of metal types used in a linotype press. A couple years later she went to work for IBM, where she used a portable machine for setting type. Years later, she established her self as an editor and desktop publisher, publishing books on the history of the UNMM, its militants and a number of artists books. Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
443 Ibid.
projects at her job. And while she also took photos, she explained that she did not keep any of the images she shot in the 1960s because their quality was very poor.

Jiménez did not have a high school degree (not an uncommon condition for women of her generation) and this situation prevented her from attending university or art school. During our conversations she made a point of clarifying that the Sindicato where she studied, although not related to the famous Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) actually is the union of linotype press workers. Jiménez’s emphasis on this issue could be read as a mere gesture to avoid confusion between different specializations within the print industry, but it could also be read differently, as a way to distance herself from a visual arts milieu and to assert her position as a working class woman (a point she also made when asked about her training in photography). While she had been interested in photography since an early age, it was not until 1974 that she was able to study photography at technical college by night in order to complement her career in the graphics industry. As I will discuss, during our conversations, Jiménez placed emphasis in distancing herself from established traditions in art, feminism and women’s activism while also claiming a place within some of these traditions. This ongoing negotiation between claiming difference and continuity was a key narrative that Jiménez used to construct her archival persona.

The legacy of TGP, a collective of print artists founded in 1938 concerned with using art to advance revolutionary causes, is well recognized. Most of its members, including Leopoldo Mendez, Pablo O’Higgins, Luis Arenal, Mariana Yampolsky and Fanny Rabel, to name a few, are well established in the annals of art history (albeit more within a history of print culture rather than “Art”). Jiménez’ need to distance herself

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from the legacy of TGP points to a different career path that led her, like the members of TGP, to an interest in linking art and politics. In this manner, and as I will discuss, the ways in which Jiménez’s constructs her career path offers an interesting counterpoint to the well-known trajectories of other famous Mexican visual artists whose interests also resided in linking art with social causes.445

Jiménez’s background at the union of linotype workers and her militancy with left-leaning organizations not only speaks about her working class background (or interest in fashioning herself as such) but also about her practice in an industry related to publishing, editing and journalism.446 These conditions link her to the life histories of many militants of the UNMM, who built careers as journalists, schoolteachers and militants of the PCM and who, arguably, came from working and middle class backgrounds and moved up as they had access to other posts and careers.447

In the mid-1960s, her militancy in the UNMM introduced her to the thought and lives of many early-twentieth-century women activists and militants, those whom she

445 After 1920s a number of art collectives whose purpose was to unite art with militant politics emerged in Mexico, these included: Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores (1922); 30-30 (1928); Lucha Internacional Proletaria (1931); Alianza de Trabajadores del Arte (1934); Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (1934); Taller de Gráfica Popular (1938). These groups started a tradition in Mexico that continues to this date. Many well recognized artists and intellectuals participated in these collectives including: David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Pablo O’Higgins, Germán Cueto, Carlos Mérida, German List Azurbide, etc.. See Alberto Hijar, Frentes, Coaliciones y Talleres. Grupos Visuales en Mexico en el Siglo XX.

446 Her husband was a journalist for various national newspapers and as a militant of the Mexican Communist Party he was in charge of the publication of the party’s periodical. Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

447 The access of education provided to women after the 1910 Revolution helped establish first wave feminism in Mexico. Particularly during the Cárdenas administration a great number of women participated in shaping social change through their work as schoolteachers, their participation in literacy campaigns and journalism. Many women wrote columns in newspapers, albeit with pseudonyms and many had to establish their own newspapers and magazines in order to have access to this field. These group of early journalists and activist included: Julia Nava de Ruisánchez, Esther Chapa, María Luisa Ocampo, Concha Michel, Amalia Castillo Ledón, Adelina Zendejas to name a few. See Genoveva Flores Quintero, “Prensa Feminista 30 años de batallas por el espacio público” en María Ileana García Gossio, Mujeres y Sociedad en el México Contemporáneo: Nombrar lo Innombrable, (México DF: H. Cámara de Diputados, LIX legislatura, Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2004), 203-231.
calls “nuestras madrinas” (our godmothers). She recalled that she first knew about the UNMM because she was invited to attend a meeting about women’s rights (the right to work, pay equity and upward mobility of women). At the time she was a militant in the Communist Youth Leagues. While the set of issues posed by UNMM were very interesting, Jiménez told me that they were all framed within a leftist discourse based on class struggle. For instance, the decriminalization of abortion, the problems brought about by the double shift, unpaid work at home, and paid work outside the home were not considered. Moreover, Jiménez recalled that issues of sexuality did not figure at all. It was not until the 1970s, with the emergence of new wave feminism (and the contraceptive pill), that she began to understand the differences between the objectives of the UNMM and the set of preoccupations of the emergent feminist collectives and new wave feminists around the world. In this instance, Jiménez resorts to constructing her encounter with new wave feminisms through a canon of expository narration following established historical discourses that differentiated between pre-1970s and new wave feminisms in Mexico. Here Jiménez begins to construct her encounter with new wave feminisms through a pattern of narration closely aligned to a romantic-epic. The epic sense of this pattern allowed her to establish identification with a community of new wave feminists, and thus, to claim membership within this collective identity.

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448 I will use the term new wave feminism (feminismo de la Nueva Ola) to refer to 1970s feminism because this is the term used by Jiménez. Other feminist scholars also use the term neo-feminismo to refer to post-1970s feminism. See Eli Bartra, Anna M. Fernández Poncela, and Ana Lau Jaiven, Feminismo en México: Ayer y hoy.

449 Daniel James defines the epic as “implying the individuals identification with the community and its values, and leaves little room for individual identity.” Daniel James, Doña María, 162.
The romantic sense of this narrative placed emphasis on her individual capacity for change and transformation through the adoption of different values.450

During the course of our conversations her views about feminism seemed to be informed more by new wave feminisms than historical feminisms (las madrinas). However, her constant return to her political awakenings with the Communist Youth Leagues, the UNMM, and her effort to establish link with las madrinas speaks of these anecdotes as foundational moments in her life, that reinforce a romantic-epic pattern of narration, a story of attaining consciousness and giving coherence and legitimacy to her political commitment as a continuation of the work started by las madrinas. This is poignantly represented in the performance Lacy's International Dinner Party (1979) (discussed in the previous section) in which Jiménez's pays homage to her madrinas: Adelina Zendejas, Amalia Castillo Ledón, Elvira Trueba and Concha Michel. This ongoing negotiation with historical feminisms speaks to her interest in documenting her relation with las madrinas in order to provide coherence and continuity to her own political commitment women's movements. By honoring her madrinas, Jiménez positions herself as part of this important genealogy of women activists.

Jiménez returned to this narrative pattern on various occasions and it was one of the key narratives she used to construct her archival persona during our conversations. However, the romantic-epic was not the only narrative pattern available to Jiménez to construct her archival persona. As Daniel James points out “one of the richest interpretative veins that can be mined in studies of life stories lies in probing the relationship between key narrative patterns aimed at creating continuity and other

450 According to James romance involves “a quest for values in a degraded world whereby the individual's moral career is established through he ability to overcome obstacles and difficulties”. Ibid., 162.
elements that clarify, obscure and make more complex, or simply leave in the tension laden-coexistence of contradictory themes and ambivalent meanings in an account of life.” Jiménez resorted to humor, irony and tragedy in several occasions as she attempted to make sense of her experiences with diverse trends of feminisms.

Through our conversations Jiménez’s definition of feminism seemed to be more ambivalent, pointing to instances of rupture and contradiction rather than continuity. On the one hand, she recognized the legacy and complexities of pre-1970s feminism and the women’s movements and, on the other hand, she seemed to conceptualize this legacy as not so feminist, making a clear division between the early women’s suffrage movement and 1970s feminist thought. However, those clear distinctions seemed to be blurred when discussing specific cases. For instance, when I asked her if feminism in Mexico prior to the 1970s could only be characterized as defined through a discourse of class struggle, she thought twice and invited me to look at the life of Concha Michel, a post-revolutionary folklore singer and activist, considered by many as the “precursor” of Mexican feminism. According to Jiménez, Michel was heavily criticized because, as a militant of the Mexican Communist Party, she stated that women, besides their commitment to social justice, had their own struggle based on the differences between women and men.

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451 Daniel James, Doña María’s Story, 165-166.

452 Despite her life-long dedication to improving the lives of women, Michel always denied any association with feminism. However, by the 1970s, as Jocelyn Olcott argues, many named Michel as “precursor” despite that her ideas were more in tune with gender essentialism and heteronormativity. For Olcott, ”Michel’s appeal to both cultural nationalists and contemporary feminists stems largely from her simultaneous claims to universality and particularity, to a rootless cosmopolitanism and an assertively autochthonous indigeneity.” See Jocelyn Olcott, ”Take off that streetwalker’s dress’ Concha Michel and the Cultural Politics of Gender in Post Revolutionary Mexico” in Journal of Women’s History, Volume 21, Number 3, Fall 2009, 36-59.

453 The full citation which may have had a role in Michel’s expulsion from the Mexican Communist Party reads: “ Men have to know that we (women) are a distinct being, with different needs and not as that bastard Stalin claims with his undifferentiated incorporations (of genders)” in Aurora Tovar Ramírez, Mil
At the same time, Jiménez also explained that "new wave feminism" was an oxymoron since, according to her, feminism in Mexico did not exist before the 1970s. She explained that while a very important women's movement existed in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s, it was in the 1970s when women became more active and developed a movement that truly differentiated itself from others both aesthetically and politically.

[...] a partir de los setenta cuando el feminismo nace en México, ese feminismo que le llaman de nueva ola. Realmente se podría decir que casi fue el único feminismo. Si hubo un movimiento de mujeres muy importante en los 30 y 40s pero de los 50s a los 70s hubo un periodo muy blanco de organizaciones y grupos. Es cierto que el voto se logra en 1953 pero no fue producto de luchas por el voto. Realmente las mujeres se pusieron mas activas a partir de los setenta. Y es entonces cuando el movimiento feminista surge como algo bastante diferenciado de las manifestaciones previas.454

[...] it was beginning in the seventies when feminism, a movement that many refer to as new wave, emerged in Mexico. A very important women's movement did exist prior, in the 1930s and the 1940s, but it dwindled from the 1950s to the 1970s. It is true that women obtained suffrage rights in 1953, but unfortunately this was not a product of women's demands. Women became more socially engaged in the seventies and as a result feminism emerged as a differentiated social movement.

Her views are opposed to some histories of Mexican feminism that trace its genesis to the nineteenth century and, most commonly, establish the emergence of a first wave of feminism in Mexico in 1916 during the first Feminist Congress that took place in the city of Merida.455 As elsewhere, the main goals of these early Mexican feminists were to obtain citizenship equality and the right to education and suffrage.456

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454 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

455 As it also commonly known the writings of 17th century Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz that advocate women’s right to education and the end of sexual double standard are taken by many to be the first feminist writings in Mexico. Others go as far as tracing a a concern with sexual double standard in a series of poems written in Nahautl dating back to pre-Cuauhtemic times. See Anna Macías, Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940 (London; Greenwood Press, 1982).

456 Ibid, 3-23.
Mexican women obtained national suffrage rights in 1953, however, despite this achievement by the early 1950s the feminist movement had almost disappeared.\textsuperscript{457} For Jiménez, like for some others, its disappearance coincided with the attainment of important government positions by women and the ways in which suffrage rights were finally obtained through actions that spoke more of political maneuvers rather than a gesture towards the empowerment of women or a preoccupation for their rights as citizens.\textsuperscript{458}

Two contradictory discourses emerge from Jiménez's perspectives on feminism. On the one hand, Jiménez aligns herself with critical assessments of the women’s movement that blame part of its decline on an act of cooptation by a corporatist scheme of the PRI government.\textsuperscript{459} On the other hand, she rescues Concha Michel as one of the madrinas who, like her, provide a sense of historical continuity to the narratives of Mexican feminisms. Jiménez’s need for distancing pre- and post-1970s feminism also

\textsuperscript{457} Alma Rosa Sánchez Olvera, El Feminismo Mexicano ante el Movimiento Popular Urbano. (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2002), 96-97.

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid. As Sánchez Olvera argues the process of granting suffrage rights to women only evolved, as those in power no longer saw it as menace. It was not until 1974 when president Echeverría reformed article 4 of the Mexican constitution that men and women were granted equal rights as citizens. During the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) the Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer successfully convinced president Cárdenas to reform article 34 granting women suffrage rights. However, congress never passed the reform due to fears of a conservative vote orchestrated by catholic women –who were seen as a political menace to the continuation of the party’s regime. Later on, president Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) granted women suffrage rights at the municipal level and also appointed women to highly visible positions. Alemán had also begun to institutionalize the labor movement through a practice known as Charrismo, which impeded women and other groups to organized independently. At the same time a large number of men began migrating north leaving only women as potential voters in small towns, hence given women the vote at a municipal level seemed an appropriate action to quell the women’s movement and to secure favorable votes. But it was still seen as a menace at the federal level. In 1953 president Ruiz Cortínez finally legalized national suffrage and in 1955 women voted for the first time. As Sánchez Olvera argues the process of granting suffrage rights to women only evolved, as those in power no longer saw it as menace. It was until 1974 when president Echeverría reformed article 4 of the Mexican constitution that men and women were granted equal rights as citizens.

\textsuperscript{459} For Ramos Escándón other factors that underscore the weakness of the women’s movement were: the late achievement of suffrage rights; its elitist character; its narrow urban base and the activism of Catholic and conservative groups that lobbied against women’s rights and blocked the countering of ingrained sexual stereotypes. Carmen Ramos Escándón, “Women’s Movements, Feminism and Mexican Politics”, 205.
speaks of her archivist persona, one that is consciously aware of classifying, collecting and periodizing difference. Through our conversations what emerged was Jiménez’s need to differentiate time periods in feminist history in order to distinguish herself from elite and pre-1970s feminism. This distinction was a key narrative used by Jiménez to explicate her archival persona. At one level, it worked to negotiate her sense of self as distinct, but at another level, it also pointed to her particular experience with both generations of feminists.

Jiménez’s perspectives on feminism began to transform in 1971, after she joined the feminist collective Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (MAS) and later Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres (MNM). Through her affiliation with MAS and MNM, Jiménez became acquainted with a diverse group of women who were concerned with issues of gender equality and sexual rights. Throughout the 1970s Jiménez participated in more than a dozen feminist demonstrations and belonged to various feminist collectives. 460 These demonstrations brought not only a new set of issues, including abortion, sexual rights, and concerns for the ways women were represented in the media, but also a different way of performing protest and making demands about those issues in public. Unlike union or political party demonstrations, feminist demonstrations, according to Jiménez, were:

*más alegres, con más idea de lo visual, con una forma particular de expresarse en sus pancartas.* 461
much more upbeat, with more of a sense of the visual, with a particularly distinct way of expressing demands in their banners and signs.

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460 Besides being a member of MAS, MNM and UNMM she also participated in Grupo Nosotras. Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

461 Ibid.
This difference, she told me, is what inspired her to take photos and collect ephemera more rigorously. Beginning in 1978, influenced by her collaborations in Rosa Martha Fernández's film productions and her participation in various feminist art groups, her militant practice and interest in photography would increasingly be driven by a concern with feminist art, initially as part of a group of militant artists established by Mónica Mayer that resulted in an art exhibition entitled “Muestra Colectiva Feminista” (1978). And, later, through her involvement in Lacy's International Dinner Party (1979) and her participation in the feminist art collective Tlacuilas y Retrateras (1983-1985). Soon after she had begun to collaborate with a diverse range of feminist art collectives, she built a dark room at her house where she developed photolithographs to produce negatives for print production and also began to experiment with this technology (photolithography) to print her own photographs.

Another event that crucially influenced Jiménez's perspectives on feminism was the UN's 1975 International Women’s Year (IWY) celebration in Mexico City. The story of her participation at the NGO forum also speaks to both expository and conversational levels of narration available to Jiménez to construct her archival persona. Unlike many other Mexican feminists who boycotted the inter-governmental event and associated activities, Jiménez attended the parallel three-day NGO forum. For Jiménez, as for others, the official program of the IWY was nothing more than a political event that reflected the policies of nation-states rather than women’s rights and demands. It was

462 The exhibition was held from September 12 to 21, 1978 and other participants included: Rosalba Huerta, Magali Lara, Yolanda Andrade, Mónica Mayer, Esperanza Balderas, Mayra Nuñez, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Concepción Lozada, Hilda Rodríguez, Jackie and Carolina Paniagua. Mónica Mayer, "De la Vida y el Arte como Feminista" in Cordero and Sáenz. Crítica Feminista en la Teoría e Historia del Arte, 403.

at the NGO forum where some of the most interesting discussions and heated debates took place. In particular, Jiménez recalled a number of passionate discussions between participants from developed and underdeveloped countries that reflected the repertoire of stereotypes cast on feminist activists from these diverse latitudes. Others have argued that these tensions tended to revolve around the views of Third World women, who tended to focus on structural problems of economic inequality, and Western feminists, who concentrated their energies on sex-specific issues such as reproductive freedom, lesbianism and abortion.\textsuperscript{464} Throughout the conference, as discussed above, Mexican newspapers played a crucial role in casting Western feminism and its alleged emphasis on sexuality as deviant, describing it as an imperialistic form that distracted its advocates from more pressing economic and social issues.

In our conversations, Jiménez was acutely aware of the politics surrounding the event and the ways the media generalized and manipulated the positions of various representatives to accommodate the pressures of the Cold War and show support for anti-imperialistic discourses. She recognized that the differences between “Third World” and “Western feminists” were not only discourses that the media and others used to advance their agendas, but that they also played a crucial role in the display of politics performed at the forum. She particularly recalled the presence of Domitila Chungara de Barrios, a Bolivian tin miner’s wife and leader of the Housewives’ Committee of the Siglo XX miners, as one of the highlights of the forum and the confrontations between first and third world feminisms. However, in contrast to the best-known narrative of the encounter, that in Domitila’s voice found in her \textit{testimonio}

\textsuperscript{464} Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret”
Let me speak!, focused on the frustration of the miner activist with the sexual and reproductive rights emphasis she encountered at the tribune, Jiménez recalled the ways the audience reacted to her participation. She told me: "When the gringas listened to what Domitila had to say they almost caught a cold" (cuando las gringas la oyeron casi les da gripa). While Jiménez’s recollection of these debates seems to follow the prescription of Western Feminists against Third-World Women, she chose to foreground how the gringas were outraged by de Chungara’s participation and not the opposite and best-known version that places emphasis on Chungara’s indignation.

The confrontation did not take place, however, between the gringas and de Chungara, but between the Bolivian delegate and Esperanza Brito de Marti, leader of Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres (MNM), one of the collectives in which Jiménez participated. As Brito de Marti delivered her closing remarks demanding equality for women and unity among feminists, de Chungara interrupted her exclaiming: “How can we women be equals when we, the wives of labourers, are thrown in jail for organizing to protest their imprisonment? We cannot speak of equality between games of canasta. Women cannot be equals any more than poor and rich countries can be equals.”

The encounter between the Bolivian and the Mexican activist has faded in favor of a discourse that pits radically sexual liberated gringas against the Latin American leftist-indigenous-working class women embodied by Chungara de Barrios. Ironically, as Olcott argues, Friedan and Chungara’s views were more compatible than what has been

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465 De Chungara and another activist from Ecuador, Marisa de Los Andes, were appalled when they arrived to the Tribune and find a group of US activists defending prostitution and lesbianism. There are diverse version of the confrontations between the Latin Americans and the US activist. For an in depth analysis see Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret”; and Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Viezzer, Let Me Speak! (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

466 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

467 Olcott, “Cold War and Cheap Cabaret”, 748.
acknowledged. Friedan had previously shunned prostitution and lesbianism as distractions for the feminist movement, precisely the themes that had provoked de Chungara’s astonishment. Even more, at the IWY forum, Friedan was more critical and vocal towards transnational corporations than in her support for lesbianism. 468

Rather than Friedan, Mexican lesbian-feminist activist and theater director Nancy Cárdenas was the protagonist of the media outrage provoked by what many observers perceived as the derailed focus of the forum towards sexual liberation.469 Cárdenas presented the first Mexican lesbian manifesto provoking the publication of numerous newspaper articles and editorials accusing the forum of not dealing with the real problems that affected the female portion of the population and promoting prostitution and lesbianism as a right and not a pathology, as defined by some experts at the time.470 Cárdenas’s session was one of the few that dealt with issues of sexuality, which in turn provoked de Chungara’s outrage.471

Through her humorous remark (when the gringas listened to de Chungara they almost caught a cold), Jiménez obscured the different trends of feminism practiced by Latin American women. Abortion, prostitution and lesbianism were (and still are) contentious issues amongst some supporters of new wave feminist militants. The difference of opinion regarding such issues thwarted the establishment of broader political coalitions. For instance, the UNMM decided to abandon the Frente Nacional por La Liberacion y Los Derechos de La Mujer (FNALIDM), an alliance of various feminist

468 Ibid., 748-749.
469 Ibid.
471 Olcott, ”ColdWar and Cheap Cabaret”, 742.
collectives and Left leaning organizations, shortly after its establishment in 1979 after gay and lesbian collectives joined the alliance.\footnote{Rocío González Alvarado, "El espíritu de una de época," 95.}

As a member of UNMM and as a member of MNM, Jiménez actively participated in these two different approaches to women's rights (one that was open to abortion, lesbianism and prostitution and the other that wasn't). Throughout our conversations Jiménez continuously negotiated these two facets of her militancy with humor and irony obscuring her own perspective in the matter. Given her weathered political experience and knowledge of the thorny issues that characterized diverse trends of feminism, our interview and subsequent conversations could be read as a performance in which her ambivalence or particular way of taking sides on controversial issues is crucial to the construction of her own political subjectivity. Equally so, this ambivalence was key to the representation of herself as an archival persona: a persona that possibly tried to encompass as many facets of the movement as possible.

During our conversations Jiménez framed her political militancy and interests on collecting, photography and feminist art through shifting and sometimes conflicting views on feminism that combined her early affiliations with Left-leaning organizations, the legacies of post-1920s feminism, and her involvement with 1970s feminist collectives. However, the last time I asked how her interest in feminism had begun she shunned all these legacies and described them as innate: "I was interested in feminism since I was a little girl" (\textit{estaba interesada en el feminismo desde que estaba Chiquita}), Jiménez recalled. Similarly, Jiménez told me that her interest in collecting was not consciously related to building an archive, rather, she told me: "I don’t like to get rid of things" (\textit{a mi no me gusta tirar las cosas}). And she added: "I never thought I would save
this or that for the future" *(nunca pensé, voy a archivar algo para el futuro)*. Hence, Jiménez’s quotidian practice of collecting, recording, and documenting feminist demonstrations, more than a conscious act of archiving, could be read as a performative act that was crucial in fashioning her sense of self.

As she continued to explain her interest in keeping things, she also described them as a personal trait:

*[Esta actividad] también dice algo sobre mi personalidad porque al mismo tiempo recolectaba los carteles y los volantes que acompañaban los eventos, entonces iba formando paquetes de información de cada evento que acompañaban las fotos que yo tomaba.*[^473^]

This practice also speaks about some of my personal traits, since besides collecting ephemera and taking photos of each event, I began to classify and group these material in order to create information packages about each demonstration.

Here Jiménez’s collection of things worked as an album of memories, but also spoke of a person interested in organizing and classifying information, one “who built information packages of each demonstration” (perhaps anticipating, or fully aware, of its historical value).

A closer look at Jiménez’s career as a writer, publisher, artist, and activist suggests that even though she denies any purpose a priori, her intention behind collecting was driven more by a political stance than by the need to hoard or any nostalgic desires ascribed to amateur collectors. The act of collecting or keeping track of political activities and achievements was not foreign to Mexican women activists, a practice of which Jiménez was quite aware.[^474^] In our conversations, she mentioned how relatives of previous acquaintances and members of the UNMM had discarded personal


papers and books not realizing the importance of keeping and bequeathing such
documents. At the time Jiménez began collecting, feminist activist in Mexico, as
elsewhere, were already keenly aware of the importance of documenting and writing
women’s history as a political intervention itself. Parallel to Jiménez’s awareness of the
importance of keeping such documentation, a change in the definition and appearance
of an archive that had been taking place within academic and artistic circles also
influenced the transformation of Jiménez’s collection of things into an Archive.

When the team of scholars and artists led by Mónica Mayer began to revise
Jiménez’s things and look for an institution to which to donate them, academics,
scholars and artists had already been questioning the conception of an archive for quite
some time.475 For instance, influenced by postcolonialist, poststructuralist and feminist
readings, historians now consider archival sources not as transparent collections of
documents that tell us how things were in the past but as edited compilations of such
things as images, artefacts, letters, sound recordings, documents, clothes, and personal
diaries that allow us to ask questions about the moral, affective and social values of the
past and inform us about the present, and equally, as in the case of Jiménez, about the
moral, affective, and social values of the collector. At stake in this conception of an
archive is the relation between history and memory, a relation that questions the
dominant hierarchies in the production of knowledge, how knowledge is transferred
from generation to generation through diverse practices and, equally importantly, how
all these practices are gendered.476 These new understandings of what an archive is

475 Ana Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance: On the Content in the Form,”
83-100. Stoler refers to this as the archival turn.

476 As Burton reminds us “Memory is always cast (and still is) in gendered terms (as unreliable,
dubious [...] as female identity),” and “the capacity of women to write history has been considered dubious
until quite recently.” Antoinette Burton, Dwelling in the Archive, 20-25.
have forced academics to rethink who counts as a historian and what counts as history.

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In the art world, an engagement with the archive has taken shape in myriad forms throughout the twentieth century. The archive has been the site of critique and the source of inspiration for many artists. 478 Conceived as an institution, that is, as a museum for storing and presenting works in public, and as an art historical discourse, the archive has been criticized for its economic, gendered, racist and sexist foundations. Envisioned as a source of memory and history, the archive has been interrogated to develop counter-memories or alternative knowledges. In recent years, however, the debate has turned towards the constitution and preservation of artists’ archives. At one level of the discussion, there is the work of conceptual and performance artists, whose ephemeral practices only live through documentation; thus, the record becomes the artwork. And, at another level, there are the artists’ personal archives, which are turned into works of art through different means including their inclusion in art exhibits, sale or through bequest to archival institutions and the acknowledgment of the archive as a work of art in its own right. 479

In recent years, there has also been an interest in the preservation and institutionalization of both feminist archives (via art exhibitions and bequests) and the

477 Ibid.

478 For recent discussions on the ways in which visual artists have engaged with the archive see Okwui Enwexor, Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art; and Charles Merewether, The Archive.

479 For instance, Andy Warhol’s Time Capsules, a work that consists of 612 cardboard boxes, which filled with “photographs, newspapers and magazines, fan letters, business and personal correspondence, art work, books, exhibition catalogues, and telephone messages, along with objects and countless examples of ephemera, such as announcements for poetry readings and dinner invitations.” Warhol began to fill these boxes in 1974 and they are now part of the Warhol collection and exhibited as works of art. See http://www.warhol.org/collection/archives/#ixzz30VL4VjUb, accessed on April 30, 2014.
archives of Latin American artists working in the 1960-1970s. The critical reception to these endeavors has been mixed. For instance, about the interest in the recovery of Latin American artists’ archives working under dictatorships and violent populist regimes, art critic Sue Rolnik has argued that rather than a concern for recovering the memory of that tumultuous period these efforts respond to a re-definition of the geopolitics of the art-world whose aim is to neutralize politics through visibility and access.\textsuperscript{480} Correspondingly, in terms of the recent proliferation of feminist art exhibits around the world, Griselda Pollock offers a related perspective.\textsuperscript{481} In *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, Pollock worries that the recent attention to feminist art, what she calls “the musealization of the movement,” could end up erasing the movement’s radical criticality.\textsuperscript{482} While both Rolnik’s and Pollock’s arguments might be accurate in speaking about some of the perils of turning archives into commodities, that is, their circulation as objects of value within the art market and their increased value as “marginal objects” and of the possible loss of the radical edge of marginal movements, their argumentations disregard the ways that wider accessibility can, at the same time, elicit oppositional responses and nuanced readings. Andreas Huyssen, who has extensively discussed the contemporary desire for memorialization including the construction of museums and monuments, the institutionalization of archives and patrimonial declarations, argues that critical assessments of the

\textsuperscript{480} Suely Rolnik, “Furor de Archivo” in *Estudios Visuales; Ensayo teoría y crítica de la cultura visual y el arte contemporáneo*, No. 7, 2010 <<http://www.estudiosvisuales.net/revista/>> accessed in April 24, 2011.


Institutions created by this desire have to consider how “there is always a surplus of meaning [in these practices and institutions] that exceeds ideological set boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic discourses.”

In Mexico, recent discussions of the state of Mexican artists’ archives of the 1960s-1970s took place in a series of panel discussions as part of the international exhibition entitled Arte [no es] Vida. Acciones, on view at Museo Carillo Gil in Mexico City from July 3- August 13, 2009 and revolved around the opposite concern: the lack of interest by state institutions in preserving archives on marginal art movements. The danger of losing the collective memory of this era was discussed as being a consequence of the lack of interest and funding directed to preserve these archives. As the majority of artists and activists from 1960-70s worked outside official channels, their work, in their view, has not been sufficiently written about or incorporated into historical narratives. Hence, the preservation of their work becomes a more pressing issue as they begin to pass away and their documents and work are deemed to be lost. Other issues discussed also touched on the relation that artists have towards their archives and on the state of disrepair of some archives that have been donated to state institutions. However, the recovery of feminist art was not explicitly discussed as being a matter of concern.

In order to circumvent the state’s lack of interest, some artists have managed to sell their archives to foreign universities. For instance, Felipe Ehrenberg, a self-defined neologist (an inventor of words and concepts), and a pioneer in conceptual art, sold part of his archive to the Special Collections Library at Stanford University in 2000 and has

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donated another part to the Contemporary Art Museum at UNAM. Others, such as Mónica Mayer and her partner Victor Lerma, have taken matters into their own hands and established independent projects like *Pinto Mi Raya*, an online hemeroteca of newspaper and magazine articles of Mexican contemporary art. *Pinto Mi Raya* and Ehrenberg’s archive could be considered as two of the most successful initiatives emerging from this context, in the sense that they have managed to secure greater accessibility and preservation. Both Mayer and Ehrenberg also consider their archives as works of art in their own right. As Vanessa Kam argues, by considering the document to be a work of art, artists like Ehrenberg and Mayer-Lerma go beyond the notion of document as evidence and subscribe to a basic principle of Conceptual Art that, in the words of Paul Wood, “was less a question of rejecting a notion of the aesthetic as of broadening its range of references, outwards from the medium specific, formally achieved harmony of a modernist painting to, potentially, anything, an object, a sound or an action.”

Particularly relevant for this discussion is that Mayer was crucial in the transformation of Jiménez’s collection into an archive, hence Mayer’s conceptualization

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485 Ehrenberg’s papers constitute a collection of personal correspondance, financial statements, drawings, lithographs, etchings, artists’ books, conference talks, invitations, posters, works by Ehrenberg’s students and colleagues, photographs, diaries, and more, documenting all aspects of Ehrenberg’s life. They are housed in different venues. One part went to Stanford, another is held at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo (MUIAC) at UNAM another part is held by his son Matthías in Xico, Veracruz, and another section containing only documents about his practices in England is held by the Tate Modern in London. See “Breve explicación de cómo nació y creció mi archivo” in Ojo Avisor, August 13, 2008, <<http://ehrenberg.ojoavisor.arts-history.mx/entrada.php?id=326>>.

486 In 1989, the two artists began “*pinto mi raya*” as an alternative space to exhibit work that was not shown in galleries or museums. In 1991 it was transformed into a home-based collection of newspaper and magazine publications on Mexican contemporary art. Mayer and Lerma collect and organize this information and sell compilations to libraries, students and artists. Other projects emerged out of the initial *pinto mi raya*, such as an online magazine “La Pala”, a series of performances that question the archival and documentation practices in state intuitions and the thorny relations between artist and critics. Mayer and Lerma also sell compilations of these documents to libraries, students and academics in order to address the lack of information regarding these practices available in academic institutions.

of what constitutes an archive also influenced the conceptualization of Jiménez’s collection into an archive. And, in turn, and perhaps more importantly, Mayer’s conception of the political importance of documenting is deeply informed by her feminist militancy and awareness of Jiménez’s archival activities as political interventions.

Mónica Mayer describes the project Pinto Mi Raya as one of “Applied Conceptual Art”, a concept that Mayer-Lerma coined with the purpose of defining:

> proyectos conceptuales que además de centrarse en la idea, pretenden tener alguna utilidad, tienen que ser funcionales. Y, como siempre decimos, el objetivo de Pinto mi Raya es lubricar el sistema artístico. Detectar sus problemas y proponer soluciones. 488

conceptual art projects that besides focusing on an idea their purpose is to have a practical application, that is they need to be functional. And, as we have repeatedly stated, the objective of Pinto Mi Raya has been to lubricate the art world; to detect its problems and propose solutions.

Mayer conceptualizes their activities as an art practice that is not only based on ideas, but as one that has a practical use and proposes solutions to problems. Their definition of applied Conceptual Art is close to an idea of militant art, however, not of modernist utopias or New Left radicalisms but a kind of militancy that actively inserts itself in the production and interpretation of knowledge. It is conceptual in the sense that it broadens the definition of art to an act of collecting and distributing information. Even though, in this sense, it subscribes to Paul Wood’s definition of Conceptual Art, within the Mexican context Mayer has had to fight extensively for recognition of her archival practice as art. 489 For instance, even her longtime fellow collaborator Maris

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489 Personal interview with Mónica Mayer.
Bustamante has trouble in recognizing an archive as a work of art. What is more, Felipe Ehrenberg, who pioneered conceptual practices, recently confessed that it was until the late 1980s when he began to recognize his archive as a work of art.

remember when... or even how things fell into place. It may well have been shortly after the Great Earthquake of September, in 1985; but at a given moment I began thinking that my files could, in fact, be considered a “work of art”, very much akin to other works of mine, of a conceptual nature, an installation perhaps, better yet, a performance, so that by logical extension, it would require special care, the care one gives to an “oeuvre d’art”. So I proceeded to give it yet again a new order, not quite knowing how best to frame the idea, how to convince “the powers that be” to perceive it—that ordered mass of papers— as art. It wasn’t until a decade after the earthquake that I met Issa Benitez, a young, very intelligent student [...] her dissertation was, precisely, on documents as works of art and after discussing her subject matter and aiding her in her research, she confirmed and honed the concept. I’ll always be thankful to her for this.

The concept of an archive as a work of art is relatively new and still received with much suspicion in Mexico (at least at the time I was doing research for this project, 2009-2011). Further, Mayer adds, that while she recognizes the paradox and contradiction of making the archive the focus of their activities since it provides durability to their ephemeral practices, she also sees it as an urgent matter. In short, the creation of the archive interests her more for what it can do in the present than for what it can do in the future. In the earliest stages of Mayer -Lerma’s project she wrote that:

> la documentacion, en un país que con las uñas tiene que defender su patrimonio cultural no es un acto sólo patriota sino heroico.

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490 Personal Interview with Maris Bustamante.
to document, or the practice of keeping records in a country that has had to defend its cultural patrimony with its finger nails, is not only a patriotic act but a heroic one.

Beginning in 1989, as part of Mexico's adoption of neoliberal economics, a reform of cultural institutions took place whereby private investment was allowed to intervene more openly in the sponsorship and financing of certain cultural endeavors and in the management of cultural patrimony previously regarded as the sole competence of state institutions. These shifts caused major debates in the public sphere and several artists took prominent roles in protecting cultural patrimony from transnational and national private corporations. It is in this context in which Mayer's early statement has to be read. However, more than a decade later, many have changed their views and are more welcoming of allowing private and foreign investment in the protection and preservation of cultural patrimony. The emphasis is now placed on obtaining a space and institution that will guarantee maintenance and access to information.

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494 Private cultural foundations have coexisted with the state structure of cultural management throughout 20th century Mexico, however, in the 1970s there was a more open and increased activity in the private sector. Valuable cultural property is designated as such by the president and is protected by the by the Federal Law of National Wealth and The Federal Law of Archeological, Historical and Artistic Monuments. The Federal Law of Archeological, Historical and Artistic Monuments (1972) is still current and does not contain any provisions for the transfer of any property designated or considered cultural patrimony of the nation that is held by private nationals into private foreign hands. Until 2012 there was no law that specifically protected or regulate archives (archivos documentales). For a discussion on the privatization of culture in Mexico see my MA thesis Art and Possibility: From Nationalism to Neoliberalism. The cultural interventions of Banamex and Televisa, Department of Art History, University of British Columbia, 2007; For a historical review of the legislation on Cultural Patrimony in Mexico and numerous debates surrounding this issue see Judith Amador Tello, 'Cronología del Patrimonio Nacional" in Mexico su Apuesta por la cultura. El Siglo XX Testimonio del Presente. (Mexico DF; Grijalbo, 2003), 635-647.

495 One of the artists that most actively engaged in the defense of cultural patrimony from privatization was Francisco Toledo. Amongst many other activities and initiatives he organized the Patronato Pro-Defensa y Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural de Oaxaca, in the City of Oaxaca, Mexico. Mónica Mayer has also been a fierce critic of the state of disrepair and the lack of interest of the government on protecting the cultural patrimony of the nation.
In a recent conversation with Mayer she confessed that while there is a recent interest in artist archives in Mexico there is still a lack of commitment for their preservation:

“Yo, a estas alturas de mi vida y al ver como está la situación aquí, prefiero que se lleven los archivos a Estados Unidos. Es horrible y va en contra de toda mi fibra pero prefiero que se vayan a Estados Unidos a que se queden aquí en donde viene el siguiente funcionario que siga tire todo a la basura porque no hay conciencia.”

At this stage in my life and, considering the lack of interest for this kind of work in Mexico, I would prefer if my archives were kept in the United States. I know it sounds horrible and goes against everything I believe in but I prefer it this way rather than having it stay in Mexico, knowing that the next public official, due to a lack of conscience, might throw all my work to the garbage.

In recent years, at least three exhibitions that concentrate on the archive as their central focus have taken place in Mexico City including one organized around the archive of Ana Victoria Jiménez, Mujeres ¿y que más?: Reactivando el archivo de Ana Victoria Jiménez (March 2011). The other two exhibitions are: Visita al archivo Olivier Debroise: entre la ficción y el documento (June 2011) curated by Mónica Mayer, which consists of more than 5000 documents of the late historian of 20th century Mexican art and La Era de la Discrepancia (March, 2008) curated by Debroise and Medina. The main idea behind the latter exhibit was to recreate iconic pieces and re-build an archive of this era. Archives are becoming the central focus of exhibitions, confirming, on the one hand, the commodification of the archive as a work of art and, on the other hand, the blurring of borders between disciplines, practices, objects, and categories (for instance, the difference between a collection and an archive). Moreover, these exhibitions play a crucial role in disseminating the information and collections

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496 Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
that are available for consultation. They collaborate in the creation of publics that will, in turn, demand access to such collections/archives.

The Memora Project, the transformation of Jiménez's collection into an archive, has to be read as part of this renewed interest in the recuperation of archives of this era as well as an example of the shift in the management of valuable cultural and historical property. While Ana Victoria Jiménez does not consider her archive as a work of art, her archive not only includes her photographic and performance-based work but documents important practices, until now not fully acknowledged in art historical narratives, elucidating events of relevance that, as Huyssen argues, have the potential to add or interrupt hegemonic narratives in that field. The bequest of her archive to a privately owned university exemplifies the shift in the management of cultural patrimony from exclusively a state endeavor to an open acceptance of private and foreign funding.

At first glance, Jiménez's act of daily collecting and visually documenting can be seen as an inextricably feminine act of no historical consequence; however, her awareness of the importance of documenting the activities in which she engaged speaks of a practice with significant political and historical implications. Jiménez's collection of photographs and ephemera was not only crucial for the construction of her identity as a feminist activist and artist, but also became an important resource for scholars who began to consult her collection to write the histories of feminism and the women's movement in post-1960 Mexico. Hence, Jiménez's archival practice speaks to a more porous understanding of the letrado sphere of influence—one that includes the multifaceted practices of a visual letrada.
By the mid 1980s, as feminist demonstrations gave way to other forms of social activism, Jiménez continued to document many of these and other important events such as the devastation of Mexico City during the 1985 earthquake, the garment workers' movement in 1985 and the electoral campaign of 1988, to name a few. After Tlacuilas y Retrateras broke apart, her involvement with artistic initiatives waned but Jiménez continued to have a prolific role in the publication of memoirs of various activists and in writing the history of the UNMM, using her personal archive as a major source. At present she continues her activism through a project dedicated to helping elderly women achieve a decent quality of life and continues to collaborate with the UNMM as an editor of their publications.498

In sum, through our conversations, Jiménez's self-fashioning as an archival persona, one who is conscious of the importance of documenting her activities as a political practice in itself, was envisioned through diverse patterns and levels of narration. By claiming distance from established politically-committed artists and from diverse trends of feminisms (while at the same time claiming alliance) she constructed a sense of self which was able to move from a background in communist militancy, to new wave feminism, to editor, to writer, to photographer and to performance artist through networks that, while similar to many other artist and activists, operated, most of the time, outside already-established channels of party politics, sanctioned art movements or upper class relations. This distancing speaks of an archival interest for classifying, collecting and periodizing difference. Equally, it speaks of Jiménez's archival persona as one that possibly tried to encompass as many facets of the new wave feminist movement as possible. Ultimately Jiménez's construction as an archival persona serves

498 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
to position her as continuing the work her *madrinas* and as a legitimate member of an
until recently acknowledged pantheon of new wave feminists and women activists.

