

THE MEXICAN EXPERIMENTAL IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL AND FILM

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A DISSERTATION

in

Hispanic Studies

For the Graduate Group in Romance Languages

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2021

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ABSTRACT

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A focus on the novel and film from Mexico provides analysis of the contemporary experimental tradition. Representations of intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, and critical regionalism in the contemporary novel and film from Mexico signal to new understandings of the current avant-garde. A selection of novels by Verónica Gerber Bicecci, Cristina Rivera Garza, Marisol Ceh Moo, and Mario Bellatin suggests that the importance of social justice rests in intermedial and bilingual *novelwriting*. Films by Mario Novaro, Pedro González Rubio, Camila Balzaretti, Pepe Perruccio and Lorena Barrera outline cinema that demonstrates concern for people's well-being. Critical theory by Irmgard Emmelhainz exposes neoliberal influences on society, art, and the lives of women in Mexico. The compound of both form and narrative makes it possible to analyze the experimental according to reoccurring patterns. The conjunction "form and narrative" identifies the aesthetic (either it be literary or filmic, for example, prose or close-ups) and the storyline (the points of view and the topics considered). The contemporary experimental in the Mexican novel and film question both of these attributes; consequently, the form and narrative informed by social concerns start to read, view, and sound different at first. As the experimental begins to be published and screened more often, patterns subsequently appear: the experimental in Mexico is making those connections possible in order to signal to the most urgent social justice concerns. Hence, the decision to complicate form and narrative simultaneously to present critical solutions demonstrates the intentionality of the experimental.

FIGURES, MONTAGES, SCENES, AND A LIST

<i>Conjunto vacío</i>	50, 147
<i>Las buenas hierbas</i>	102, 118, 120-1
<i>Alamar</i>	106, 126, 130
<i>Jacobo el mutante</i>	151-2
<i>Jacobo reloaded</i>	154
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The Mexican Experimental in the Contemporary Novel and Film

INTRODUCTION: The Experimental and Social Justice

The experimental approach creates novels and films that go against the common trends and makes its audience wonder what they are either reading or viewing. The current Mexican “avant-garde”—the artists ahead of their contemporaries—demands a resistance to the standardization of form and narrative in the mediums. As a result, authors and directors who relate with the experimental do not measure the value of their work by the judgment of economic figures. The Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film concentrates on representation instead of book or box office sales. Both the abstraction of form and narrative along with low-budget projects outline the definition of the experimental; moreover, a concentration on social justice creates a genre of the Mexican experimental novel and film. Four dimensions of social justice manifest in the genre: intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, and critical regionalism. Consequently, interpretation of the Mexican experimental novel and film addresses the identification of topics concerning people’s well-being. Art can occupy a certain square footage in galleries. The novel and film do not relate to space in that way. Thus, I use the allegory of rooms for novels and film to do exactly what they cannot. In each room, the novel and film take space up, and I argue that these marked out dimensions suggest a clearer depiction of the genre and medium. By taking a tour of allegorical rooms, I observe the show of individual works along with entire networks. I follow the light that the experimental aesthetic gives off in these installation spaces. Furthermore, the allegorical passageways between the artistic salons are filled with novelists, filmmakers, artists, and critics. A brief imagined narrative of these beings and

the art that affects them allows for a unique understanding of the avant-garde community and the experimental aesthetic.

The experimental poses questions about production and interpretation of established art traditions. It is difficult to get a sense of where the experimental starts, stops, and elides with other genres. Maybe the tilted shots of a short film or a drawing intertwined in prose suffice for the experimental production to a certain regard. The language used to create signposts around the experimental leads to an indexical approach to understand the genre. According to specific attributes, the experimental produces an interpretable expression. I consider the contemporary novel and film in Mexico with apprehension because I find the distinguishing characteristic of the experimental to be elusion. When the narrative or form does fall in line with other classifiable traditions, it is clear that the experimental also seeks to place doubt on established genres. In addition, I contend that the experimental points to a critical understanding of art.