Jiménez’s archive and archival practice are central nodes in which all her
activities connect, find meaning, and are accorded historical relevance. Jiménez’s
collection of photographs and ephemera was crucial for the ongoing construction of her
identity as a feminist activist and artist, but also became an important resource for
scholars. In this sense, as Appadurai reminds us, the intentions of Jiménez are not as
crucial as looking at how objects circulate and acquire different meanings and
relevance, for things, like anything else, have a social life.499 Hence, what began as a
personal collection of ephemera and photographs, more in tune with the activities of a
cronopio, was turned into an archive, in the sense of *fama*, as Jiménez and others began
to understand the value of her archive as a historical and political document and began
to use it to write histories that have, for the most part, been ignored in official historical
narratives of the era. What her archive proposes is a different narrative of the histories
of new wave feminism, one that casts it as not an exclusive movement of middle-class
university-educated women, but rather of those who, despite their backgrounds and
education, were concerned and aware of how the oppression of women encompassed
economic ailments as well as social and cultural conditions that were gendered and
sexualized.

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CHAPTER 5.

Secret documents and feminist practices

According to Michelle S. Smith, the only way to recover the original power of the archive is to restore its moment of origin by reading it in relation to other archives with which it first engaged.\(^{500}\) Moreover, as Antoinette Burton argues, even though “their origins are often occluded and the exclusions on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being as a result of specific, political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures.”\(^{501}\) Jiménez’s archive came into being at two distinct, but interconnected moments: first, at a crucial time for international women’s rights battles and in the midst of a violent decade during which Mexican bureaus of intelligence produced hundreds of spy reports documenting the activities of a wide range of social movements; and, second, in the context of the archival turn and a transformation in the management of valuable cultural property. Following Smith and Burton’s lead, in this chapter I read Jiménez’s visual archive against and along the intelligence reports filed by state agents on feminist demonstrations to explore the intersections, interruptions and the challenges they pose to one another. In particular, by reading the visual focus of Jiménez’s archive against the textual focus of the secret service’s archive, I contend that one of the things that surfaces through this comparative reading is the women’s demand for the right to see and to be seen—that is, the right of women to return the gaze, even that of state informants. This difference in focus—visuality and text—also points to the gendering of the spheres of action of the letrados and visual letradas.


The streets of Mexico City during the 1970s were a contested and dangerous territory. The killings on the Day of the Corpus Christi festival in June 10, 1971, confirmed early on that president Echeverría's democratic opening was not democratic at all, forcing many to take radical actions that showed up later on as urban and rural guerrilla movements.\(^{502}\) During Echeverría’s term, a dirty war that had began decades earlier was renewed to crush radical activity.\(^{503}\) Urban guerrilla groups such as *Liga 23 de Septiembre* orchestrated several kidnapings of political and industrial leaders provoking a violent nation-wide retaliation from government officials.\(^{504}\) Agents working for the Mexican bureaus of secret intelligence (*Dirección Federal de Seguridad*, *DFS* and *Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, DGIPS*)\(^{505}\) infiltrated social movements and persistently kidnapped and tortured hundreds of people with estimates of 532 disappeared between 1970-1980.\(^{506}\) Records of these activities, along


\(^{503}\) Ibid.

\(^{504}\) In 1973 Eugenio Garza Sada and Fernando Aranguren, important industrial leaders and business-men the first from the city of Monterrey and the second from the city of Guadalajara were kidnapped and executed. Other personalities that were kidnapped by *Liga 23 de Septiembre* included Duncan Williams a British envoy (1973) and José Guadalupe Zuno (1974), Echeverría’s father-in-law and ex-governor of the state of Jalisco.

\(^{505}\) For a history of the Mexican Departments of Intelligence see Sergio Aguayo, *La Charola*; and María de los Ángeles Magdaleno Cárdenas "Documentos sobre la Policía" in *Históricas: Boletín de Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas*, 77, September-December, 2006, 34-45; and Katy Doyle’s “The Mexico Project”. For recent study on the activities of these spy agencies see special issue of the Journal of Iberian Studies edited by Tanalis Padilla and Louise E. Walker "Spy Reports: Content, Methodology, and Historiography in Mexico’s Secret Police Archive" in *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, 19:1(July, 2013).

\(^{506}\) According to the Mexican Human Rights Commission this is the number of complaints that were received and investigated. The official report acknowledges that this number is probably not the total amount of disappeared indicating that the number of disappeared could be larger. See "Informe especial sobre las Quejas en Materia de Desapariciones Forzadas Ocurridas en la Decada delos 70 y principios de los 80" in Comision Nacional de los Derechos Humanos Mexico <http://www.cndh.org.mx/Informes_Especiales>, accessed on June, 2012.
with daily reports on all kinds of suspicious gatherings, were dutifully kept as part of the activities of these two agencies.

As Ana Victoria Jiménez collected ephemera and documented feminist demonstrations, a group of government agents and infiltrators followed her footsteps, keeping detailed records and photographs of the women’s daily activities. The documentation is not surprising considering the state of the turmoil in Mexico City’s streets, the government’s paranoid interests in keeping suspicious activity in check, and the interest in being informed on women’s activism in the context of the UN's IWY celebration. However, until recently, not many were aware that spy reports documenting the activities of new wave feminists were kept at Mexico’s National Archives (Archivo General de la Nación, AGN).

In 2002, as part of the promises of Mexico’s democratic transition and after a long civic battle, public access to documentation of Mexico’s dirty war and the repression of the student movement was tacitly granted as some DFS and DGIPS files were transferred to Mexico’s National Archives. The records documenting feminist activism were included in the transfer. Documents, transcripts, and photographs describing the activities of women who participated in feminist and women-led demonstrations from the 1960s to the 1980s are held within the DGIPS files alongside intelligence reports on workers, students, guerillas and indigenous organizations.

In these documents, I found detailed written transcripts of many demonstrations photographed by Jiménez, as well as evidence that many of these women were followed. For instance, a document dated October 16, 1972, describes

507 For a history the polemics in transferring of these archives see Sergio Aguayo, La charola: Katy Doyle’s “The Mexico Project”; and Tanalis Padilla and Louise Walker “Spy Reports.”
508 (AGN), (APF-XX), (DGIPS), Box 1491-B; Box 1634-B; Box 1697-C; Box 1602-B; Box 1692-B.
how art critic and UNMM militant Raquel Tibol along with Marta López Portillo de Tamayo and Estela Carreto, president and member of the UNMM, boarded a plane bound for Havana and Santiago de Chile. Another document contains black and white photographs of UNMM meetings. The photos are glued to paper with blue pen marks identifying the women in them. The series of photographs were filed alongside images (mug shot style) of members of La Liga 23 de Septiembre, one of the many urban guerrilla groups active in Mexico in the 1970s. Another document dated September 24, 1977, describes a meeting organized by Coalición de Mujeres Feministas, CMF, to discuss the decriminalization of abortion conducted by Rosa Martha Fernández. The reports also contain biographical profiles and lists of names of the members of various feminist collectives, speculations as to their political affiliations and relations with other organizations, as well as detailed descriptions of the demonstrations they organized including the banners they carried, the songs they sang, the plays they staged, the routes they followed in their demonstrations and copies of the flyers and posters they distributed.

All these records are typed using a computer or typewriter machine. They all include the date and most are signed with cryptic initials such as “P.L.L.” or “P.D.H”. Most likely these reports were directed to the Ministry of Interior (Secretario de Gobernación). The reports also include documents and newspaper clippings about meetings and demonstrations of women’s groups that did not sympathize with the

510 (AGN), (APF-XX),(DGIPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8,189- 193.
511 “Se Inicio hoy en el auditorio de recursos minerales la segunda jornada nacional sobre el aborto conducida por Rosa Martha Fernández” in (AGN), (APF-XX),(DIPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8, 220, September 24, 1977.
512 Up to 1952 when the two agencies merged, DFS agents reported directly to the president and DGIPS agents reported to the Ministry of Interior. Sergio Aguayo, La Charola, 62.
politics of the UNMM or the feminist collectives, organizations, that is, that were supportive of Echeverría's policies.513

At one level the finding of spy reports tracking the activities of women's groups as well countless articles supporting Echeverría's reforms is not surprising considering the celebration of IWY year (1975) and the debates ensued by reforms to Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution (1974). At another level, one cannot disregard the way in which the amount of documents filed also reflects the bureaucratic and paranoid workings of the Mexican government. Scholars have explained the excess of documents as a mechanism to justify the existence of secret service organizations and to maintain networks of corruption and extortion developed by its agents. 514 According to Sergio Aguayo, between 1958 and 1985 state intelligence and thus the production of reports increased exponentially.515 Louise Walker's recent study of spy reports on middle class gossip that took place in diverse venues including supermarkets, gas stations and dry cleaning shops during Echeverría's administration, provides a sense of the reach and paranoid workings of these practices of infiltration.516 Jacques Derrida's psychoanalytical reading of the obsessive need for collecting information, a process he refers to as archive fever, is perhaps useful to understand the Mexican state's obsessive

513 Ibid., 162. “La Asociación Mexicana de Mujeres Jefas de Empresa, A.C. apoya incondicionalmente las reformas economicas del presidente Echeverría” January 12, 1973. (AGN), (APF-XX), (IPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8, 220 and file 8,109; “Yo Mujer en Mexico Creo” an open letter supporting the democratic reforms adopted by president Echeverría and his 4th presidential informe, signed by 3 senadora, 15 diputadas, 9 funcionarias, and 11 women organizations.

514 Sergio Aguayo, La Charola, 250.

515 Ibid, 94.

516 Louise E. Walker, "Spying at the Drycleaners: Anonymous Gossip in 1973 Mexico City" in Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research, 19:1 (July, 2013), 52-61. Walker’s work forms part of a special issue of this journal dealing with these domestic spy agencies and their various activities.
tracking of information at a time when its legitimacy was under attack. Yet, at another level, the finding of these documents fulfills my excitement for classified documents, a process that Stoler concludes, “serve[s] as signal to direct attention and cue for one’s repeated return to what knowledge should be valued.”

Regardless of my excitement and insights on Mexican intelligence workings and PRI’s paranoia, the finding of the DGIPS documents has the potential of changing the terms in which the histories of new wave feminisms can be conceptualized. On a broad level, the existence of information about these women in the national archives counters preconceptions about the general exclusion of women from archives. It also tells us about the increasing importance of visuality in transforming the terms of political engagement of feminists’ activists and emerging visual letradas. Equally, it speaks to the gendering of spheres of action for letrados and visual letradas. And moreover, it contributes to the development of alternative kinds of histories about the porosity and function of spy reports.

The discussion regarding the exclusion or inclusion of women in the archives is a complex issue. As is well known, the presence of women’s voices in the archives depends on modes of reading (against or along the grain) and, moreover, on academic willingness and interest to find female voices. In the context of the recent opening of these files and studies discussing the ways it can change the historiography of post-revolutionary Mexico, the inclusion of reports of state informants spying on the

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\item \textsuperscript{517} Derrida discusses how the death drive, the fear of destruction is what gives rives to the archive fever. Jacques Derrida, \textit{Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression}, 10-12.
\item \textsuperscript{518} Ana Laura Stoler, \textit{Along the Archival Grain}, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Reading archives "along or against the grain" refers to seminal studies by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ana Laura Stoler. See Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: an essay in reading the archives" and Stoler’s \textit{Along the Archival Grain}. For creative ways in which women voices are represented in a wide range of archives See Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (ed), \textit{Contesting the Archives. Finding women’s voices in the sources} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
\end{itemize}
activities of a small group of middle class women could change persistent forms of academic discrimination towards Mexican new wave feminism.\textsuperscript{520} The importance of this finding is that, to my knowledge, most histories of post-1970s feminism have yet to use these documents as sources. At present, most histories are based on testimonials, writings by activists or newspaper articles.

Several of the women I interviewed thought very few interested parties attended their activities and recalled that they had to fight for coverage in the press (or provoke it themselves). They believed no one paid attention to their demonstrations. When I shared my findings with some, they were not surprised to learn members of the UNMM were under surveillance. The UNMM was closely related to the Communist Party and it was known that the government kept their activities in check. They were surprised, however, that documents regarding feminist collectives were also included.\textsuperscript{521} Ana Victoria Jiménez was not surprised at all. Years earlier she had experienced the workings of state infiltration when she was detained in the offices of the PCM.\textsuperscript{522} When I shared my findings with her, she told me that everyone in UNMM knew that they were being followed.

\textit{Si lo sabíamos. Había muchas mujeres que asistían una o dos veces a las reuniones de la unión de mujeres con sus libretitas y se la pasaban apunte y apunte. Era muy fácil identificarlas. Pero realmente no se que lograban los de gobernación al mandar a sus agentes.}\textsuperscript{523}

\textsuperscript{520} Most recent studies of that use DFS and DGIPS declassified documents as sources concentrate on histories of worker, peasant, student and guerrilla movements. Slowly some of these studies are incorporating indigenous movements and other actors such as doctors or middle classes. See for example Tanalis Padilla and Louise E. Walker (ed) \textit{"Spy Reports: Content, Methodology, and Historiography in Mexico's Secret Police Archive."}  

\textsuperscript{521} Mónica Mayer, interview; and Eli Bartra, interview with the author, unpublished, July 30, 2011, Mexico City  

\textsuperscript{522} \textit{"La Policía Actua. Aprisiones a Granel"} in Novedades, April 15, 1965 in Ana Victoria Jiménez archive and interview with Ana Victoria Jiménez.  

\textsuperscript{523} Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
Yes we knew. There were several women who attended UNMM meetings once or twice. They came with small notebooks and they spend the whole meeting taking notes. It was pretty easy to identify them. But really, I don’t understand what agents of the ministry of interior gained with such activity.

The fact that the feminist collectives have a place in the national archives can change the way we think about their histories while also confirming the surveillance practices that were a staple of the government at the time. For instance, following the narrative filed by state informants who, in a descriptive fashion filed reports on any women's organization they encountered, a story of continuity of women's movements that would crucially link UNMM activism with feminist collectives could emerge, despite their well-known political differences.

Read side by side, Jiménez’s visual archive and the AGN archive restore the role women and their activities played in public debates of the time. The existence of the two archives gives authority to the movement, notwithstanding the differences in the terms with which they do so. Most of the time the DGIPS reports construct feminist activism as a menace in need of surveillance through text-based reports and Jiménez’s images frame the movement as records of a personal experience. The two archives coincide in changing the value of the artifacts saved. For example, in both I found pamphlets and posters of the movement. The act of saving these documents instills in them an aura of importance and permanence these documents did not have in the first place. However, the ways they are kept speaks of different values ascribed to them. Whereas Jiménez’s documents are nicely kept and even photographed as works of art, in the AGN most of the documents are perforated and kept in a dusty binder or as loose pages inside yellowed folders. The faded ink on the reports and the erasure of the text only serves as a reminder of the possibility that next time you look for them, these documents may not
be around (due to the fading ink and misfiling or the countless rumors of their mysterious vanishings).

Reading the two archives side by side also completes the memories and recollections of many participants who have written testimonies of their militancy in the 1970s or what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called "the interplay between historicity 1 and historicity 2, between what happened and what is said to have happened." The documents provide factual information that supplements oral testimonies including dates, places, names (often misspelled) and estimates on the number of people in attendance. Jiménez’s photos of feminist demonstrations and DGIPS descriptive reports read in conjunction with oral testimonies and newspaper articles work in a complementary manner to provide a more complete sense of the activities that these women carried out.

A document dated May 28, 1978, reports that a meeting held outside the national auditorium where the Señorita México contest was underway was attended by more than a 100 activists and was organized by five different women’s collectives to protest the beauty contest.

De las 16:30 a las 17:45 horas de hoy en la explanada del Auditorio Nacional, se llevó acabo una concentración de 5 organizaciones feministas para protestar por el sistema de la organización del evento "Señorita México" con una asistencia aproximada de 100 personas. Encabezarón la concentración Sonia Riquer, Jan Merin (sic), Esperanza Brito de Martínez entre otras pertenecientes as Comité Mexicano Feminista, Movimiento Pro Liberación Feminista; Colectivo de Mujeres: Movimiento Nacional Feminista Mexicano y Comité Revuelto(sic); entre otros. From 16:30 to 17: 45 five feminist organizations held a meeting to protest against the organization of Miss Mexico at the entrance of the

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525 "Sin incidentes, aproximadamente 100 activistas de 5 organizaciones feministas, hoy efectuaron un mitin en la explanada del auditorio nacional, de protesta por la realizacion del evento señorita Mexico." May 28, 1978, (AGN), (DGIPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8, 246-248.
National Auditorium. There were approximately 100 people in attendance. The leaders of the meeting were Sonia Riquer, Jan Merin (sic) Esperanza Brito de Martinez among other militants of Comité Mexicano Feminista, Movimiento Pro Liberacion Feminista, Colectivo de Mujeres, Movimiento Nacional Feminista Mexicano y Comite Revueltos (sic).

Besides stating the names of the participants and affiliations of some attendants, the reports included transcriptions of texts of the banners they carried and a description of theatre plays staged by La Revuelta collective. As mentioned earlier, scripts for these spontaneous plays are, to my knowledge, non-existent. These documents are valuable in that they provide descriptions and also give us a sense of the reception and the kinds of publics these demonstrations called into being.526

In Jiménez’s archive, black and white images of members of La Revuelta members wearing masks and performing to an audience while other participants held signs reading “we are fed up with all the manipulation” provide visual evidence to accompany the text descriptions in the DGIPS reports. A particular image from Jiménez reveals how these two archives were perhaps more conscious of each other's existence than what I (and others) had initially imagined (Fig. 22). The image is a snapshot of La Revuelta’s theatrical play.

526 My concept of a public is informed by Michale Warner’s argument on how publics come into being in relation to a text and its circulation- that is it does not exist prior to the text. Michael Warner “Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version)” in Quarterly Journal of Speech, 88:4, (September 2002), 413-425.
According to a DGIPS report the play represented:

Una crítica en donde se señalaron las farsas con las que se trata a las concursantes de las que se hace una explotación indiscriminada, se representó como concursantes a la señorita México, señorita Miss USA, Miss Italia y Miss India; a la vez, se vertió el cariz contrario del que viene representando las participantes en el certamen, haciendo notar que fuera del concurso, éstas son Mujeres sumisas y esclavizadas a las áreas del hogar y por ende a los caprichos del hombre, llámeselo esposo o amante.527

A critique in which they highlight the masquerade the contestants have to go through and who they exploit indiscriminately. The actors represented Miss Mexico, Miss USA, Miss India and Miss Italy. They wore a double disguise to show how outside the contests, in their daily lives, these women were enslaved by housework and were submissive to the wills of their husbands or lovers.

Jiménez’s image foregrounds a side view of a member of La Revuelta wearing a disguise that portrays a beauty pageant contestant on the front and a shabbily-dressed housewife on the back. However, the focal point of the image is a man standing almost out of the frame in the left corner of the image. The man looks directly at the camera, his piercing gaze trespasses the polarized lenses of his Ray Ban glasses. His upright pose indicates he is aware Jiménez is taking a photo. Arguably, this man could be part of the audience, however, his outfit and self-assured pose suggest his identity as a guarura, a bodyguard or an informant of the DGIPS. Was Jiménez aware of his presence as much as he seems to be aware of Jiménez’s camera?

In our conversations, Jiménez and Mayer described the feminist demonstrations in which they participated as small affairs of no more than 20 or 50 female participants. In this scenario, it might have been easy to detect a mole. However, the demonstration at the auditorium was of a different magnitude. It was a heavily invigilated event with a larger-than-normal audience since the beauty contest was underway inside the auditorium.

auditorium at the same time as the feminists demonstrated outside.\(^{528}\) My desire to find the infiltrator in Jiménez’s photo is sustained by my indexical reading of the image, a reading concerned with pointing out the existence of the spy and demonstrating that each acknowledged the other’s presence.

Extracting women’s agency solely from a straightforward reading of women’s presence in photographs is problematic. For instance, Andrea Noble has acknowledged how “photographic images are much more complex than their apparent transparency would have us believe.”\(^{529}\) Noble proposes we focus on the multiple looks in a photograph’s production, dissemination, and reception to look differently at the historical narratives in which they are embedded.\(^{530}\) Following Noble, another reading emerges from this image, one that points to the contested environment of Mexico City’s public spaces and the role of women in them. The particular conditions of Jiménez’s image pose certain constraints to this kind of reading, since it has not circulated widely; however, multiple looks are indeed embedded in the image.

First is the look of the suspected spy, who adopts a challenging pose toward the camera (or toward the viewers of this image). His demeanor leaves no question about his masculinity. He is there to look at women, to ascertain his sexual power as a spectator of a beauty contest. But what he encounters is a second look, that of women looking at him. Jiménez is pointing the camera at him. Then, there are the looks of La Revuelta’s members who, while enacting their play, also engage the audience to see its responses. Looking at other of Jiménez’s images reveals the presence of women in the

\(^{528}\) “Mitín contra los concursos de belleza, frente al Auditorio Nacional” in El Día, May 29, 1978, (AGN), (APF S -XX), (DGIPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8, 258.

\(^{529}\) Andrea Noble, \textit{Photography and memory in Mexico: Icons of the Revolution} (Manchester and New York; Manchester University Press, 2010), 117.

\(^{530}\) Ibid.
audience, who also scrutinize the responses of other men in the audience (Fig.23-25). Arguably, by reinforcing how women use their beauty as facades for their submission at home, the play was not challenging masculine desires, but actually reinforcing them. However, what emerges from these images and its context is that what was at stake was the right to gaze as women and at women, something deeply related to the objectives of the feminist collectives, and that is perhaps more critically brought to bear through this image as a powerful contestation of daily modes of looking.

Jiménez’s images also provide important evidence of embodied encounters. The poses and facial expressions of the audience witnessing La Revuelta’s play give us a sense of how their performances were interpreted. In one of the images (Fig. 23) young girls seem to laugh and be amused by a close encounter between the protagonist of the play, the Janus-faced housewife-beauty pageant contestant, and a man standing in the audience. Holding a role of papers in one hand and folding his arm across his chest in protective demeanor, the man stares at the protagonist’s house-wife side as she approaches and inadvertently gets closer and closer to him. One reading of the protective demeanor of the man and the surrogate weapon in his arm (the roll of documents) could reinforce an interpretation of the intent of the play: the ways beauty pageant contestants hid their submissive and enslaved lives behind their beauty. The man in the image is ready to pound the protagonist with the roll of documents if she gets too close or if she steps out of line, while the other side of the protagonist’s disguise shows the beautiful beauty pageant contestant to the public. Yet another reading could see the downward look and protective stance of the man as hiding from the ridicule of the laughs of the young girls who look at the scene. And most importantly, here the gender of the letrado is made evident as he holds the documents in his hands, and contrasted with the visuality of the visual letrada (Jiménez camera and the interplay of looks from the public).

Reading the textual focus of DGIPS documents along the visual focus of Jiménez’s archive allows us to reconstruct different aspects of the cultural practices and legacies of feminist demonstrations. We get a sense of the publics they called into being, the ways in which their plays were interpreted (both by their publics and state informants)
and, moreover, they provide important snapshots of embodied encounters that are usually not available (or not read) in the historical records.

A close reading of some of the language used by state informants is also revealing of the workings of state surveillance and possibly on how the reports could serve as a means of communication between activists and informants, as well as raise questions as to the identity of the informants and where their allegiances stood. As Pablo Picatto has noted, the allegiances of informants are as difficult to ascertain and as convoluted as the Mexican intelligence system itself. Famous journalists, intellectuals and activist are said to have been both informants and victims of state surveillance and violence. Given this situation is not surprising that many used the system to pursue their own agendas. Here I would like to call attention to two documents that describe the establishment of Coalición de Mujeres in the context of demonstrations against Miss Universe and Señorita Mexico pageants to show how spy reports were also a means of communication and assertion for feminist activists. The first report entitled "La Coalición de Mujeres en una reunión de temas que les atañen," dated on May 31, 1978, describes a meeting with more than 70 women to discuss the decriminalization of abortion and sexual violence and domestic violence against women. At the end the informant reports:

*las personas que hicieron uso del la palabra indicaron que sus reuniones son netamente de tipo social que por ningún motivo tratan o trataran de enredarse en política, ya que el interés que ellas persiguen es exclusivamente el bienestar de la mujer, así mismo indicaron que cuentan con un domicilio social el cual esta ubicado en las Calles de Yucatán no, 132-3 Col Roma y se juntan los lunes y viernes.*

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532 "La coalición de Mujeres en una reunión de temas que les atañen" May 31 1978, (AGN), (APF S-XX), (DGIPS), Box 1634-B, "Generalidades" file 8, 259.
Those who spoke at the meeting indicated that their meetings have a social intent and that by no means seek any political purpose. That they only seek to improve the quality of life of the female portion of the population. They also indicated that they had a meeting place located at Yucatan Street no. 132-3 in the Roma neighborhood and that they meet on Monday's and Friday's.

The wording of this last paragraph could be read both as an invitation to attend more meetings and quite an ironic assurance that the intent of CMF in discussing the decriminalization of abortion and violence against women did not seek any political end. At the time, the Coalition was working on a legislative proposal on volunteer motherhood that would be presented to Congress by the end of the following year in alliance with several left-wing political organizations including the Mexican Communist Party, which had recently been legalized in the context of president López Portillo's political reform. The second report, dated on June 5, 1978, sends a completely different message:

*cabe hacer notar que se desconoce hasta ahora si esta Coalición tiene ya oficina en donde despachen, esto en virtud del hermetismo, discreción y desconfianza con que vienen trabajando.*

It is worth noting that we are not aware if this Coalition has an office. We do not know this information because of the hermetic and secretive way in which they conduct their business.

This second report adheres to Sergio Aguayo's assessment as to the purpose of Mexican intelligence in which the need to create enemies and secret plots fed a whole system of informants and government agents. And yet, despite the surprise of some of the activist about the existence of these documents, these reports, along with Jiménez's images, attest to the ways in which feminist activists were consciously aware of being

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533 *Antecedentes y objetivos de la Coalición de Mujeres feministas que encabezan Juana Armanda, Anilu Elias y la Dra, Edna Brostein* Junio 5, 1978 , (AGN), (APP S -XX), (DGIPS), Box 1634-B, “Generalidades” file 8, 271.
the object of the state informants’ gaze and sought many ways to look back at them (and perhaps protect themselves at the same time).

Read in opposition, the DGIPS reports and Jiménez’s images produce different narratives of numerous events. Jiménez’s tone is celebratory while the AGN archive is dry and descriptive. In the DGIPS documents, emphasis is placed on the number and identification of those attending each event along with a detailed transcription of discourses. In contrast, Jiménez’s archive could be seen as a snapshot taken in the heat of the moment—images that mostly show a group of women enjoying themselves and engaging with an audience, making the public space their own. But, as I have hopefully shown, reading her photos from a framework that considers embodied encounters and the multiple looks implicated in a photograph, Jiménez’s photos can also be brought to bear on other narratives.

In its organization, the AGN archive is linear (despite the questionable order and content of the boxes and documents that can change) and it follows a chronological sequence of events. In contrast, Jiménez’s archive (at the time I was able to consult it) was not organized or classified; despite this disorganization, its focus is a bit different than the papers in the AGN. It grants political and historical value to some activities, such as Lacy’s International Dinner Party (1979), that, as far as I know, were unnoticed by the government bureaucrats who kept track of the feminist activities and by the media. The nature of these two archives is essentially different, one is a personal archive and the other is part of the collections of the National Archive. Despite these differences, both archives share in a common moment of origin and of reappearance as public archives at a crucial time of interest in the archive. They both posse limits to
what can be said about the PRI's rule and more importantly about the practices of new wave feminists and visual letradas, and the state of the archives in Mexico.

While both archives have a promising potential in terms of granting public access, they equally share the peril of inaccessibility. On the one hand, the transfer of Jiménez's archive into the special collections of a privately funded university has the potential of ensuring its future preservation, due perhaps to better access to funding and human and technical infrastructure and resources. However, on the other hand, the location of the IBERO on the outskirts of Mexico City with no easy access by public transportation and, more importantly, the lack of proper legislation with regards to the protection of archives in Mexico can curtail the promises of accessibility. While the central location of the Mexican National Archives provides easy access to the DGIPS, the lack of proper legislation places similar constraints on them as those posed to Jiménez archive.

On January 24, 2012, after a long debate, a Federal Law of Archives was promulgated. The law is supposed to streamline the access to federal archives and regulate the preservation of documents deemed important to the nation, both in private and public hands. Until then, there was no law that protected archival documentation as patrimony of the nation, in contrast, for example, to the still limited Ley Federal sobre Monumentos y Zonas Arqueológicas, Artisticos e Historicos (1972) that protects monuments, archeological sites and works of art that are of historical importance. The Federal Law of Archives doesn’t have jurisdiction in the states and, critics argue, that its

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534 See for example Diana Taylor's discussion on the promises of new technologies and the importance of conservation to ensure accessibility. Diana Taylor "Save As... Memory and the Archive in the Age of Digital Technologies" presentation at The Doreen B. Townsend Center for Humanities at UC Berkeley on September, 30, 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rf0UJ> accessed on May 10, 2011.
wording is vague granting a lot of room for maneuvering. Moreover, Article 7 of the law could be read as corroboration that the countless rumors of disappearances and misfilings are, in fact, more than rumors.

Artículo 7. Bajo ninguna excepción los servidores públicos podrán sustraer documentos de archivo al concluir su empleo, cargo o comisión. Article 7. Public servants, under no circumstances or exceptions, are allowed to remove archival documents when their job comes to an end.

At the time I finished writing, Jiménez’s archive had not been classified and was not available for consultation. I was able to consult it between 2010 and 2011, before it was transferred to the special collections of IBERO. I consulted the DGIPS files in 2009 and 2010. I found the spy reports on feminist demonstrations by accident while doing a broad search on Echeverría’s administration and the IYW. At present, DGIPS as well as DFS files continue to be accessible and, recently, some reports are available online and others are available by request in digital format for researchers with an address in Mexico City.

In sum, both archives promise to advance our understandings of the ways in which visual letradas conceived of their right to see and to be seen (not only in visual terms in this particular case). As with any other archive, both collections are fraught and it is only by reading them along and against other sources that a more complete sense of the activities of these women can emerge, even if as incomplete representations, such as this one. Through reading of these two archives the visual


537 Padilla and Walker, "In the Archives: History and Politics", 5.
letrada emerges not solely defined by the visual nature of its sources—like Jiménez photographs. Rather, the visual letrada develops through a willingness to contest and return the gaze through images, ephemera, street performances, archival practices and embodied encounters as seen through the interplay of looks between publics and performers.
CHAPTER 6.

Performing feminist art: *Tlacuilas y Retrateras* and *la Fiesta de Quinceaños*.

The emergence of a differentiated feminist art movement in Mexico and, more importantly, an awareness of how feminisms could collaborate in dismantling the structures of the art establishment encountered several obstacles. In comparison to other areas of the humanities that adopted feminist theory and gender studies as crucial frameworks of analysis beginning in the 1980s, this was not a widespread practice in the field of art history and art criticism. Rather, formal analysis and social art history took precedence until the mid 1990s. According to Cordero and Sáenz, one of the reasons why art critics and historians have been late in adopting feminist frameworks in Mexico rests with the traditional function that both art and art historiography played as symbolic supports for the hegemonic discursive practices of the groups in power. As in other societies, additional factors at play included the gendered division of labor that deemed the high arts as an exclusively masculine territory while the lower arts or crafts were deemed feminine ones. In Mexico, this division became more paradigmatic as popular culture and the pre-Hispanic past became the foundations for the development of a highly masculine school of art, Mexican Muralism, that would not only play an important role in the creation of a national imaginary, but would dictate the

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539 One of the early studies that use a gendered perspective is Angélica Velázquez Guadarrama on nineteenth century painter Manuel de Ocaraza, "Castas o Marchitas: 'El Amor del Colibrí' y 'La Flor Muerta.' de Manuel de Ocaraza" in *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, no 73 (1998),125-160.

parameters of art criticism and historiography for the most part of the twentieth century.

The conception of feminism as an imported ideology also influenced the lack of interest that Mexican artists showed in labeling themselves as feminist artists. During the 1970s, feminism in Mexico was (and sometimes still is) mostly understood as an imported imperialist dogma that prioritized issues of sexual liberation over more pressing class-based and social justice agendas.\textsuperscript{541} According to artist and scholar Maris Bustamante many young female artists in the 1970s feared the consequences of being labeled as feminists in an already male-oriented art world.\textsuperscript{542} They worried they would be accused of being self-indulgent rather than politically committed.

In spite of this situation, several efforts that explored the role of women in the arts, such as the special edition of \textit{Artes Visuales} magazine (1976), were organized during the 1970s. Outside the established circles of art, a limited number of emergent young artists, some of whom were also militants of the feminist movement, began to describe themselves as feminist artists during the 1970s including Mónica Mayer, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Magali Lara, Rosalba Huerta and Lucila Santiago.\textsuperscript{543} Some of these artists participated and organized feminist art exhibitions such as "Collage Intímo," at \textit{Casa del Lago} (1977), and "Muestra Colectiva Feminista," at \textit{La Galería Contraste} (1978). As mentioned earlier, Mayer and Jiménez also collaborated in the organization of the Mexican version of Lacy’s International Dinner Party (1979) in the house of Lila Lucido de Mayer. Jiménez also participated in Mayer's project \textit{Traducciones: Un Dialogo}.

\textsuperscript{541} Jocelyn Olcott, "Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret"  
\textsuperscript{542} Maris Bustamante, interview with the author, unpublished, August 6, 2010.  
\textsuperscript{543} Mónica Mayer's "De la Vida y el Arte como Feminista" in Cordero and Saenz, \textit{Critica Feminista}, 401-413; and Magali Lara’s "La Memoria es como una piedra pulida" in Cordero and Saenz, \textit{Critica Feminista}, 415-420.
Internacional de Mujeres Artistas (1979). Moreover, several feminist militants engaged in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices, such as the street plays of La Revuelta or the films of Colectivo Cine Mujer. All these endeavors, I argue, constitute valid engagements with feminist artistic frameworks and practices regardless of the apparent disciplinary boundaries and political affiliations that have curtailed their being understood as such.

A parallel objective of this dissertation is to contribute to an ongoing conversation that acknowledges the practices of all these visual letradas as feminist argumentations in and of themselves. These argumentations and practices worked to change dominant perceptions about the lack of existence of a feminist critique and a feminist art movement. In doing so, rather than conceptualizing a feminist art movement in the singular or as a product of a charismatic personality or as a closed disciplinary field, I subscribe to Cornelia Butler’s proposal to think of feminism “as a relatively open-ended system that has throughout its history of engagement with visual art, sustained an unprecedented degree of internal critique and contained widely divergent political ideologies and practices.”544 In this chapter I focus on Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez’s engagement with the establishment of a feminist art movement, both of whom explicitly declared an interest in establishing just such a thing. In particular, I discuss the performance "La Fiesta de Quinceaños" by the feminist collective Tlacuilas y Retrateras, established in 1983 by Jiménez along with other artists and academics in order to provide another perspective on Jiménez’s feminist militancy and archival practice.

During the 1980s the concept of feminist art gained a significant presence in Mexico City’s art circles. According to Mónica Mayer, the golden era of Mexican feminist art took place in the early 1980s. Various feminist art collectives emerged during this time and the magazine *FEM*, a specialized feminist magazine, dedicated an issue to women’s art (*La Mujer en el Arte*) (Fig. 26).

![Figure 26. "Cover of FEM magazine, La Mujer en el Arte (1984)" Llevo mi destino cosido al cuerpo (I carry my destiny stitched to my body). Drawing by Magali Lara. Courtesy of Ana Victoria Jiménez](image)

Mónica Mayer, the only visual letrada trained as a visual artist of the four letradas I follow in this dissertation (Fernández, Mayer, Jiménez and Weiss), asked the publishers of *FEM* to edit a number on the topic. In the editorial note the editors, with an ironic tone, however, apologize to *FEM* readers for also including in the issue a

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discussion about the economic crisis that at the time was devastating Mexico’s economy.

“Extrañará a nuestras lectoras que abordemos en este número dedicada al arte, problemas tan prosaicos como el del aumento del precio a la carne y el de la escasez de leche. No queremos ofender con esto a quienes esperan encontrar en estas páginas un motivo de solaz para el espíritu; pero nos parece difícil poder escapar –aunque solo sea momentáneamente– al agobio que las mexicanas vivimos hoy en día.”

It will surprise our readers that in this issue dedicated to the arts we discuss prosaic problems such as the rise in the price of beef and the scarcity of milk. We certainly do not want to offend those who expect to find in these pages solace for the spirit, but it seems difficult for us to escape –even for a few moments– the harsh realities that Mexican women/las mexicanas experience nowadays.

The conception of art as a bourgeois practice or a differentiated experience from the troubles of daily life continued to haunt feminists. As discussed earlier, Mayer and Jiménez had witnessed how many feminist militants perceived art as part of a bourgeois practice and the art world as a patriarchal institution with no interest in change. The editorial also reflects the harsh economic realities experienced by the Mexican population in the mid-1980s. It sends a reassuring message to the number of women activists, from all social spheres, who were beginning to come together to form a wider women’s movement and who, arguably, were the intended audience of the magazine.

Established in 1976 by Alaíde Foppa and Margarita García Flores, by 1984 FEM magazine was the most well known independent feminist magazine in Mexico (and perhaps Latin America). Since its establishment it was a significant media outlet for many new wave feminist militants as well as an alternative to established cultural magazines. Articles published in FEM included economic and political analysis that

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548 Ibid, 2.
549 They did so at the meeting between US and Mexican artists and militants held in Cuernava as part of Mayer’s project “translations”. See Mónica Mayer, interview with the author; Ana Victoria Jiménez interview with the author.
affected the female portion of the population as well as critical essays on theater, visual arts, film and literature produced by women. During the 1980s, many militants of the early 1970s collectives turned their efforts towards developing links with urban popular and rural women's organizations as well as grassroots organizations, which would grow into a trend of feminism labeled as feminismo popular (popular feminism).\footnote{550} This transformation was motivated by a number of factors that produced important changes in the geographies of Mexico City during this decade.\footnote{551} One of these factors was the economic crisis beginning in 1982 that produced massive unemployment and consequently displaced large numbers of women into the informal sector. Many of these women became responsible for the survival of their families and along with increasing numbers of rural migration to the city these informal activities would reveal the feminization of poverty, a situation that many activist would begin to address.\footnote{552} Equally important was the influence of crucial measures implemented by international organizations via the UN in the context of the UN's declaration of the Women's Decade after the IWY conference (1976-1985). The following year wider forms of collective and solidarity action amongst women would emerge as result of the 1985 earthquake including the mobilization of the Union of Seamstress, Sindicato de Costureras 19 de Septiembre.\footnote{553} Hence, the justificatory tone of the editorial in the special issue on women's art (mostly perceived as a bourgeois practice) needs also to be read in the context of this crucial moment in the establishment of wider coalitions.

\footnote{551} Ibid., 217.  
\footnote{552} Martha Zapata Galindo, "Feminist Movements in Mexico", 19.  
\footnote{553} Ibid.
amongst women’s groups—an objective pursued by many feminist activists (many of whom collaborated in *FEM*).

Eight years after the special issue of *Artes Visuales* (1976) dedicated to the discussion of women in the arts several things had changed within the established circles of art. The articles in *FEM* recognized the work of many women artists and showed interest in the potential that feminism offered to develop a critical methodology in the arts as well as to recover the role of women within Mexican art history. Art historian Raquel Tibol, who had already began to publish work to recover the place of women artists within the narratives of art history, criticized scholars who were beginning to write the histories of women artists, she criticized those placing emphasis on 20th-century women and disregarding the importance of various 19th-century women artists.554 Rita Eder, art historian who had also participated in the discussion in *Artes Visuales*, introduced feminism as part of a shift in academic discourses that placed emphasis on minorities as a way to destabilize the white-male western-centric focus of academia.555 Indeed, this was a response to changing academic discourses but also a response to the greater number of women taking part in visual art practices who were adopting a critical stance about the ways femininity had been visually represented, whether they declared themselves as feminists or not.556 Other articles published in the special edition of *FEM* included Leticia Ocharan’s genealogy of the participation of


556 Also one has to remember that is at this time when the iconic work of Frida Kahlo begins to be recognized internationally and some of these readings approach her work from a feminist perspective. The biography published by Hayden Herrera un 1983 played a crucial role in popularizing the work of Frida Kahlo. See Herrera, Hayden. *Frida, a Biography of Frida Kahlo*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).
women in the graphic arts since the mid-nineteenth century and Bertha Hiriart’s discussion of film made by women in the 1980s.557

This special issue of FEM also included articles by Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez. Both of these articles revealed their authors’s intentions of establishing a feminist art movement that endorsed a critique of the patriarchal workings of the art establishment and that would offer an intervention in art education. Mónica Mayer published her proposal for what feminist art in Mexico could look like.558 Mayer defined feminist art as not only “the objects produced by artists but the critical influence of feminist culture in the arts”559 and she traced the existence of four genres of feminist art that were active in Mexico City at the time. First, she pointed to an individual approach taken by artists whose work dealt with feminine content and, second, to the then recent organization of women-only exhibitions. These exhibitions, she said, although rescuing the work of women from oblivion, at the same time worked against the objective of analyzing the patriarchal structures of the art world. Consequently, presenting these exhibitions as a solution to achieve women’s representation in the arts missed an important critical opportunity. Then Mayer mentioned the practice of feminist militant art, citing the pieces that Ana Victoria Jiménez, Lila Lucido de Mayer and Rosalba Huerta designed for the 1979 campaign against abortion, along with many other graphic and ephemera produced for some feminist demonstrations (Fig. 27). And lastly, Mayer discussed the work of several art collectives. The participation of Ana Victoria Jiménez in the issue of FEM magazine


559 Ibid.
consisted of a bibliography featuring relevant works on the topic of feminism and the arts, including national and foreign articles, and her collaboration in the article published by the feminist art collective *Tlacuilas y Retrateras*.

**Figure 27.** Ana Victoria Jiménez (1979). “Demonstration against abortion by Coalición de Mujeres Feministas at the mother’s monument”, courtesy of the artist.

In 1984, inspired by a feminist art workshop directed by Mónica Mayer from 1983-1984 at the National School of Visual Arts (*La Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, ENAP*), at least three feminist art collectives were established in Mexico City. Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante established the two-woman collective, *Polvo de Gallina Negra*, with the purpose of analyzing the representation of women in the arts, promoting the participation of women in the arts, and creating alternatives to

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560 Other collective practices in the 1980s included those of Magali Lara, Rowena Morales and writer Carmen Boulos. Magali Lara, ”La Memoria es como una piedra púlida”, 415-420.
traditional representations of femininity from a feminist perspective.\textsuperscript{561} Artists Nunik Sauret, Roselle Faure, Rose van Langen, Guadalupe García and Laita established \textit{Colectivo Bio-Arte} with the objective of addressing the biological transformations of women through visual means.\textsuperscript{562} The third collective, \textit{Tlacuilas y Retrateras}, was established by Ana Victoria Jiménez, Consuelo Almeda, Karen Cordero, Lorena Loaiza, Patricia Torres, Nicola and Elizabeth Valenzuela (Fig. 28). Taking their name from the nahuatl word \textit{Tlacuilos}, who were a group of men in charge of painting pictograms, and \textit{Retrateras}, a neologism related to the pictorial tradition of portraiture (\textit{retrato}), these women set out to analyze the working conditions of Mexican artists and propose theoretical and practical alternatives. Among the objectives of \textit{Tlacuilas y Retrateras} were: 1) to promote discussion about the state of affairs of Mexican women artists; 2) demand that artists have access to the same basic rights as other workers (childcare, medical insurance); 3) promote the study of Mexican visual artists; 4) develop feminist art workshops and; 5) endorse the potential of the arts as tools for political consciousness.\textsuperscript{563}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{561} Herminia Dosal participated briefly with Mayer and Bustamante. See Araceli Barbosa, \textit{Arte Feminista} and Mónica Mayer, \textit{Rosa Chillante}.
\item \textsuperscript{562} Araceli Barbosa, 138-139.
\item \textsuperscript{563} Araceli Barbosa, \textit{Arte Feminista en los Ochentas en México}, 138-139.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}

*Tlacuilas and Retrateras* published a collective article in the issue of *FEM*. The article was the first part of the results of a research project regarding the working conditions of women artists in Mexico. 

This first part of the research focused exclusively on women’s participation in the visual arts; the second part of the project was to focus on women’s participation in other creative practices, including crafts (to my knowledge this part was not completed). Their project consisted of interviews that centered on the following questions: under what conditions do women intervene in this field and what kind of social constraints do women face (family, work peers, teachers).

The results showed that, at the time, less than 20% of recognized artists were female; that their work was valued at a lesser price than their male counterparts; that it was not

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distributed equally; and that they had to deal with a lot of family and social
preconceptions in order to pursue a career in the arts. For instance, in terms of the art
school environment, many female students spoke about how neither the art professors
nor their male counterparts would take their work seriously. And, in terms of the family
environment, a number of testimonies discussed how some families accepted that
women studied painting, only because it would endow the female student with some
cultural capital and make her a more interesting housewife. Other testimonies spoke
about how their families would equate art school with a libertarian and sexually
promiscuous environment and had trouble accepting that their daughters would study
art. Yet other families did not consider art to be a real profession through which a
decent living could be earned.

This kind of sociological approach to art was in close dialogue with projects and
practices of other feminist artists and activist around the world, most famously those of
the Guerrilla Girls and French sociologist Hervé Fisher. In addition to the exposé
quality of these kinds of practices, this project also points to the widening sphere of
action of visual artists. Considering also the context in which the issue of FEM was
published gives us an idea of the publics that the work of Tlacuilas and Retrateras and
FEM called into being. Just as the publication of *Artes Visuales* on women’s art in 1976
was an inspiration for Mónica Mayer’s career as a feminist visual artist, the publication

565 The term sociological art was coined in 1971 in France with the purpose to bring back art to
the society it created it. In 1983, Hervé Fisher organized the exhibition “Where does the street reach?”
which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, it consisted of “… inviting the population to
come to the Museum to paint, draw, express personal worries of everyday life, give opinions about what
the Mexican society is for them; their past and their future; what they think about our world…” The
exhibition received mixed reviews but proved to be influential to many, including Nestor García Canclini
and Felipe Ehrenberg. For the work of Hervé Fisher see << http://www.hervefischer.net/ >> accessed on
May 20, 2011. Guerrilla Girls is an anonymous group of “women” established in 1985 in response to the
Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition “An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture” that
showcased 169 artists; out of those 169, only 17 were women. See Guerrilla Girls, *Confessions of the
of *FEM* responded to increased and widening interests in feminist practices. At the time a process of institutionalization and professionalization was in place, one that would mark the entrance of 1970s activists into formal politics and the establishment of women's studies and gender studies in academia. Regardless of these advances, the activities of this group of women was still not very welcomed within the established circles of art.

A few months after the publication of *FEM*, in August 1984, *Tlacuilas and Retrateras* organized the public performance entitled *Fiesta de Quince Años* at the San Carlos Academy in downtown Mexico City. The objective was to analyze the traditional celebration that marked the sexual rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood, a topic already address by Jiménez in the context of the meeting with US artists and Mexican feminists held in Cuernavaca in 1979. Three other collectives participated in *Tlacuilas*’ performance along with several artists, writers, musicians and critics. It consisted of five *acciones plásticas* or performances, an exhibition of more than 30 artists and a public reading of poetry.

The performance by *Tlacuilas y Retrateras* was the central piece of the event. It consisted of staging the traditional celebration by enacting the dance usually performed by fifteen-year old girls accompanied by their *chambelanes* (male chaperones) and the eating of a cake in the shape of a woman’s high-heeled shoe donated by Sanborn’s restaurant. Also part of the celebration was the presence of art critic Raquel Tibol, as *la madrina*, artist Fanny Rabel and Nahum B. Zenil, as godfathers, and the father of the

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566 Other activities of *Tlacuilas and Retrateras* included: their participation at demonstration against rape organized by *Red Nacional de Mujeres* at el Hemiciclo a Juárez on October 7, 1983. The group made several signs and banners for the demonstration. Later they participated in *Polvo de Gallina Negra*’s performance *Las Mujeres Artistas o Se solicita Esposa* held at *La Biblioteca Mexico*. Mónica Mayer personal archive.
fifteen year old played by Jose Luis Cuevas (who never showed up). Four other performances followed the staging of *Tlacuilas and Retrateras* including a performance by Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante along with their respective partners Victor Lerma and Ruben Valencia. They represented the romantic and sexualized nature of heteronormative relations. Mayer and Lerma romantically kissed with a huge red heart as a backdrop, while Valencia sprayed the public with a liquid representing semen that came out of small bottle that he had ripped from a prosthetic sexual organ that Bustamante was wearing. The event finally concluded as two young women appeared with their bodies covered with pieces of meat, pointing to the sexual availability of the fifteen year old that underlines the purpose of these celebrations.

For Jiménez the passage between girlhood and womanhood that located women as fertile beings is brought to bear in this celebration. This passage is constrained by social discourses that stress the values of chastity and virginity, while, at the same time, announcing to the world that *la quinceañera* is sexually available.

By this time Jiménez defined feminism as a way of looking at the world that makes us aware and questions the roles imposed on women by society, allowing us to see how these roles define and constrain women’s sexuality. The invitation to *la Fiesta de Quinceaños* included a series of questions that probed this celebration from a feminist point of view (Fig. 29):

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569 Ibid. Other performances included “Por Isabel” a performance by Marí Guerra, Eloy Tarciso and Robin Luccini; and a performance by Patricia Torres and Elizabeth Valenzuela.

570 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

571 Ibid.
Porque sigue existiendo la fiesta de quince años?; ¿Es un ritual de iniciación femenina heredado de la cultura prehispánica o una tradición importada de países desarrollados?; ¿Cuáles son las razones por las que dicha celebración tiene tanto arraigo en nuestra sociedad?; ¿Es una tradición patriarcal que dispone de la hija para ofrecerla como esposa o una promoción comercial para el derroche y la preservación del status social?; ¿Cuál es, de donde viene y que significado tiene la iconografía que rodea a la fiesta?; ¿Qué alternativas proponemos para una celebración distinta?

Why does the fiesta de quince años continue to be practiced? Is it a pre-Hispanic right of passage ritual or is it a practice imported from developed countries? Why is this celebration so engrained in our society? Is it a patriarchal tradition that offers a daughter in marriage or is it a commercial enterprise in order to maintain a social status? What is it and what is the significance of the iconography that is used in this celebration? Is this celebration relevant for contemporary 15 year olds? How would we want girls to initiate their lives and towards what aim? Is there something still valuable from this celebration? What alternatives could we propose?

Figure 29. "Invitation to Fiesta de Quince Años addressed to Concha Michel, invited as madrina de libro", images courtesy of Ana Victoria Jiménez.

572 La Fiesta de Quince Años, invitation in Ana Victoria Jiménez’s archive.
Besides organizing and participating in the event, Jiménez constructed a board game based on the game *El Juego de la Oca* (snakes and ladders) entitled “*El juego de la sirena tratando de romper el círculo sin fin.*” Jiménez reconstructed the game using found illustrations and her photos, mostly taken in the *novias* district in downtown Mexico City. The piece reconstructed the life of Mexican women as a game dictated by celebrations, traditional myths and female archetypes including the mermaid, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the cult to *San Antonio* (which states that if you put a statue of the saint upside down it ensures that you’ll get married), as well as bodily functions and social issues such as menstruation, violence against women and prostitution (Fig. 30-32).

While the instructional text has a prescriptive tone, the fact that it was intended as a participatory piece, that is, a game of losers and winners, adds a sense of possibility and agency to Jiménez’s views on such topics. Moreover, the fact that both men and women could play the game, which referenced both female archetypes and social issues that victimized women, created a queer space of engagement in which normative roles could potentially be transgressed by the players as they played the game.

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573 “Juego de la sirena tratando de romper el círculo sin fin versión de Ana Victoria Jiménez A.” in Ana Victoria Jiménez archive and interview with the author.

574 The game was set up inside a vitrine and hence no real participatory experience existed.
Figure 30. Ana Victoria Jiménez (1984) “El Juego de la sirena tratando de romper el círculo sin fin”, courtesy of the artist.

Game of the Mermaid or Attempting to break the unending vicious circle — a version by Ana Victoria Jiménez.

You need a couple of dice to play. The game is played by an unlimited number of players. If in the first roll of dice the player gets a 5 and 3, the player should move to case number 28. If the dice rolls 6 and 4 the player should move to case number 12. If the player stops on the mermaid case (a fabulous half women and half fish being that, according to mythology, was supposed to sink ships when sailors listened to her singing and because she is capable of breathing air and living underwater, she represents women trying to escape myths without fear of shipwrecks.) The player who lands in case 12 should continue to advance. When a player reaches case 21, her or she looses two turns. When a player arrives to case number 29 Rape (sexual abuse inflicted to a woman by one or several men. It can be performed using force or psychological violence and would have life long psychological repercussions on the victim). The player should stay there until another player falls on the same case. Whoever arrives first to case 39 To dress Saints or to see if San Antonio can grant us a miracle continue to case number 44. The Labyrinth, case 44, is the place where women find themselves since childhood even though they desire to escape. The player will remain there until someone else falls on case 44. The Butterfly, case 47, represents the metamorphosis of a silk worm, it as beautiful and as ephemeral as dreams. Like all the fairytales that we’ve been told, whoever falls in this case shall return to the beginning of the game. Whoever gets to case number 49, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), Mexican poet and writer who dedicated her life to study, not to know more but rather to be less ignorant, shall return to case 39.
Whoever falls in case 52 The Jail shall remain there until another player gets to it. The player who falls on case 58 shall begin the game again. If a player falls on case number 60 Prostitution, a patriarchal institution that designates a number of women to please the masculine community, shall move to case number 52. If a player falls on case number 53, illusions, a mistaken sense perception that makes us confuse appearances for reality shall return to case number 31. Whoever gets to case number 55 shall recite stories about princes and shoes and shall return to case 42. When a player gets to case number 56 menstruations, a physical process that marks the ability to conceive children, has to move to case 31. Whoever gets to a case that is occupied by another player shall remain in that place and the first player shall switch places with the second player. The player who earns more than the necessary points to reach case number 63 shall backup the surplus number of points. The player who arrives to case number 63 is the winner!

Acknowledgments: Maria Salud Ramírez, Ana Alvarez, Ramon Tirado and Pablo Jiménez. Some definitions are based on Victoria Sau. The illustrations of the Mermaid and the Jail are taken from original board games.

Figure 32. Ana Victoria Jiménez (1984) “El Juego de la Sirena Tratando de Romper el círculo sin fin”, (detail of game instructions) courtesy of the artist.

In spite of the fact that, at the time, the art establishment seemed to be more open to exploring feminist issues in art, Fiesta de Quinceaños stirred up the art community of Mexico City. Raquel Tibol, the famous art critic, feminist and militant of the UNMM, who was designated a madrina, wrote scathing reviews of the event. Other reports captured the views of the audience who felt insulted by the ridicule inflicted on the Quinceañera tradition. Further, a neighbor of San Carlos commented:

"estas niñas ricas, que no saben lo que son los XV años populares. Es la única fiesta importante de la chica marginada. Es su fiesta y de nadie más. Que sepan que es pobreza y la entiendan en su significado"575

this rich girls do not understand the significance of this celebration in popular terms. This is not only the only but also the most important celebration for a marginal girl. It is her party and no one else’s. They (the rich girls) should acknowledge what it means to be poor and what is the significance of this celebration.

For Jiménez the event was misunderstood by the art community and by the audience. This misunderstanding points to the constraints within the art community of accepting a multidisciplinary event as such *La Fiesta de Quinceaños* as art. In fact, many famous artists who had agreed to participate did not show up. On the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, the responses of the audience and the passersby, as the statement of the neighbor of San Carlos attest, exposed the celebration as a space of contestation, where not only feminist criticisms but also those of broader publics had a stake in celebrations and representations of feminine gender and sexuality. According to one newspaper report, more than two thousand people were in attendance.

Indeed, the meaning of this event could become more complex if different voices were allowed into the discussion. While this was one of the intentions of *Tlacuilas y Retrateras*, the discussions in the following days revolved around the attacks of Tibol and the defensive responses by Mayer and others that were aimed at the ways in which the art world discriminated against these kind of performative practices. The discussion was framed as one pertaining only to the arts’ community. Even though the media covered the event, there was no engagement with other audiences. Overcoming this inability has been, and still is, the quest of many avant-garde movements that attempt to break with the constraints of their cultural fields only to be pulled back into them in order either to defend themselves and take a stand, as in this case, or to gain recognition, paradoxically sustaining their fields of production.

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576 Among the artists that decided to not show were Arnold Belkin and Jose Luis Cuevas. "Damas y Caballeros, madrinas y Raquel Tibol en *La Fiesta de Quinceaños*" in Mónica Mayer personal archive.

577 Ibid.

578 Karen Cordero, Mónica Mayer and Jiménez, along with artist Maris Bustamante appeared in at TV show hosted by Paty Berumen to expose their views about and the objectives of feminist art. Monica Mayer, interview with the author.
In part due to the public reception of *La Fiesta de Quince Años*, the collective *Tlacuilas y Retrateras* disbanded—some members seeking to develop careers as visual artists preferred not to stir up the art establishment. However, ultimately, for Jiménez, the event was a success. More than 30 artists participated, representing what *la fiesta de quinceaños* meant to them. There were romantic, ironic, insulting and critical interpretations with an audience of more than 2000 people. For Jiménez the event was about exposing and provoking not about coming to closure. It was yet another avenue in which visual letradas exercised their right to self-representation.

The reception of *Fiesta de Quinceaños* summarized the constraints that the establishment of a differentiated feminist art movement in Mexico faced. Not only did feminist scholars show a limited interest in linking art with feminism, but also the art community completely shunned their efforts. Critics disqualified the activities of the feminist collectives on the grounds of the poor aesthetic quality of their events, arguing that they were a copy of the US feminist model. Others also argued that a feminist critique was at work in the art of previous artists who didn’t need to proclaim their militancy so literally and through such public events. Clearly the public aspect of the performance transgressed, even then, the elitist nature of the art gallery. *La Fiesta de Quinceaños* brought together several practices that had been introduced by feminist collectives in the 1970s and the practices of art collectives such as *Los Grupos*. *La fiesta*

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579 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
580 In conversation with Araceli Barbosa, Ana Victoria Jiménez acknowledges how many feminist activists didn’t understand what they [the feminist art collectives] were trying to do. In fact she argues that Mayer began to advertise her feminist art workshop at *La Coalicion de Mujeres Feministas* and disappointingly no one showed up. See Araceli Barbosa, *Arte Feminista*, 157.
was a collective experimentation with performative languages in a public space that engaged with a particular kind of politics: the ways in which normative femininity and masculinity were constructed through cultural traditions. *La Fiesta* was a transgressive performance that questioned traditional art formats and conceptions of how the relation between art and politics had been conceived in Mexico for most part of the twentieth century. These women’s art collective actions provoked the art establishment into publicly taking a stand on where they thought the direction of women in the visual arts should go. Art critics were not ready to discuss the interdisciplinary nature and the different aesthetics espoused by feminist collectives as art. Therefore, even though many were interested in researching the working conditions of women in the arts and critiquing the representations of femininity, the majority of artists ultimately opted for more subtle and personal tactics for disturbing the patriarchal workings of the art world and its visual conventions.  

Like other art collectives, by the early 1990s the feminist collectives established in the 1980s had disbanded. Visual artists were not immune to the economic crisis and many collectives dissolved as artists sought to establish individual careers. By the mid 1990s a new generation of artists would begin to establish collectives and alternative spaces at the same time that Mexican art rose to popularity in international markets. The politics that drove 1970s and early 1980s collectives—including feminism—were shed for an interest in participating in the global languages of contemporary art, effectively erasing the legacies of this earlier period.

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582 Magali Lara, interview with the author, unpublished, August 28, 2010.
The short-lived establishment of feminist collectives or, for that matter, the attempt to develop a militant feminist art movement seen through the perspective of Mayer and Jiménez casts it as the failed project of a small group of women. However, tracing its connections with 1970s feminist militancy and collective practices as well as Los Grupos locates their efforts at a crucial time when many sought to redefine the links between militant politics and art practices, and at the crossroads of an increased participation of women in the public sphere due to social and political developments at both local and international levels. A study of the constraints they faced and the reception of their works reveals how many interests and values were challenged by their practices of self-representation.

In sum, Jiménez’s archive is a valuable resource that allows us to look at the ways several women sought to challenge structures that oppressed women within the art world including feminists discourses that conceived of art practices and the art world (traditionally defined) as bourgeois practices and not a priority for feminist struggle. Equally, they regarded the creation of a feminist art movement as a foreign and imperialistic imposition. Jiménez’s documentations read alongside oral testimonies and media reports show how these discourses were not rigid but, rather, constantly produced and contested through interconnections between distinct and sometime competing feminist interests. Moreover, Jiménez’s practice as a visual artist shows another facet of her militancy that speaks of her shifting stance towards feminism and her archival persona. In light of her earlier political experiences, her engagement in Tlacuilas and Retrateras provides a more nuanced account of the histories of new wave feminism pointing to a narrative of both rupture and continuation with other women’s movements and the crucial role that aesthetic practices played in such endeavors.
SECTION 3.

VISUAL LETRADAS PROTESTING THE MEDIA ARCHIVE

In the late 1970s throughout the Latin American region discussions over the existence of a distinct “Latin American photography” or “way of seeing” were taking place through the organization of international meetings, first in Mexico, in 1978 and 1981, and then in Havana, in 1984. Influenced by the militant practice of many photographers and the excitement over the triumphant revolutions of Cuba (1958) and Nicaragua (1979) in these forums, participants foregrounded photography as a weapon that could transform the social and economic realities of the region, una arma de transformación social. Such a weapon, however, was often wielded in highly gendered ways.

Whereas the vast majority of the images of the photographers who attended these meetings either glorified the masculinity and heroism of revolutionary fighters or

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584 Throughout this chapter I use the phrase “way of seeing” to mean various things. First, in John Berger’s sense who noted in his famous 1972 study that the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. Second, I use a more expanded notion adopted by many visual theorists to point to the ways visual images organize and reiterate particular power relations but also how they bear these relations within their formal structure and in their conditions of production, distribution and reception and how in turn all these aspects are explicitly gendered. And third, it is the best way I could translate “mirada” or “forma de ver” which was used in many of my Spanish sources to indicate a more ethical or different way of seeing that was enunciated from the periphery rather than from the center, nonetheless, following very similar aesthetic and technological conventions.

585 This kind of discourse about photography was not exclusive to Latin America. Various photography/media theorists also compared photography to a gun, una arma. Most famously was Susan Sontag who gave a conference in UNAM in Mexico City in the 1971 and Les Levine whose writings were published in the Mexican magazine Artes Visuales also in the early 1970s. In Mexico, Katya Mandoki, columnist on photography for the newspaper Uno Mas Uno, proposed to give away photographic cameras to the inhabitants of Mexico City’s shanty towns so that rather than spending their free time watching TV they would go out and take photos of their surroundings. By doing this, Mandoki argued, they would become producers rather than passive receptors of the dominant culture. Moreover, she added, photography would become “una arma de transformación social” and not only a legitimized form of art. See Katya Mandoki, “Boom y trasfondo ideológico de la fotografía en México” in Rogelio Villareal M., Aspects de la Fotografía en México Vol. I (México: Federación Editorial Mexicana, 1981) 41-42; Franco, Fernell, Sagrario Berti, María Iovino M., and Graciela Iturbide. Fernell Franco: Amarrados (Bound) (New York, NY: Americas Society, 2009); and Olivier Debroise, and Elizabeth Fuentes Rojas. Fuga mexicana: un recorrido por la fotografía en México (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 18.
portrayed the miseries and precariousness of Latin American realities, women were mostly represented as companions of revolutionary leaders, as sexualized ethnic beauties, or as victims of class and racial disparities.

These photographic traditions followed, to some extent, the realistic documentary aesthetics set a decade earlier by New Latin American Cinema. During most of the 1970s and well into the 1980s New Latin American Cinema, for the most part, and Latin American documentary photography, to some extent, became the reference points for US and Third World filmmakers, photographers and scholars associated with the New Left. In Mexico, both practices influenced dominant visual conventions that defined what counted as politically committed art and determined frames of reference for the production of alternative, commercial and national productions interested in social change.

In this section, I closely examine how the practices of Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández and Pola Weiss challenged dominant definitions of what constituted politically committed art or a political engagement in the arts. I describe how their practices contested dominant visual regimes and actively participated in the development of alternative regimes of media and visuality. In doing so, the visual archives they constructed complicated national and local histories of social movements, feminist cultural politics, and alternative photographic, film and video production.

586 For an overview of the work of the photographers that participated in the first meeting organized in Mexico City in 1978 see Alejandro Castellanos and Cecilia Hidalgo, Revelación Revuleta y Ficción. Hecho en Latino America. (Mexico: Centro Nacional de la Artes, Centro de la Imagén, 2007).
587 Ibid.
In this section the “archive” continues to be a keyword that manifests itself at two moments: first, at the moment of creation, guided by the ongoing interest of Fernández, Jiménez, Weiss and Mayer in documenting their own artistic practices; and, second, at a more recent moment of self-reflexive understanding of the archival potential of their work. In this section the archive is also taken to mean a collection of images, the aesthetic conventions that give shape to a disciplinary tradition (or genre), the performative practice of producing audiovisual records and images and, most importantly, following Foucault, a system that defines and delimits discursive practices. The practices of these four women ask whether an artwork can be considered an archive and contest the notion of an archive through the kind of information they record.

By offering competing visual evidence, Jiménez, Fernández and Weiss produced visual archives that provide a counter archival perspective. This perspective challenges and interrupts normative visual archetypes of Mexican femininity espoused and produced by established image-making traditions. In so doing they provide new perspectives on the role of audiovisual media as records of the past and equally produce new regimes of media and visuality.

However, the intent here is not to posit a correct way of depicting Mexican women or femininity, as if a fixed definition of such things existed somewhere, nor do I purport to provide a supposedly more ethical way of seeing or approaching media practices. Rather, my intention is to open up the spectrum of available visual discourses not to relativize them but to place them side-by-side in such a manner that they

589 While I do not devote a chapter to Monica Mayer’s work her experiences are discussed throughout this dissertation and in this section, chapter eight considers her experiences with Cine Mujer.

interrupt each other’s narratives. These interruptions will point to the production of competing visual representations that destabilize normative visual discourses that continue to be consumed and circulated as representative of Mexican and, sometimes, Latin American visual culture. Moreover, such a reading points to the existence of competing ways of seeing at a time when a Latin American way of seeing was being theorized.

The other engagement with the archive that Jiménez, Fernández and Weiss particularly share is with the medium itself. They all use a form of recording media: photography, film and video. Each media poses a particular challenge in relation to the archive not only as means of recording information but also as to how that information is preserved, exhibited and made accessible to the public. As rapid technological advances render media formats obsolete, resources to transfer between platforms represent one of the biggest challenges in maintaining accessibility to time-based work.\footnote{591} Institutions dedicated to the preservation of Mexican film and photography have been in place since the mid 1970 but, as with any other archive, who decides what enters into the Archive becomes a matter of contention. Thus, the lack of recognition of the practices of these three women renders the access to their work and preservation of their archives a more urgent matter. For instance, the films of Cine Mujer are kept at Filmoteca UNAM but their access is limited, as far as I know, by the fact that they have not been transferred to a digital format.\footnote{592}

\footnote{591 For a recent discussion on challenges of preserving and exhibiting media art see Julie Noordegraaf, Saba G. Cosetta and Le Maitre Barbara, (eds) \textit{Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art. Challenges and Perspectives} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).}

\footnote{592 I was not able to see Cine Mujer films at filmoteca UNAM. I was able to consult them at Rosa Martha Fernández personal archive.}
During the 1970s film was a well established and recognized practice in the Mexican cultural field that included a system of production, distribution and consumption with both national and international reach as well as an established group of film producers and film critics who determined the quality and genre of movies. As mentioned earlier, Echeverría’s administration reform package injected new energy into the production of both commercial film as well as independent cinema. Efforts to preserve Mexican film production were also put in place during that decade through the establishment of Cineteca Nacional in 1974.593

Photography, on the other hand, was only officially recognized as an artistic discipline in the 1970s despite the fact that a number of national and international artists had already adopted it as their preferred medium of expression.594 In other disciplinary terrains such as anthropology and journalism the use of photography had become ubiquitous and, by the 1970s, there were a set of visual conventions that distinguished ethnographic photography and photojournalism as two distinct genres. Moreover, the government began to show an interest in the preservation of historical photography through the establishment of Agustín Víctor Casasola’s archive.595

Video, as discussed earlier, was a relatively new and expensive medium on the Mexican cultural scene that was not easily accessed. This meant that, in contrast to film

593 See chapter two of this document for more on the Cineteca.

594 In Mexico, many “art” exhibitions of photography took place before the 1970s including shows by Lola and Manuel Álvarez Bravo beginning in the 1930s, as well as an exhibition of photojournalism in El Palacio Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1947. But it was in 1977 when the Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) included photography in the graphic biennial that a discussion of photography as art became prevalent in Mexico’s fine art circles. See Elizabeth Ferrer, Lola Álvarez Bravo, (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005), 20-21; Rebeca Monroy Nasr, Ases de la cámara: textos sobre fotografía mexicana. (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010); and Rogelio Villareal, Aspectos de la Fotografía en México.

595 For a detail analysis of how the archive was constructed and about the other photographers that collaborated with Casasola see John Mraz, Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity. (Durham : Duke University Press, 2009). And for the role of Casasola’s archive in shaping collective memory see Andrea Noble’s Photography and Memory in Mexico.
and photography, there were no frameworks to understand video as an artistic practice other than through television broadcasting. Once a video was produced, artists faced great challenges to exhibiting and distributing their work. Mexican artists interested in experimenting with video in the 1970s had to have connections with private or public television broadcasting companies or resort to their own means to produce a video. In contrast to film or photography a state infrastructure that supported video art would not be in place until the early 1990s. As video became more affordable it would become the media of choice for grassroots organizations and other marginal groups (including feminist collectives) in Mexico as elsewhere in the Latin American region.596

596 See for example Patricia Aufderheide “Grassroots Video in Latin America” and Irene S. Goldman “Latin American Women’s Alternative Film and Video. The case of Cine Mujer, Colombia” in Visible Nations, 219-238; 239-261.
CHAPTER 7

Interrupting photographic traditions: the photographs of Ana Victoria Jiménez

“Society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it. To do this, it possesses two means. The first consists of making Photography into an art, for art is not mad. (...) The other means of taming the Photograph is to generalize, to gregarize, to banalize it until it is no longer confronted by any image in relation to which it can mark itself, assert it special character, its scandal, its madness.” — Roland Barthes. 597

Between the 1970s and the 1980s the practice of photography in Mexico, as elsewhere, underwent various transformations. Encouraged by influential meditations on how we deal and make sense of photographic images, such as those of Barthes in the above quote, a critique that addressed the power relations implicit in the act of taking a photograph began to unfold. 598 At the same time, photography was being elevated as an artistic discipline in its own right. 599 Around the world exhibitions on photography were organized giving material weight to an already developed photographic canon as the work of some photojournalists and amateurs was elevated to the category of auteur photography. 600 In Latin America, photographers began to search for a distinct way of seeing to characterize the image production that was concerned with promoting social

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599 For a particular discussion on photographic exhibitions organized in the US beginning in the early 1980s, the opening of specialized photographic exhibition venues in important museums and the inclusion of photography in art historical narratives see Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, Photography at the Dock. Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices.

600 Ibid.
change through the representation of the political and social hardships experienced in the region.  

In Mexico, events such as the establishment of the Agustín Víctor Casasola’s archive in 1976 not only stressed the importance that photographic images had in the construction of national imaginaries and official historical narratives but pointed to the significance that visual archives would continue to play in such constructions. Moreover, echoing developments around the world, the Mexican state began to legitimize photography as an independent artistic practice by including photography as a discipline in state-sponsored art exhibitions. At the same time, it financed the exploration of diverse indigenous communities and the publication of photo-essays, thus renewing the practice of ethnographic photography (fotografía etnográfica de autor). Likewise, the practice of photojournalism in Mexico would gain some legitimacy as photographers were granted more credit for their images and were able to work more freely due to the establishment of independent media outlets. Within this context of crucial transformations and debates in the field of photography, Ana Victoria Jiménez began to photograph street protests by feminists in Mexico City. In this chapter I read Jiménez’s photographic practice and her images as meaningful actors

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601 See Katya Mandoki, “Boom in trasfondo ideológico de la fotografía en México”; and Fernell Franco, Amarrados.

602 John Mraz, Looking for Mexico and Andrea Noble’s Photography and Memory in Mexico.

603 Elizabeth Ferrer Lola Álvarez Bravo; Rebeca Monroy Nasr, Ases de la cámara; and Rogelio Villareal, Aspectos de la Fotografía en México.

604 Here I am referring to the publications sponsored by the Institute of Indian Affairs (El Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI) beginning in 1978 in which Nacho López, Graciela Iturbide, Mariana Yamplosky and Pablo Ortiz Monasterio among other photographers who participated.

within debates over the role of photography, particularly as these discussions developed in Mexico during the 1970s and 1980s.

For the most part, Jiménez’s repertoire of images has, until recently, eluded any form of genre or stylistic classification. This lack of recognition is mostly due to the exclusion of her practice from historical narratives—the result of a lack of awareness about her work—and, most notably, the marginalization that her kind of practice has been subjected to by the structures that legitimize the field of photography. Jiménez herself, over the course of several interviews, emphatically denied that her photographic work could be considered either art or photojournalism, in spite of the fact that her images had circulated, although marginally, in art galleries as well as had been published in some newspapers. Perhaps Jiménez’s somewhat modest assertions echo Barthes’ concerns about what drives us to frame photographic images as art or as any genre for that matter, thus offering a strategy for tempering or taming them, as he states in the quote with which I began this chapter. In other words, it is conceivable that Jiménez was worried that her images would have their madness tamed by means of categorizing them within disciplines or styles. By denying their categorization as art or photojournalism, her images had no referent and, in this condition, their meanings were loose and lost and, arguably, carried their madness within themselves for a longer period of time. Madness could be understood as the polysemic capacities of photographic images, which Barthes has theorized extensively, or as a radical political impulse, which is ascribed to things that have been kept at the margins.

606 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

607 Roland Barthes has theorized the instability and mutability of photographic meaning through his conceptualization of photography as a semiotic event. The meaning of a photographic image, according
Photographic images do produce visual discourses and circulate in certain economies that influence our understandings of self; in turn, they are influenced by these understandings, despite the fact that their meanings are never fixed. Moreover, the act of taking a photograph is an encounter of uneven power relations. Taking this into consideration and following the work of Deborah Poole and Michelle Shawn Smith, both of whom read photographic images as they relate to other archives, I propose to read Jiménez’s photographic practice against and along other visual archives that emerged within this landscape of debate over the role of photography. Reading the emergence of distinct visual archives concurrently at the moment of their conception enables the possibility of finding photographic meaning in the interstices between them in, as Michele Smith puts it, “the challenges they pose to one another, and in the competing claims they make.” In addition, this reading situates Jiménez’s repertoire of photographs as part of a network of images and visual discourses, that is, as distributed within a system of production, circulation, and consumption. This approach allows me to investigate more fully the economies that drive the production of

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608 For different ways of addressing these uneven power relations see Ariella Azoulay’s The Civic Contract of Photography. She studies images of violence inflicted against Palestinians and argues that the violent encounters produced by the photographic act are controlled by the image itself because a civic contract polices them. As long as photographs exist, she argues, “we can see in them and through them the way in which such a contract also enables the injured parties to present their grievances, in person or through others, now or in the future.” Ariella Azoulay, The Civic Contract of Photography (Zone Books: New York, 2008), 85-86. For an interesting take on how other indigenous or “non-western communities” relate to images and counter the academic biases on reading the object-subject power relation, particularly in regards to ethnographic photography, see Deborah Poole, Vision Race and Modernity; and Elizabeth Edwards, “Thinking Photography Beyond the Visual?” in Long, J. J., Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch. Photography: Theoretical Snapshots. (London: Rutledge, 2009) 31-48.

609 Deborah Poole, Vision, Race and Modernity; and Michelle Shawn Smith, Photography on the Color Line.

610 Michelle Shawn Smith, Photography on the Color Line, 3.
knowledge, that is, those economies that decide what should be tamed and what should be left in a state of madness.

I read Jiménez’s visual archive in relation to a repertoire of images depicting women and, in some cases, produced by women that are framed within two broad photographic traditions: auteur ethnographic photography and photojournalism. I locate Jiménez’s archive in relation to a tradition of ethnographic photography closely linked to discourses of indigenismo and photojournalism as they were renewed in the 1970s and, in turn, were traversed by discussions over the existence of a Latin American way of seeing, the institutionalization of the Agustín Víctor Casasola’s archive and the legitimization of photography as an art in its own right. These three last events help to frame an understanding of the kinds of photographic images that were seen as valuable as well as of the discourses that were used to justify their value. In addition, I also map out certain discursive shifts over the course of twentieth-century Mexico that have gendered the practice of photography as male or female, irrespective of who takes the photograph. In specific, I am interested in the intersections of such gendered conceptions of photographic practice as they take place in relation to reconfigurations of discourses of indigenismo and public expressions of feminist demands. Reconfigurations of indigenismo played a crucial role in countering the unruly public performances of feminist women who demanded their rights on the streets and, at the same time, indigenista photography was one of the means through which depictions of sanctioned femininity circulated throughout Mexico and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{611}

\textsuperscript{611} A wide range of studies have analyzed how particular representations of gender, sexuality and ethnicity came to constitute central elements of a wide-spread accepted notion of mexicanness and in turn how indigenismo intersected these representations and also how these representations were always appropriated and contested by different communities. For a seminal study on how official national representations and narratives were highly gendered see Jean Franco, \textit{Plotting Women: Gender Representations in Mexico} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
By *indigenista* photography I mean the tradition of taking photographic images of indigenous communities that had its origins in nineteenth-century *costumbrismo* and in an anthropological way of seeing that developed in the 1920s. I discuss the reconfigurations of this tradition in the 1970s through the work of Graciela Iturubide and map out a genealogy of other photographers including Tina Modotti, Lola Alvarez Bravo and Mariana Yampolsky, all of whom also ascribed to an ethics of visualizing femininity entrenched in indigenismo and whose work is valued as art. That is, their photographs are held in private and public art collections and circulate in art exhibitions, auctions and even as advertisements for transnational brands.612 Despite the contradictory readings their images incite or their critical intentions, these images circulate and are consumed in a manner that has contributed to the perpetuation of a way of seeing that has consolidated the consumption of romanticized images of Mexican women as indigenous exotic beauties or as “radically tamed revolutionaries.”613 Their work is complicit with the construction of a national imaginary that feminizes ethnicity, exalting the figure of woman as equal to indigenous-mother, while, at the same time, produces sexualized representations of femininity as the exotic indigenous Other.

In contrast, I suggest that Jiménez’s different choice of subject matter, as she wielded the viewfinder towards the women behind the camera rather than at their romanticized indigenous subjects, provides an alternative visual narrative about Mexican femininity and desire, one that was not appealing to government officials,

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613 By radically tamed revolutionaries I am referring to process of commodification of the act of cross-dressing as a Tehuana that was motivated by the popularization of Frida Kahlo’s and Tina Modotti’s lives as academics began to write about them, turning them into symbols of radical femininity. See the 1982 Whitechapel exhibition in London entitled *Tina Modotti and Frida Kahlo* and the publication of Elena Poniatowska’s *Tinisima* in 1991.
international audiences or the parameters that defined Latin American realities that photographers sought to represent at the time. Notwithstanding this difference, I also contend that it is only through the reading of both archives side by side that a more nuanced understanding about feminine visual desires/pleasures and the ways some women chose to represent themselves can emerge.

In terms of photojournalism I discuss two of the major exponents of this practice, Hector García and Nacho López, along with some more recent work that has been labeled as New Photojournalism. I consider how the history of this photographic genre has obscured the participation of women and how most photojournalistic images follow traditional representational tropes of sanctioned femininity. Offering Jiménez’s archive as evidence of the existence of a different photojournalistic archive allows me to show how the reconfiguration of a new stylistic genre, New Photojournalism, continues to perform similar exclusions and endorse visual conventions that helped define Mexican photojournalism.

These two visual archives (indigenista photography and photojournalism) constitute visual representations of femininity that have been crucial in influencing imaginings of women as they, in turn, have constantly been influenced by new subjective understandings of how men and women have chosen to enact gender roles in an environment shaped by class and racial tensions. As such, these archives are not static but constantly being reconfigured and reinterpreted. While this is not in dispute, I argue that Jiménez’s archive enunciates transformations in the field of visual representation from a different vantage point, one that could be labeled as a feminist perspective. This is the case not only because her photographic images are “literal” representations of the feminist movement or because she is a woman photographer but,
most importantly, because her photographic practice involves a kind of self-
representation that involves a critique against the normative ways in which Mexican
femininity was represented and sexualized in relation to the other two archives
discussed.

Furthermore, given that this is one of the first studies of the Jiménez archive, I
find it necessary to historicize the process of its creation in relation to other
photographic archives in order to perform a double move in opposite directions. The
first is to investigate the discourses that perform the exclusion of Jiménez's work at the
moment of its creation rather than to “tame” (or frame) Jiménez's work as either art or
photojournalism. The second is to understand why is it that her archive comes to light
at this moment in time. In other words, to identify the kinds of archives (discourses)
that allow me to acknowledge the existence of Jiménez's archive at this moment and, in
turn, to think about the exclusions that are now being produced.

And, finally, this discussion joins recent studies on the history of photography in
Mexico that are, on the one hand, looking more closely at the role of photography in
constructing national imaginaries and, on the other, rescuing the histories and practices
of women photographers from the turn of the twentieth century until its end. 614 My
study departs from these studies by reading the emergence of competing visual
archives concurrently and in attempting to integrate a framework that accounts for

614 In terms of recent studies on women photographers active in Mexico before 1960 see the
exhibition Otras Miradas. Fotografas en México, 1872-1960 curated by José Antonio Rodríguez at the
Museum of Modern Art in Mexico, May 18- August 14, 2011; and for a review from 1910-2010 see Emma
Cecilia García Krinsky’s, Mujeres detrás del la lente. 100 años de creación fotográfica at El Centro Cultural
de Tijuana (CECUT), September 2011 to January 2012. For recent research on women photographers during
the revolution see Samuel Villela F., Sara Castrejón, fotografa de la Revolución (Mexico: CONACULTA,2011).
Otherwise it is known that during the nineteenth century many women assisted in their husbands’ portrait
studios, most notably Natalia Baquedano assumed the operation of her husband’s business when he
passed away. About early twentieth century women photographers see Leonard Folgarait Seeing Mexico
Photographed: The work of Horne, Casasola, Modotti and Alvarez Bravo (New Haven: Yale University Press,
2008), 110-113 and Olivier Debroise, Fuga Mexicana. Un recorrido por la fotografía en México, 72-73.
feminine desire, fantasy and curiosity, understood as critique to normative arrangements of sexuality/gender. As Griselda Pollock has argued in another context, such a framework allows femininity to be examined “not as a negative cipher of a dominant and normalizing masculinity, but as a complex socio-psychic formation, equally but specifically an effect of the process of human subjectivity.” 615 In other words, in reading these archives I also consider what desires drove their constructions and how formations of gender/sexuality, which are not static, play a role in these constructions.