The attention to intersectional feminism and critical regionalism in the experimental aesthetic supplies a connection between art and social justice. The experimental animates intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, and critical regionalism. One idea transforms into five ideas in my approach to the experimental. To this end, I pose the question: is the experimental a way to observe the powers behind artistic production and representation? I hold that the experimental establishes new measures of value that produce alternative summations. No longer does the experimental hinge upon the sociopolitical factors of the early twentieth century nor the 1970s. I pay close attention to the interest of novelists and filmmakers to put their

finger on the experimental. It is not a surprise that Cristina Rivera Garza, who is a novelist that will be considered below, suggests a possible outline of the experimental in an interview held by Seoul National University. Rivera Garza writes online. What is experimental in Mexico clearly does not necessarily relate to contemporary Korean novels. Rivera Garza refers to Jen Hofer, a North American Poet, to approach the subject of the experimental.¹ Responding to the question, “¿A qué autores se siente cercana?”:

De cualquier manera, me gustan, sobre todo, los autores para quienes escribir un libro es escribir dos libros. Quiero decir que me resultan muy interesantes los libros que no se plantean únicamente el desarrollo de una anécdota. Me siento cercana a aquellos libros que producen y siguen sus propias reglas (que es la mejor definición de la escritura experimental, que le oí, por cierto, a Jen Hofer, poeta y traductora norteamericana). (*Desde México para Corea*).

The number of diverse voices necessary to bring the experimental into focus clarifies the heterogeneity in aesthetic and political geography of the tradition. The experimental demonstrates the powers behind artistic production and representation; thus, for art to maintain autonomy from other fields, it's necessary for distinct methods to arise. In the rooms dedicated to the experimental, many special effects are possible. The experimental takes on aesthetics that capture the contemporaneous social issues, and I maintain that novelists and filmmakers adjust the depths of field of this allegorical salon. Rivera Garza remarks that the experimental depends on someone “following their own rules”; nonetheless, it is significant that this definition comes from a woman poet. The inclusion of women's voices outlines the shape of

¹ Jen Hofer translated *Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (2003). Her own poetry collections include *As far as* (1999), *Slide rule* (2002), and *One* (2009).

the experimental for Rivera Garza. As a result, this remark is congruent with my proposed contours of the Mexican experimental.

I will push for a point of view of the experimental that does not hinge on definitions from Anglo-America. Marisol Ceh Moo, who is another novelist to which I will refer, states in an interview for the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*:

No tengo a ninguno que pueda tomar como referente porque manejan una temática que se vincula mucho a la comunidad, sus cosmovisiones. A mí me interesa más la universalidad, enseñar que las comunidades indígenas también tienen problemas sociales contemporáneos. Esa ruptura de temática, y la de género, ya que me atreví a escribir novela, también rompió la hermandad con el resto de los escritores mayas. (“La escritora maya que rompe paradigmas”) Ceh Moo professes the way focusing on social problems has led her novels to

“break” with other Mayan writers. Given that Ceh Moo refers to her avant-garde position within the Mayan literary tradition, it is evident that there are multiple artistic conversations coming from women about the experience of writing with autonomy. Still, I make the point that the Mexican experimental genre in both novels and film will need to come from the marginalized populations more and more. In addition, I include novels and films with the Mayan language to participate in the restructuring of reading and viewing practices in Mexico. I juxtapose Rivera Garza and Ceh Moo not to create a value scale of the experimental; on the contrary, I believe the experimental requires the conversation between women with different social intersections. Rivera Garza is from the North of Mexico and Ceh Moo is from Southeast Mexico. Yet, it is paramount to understand that Ceh Moo is a Mayan novelist from a community that is autonomous of Mexico and subject to national hegemony. Subsequently, it is crucial to make note that Rivera Garza lives a different life as a novelist than Ceh Moo. Not only is there less financial support for Mayan literature, but Ceh Moo also writes within a national and world literature

setting that practices systemic racism. The experimental rests on the point that Rivera Garza's and Ceh Moo's novels emphasize: if the empowerment of women in Mexican novels is possible, it is also possible within the nation of Mexico. These comparisons demonstrate the necessity of a study of literature from autonomous indigenous communities and the same nation that implements the hegemony to adhere to critical positions. Consequently, I argue that conversation between women novelists and filmmakers about the social justice stances they take will relate to communities of audiences at an intersectional feminist level. In order to give an outline of the study of the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film, I will address the Methodology and the Argument of the interdisciplinary analysis.