Cross-dressing as indigenous and the gendering of photographic practice

Photography arrived in Mexico in 1839 and has played a crucial role in imaging and constructing the nation since that time.616 In Mexico, as elsewhere, photography has been entangled with modern fantasies and fears, as much as it has defined artistic, scientific and political projects. In the early twentieth century, greater access to cameras and the widespread reproduction of all kinds of photographs sealed its association with modernity. And, as Esther Gabara argues, “photographs captured the circulation of products, objects and people that contributed to the development of an epistemology that related seeing with knowing and represented the subjects of modernity marked by race and gender.”617 For Walter Benjamin, photography and cinema revolutionized our conception of the arts by shifting their conventional


616 While this is certainly the case, I do acknowledge the importance that images have had throughout history. For instance, Serge Gruzinsky argues that images exercised a crucial role in the discovery, conquest and colonization of the New World that started a “war of images” that continues to this day. Serge Gruzinsky, Images at War. Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019).

association with ritual and tradition into a relation with politics. Photography was able to dismantle the “aura” (authenticity and value) attached to the work of art as a unique representation because it was able to reproduce images serially and mechanically. Images could be more readily used to elicit particular affiliations and experiences and potentially collaborate in the emergence of a more democratic visual economy. By visual economy I mean the distribution of images in a system of production, circulation, and consumption.

In Mexico, as if to confirm Benjamin’s observations, photographic images became primordial resources to advance state cultural programs. One of the ways this was done was through the use of the photograph as historical evidence, a practice institutionalized with the Mexican Revolution. Out of the armed conflict, photojournalism and the photo-essay emerged as genres that would support and represent the histories of twentieth-century Mexico, both nationally and internationally. As John Marz argues, since the 1920s, the story of Mexico’s past has often been told through illustrated histories where Great Men are celebrated as the makers of

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620 This is not to say that during the Porfirio Díaz regime photography did not play a crucial role in establishing power and civil control or in fulfilling bourgeois desires. See Andrea Noble, *Photography and Cultural Memory in Mexico*; and Roberto Tejada’s *National Camera.*
To this date, this practice continues to be an important forum, one in which leading historians participate.\footnote{See John Mraz, \textit{Looking For Mexico}, 5.}

Photography has also played a crucial role in the state's policies of \textit{indigenismo}, a set of reforms and practices that attempted to integrate indigenous cultures in the development of a national narrative in order to construct a modern sense of mexicanness (\textit{mexicanidad}). As many have argued, indigenismo was a process of internal colonization and expropriation whereby the image of the Indian emerged as the source of mythical originality and the basis of national identity.\footnote{Prestigious historians who have used illustrated histories include Lorenzo Mayer, Enrique Florescano, Luiz González y González, Javier García Diego and Álvaro Matute. Ibid.}

Through the emergence of anthropology, both as an academic discipline and as an amateur practice of many local and foreign intellectuals and artists, the post-revolutionary government set out to civilize indigenous communities and teach elite sectors of society to revalue their Indian heritage. To this end, anthropological expeditions to all regions of the country were organized in order to photograph, study and educate Indigenous communities. Anthropology became the scientific discourse that legitimized and underwrote the post-revolutionary project of national construction through shifting discourses of indigenismo.\footnote{Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution and \textit{Indigenismo}" in \textit{The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).}

Photography (along with cinema) not only visualized and gave material weight to this anthropological discourse, but was also the most effective

\footnote{For a more expanded study on ideas of indigenismo and the importance of anthropology in developing such discourses from the 1920s through the 1970s see Arturo Warman, \textit{De eso que llaman Antropología Mexicana} (Editorial Nuestro Tiempo: México, 1970). And for more critical studies on indigenismo and anthropology see Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, \textit{Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism}. (Public worlds, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Alexander S. Dawson, \textit{Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico}. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).}
means through which these discourses were popularized. Photographs (and films) circulated widely and in so doing they not only reproduced anthropological discourse, but also actively participated in the construction of a sense of *mexicanidad*.

This inextricable relationship between anthropology and photography that emerged in the post-revolutionary era renovated two already established image-making traditions that gendered ethnicity as female. The first tradition consisted in romantically depicting indigenous women engaged in their daily practices as they traversed ravished landscapes showing their exotic beauty. This tradition was shaped by an orientalist way of seeing that had its roots in colonial conventions and the visual desires of many nineteenth-century travelers.

The second tradition emerged out of a sanctioned repertoire of images of *tipos mexicanos* produced as a catalogue of regional traits in order to promote a unified sense of Mexican culture that had its origins in colonial depictions of *castas* and nineteenth-century *costumbrismo*. From this new collection of sanctioned Mexican cultural attributes, two dressing styles became symbols of Mexican femininity —the *Tehuana* and *China Poblana*. Throughout the twentieth century, images of women dressed as

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625 For discussions on how indigenismo was translated into visual representations particularly in cinema see Julia Tuñón "Femininity, Indigenismo and Nation. Film Representation by Emilio “El Indio Fernández” in Jocelyn Olcott and Mary Kay Vaughan, *Sex in Revolution. Gender, Politics and Power in Modern Mexico*; For a critical view on the history of indigenous photography and its links with anthropology see A. Bartra, A Moreno-Toscano, E. Ramirez Castañeda, *De Fotógrafos y de Indios* (Ediciones Tecolote: Mexico, 2000).


627 This fashion practice had also its origins in turn of the century image making traditions that developed the Mexican picturesque or *costumbrismo* —images of tipos mexicanos showing women dressed in indigenous attire and men as charros, or peasants that circulated in magazines, books, postcards, *cartes-de-visites* and wax figurines. On how the *costumbrista* tradition came into being and how it was adopted by the publishing industry through the introduction of lithography and, subsequently, the role that *costumbrista* lithographs published in magazines and books came to be regarded as representatives of mexicanidad see María Esther Pérez Salas. *Costumbrismo y litografía en México: Un nuevo modo de ver.* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2005). On the history of this tradition in relation to notions of race and vision see Deborah Poole
Tehuanas or as Chinas Poblanas became popular signifiers of Mexican femaleness and the standard for Mexican beauty. Concurrently, urban women, including famous artists and intellectuals, cross-dressed as indigenous and in so doing also collaborated in the establishment of a national fashion style. The performance of urban women dressed as indigenous both inscribed and contested a normative gendered view of indigenous as female.

These two visual traditions of gendering ethnicity as female—images of indigenous exotic beauty and radically tamed middle-class women dressed as Tehuanas and Chinas Poblana—were renewed at a time of great anxiety about the performance of femininity in public spaces. As anthropologists were sent out into the regions to study, photograph and educate indigenous communities, the female portion of the emergent middle-classes was demanding a place in the new national landscape. Women in urban centers were not only demanding suffrage rights but were out on the street


629 For many this cross-dressing performance was a strategy to criticize the feminization of ethnicity or a form of empowerment and transgression of middle-class mores. See Erica Segre, Intersected Identities, 177.

630 The first feminist congress in Mexico was held in 1916 in the city of Merida, following several feminist magazines were established and in 1923 the First Congress of the Pan American League for the Elevation of Women was celebrated in Mexico City from which a letter demanding equal political rights was crafted and sent to the Mexico’s president Alvaro Obregón. See Carmen Ramos Escandón, “Women’s Movements, Feminism and Mexican Politics” in Jane S. Jaquette (ed) The Women’s Movement in Latina America, 199-205.
having *vidas públicas*. They had joined the work force. They had emerged as consumers in their own right. They had adapted their looks to the latest trends of transnational fashion and beauty, smoking cigarettes and listening to jazz music.

These unruly performances were the subject of many discussions about women’s proper behavior in all kinds of media, particularly in printed matter (comic books, newspapers and magazines). The attention given to the images of these feminine performances not only reveals the centrality that feminine virtues had for the state’s national project, but the important role that images played within this project.

On the pages of newspapers and in magazines a “war of images” directed at women took place. Advertisements of Clavel Cigarettes, Hinds Cream, Tequila Victoria, Oliver Typewriters, Electric Irons, and Kodak cameras along with images of women dressed as pelonas (flappers) or Tehuanas proposed contradictory virtues and looks about the Mexican *chica moderna*. As Anne Rubenstein argues, contrasting ideas of invented pasts and imagined futures were played out through competing representations of *chicas modernas* and traditional women. However, by the 1940s, the modernity

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631 As Esther Gabara notes, men that have posts in government or in public service are said to be *hombres públicos*, while women who are *mujeres públicas* are considered as prostitutes. Gabara, *Errant Modernisms*, 150-152.

632 For a discussion on the adoption of transnational fashion styles see Ageeth Sluis, “Bataclanismo! Or, How Female Deco Bodies Transformed Postrevolutionary Mexico City” in *The Americas*, Volume 66, Number 4, April 2010, 469-499; On pelonas see Anne Rubenstein "The War on Las Pelonas; Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924” in Olcott and Vaughan *Sex in Revolution. Gender, Politics and Power in Modern Mexico*, 57-80.

633 For a discussion on shifting discourses of modernization and tradition as they played out in images/performances of public women in comic books and other printed matter see Anne Rubenstein *Bad Language, Naked Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation. A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). For an analysis on how members of Los Contemporaneos, Estridentistas and the government wrote pieces attacking women's unruly behaviour see Esther Gabara, 'Essay. Las Bellas Artes Públicas, Photography and Gender in Mexico”, 145-194.


635 Anne Rubenstein, "Home-loving and without vices”, 46.
espoused by *chicas modernas* began to lose ground as government leaders began to uphold conservative social values. The virtues and images of *chicas modernas* became unattractive in comparison to the virtues of the submissive and long-suffering Mexican mother that never left home as the state shifted its rhetoric from an emphasis on progress to a language that combined tradition and progress.\(^{636}\) This shift would give preference to motherhood as the primordial signifier of feminine values shaped by the virtues of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the beautiful traits of a mestizo women dressed in *traje nacional* (*Tehuana, China Poblana* or a mixture of both). Nonetheless, as the modernizing project gained momentum due to economic and coerced political stability, *indigenismo* was reproduced and internalized through commercial films and photographs.\(^{637}\)

As the proper virtues of Mexican women were being visualized and contested through printed photographs in the media, in the early decades of the twentieth century, many intellectuals conceived of photography as an effeminate media.\(^{638}\) In the early 1930s, Salvador Novo described photography as the daughter of the fine arts because she followed in the footsteps of her mother, painting, without yet being able to develop her own aesthetic language.\(^{639}\) Following Walter Benjamin, others have argued that the process of the legitimization of photography as an art form was complicated by various technological, political and cultural factors.\(^{640}\) For feminist art historians,

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\(^{636}\) Ibid.

\(^{637}\) Julia Tuñon “Femininity, *Indigenismo* and Nation. Film Representation by Emilio “El Indio Fernández” and A. Bartra, A Moreno-Toscano, E. Ramirez Castañeda, *De Fotógrafos y de Indios.*


\(^{639}\) Ibid.

\(^{640}\) As multiple copies of one image could be produced from one negative, photographic images were able to circulate in various places at the same time (ie, newspapers, illustrated magazines and art galleries) and could be part of different clubs, organizations or artistic institutions, locating photography
photography represented a frontal attack on the male-dominated art world, one which was based on constructions/assumptions of originality and exclusivity represented both by the signature of the male artist and the ability of the connoisseur to recognize an artist's style. Moreover, the invention of the handheld camera that brought photography to the masses also carried with it the potential for stripping the (male) photographer of his exclusive status as an art producer. Photography, both as a technology and a mass practice, represented a threat and a revolutionary means of accessing many fronts (the art establishment, national projects, consumer practices).

These tensions were also played out in the pages of Mexican illustrated magazines, where Kodak advertisements depicted women as both the object and subject of photography. Ads directed to middle-class women labeled photography as “the best job for women.” Hence, in the context of the early twentieth-century male-dominated Mexican muralist art scene and photography's arbitrary status as an art form and as mass-media practice that was advertised as an ideal activity for women, it comes as no surprise that Novo conceived of photography as “effeminate”.

In the aftermath of the revolutionary conflict photography emerged as a tool for reproducing and popularizing the project of national construction through its links with anthropological practices and discourses of indigenismo. However, the widespread development of print communications (press, comic books, magazines) and the advancements of industrial and consumer capitalism developed competing practices.

\[\text{in the “sphere of the legitimizable.” Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Definition of Photography” in }\]
\[\text{Photography a Middlebrow Art (Stanford University Press: Stanford, Cal., 1990) 73-99.}\]

\[641\text{ Andrea Noble, Tina Modotti. Image, Texture and Photography, 59-86.}\]
\[642\text{ Ibid., 66-67.}\]
\[643\text{ Gabara, Errant Modernisms, 152.}\]
\[644\text{ Olivier Debroise, Fuga Mexicana, 38.}\]
\[645\text{ Salvador Novo, “El Arte de la Fotografía”.}\]
and image repertoires, providing some alternative perspectives of how female looks and virtues were envisioned and intersected by a variety of desires other than those promoted by post-revolutionary projects.646

By the mid 1970s the inextricable relation between photography, indigenismo and a concern over women’s bodies in public spaces was reconfigured through various events. The renovation of Indigenismo’s auteur photography, the professionalization of photojournalism, international discussions over what constituted a Latin American “way of seeing,” the emergence of new wave feminism and the hosting of the first UN’s International Women’s Year Conference in Mexico City also coincided with a shift in the gendering of photographic practice, from being considered a dubious feminine practice to a full-fledged masculine revolutionary practice, thus renovating the war of images over the representation of Mexican femininity.

President Luis Echeverría’s reforms in the fields of folklore, craft and indigenous rights inaugurated the renewal of discourses of indigenismo. In 1975, his government convened the First National Congress of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, “giving Indians an opportunity to claim a role in the complex political process of formulating a new version of national Indian policy while demanding self-determination.”647 He complemented his support by promoting folklore and the production of artesanías through the creation of the National Fund for the Promotion of Craft (FONART). And, most symbolically, the presidential couple adopted as official attire a dressing style from los tipos mexicanos — a guayabera, a southern-Mexican-

646 See Anne Rubenstein, Naked Ladies and Bad Language, “The War on las Pelonas”; and Joanne Hershfield, Imagining La Chica Moderna.

Caribbean linen shirt for the president, and a *Tehuana* or *China Poblana* dress for María Esther Zuno de Echeverría, the President’s wife. 648

Another important event in this renewal was orchestrated in 1976 by the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INI), a governmental institution established in 1948 to deal with indigenous communities, when it commissioned several photographers, including Nacho López, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Mariana Yampolsky and Graciela Iturbide, to go and explore the regions of the country accompanied by an anthropologist (or an intellectual) in order to produce photographic books of an indigenous community of their choice. 649 In these books, which I will discuss in the following sections, the work of these photographers followed, for the most part, an anthropological way of seeing established by their predecessors in the 1920s.

In the midst of the 1970s official revival of indigenismo and in the context of debates over Latin American photographic practice, hundreds of new wave feminists began to demand a broad range of rights. They were out on the street claiming their sexual and reproductive rights and asserting their right to represent their own bodies in the media. Groups of women wearing skirts and blouses, bell-mouth jeans and platform shoes, or dressed in *jipiteca* style (an indigenous blouse with jeans signaling the

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648 It is interesting that Echeverría did not adopt the *Charro* look. Despite its popularity in *mariachi*, the *Charro* attire was also used by Emiliano Zapata. In the context of civil unrest during Echeverría’s period it was perhaps not a good thing to enliven Zapata’s memory. For a discussion on the subsequent presidential couple José López Portillo and Carmen Romano de López Portillo (1976-1982) on their cultural policy and revival of indigenismo see Cesar Espinoza and Araceli Zuñiga’s *La Perra Brava*; and José Agustín *Tragicomedia Mexicana*, vol II.

649 Graciela Iturbide’s *Those who live in the sand*, looks at the daily existence of the Seri inhabitants of Punta Chueca in Baja California. Nacho López’s *Los Pueblos de Bruma y de Sol* explores the Mixe area in the state of Oaxaca. Pablo Ortiz Monasterio’s looks at the Huave fisherman in the Juchitán district of the state of Oaxaca. Mariana Yampolsky’s *La Casa de La Tierra* documents the lives of Nahua, Otomis, Tarascos, Amuzgos, Zapotecas, Chinantecos and Tepehuanos. Her book is accompanied with a text by Elena Poniatowska. The four books were published as a collection of audiovisual ethnographic archives directed by INI-FONAPAS as part of the Olin Yoliztli program between 1976-1981 financed by Carmén Romano de López Portillo.
adoption of 1960s US hippie fashion with an Aztec twist) began to organize protests in Mexico City. As in the early 1920s, the performance of urban women dressed as indigenous both inscribed and contested a normative gendered view of indigenous as female. In the context of the Cold War, the legacies of the Cuban Revolution, the emergence of military dictatorships and the United States’ penetration in the Latin American region, indigenismo not only became an integral part of Mexican folklore and identity, but also a symbol of Latin American and Chicano protest and pride. Images of women dressed as Tehuanas became a contested sign of subversion entangled in the geopolitics of the Latin American Cold War. While government officials and artists continued to exploit these images as lures of the exotic via art exhibitions and economic and cultural exchanges, all over Mexico urban women dressed as Tehuanas flocked to the peñas to sing canciones de protesta against Anglo-American imperialism and Latin American dictators.

Like in the 1920s, by the 1970s images of women cross-dressing as indigenous was part of a fashion style that overtook Mexican urban centers, as elsewhere. This fashion practice signaled a new configuration of gendered/political subjectivities that merged transnational fashions, rock music, protest song, feminist demands and anti-imperialistic discourses with more fluid and contested claims over indigenous roots.

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650 For a discussion on the adoption of indigenous roots by urban middle classes as they relate to 1960s counterculture and the influence of US rock and roll music see José Agustín La contracultura en México: la historia y el significado de los rebeldes sin causa, los jipitecas, los punks y las bandas (México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1996); and Eric Zolov, Refried Elvis: the rise of the Mexican counterculture.

651 For a discussion on the ways in which the Chicano movement in the 1960s, and Chicana Art in particular, turned to their Mexican pre-Columbian heritage as way to claim difference an assert their rights to citizenship in the United States see for example Lucy Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural Setting (New York: Pantheon, 1990); Kary Karen Davalos, Yolanda M. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
Women wielding the camera: images and genealogies of photographic practices.

In the context of the reconfigurations of gender/political subjectivities that took place in the 1970s and following the dictates of state institutions, some women photographers chose to look for a still more “authentic” feminine essence, travelling to rural communities in search of mythical examples of matriarchal indigenous organizations, while others chose to point their viewfinder towards the women on the street and, thus, fight the war of images from another front. I would like to highlight two images that visually represent these distinct image-making traditions.

The first image, taken by Jiménez in 1982, depicts a group of women from La Coalición de Mujeres performing what looks like a line-dance choreography celebrating the establishment of the first Red Nacional de Mujeres, a national network of women's groups that fought for women’s rights from different ideological perspectives (Fig 33).

![Image of women from La Coalición de Mujeres](image)
It belongs to a series of images that document a performance on the occasion of the celebration of the II National Encounter of Women (*II Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres*). In the foreground four women holding hands dressed in jeans, shirts, sweaters and tennis shoes appear to be singing (shouting or laughing in chorus) as they walk towards Jiménez’s camera. More women performing similar actions fill up the background of the image. In the left corner of the photograph, a woman wearing an embroidered indigenous blouse (a kind of *huipil*) and jeans holds the hands of another woman in preparation for some movement. The woman wearing the indigenous blouse seems to have a darker skin tone in comparison to the women who occupy the foreground.

Despite running the risk of arriving at facile conclusions about class and racial backgrounds of the members of *Coalición de Mujeres* based only on this image, I still would like to call attention to this image as a signpost of the diversity of women who are depicted in Jiménez’s visual archive and the range of audiences and perusals these women were attempting to reach. This emphasis on diversity not only points to the ways in which urban femininity was lived and experienced on the streets of Mexico City but, most importantly, also speaks to the contested attempts of a wide range of women’s groups (unionized groups, grassroots, urban and indigenous movements as well as feminists and lesbians) that came together in the 1980s with the purpose of constituting broader coalitions from diverse ideological perspectives to demand women’s rights throughout Mexico.

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652 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.

653 The 1980s is seen by some as a time when urban feminist reached out to other women’s groups, labelled as *feminismo popular*. While most agree that their attempts ended in failure others
As noted in another section of this study, Coalición de Mujeres Feministas was established in 1976 by various feminist collectives to demand three basic rights: 1) the decriminalization of abortion, 2) penalization of rape, and, 3) protection for battered women.⁶⁵⁴ In 1982 they joined another ensemble of feminist and lesbian collectives to establish la Red Nacional de Mujeres (RNM). This network was an inclusive attempt to construct and promote dialogue amongst women’s groups across Mexico without demanding their adherence to any common goals, ideology or lines of work.⁶⁵⁵ More than 21 groups joined the network including eight from different regions in the country.⁶⁵⁶ The network disbanded in 1985, but many of its members continued to work towards legislation of a broad range of women’s rights and many consider these failed attempts at building coalitions as crucial stepping-stones that helped in opening spaces for the discussion of women’s rights from different perspectives throughout the country.⁶⁵⁷

The other image I wish to highlight was taken two years earlier, in 1979, by Graciela Iturbide (b. 1942), one of the most internationally renowned of Mexican photographers. The image entitled “Our Lady of the Iguanas” is a portrait of an indigenous woman with iguanas on her head. The woman, Iturbide tells us, arrived at

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⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. and Marta Lamas, “Fragmentos de una Autocritica” and Gloria Careaga Perez “La Lucha por el Placer” in Griselda Gutiérrez, Feminismo en México 71-82.

⁶⁵⁶ Nathalie Ludec, “La boletina de Morelia.”

⁶⁵⁷ See Griselda Gutierrez Castañeda, Feminismo en Mexico.
the market of Juchitán to sell the Iguanas. As she was putting them on the ground, Iturbide asked her if she could take her picture, the women agreed and put the iguanas back on her head. To take this shot, the women and Iturbide rehearsed various positions. Finally, Iturbide chose to position her camera below the eye-line producing a pronounced visual angle that magnifies the woman’s size giving her an aura of empowerment. This visual composition breaks with the traditional framing of portraits taken from an eye level angle and with aesthetic conventions of traditional ethnographic photography.

In contrast to Jiménez’s photograph, “Our Lady of the Iguanas” has circulated widely in different venues and belongs to Iturbide’s famous photographic study on the women from the region of Tehuantepec, Juchitán of Women (1989). In 1979, Francisco Toledo invited Iturbide to Juchitán, a Zapotec town in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, to witness the turmoil in the region. The emergence of the Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI, 1973) during Echeverría’s apertura democrática set in motion a grassroots movement that sought autonomy and self-governance. The result of this invitation was the publication of the photo- book Juchitán of Women with text by Elena Poniatowska.

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659 Ibid.


661 Iturbide was not the only artist that Toledo invited to Juchitán. Interesting counterpoints to Iturbide’s images are photographs by Lourdes Grobet depicting Juchitecas participating on street demonstrations. For a review of a wide-variety of artistic renditions of COCEI see “Signs of Belonging and Exclusion” in Edward J. Mccaughan Art and Social Movements, 57-100.

This work established Iturbide as an internationally renowned photographer. In 2007 the Getty Museum in Los Angeles organized the exhibition *The Ghost Dance: Photographs by Graciela Iturbide* on the occasion of the museum’s tenth anniversary.\(^{663}\)

The focus of this exhibition was Iturbide’s images “on the powerful matriarchal aspects of Juchitán culture,” which, according to the curator, are “now considered central to Iturbide's oeuvre.”\(^{664}\)

About this body of work that gave her international recognition, Iturbide states that over a 10-year period she lived in the region in order to develop a better understanding of the lives of these women. These sojourns allowed her to develop collaborative and participatory relationships.

In the Juchitán I spent a lot of time at the public market, hanging out with the women there, these big, strong, politicized, emancipated, wonderful women. I discovered this world of women and I made it my business to spend time with them and they gave me access to their daily world and their traditions.\(^{665}\)

Iturbide’s images were romantically framed by Poniatowska’s text that accompanied them:

> Juchitán is not like any other town. It has the density of its Indian wisdom. Everything is different; women like to walk embracing each other, and here they come to the marches, overpowering, with their iron calves. Man is a kitten between their legs, a puppy they have to admonish, “Stay there.” They trade roles; they grab men who watch them from behind the fence, pulling at them, fondling them as they curse the government and, sometimes, men themselves.\(^{666}\)

\(^{663}\) The only other exhibition organized of a Mexican photographer at the Getty was *Manuel Álvarez Bravo: Opitcal Parables* in 2011. The introduction to Iturbide’s catalogue that accompanies this exhibition makes a point out of this and builds on the relation that Iturbide had with Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Graciela Iturbide and Judith Keller, *Juchitán* (Getty Publications: J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2007), vi.

\(^{664}\) Ibid.


Poniatowska’s text, which serves to anchor the meaning of Iturbide’s images, showcases Juchiteco women as sexually and politically independent. Produced at a time when issues of indigenous forms of governance were being fought for in the region, Iturbide’s images and Poniatowska’s text emphasized their overt sexual nature and the prominent role they played in the political life of the region. The book was not only an important accomplishment in Iturbide’s career, but also exalted the myth of the matriarchal organization of the region’s Zapotec communities. While the participation of Juchiteco women was crucial for the organization of COCEI, Lynn Stephen has argued that a very small number of women achieved leadership positions.\(^ {667}\) Echoing the concerns of others who have studied the COCEI movement, Stephens has also noted “the myth of Juchitán as a matriarchy is far from true.”\(^ {668}\)

If one considers that these images were also produced at the height of the new wave feminist movement, one has to wonder about their intended audience. Indeed, Iturbide’s images have been adopted as symbols of a kind of feminism that exalts the alleged matriarchal structure and political organization practiced by these women. For Iturbide herself, this experience made her a strong supporter of feminism.\(^ {669}\) However, at precisely a time when many women took to the streets to reclaim their right to represent themselves, Graciela Iturbide’s feminist search turned to a tradition that romanticized the myth of matriarchal politics that was supposedly practiced by the women of Juchitán. Following this tradition not only continued to exoticize Mexican femininity, it also relegated female political participation to a kind of matriarchal

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\(^{669}\) Graciela Iturbide and Judith Keller, Juchitán, 7.
structure that only works in opposition to patriarchy in a secluded and mythical setting. Moreover, by framing and justifying traditional feminine virtues through the tropes of indigenismo, Iturbide's image took visual prominence as symbol of "Mexican feminism", both nationally and internationally, while images, such as that of Jiménez depicting the struggle of Mexican women who were out on the streets demanding a change in the structures that undermined their rights, were relegated to oblivion.

Iturbide's iconic *Our Lady of the Iguanas* has been appropriated and re-signified in numerous ways by different communities.\(^\text{670}\) In 1996 it was featured as a symbol of women's independence in the feminist film *Female Perversions* (dir. Streitfield and Hebert, 1996) and was adopted as powerful sign of women's emancipation by other communities who refer to the image as “la medusa de Juchitán."\(^\text{671}\) These re-appropriations do speak to the impossibility of linking a particular ideology to an image given the instability of photographic meaning and, in a broader setting, to the social lives of things. However, Iturbide's images also participate in a transnational visual economy that was supported by the Mexican regime in order to broadcast its pride in “ethnic pluralism”. As such, her practice is in dialogue and plays a part in various structures of knowledge production that sustained the different ways that the Mexican regime dealt with the question of the Indian —from an ethnographic search to support a national project and induce pride in the nation's Indian heritage to a discourse that

\(^{670}\) One has also to consider that despite its romantic and mystified depictions, the book raised awareness on the idiosyncrasies and plights of the Zapotec community.

was aimed at taming unruly bodies as well as critical attempts at deconstructing this project.

Iturbide belongs to a genealogy of internationally-known women photographers including Tina Modotti, Lola Álvarez-Bravo and Mariana Yampolsky whose best-known work contributes to the repertoire of romantic depictions of indigenous women. Like Iturbide, all of these photographers travelled to the region of Tehuantepec and other rural communities to produce images of indigenous women. Arguably, they all proposed different and critical ways of seeing indigenous women. This genealogy of women gives legitimacy to and helps to frame Iturbide’s photographic career within a tradition of women photographers who chose to tread a dangerous path, that is, they attempted to criticize a photographic tradition that continues to be consumed and circulated in a manner that idealistically fixes and feminizes ethnicity.

Similar to my reading of Iturbide’s Our Lady of the Iguanas, Tina Modotti’s famous image Women of Tehuantepec (1923) which depicts a woman of the region of Tehuantepec carrying a painted gourd on her head is shot from below rather than frontally helping to capture the dignity and pride of these women while avoiding the picturesque qualities of a frontal portrait taken at eye level. Moreover, like Iturbide, Modotti’s interest in the women from this region has been explained as an interest in their political organization. During Modotti’s time in Mexico (1923-1929), the women of Tehuantepec were highly regarded for their sensual beauty and sexual

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672 See for example Andrea Noble’s, Tina; Elizabeth Ferrer’s, Lola Alvarez Bravo; Leonard Folgarait’s, Seeing Mexico Photographed and Erica Segre’s, Intersected Identities.

673 Mariana Figarella, Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en México (UNAM: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002).

674 Ibid. For instance Mariana Figarelli argues that Modotti’s intrest in the region has to be read in the context of her feminist and communist militancy.
freedoms, a conception developed through the imaginaries of 19\textsuperscript{th} century travelers but reified by the images of Sergei Eisenstein and Diego Rivera, among others. At the time it was also widely believed that the women from the isthmus possessed unusual political power since many thought that they managed their societies according to the rules of matriarchy.\textsuperscript{675}

Like Modotti, Lola Álvarez Bravo was an active participant in a transnational network of artists and intellectuals that defined Mexico’s 1920 artistic milieu. They participated in the intellectual effervescence set in motion by José Vasconcelos’ cultural program, the emergent international modern photography movement and are part of a generation of creative females who broke with traditional mores that defined women’s roles in their time (Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, Concha Michel, Antonieta Riva Palacio Nahui Ollin, Guadalupe Marín, Rosa Casanova, etc.). All these women were lured by the powerful myth of the women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and many have discussed their performance of cross-dressing as Tehuanas as an ironic critique of the spectacle of gendering ethnicity as female.\textsuperscript{676}

In contrast to Modotti’s fleeting and turbulent career as a photographer, Lola Álvarez Bravo, who also spent time in Oaxaca in the 1920s, was able to establish herself as photographer and educator. Between the late 1930s and the 1950s she visited the region of Oaxaca on various occasions and took her most memorable images.\textsuperscript{677} At the time she worked for the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) and, as part her work, she

\textsuperscript{675} For a critical assessment of the matriarchal practices in the isthmus of Tehuantepec see Analisa Taylor, “Malinche and Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico” in Signs, Vol. 31, No. 3, New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture (Spring 2006), 815-840; and Lynn Stephen, “The Creation and Re-creation of Ethnicity: Lessons From the Zapotec and Mixtec of Oaxaca”

\textsuperscript{676} Erica Segre, \textit{Intersected Identities}, 177.

\textsuperscript{677} See Alvarez Bravo, Lola, and Elizabeth Ferrer. \textit{Lola Alvarez Bravo}. 51.
was sent to study and gather information on popular dances and traditions to be used for urban artistic productions, yet another strategy to integrate indigenous cultures into national culture. \(^{678}\) One of her most well-known images, *Entierro en Yalalag* (Burial in Yalalag, 1946), was taken in the Zapotec region as part of an INBA project. The image depicts a group of women covered in white rebozos walking behind a coffin. None of the women are facing the camera; they represent an amorphous mass of sorrowful mourners. The image is taken from a distance that allows the photographer to depict the mass of sorrowful mourners as they walk through mountainous landscape.

Lola Álvarez Bravo was quite aware of how photography had collaborated with the mystification and commodification of the Indian into a discourse of national identity. In spite of the fact that her images were used to develop national dance choreographies that, in turn, collaborated with this mystification, she developed a theory of photography to counter it. According to Erica Serge, Lola Álvarez Bravo’s photographic investigations had to do with an interest in going deeper into the image, to provide an antidote to a superficial kind of seeing that had allowed for the commodification of the image of the Indian, mostly manifested through embodiments of feminized ethnicity. \(^{679}\) To this end, Lola Álvarez-Bravo posited “*lo popular profundo*” as a corrective to “*la mirada engañosa*” (the deceiving gaze) that had turned national identity into a commodity. She proposed the “third eye” which combined the pleasure of the search and the finding: an eye that allowed the photographer to see all and then

\(^{678}\) Most notably her photos were used by for Anna Sokolow at the time director of INBAs Dance Company. Ibid., 51.

\(^{679}\) Ibid, 176.
select the best image. As we can see, Lola Álvarez Bravo’s third eye was only concerned with the ethics of composition and framing that would provoke in the spectator a more ethical awareness about the Other (the indigenous communities and their authentic traditions). Clearly she was not concerned with the complex set of encounters and relations set in motion by the photographic act. Her strategy to break away from dominant nationalist stereotypes was to provide the spectator with a more profound and complex image, that is, what she believed to be a more “authentic” representation of Otherness posited by "lo popular profundo.” Nonetheless, Lola’s search, like that of many others, ended in another form of essentialism that failed to do away with the distancing effect between the subject and the object.

Like Lola Álvarez Bravo, Mariana Yampolsky made photographic images at a time when the 1920s Cultural Revolution was being institutionalized. Between the late 1940s and 1960s anthropologists turned to photography with the intent of deconstructing the homogenizing tendencies of ethnographic archetypes established by the institutionalization of the revolution’s cultural program. The efforts of these anthropologists were not devoid of essentialist views. Like Lola Alvarez Bravo, Yampolsky directed her attention to the Indian and the rural as part of an interest in

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681 Nacho López theorized the development of an optical conscience predicated on testimony and critical engagement to obviate the eye of the “tourist photographer” who shoots his camera like a shotgun without any consideration and only in search of sensationalism. One of the ways López tried to promote this critical stance by openly directing his shots and manipulating images in the dark room. See John Mraz, John Mraz, Nacho López y el Fotoperiodismo de los Años Cincuenta (Oceanos-CONACULTA: Mexico, 1999); and Erica Serge, Intersected Identities, 174-175.

682 See Olivier Debroise, Fuga Mexicana, 117; Erica Serge, Intersected Identities, 158.

683 For a critical view on the history of indigenous photography and its links with anthropology see A. Bartra, A Moreno-Toscano, E. Ramírez Castañeda De Fotógrafos y de Indios, and for a critical view on how anthropology collaborated in the national project see Lomnitz-Adler, Claudio. Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism.
undoing these homogenizing myths. As Erica Segre notes, Yampolsky and Álvarez Bravo, along with Nacho López, “were aware of the mystifications of the ethnographic gaze, the discursive aesthetics of cultural nationalism in art and film in the 1930s and 1940s and the compelling archive produced by foreign photographers.”

Younger than Lola Álvarez-Bravo, Yampolsky approached her subject influenced by a concern with collaboration and participatory observation, a strategy that Iturbide would follow in her work on Juchitán women. Yampolsky allowed and promoted that her subjects took responsibility for they ways in which they wanted to be represented. She invited and welcomed collaboration in the construction of her shots. This emphasis on collaboration became a powerful seduction for post-modern ethnographic practices in the 1980s. As Stephen A. Tyler argues “because postmodern ethnography privileges ‘discourse’ over ‘text,’ it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer.”

Like Yampolsky, Graciela Iturbide also emphasizes the idea of collaboration and dialogue, which includes everything from asking permission to take a photograph to letting the subject chose they way they want to be photographed to the more

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684 For instance, Nacho López theorized the development of an optical conscience predicated on testimony and critical engagement to obviate the eye of the “tourist photographer” who shoots his camera like a shotgun without any consideration and only in search of sensationalism. One of the ways López tried to promote this critical stance by openly directing his shots and manipulating images in the dark room. See John Mraz, Nacho López and Erica Segre, Intersected Identities, 174-175.


committed ethnographical move to go and live within the chosen community in order
to expiate the guilt of the transcendental observer. These strategies that have served to
justify the less-Objectivizing ways of seeing of these photographers are enmeshed in
debates over the politics of representation and, as I will discuss in the next section, are
also in dialogue with the search for a more “ethical way of seeing” that many Latin
American photographers were searching for at the time.

The images of these four photographers (Modotti-Álvarez-Bravo-Yampolsky-
Iturbide) belong to many private collections and specialized archives; they are often
published in photo-books and are also commonly included in surveys of Mexican
photography. Many factors have contributed to the international recognition of these
four women photographers. One would like to think that the first and foremost reason
is the aesthetic quality of their images. However, the fact that they are women working
in the highly masculine art environment of Mexico City has also played an important
role in the ways their lives and careers have been excavated as symbols of diverse
feminist oriented art-historical projects. Moreover, all forged relations with important
male photographers and intellectuals that has helped both to obscure and mystify their
careers.

For instance, it has only been in recent years that Modotti and Lola Álvarez
Bravo have been discussed as artists in their own right, that is, not as “assistants”,
“lovers” or “copies” of their famous partners Edward Weston and Manuel Álvarez
Bravo, respectively. Similarly and perhaps quite aware of the repercussions of openly
declaring her relation to Franz Boas, Mariana Yampolsky was reluctant to discuss the

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688 The bibliography about all of them is extensive and some references are cited throughout this
discussion.
issue until later on in her career. In contrast to her older counterparts, Graciela Iturbide has been able to capitalize on her relation to Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Iturbide was his student and assistant in the early 1970s. This experience propelled her career as a photographer and, now, she is internationally recognized, along with Manuel Álvarez Bravo, as one of the two best-known Mexican photographers.

However, in addition, to the intricate factors that have made their works and photographic careers compelling, another equally complex issue that plays a role in the attention given to their photographic images is the pleasure that looking at images of the Other gives us. Visual images captivate us, especially when they depict something that we find strange. As Michael Taussig argues, the “the spell photography weaves around us is multiplied in images of people from the colonial or non-European world who appear both like us and not like us.” Nonetheless, this pleasure is also culturally and historically bounded.

In Mexico, images of indigenous women circulate and are mostly consumed as romantic depictions of Mexican women that feminize ethnicity; in turn, these practices are inextricably connected with shifting discourses on indigenismo. In spite of the fact that this discursive process (indigenismo) is not static or univocal but rather a dialogical construction, discourses of indigenismo circulate within a visual economy that gives priority to certain (mis)representations and obscures others. Internationally, a varied group of collectors shows interest in these images perhaps to reassure themselves that something survives from the ongoing devastation of colonialism and

689 Franz Boas was her uncle. See Francisco Reyes Palma, Carlos Monsiváís, Los México de Mariana Yampolsky Rito y Regocijos (Fundación Cultural Mariana Yampolsky: Mexico, 2005) 11.
imperialism and to fulfill the pleasure provoked by looking at the Other. Locally, the way these images are consumed is not that different. As Cuauhtémoc Medina states while discussing Iturbide’s work, “like most middle-class people in Mexico [Iturbide] was a tourist in her own country” \(^691\) and her practice needs to be understood as an exploration of Otherness.

Jiménez, however, attempts something very different. While aesthetically, the images of Jiménez are lacking in comparison to the Modotti-Alvarez Bravo- Yampolsky- Iturbide’s repertoire, they are nevertheless significant in offering an alternative strategy for addressing the power relations inherent in the economy of the visual. Jiménez’s practice interrupts this genealogy when she directs her camera onto a diverse ensemble of women demanding their rights to represent themselves. Nonetheless, the power and complex meanings of both visual archives (Jiménez and the Modotti-Alvarez-Bravo- Yampolsky –Iturbide genealogy) can only be established by reading them together. Read side by side, they offer different perspectives as to how women have visualized themselves, the answers they have offered, and the ways in which they have contested the power relations inherent in the act of taking a photograph. Taken together, they help chart the politics of representation within a visual economy.

**Mexican visual letradAs: archival practices and the excavation of revolutionary moments.**

In the summer of 1980 the recently established National Council of Mexican Photography (Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía, CMF) sponsored two exhibitions, a selection of photographs from the Casasola archive and a sample of the work of 12

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Cuban photographers. The Casasola section included 96 images taken in Mexico between 1900-1919 showing the contrasts between the urban poor and the middle classes enjoying the Porfirian lifestyle and images of the highpoints of the revolutionary armed conflict. It was one of the first exhibitions showcasing the recent institutionalization of this archive.

The Cuban selection consisted of 122 images depicting the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the ways it had changed everyday life for Cubans. These two exhibitions not only represent a high point in ongoing debates over the role of photography in Latin America, but also frame the history of Latin American photography within a progressive narrative that begins and ends with two triumphant revolutions. They endow photography with a particular mission, more so at a time when many members of CMF were in Nicaragua documenting the Sandinista Revolution.

Described as an exhibition of “Two Revolutionary Moments” by the Mexican Fine Arts bulletin, these exhibitions attest to the powerful role of photographs as historical

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692 The National Council of Mexican Photography was established in 1977 by a group of Mexican photographers with the objective of promoting the work of Latin American photographers and organizing workshops, exhibitions and conferences about photography. Its president was Pedro Meyer, vicepresidents: Aníbal Angulo and Lázaro Blanco, Julieta Giménez Cacho as secretary, Enrique Bostelman as treasurer and José Luis Neyra as curator. See “Documento de Formación” in Consejo Nacional de la Fotografía, Fondos de la Biblioteca de las Artes, Ciudad de México (BA); and Angelina Camargo, “La Casa de la Fotografía” se inaugurará hoy, con obras de Mexicanos y Cubanos” in Excelsior, July 8, 1980, 12-C.

693 The Cuban selection included images by Alberto Korda, Raúl Corrales, Mario García Joya “Mayito”, E. Haya “Marucha”, Ramón Grandal and Rogelio López. Previous attempts to join the photographic histories of both Revolutions had been done in 1963 by the Cuban periodical Revolución with the exhibition entitled “Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana del Archivo Casasola y la Exposición Cubana “Díez Años de Revolución”. See Mario García Joya’s “Relación entre la realidad y estilos de la fotografía en America Latina” in Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía, Hecho en Latino América, Memorias del Primer Coloquio Latino Americano de Fotografía (Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía: Ciudad de México, 1978), 11-18; and Angelina Camargo, “La Casa de la Fotografía.”

694 Most famously, CMF’s president Pedro Meyer opened an exhibition of his photos taken in Nicaragua in La Casa de la Cultura in Queretaro in March 1980, but previously the same images had been published in Mexican national newspapers since 1977. See Fondo Pedro Meyer at http://www.pedromeyer.com, accessed in February 28, 2012.
documents. On the one hand, they remind us of what kinds of histories have been foregrounded in the region and the active role that images play in this process. And, on the other hand, they express the ways photographs have been used to shape and influence public opinion, since images of both revolutions circulated widely becoming signposts of Latin American identity. Moreover, the photographs of these two exhibitions point to a Latin American tradition of photojournalism and to the role photographers had in representing the realities of the region. Within this revolutionary landscape, the new wave feminist revolution that Ana Victoria Jiménez chose to document did not play a significant role, nor was her practice recognized as that of a photojournalist.

In Latin America as elsewhere, during the 1970s debates over the role of photography revolved around its legitimization as an art form or as a tool for documenting reality. The search for a particular Latin American photographic aesthetic and methodology—a search that would lead to the recognition of the work of Latin American photographers in international markets and would posit their way of seeing as different from the exoticizing gaze of the foreigner—was behind the establishment of the CMF and the organizing of the First Latin American Colloquium of Photograph, *Hecho en Latino América*, in 1978.

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697 Besides the establishment of and the organization of the Colloquim, during the 1970s the Mexican publishing house *Siglo Veintiuno* began to edit photo books that documented the realities of the region. Amongst the most well known and influential were *Para Verte Mejor Latino América* with photos by Paolo Gasparini accompanied by a text by Edmundo Desnoes and Enrique Bostelman’s *América: Un Viaje A Través de la Injusticia*, published in 1972 and 1970 respectively. See Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía, *Hecho en Latino América, Memorias del Primer Coloquio Latino Americano de Fotografía* (Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía: Ciudad de México, 1978).
In Mexico, photojournalism and the photo-essay were established as photographic practices in the midst of the Mexican Revolution and the creation of Agustín Víctor Casasola’s archive played a crucial role in the development of these genres. Long before the War on Terror, the Mexican Revolution was one of the first armed conflicts that experimented with embedded photographers and cinematographers. Villa and Zapata had their own personal photographers, and Villa famously signed a contract with the US based Mutual Film Company giving it exclusive rights to film his battles. Hence, images of Villa and Zapata, along with a cadre of revolutionary caudillos, began to circulate in diverse venues. Out of the armed conflict, photojournalism and the photo-essay emerged as genres that would support and represent the histories of twentieth century Mexico, both nationally and internationally. From then on photojournalism and photo-essays became some of the most useful resources to advertise the ideologies of those in power and shape public opinion.698

The visualization of the armed conflict and the wide circulation of images about it also collaborated with the development of a visual practice that would alter the role of the letrado, the masters of the written word and the image-makers that produced myths of tradition and power. 699 As Olivier Debroise states, Agustín Víctor Casasola played a crucial role in institutionalizing the role of photography as objective evidence of history in twentieth-century Mexico. In this sense, he became part of a new generation of

698 I define photojournalism as a practice that consists of taking images of an event in order to tell a story. It is closely related to the work of a journalist and depends on a narrative that gives evidence to the objectivity of the images. The content is directed by the event itself and the quality is represented by the ability of the photographer of being present in the precise moment in which events unfold. A genre of photojournalism is the photo-essay which allows the photographer “more creative freedom” since he/she have more time to select and construct the images that most accurately illustrate a narrative. But as semiotic events their meanings are dependent on many other factors.

699 I label these men and women who began to use photography in the early twentieth century as visual letrados because the wider access to photography also played an important role in creating new relationships of power and knowledge. See my discussion on the concept of letrados in the introduction of this document.
letrados who extensively put photography at the service of the construction of knowledge and the wielding of power. 700 From the work of Casasola emerge two important practices that I would like to foreground. One is the practice of photojournalism/photo-essay that inaugurated a tradition of image making in Mexico that is closely linked with the production of certain histories that endow the photographic image with historic objectivity. 701 The other is the practice of building a visual archive closely linked to the emergence of visual letrados. 702

In 1911, Casasola established the first Association of Press Photography in Mexico and, along with all his family, soon began to build a visual archive that today holds more than half-million images which “have become indissolubly integrated into Mexican patrimony.” 703 Early on, the Casasolas began to publish bilingual graphic histories, historias gráficas, that shaped in many ways the field of historical production in Mexico. According to John Marz, the main meta-text in historias gráficas is “the presentation of history as if it were the domain of Great Men.” 704 Beginning in the 1940s, Gustavo Casasola, Agustín’s son, reprinted his father’s archive and continued to published illustrated histories that were crucial in producing a graphic history of

700 Olivier Debroise, Fuga Mexicana, 15-16.

701 Recently, these kinds of readings and uses of the Casasola archive are being challenged particular through readings of images of Las Soldaderas in order to argue for women’s agency in the revolution that were ignited by Elena Poniatowska’s 1999 book Las Soldaderas which features images of women from the Casasola archive in a narrative that casts them as being active players in the Revolution. For a counter-reading of Casasola’s images that includes a gendered perspective see Andrea Noble’s “Gender in the Archive: Maria Zavala and the Drama of (not) Looking” in Phototextualities, Intersections of Photography and Narrative, 136-164.

702 Casasola is not the sole author of the images included in his archive. The fact he obscured the authorship of many of his collaborators could speak about his awareness of the power of creating a visual archive and the symbolic gains he would obtain in return. See John Mraz, Looking for Mexico and Andrea Noble’s Photography and Memory in Mexico.

703 John Mraz defines historia gráfica as the medium that most explicitly assigns meaning to historical photographs through an assortment of large format multi-volume series that reproduce photographs accompanied by an uneven assortment of texts. John Mraz, Looking For Mexico, 66.

704 Ibid., 5.
Mexico’s past. A 10-volume edition printed by Gustavo in 1973 charts the history of Mexico from El Porfiriato through the first years of Echeverría’s presidency.

In 1976 the Mexican state purchased the archive, currently housed in Pachuca, Hidalgo, at La Fototeca Nacional, thus creating the first archive dedicated to collecting visual material. This achievement also legitimized photographic practice and reassured many photographers that their work was of interest to the nation. This archive now houses more than 30 collections of diverse photographers that worked in Mexico.  

Mariana Yampolsky, whose work I discussed in the previous section of this chapter, played a crucial role in negotiating the establishment of the Casasola archive. Her role in this achievement provides an interesting counterpoint to Jiménez’s archival practice. Like Jiménez, Yampolsky’s involvement with the Casasola archive also poses interesting questions to traditional gender conceptions that see the activities of the letrados as an exclusively masculine territory. Nonetheless, while both women show an interest in the power of photographic images and their political and historical value, one works within an officially sanctioned framework and the other within a framework that is not considered relevant. Further, while these two archives traversed different paths, that is, Casasola’s archive is officially sanctioned at the time when Jiménez begins to construct hers, reading them concurrently not only reveals what kind of images were deemed valuable and why but also posits both Yampolsky and Jiménez as important

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706 Yampolsky also collaborated in various state projects including: the design and publication for free text books for the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) and was editor of various children encyclopedias also edited by SEP. See Erica Serge, Interesected Identities, 159; and Elena Poniatowska, *La raíz y el camino*.

707 See my discussion in the introduction section of this document.
visual letradAs of their time, that is, as women who understood and commanded the visual from two very different revolutionary perspectives.

Photojournalism, images of women and the ethics of seeing

By the 1940s, advances in visual technology had encouraged the professionalization of photojournalists but also broadened the ways knowledge was constructed and the ways power was wielded through the reproduction of photographs. The contestation over what kind of images circulated became a battlefield as the improvement of reproduction techniques encouraged the establishment of a wide range of illustrated magazines in Mexico City.  

However, government control of the press and illustrated magazines was widely known. This control not only included editorial censorship but ownership of paper production and distribution through the state-owned company PIPSA. Moreover, picture editors and government censors were quite aware of the instability of photographic meaning; wisely, they forced photographers to surrender their negatives to the press. In this way, they not only controlled the circulation of images but the meaning of images. In time, as Mraz and others have argued, these magazines became crucial resources through which the government and intellectuals developed, manipulated, discussed and tried to shape a sense of mexicanidad. For instance, on March 1952, President Ruiz Cortines publicly...

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708 Magazines such as Hoy, Rotafoto, Mañana and Siempre! were the most known. In all of them presidential activity dominated the scene and the work of photojournalist was censored regularly. John Mraz, "Illustrated Magazines, photojournalism and historia gráfica" in Looking For Mexico, 153-200.

709 See Anne Rubenstein “The Creation of Mexican Comic Books, 1934-1952” in Bad Language, Naked Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation, 17; and John Mraz and Ariel Arnal. La mirada inquieta: nuevo fotoperiodismo mexicanos, 18.


711 For instance in 1951 the magazine Hoy covered a series of conferences organized at UNAM were famous intellectuals including Samuel Ramos, Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga and Juan José Arreola, among others the centered on discussing "what are Mexico and lo mexicano" see Rosa Castro “Qué es y cómo es lo mexicano?” in Hoy, 14 Abril 1951, 36-39 cited in John Mraz, Looking For Mexico, 158.
acknowledged the role of these magazines by praising them for their collaborations in “homogenizing the national consciousness.”  

While, up to 1968, most of the press and magazines followed the presidential mandate and a great number of reporters and photojournalist received *embutes* or *chayotes* for their work, many photographers also published their photos and photo-essays independently or were granted certain freedoms due to their personal relations. These more independent works did not follow the current presidential mandate and could be read as being critical. Examples of this include the work of Los Hermanos Mayo, Nacho López and Hector García. Following the tradition already established by the Casasolas, these photographers began to make images of the daily lives and struggles of Mexico City dwellers. Their works were an important influence on the development of a new kind of photojournalism after 1968 and their careers serve as a means of reflecting on the complex web of desires and affiliations that have characterized the practice of Mexican photography.

Hector García is mostly known for his photos of student, teacher and worker demonstrations (1958 and 1968), although recently his depictions of urban life in Mexico City have become popular in gallery circles. His shots of teachers and railroad workers were highly censored and were only published in marginal magazines. In contrast, his images of the student massacre of 1968 were, and continue to be, crucial in disseminating and denouncing details about the *Tlatelolco* events. Most famously his

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713 Ibid, 153-200.

714 Ibid.

photos illustrate Elena Poniatowska’s *La Noche de Tlatelolco* (1975) and Carlos Monsiváis’s *Días de Guardar* (1971) along with articles written by Juan García Ponce and Carlos Fuentes in established cultural magazines such as *Siempre!* and *La Cultura en México*. Right after the massacre, he infamously accepted a post as president Luis Echeverría’s official photographer (1971-1976). This is perhaps not that surprising considering the incestuous relation that the Mexican state has had with intellectuals and artists since the early 1920s and Echeverría’s cooptation of intellectuals at the beginning of his mandate.

Despite his humble origins, García developed relations with important intellectuals, politicians and artists from early on in his career. These networks facilitated, to some extent, the exhibition of his photographs as art works in New York in 1971 and at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City in 1975. But perhaps the kind of photos that he took played a more significant role in crowning him as an important Mexican photographer.

His images depict the urban poor in 1950s Mexico City, which at the time had a critical intent. Images of Mexico City slums and street beggars defied the efforts of the government to present Mexico as a developed nation.716 García also took intimate shots of the starlets of the golden age of Mexican cinema, which by the early 1950s was already in decline. As I mentioned earlier, he also documented social uprisings and demonstrations that have been taken up as icons of mid-twentieth century Mexico’s struggle for social justice. Despite García’s critical intentions and the aesthetic and

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716 As is well documented during the presidencies of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) Mexico pursued a project of industrialization with the hopes of becoming a “developed nation”. The release of Luis Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados* (1950) that depicted an episode in the life of a group of destitute children in Mexico City represented a fierce critique to the government project and the cinematography of Gabriel Figueroa became an influence for documentary photographers, such as García and López.
documentary value of his work, his images also circulate and are consumed in a manner that serves to fulfill other kinds of desires: the nostalgic lure for the 1950s, the conception of Mexico as a never ending source of revolutionary and leftists generations and, most obviously, the image of Mexico’s quintessential destitute, a woman and child begging for money on a street corner. Currently his work is held at the Fundación Archivo Hector García, started by his colleague and wife María Sánchez de García, as well as in international collections.717

A contemporary of García’s, Nacho López is considered by many as a role model due to his “ethical way of seeing” and for developing a critical and pluralistic tradition of photographing the daily lives of Mexico City dwellers.718 He is mostly known for his critical photo-essays about the urban poor and working classes of Mexico City published in illustrated magazines during the 1950s.719 He is less known for his collaboration with INI, a relation that lasted for more than three decades and produced an archive of photographs and films of indigenous communities now held in the archives of the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas.720 In the 1960s he was involved with the art collective Nueva Presencia, a group of artists who were interested in reactivating a socialist realist aesthetic that could speak to their time.721

717 The foundation was established in 2008 with family funds but it is currently financed by private and public funds. Some of his photos are also held at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. See Érika Montaño Garfias “Nace la fundación María y Hector García con un millón de negativos” in La Jornada, Tuesday, March 28, 2008; Norma Inés Rivera, Pata de Perro: Biografía de Héctor García (México: CONACULTA, 2007); and the foundation website at and http://www.fundacionarchivohectorgarcia.net/

718 According to Mraz Nacho López was the first photographer to develop a theory of what became known as the new photojournalism in 1976. See John Mraz, Nacho López, 11.

719 Ibid.

720 This body of work is now kept at La Fototeca Nacho López and accessed via Comision de Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas’ website, accessed March 5, 2012, http://www.cdi.gob.mx/.

1970s, he began to publish critical essays on photography and to teach at various universities (UNAM in Mexico City and Universidad Veracruzana in the state of Veracruz). In 1978, López participated in the first Latin American colloquium of photography, *Hecho en Latino América*. At the event, he accused US photographer Cornel Cappa of exoticizing Latin American harsh realities through the publication of images in *Life* magazine. López contended that Cappa's images were nothing more than “a reflection of the uncommitted way of seeing of a foreigner.” Against this uncommitted way of seeing, López would write extensively and advocate the development of a *conciencia óptica* (an optical conscience) and defended what he believed to be the true function of photography:

> *La función de la fotografía, creo fervientemente, es aquella que sirve mejor a las luchas vitales de los pueblos y al hombre en la afirmación de su dignidad.*

The function of photography, I fervently believe, is that which serves the vital struggles of the people and the affirmation of human dignity.

That same year, in order to commemorate INI's thirtieth anniversary, López published a harsh critique of several renowned Mexican colleagues (Gabriel Figueroa, Luis Márquez, Guillermo Kahlo, Hugo Brehme and Augustín Martínez) for having allowed themselves to continue with a picturesque and exoticizing view that decontextualized indigenous communities.

> *se dejaron llevar por los lirismos pictóricos emanados de las imágenes aisladas de Eisenstein y Tissé, y buscaron con matices particulares enfatizar el rostro pétreo del indígena recién bañado, suspendido en el tiempo e inmovible al infortunio.*

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722 Cornel Cappa’s presentation “Social Photography: Testimony or Cliché” was one of the most contested panels of the Colloquium. *Memorias del Primer Coloquio de Fotografía*, 723 Nacho López, *Memorias del Primer Coloquio de Fotografía*, 41; John Mraz, *Nacho López*, 175; and Erica Serge *Intersected Identities*, 174-175.


They allowed themselves to be carried away by the pictorial lyricisms produced by the images of Eisenstein and Tissé, and they search for particular contrasts to emphasize the harsh face of an Indian who has just finished taking a bath, as if suspended in time and oblivious to their intrusion.

In the midst of the Latin American photographic effervescence of the late 1970s, López enunciated a critique that was already in the making; however, as I will discuss, the distance between his theory and his photographic practice reveals the complexities of attempts at controlling the meaning of photographic images and the conundrums of the search for a more ethical way of seeing in a system that a priori sets a power relation between the one who possesses the camera and the one who is possessed by it. This relation persists, to some extent, even if one subscribes to a politics of representation that advocates for self-representation (the Other representing itself).726

In 1950, López published a photo essay in the magazine Mañana entitled Noche de Muertos, documenting the celebration of the day of the dead on the island of Janitzio, in the state of Michoacan. Just as Oaxaca had been the fountain of Mexicanness and a well of iconographic images of Mexico that circulated internationally, by mid twentieth century the day of the dead celebration was becoming one of the most typical Mexican tourist attractions and López’s photo-essay played an important role in its institutionalization as tourist destination.727 After him, photographers such as Walter

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726 The politics of representing the Other have been extensively theorized by postcolonial critics including Edward Said, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to name a few. Following some of their arguments I do not subscribe to the idea that the solution to the problem is to Not to study or represent the Other, this would amount to say that one can only speak about one self and, most importantly, one would surrender a political imperative particularly if one is in a position of power. Rather I espouse the existence of diverse strategies that undermine and decenter the power relations that structure the production of knowledge by diverse actors at different historical moments, including but not exclusively self-representation. This is the value that I find in Ana Victoria Jiménez archive. Reading her archive and practice along other practices allows for a wider understanding of the complex workings of the visual economy.

727 The popularization of day of the death celebration was showcased extensively in the 1930s government sponsored magazine “Mexican folkways”. See Alex Zaragoza “ The selling of Mexico: Tourism
Reuter, Hector García and Luis Mayo flocked to Janitzio to produce photo-essays of the same celebration for illustrated magazines that the government would then use to promote the site as a tourist destination. In López’s photo-essay, women were portrayed as passive and sorrowful mourners of their dead relatives. Indigenous women were depicted with downcast eyes, their faces half lit by the candle light and their heads covered with rebozos.

In the case of urban Mexico, López extended his representation of the female population to include images of upper class women. In his photo essay Las Mil Caras de la Ciudad (1955) images of bourgeois women are juxtaposed with those of the lower classes to contrast how class disparity is lived in Mexico City. In the image Iguales two overwhelmed women are captured while waiting in line in a supermarket. One woman wore an apron and braided brown hair while the other was taller, had blond short hair and wore a skirt and blouse. In this image a commentary about how domestic chores had the capacity to erase class differences was present. López’s critical intentions were anchored by the photo’s cutline, which as Roland Barthes has observed serve to fix the meaning of the image.

Gordas y flacas, feas y bonitas, ricas y pobres, sirvientas y patronas son iguales a la hora del Mercado. Idénticas en la búsqueda del artículo más barato y de mayor calidad; semejantes a la hora de pagar y totalmente parecidas en el regateo que ahora, en los llamados supermercados, ha desaparecido. Heavy and slim, ugly and beautiful, rich and poor, maids or employers they are all the same at the Market. They are the same as they look for the cheapest item of the best quality; they are the same when they pay


728 For a discussion of López’s Las Mil Caras de la Ciudad see Mraz’s, Nacho López, 187-197.


730 Cited in John Mraz, Nacho López, 195.
and they are completely identical when they bargain, a practice that has disappeared in the so called supermarkets.

In spite of this photo that seems to propose a more complex critique that considers gender as a category that actively shapes the lives of Mexico City inhabitants, the meta-narrative constructed by this photo-essay was a denunciation of class disparities as the source of all the ailments of Mexican society. This was demonstrated in the previous spread where an image of two upper-class women having tea and smoking cigarettes is placed above an image that depicts two poor men drinking beer on the street. Here middle-class women are used as symbols of class oppression.

From the work of García and López an image-making tradition that was as critical as it was fraught emerged. Its most important legacy was the treatment of the city as a crucial actor. Their images opened the possibility of reading the city as a space of contestation where negotiations about class and gender were actively taking place. Nonetheless, on the whole, López and García’s depictions of urban women seem to be reduced to representational tropes that fall into the categories of the despotic bourgeoisie, the prostitute, or the oppressed victim. While García extended his gaze to the starlets of the Golden Era, López mostly stayed within the aesthetic of Luis Buñuel’s Los Olvidados (1950), that is, poor urban women as prostitutes or covered in rebozos playing the victim in a street corner or in court. On some occasions, López chose to represent women as sexual symbols, as in his iconic photo essay Mujer Guapa (1953). Urban women were never presented as active members of society, but rather as tropes for class difference or sexual desire. In the case of indigenous women, both García and López were unable to get away from the picturesque and the “Othering” tradition that they fought to escape. They depicted indigenous women as victims. In these images, women become ciphers of the “crude realities of our countries”. Albeit, García and
López were able to produce aesthetically valuable works in a highly surveyed environment and have been considered models by many subsequent generations of photojournalists.

**New photojournalism**

In the final years of the 1970s a new generation of photojournalists began to emerge. In 1976 president Echeverría’s take-over of one of the biggest national newspapers, *El Excelsior*, prompted various journalists to establish independent media. These independent media outlets gave more freedom to their journalists and began to give more credit to photojournalists. Also crucial to this opening were the interests and needs of many of these independent media to have their own news sources on the struggles of Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Mexican newspapers such as *Unomasuno* and *El Sol de México* began to send their own photojournalists to cover these Central American conflicts rather than depend on international news agencies. These photojournalists were paid, given editorial independence and, most importantly, they were given credit for their images. For Mraz, the characteristics of *new photojournalism* are its emphasis on representing daily life; the portrayal of *el pueblo* in a manner that avoids the picturesque, exotic, romantic or condemning image-making traditions; an aesthetic emphasis on photography as subjective rather than an

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731 According to John Mraz a different kind of photojournalism began to emerge in Mexico in 1976 due in part as a result of Echeverría’s assault on *Excelsior* (Julio Scherer’s team) that led to the establishment of *Proceso* magazine, which became an inspiration for the founding of other independent newspapers. In fact *Proceso* did not give a lot of importance to photos, rather the establishment of *Unomasuno* (1977), and later on *La Jornada* (1984) were the newspapers that valued the power of images to convey news in equal standing to texts and allowed editorial independence to photographers. Several female photojournalists participated in the establishment of these newspapers including Crista Cowrie and Marta Zarak in *Unomasuno* and Maritza López in *Excelsior*. See John Mraz and Ariel Arnal, *La Mirada Inquieta*; and Ulises Castellanos, *Manual del Fotoperiodismo. Retos y Soluciones* (México: IBERO, 2003).

732 Until then images were seen as mere illustrations of the news, they were seen as secondary to the text and rarely were photojournalist given credit for their work. The credit and money for news-coverage was given to the reporter. Mraz and Arnal, *La Mirada Inquieta*, 23-24.

733 Ibid.
objective representation; a revaluation of photograph’s fundamental value as information as independent from the text; and, most importantly, the participation of women as photojournalists.\textsuperscript{734}

Mraz’s studies on photojournalism are of interest for two reasons: first, because his work in the field of Mexican visual culture and photography and photojournalism is one of the most recognized in both the Spanish- and English-speaking academia, and, second, because he credits the participation of women as being one characteristic of the new photojournalism. I would like to take issue with Mraz’s last point, something that he addresses differently in the Spanish and English editions of this text, and that would help to frame why Jiménez’s practice has been mostly ignored.

In the Spanish edition, \textit{La Mirada Inquieta Nuevo fotoperiodismo mexicano: 1976-1996}, published in 1996 by Centro de la Imagen, Mraz interviews several young and established photojournalists and highlights the work of only one female photojournalist, Elsa Medina, who began to work as a photojournalist in the mid-1980s for the newspaper \textit{La Jornada}. For Mraz, a photo by Medina, \textit{Hands in the Subway} (1988), that depicts arms and bodies holding a post inside a subway car around a woman wearing a traditional \textit{rebozo} who attentively looks at something outside the picture frame, unaware that she is being photographed, serves to introduce the characteristics of new photojournalism.

\textit{esta imagen de las manos agarradas al poste nos presenta algunos de los elementos que han definido lo nuevo fotoperiodismo mexicano durante los últimos veinte años. El enfoque sobre la vida cotidiana y la correspondiente presencia del pueblo no es en ningún modo pintoresco, ni alabatorio, ni condenatorio, ni amarillista. Al documentar las condiciones infrahumanas del transporte público, vemos una crítica implícita a la administración del país. Hay también una búsqueda estética que ignora las

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid.
reglas clásicas de composición; en este caso, haciendo referencia al espacio fuera del cuadro como una manera de insistir en que la foto solamente aísla una rebanada de la realidad [...] Por otro lado, la foto fue hecha por una Mujer. La participación de las Mujeres en el fotoperiodismo de los últimos años posee características nunca antes vistas.735

This image that shows a pair of hands holding on to a subway post presents some of the elements that have defined the new mexican photojournalism of the last twenty years. The focus on the daily life of the people is not picturesque, laudatory, condemnatory or alarmist. Rather by documenting the infrahumane conditions of the public transit we see an implicit critique the public administration of the country. There is also an aesthetic search that ignores the classic conventions of composition; in this case by making reference to the space outside the frame to insist that a photograph only isolates one slice of reality [...] On the other hand, the photograph was taken by a woman. The participation of women in photojournalism of the last twenty years presents characteristics never seen before.

Besides the portrayal of the subway as a new actor, this image doesn’t seem to add anything new to the existing repertoire of images of Mexico City’s life. While Mraz makes an example of this image because it is taken by woman and this fact does give us an idea of women’s participation in photojournalism (only one), Mraz’s reading of this image is a continuation of the tropes and traditions that follow closely those established by López and García. Moreover, Mraz does not account for ways in which this image could be contesting or speaking to normative gender constructions which, in my opinion, would be an important aspect of any kind of image-making practice in post-1968 Mexico, whether taken by women or men. 736 By placing emphasis on the hands that are holding the metro railing other readings of the image could be explored. We

735 Mraz and Arnal, La Mirada Inquieta,16.

736 In this sense I agree with Andrea Noble observation about one of the most important legacies of feminist theory: "If photography has prepared the ways for an interrogation of vision, then theories of feminism have a serious stake in that project because feminist scholarship has identified a pressing need not only to reininsert women as cultural producers into the framework of visual representation but also to call into question the dominant structure of looking in a Western Society, whereby women is framed as the passive object of the gaze." Andre Noble, Tina, 27.
could interrogate the experience of riding a subway car as a space where gender and class boundaries are reconfigured.

Mraz is more concerned with the fact that the woman depicted in the image is looking outside the frame and how that act in itself points to Medina’s concern with a critique of the medium as a producer of objective reality (something that indeed was in vogue in the field of photography at the time). Having said that, the fact that a woman wields the camera does not mean that a critical view of sexual difference is intended since, as many have argued, gender constructions (masculinity and femininity in this case although of course there are many others) are subject positions that can be cohabitated by all kinds of gendered bodies at different points in time. The issue here is the way in which Mraz accounts for the participation of women as having a say in changing photojournalism in Mexico and including only Medina in his analysis.

As I have mentioned, Ana Victoria Jiménez began to take photos of feminist demonstrations in 1971. Her images did appear in some newspapers and magazines, mostly without credit, as was customary. While Mraz’s study points to a complex set of issues that gave rise to what he labels new photojournalism, it is revealing that no mention is made of the legacy of the new feminist movement not only in opening spaces for the participation of women in photojournalism in the 1980s, but in recognition of their work as image-makers who, like Jiménez, covered an important revolutionary event independently, or to feminist academics who were criticizing the ways women were represented. While this may be the result of editorial decisions or, arguably, lack

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737 By the mid 1970s many photographers engaged with a critique of the media itself as a way to address the power relations implicit in the act of taking a photograph and most importantly as an attempt to interrupt the ways in which photographic images had been used to construct ideologies of objective reality. See Abigail Salmon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock.*

738 Her images appeared in *Siempre, Revista de Revistas, La Jornada,* and *FEM.* See Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview with the author.
of knowledge of Jiménez’s practice, it also speaks to the ways dominant institutions that authorize artistic careers and research the histories of Mexican new wave feminism and topics have mostly ignored their legacies in cultural practices.

El Centro de la Imagen, the publisher of the Spanish edition of Mraz’s book, was established in 1994 as part of the package of cultural reforms that consolidated the creation of the Mexican Council for Arts and Culture (CNCA) under the Carlos Salinas de Gortari administration. It grew out of the dissatisfaction that had provoked the demise of the CMF that, by then, had been disbanded. Over the years, Centro de la Imagen has become an important research and publishing center dedicated to the promotion of photography and an important legitimizing institution for aspiring photographers. It seems fitting that in 1996 it would sponsor the publication of Mraz’s book which narrates a positive and redeeming narrative of contemporary photojournalism at a time when many institutions and photojournalists needed to appear critical and unbiased. It was also a time when emphasis was being placed, once again, on the Indigenous question, now in the context of Zapatismo. This context may help explain Mraz’s emphasis on the non-picturesque representation of the woman in the rebozo in Medina’s image.

The English edition of this text is included in Looking for Mexico. Modern Visual Culture and National Identity (2009). It also focuses on Medina’s image as an example of new photojournalism, but this time Mraz gives credit to the feminist movement as being one of the elements that converged in the development of new photojournalism:

the feminist movement of the 1970s also contributed novel perspectives, as women such as Graciela Iturbide and Flor Garduño became internationally recognized photographers largely because of their imagery that portrayed women as the new national essence. 739

739 John Mraz, Looking for Mexico, 215.
The mention needs some clarification. As is well documented, images portraying women as the national essence are not new in the visual archives of twentieth century Mexico (Rivera, Eisenstein, Alvarez Bravo, Indio Fernández). The legacy of the feminist movement would rather be, one would imagine, to contest “images of women” as the national essence. However, there are distinct and varied feminisms and indeed the highly romanticized images of Garduño and Iturbide could be taken as representing one vision of feminism that romanticizes femaleness as the national élan, or as symbols of matriarchal politics, as I noted earlier. Still, for Mraz, the fact that they are Mexican women photographers having international recognition seems to be the legacy of the feminist movement. The inclusion of a gendered critique of the production of images, that is, as a different perspective on the content of the images, whether produced by a man or a woman, is not in his purview.

Another interesting difference in the English version of Mraz’s text is his reading of Medina’s photograph. According to Mraz, Medina’s image avoids folkloric and picturesque depictions but, in spite of this, he has to resort to tropes, such as the pyramid, the rebozo and the baseball cap, as signifiers of difference to describe the image for an English speaking audience:

The photo encompasses Mexico in a jumbled pyramid of arms and bodies that form around a woman wearing a traditional rebozo—a metaphor for the Indian base of Mesoamerican civilization—while at the top a man’s baseball cap attests to the pervasive US presence in today’s society.\(^{740}\)

The use of words that are recognized signifiers of difference (Mexican and Anglo-American) reveals the incapacity to escape “Othering recourses” that exoticize as much as facilitate consumption and understanding. The different readings of Medina’s

\(^{740}\text{Ibid., 217.}\)
image as well as the way the inclusion of women as photographers and the legacy of the
feminist movement is included for different audiences, by different publishers, by the
same author at distinct historical moments, points to the mutability and instability not
only of the meaning of photographs but of changing parameters and power relations
that are at play in the construction of knowledge. In this movement of re-readings, my
focus on Jiménez and my intention to place her practice as an interruption to the
narrative of new photojournalism is also a response to my particular historical moment.

In sum, the different actors that I briefly followed in this section produce one of
the many networks and genealogies that had a say in defining what the field of
photography, photojournalism and the photo-essay looked like in 1970s Mexico. The
images that were valued were those that fit certain imaginings of the realities of Latin
America and followed previous representational conventions. Most prominently were
the ills of the poor in relation to a growing metropolis and faulty industrialization
programs; the question of a more ethical way of representing the Other (who had the
right to more ethically capture the Indian and how); and the framing of Latin America as
the land of revolution (revolutions against imperial oppressors, foreign or national
governments). Within this network, images of urban women actively demanding their
rights were not in the purview of photographers, institutions or academics that had the
power to legitimize who counted as a photographer and what contents were critical,
creative and representative of Latin American photography.

Nonetheless, within this genealogy a trace of what I refer to as the visual letrada
begins to emerge. This trace was present in photographers that were concerned with
finding a personal, political or ethical way of seeing. Equally, it was present in image-
makers that understood the importance that images play in constructions of personal
and national projects: photographers that comprehended and commanded the visual 
from very different revolutionary perspectives. Particularly those like López and García 
whose images opened the possibility of reading the city as a space of contestation 
where negotiations about class and gender were actively taking place.

In the following chapter I will discuss the collaboration of Jiménez in the films 
directed by Rosa Martha Fernández as part of Colectivo Cine-Mujer in order to show 
how Jiménez’s approach to photography and way of seeing related to broader media 
practices that considered the urban landscape as a crucial factor in the formation of 
gender and sexual relations. In the same manner that the feminist demonstrations 
asked of their publics to imagine what a new participatory (or revolutionary) embodied 
and gender citizenship would look like, the films of Cine Mujer and photography of 
Jiménez were records of that possibility. Further, the incorporation of Jiménez’s 
photographs in Cine-Mujer’s films points to another archival relation between media 
that, as I will discuss in Chapter 9, were also fully exploited by Weiss’s experiments with 
video.
CHAPTER 8.

“¿Cosas de Mujeres?”: Feminist collaborations in 1970s Mexico City

In 1978, Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez found themselves collaborating with Colectivo Cine-Mujer (1975-1985), a group of women dedicated to the production of films about social issues established by Rosa Martha Fernández and Beatriz Mira, then students of film at Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC).741 From 1975 to 1985, Colectivo Cine - Mujer produced more than six films on issues such as abortion, rape, domestic violence, prostitution and also documented gatherings of women’s organizations. 742 Its establishment coincided with the emergence of feminist film around the world. However, the productions of Cine Mujer began to be regarded as such in the mid 1980s when their films began to circulate internationally.743 Their reception in Mexico by both the commercial and independent film industries was not favorable. Despite Echeverría’s reforms to the film industry and relaxed censorship, issues of sexuality including rape and abortion were still taboo topics for the majority of

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742 In 1981 they released the documentary Es Primera Vez (dir. Beatriz Mira) about a gathering of women’s organizations that took place in Mexico City in 1980 involving women workers, campesinas and community activists. According to Esperanza Tuñon these gatherings played a crucial role in introducing the question of gender to struggles previously understood solely in terms of class. Other movies by Cine Mujer include: La Vida Toda (1978, dir. Carolina Fernández); Yayaltecas (1984, dr. Sonia Fritz); Vicios de la Cocina (1978, dir. Beatriz Mira); Vida de Angel (1982) and Amas de Casa (1984) both directed by Angeles Necochea; Amor Pinche Amor (1981) and No es Por Gusto (1981) codirected by María Eugenia Tamés and Mari Carmen de Lara. See See Elissa Rashkin, Women Filmmakers in Mexico, 249-251; and Esperanza Tuñon, Mujeres en escena; de la tramoya al protagonismo (1982-1994) (Mexico: PUEG, 1997).

743 According to Rosa Martha Fernández Cosas de Mujeres and Rompiendo el Silencio were projected in Kenya at the Third UN Women’s Conference held in Nairobi in 1985 and also in 1981 during the first international encounter of feminist cinema and video that took place in Holland. In 1984 the film Amas de Casa (1984) was included in Karen Ranucci’s compilation of Independent Latin America film and video. Interview with Rosa Martha Fernández; Millan, Derivas de un Cine Femenino; and Karen Ranucci, “On the trail of Independent Video” in Julianne Burton, eds. The Social Documentary in Latin America (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 193-208.
Mexicans.\textsuperscript{744} Even more so was the realistic approach with which Cine Mujer depicted female characters and bodies. Although, as Ramírez Berg argues, Mexican film production after 1968 began to witness the emergence of female characters that seem to contest and confront Mexican patriarchal schemas, the conventions of representation adopted by Cine Mujer still contested this apparent new approach to female characters.\textsuperscript{745} Likewise, the political commitment of those involved with Cine Mujer was not in the purview of dominant social documentary schemas, nor did the avant-garde faction of independent Mexican Cinema value its realistic approach.\textsuperscript{746}

Cine-Mujer films not only disrupted norms in terms of content and cinematic and generic conventions by which women had been previously represented in film, but the organization itself also proposed alternative modes of production and distribution.\textsuperscript{747} Cine-Mujer developed a team of women who tackled all aspects of the film industry including production, content and distribution. It developed its own mechanisms of distribution in collaboration with Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and through the establishment of an independent distributor, ZAFRA.\textsuperscript{748} Their films were shown through alternative networks of distribution and non-commercial spaces including women’s collectives around the country, university forums and informal gatherings.\textsuperscript{749} In spite of scathing critiques from the established


\textsuperscript{745} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{746} See chapter two of this dissertation for a discussion of the different approaches to film practiced in Mexico at the time.

\textsuperscript{747} Millán, \textit{Derivas de un cine femenino}; and Rashkin, \textit{Women Filmmakers}.

\textsuperscript{748} Millán, \textit{Derivas de un Cine Femenino}, 115.

film community, several of their films were nominated for prizes and recognized by the Mexican film industry.\textsuperscript{750}

Ana Victoria Jiménez collaborated in two films produced by Colectivo Cine Mujer directed by Fernández: \textit{Cosas de Mujeres} (1975-1978), dealing with abortion, and \textit{Rompiendo el Silencio} (1979), which took on the issue of rape.\textsuperscript{751} Jiménez provided Fernández with photos for both films and both Jiménez and Mónica Mayer collaborated with research for \textit{Rompiendo el Silencio}. Both are black and white films shot in 16 mm that mixed strategies and conventions of fictional and documentary films. They featured interviews, statistical data, still photography and a fictional narrative.

In this chapter I discuss these two films to trace the ways in which their production shaped the feminist militancy of Jiménez and Mayer towards a political practice with an interest in questioning, through the arts, women’s living conditions. Fernández’s previous experiences with Cooperativa de Cine Marginal and militancy in the first feminist collectives—an experience that she shared with Jiménez —position her, along with Jiménez, as the first generation of visual letradas that I am interested in mapping in this study. Fernández’s understanding of the political and historical value of film deeply informed and confirmed Mayer and Jiménez’s militancy. The creative connections that these women produced through film making not only questioned disciplinary boundaries and genres but provide an alternative model of production premised upon the importance of developing and keeping visual records of their political practices. In this chapter, I also explore how Cine Mujer's production

\textsuperscript{750} \textit{Cosas de Mujeres} was nominated for an Ariel in the category of short film in 1978 and \textit{Vicios de la Cocina}, directed by Beatriz Mira won an Ariel in the category of documentary that same year. Millán, \textit{Derivas de un Cine Femenino},114-117.

destabilized normative constructions used to define parameters of politically committed art and how these two films directed by Fernández and produced by Cine Mujer provided an alternative to dominant conventions of representation.

These two films, in particular, are pivotal nodes that meaningfully connect the practices of the visual letradas I discuss in this dissertation. Cosas de Mujeres and Rompiendo el Silencio map out the ways in which gender and sexual violence against women is deeply embedded and in a dialogic relation to the production of urban space. Moreover, these two films, like Jiménez’s photographs, speak to and function as records of the ways in which feminist demonstrations were politicizing the female body throughout the streets of Mexico City. In a similar manner but with a distinct tone, Pola Weiss began to produce videos that explored her female subjectivity and broader gender and class relations, as they were experienced through Mexico City. Together, all these different media practices that turned to the streets of Mexico City during the 1970s—photography, film, street demonstrations and video—transgressed dominant representations of the female body. In doing so they contravened normative divisions of public and private space and ultimately transformed the geographies of Mexico City as well as its regimes of media and visuality.

“¿Cosas de Mujeres?:” breaking the silence on “women’s issues”

One of the chief preoccupations amongst feminist activists at this time was how to raise consciousness and, as part of this concern, two points of contention demanded attention: first, how to intervene in the media, and, second, how to develop links with working-class women’s organizations. To this end, in 1975 Rosa Martha Fernández and Beatriz Mira promoted the establishment of Colectivo Cine-Mujer. In particular, Rosa Martha Fernández’s militancy in the feminist movement shaped the direction of Cine–
Mujer from 1975 to 1980 towards a preoccupation with unveiling the social mechanisms that oppressed women within the broader context of class struggle. In the words of Fernández, the purpose of the group was to work towards contra-ideologización, which she defines as:

“mostrar cuáles son los intereses políticos, económicos y culturales que hacen que la mujer esté en el estado en el que se encuentra.”

To show the political, economic and cultural interests that sustain the present conditions that women face.

Rosa Martha Fernández was already a university professor of psychology when she decided to study film after her experience with Cooperativa de Cine Marginal, an earlier film collective that produced super-8 films, which served as communication tools between different worker unions across Mexico. In Cooperativa de Cine Marginal, Fernández worked as a camerawoman and was responsible for filming a nation-wide protest by the female textile workers union from Medalla de Oro, who marched from the city of Monterrey to Mexico City to demand better wages and job security.

Fernández had first become politically active after witnessing the 1968 movement in Paris as a psychology student. She was then introduced to feminist activism while studying television production in Japan in 1972. Upon her return to Mexico and before establishing Cine-Mujer in 1975 she published several articles exposing and analyzing the sexist mechanisms of the advertising industry in the country.

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753 See discussion on chapter 2 of this document for an account of the relation of Fernández with Cooperativa de Cine Marginal. Rosa Martha Fernández, interview with the author.

754 Ibid.

755 Fernández tells me that she gained political consciousness while studying psychology in Paris in the late 1960s. Afterwards she went to Japan to study TV production and it was there where she became acquainted with Japanese and US feminists groups. Ibid.
and participated in various small feminist consciousness-raising groups and became a militant of Mujeres en Acción Solidaria, (MAS, 1971).\textsuperscript{756}

The first film produced by Cine-Mujer was Cosas de Mujeres (42 min, dir. Rosa Martha Fernández, 1975-1978). The film's title ironically refers to a phrase used to diminish the importance of an issue. Anything that was deemed to be a woman's issue was regarded as not relevant for public discussion or pertinent to broader social, cultural and political fields. Mostly, it makes the personal political by making public the issue of abortion. The film covers all the chief concerns that surrounded the issue of abortion at the time, including how abortion affected all social classes and the various responsibilities of health and governmental officials. The film visually represents the demands for the decriminalization of abortion that in 1976 had brought together all the feminist collectives into establishing Coalición de Mujeres. The movie was screened as part of the activities of the campaigns in favor of the decriminalization of abortion and functioned as a didactic tool to promote discussions around these issues.