Methodology

The novels and films informed the selection of the critical theory. Likewise, the critical theory encouraged the interpretation of the novels and films. The difficulty of visualizing a line that divides the art from the theory signals that they share a commonality: the focus on social justice. This material allowed me to identify the four categories of social justice in the contemporary, experimental novel from Mexico. As a result, the analysis makes connections between the novels and films considering the role of the experimental, and the importance of social justice in the two mediums proves to be definitive in the 21st century. Research at many libraries and universities — namely Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania and the Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas “Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster” at the Escuela Superior de las Artes de Yucatán— fostered the interdisciplinary study. Still, the feminist bookstore La Meiga in Mérida has

also fostered important moments of collaboration and readings. The research and selection frames three categories: novelists, filmmakers, and critical theorists. I consider the following novels and the novelists: *Conjunto vacío* (2015) by Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza, *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* (*Sólo por ser mujer*) (2015) by Marisol Ceh Moo, and *Jacobo el mutante* (2002) and *Jacobo reloaded* (2014). At the same time, I analyze the following films: *Las buenas hierbas* (2010) by Maria Novaro and *Alamar* (2009) by Pedro González Rubio. With regard to critical theory, I emphasize the importance of *La tiranía del sentido común: la reconversión neoliberal del México* (2016) published by Irmgard Emmelhainz. These are the fundamental sources: 3 women novelists, 1 male novelist, 1 woman filmmaker, 1 male filmmaker, and 1 woman critical theorist. The only person of color is the novelist Marisol Ceh Moo. Consequently, the overall selection demonstrates an intention of inclusion and moments to reflect about more voices. More directly, the people of color in the arts —across the board from assistants to iconic figures— should not have to wait for representation. I will make note of the efforts by the white Mexicans to include non-white Mexicans and stories into their productions. Although I conclude that the future of the project must consider more inclusive selections.

There are some secondary sources I would also like to mention with the hope of underlining their importance. The subsequent novels will serve as cornerstones in my analysis: *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) by Cristina Rivera Garza; *Mudanza* (2010) by Verónica Gerber Bicecci; *T'ambilák men tunk'ulilo'ob* (*El llamado de los tunk'kules*) (2011) by Marisol Ceh Moo; *U yóok'otilo'ob áak'ab* (*Danzas de la noche*) (2011) by Isaac Esaú Carrillo; *La historia de mis dientes* (2013) by Valeria Luiselli. I will also

contextualize the following films: *El automóvil gris* (1919) by Enrique Rosas; *Que viva México* (1932) by Sergei Eisenstein; *Contemporary artist* (1999) by Ximena Cuevas; *Semilla* (2017) by Pepe Perrucci; *Helio* (2018) by Lorena Barrera; *Silente* (2018) by Camila Balzaretti. The critical theory that will also play a significant role is constituted by the subsequent works: *Representaciones sociales mayas y teoría feminista: crítica de la aplicación en la interpretación de la realidad de las mujeres mayas* (2007) by Rosa Pu Tzunux; “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist” (1989) by Kimberlé Crenshaw; “Del feminismo combativo al ‘feminismo líquido’. La historia reciente de un sueño añejo” (2009) by Elsa Muñiz; “Becoming the 3rd wave” (2002) by Rebecca Walker; *Strategic Occidentalism: on Mexican Fiction, the Neoliberal Book Market, and the Question of World Literature* (2018) by Ignacio Sánchez Prado; *Cine mexperimental: 60 años de medios de vanguardia en México* (1998) by Jesse Lerner and Rita González; *Ismo, ismo, ismo : cine experimental en América Latina = Ism, ism, ism : experimental cinema in Latin America* (2017) by Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza. These networks of novelists, filmmakers, and critics come together to form a line and create ideas against social injustice. I have put forth methods to strengthen the solid connections between these thinkers in hope that more critical analysis can take place in future projects.