The film is held together by means of a central fictional narrative that tells the experience of Paz, a 19-year-old sociology student, played by Patricia Luke, in trying to obtain an abortion. The movie begins as we see Paz travelling on public transit traversing the streets of Mexico City. At each stop a different women gets on the bus and Paz looks at her as she reflects on her situation. The city is presented as an important character in the movie not only as context but also as an element to develop identification with potential viewers.

We are shown how the young student, having no one else to turn to, seeks help from a friend to find a doctor who will agree to perform an abortion. Meanwhile a

\textsuperscript{756} I discuss some of the articles that she wrote in chapter two of this dissertation.
narrator’s voice reads two articles from the civic code that define abortion as a criminal act. The story of the young woman unfolds as we listen to Janis Joplin’s *Bobby McGee*. The story is interrupted by the testimony of an older woman, clearly from another social strata, who narrates her experience with abortion and sexual abuse. The story of the young women ends as we see her, accompanied by her friend, inside a taxi being driven to a hospital, already semi-unconscious, where she most probably dies.

The film continues in a hospital, where we see numerous women on the verge of giving birth as well as being treated for the effects of induced abortions. Women’s bodies are carried through hospital hallways, inspected with speculums or medicated as we listen to how doctors question them about the reasons for their conditions. The images of the hospital fade as we read some statistics on abortion, then we are shown a newspaper clipping in which Mario Moya Placencia, then Secretary of Government, declares that abortion is a “cruel and antisocial remedy.” Right after, we are presented with an interview with Carmen Coto, a gynecologist. She talks about the number of Mexican women who are using contraceptive methods (8%), the diverse kinds of contraceptives that are available in Mexico and their side effects. Then we hear the voice of a doctor demystifying the risks of inducing an abortion. He says that risks of mortality, which are 2 for every 4 women, would be reduced if abortions were performed correctly, that is, if abortion were legal and women could be cared for properly. While the doctor and Fernández discuss these issues, the viewer is presented with a series of still images of women’s bodies in hospital gowns being examined with speculums and other vaginal apparatuses (Fig. 34).
The film ends with a series of still images that show various groups of women demonstrating in favor of the decriminalization of abortion, including those from Italy, the US and Japan. The last shot is a still image taken by Ana Victoria Jiménez. In this image we see Mexican feminists demonstrating outside the chamber of deputies in Mexico City in November 1977 as part of the campaigns for the decriminalization of abortion (Fig. 35).
Figure 35. Still Images from *Cosas de Mujeres*, courtesy of Rosa Martha Fernández personal archive.

Still images, interviews, testimonies and news clippings are some of the most frequently used visual strategies (or rhetorical tools) in a documentary film. Edited together they produce a reality effect, a sense of credible connection with a real event, which legitimates the documentary film as a “credible” source of knowledge in comparison to a fictional film. Jiménez’s image intervenes in the development of this reality effect at various levels. On one level, Jiménez’s photograph contextualizes the Mexican feminist movement in the midst of a global fight for women’s issues. Her image gives international relevance to the small group of Mexican women who dared to propose and demand reforms to laws pertaining to their bodies. In this manner,

757 However, precisely how the connection with the real is constructed and, moreover the possibility of actually developing a connection with the real has been theorized and debated intensely. For a review of major debates see Stella Bruzzi’s *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London; Routledge, 2000).
Jiménez’s photographs begin to acquire political and historical weight through this film. As Andrea Noble argues:

... for demonstrations to achieve an impact beyond the localized public spaces in which they take place, they depend on the presence of photographers and film crews to create a widely disseminated spectacle of protest. In short, their political agency is predicated in their ability to travel across media and space, thereby appealing to a broader national and international community of viewers.758

On another level, Jiménez’s photos are used as evidence of the real, as indexes of reality.759 As Geoffrey Batchen and others have argued, the indexicality of photographs “... is crucial to the process of memory work, as it operates in and through photographs. This is because the indexical sign, as relic of past reality, takes us back to the scene of memory.”760 The still shots used at the end of this film are indexical signs that point to events of the past, in this case to demonstrations held in the past. However, I argue that the images also work in the opposite direction; they serve to actualize the present. They work in the present not as mnemonic devices of the past, but as images of the actual moment. Jiménez’s image of the 1977 demonstration shown in the film was closely linked to events that were unfolding at the same time that the film was screened.

Cosas de Mujeres was a crucial tool for the campaigns in favor of the decriminalization of abortion. The film was shown at demonstrations and encounters as

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759 The conception of photography as index or icon has been crucial to explaining the complex ways in which photography produces meaning. They are derived from the narratological work by Charles Sanders Pierce, but most influential to the field of photographic theory this notion was also espoused by Roland Barthes. As Hirsch explains in Pierce’s system photography is defined “as both an icon, based on the physical resemblance or similarity between the sign and the object it represents, and as an index, based on a relationship of contiguity, of cause and effect, lie a trace or a footprint.” Others have argued the photograph is a highly mediated cultural construct that depends on a multitude of gazes and cultural specific modes of reading and viewing. See Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 6; and Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida.

760 Cited in Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, Phototextualities, Intersections of Photography and Narrative, 5.
way to raise consciousness; to demonstrate how many levels of society and lives were implicated in and affected by abortion. Viewers were presented with images of bodies being scrutinized at hospitals, which they might be able to recognize; they saw images of newspaper clippings that they might have read along with images of Mexico City streets where they perhaps walked. As they recognized the women in the photos, since perhaps they were the same ones screening the movie, such images served to provoke a sense of shared experience and to locate this film in the present.

In 1979 Fernández directed the movie *Rompiendo el Silencio* (42 min, dir. Rosa Martha Fernández), which deals with the issue of rape. As in the previous film, Jiménez collaborated by providing still images. Throughout the film, interviews and statistical data on rape are woven together with three main testimonies—one by a rapist in jail, another by a young militant worker and a third by a married woman, the latter two having been raped. For this project Fernández interviewed people on the streets of Mexico City, questioning them about their perceptions of rape. Filmed also in black and white, still images of the people interviewed are frozen in time as we listen to their responses in real time. Arguably, the stillness of the images makes the viewer more aware about the sound of the voices of those being interviewed. It allows the viewer time to scrutinize the faces, to identify them, thus adding a more dramatic tone to their responses. As we listen to the responses of all kinds of city dwellers, the still images

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761 Questions included: Do you think that a woman that has been raped looses her value?; Do you think that rape is a violent and forceful act or does woman provoke it (by using revealing clothes or insinuating themselves)?; What kind of men are more prone to become rapists (poor, rich, unemployed, etc..)?; What kind of women are most commonly raped (poor, rich, etc..)?; Why do men rape women?; Do you think that men's sexual appetite gives them the right to rape women?

762 Reading these images as an index of the voices of the interviewed is not as straightforward. The photos were taken because at the time the director did not have access to a film camera that could record such interviews in real time on the streets, hence, the possibility that the voice does not match the face exist. Interview with Rosa Martha Fernández.
locate the issue of rape as a public theme open to discussion (which, as the title indicates, it wasn’t). As in the previous film, Jiménez’s photographs were crucial in the development of a reality effect giving the documentary a sense of relevance in the present but also endowing it with credibility as a source of knowledge (Fig. 36).
Figures 36. Still Images from Rompiendo el Silencio, courtesy of Rosa Martha Fernández and personal archive of Ana Victoria Jiménez archive.
In both films—Cosas de Mujeres and Rompiendo el Silencio—the female body is open for public scrutiny. Vulnerable and grotesque, it is also shown as politically active in street demonstrations. The visual archive of female bodies that these films construct includes opened-legged female bodies being examined with speculums and other vaginal apparatuses; bodies giving testimony of rape and sexual abuse; and bodies demanding reproductive rights on the street. This repertoire of representations of female bodies is in stark contrast to those depicted in both mainstream and independent film at the time. While certain commercial films that began to circulate in Mexico during the 1970s seemed to break with the self-sacrificing mother and fallen-woman stereotypes of the Golden Era of Mexican Cinema and offer new roles to which women could aspire, these films were mostly directed by men and still read as cautionary tales of the perils of women’s liberation. As Ramírez Berg argues, there was a shift from the virginal self-sacrificing mother and fallen-women archetypes towards the archetype of a mad woman who sacrifices her sanity in search of career independence and sexual freedom.

In terms of the independent film movement produced in super 8 film, Cine Mujer’s approach also represented a different engagement in terms of production, content and political commitment. After Fernández established Cine-Mujer, Cooperativa de Cine Marginal continued to produce films on workers strikes and union

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mobilizations. On some occasions women were represented as politically active but mostly as background bodies in the context of a broader worker struggle.765

Representation of female bodies and characters in the independent movies produced as part of the super 8 movement followed to some extent the changes that Ramírez Berg alludes to but were perhaps more bold in their depictions of the female nude. In the experimental film _La Segunda Primera Matriz_ (15 min., dir. Alfredo Gurrola, 1972) close-up images of doctors extracting a baby from a female body as she is giving birth are shown as part of a fragmented narrative that includes nude male and female characters traversing through a forest.766 In _Materia Nupcial_ (20 min., dir. Alfredo Robert, 1974) a male and female couple is filmed while having sexual intercourse.767 These two representative examples of non-militant super 8 productions provide a distinct repertoire of images of the female body. However, these representations are mediated by the male director’s existential searches. The female body in these films is used as a metaphor of origin or as a site to overcome male sexual fears. Indeed, the independent super 8 film movement was predominantly male.768

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765 The only film that focuses on women’s worker struggle produced by Cooperativa was the one from _Medalla de Oro_ in which Fernández participated as a camera woman. However, according to Fernández she never saw the final version of this movie and she is not sure that it exists. The films of Cooperativa de Cine Marginal that I was able to consult at Filmoteca UNAM did not portray women and consisted of various Comunicados. They included: “Comunicado 1 Insurgencia Obrera” (n.d.) on Rafael Galvan and Demetrio Vallejo; “Los Soplones y Los Judas” (n.d.) on worker mobilization in Irapuato, Guanajuato; “Comunicado 3 Por la Democracia Sindical” (n.d.) on workers mobilization in Celaya, Guanajuato; “Comunicado 4” on workers mobilization in Torreon, Coahuila; and “Huelga Nissan Mexicana” (1973, dir. Alejo Pichardo). As I will discuss in the next chapter, Cooperativa de Cine Marginal’s approach to film as a means of alternative communication between different workers unions throughout the country was continued by _Redes Cine y Video_ in the mid 1980s. All films consulted at Filmoteca UNAM on September 10 and 11, 2010.


767 Ibid.

In contrast to these films Cine Mujer films show a vulnerable, abused but nonetheless politically active female body that turns to the city, the space that shapes the structures that oppressed her, as the stage from which to demand her right to claim the personal as political. These movies break with the silencing mechanisms that relegate issues of sexual violence to the private domain. More than cautionary tales they were meant to inspire women to deconstruct their own living conditions by resorting to realist strategies to promote a sense of self-identification with their potential viewers.

Critique, reception and mechanisms of exclusion

For many members of Cine-Mujer, each film they produced was a learning process, the results of which were not always well received. Fernández recalls that her movies were severely criticized because they wouldn't fit within the strict boundaries of either fiction or documentary. Their reception was enmeshed in the political debates that divided the two existing film schools in Mexico City and larger discussions about the political commitments of documentary films versus the capitalist interests that backed up fiction films. Fernández explains:

> en el CUEC se hacía básicamente documental, hacer ficción era totalmente reaccionario. Y la gente de ficción, del CCC, me decían que hacer documental era cosa de los pobres. Y entonces era inconcebible que se mezclaran. Pero a mi el documental me daba la verdad que yo necesitaba porque se trataba de concienciar sobre un problema pero, por

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769 At the time the French film-maker Chris Marker had produced his iconic piece La Jetée (1962) using only still black and white photographs experimenting with the idea of fiction and documentary. Since Mexican film makers were closely following the developments of French cinema it seems odd that these kinds of experimentations were not well received, the contempt against Cine-Mujer films have perhaps more to do with their militant approach. For more on Chris Marker see Jon Kear’s “In the spiral of time: Memory, Temporality and Subjectivity in Chris Marker’s La Jetée” in Phototextualities, Intersections of Photography and Narrative, 218-234.

770 In 1975 president Echeverría established El Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) as part of the package of reforms to the film industry. Many saw its establishment as a strategy to compete with the militant productions coming out of the CUEC, the film school associated with UNAM, the national autonomous university. The films produced at CUEC tend to be more politically engaged through the documentary genre where as the films produced at CCC tended to be more fictional feature films. This is discussed at length in chapter 3 of this dissertation.
otro lado, el documental no me daba para demostrar de una forma visual lo que pasaba.\footnote{Interview with Rosa Martha Fernández.}

At CUEC everyone produced documentaries, fictional films were seen as something reactionary. On the other hand, the people from CCC would tell me that making documentaries was a thing of the poor. In this situation, it was inconceivable that the two genres would mix. Nonetheless, the documentary provided me with the veracity that I needed because the objective was to raise consciousness, however, in most of the cases it didn’t provided me with enough material to prove through visual means the whole situation I wanted to portray.

In contrast to these views, Jorge Áyala Blanco, a film critic, locates the problems of Cine-Mujer’s films in their formal and ideological weaknesses. In a scathing assessment of Cine-Mujer’s early films written in the mid 1980s, he argues that they were gratuitously denigrating and tasteless, “desabridos y gratuitamente denigratorios” and, further, that this lack of aesthetic quality provoked the demise of feminist cinema in Mexico:

\begin{quote}
El cine feminista mexicano se extinguió como llegó. Por más que retumbaran los montes feministas, su parto dio como resultado un escualido y asustadizo ratoncito. \footnote{Further, Ayala Blanco describes Colectivo Cine Mujer as the personal project of Fernández with the purpose to secure free volunteer work and produce her films. Ayala Blanco, Jorge “El parto de los montes feministas” in La Condición del Cine Mexicano (Mexico: Editorial Posadas, 1986), 447-462.}
\end{quote}

Feminist film in Mexico disappeared as quickly as it emerged. Despite its rambunctious and critical demands, the movement gave birth to a scared and feeble little mouse.

Áyala Blanco makes reference to the situation of feminist film by the mid 1980s when many film students were no longer interested in producing feminist militant films. Rather, these younger filmmakers supported the idea of a feminine film, one that dealt with personal issues, but that didn’t declare itself as feminist in an a priori
manner. Later members of Cine-Mujer, such as María Novaro, also indicted the early films directed by Fernández:

... su rollo feminista era muy mitificado y muy radicalizado. Sus temas nunca me gustaron. La película de la violación y del aborto, ¡que horror! Her feminist discourse was intensely mythified and very radicalized. I never liked her themes. The movies on abortion and rape were awful.

At play in such indictments of Cine-Mujer's earlier productions are also larger debates that have obscured the legacies of feminist documentaries in favor of feminist avant-garde film internationally. While neither practice officially exists as an established genre of filmmaking in Mexico, Alexandra Juhasz raises interesting points on diverse feminist mechanisms that have excluded 1970s feminist realist documentaries from the history of feminist filmmaking. In, "They said we were trying to show reality," Juhasz argues that British, French and American feminist film theory criticism towards realism shifted the focus towards the production of feminist avant-garde film thus marginalizing documentaries. In contrast to this critique, Juhasz argues that "... realist images of women discussing their lived experience constitute an important strategy with which to initiate a challenge to the depiction of reality." Interestingly, to back up her arguments, Juhasz proposes to look at the "... theoretically

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774 “María Novaro is one of the most recognized Mexican film directors due to the success of her film Danzon (1991). She joined Cine-Mujer after Fernández had left. She worked on the films Es Primera Vez (1981) and Vida de Ángel (1981). She had a previous history as militant of the Left and with this background she had difficulty with women’s groups since she saw them as a petit-bourgeoisie endeavor. She defines her films as a personal search, as such, her feminine condition comes through, but she rejects feminism as a political stance. María Novaro in Margara Millán, “Vocaciones: Cine y Video Mexicano hecho por Mujeres,” 426.

775 In the article Juhasz also discusses how this exclusion emanating from the academic world has led to the loss of many of these kinds of documentaries. See Alexandra Juhasz, "They say we were trying to show reality—all I wanted to show is my video: The politics of realist feminist documentary" in Lo Personal es Político: Feminismo y Documental (España, Gobierno de Navarra:Instituto Navarro de las Artes Audiovisuales y la Cinematografía, 2011), 136-171.

776 Alexandra Juhasz, "They say we were trying to show reality," 158.
sophisticated approach of directors of Latin American Third Cinema” like Fernando Birri. Birri defended his reality-based approach to filming political movements as a powerful strategy of criticism: ”by testifying critically to this reality, to this sub-reality, to this misery, cinema refuses it. It rejects it. It denounces, it judges, it criticizes and deconstructs it.”

Indeed, social documentary production in Latin America approached reality as a form of deconstruction and on many occasions fused fiction and documentary. However, new wave feminist demands were not considered as part of the realities of Latin American counties until the mid 1980s. From a U.S. academic point of view, Birri’s defense of realism as a strategy for deconstruction is effective for the recovery of 1970s U.S. feminist realist documentary; however, from a Latin American perspective, such a focus on reality and misery took place without the concomitant inclusion of feminist demands for reproduction rights and criminalization of violence as part of a valid and real political movement. These early productions of Cine Mujer were caught up in various structures of exclusion that have obscured its legacies.

**Legacies and networks**

Despite these critical views, Cine-Mujer was a relevant endeavor. At a time when many other cultural producers were searching for alternative forms of production and distribution, as well as ways to reach other non-specialized audiences, Cine-Mujer can be seen as another attempt to achieve these goals. For Jiménez her experience in Cine-Mujer represented one of the many avenues through which feminist militants addressed difficult issues like abortion and rape. According to Jiménez, the collective

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778 Ibid.
779 For a review of genres and categories of social documentary in Latin America see Julianne Burton *Social Documentary in Latin America*. 
and interdisciplinary approach of Cine-Mujer provided these women with a space of experimentation particularly "as they didn't have any manuals on how to address such issues." 780

We did not have manuals or precedents on how to address the issues of rape and abortion in Mexico. We had been exposed to many European films that circulated at the time and which indeed served as inspiration, but the fact was that each of us came from a different background and each brought different ideas to the project.

Moreover, for Ana Victoria Jiménez the experiences with Cine-Mujer augmented her awareness of the importance that her images had as historical and political tools. Her participation in the two films discussed provided her with another perspective about the social and political uses of photography. As the films were projected in diverse venues, Jiménez’s photos gave relevance to the movement beyond Mexico City. Through her participation in Cine-Mujer, Jiménez met Mónica Mayer, who also helped with the production of Rompiendo el Silencio.

For Mayer, her participation in Cine-Mujer was a valuable learning experience that confirmed her interest in feminist militancy through the arts. She related her experience as akin to other revolutionary moments such as the Russian Revolution or the first years of Mexican Muralism when an interdisciplinary and collective approach to art making was linked to a revolutionary goal.

yo digo que fue un momento como la Revolución Rusa o los primeros años del Muralismo Mexicano, de esos momentos que hay un trabajo entre las

780 Ana Victoria Jiménez, interview by author.
781 Ibid.
artistas, las historiadoras y la sociedad y que hay un sentir que el trabajo sirve de algo. 782

I think (that Cine Mujer) was akin to those revolutionary movements in which the collaborations between artists, historians and the society in general shares a commitment for a cause such as the early years of the Mexican Movement or the Russian Revolution and that there's a sense that the work means something.

Cine- Mujer also provided her with an opportunity to experience first hand the social mechanisms of sexual discrimination against women.

In the late 1970s I interviewed the police department doctor who examined women who had been raped. I was meeting him as part of the research for the film Rompiendo el Silencio (Breaking the Silence), by Rosa Martha Fernández, during my brief participation in the first film collective Cine-Mujer.

I listened to the doctor as, without even blinking an eye, he said that it was impossible to penetrate a women against her will, even though his most recent case had been that of a 70 year old women who had been knocked out. The man was unable to see how absurd and discriminatory his approach was. 783

Colectivo- Cine Mujer expanded Mayer's sphere of militancy into broader social fields. For instance, through her research experience for Rompiendo el Silencio she learned about Cecilia—a young single mother—who was repeatedly abused since "she had nothing to loose" until she committed murder in self-defense as a way out of abuse.784 Mayer and other members of Cine-Mujer took on Cecilia's legal case.785

Influences between the two generations of visual letradas did not work in only one direction —from the oldest to the youngest or from Fernández and Jiménez to Weiss and Mayer. As I've shown in Section Two of this dissertation, Mayer influenced and supported Jiménez's participation in feminist art groups such as Tlacuilas y

782 Mónica Mayer, interview with the author.
783 Mónica Mayer, "Video a la Mexicana: De sexo-s, amor y humor."
784 Mónica Mayer, interview with author.
785 Ibid.
Retrateras. Similarly, but perhaps not so directly, Weiss informed Fernández’s current practice as a videodance producer.

In 1980 Fernández left Cine-Mujer and volunteered with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua where she produced television programs for women and children and directed movies until her return to México in 1984.\textsuperscript{786} Years later, as director of TV UNAM (1989-1994), she negotiated the establishment of a screening venue in honor of Pola Weiss and she also negotiated the initial transfer Weiss’s videos at TV UNAM.\textsuperscript{787} Throughout the 1990s Fernández continued with her documentary and didactical approach towards audiovisual media. She produced a television series entitled \textit{Prisma Universidad} (1985-1997) on student organizations at UNAM and documentary films such as \textit{Casa Dividida} (1988), which addressed a phase of Che Guevara’s life.\textsuperscript{788} She also adopted video as her media of choice and began to experiment with videodance, a genre that, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Weiss introduced to Mexico in 1977.\textsuperscript{789}

As director of TV UNAM she supported the production of several videodance projects. When I interviewed her at her house in Mexico City she was finishing the production of \textit{Entre Paredes de Agua} (30 min, dir. Fernández, 2010). \textit{Entre Paredes de Agua} is a highly sophisticated videodance project, most of it shot underwater. It took four years to produce and makes use of computer animation software as well as visual effects like chroma key, the use of a green screen to layer different scenes. As our

\textsuperscript{786} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{787} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{789} Fernández experiments with video dance include: \textit{Danza Picnic}, DVD, dir. Rosa Martha Fernández (Mexico City: TV UNAM, 2002) and \textit{Entre Paredes de Agua Entre Paredes de Agua}, DVD, dir. Rosa Martha Fernández (Mexico: IMCINE, Canal 22, 2010).
conversation came to an end she told me me that her future plans are to continue to experiment with video art and videodance. As she told me this I couldn’t stop thinking about the ways in which Pola Weiss’s work is present in Fernández’s approach to video.

In sum, Colectivo Cine Mujer represents another model that was open to the participation of women in cinema and audiovisual media in general. Growing out of independent Latin American and Mexican practices of politically-committed film, the audiovisual productions of the film-makers of this collective politicized the female body and, by doing so, broke with conventional forms of representation to propose an alternative approach to film production. The early films of Cine-Mujer interrogated the ways in which visual images created and reproduced dominant power relations. In the following chapter I discuss Pola Weiss’s experiments with video that developed at the same time as Jiménez photographed feminist demonstrations. This was also the time when Mayer began to explore performative practice and they both collaborated with Fernández’s productions through Cine Mujer. Together, the practices of these women provide different modes of political engagement through audiovisual media that would radically change regimes of media and visuality.
CHAPTER 9.

extraPOLAting, interPOLAting, and POLArizing the archive: the videos of Pola Weiss

Of all the visual *letradas* I follow in this work, Pola Weiss (1947–1990) is the only one who did not self-identify as a feminist. However, like Rosa Martha Fernández, Mónica Mayer, and Ana Victoria Jiménez, Weiss was interested in exploring feminine subjectivity and the living conditions of urban Mexican women through visual media. Like Mayer and Fernández, Weiss pursued a career as a visual artist on her own terms. Convinced of its potential as an artistic media, Weiss used video to explore and experiment with a wide variety of disciplines—dance, music, poetry, live performance, and moving images. Much like Mayer and Fernández’s work in performance and film, Weiss’s experiments with television broadcasting and video contested established disciplinary divisions and traditions of visual representation.

Video also provided Weiss with a platform from which to explore herself. Weiss adopted video as an extension of her own body. From 1977 to 1989 she developed a series of works in which she established an embodied relation with the video camera that complicated the representation and the reading of her body, as well as the relation between artist and spectator (subject and object of representation). In this way, Weiss’s audiovisual experiments articulate a utopian impulse\(^{790}\) motivated by a desire to transform and challenge what counted as female experience, intellectual and artistic inquiry, and dominant class and racial hierarchies. Some of Weiss’s experiments with

\(^{790}\) For a historical and theoretical discussion of the concept of utopia in Latin American cultural production and distinct frameworks of understanding what counts as a utopian impulse, see Kim Beauchesne and Alessandra Santos, “The Theory and Practice of the Utopian Impulse in Latin America” in Beauchesne and Santos, eds., *Utopian Impulse in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–26; For a discussion of utopía as a concept moved by a desire to create a better way of living, see Ruth Levita’s *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).
video point to the development of an alternative audiovisual space in which dreams of a better world could come to fruition.

Like other artists experimenting with video at the time, Weiss used the video camera as a confidante with which to share her most intimate secrets and the video monitor as a mirror. For instance, through what she called autovideoato, she sought to establish a different approach to self-portraits. Autovideoato (18 min, 1979) consisted of a series of self-reflexive anecdotes of Weiss’s experiences with various psychological therapies. In the video, Weiss interrogates spatial corporeal sensibilities by intermixing testimonies and footage from her adult life and her childhood. Using layering image effects (chroma-key) and highly contrasted silhouettes of her naked body, she seems to make her body travel across time and space, blending and rupturing the past and the present. She applied the same approach when producing portraits for others. Her explorations of self were not bounded to her own subjectivity, but involved broader explorations of the relations between self and technology.

At times, Weiss transformed her camera, which she referred to as her escuincla (daughter in nahuatl), into an eye or a limb as she danced with it in her hand, filming her movements. During these live videodanzas, the interplay of projections and

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791 Artists’ prevalent use of the camera and the monitor as tools to investigate the self led Rosalind Krauss to conclude that, in general, narcissism was the condition that defined video art as a genre in the 1970s. While a narcissistic impulse is present in Weiss’s video productions and the construction of her artistic persona, I rather focus on the ways in which her “narcissism” led to alternative understandings of female subjectivity and women’s experience while contesting hegemonic regimes of representation. See Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism.” October 1 (Spring 1976): 50–64.

792 Autovideoato, VHS n. 2, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: artTV, 1979); and Autovideoato 2 VHS n. 3, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: art TV, 1982). Unless otherwise stated, all of the videos were consulted at ARKEHIA on September 6, 2010 as part of the La Era Discrepancia files on loan from TV UNAM.

793 For instance, in arTveing, a video portrait of theater director Miguel Angel Tenorio, Weiss conducts the interview by focusing on the moments of psychological crisis that have influenced Tenorio’s creations. As in other videos, Weiss breaks with the linear narrative by superimposing layers of images and using visual effects. arTveing VHS, n. 3, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: art TV, 1982–83).
reflections from monitors and mirrors fractured the spatial and durational sequence of her performances. At the same time, such reflections and projections blurred the boundaries between spectator, artist, and object of representation. Like other artists at the time, Weiss adopted the camera as a prosthetic to explore and push the limits of bodily experiences.\footnote{See, for example, Amelia Jones's discussion of Carolee Schneemann's \textit{Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions} (1963), which, as I will discuss, could have been an inspiration for Weiss's later work. See Amelia Jones, \textit{Self/Image. Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject}. (London: Routledge, 2006). 172–173.} Moreover, in conceiving each of her videos as an \textit{alumbramiento} (an act of giving birth), Weiss transformed her creative process into an act of copulation with her \textit{escuincla}, something akin to what Donna Haraway would later label cyborg sex.\footnote{In 1985, Donna Haraway's manifesto famously presented the cyborg as a hybrid model of feminine subjectivity that defied any kind of fixed definition of what counted as female experience and as a critique of the exclusionary practices of white heterosexual feminist discourses. Haraway's ideas led to the development of queer theory and cyborg feminism. See Donna Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto" in David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy \textit{The Cybercultures Reader} (Routledge: New York, 2001), 291-324. For a critique of Haraway's manifesto and adoption of the cyborg as a symbol of a new kind of female experience, see Ann Balsamo, \textit{Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).} Haraway refers to cyborg sex as “couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality.”\footnote{Ibid, 291.} Weiss's incestuous act of copulation with her \textit{escuincla} resulted in productive experimentation that radically altered what counted as female experience. As Haraway put it, “The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century.”\footnote{Ibid, 291.} Indeed, Weiss's experiments led her to a particular kind of self-fashioning that integrated video technology as an extension of herself. Much like Haraway's use of the cyborg as a model to explain the diversity of women's experiences, Weiss invented her own categories to explain her practice and self, which constantly overflowed existing
frameworks. Through the creation of playful neologisms like extraPola, interPola, POLAroid, Venusina, teleasta, and videa, which she used to describe herself and her practice, Weiss crafted an out-of-the-ordinary artistic persona that avoided any kind of fixed definition, thus challenging and exploding established meanings of what counted as women’s experience in 1970s Mexico.

Through her embodied approach to video technology, Weiss proposed an alternative model of a visual letrada that not only questioned the art establishment by embracing interdisciplinarity, but also explored different corporeal sensibilities and new relations between self and technology. She championed video as a valid form of intellectual inquiry and a medium that conceived embodied subjects. Weiss’s blurring of the object and subject of representation went beyond breaking with the construction of women as the object of the male gaze. Her video explorations point to a search for an embodied being—what she referred to as the “cosmic man.”

Through her combined use of sound, music, voice, visual effects, images, and movement, Weiss exploits what Laura U. Marks would later label “haptic visuality” to demonstrate that the way we see and relate to screen images is neither disembodied nor void of desire. Moreover, at a time when video was being introduced to Mexico, Weiss’s artistic work constituted a

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798 Juan Garibay Mora, “El Video Arte, Superación de la Caja Idiota para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual” in Excelsior, section E, 1, August 14, 1982.

799 Laura U. Marks proposes a model of haptic visuality to oppose an optic visuality based on a Cartesian and disembodied model of perception that excludes desire. Marks argues that haptic visuality is a synesthetic visual encounter with a screen image involving touch, smell, and desire. Marks uses the term in her study of intercultural cinema (film and video) produced from an experience of exile or the diaspora in the late 1980s and 1990s. See Laura U. Marks, The Skin of Film. Intercultural Cinema and the Senses (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000). Amelia Jones follows Marks to explore how art works produced in the post-1960s period explored televisual images (video, film, television) to convey embodied subjects in a manner that evoked haptic opticality rather than following the object-subject construction reversal that Laura Mulvey proposed in the early 1970s. As I will demonstrate, Weiss’s conception of video as presented in her writings, interviews, and videos, is more in line with Marks’s and Jones’s approaches than with a mere reversal of object and subject of representation. Weiss’s video work and exaggerated use of metaphor, allegory, and performance overflow any kind of binary construction of perception. See Amelia Jones Self/Image. Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject.
practical engagement with feminist sensibilities that were emerging globally and that would become prevalent in the decades to follow. While some scholars have discussed Weiss’s approaches to video as being “queer avant la lettre,” my purpose is to study Weiss as a significant producer and theorist who proposed her own categories to understand her practice and the potential of video and television broadcasting rather than appropriating Weiss as a representative of subsequent discourses and interests.

In this chapter, I discuss some of the ways in which Weiss’s practice altered Mexican regimes of visuality and factored in the development of video as a communication and artistic medium. I locate Weiss’s practices as part of a transnational network of people—artists, dancers, musicians, and technology aficionados—interested in the potential of video and television broadcasting as an artistic medium of expression rather than as a commercial medium of communication.

Weiss’s videos were part of a meaningful dialogue with an international group of artists that, in the 1960s, began to interrogate and develop distinct corporeal sensibilities mediated through audiovisual technologies. This increased interest in the body responded to emerging practices brought about by technological advances like the

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800 Here, I am thinking of Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto and scholars like Alexandra Juhasz, who study female artists’ approach representing their own bodies as “autobodies.” In addition, Weiss’s work could be interpreted as being in dialogue with feminist psychoanalytic approaches following the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigary, who questioned and expanded Freud’s and Lacan’s theories by placing the mother-daughter relationship as a productive element in the construction of female subjectivity, rather than as unproductive or subordinate to male subject constitution. However, in this chapter, I am more concerned with mapping networks of exchange and Weiss’s relationship to the other visual letradas I discuss in this study and, most importantly, considering all of their work as valid and practical theoretical engagements in and of themselves that transformed regimes of media and visuality and the spheres of action of the letrado tradition in Mexico. For Alexandra Juhasz’s conception of “autobodies” in relation to feminist video produced in the 1990s, see “Our Auto-Bodies, Ourselves: Representing Real Women in Feminist Video” in Afterimage (February 1994): 10–14. For an interpretation of Weiss through a psychoanalytical framework see Rita Eder, “El Cuerpo y El espejo: ansiedades en la autorepresentación,” available at http://www.museodemujeres.com/matriz/biblioteca/023_ederita.html, accessed on August 6, 2011.

801 For a work that links Weiss practice to cyborg feminism and queer theory see Mónica Mayer, “Video a la Mexicana: De sexo-s, amor y humor.”
proliferation of televisual images of unknown bodies in live and recorded time that inundated the once-private realm of living rooms in many urban centers around the world. As Douglas Rosenberg argues, these televisual images—as varied as Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon, entertainment shows with live audiences, and the broadcasting of the Vietnam War—gave audiences a different sense of corporeality.

Moreover, and of crucial importance for this study, feminist discourses and the practices of a marginal group of international artists reemerged. Some of these artists were self-declared feminists who began to contest the traditional conventions for how art and media represented the female body. Artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Joan Jonas, and Shigeko Kubota—to name a few—began to challenge the ways in which the female body was represented by blurring the boundaries between the subject and the object of representation through the use of video, installation, and performance, and above all by proposing a more messy and embodied model of perception. In particular, Japanese-born and U.S.-based Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937) would be an important motivation for and influence on Weiss’s video production.

In her local context, Weiss’s video production broke with several conventions of representation that radically transformed Mexican visual regimes, but her practice also gave continuity to ways of seeing and conventions of representation established through film and photography decades earlier. Her practice was deeply embedded in

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802 After World War II, television audiences in most of the United States and major urban centers in Mexico were able to witness political debates, the walk on the moon, all kinds of entertainment, celebrities, and, perhaps most crucially, the broadcast of the Vietnam War. Rosenberg, Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image, 11–12.

803 Ibid.

804 The literature on these themes is very broad. For work that informs my reading of Weiss’s work in relation to the group of artists I mention, see Amelia Jones, Self/Image. Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject; and Midori Yoshimoto, Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York. (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
and committed to the local context. As noted in a previous section of this document, Weiss championed image making as a valid form of intellectual inquiry and understood the potential of audio-visual information for educational and political purposes in a way that aligned her to approaches of documentary filmmakers in Latin America. Some of her work explored issues of poverty and unequal gender, racial, and class relations, as they were experienced on the streets of Mexico City. In some of her most well-known videos her body is used as an allegory of the city. By inscribing her personal experience in relation to the urban landscape through video, Weiss, like all the other visual letradas discussed in this dissertation, points to the city as a crucial space for the negotiation and production of gendered subjectivities and regimes of knowledge. In doing so, her work speaks to the battle of representation (visual and in formal politics) that was taking place on the streets of Mexico City throughout the decade and to transformations in the sphere of action of the letrados. On several occasions, she traveled to small communities to videotape and document traditional dances and performances. These documentary approaches to video making followed a well-established anthropological way of seeing—an objectifying gaze underscored by an unequal distance between the object and the subject of the gaze. However, she attempted to break with this established way of seeing by making use of the self-reflexive potential and new capacities afforded by video to activate and awaken the spectator.

One of the ways in which Weiss attempted to break with an objectifying way of seeing was by attempting to break with what Spielmann and others have called the

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805 For a review of Latin American approaches to documentary filmmaking, see Julianne Burton, ed. The Social Documentary in Latin America; Michael T. Martin (ed), New Latin American Cinema; and Jessica Stites Mor, Transitional Cinema.

806 Some of these works include St. Cruz Tepepexpan (n.d), filmed in the State of Mexico; Cuilapan de Guerrero and Los Muertos en Etlá (n.d), filmed in Oaxaca (1979); and Papalotl (1979) and Cuetzalan y yo (1979), filmed in the state of Puebla.
media border—the separation between real experience and the reality structured by a medium.807 Weiss did so by using visual effects, incorporating feedback, using multiple cameras, experimenting with sound and music, and by “extraPOLAting” (making the viewer see images), “interPOLAting” (interrupting the viewer to disrupt the narrative), and “POLArizing” (inviting the viewer to reflect on what he/she saw).808

It has been a source of constant debate whether self-reflexive capacities can be attributed to any medium’s technological or aesthetic specificities, as Clement Greenberg argued for formalist painting, or as Spielmann argues for video and other screen media.809 Debates over the particular characteristics of any medium get even more tangled up with each new medium’s attempts to achieve recognition and claim its newness. For Bolter and Grusin, what is new about new media “comes from the particular ways in which new media refashion themselves to answer the challenges posed by older media.”810 However, as Lisa Gitelman explains, media “are socially embedded sites for the negotiation of meaning” and, as such, “media are complicated historical subjects.”811 Gitelman goes on to define media as “socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with

808 Pola Weiss, “Los Extrapola, se interpola Weiss (performance y videos).”
811 Lisa Gitelman, Always Already New, 7.
popular ontologies of representation.”  

In this chapter, I follow Gitelman’s more encompassing definition of media to explore the ways Weiss works without losing track of video’s technological specificities that allowed for an augmented sense of critical reflexivity from the artist and spectator. I also consider the ways in which video borrowed from and added to established conventions of photography and documentary filmmaking in order to establish itself as a medium, while considering its inherent openness and inter-medial capacities—its abilities to mix, mediate, and interact with other media.813

Weiss’s diverse engagements with video represent an important link within a network of image-makers that meaningfully connect the previous generation of visual letradas, including Ana Victoria Jiménez and Rosa Martha Fernández, and the following generation of image-makers that would adopt video as a medium of choice. Much like Mayer, Weiss’s body of work anticipates an interest in the potentialities of new media technologies in relation to performance and archival traditions that would become prevalent in the decades to follow.

Although her practice radically transformed Mexican regimes of visuality, Weiss’s work has not been significantly incorporated into the histories of media, art, and feminism. Some monographs of her work exist, but not a thorough study that aims to link her practices to a genealogy of visual letradas, both national and transnational.814

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812 Ibid.

813 In 1965, Fluxus artists redefined the term intermedia as “the field between the general area of art media and those of life media—indefinable media that falls in between preexisting categories.” Since then it has been used as a category to understand video production. See Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York*, 6; and Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*.

This is due in part to entrenched misogynistic practices that have historically obscured the legacies of women in the arts.\textsuperscript{815} In the case of Weiss, such silencing mechanisms were exacerbated by several factors that have to do with the skepticism towards video as an artistic genre and Weiss’s unconventional personality and practice that abjured any kind of definition. Rumors of Weiss videotaping her suicide (May 6, 1999) in combination with anecdotes of her eccentric personality and the lack of interest from the art establishment to understand video as an art form contributed to the development of a marginal cultish following that, in part, distracted from her achievements as a visual letrada.

Another crucial aspect that until recently hindered a meaningful discussion of Weiss’s work is the lack of support for keeping and maintaining her personal archive and work. The stories behind the bequest of her personal papers and the limited access to her video work underscore and set the limits of this chapter.

In 1998, one of Weiss’s students, Edna Torres Ramos, donated Weiss’s work to TV UNAM. Ramos received Weiss’s material from Fernando Mangino, Weiss’s partner at the time of her death. Ramos then catalogued the material, consisting of 38 videos and several stock images, to write her bachelor’s thesis entitled, “El videoarte en México, el Caso de Pola Weiss.” From 1998 until 2012, when Weiss’s archive was donated to ARKEHIA, the center of documentation of the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), some of her videos circulated surreptitiously amongst circles


of artists within Mexico. Internationally, a couple of her videos were distributed through the Netherlands Media Art Institute.\textsuperscript{816} Currently, many of her videos are available on YouTube.

In the context of a renewed interest in rescuing artists’ archives and the attention the exhibition \textit{La Era de La Discrepancia} brought to the work of Mexican artists working in the 1970s, Edna Torres Ramos obtained funding in 2011 from FONCA to curate and restore Weiss’s archive.\textsuperscript{817} Currently, the Pola Weiss archive, held at ARKEHIA, consists of 3,165 records, including personal documents, photographs, catalogues, slides, and film negatives.\textsuperscript{818} Between 2009 and 2011, when I was researching this project, I was able to see 38 of Pola Weiss's videos held at ARKEHIA. The videos were on loan from TV UNAM and held as part of the archive for the exhibition \textit{La Era de La Discrepancia}.\textsuperscript{819} The video footage I saw does not represent Weiss’s complete body of work. The initial donation to TV UNAM included various versions of the same videos as well as many video stock images. It is possible that different versions of the same video exist. I was also able to consult other material held at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, including catalogues, posters, and invitations for Weiss’s shows. At Biblioteca de las Artes, Hemeroteca Nacional, and the Faculty of Political Science and Communications at UNAM, I was able to consult Weiss’s thesis and some newspaper interviews. Conversations with Rosa Martha Fernández, Sarah Minter, Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante, and Eli Bartra also helped in

\textsuperscript{816} See LIMA (media arts foundation), previously the Netherlands Media Art Institute http://catalogue.nimk.nl/site/?page=\%2Fsite\%2Fartist.php\%3Fid\%3D3730, accessed on November 29, 2012.

\textsuperscript{817} Personal electronic communication with Edna Torres Ramos, November 29, 2012.

\textsuperscript{818} Sonia Sierra, “Pola Weiss, La madre del videoarte mexicano” in \textit{El Universal}, Friday September 7, 2012.

\textsuperscript{819} Fondo Pola Weiss, TV UNAM, consulted at ARKEHIA on September 6, 2010.
reconstructing parts of Weiss’s legacy. While recognizing Weiss as a video pioneer, all of them directed our conversations towards Weiss’s difficult personality and tragic death. These conversations confirmed the ways in which the myth and stigma surrounding Weiss have limited the recognition of her achievements.

Towards a pre-history of video emerging from Mexico City

Historically, the emergence of new technologies has prompted artistic experimentation.

Video and television broadcasting were not exceptions. The terms are often used interchangeably to refer to audiovisual images viewed through a television monitor.

Beginning in the 1960s, visual artists collaborated in blurring this distinction as they began to experiment with both technologies as a way to change, explore, and explode their image-making and broadcasting capacities.820

820 As is well known, in 1964, the Korean artist Nam June Paik and the Japanese artist Shuya Abe began to experiment with the handheld video camera (Sony Portapak). Some years earlier, in 1954, the German artist Wolf Vostell also used television monitors as part of his art installations. Soon after, Paik and Vostell joined George Maciunas in Fluxus, becoming pioneers of video and conceptual art. These artists, along with Bruce Nauman, Chris Burden, and Vito Acconci, became the “pioneers” of video art and the protagonists of a history that emanates from the dominant centers of the art world through a male-based perspective. Yet another important milestone in the history of video was Jean Luc Godard’s use of a video camera to record images of the student demonstration in Paris in 1968. Outside these networks of Western art, Brazilian artists, for instance, began to experiment with video in the late 1960s, and by the mid 1970s a group of artists including Sonia Andrade, Leticia Parente, and Regina Silveria was already working in the medium. In Vancouver, Intermedia, established in 1967, was the first art collective to begin to discuss the ways in which television was changing art production via the theories of Marshall McLuhan. Intermedia introduced the first Portapak to Vancouver artists via in 1968. In addition, North American and European feminist art historians and activists have constantly argued for the recognition of feminist experiments with video as an alternative to the male-based histories of the medium. In parallel to these feminist projects, other scholars are arguing for the recognition of experimental television collectives that have also been left out of dominant narratives of the history of video. For Brazilian video art, see Arlindo Machado, “Video Art: the Brazilian Adventure” in Leonardo, vol. 29, No. 33, 225–231. For Vancouver video art development, see Marina Roy, “Corporeal Returns: Feminism and Phenomenology in Vancouver Video and Performance 1968–1983” in Canadian Art, Toronto, Summer, 2001; and http://intermedia.vancouverartinthesixties.com/1968/default, accessed on July 5, 2012. For a review of the archival and experimental uses of video at the Women’s Art Building in Los Angeles during the early 1970s, see Cecilia Dougherty, “Stories from a generation: Early video at the LA Woman’s Building” in Afterimage, Vol. 26.1, July–August, 1998, 8–11; and for the uses of video by French feminist collectives, see Stéphanie Jean, “Disobedient Video in France in the 1970s: Video Production by Women’s Collectives” in Afterall: Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry, issue 27 (Summer, 2011) 5–16. For alternative histories of video activism in the United States, see Jesse Drew, “The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism” in Collectivism after Modernism, 95–114.
Video and television are electronic media. In contrast to film, both rely on electronic signals to produce images rather than on a chemical process and a material medium like film and photography. Television broadcasting consists of a complex infrastructure through which visual images—prerecorded on film, later live through video, and currently through digital means—are transmitted through electronic signals to television monitors or receivers. In its early stages, the television monitor received electronic signals that were decoded through a cathode ray tube to present clear images to the spectator. Initially, artists were interested in disrupting the ways in which the television monitor decoded electronic signals to investigate new ways to produce images and unsettle mainstream and commercial goals of television broadcasting. They were interested in finding a new medium of artistic expression. Television broadcasting was appealing because of its massive reach and democratizing potential. In the early 1960s, Korean-born and U.S.-based artist Nam Jun Paik placed a magnet on top of a television monitor to distort the transmission of electromagnetic signals from the cathode ray tube into the television screen. His piece “Magnet TV” (1965) produced a set of abstract moving images. Paik was part of an international network of artists known as Fluxus, a group interested in experimenting with dance, music, technology, and other forms of expression to break with the art establishment. Although Paik’s early work did not produce a counter or anti-establishment discourse, but merely attempted to elevate video to the status of painting, as Martha Rosler and others have

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822 Ibid.
argued, his experiments anticipated visual effects that would become a staple of video aesthetics; they were crucially influential in Weiss’s video work. 824

Video was also attractive to many technology enthusiasts because of its particular capabilities to produce and reproduce audio and visual inputs through electronic signals. 825 Video signals are typically produced inside a camera. These signals can circulate between recording and reproduction equipment and can be modified by different kinds of machines (processors, scanners, keyers, and synthesizers) and broadcast both auditorially and visually. 826 Audio and visual signals can be processed and transformed alternately so that audio signals can be converted into visual signals and vice versa. This means that audio signals can modify or dictate the ways in which a video image looks since they can be transformed into visual signals; in the same way, visual signals can generate sounds.

Video signals can also be created through devices such as video synthesizers without the need of an optical device. This means that, in contrast to film, video technology allows for the production and reproduction of audiovisuals by manipulating electronic signals even without the need for a camera. In addition, video signals can be recorded to videotape—a magnetic strip that can simultaneously record audio and visual signals into one magnetic track rather than as two separate elements put together on a filmstrip. The direct recording onto the magnetic strip made video much more affordable and efficient than working in film, since it did not need to be developed.

824 While I agree with the criticism of the sanctification of Paik as the “father of video art” advanced by feminist artist Martha Rosler and video artist Woody Vasulka, in the realm of explorations of the aesthetic specificities of the video signal, Paik’s work is of relevance for the work of Pola Weiss. For Rosler and Vasulka’s assessment of Paik’s work, see Chris Meigh-Andrews, The Origins of Video Art, 15.

825 Spielmann, Video: The Reflexive Medium, 1.

826 Ibid., 2.
Another important aspect of video that attracted artists and technology enthusiasts was its ability to incorporate feedback. Audio and visual feedback can be incorporated through the manipulation of electronic signals or by feeding different video channels into one through diverse reproduction devices (monitors or image processors). Audience feedback could also be integrated as part of the video. Live transmission and audience feedback unsettled the relation between spectator and representation, since video footage could be shown immediately after being videotaped or at the same time as it was being produced. Video augmented the immediacy through which bodies were experienced across time and space, as established decades earlier through television and radio broadcasting. These technological dimensions and abilities prompted numerous artists, mostly with backgrounds in dance, performance, and music, to experiment and break with the relation between the object and the subject of representation in ways that film and photography could not. Video’s degraded image also evoked a kind of aesthetic that, while similar to experimental film, also had a sense of artificiality that was appealing to artists interested in breaking media’s boundaries.827

With time, video’s affordability and ease of use prompted more intimate interactions and the establishment of independent networks of distribution, in turn providing new ways to produce and relate to audiovisual images. All these abilities made video the medium of choice for many grassroots movements, including feminist artist and collectives. Many feminist artists in the 1970s were attracted to video because of “its lack of history, its immediacy and less commodifiable nature.”828 Many felt empowered by the newness of video, as they thought it would enable them to

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827 Amelia Jones, "Cinematic self imaging and the new televisual body" in Screen/Image, 137.
achieve a place as art producers. At the time, video, as an artistic medium, did not have the male historical focus of other media. Video also became the medium of choice for many small feminist consciousness-raising groups.

As discussed previously, in the early 1970s, video was still an expensive technology in Mexico. As in the rest of the Latin American region, feminist and grassroots collectives resorted to super 8 and 16 mm film rather than video to produce independent media.\textsuperscript{829} Artists interested in experimenting with video had to have links with the broadcasting industry. Both private and state broadcasting companies were open to experimenting with the newly available video technology and eagerly opened their doors to new generations of media professionals—including women. In 1974 Pola Weiss, then a communications student and a collaborator with both state and private television, travelled to several European cities to investigate the state of television in Europe. That same year, Weiss wrote a pilot program for Televisa entitled \textit{La Grapa} and declared to be a \textit{teleasta}—a producer of televisual images.\textsuperscript{830} It was not only broadcasting companies that were interested in video; several efforts to introduce the emergent medium of video to young generations of artists were organized in Mexico City.

In 1973, Video Art Nueva Estética Visual, an exhibition held at MAM and sponsored by the U.S. embassy, introduced the vanguard of U.S.-based video artists and experimental television to Mexican audiences.\textsuperscript{831} Among those artists were Woody and

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\textsuperscript{829} Grassroots collectives adopted video more widely in the 1980s, when the equipment became more affordable. Patricia Aufdeheide "Grassroots video in Latin America"; and Julia Lesage "Women Make Media: Three Modes of Production" in Julianne Burton ed., \textit{The Social Documentary in Latin America}, 315–350.

\textsuperscript{830} Pola Weiss, "Extrapolación. Los Extrapola, se interpola Weiss (performance y videos)."

\textsuperscript{831} Museo de Arte Moderno, \textit{Video Cinta de Vanguardia, VideoArt. Estética Visual}.\end{flushright}
Steina Vasulka, owners of New York City’s The Kitchen, one of the first and most well-known independent video art distribution spaces.\textsuperscript{832} The exhibit also included the work of William and Louise Etra and Stephen Beck, all of whom were involved in the design of machines that could produce and distort audio and visual signals without the need for a camera.\textsuperscript{833} Ed Emschwiller, a filmmaker and illustrator, showed an experimental video entitled \textit{Scapemates} (1972) that intermixed dance choreography with abstracted and distorted chroma-keyed images synchronized to music.\textsuperscript{834} The video shows abstracted images generated by audio signals while dancing bodies float over a fluorescent city landscape produced through the use of a video synthesizer.\textsuperscript{835} This aesthetic would crucially influence Weiss’s experiments with video. While there are no records of the influence of such an exhibit in Pola Weiss’s career development, it is possible that she was introduced to the potentials of image distortions and effects—such as chroma-keys, solarization, and audio/image interchangeability, as well as experiments with choreography and sound—through this exhibit.

By the early 1970s, and as noted in a previous section, Weiss, like other artists of her generation, was already interested in exploring video as an alternative to commercial television broadcasting. In the early stages of her career, she used the neologism \textit{videa} to explain her practice as a person who has visual ideas or who thinks

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{832} Ib. \textsuperscript{832}
\item \textsuperscript{833} At the time, most of these machines were called video synthesizers, but, as Spielmann notes, there was much incoherence in naming apparatuses at this experimental time, as no proper protocols or distinctions were put in place. Spielman distinguishes between video synthesizers, image processors, and scan processors. Yvonne Spielmann, “Video Aesthetics: From Technology to Medium.”
\item \textsuperscript{834} Ib. \textsuperscript{834}
\item \textsuperscript{835} Emschwiller is considered to be one of the early artists to experiment with video synthesizers and image processors, helping to establish video visual conventions. See Electronic Arts Intermix, Ed Emschwiller, http://www.eai.org/artistBio.htm?id=471, accessed on December 12, 2013.
\end{itemize}
visually. At a moment when Mexican male intellectuals and politicians debated the content of television programming and the management of broadcasting, Weiss advocated for video as a tool to explore audiovisual production as a valid form of intellectual activity. She championed the potential of video to develop an alternative to commercial television programming. But Weiss also imbued video and television with a utopian potential that could give rise to what she called the “cosmic man,” a new sensorial being in touch with his/her feelings. In other words, Weiss believed that video was able to convey how our experiences are embodied. She conceived of video as a translator of our deepest feelings and memories:

Por sus características técnicas, el video, es un excelente traductor de tu memoria que nos brinda la oportunidad de introducirnos a las cosas que pasan en nuestra cabeza, en nuestros sentimientos, en lo que pasa adentro.

Because of its technical characteristics, video is an excellent translator of our memory. It provides us with a way to access what happens inside ourselves, in our minds, and with our sensations.

Throughout her career, Weiss produced scripts and documentaries for television and private clients in combination with more experimental video and performance work. Some records indicate that part of her archival footage contains video spots for Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Luis Donaldo Colosio’s presidential campaign. Other sources indicate that, in 1983, she participated in the production of an experimental

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836 Marcela Fernández Medellín, Mujeres a través del video, 21.
837 See the discussion in section 1 of this document and Juan Garibay Mora, “El Video Arte, superación de la caja idiota, para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual.”
838 Ibid.
839 Ibid.
841 Marcela Fernández Medellín, Mujeres a través del video: Intimidad y subversion, 17.
television program called Videocosmos for Channel 9 in Mexico City. Meanwhile, she continued to produce work experimenting with dance, sound, music, and poetry. At times, these different approaches to video making were indistinguishable in her work. At other times, she made clear attempts to construct a vocabulary to understand different approaches and uses of video and television broadcasting through different neologisms like autovideoato (self-portraits), videodanza (dance performances), and artVEing (video interviews). Mainly, she aimed to produce experimental programming for television through her company artTV—a studio she funded with difficulty and through her own means. In one of her last interviews, she affirmed that more than anything else, she was a teleasta—a producer of televisual images. Video art was her other voice and her other self, Weiss stated (“antes que nada soy teleasta, el videoarte es mi otra voz, mi otra mirada mi otro yo”). Thus, Weiss confirmed that, while she was interested in video art, she was equally interested in producing televisual images for a broader audience, while also signaling her refusal to be classified in any established discipline or association.

V is for video and vagina: the exchanges of Pola Weiss and Shigeko Kubota

In 1975, as Weiss was finishing her bachelor’s thesis on the uses of video as an alternative medium to commercial television broadcasting, Weiss met and interviewed Japanese-born and U.S.-based video artist Shigeko Kubota. The meeting with Kubota marked an important transformation in Weiss’s approach to video. It confirmed that her search for an experimental approach was of interest in other places. After the meeting

843 Weiss complained about her lack of resources and how she had to work as a professor at UNAM and write articles to support her productions. See Pola Weiss, “LA TV TÉ VE”; and Jorge V. Carrasco, “Pola Weiss: la cineasta olvidada.”
844 Forjadores del Video. VHS, directed and produced by Rafael Corkidi.
with Kubota, Weiss began to conceptualize some of her work as video art, while still keeping her commitment to be a *teleasta*.

In examining Kubota’s life and career, certain parallels and dialogues with Weiss’s career and approach to video emerge. However, in narrating her exchanges with Kubota, rather than placing Weiss in a derivative position in relation to those artists who produce work from hegemonic centers of the art world, my purpose is to shed light on parallel networks of exchange and production. My aim is to locate Weiss as a meaningful producer and theorist who proposed her own categories to understand not only her practice but also the potential of video and television broadcasting emerging from Mexico.

As I will discuss, Weiss and Kubota developed an embodied relation with video that empowered their positions as female video producers. Much like other artists in the early 1970s, they were both attracted to video because of its lack of history, which afforded many feminist-minded artists a clean slate from which to launch their careers without the burden of an existing male tradition or established categories and genres. Both Weiss and Kubota were deeply invested in developing categories to understand their media explorations. While using video’s intermedial capacities to mix and fuse a wide range of practices and conventions of representation, they also transformed traditional female forms of expression. For instance, following their interests in using video as a tool for self-knowledge, they both championed video as a medium akin to diary writing, what Kubota labeled *videodiary*. They both produced videos to record important events in their lives, like the deaths of their respective fathers and their

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travel experiences in search of their past and their ancestors. In using video to transform the female experience of diary writing, they transgressed traditional gendered conceptions of technology as male and diary writing as female. They also explored and blurred conceptions of what was considered a record of an event and what constituted a work of art. In doing so, they established audiovisual discourses, frameworks, and practices that were in dialogue with other experimental approaches and that would characterize genres in feminist media production decades later.

While Kubota is considered one of the female pioneers of video art, her artistic career, like that of many other female artists, has been overshadowed by that of her partner, Nam June Paik. Nonetheless, amongst feminist art scholars, Kubota is widely regarded for her performance *Vagina Painting* (1965), in which she attached a brush to her underwear and painted the floor with red ink. She is also one of the few women officially recognized as a member of Fluxus and credited as a pioneer who experimented with and coined the terms video installation and video sculpture.

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846 Kubota’s father died in 1974, and she incorporated her experience of attending his funeral into *Broken Diary* (1969–1975). Weiss continued to explore her own story in *Autovideoato VHS*, n. 3 (Mexico City: artTV, 1979). She also traveled to Strasbourg in Alsace, France to search for her grandparents and produced a video of the experience in *Videorigen de Weiss VHS*, n. 4. (Mexico City, 1984). According to some sources, in 1989, she attempted to bring the camera to the funeral of her father, Leopoldo Weiss, an act that was not well received by the rest of her family.


848 Earlier, several experimental filmmakers had produced films focusing entirely on female vaginas as exploratory exercises conducted in small consciousness-raising groups. See, for example, *Near the Big Chakra* (dir. Ann Severson, aka Alice Anne Parker, 17 min, 1971); and, for later interpretations of feminist self-explorations, see Alexandra Juhasz, “Our Auto-Bodies, Ourselves: Representing Real Women in Feminist Video.”

849 While numerous anthologies of feminist art credit Kubota’s *Vagina Painting* performance as an iconic piece in the history of feminist art, Midori Yoshimoto reviews the ways in which Western feminist scholars have interpreted Kubota’s performance and offers an alternative interpretation of the performance that includes particular Japanese cultural traditions, including reference to Geishas’ performative and seduction practices. See Midori Yoshimoto, “Self-Exploration in Multimedia: The Experiments of Shigeko Kubota,” 179–180.

850 Ibid.
Kubota began to use the video camera as early as 1969 to videotape important events in her life, like her travels through Europe, Japan, and the United States. About the difficulties working with early video equipment, Kubota stated:

When I began taking my video diary, the video equipment had just been invented and was very large and heavy. Besides, its battery was even heavier. Since I was carrying around this equipment on my back, I totally hurt my back and hips.851

The exertion required to carry the large and heavy video equipment caused Kubota to have a miscarriage, an experience she shared with Weiss that would be the subject of one of Weiss’s most emotionally charged videos, Mi-Co-Ra-Zón (1986, 10 min.).852 Both Kubota and Weiss developed embodied relations with their cameras. Each of these women saw her camera as an extension of her body and a prosthetic for a mother-daughter relation, but also as a substitute for a sexual partner and a means to claim self-sufficiency. In a poem that accompanied Kubota’s video installation Behind the Video Door (1969–1976), which incorporated parts of Kubota’s personal and professional life, she stated:

I travel alone with my Portapak on my back, as Vietnamese women do with their babies. I like video, because it is heavy. Portapak and I traveled over Europe, Navajo land, and Japan without male accompany. Portapak tears down my shoulder, backbone and waist. I feel like a Soviet woman, working on the Siberian Railway (…)853

In July of 1975, when Weiss interviewed Kubota in Mexico City, Kubota was acting as the curator of Anthology Films Archives (1974–1985), a center for the


852 Mi-Co-Ra-Zón. VHS n. 4, directed by Pola Weiss, music by Federico Luna. (Mexico City; artTV, 1986)

preservation and study of independent, experimental, and avant-garde film established in New York City in 1969. A month prior to her arrival to Mexico, Kubota exhibited VideoPoem (1975) at The Kitchen in New York City. VideoPoem consisted of a small monitor inserted inside a zippered cloth bag that Kubota had sewn. The monitor showed a video with images of Kubota’s face peaking through the zipper of the bag. The piece was dedicated to Kubota’s previous husband, avant-garde Japanese musician Kosugi. The poem accompanying the installation reveals the empowered and embodied relation Kubota developed with video.

- Video is Vengeance of Vagina
- Video is Victory of Vagina
- Video is Venereal Disease of Intellectuals
- Video is a Vacant Apartment
- Video is Vacation of Art
- Viva Video...

According to Mary Jane Jacob, Kubota’s claim for video as vengeance of the vagina emphasizes video “as a medium empowering women and enabling them to achieve a place in Western art that many felt could not be made through the more traditional male-dominated disciplines of painting and sculpture.” In VideoPoem, Kubota quite literally re-creates the icon of the vagina dentata, which represents the male fear of female genitalia. With the artist as the focus of the video, Kubota’s VideoPoem announced how video, as a new medium, could finally bring justice to the forgotten female artist. But VideoPoem also signals Kubota’s embodied relation with

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854 I could not find information on the purpose of Kubota’s travel to Mexico City. It is interesting that it roughly coincides with the U.N.’s International Women’s Year Celebration in Mexico City. Yoshimoto, “Self-Exploration in Multimedia: The Experiments of Shigeko Kubota,” 179.

855 Ibid., 191.

856 Shigeko Kubota, invitation card to the exhibition VideoPoem at The Kitchen, New York, June 7, 1975; Kubota file, Anthology Film Archives, cited in Midori, 233.

857 Mary Jane Jacob, Shigeko Kubota. Video Sculpture, 8.
video. Her body was able to speak and to be seen through a monitor that represented her vagina—the inside and the outside of her body were blurred. Moreover, the video was an extension of her body that brought her into being. Like Kubota, Weiss would resort to the vagina as a metaphor to explain her relation with video.

Weiss interviewed Kubota at Weiss’s home studio in Mexico City on July 17, 1975. The video recording of the interview not only demonstrates that Weiss was deeply aware of Kubota’s life and career, but also shows Weiss’s particular interests in exploring and contesting the limits and possibilities of video and television broadcasting. With an audience present, Kubota and Weiss spoke about different approaches to video making (video art and video installation) and about Kubota’s experience as a female artist in Japan and New York. However, beyond disseminating Kubota’s experiences, Weiss used the interview to present her own views about video and television broadcasting to a Mexican audience. Kubota was there to affirm Weiss as a valid visual lettrada.

The exchange between Kubota and Weiss begins with a conversation on the differences between video art and video installation. Next, Weiss goes on to ask Kubota if she has experienced gender discrimination in New York or if gender equity exists. Interestingly, Weiss prefaces this question by stating that Kubota is the wife of Nam Jun Paik. As we listen, the camera focuses on the face of an unidentified male in the audience. During the interview, Weiss constantly interrupts the conversation to ask the audience if the recording of the interview is playing live in the monitors she located

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859 Ibid.
in the back of the studio (as the background of the interview). She asks someone (an assistant, perhaps) to distort the image so that the intended viewer thinks that his/her television is not working properly.\textsuperscript{861} Then the camera focuses on Weiss, who talks to the viewer (not the live audience, but the intended viewer of the recorded interview) and explains that video art consists of distorting images (the clear image that the television decodes and presents to the viewer). Video art, she continues, consists of creating feedback, image distortions, and color alterations by playing with brilliance and contrast.\textsuperscript{862} After an intermission, the camera focuses on Kubota, who sits on a chair. The interview ends with a blurred and distorted image of Kubota smiling.\textsuperscript{863}

After this meeting, Weiss travelled to New York City in the summer of 1976 to learn more about video art in the United States. It is not clear whether she met Kubota or Nam June Paik in New York, but there is some evidence that she remained in touch with Kubota.\textsuperscript{864} Regardless, Weiss speaks of this trip as a revelation in contrast to what she had witnessed earlier through her travels in Europe:

\begin{quote}
En Europa me enseñaban obras de teatro y documentales de pintores en televisión y yo decía, no, no, no. Después fui a Nueva York y encontré el video y no te imaginas porque en ese entonces yo daba un taller de video en la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y lo que hacíamos era precisamente eso.\textsuperscript{865}
\end{quote}

In Europe they showed me theater plays and documentaries made for television, and I thought to myself, this is not what I am looking for. After, I went to New York, and there I found video art, and to my surprise, what I found was exactly what I was teaching my students at a video workshop in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

\textsuperscript{861} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{862} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{863} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{864} Kubota mailed a Polaroid photograph of their interview to Weiss once she returned to New York. Fondo Pola Weiss, ARKEHIA, MUAC.
\textsuperscript{865} Juan Garibay Mora, “El video arte, superación personal de la caja idiota para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual.”
After Weiss returned from her trip to New York City, she began to produce videos and promote video art as an artistic genre more openly. In 1977, Weiss participated in the organization of the “IX Encuentro Internacional, I Encuentro Nacional de Videoarte” held at the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil. Weiss and Miguel Ehrenberg were the only Mexican artists included in the 1977 show, along with many Canadian, European, U.S.-based, Chilean, and Argentinian video artists. Weiss presented one of her first experimental videos, *Flor Cósmica* (1977, 15 min.). Like Kubota, Weiss resorted to iconic references to female genitalia to express her approach to video making. In *Flor Cósmica*, Weiss used the flower as a symbol of female sexuality, fragility, and seduction. The video is a playful experiment with visual distortions and sound in which a naked female body dances to the rhythm of Chick Corea’s “Return Forever.” In the video sequence, the female body morphs into a high-contrast silhouette and then fades in and out, transforming into images of highly contrasted and fluorescent flower shapes that emanate from her pubic area (Fig. 37).

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A year later, and more in line with Kubota’s more radical stance, Weiss referenced the vagina as a machine of video production. In a graphic manifesto that accompanied the exhibition of her videos Mujer-Ciudad-Mujer (1977) and Somos Mujeres (1977) at the 1978 February Biennial at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, Weiss claimed the vagina as the site of video production through word play and image collage (Fig. 38). In this graphic manifesto, Weiss declared her self-sufficiency and independence as a video producer.

The focal point of Weiss’ graphic manifesto is the phrase: “yo rubricaba poemas en su cuerpo, en su vagina eyaculaba imagines” (I inscribed poems in her body, and in her vagina I ejaculated images) (Fig. 38). Without the support of the images, it would be
unclear who the “yo” (I) identifies and who is performing the action of inscribing poems. On the first page, we see the outline of a woman (clearly Weiss) carrying a camera videotaping another woman (Weiss as well), who stands with her legs open; the poem comes from her vagina. Below, on the floor, another camera films the letters coming from the vagina (Fig. 38).

Figure 38. Salon 77 Bienal de Febrero Nuevas Tendencias (Mexico: INBA, 1978). Courtesy of Mónica Mayer.

Weiss is the artist, the object, and the subject of the gaze in this visual poem. She claims complete authorship for both the inspirations (the poems) and the creative production (ejaculation of images). The following page is an image of Weiss carrying a
television monitor with the logo of her company, artTV, with a printed typographical composition that reads: “ciudad-mujer-analogía-ciudad” (city, women, analogy, city) (Fig. 39).

![Image of television monitor with artTV logo]

**Figure 39.** *Salon 77 Bienal de Febrero Nuevas Tendencias* (Mexico: INBA, 1978). Courtesy of Mónica Mayer.

This last page serves to frame both the videos Weiss included in the exhibition. As discussed previously in the introduction, both videos are meditations on the relation between feminine bodies and the urban landscape. In *Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad*, Weiss uses the female body as an allegory of the city and urban decay in a manner that breaks with conventional representations of the female nude. According to Jorge Carrasco, the video
was censored on commercial television because it showed a female nude. The body of Vivianne Blackmore, the model, is seen from the front; her breasts are exposed, and she is performing undulating movements (Fig. 40).

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 40.** Pola Weiss, ”Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad”. Courtesy of Fondo Pola Weiss, ARKEHIA, UNAM.

As Monica Mayer recalled years later:

I was surprised by the fact that [Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad] showed a real woman, with scars and cellulite. It made me laugh to see her breasts bouncing to the sound of the bells, and I was surprised to see the frontal shots of her pubic area. It was a female body seen by a woman. In *Somos mujeres*, Weiss’s psychedelic dissolves blend images of modern buildings and poor women begging on the streets with children in their arms. The

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867 Jorge V. Carrasco, ”Pola Weiss: la cineasta olvidada.”

868 Mónica Mayer, ”Video a la Mexicana: De sexo-s, amor y humor.”
soundtrack intermixes dialogues in indigenous languages with the weeping sounds of women and children. At some point in the video, the women on the street seem to throw things at Weiss and her camera.\textsuperscript{869} Weiss's incorporation of feedback (the women's responses) speaks to her overall interest in breaking the media border and \textit{interPOLAting} (interpellating) something that was already present in Kubota's interview, and that would become a constant in her work.

These three works—the videos and the graphic manifesto—contain elements that Weiss would continue to explore and that would become prevalent in her approach to video making: first, an interest in being both the object and the subject of the gaze; second, the use of video to blur the distinction between the private and the public—the images that come from her vagina and her dance performances; third, the use of words as an element of a visual sequence; and fourth the use of the female body as an allegory of the city. As I will discuss, this focus on the relation between the city and the female body connects Weiss with the work of the other visual letradas I examine in this project and to crucial transformations in the spheres of action of the letrados.

Besides their shared interest in developing categories for understanding self-knowledge and their embodied approach to video, Kubota and Weiss also shared an interest in producing videos in direct reference to dominant male icons in the history of art. In 	extit{Marcel Duchamp's Grave} (1975), Kubota visits Duchamp's grave in Rouen, France, as a meditation on death and as homage to Duchamp.\textsuperscript{870} In 	extit{Video Chess} (1975), “she replaces and sometimes fuses her image with that of Duchamp, while she reverses

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{870} After this initial engagement, Kubota continued to pay homage to Duchamp in \textit{Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase} (1975–1991) and \textit{Duchampian Door} (1976–1977). Yoshimoto, \textit{Self Exploration in Multimedia}, 190.
\end{itemize}
Edouard Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur L’Herbe* and the tradition of the female nude with an image of Paik.”\(^{871}\) Weiss, in a more satirical and irreverent manner, presented a video installation at Chapultepec Gallery in Mexico City entitled *Video instalación: Bidé o Escultura* (1980).\(^{872}\) The installation makes reference to Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), in which the artist famously signed a urinal with the pseudonym Richard Mutt and claimed it as art. In *Bidé o Escultura*, Weiss appropriates and feminizes the Dadaist act of naming an everyday life object as art by placing a television monitor playing a video of a stream of water on top of a bidet. During the exhibition, she interviewed the audience and asked them if they knew what a bidet was.\(^{873}\) Most of them did not know that it was a porcelain object that was mostly used by women to wash their genitalia. In *David* (1983, 11 min.), a video filmed in Yugoslavia, Weiss is seen throwing stones at a replica of Michelangelo’s sculpture; she then intermixes images of her body taking the place of the sculpture through video effects.\(^{874}\) In *Bide o Escultura*, Weiss takes the place of the male artist, while in *David*, she claims her place as the object of the gaze. In both cases, Weiss explores her position as a woman making videos about female bodies and is guided by a desire to see and to be seen. Her approach is not a simple reversal of the objectifying male gaze; she understands that there is power in the act of being seen.

Both Kubota and Weiss feminized video making through wordplay and allegory. In the process, they contested and explored normative definitions of female experiences and ways of seeing and perceiving. Video allowed them to make sense of and reconcile

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\(^{873}\) Fernando Mangino, in *Pola Weiss, Re-Conocimiento*.

\(^{874}\) *David*. VHS. Directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: artTV, 1983). Fondo TV UNAM consulted in ARKEHIA on September 6, 2010. According to the credits, the video was filmed in Yugoslavia.
contrasting and competing female experiences and desires, leading towards a reconfiguration of their own female subjectivity. For Weiss, video was a tool of empowerment and self-knowledge, but also a tool to seduce viewers.

**Video as archival record**

After the February Biennial at the Museum of Modern Art, a small number of other artists began to experiment with video in Mexico City. In 1979, Andrea Di Castro, Humberto Jardón, Cecilio Balthazar, and Sandra Llanos (a Colombian artist) presented an exhibition of videos, happenings, and installations that included a live music performance entitled “Intervalo Ritual” at Casa del Lago in Chapultepec.875 None of these works used the female body in the way Weiss approached it as a medium to explore and explode feminine subjectivity and traditions of representation.

Internationally, videos began to circulate in festivals, galleries and museums, and through marginal video collectives.876 By the mid 1970s, these spaces began to distribute and archive experimental video. International exhibitions and video festivals held in Toronto (1974), Philadelphia (1975), and London (1976) were crucial in the process of institutionalizing video as an art form within the gallery system.877

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exhibitions, video was still idealized as a means to democratize television broadcasting.\textsuperscript{878} However, this ideal soon vanished, as galleries and museums—mostly in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe—began to develop spaces to exhibit video art, and in the process produced genres, subgenres, and even disciplinary categories to distinguish between performative, documentary, and experimental video. In the process, video was transformed into a medium, “a specific media language and semiotic system that established an aesthetic vocabulary specific to the video-graphic capacities of electronic signal processing.”\textsuperscript{879} Part of this new vocabulary included an emphasis on video recording capacities that allowed artists to document their works.

Video provided artists with a more affordable and immediate means to record performances. Soon the documentation of the performance would gain equal—or greater—value than the event itself. The record, rather than the performance itself, became the marketable and collectable art piece, leading to the incorporation of video art as a marketable art commodity. Simultaneously, video increased the possibilities for keeping records of all kinds of events and of building more affordable personal audiovisual archives. As Rosenberg argued, conceptual artists’ emphasis on the record anticipated what Jacques Derrida would label our contemporary archival fever, a displacement of experience that privileges playback over liveliness.\textsuperscript{880}

Pola Weiss also believed in the twin potentials of video as a recording device and as a tool to develop generations of audiovisual producers/users. In an interview in

\textsuperscript{878} Following the 1960s experiments with television monitors, artists were still concerned with manipulating the video signal to produce images and used a mixed array of practices, combining dance and music in their work. These generations of artists sought to intervene in the broadcasting signal and use it as an alternative to the gallery and museum system. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{879} Yvonne Spielmann, “Video: From Technology to Medium”, 54.

\textsuperscript{880} Douglas Rosenberg, Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image, 26.
1982, Weiss commented on the future of video, on her belief that people would own personal video libraries, and that everyone could become the product of her/ his audiovisual experiences.\footnote{Juan Garibay Mora, "Pola Weiss y el Video Arte" (parte 2), in *Excelsior*, August 17, 1982, Section C, page 1}

*En un futuro yo digo que debería ser así. Que cada persona con sus cualidades pudiera volverse productor de sus experiencias porque al hacerlo va a encontrar que muchas personas se identifican con sus mensajes (...) Ahora bien los discos como las grabadoras y las fotografías y a últimas fechas los equipos Betamax están cumpliendo con la función de registro. Y si antes la gente tenía libros dentro de muy poco van a tener videocasetes.*\footnote{Ibid.}

I think that in the future, each person will be able to record his or her own experiences according to his/her own capacities. By doing so, they will discover that a lot many people identify themselves with their messages. Currently, tape recorders, photographs, and, lately, Betamax equipment are being used as recording devices. So if in the past people owned libraries of books, in the future they will own videotape libraries.

Weiss’s enthusiasm for the potential of video to engender an infinite number of producers is in stark contrast with Derrida’s fear of the annihilation of memory due to an overabundance of documentation and record producers.\footnote{Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 11.} Weiss also celebrates the possibility that video could give people ways of communicating with each other in a more meaningful manner. Most importantly, Weiss’s approach to video as a form of self-knowledge speaks to an archival impulse. Weiss, like the other three visual letradas discussed in this study, expanded the notion of an archive by using video as medium to keep a record of her life, her feelings, and her thoughts and desires. Her experiments with video form an archive of sorts that consists of audio-visual records of how daily experiences are inscribed onto the female body. Her work is an attempt to build an archive of embodied perceptions and sensations through screen images.
**Videodanza and recognition**

The video exhibitions organized in Mexico City, first in 1973 and then in 1977, locate the capital city as a node within this early international network of art video history.\(^\text{884}\)

However, in spite of this initial interest in video art, art critics in Mexico did not recognize video as an art form until the 1990s. As in most of the Latin American region, video in Mexico would be more openly used as a medium of communication for independent and artistic projects, grassroots organizations, and government-funded productions in the mid-1980s, when it became more affordable.\(^\text{885}\) Indeed, at the time that Weiss produced her works, video was not recognized as an art form.\(^\text{886}\) It is interesting to note that several of Weiss's videos are voiced in English with a foreign audience in mind. However, Weiss did receive government support for some of her productions. For instance, her participation in the dance festival as part of the 1979 Venice Biennale, in which she performed *Videodanza, Viva Videodanza*, was funded through a government grant (Fondo Nacional Para Actividades Sociales, FONAPAS) (Fig. 41).\(^\text{887}\)

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\(^\text{884}\) Juan Acha, “El arte del video tape encontra de la t.v.”

\(^\text{885}\) For instance, according to Felipe Ehrenberg, an artist who experimented with video technology at the time, while some television stations were open to inviting artists to experiment with their video equipment, no one understood the value of such work as art. “Mexico Participa en un evento de TV” in Excelsior, Seccion Radio y TV, 1978; Fondo Felipe Ehrenberg, ARKEHIA, MUAC.

\(^\text{886}\) For instance, in *Papalotl* (1979), she introduces herself in English. This video was produced for Channel 9 in New York. *artVEing* is also voiced in English, and there is no reference that this work was produced for a U.S. audience or cable network.

\(^\text{887}\) As part of her experience in Venice, she recorded interviews with other festival participants; however, records of such interviews were not kept, arguably because of the lack of interest in this work. Edna Torres Ramos, *El Video Arte en Mexico*, 62.
Weiss’s work also received media attention; however, most of this attention emphasizes the lack of support and recognition she received, speculating about the depression that may have caused her suicide in 1990. The myth of the unrecognized and

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misunderstood artist negated a deep engagement with her work. In media interviews, Weiss complained about the lack of support and recognition she suffered in Mexico, in comparison to the attention videos and performances received abroad. In 1987, as member of the jury at the IV International Festival of Video and Film in Rio de Janeiro, she declared:

_En México no existe nada de esto, por ello mi existencia como video artista se da en el extranjero, aunque produzco en México._

In Mexico, nothing like this exists. This is why even though all my video production is made in Mexico, I am only recognized as a video artist abroad.

During 1979, Weiss produced more than 10 videos. In addition to the Venice Biennial, her work was shown in Caracas, Athens, Paris, Kansas City, and New York. Most of the videos experimented with what she would label _videodanza_ but also fused an interest with a documentary tradition. Weiss’s experiments with video dance locate her as a pioneer in the development of a practice that only recently has been recognized in Mexico.

Some of these videos were shot in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Mexico. In these videos, Weiss used a second camera that she labeled the objective camera, while her camera work was credited as the subjective camera. In most of these productions, the cameras show Weiss dancing from different angles. The objective

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889 Juan Garibay Mora, “El video arte, superación de la caja idiota, para los seres cuyo pensamiento es visual” in _Excelsior_, section E, page 1, August, 1982; and “Pola Weiss y el Video Arte” in _Excelsior_, section C, 1-c, August, 1982.


891 Pola Weiss, “Los Extrapol, se interpola Weiss (performance y videos).”

camera takes the place of an audience, while the subjective camera is an extension of Weiss’s body. Weiss worked with both cameras and visual effects to break the media border and add a self-reflexive intentionality to her work. About her use of effects, she said:

Even though they add a formal element, visual effects are really important for my work because they make the viewer reflect on what they are seeing. I send a message and then, all of a sudden, I use a visual effect. The rupture that the effect causes gives the viewer the opportunity to think about what he/she saw, assimilate it, and then follow with what is next. As I’ve told you before, video is a great opportunity to mobilize and awake your curiosity.

Weiss also used effects to provoke a sensorial reaction in her intended viewer.

She believed that content and form should go hand in hand to produce an embodied response in the viewer.

When I began to play with shapes, I mixed black and white inputs to create shapes that suddenly brought up old sensations that made me want to shout, to cry: they gave me goose bumps. Then, I reflected on this and realized that form is an integral part of content. And that if the form was given or determined by technique, it became indispensable to work both—form and content—so that my videos could reach other people.

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893 Juan Garibay Mora, “Pola Weiss y el Video Arte.”
894 Ibid.
Weiss experimented with various techniques to create effects. She adopted a hands-on approach to overcome the lack of available technology. In a recent interview, Fernando Mangino recalled how Weiss produced visual effects:

Todo lo sacaba de la norma, muchos efectos los hacía sacando de foco cosas de cristal o esferitas varillas o cosas brillantes y todo lo ponía entre un monitor y la cámara para que se creara una retroalimentación infinita. 895

She was interested in taking things out of the norm; she created visual effects by videotaping shiny things such as crystal balls or Christmas decorations out of focus. She then fed those images through a monitor and a video camera, creating an infinite feedback loop.

Sound is also an important aspect of Weiss’s body of work. Her work incorporates ambient sounds, her voice, and music. Weiss’s voice is mainly heard in her autovídeoatos and interviews. In her videodanzas, she mainly uses music. Federico Luna, a musician and composer, and Weiss’s sister Kitzia Weiss, also a composer, collaborated with Weiss on numerous occasions. Weiss’s approach to video signaled that sound and visual regimes needed to be understood and perceived as a whole.

In Cuilapan de Guerrero (1979, 6 min.),896 Weiss dances at the entrance of an old hacienda in the state of Oaxaca to the rhythm of music composed by her sister Kitzia Weiss. In Papalotl (1979, 3 min.), Weiss introduces herself, her escuincla, and her practice as art for television in English.897 Then she is seen dancing wearing a yellow dress on the streets. To distinguish between the objective and subjective, she uses a sphere effect (a visual effect that distorts the image as if it was seen through a transparent sphere) to frame the escuincla view. Papalotl was shown on Channel 10 in

896 Cuilapan de Guerrero, VHS n. 1, directed by Pola Weiss, objective camera by Víctor Blanco, subjective camera by Pola Weiss, audio by Humberto Terra and music by Erik Satie (Mexico City; artTV, 1979).
897 Papalotl, VHS n. 2.
New York City. In *Cuetzalan y Yo* (1979, 8 min.), Weiss captures a procession in the town of Cuetzalan. In the video, Weiss talks about her impressions and experiences as we see a collage of images showing the pyramid located near the town and a scene of the procession through the town streets. In this video, she attempts to break the media border using graphic effects. Her face breaks the border of the screen as she appears through a small peephole, telling the viewer how she felt as she witnessed the procession: “I felt as if I was one of them” Weiss says. This image fades and morphs into a scene of Papantla dancers (*voladores de Papantla*) approaching the camera and giving Weiss a flute. The video ends with images of Papantla dancers performing their traditional flying dance intermixed with images of Weiss’s body as if she were flying along with them, created through the use of chroma-key effects. As in *David* (1983), in which Weiss uses video to create an imaginary space in which she can realize her fantasy of taking the place of the male body, in *Cuetzalan y yo*, Weiss creates an imaginary space in which her desire to integrate herself with others can finally be sated.