My approach to the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film has led me to put into practice an interdisciplinary method. I have organized analysis on both the novel and film. Second, I have produced a film about contemporary novels from the Yucatán Peninsula. Given that another document corresponds to the film, I

will focus on the methodology for the written component. First, the research involved in organizing contemporary Mexican novels and film according to the experimental genre produced three chapters with both unique and overlapping approaches. Second, an explanation of the approach to novels, as a literary genre, and film, as a medium, also gives detail to the methodology. Third, commentary on the history of the Mexican experimental describes the significance of the contemporary form and narrative of the tradition. Fourth, an understanding of the social justice efforts according to social justice also deserves attention in order to visualize the organization of the novels, films, and critical theory.

The first chapter frames the following three novels: *Conjunto vacío* (2015) by Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza, and *Chentumeen x ch'úupen (Sólo por ser mujer)* (2015) by Marisol Ceh Moo. In addition, critical theory by Irmgard Emmelhainz provides initial definitions of contemporary feminism in Mexico. Terms like “necro-capitalismo” and “sensibilidad neoliberal” introduces the compelling argument that artists must make art “committed” to social injustice, for example, the representation of feminism. The group of three women novelists tell stories that delineate important topics for the experimental. Gerber Bicecci writes about the exile her family suffered from the Dirty War in Argentina. Rivera Garza tells the story of a woman assassin who practices the castration of men. Ceh Moo narrates the life of a Mayan woman and her struggle to prove her innocence after killing her husband in self-defense. The three novels provide me the opportunity to signal to the diverse effort of women who want to write their own stories. The second chapter contains analysis of the two films *Alamar* (2009) by Pedro González

Rubio and *Las buenas hierbas* (2010) by Maria Novaro. Equally, a focus on critical regionalism leads to better understandings of gender and anti-racism. Two reports on feminist protests and the building of the Tren Maya accompany the film analysis. The third chapter offers interpretation of *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) by Cristina Rivera Garza, *T'ambilák men tunk'ulilo'ob* (*El llamado de los tunk'kules*) (2011) by Marisol Ceh Moo, *El automóvil gris* (1919) by Enrique Rosas, *Semilla* (2017) by Pepe Perrucci, *Helio* (2018) by Lorena Barrera, and *Silente* (2018) by Camila Balzarette. Arguments about social justice, which were developed in the first and second chapters, emerge within a framework of examples of the Mexican experimental. The interdisciplinary study begins with individual chapters (the first chapter is dedicated to novels and the second chapter to film); however, the final chapter brings the literary genre and the film medium together.

How does the experimental alter different mediums and genres? Apart from the switch in representation, I observe that the experimental leads to a critique focused on form and narrative. I do not mean to say the experimental novel necessarily runs parallel to the experimental film. The literary genre and the artistic medium differ in extraordinary ways. While the novel's development, as an artistic practice, reaches back to more than four hundred years, artists have worked with cinema for only one hundred and thirty years. The sociohistorical underpinnings of the novel point to numerous aesthetics, political stances, critiques of injustice, national ideologies, and economies that span more than three times the amount of time than that of cinema. The novelist, thereby, has pondered on the limits and the freedom of the genre for much longer. For that reason, an historical comparison of the novel and film—even if I set

out to look at contemporary artistic approaches— means the diachronicity of the novelistic and filmic language do not match.