Video provided Weiss with an alternate space in which a utopian project abolishing class, ethnic, gender, and racial divisions could be realized—according to her own desires. Because a utopia must by definition be idealistic, Weiss’s attempts to break the media border and interpellate the viewer at times became patronizing and idealistic experiments that could easily be placed within an anthropological way of seeing. Nonetheless, her playful approach and attempts to integrate herself as part of the representation did provide an alternative approach to the dilemmas of seeing and

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898 Pola Weiss, “Los Extrapola”
899 *Cuetzalan y Yo*, VHS, n. 2, directed by Pola Weiss. (Mexico City; artTV, 1979).
900 Ibid.
representing the Other. Some unfinished work I was able to see seems to indicate that she attempted to follow this line of exploration further.901

*extraPOLAting, interPOLAting, and POLArizing* the viewer: *Pola la Venusina*

While Weiss was enthusiastic about video’s potential to enable a wide number of users and producers, she also believed that viewers were unable to see that potential on their own. On the occasion of her 1983 solo exhibition at Galería Chapultepec in Mexico City, Weiss conceptualized herself as a kind of female audiovisual messiah, bringing viewers out of their darkness and showing them how to see. In so doing, Weiss claimed to be an extraterrestrial love-goddess, a *Venusina*, who would guide viewers from a place without images into a better world where light would bring them into being. She offered to guide viewers out from under the control of commercial television and into a state of reflection and introspection.

Los extrapola (a ustedes), los extrae de la obscuridad donde todavía no hay imágenes, y los saca a la luz, los da a luz y ven ustedes la luz (nacen). Los extrapola (a ustedes) con su ojo, los extrae de la obscuridad (donde todavía no hay imágenes) con su cámara, y los da a luz (y ven luz) con un monitor.

*Pero también se interpola*: se pone entre ustedes delante de la cámara, con ustedes; se intercala en la experiencia antigua, en lo que ustedes hacen; *interrumpe*, hace una breve intermisión en la continuidad (del universo). *Como el cometa*, su luz sigue brillando para iluminar lo que viene, el video del futuro.

*Y los polariza*: los hace concentrar su atención (la de ustedes), o el animo, en sus videos (los de ella), al modificar los rayos lumínicos por medio de la reflexión.902

She *extraPOLAtes* (you, the viewer), she extracts you from darkness, a place where no images exist; she brings you out into the light and as you see the light you are born. She *extraPOLAtes* (you) with her eye, she

901 In *Santa Cruz Tepexpan*, Weiss’s camera follows the town’s people in a procession that culminates with a typical dance on top of a mountain. *Los Muertos en Elta, Oaxaca* shows images of children playing in a graveyard. In *Inertia*, aerial images of Mexico City are intermixed with images of pre-Hispanic ruins. *Santa Cruz Tepexpan* VHS n. 1, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: artTV, 1979); *Los Muertos en Elta, Oaxaca* VHS n. 1, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: artTV, 1979); and *Inertia*, VHS, n. 4, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: artTV, 1989).

902 Pola Weiss, “Los Extrapolas, se interpola Weiss (performance y videos).”
extracts you from darkness with her camera, and she gives you birth (and you see the light) through a monitor. But she also interPOLAtes you: She places herself between you and the camera; she interrupts your old habits of seeing; she interrupts; she makes an intermission in the continuity of the universe. Like a comet, her light keeps shining to illuminate what is coming: the video of the future. She POLArizes you: she makes you focus your attention, your intention, through her videos as she modifies the light rays through reflection.

Weiss had first put those theories into practice a few years earlier. Weiss enacted the role of audiovisual messiah in *La Venusina Renace y Reforma* (1980), a video-dance performance that took place in the public plaza outside the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City (Fig. 42).

**Figure 42.** Pola Weiss. “Videodanza a dos tiempos”, “Videoarte-Performance” y “La Venusina Renace y Reforma”. Auditorio Nacional, 14 de Diciembre de 1980. Fondo Pola Wiess, ARKEHIA, MUAC.
With her heavy camera on the shoulders, she danced as she traversed the bodies of the spectators, who watched her move through mirrors. The camera filmed the reflections of the public and her movements, while monitors played back her movements in real time. Reflections and projections of movements were in constant feedback, thus blurring the divide between the object and the subject of representation, or in Weiss's terms, extraPOLAting, interPOLAting, and POLArizing the viewer. Underneath the wordplay and exaggerated metaphor, it is clear that Weiss understood that the separation between object and subject on the screen produced was not real. Her live experiments with dance, music, and video could also be read as didactic demonstrations of the ways we experience the world through representations. For Weiss, this process was always messy and embodied, rather than separated. ⁹⁰³

Weiss’s attempts at extraPOLAting, interPOLAting, and POLArizing the viewer extended beyond her experimental work. Like other visual letradas, Weiss resorted to humor in her attempts to break the media border. She appropriated cultural symbols of the Mexican Revolution by stating that she was “La Nieta del Ahuizote” in a video-performance and invited the viewers to dress like their grandparents through her video performance “Toma el video abuelita... y enséñame tu ropero” which made reference to a popular children’s song (Fig. 43).

⁹⁰³ For a study that look at contemporary artistic engagements that question the separation between the object and the subject of representation, see Amelia Jones, Self/Image. Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject; and for a study that looks at cinema as an embodied and a haptic technology, see Laura Marks, The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses.
In a series of documentaries she produced for TV UNAM, Weiss used irreverent visual allegories as a surreptitious mode of critique. In *Freud-Hombre* (1978, 12 min.) Weiss recreates the life of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud through images that fade in and out against a backdrop of pink fluorescent effects and psychedelic spirals. The final sequence of the video shows a series of images of nude female bodies taken from *Freud-Hombre*, VHS, n. 1, directed by Pola Weiss; assistant Magda Hernández; Coordination Ignacio Millan (Mexico, City: artTV and Series Pensamiento Analítico Actual, TV UNAM 1978).
famous paintings combined with live video shots while the voice of the narrator explains the relation between the patient and the psychoanalyst. Weiss implies that the patient takes the position of the object of the gaze—a nude, reclining female body—while the psychoanalyst is mainly fulfilling his voyeuristic desires.

In *Sol o Aguila* (1980, 27 min.), images of the Teotihuacan ruins and the Mayan Calendar are fused with shots of indigenous people walking on the streets of Mexico City; at the same time, an image of a Mexican peso spins into the air. The viewer is left to guess whether the coin flip will come out heads (*sol*) or tails (*aguila*). The choice is between the living indigenous migrants begging on the streets of Mexico City or a mythical pre-Hispanic past: this is sarcastic commentary on government leaders’ use of Mexico’s indigenous past and present for their own means and interests. In *Tasas de Interes* (1983, 6 min.), porcelain teacups swirl and move up and down the screen; this visual allegory for the fluctuation of interest rates provides sarcastic commentary on Mexico’s preparations to embrace a neoliberal economic model to escape the economic stagnation of the early 1980s.

*El Salto* (1982, 13 min.) is perhaps the most representative video in this series, as it the only video in which Weiss literally addresses feminist political concerns. The video was supposed to be a documentary about the life and thinking of Karl Marx; however, Weiss’s interpretation of Marx turns into a commentary on how visual thinking and art could lead to the emancipation of women. According to some sources,

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905 *Sol o Aguila*, VHS, n. 2, directed by Pola Weiss; produced by Victor Blanco; music by Kitzia Weiss, Javier Ledezma, Gabriela y Arturo (Mexico City: artTV, 1980).

906 *Tasas de Interes*, VHS, n. 3, directed by Pola Weiss, (Mexico City: artTV, 1983).

907 *El Salto*, VHS, n. 3, directed by Pola Weiss; assistant Rolando Chavez, Celia Halvas, Guillermo Guzman; music by Federico Luna (Mexico City: artTV, 1982).
the video was not well received at UNAM.908 The video fuses and layers a series of historical images depicting many women performing different kinds of activities as well as objects that are identified as feminine—including a woman's jewelry box. The sequence ends by fading into images of women demanding suffrage rights on the streets. Marx appears as a still image with a mouth that moves like a puppet over a series of vocal arrangements that states:

Marx, Capital, fuerza de Trabajo, Marx, lucha de clase [...] 
la fuerza de la mujer, en tus manos esta la fuerza de cambiar, la mujer puede cambiar si con sus ojos puede contar lo que ha visto, la mujer trabaja con su mente”909 
Marx, Capital, Labor, Marx, Class Struggle [...] 
The force of women, power of change is in your hand; women can change if they can tell what they see; women work with their minds.

The final image sequence is a profile of a woman in whose head a video screen opens—like a window into her mind—in which we see a hand writing the word arte (art), an image of Weiss at her desk, and, most significantly, an image of the cover of FEM, the feminist magazine Alaide Foppa and Margarita García Flores established in Mexico City in 1976. Weiss was never associated with the feminist movement in Mexico, but this video shows that, while she was perhaps not a militant, Weiss did have a very particular feminist sensibility that crucially informed her role as a visual letrada. Her video camera was the tool of labor and her capital. Other examples in her series of documentaries show that Weiss was searching for an audiovisual vocabulary and a style of narration that was playfully fragmented and tactile so that she could reach potential audiences and show them how to see.910

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908 This video has been read as critique of Marxism and was not well received in UNAM's intellectual circles. Salvador Mendiola, “El Ritual Amoroso de la bruja electrica (1947–1990).”

909 El Salto, VHS, n. 3.

Mi ojo es mi co-ra-zón: The return to the city as allegory of the female body

In the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake that destroyed parts of Mexico City, and coinciding with the increased affordability of video equipment, a number of independent projects and production houses emerged throughout Mexico.\(^{911}\) Different approaches to and uses of video began to emerge. In 1986, a year after the earthquake, Weiss revisited the approach to the city as an allegory of the female body that she had established with Somos Mujeres and Ciudad-Mujer-Ciudad. In Weiss’s best-known video, Mi CoRa-Zón (1986, 10 min.) she uses the destruction of the city as an allegory of her abortion.\(^{912}\) In the video, we see her body bleeding as images of destruction and chaos after the earthquake fade in and out. As Weiss dances to the beating of a heart, a collage of images of the rescue effort after the earthquake are blended with hospital images and photos of her childhood. Mexico City is broken and so is she.

The video begins with a series of close-ups of Weiss’s mouth as she spells and says mi co-ra-zón as if inviting the viewer to enter her body. Each syllable she utters is written on the screen, layered on top of the mouth that enunciates the sounds. We hear her voice and we see that it is not disembodied. Her voice continues: “Mi ojo es mi corazón (My eye is my heart).”\(^{913}\) For Weiss, there is no difference between the inside and the outside—what she sees and what she feels. Weiss blends her body with the camera (Fig. 44).

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\(^{912}\) Mi Co-Ra-Zón, VHS, n. 4, directed by Pola Weiss (Mexico City: art TV, 1986).

\(^{913}\) This piece could be a direct reference to Carolee Schneemann’s Body Eye (1963), in which the artist merged her own body with the material of her performance. The possibility that Weiss could have known about Schneemann’s works is not far fetched since Schneemann collaborated with Kubota and with Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg for his Beau Geste Press project. Ehrenberg, who also befriended Pola Weiss, lived in Mexico in the early 1970s after his temporary exile in London and experimented with video and conceptual arts. For Schneemann’s work, see Amelia Jones, Self/Image, 172–173; and Felipe Ehrenberg, interview with the author, unpublished, April 13, 2011.
Weiss’s eye is a camera. Images of the city and her body fuse into each other. She is part of the city and the city is part of her. If the city is turned inside out, so is she. Mi-Co-Ra-Zón sums up Weiss’s approach to video that she began with Somos Mujeres and Mujer-Ciudad-Mujer. As Rita Eder proposes, Weiss’s production creates an archive of images that suggests an interest in self-representation and interrupting and creating different visual signals and ways of decoding them: the relation between voice and place, and eye and heart; the city as an allegory of the body; the body as self-knowledge; the camera as mirror. But Mi-Co-Ra-Zón also links the private with the public—Weiss’s abortion with the earthquake—in a manner that speaks of an interest in producing a record of an important event. In developing a narrative out of fragments of

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914 Rita Eder, “El Cuerpo y El espejo: ansiedades en la autorepresentación.”
images of her childhood, her abortion, and the city in ruins, she inscribes her history in relation to an urban landscape that is also the seat of government: the place from which hegemonic discourses and ways of being and seeing are dictated. *Mi Co-Ra-Zón* is also a visual archive of a city in ruins: a record of a moment that has been narrated as watershed period in the history of Mexican civil society.\footnote{Carlos Monsiváis, *Entrada libre: crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza.* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1987).} Weiss’s work, like that of Jiménez, Fernández, and Mayer, functions as an archive for an alternative narration of the development of a civil society, a narrative that considers the importance of a feminist sensibility engaged in the production of historical records through an emphasis on female self-representation (both visually and politically). In *Mi Co-Ra-Zón*, Weiss turns a recurrent feminist art strategy—using her sexualized female body against a hegemony of masculine ways of seeing—into one that challenges what counts as history and who counts as a historian by assuming herself as the object and the subject of representation and as an allegory of the city. This focus on the relation between the body and the city connects all the visual letradas I discuss in this study and points to the transformations in the gendering and spheres of action of the letrado tradition that gave rise to alternative regimes of media and visuality. These regimes placed the city as a crucial actor in producing and reproducing gendered subjectivities prompting a reconfiguration of the cultural geographies of Mexico City. By championing video production as valid form of knowledge production and using the female body as an allegory of the city, Weiss contests the masculine hold of the letrados in producing myths of tradition and power. Here Weiss no longer writes the city, but visualizes it as a feminized space.
Transnational networks, forms of erasure, and other video visual letradas

Other approaches to video making and transnational and local networks of production began to develop as Weiss was producing *Mi-Co-Ra-Zaón.* Some aimed to develop independent means of communication, while others were more interested in institutionalizing video as an art practice. For instance, Francis García and members of Redes Cine y Video continued with the tradition established by Cooperativa de Cine Marginal and other earlier super 8 film collectives interested in producing alternative networks of information. They independently produced and distributed videos documenting the demands and fights of worker and student unions in the 1980s. Meanwhile, Rafeal Corkidi became instrumental in establishing a program of Video Biennials and promoting video as an artistic practice. Also in the mid-1980s, Sarah Minter, Gregorio Rocha, and Andrea Di Castro began to produce video work that would garner international attention.

Sarah Minter (b. 1953) is of particular relevance, since her practice represents the generation of visual letradas that came after Pola Weiss and continued to explore the relation between the urban landscape and the construction of embodied subjectivities. After working as a graphic designer and a super 8 film-maker, Minter began producing videos in 1982; she currently teaches video production at La Esmeralda in Mexico City. Like Weiss, Minter acquired her video equipment

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916 Ibid.

917 In 1986, Rafael Corkidi, Miguel Baéz, Adriana Portillo, Francis García, and members of Redes, Cine y Video organized one of the first festivals of video film at the Agora Library in Mexico City. See *Forjadores del Video*; and Adriana Zapett, "Video Arte en Mexico" in *Discurso Visual*, http://discursovisual.net/1aepoca/dvweb07/art02/art02.html, accessed on July 15, 2011.

918 Rafael Corkidi, *Forjadores del Video.*


independently through her own means and connections.\textsuperscript{921} Between 1985 and 1986, she produced \textit{Nadie es Inocente}, a 56-minute video that fused a fictional narrative with a documentary about a punk gang, Los Mierdas Punks, from Neza, an underprivileged sector of Mexico City also known as Nezahualcoyotl. At a time when punk music in public spaces was heavily policed and Neza was the site of constant gang confrontations, Minter befriended Los Mierdas Punk and followed them through their sojourns, fights, heartbreaks, and arrests.\textsuperscript{922} The experience with Los Mierdas Punk deeply marked Minter’s initial overt political approach to video-making that followed an earlier established documentary/fiction tradition espoused by Cine Mujer. Minter developed a more experimental body of video work, but when I interviewed her in 2010, she had returned to her documentary roots. She was finishing \textit{Nadie es Inocente 20 Años Después} (2010–2011), in which she traces what happened with Los Mierdas Punk over 20 years.\textsuperscript{923} While at first \textit{Nadie es Inocente} was not well received because of the harsh realities it presented, it was shown at several international festivals, including Havana Film Festival.

Parallel to these developments, in 1980, Martha Colmenares, Alvaro Vasquez, Fernando Hernández Mata, and Inocencio Mena, established the Zapotec video collective K-Chon Video Cine Zapoteca. All from the Zapotec region of Oaxaca, these artists had migrated to Mexico City in the early 1970s to study for different careers and had returned to their communities in the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{924} The K-Chon collective’s use of video stemmed from an interest in producing newsletters and photomurals to

\textsuperscript{921} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{922} \textit{Nadie es Inocente}, DVD, directed by Sarah Minter (1986).

\textsuperscript{923} Sarah Minter, personal interview with the author.

disseminate information about community and assembly meetings throughout the Chinantec and Zapotec regions of Oaxaca.\textsuperscript{925} The K-Chon collective, and especially Colmenares’s participation, is of interest as the group not only represents another way of seeing but also exemplifies other independent networks of production, anticipating several government-funded programs that would promote the use of video as tool of indigenous self representation.\textsuperscript{926} As seasonal migrants in the United States, K-Chon members acquired their video equipment with wages earned as farm workers in California.\textsuperscript{927} Through networks of migration, their videos became known amongst other migrant communities in California, which also began to support video production in their own regions in Mexico.\textsuperscript{928}

In the 1980s, New York journalist Karen Ranucci put together a video compilation of Latin American media that included video productions by the K-Chon collective, Sarah Minter, and Colectivo Cine Mujer.\textsuperscript{929} This compilation is interesting on two levels. First, it points to both the local and transnational networks that gave rise to Mexican media in 1970 and 1980. Art, video, film, and photography could no longer be framed through a nationalistic perspective; cosmopolitan, migrant, and political

\begin{footnotes}
\item925 Ibid, 112.
\item926 By 1987, the Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INI) began to organize and sponsor video workshops in indigenous communities through a program called Transferencia de Medios Audiovisuales a Comunidades Indígenas (TMA) as part of its aim to pluralize entrenched indigenista practices, by teaching and giving access to newly available technology to indigenous communities. Like the institutionalization of video art, programs to promote the production of video in indigenous communities became formally established in the 1990s. For a history of INI’s media transference programs, see Erica Cusi Worthman, \textit{Indigenous Media}, 60–89.
\item928 Erica Cusi Worthman, \textit{Indigenous Media in Mexico. Culture, Community, and the State}, 112.
\end{footnotes}
networks of production and exchange broke with such national bounds. Second, as one of the first compilations of Latin American independent media, Ranucci’s compilation set a particular standard for what would be considered political and independent media in Latin America for an international audience. Minter’s work *Video Road* (1985), shot on super 8 film and transferred to video, is a collage of images of a road trip through Mexico. *Amas de Casa* (1984), from Colectivo Cine Mujer, is a testimonial video of the experiences of a group of housewives evicted by their landlords.\(^930\) *Nuestra Tequío* (1984), by the K-Chon collective, documents community work (*tequío*) in the Zapotec community of Yalalag. In Ranucci’s words, “the video depicts hundreds of Zapotecs coming together from the surrounding villages to put on a new roof for a building that took more than three years to construct.”\(^931\) These works were all part of the collection.

Absent from the compilation of Mexican independent media are Weiss’s experimental videos and media theories. Also absent are the earlier works of Colectivo Cine Mujer (1976–1979) that focus on abortion and rape. While these exclusions could be coincidental, this selection developed a narrative of women making media in Mexico that erased Pola Weiss from the trajectory. It denied her approach to video as “Latin American” or “political.”

By weaving together the practices and relations of all these women, my study aims to break silencing mechanisms such as those produced by compilations of Latin American history that bound artistic production to a projection of desires that fails to examine diverse feminist sensibilities and networks of exchange and production. In broad strokes, the events and networks Weiss laid out through her video practice were

\(^{930}\) Ibid.  
\(^{931}\) Ibid.
fragments within a set of histories that would set in motion a new generation of visual *letradas*, from indigenous video producers such as Teofila Palafox to internationally known Mexican video artists like Ximena Cuevas.

In sum, Pola Weiss’s practice not only broke with dominant ways of seeing and representing the female body, but also championed video production and television broadcasting as media that could develop an awareness of embodied forms of perception and knowledge. With precarious means, she developed a body of work loaded with a complex feminist sensibility that allowed for an existential search and political engagement. As a pioneer, she was able to foresee the future uses of audiovisual technology. Her eccentric approach was, at times, idealistic, but it represented a political engagement that anticipated relations between technology and the self. In particular, Weiss use of the body as an allegory of the city speaks to the battle of representation (visual and in formal politics) that was taken place throughout the streets of Mexico City. Her approach alludes to the importance that the capital city has had in forging myths of tradition and power previously the exclusive territory of the letrados. Weiss turns this tradition around. The city is no longer written by the letrado, or visualized by the visual letrado (García and López), the city is a female body and the site of Weiss’s personal experiences. By visualizing the connection between her personal experience and the urban landscape, Weiss’s practice points to the transformations that I have been arguing for throughout this project: the feminization of the cultural geographies of Mexico City and the concomitant emergence of new regimes of media and visuality. Through her interdisciplinary practice Weiss claims her role as a visual letrada able to visualize and negotiate the ways in which female experiences and knowledge are produced through the use of audiovisual technology.
CONCLUSIONS

MUJERES QUE SE VISUALIZAN

“Yo sé como me veo, si pregunto es para saber cuanto te gusta.”
— Soy Totalmente Palacio, billboard campaign, Mexico City, 2000.

“Lo curioso es que creas que puedas controlar mi imagen”

The emergence of the visual letradas recounted in this study suggests new ways of thinking about the role of feminisms in developing new regimes of media and visuality as well as in transforming existing ones in post-1968 Mexico. In contrast to the closed disciplinary focus and national parameters that have characterized the twentieth-century Mexican historiography of feminisms, media, art, and women’s history, this dissertation emphasizes the interconnections between these fields; it does so by focusing on three main categories—the city, the archive, and the media—all previously conceived as masculine territories in which letrados mediated and produced myths of power, tradition, and knowledge. Bringing an interdisciplinary, local, and transnational lens to bear on these categories and by showing how visual letradas appropriated them as key spheres of action, this project narrates how normative representations of the female body (visually and in formal politics) were contested throughout Mexico City and how, in turn, such challenges affected and effected politics.

The three sections of this study weave a narrative in which disciplinary boundaries and genres are blurred, giving more weight to a history of interconnections, affinities, and confluences of changing and competing female experiences, aspirations,
and desires. Read together, they map out parallel interconnections in time and space between these different spheres of action. Doing so makes visible the means by which diverse visual letradas turned these spheres of action into key areas of exploration for new forms of female experience and desire. By politicizing the female body and rendering this politicization visible, visual letradas set in motion a process whereby the city, the archive, and the media were feminized. Through their willingness to return the gaze by means of images, ephemera, street performances, archival practices, and embodied encounters, they unveiled the female body as socially constructed across media—discursively, performatively, and spatially. Just as visuality and media are identified as key sites in which sexual and gender differences are inscribed and contested, the willingness of visual letradas to intervene in this process by returning the gaze represents the key narrative of this study.

Read separately, each section produces a narrative of excavation that recovers and gives visibility to silenced female practices, positioning them against structures and discourses that have rendered them invisible. Rather than just re-inscribing their marginal status, however, the tactic of each section is to reveal the challenges the margin poses to the center as well as to acknowledge how these positions are dynamic and interchangeable in the context of competing interests and desires. Section 1, *Feminizing the City*, presents feminist street demonstrations as valid forms of politically committed art practice and key elements of feminisms that were used to imagine and promote new participatory forms of citizenship. This section also maps the feminizing of the geographies of Mexico City, in which visual letradas contested and opened patriarchal structures and spheres of action (media, juridical discourses, and urban landscapes). Section 2, *The Archival Practices of a Visual Letrada*, discusses the archival
practices of Ana Victoria Jiménez in order to highlight the challenges her actions and archive pose for histories of feminism and feminist art, on the one hand, and for conceptions of the archive, on the other hand, at two distinct historical moments: first, the performative moment of the creation of the Jiménez collection between the 1970s and the 1990s, and, second, the moment of Jiménez’s self-reflexive understanding of her collection as an archive in 2011. In the third section, *The Visual Letradas Protest the Media Archive*, the works of Jiménez, Fernández, and Weiss are situated within the boundaries of their specific media to render visible their practices and networks of production. Their works are discussed as theoretical interventions in and of themselves that critically interrogate the ways in which media representations (visually and performatively) constructed gender and sexual differences and explored new forms of female experience.

Much as it was for those letrados featured in the work of Angel Rama, the city (both physical and imagined) was the site of mediation, contestation, and articulation for the visual letradas discussed in this study. Indeed, all the visual letradas considered here not only lived in Mexico City but also understood that in Mexico during the 1970s, the fight for representation and struggle for meaning occurred and were articulated against and within “the place where hegemonic meaning is established and from which it is disseminated.”933 Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández, Mónica Mayer, Pola Weiss, and all the activists who participated in feminist demonstrations made Mexico City their battleground.

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933 However, as many have argued, this was a highly mediated and dialogical process in which all regions and diverse actors participated in the lettered city. See Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, 266.
The centralized cultural and political structure of Mexico, as well as its “apparent stability” (compared to other Latin American countries), made Mexico City a privileged capital for many in the 1970s and well into the 1980s, when a neoliberal economic model was implemented and a democratic transition of power was planned. Such restructurings would set in motion a process of decentralization and privatization that would not only give more power to media conglomerates and private corporations but also open up more avenues of expression and action for women and other marginalized sectors of the population in other regions of the country—a process that, as discussed, took shape in the 1970s and in which feminist activists played a crucial role.

By the mid 1980s, many militants of the early feminist collectives of the 1970s developed links with urban and rural popular and women’s organizations as well with grassroots organizations, which grew into a trend of feminism labeled as feminismo popular (popular feminism). This transformation was motivated by a number of factors that produced important changes in the geographies of Mexico City during this decade. One of these was the political reform enacted in 1979 by president José

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935 One of these factors was the economic crisis beginning in 1982 that produced massive unemployment and consequently displaced a large number of women into the informal sector. Many of these women became responsible for the survival of their families. Along with increasing rural migration to the city, these informal activities would reveal the feminization of poverty, a subject many activists would begin to address. Another factor behind transformations in the geographies of Mexico was the mass destruction of homes and workplaces as a result of the 1985 earthquake and the many forms of collective and solidarity action. Yet another important factor was the reaction to the electoral fraud of 1988 that strengthened existing groups in the opposition and prompted the establishment of a coalition of leftist parties to confront the two dominant political forces (Partido de Acción Nacional [PAN] and PRI). Equally important was the influence of crucial measures implemented by international organizations via the UN in the context of the UN’s declaration of the Women’s Decade after the IWY conference (1976–1985). These measures led to the financing of a range of projects that focused on women’s education, literacy, and health. While the framework of these projects fell under the banner of development and family planning, some international organization and NGOs supported women’s research groups and agencies that offered help to victims of sexual violence. Ibid., 217; and Martha Zapata Galindo, Feminist Movements in Mexico, 19.
López Portillo (1976–1982). Despite well-documented corruption and embezzlement scandals, it was at this time that the existence of opposition parties in Mexican political practice, however flawed, came to be formalized. This reform would be crucial for many feminist groups and for many women who would gain access to political posts in opposition parties.

The emergence of a wider mobilization of women also set in motion a process of institutionalization and professionalization. While, on the one hand, this process set autonomous feminists against popular feminists, on the other hand, it marked the entrance of 1970s activists into formal politics and the establishment of women's studies and gender studies in academia.\footnote{For instance, in 1983, El Colegio de Mexico launched an interdisciplinary women's studies program.} Important avenues for political action became available to women in Mexico as a result of these processes. However, while studies of the formal political achievements of new wave feminisms have been undertaken and the careers of several activists explored, the role of creative forms of expression across disciplines and through diverse performative practices in changing the terms of civic engagement, politics, and regimes of media and visuality have, for the most part, been ignored.

López Portillo's administration also ushered the Mexican economy into a period of severe financial crisis that would prompt a change in policy towards neoliberal economics under the administration of president Miguel De La Madrid (1982–1988). Visual artists were not immune to the crisis and many collectives dissolved as artists shed the ideals of collectivism to establish individual careers and participate in newly
established private art markets or to earn a living through other means. 937 During López Portillo’s tenure, the private sector, both national and transnational, was encouraged to participate in the arts. This encouragement gave a boost to the Mexican art market and led to the inclusion of many Mexican artists in international markets. 938 Televisa became a major protagonist of this process when it financed the construction of the Museo de Arte Rufino Tamayo (1981) and opened the Cultural Center for the Arts, both in Mexico City (1987). During the 1980s several self-declared feminist art collectives were established and disbanded in Mexico City, including Jiménez’s Tlacuilas y Retrateras (1983–1984) and Mayer’s Polvo de Gallina Negra (1983–1993). While the Museo de Arte Álvar y Carmén Carillo Gil (established in 1974), a museum supported by private and state funding, did support several exhibitions of feminist art, the work was generally met with harsh criticism and was not active in the art market. 939

By the 1990s, a new generation of artists began to establish collectives and alternative spaces. The politics that drove the 1970s and early 1980s collectives—including feminisms—were then shed for an interest in participating in the global languages of contemporary art, effectively erasing the histories of this earlier period.

937 When asked about the reasons for which many of the Grupos collectives disbanded, several of the artists interviewed stated that the economic crisis forced them to look for jobs and leave behind their ideals of working collectively. Another important factor also seen in other collective efforts was disagreement between members. See Victor Muñoz, interview with the author; Mónica Mayer, interview with the author; and Alberto Hijar, interview with the author.

938 Televisa and Grupo Alfa begin to participate more openly in cultural matters with their financing of the construction of the Museo de Arte Rufino Tamayo (1981). President López Portillo promoted international private investment in the arts, such as the art collection practices of Armand Hammer, a U.S. oil baron. See Espinoza and Zuñiga, La Perrra Brava.

939 In 1977, the present-day Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (MACG), a state institution, hosted the first Mexican and Central American Symposium on Women’s Research, which was accompanied by an art exhibition curated by Alaide Foppa. Between 1984 and 1987, Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante exhibited Polvo de Gallina’s project Madres, also at the MACG. This project was also shown at La Esmeralda national school of art in Mexico City, and at the Centro de la Mujer. See “Exposición de obras plásticas del primer simposio mexicanos centroamericano de investigación sobre la mujer” in Fondo Carrillo Gil; and “Curriculum of Polvo de Gallina Negra” in Mónica Mayer personal archive.
These new generations of artists were supported by the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA, 1988) and Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA, 1989), two state intuitions President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) established to foster and protect cultural production as part of his decentralization and privatization measures in the cultural sector. In conjunction with national and international corporate funding, CONACULTA and FONCA fostered the introduction of these generations of young Mexican artists into the international market to promote and update the image of Mexican culture as the country prepared to sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1992). Artists such as Gabriel Orozco (b. Jalapa, Veracruz, 1962), Miguel Calderón (b. Mexico City, 1971) and Francis Alÿs (b. Belgium, 1951) have been discussed as ambassadors of this process that was backed by a generation of curators eager to ease the burden of the nationalistic framework through which Mexican art had traditionally been consumed both nationally and internationally. This process entailed an effective disavowal of the experimental practices of Mexican artists working in the 1970s.

By the late 1990s, scholars all over the world began to revise the histories of conceptual art to include artists from previously marginalized regions as meaningful players, including Latin American artists working in the 1970s. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, two-revisionists projects in Mexico had already

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941 Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, 108.

attempted to historicize the role of Mexican artists working in the 1970s as part of a
global history of conceptual art. In particular, *La Era de la Discrepancia: Arte y Cultura
Visual en México, 1968–1997*, a product of the same group of curators and scholars who
launched the careers of Alÿs, Calderón, and Orozco and who had disavowed the national
framework to explain their practices, approached this revision through the
interdisciplinary framework of visual culture. In doing so, they hoped to dismantle the
limitations of art historical analysis that classifies cultural forms according to “high and
low” categories or according to discipline based on media specificity (photography,
painting, film, sculpture). However, *La Era de la Discrepancia*’s narrative is premised
upon the boundaries between media specialization and artist prestige; the practices of
visual letradas and new wave feminisms, key for visual studies, are, as a result, mostly
disregarded. As I have shown, feminist scholars and artists have engaged in a global
interrogation of visuality and representation since the 1960s, providing a crucial
framework of analysis for visual culture. My contribution to this current reframing is
to insist that the practices of visual letradas working in Mexico City were theoretical
engagements in and of themselves that critically interrogated established regimes of
media and visuality in post-1968 Mexico. Visual letradas showed how gender and
sexual differences were inscribed in a diverse range of cultural forms by positioning
visuality and performativity as key forms of political representation.

In this context, studying the creative practices of a group of diversely minded
feminist artist and activists based in Mexico City, and the local and transnational

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943 Olivier Debroise, *La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en México, 1968–1997*; and

944 For an analysis of the theoretical interconnections between visual culture and feminisms, see
networks they forged, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the legacies of feminisms in the histories of post-1968 Mexico in at least three ways. First, it confirms the existence of a diverse range of feminist demands beyond politics as formally defined. Second, it locates the practices of Mexican feminist-minded artists within a wider political geography of feminist artists, activists, and theorists interested in unveiling the ways in which visual representations create and reproduce patriarchal power relations within their production, distribution, and reception. And, lastly, it shows how the advent of audiovisual technologies opened avenues of expression to a diverse spectrum of women and, in turn, how these women played an important role in transforming fields of power and knowledge previously deemed masculine territories.

In the summer of 2000, several months before Vicente Fox became Mexico’s president, and signaling the temporary end of the PRI’s 71-year rule, a new generation of media-savvy visual letradas rekindled the battle for female representation in the streets of Mexico City. This new generation of visual letradas continued to propose that a transition to democracy should include women’s right to return the gaze, that is, to represent themselves across media and by means of many practices. Between July and August, 2000, a series of billboards surreptitiously appeared in 10 of the most transited intersections in Mexico City. The billboards attacked El Palacio de Hierro, one of the oldest department stores in the city\textsuperscript{945} for its \textit{Soy Totalmente Palacio} (I am totally Palacio) ad campaign, which sexualized, racialized, and promoted consumerism among

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{945} El Palacio de Hierro was developed by J. Tron and Company in 1888. Its first department store opened in 1891 in a five-story iron and steel building (hence its name) located at the corner of present-day 5 de Febrero and Venustiano Carranza streets in downtown Mexico City. Since then, it has grown to be one of the biggest department stores, with establishments all over the country. See Jessica Samperio Díaz and María de Pilar Vázquez Salcedo, \textit{Análisis de la Representación de la Mujer en los Medios Impresos de la Campaña de El Palacio de Hierro.} Bachelor Thesis, Universidad de las Américas Puebla, Escuela de Ciencias Sociales, Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación, November, 2004.
\end{footnotesize}
Mexican women. Lorena Wolffer (b. Mexico City, 1971), an artist and cultural activist, was behind the counter-ad campaign.

In this, Wolffer was responding to Ana María Olabuenaga (b. Mexico City), the creative director of the advertising firm Teran TBWA, responsible for designing and launching the internationally recognized ad campaign. Olabuenaga’s objective was to enhance the image of El Palacio de Hierro among Mexican female consumers and position the store above Liverpool, its main competitor. The most popular media format in the Soy Totalmente Palacio campaign was a series of billboards with witty slogans accompanied by images of thin, tall, white or light-skinned women in luxurious landscapes, positioning El Palacio de Hierro’s products as an integral part of Mexican women’s lifestyles, desires, and attitudes as Mexico became an economic partner of the United States and Canada:

Porque un psicoanlista nunca entenderá el poder curativo de un vestido. Porque solo una buena esposa evita mucho ir de compras.

Hay dos cosas que una Mujer no puede evitar: llorar y comprar zapatos.

Cada vez hay menos principes, por fortuna, cada vez hay más Palacios.

Lo curioso es que lo que Ama una Ama de casa son las tiendas.

Because a psychoanalyst would never understand the curative power of a dress.

Because only a good wife avoids going shopping often.

There are two things that a woman can’t avoid: crying and buying shoes.

Every day there are fewer princes, but fortunately there are more Palacios.

946 Wolffer’s billboards were exhibited from July 1 to August 30, 2000, at Tlalpan and Eje 6 Sur; Periférico Canal de Garay and Eje 6 Sur; San Antonio Abad, Plaza Santa Cruz; Insurgentes and Avenida del Imán; Insurgentes and Copilco; Insurgentes and Quintana Roo; Avenida Santa Teresa, Pedregal del Lago; Río Churubusco and Calle 17; Periférico Sur and Zacatépetl; and Viaducto and Tránsito, in México City. See Lorena Wolffer’s website http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html, accessed on March 10, 2014; and “Campaña de Olabuenaga; Wolffer reccurre a la estrategia critica” in La Jornada, Monday 31 July 2000.

947 Marketing analyses at the time pointed out that El Palacio de Hierro had a 25% market share, in contrast to Liverpool’s 30%. See “Fabrica de Ideas que ‘Son Totalmente Palacio’” in Al Diseño. (Septiembre, 1999). (44), 2–7; and Díaz and Vázquez, Análisis de la Representación de la Mujer.

948 Agencia Terán TBWA, Campaña Institucional “Soy Totalmente Palacio,” 2003, cited in Díaz and Vázquez, Análisis de la Representación de la Mujer.
The curious thing is that what a housewife loves are the stores.

Following the strategy of many female lifestyle magazines, *Soy Totalmente Palacio* appropriated and twisted feminist aspirations for an independent and professional lifestyle. The *Soy Totalmente Palacio* campaign constructs an image of a woman no longer interested in attracting a man or being a good housewife; it posits consumerism, beauty, and luxury as forms of female empowerment. That this elitist, racist lifestyle, unattainable for the majority of the Mexican population, was promoted throughout Mexico City was perhaps not surprising. Since the beginnings of the print industry, advertising campaigns have produced lifestyle aspirations that target women, and, as many have argued, these ads offer insight into changes in gender relations, attitudes, and aspirations, as well as competing political and economic interests.\(^{949}\) However, what is of importance here is to map out the emergent generation of visual letradas, who continue to fight the war for representation and articulate the battle through the same spheres of action used by the visual letradas of the 1970s.

Despite major attempts at dismantling its symbolic standing, Mexico City is still one of the most important sites for the articulation and contestation of meaning at a national level. Indeed, in October, 1996, when a masked and traditionally dressed Comandante Ramona of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) finally reached *el Zócalo* to participate in the National Indigenous Forum and famously declared “*Nunca más un México sin nosotros*”\(^{950}\) (never again a Mexico without us), she most likely encountered a city plastered with *Soy Totalmente Palacio* billboards that

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\(^{949}\) Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*; and Joanne Hershfield, *La Chica Moderna.*

denied both her presence in the city as well as her lifestyle. However, Ramona’s performance at *el Zócalo* made visible another kind of visual letrada who, like Olabuenaga and Wolffer, was also the product of Mexico’s democratic transition. The visibility of this visual letrada was also enabled by transformations that led to the process of democratization, including the feminization of several spheres of action previously deemed masculine territories through the active participation of an earlier generation of visual letradas in these fields.

Wolffer’s 2000 counter-ad campaign, *Soy Totalmente de Hierro*, used the same media strategy designed by Olabuenaga, but her model was a medium-built, dark-skinned woman not placed in a luxurious setting. Wolffer located her model in a quotidian urban setting and framed her image with witty slogans that, according to the artist, directly responded to the ways in which Olabuenaga’s campaign manipulated the female body and reinscribed stereotypes of femaleness:951

> Ninguna campaña publicitaria es capaz de silenciar mi voz.  
> El problema es que pienses que mi cuerpo te pertenece.  
> Lo curioso es que creas que puedas controlar mi imagen.  
> ¿Quién te enseña a ser Mujer?952

Not a single advertisement campaign is capable of silencing my voice. The problem is that you think that my body belongs to you. The curious thing is that you think that you can control my image. Who teaches you how to be a woman?

With close affinities to Mayer’s *El Tendedero*, one of the billboards produced by Wolffer speaks to everyday street encounters that sexualize female bodies through touch or innuendo. It shows a defiant woman with arms crossed in the foreground framed by the slogan “Este es mi palacio y soy totalmente de hierro” (this is my palace and I am made of

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952 Ibid.
steel) while a group of men approaches the woman from behind. Indeed, much like Mayer’s El Tendedero, Jiménez’s photographs, Fernández’s movies, Weiss’s videos, and the feminist demonstrations discussed in this project, Wolffer, Olabuenaga, and Comandante Ramona use the streets of Mexico City and the female body as the sites in which to fight for political representation and specific constructions of femininity. All use different media and practices that construct audio-visual archives of different female experiences and subjectivities to do so. Wolffer, Olabuenaga, and Comandante Ramona make use of regimes of media and visuality that have been opened up through a long process of transformation in historically constituted fields of power and knowledge. Beginning with Jiménez’s madrinas, these fields have changed and will keep doing so as new modes of female experience continue to be explored through the city and the archive, across regimes of media and visuality.
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