By joining the words *novel* and *writing* connects the act of the composition with the genre itself. The art of *filmmaking*, for instance, enjoys the characteristic of being creative. Apart from the distinction between medium and formal genre, the term *novelwriting* can also connect the *novelwriter* with a likeness to a *filmmaker*. Because experimental films can introduce all types of footage, it is relevant to consider the varied components of the contemporary experimental novel as well. The novel is a literary genre, and film is an audiovisual art. The novel does not usually begin and end in one sitting unlike most film screenings. Despite these differences, I hold that the superimpositions of the genre and the medium provides telling observations on the way art takes form. Because the novel comes before film, the latter could be seen as superimposed in the former. Filmic adaptations of novels before the invention of cinema also exemplify this procedure. Ilana Dann Luna proposes that the feature of multimedia inherent in film adaptations allows for a relation between novels and film.² In addition, Dann Luna emphasizes that the reconsideration of films and novels by women encourages a significant study of gender identity, “Through dialogue, the filmmakers are able to critique and expand the initial messages of the source texts’ feminist thrust” (Dann Luna 6). The adaptation of Rosario Castellano’s novel *El viudo Román* (1964) into *El secreto de Romelia* (1988), directed by Busi Cortés, demonstrates feminist overtones in the intermedial production for Dann Luna. In pairing the novelist with the filmmaker Dann Luna explains the adaptation, “Cortés

² Ilana Dann Luna. *Adapting Gender: Mexican Feminism from Literature to Film*.

liked Castellano's style of storytelling, the use of nonlinear time. Yet she decided that she didn't want to simply "'illustrate' the novel, but rather to make an intervention" (Dann Luna 57). The logic behind the novel and the film for Dann Luna leads to opportunities for feminist reparation through adaptation. Even though I do not consider the adaptation of the novel to film, I emphasize the relationship between the novel and the film. Consequently, I argue that the comparison of the experimental novel and film demonstrates the phenomenon of the superposition of these two mediums in the 20th and 21st century.

The allegory of experimental novelists and filmmakers coming and going into rooms in a hurried and impatient fashion continues to play out as well. I suggest some of the rooms have dim lighting and others have nearly blinding light. The installations—which represent form and narrative—in the rooms vary from the mainstream, historical novel to the neoliberal, romantic comedy. The artists pass through the dark corridors emitting their own light and reflecting the light of others. It is to say, they influence one another by exposing and altering with generic standards. There is always a possibility the experimental artist will get lost and never find their way back to the salons of light. Perchance the form or narrative produces so little light the novel or film goes without being seen. In other words, the experimentalist runs the risk of taking misleading turns in the labyrinth of literary and filmic genres and subgenres.

The experimental novelists, filmmakers, and artists create places where epistemologies meet and new touchstones of form and narrative take hold in structures of knowledge. I propose that the experimental novel and film from Mexico bridge virtual realities in conjunction with reality itself through critical discourse and

elaborate on the topics of feminism and the exploitation of regions. The allegory of passageways filled with experimental novelists and filmmakers provide an experience not unlike a tour in a gallery or museum. Irmgard Emmelhainz sketches out the difficulty of the creation of “un arte autónomo comprometido” and highlights several pieces of contemporary art to explain (Emmelhainz 151). The opening title of an art exhibition “Ningún artista resiste un cañonoazo de \$50,000 dólares” (2011) by Monterrey born artists Tercerounquinto enters into the anti-capitalist analysis by Emmelhainz. Secondly, the short film *Artfilm I: Ever Present — yet Ignored* (2006) by Adriana Lara tells the story of people taking tours in museums. The film presents another connection with fine art through form and narrative, apart from also being part of the Museo Jumex Collection. I suggest the allegory of corridors visualize novelists, filmmakers, and the experimental. Given this link with the allegory and the critical theory, I suggest a study of Mexican fine art alongside of the novel and film.

Now, the lights from the artistic rooms that cast shadows in the halls express greater verisimilitude. In other words, I claim that the allegory comes closer to being in high-definition resolution. I recommend that the traits — counter-narratology, focalization, collaboration, and self-inclusion— animate some optics to recognize the experimental. These features will be pointed out in the narrative arc, character development, prose, filmic language, focalization, intermediality, production and more to create an indexical understanding of the experimental. At the same time, the complexities between the novel and film add even more points of view. Finally, the avant-garde, innovation, and the experimental produce other options to analyze aesthetic and visualize social justice problems.

Despite the influence of time on the experimental, I believe the period for the contemporary experimental needs to begin from as far back as 1999. I part from the year 1999 to structure my understanding of the current experimental. I choose this year because the novel *Nadie me verá llorar* by Cristina Rivera Garza, *Contemporary artist* by Ximena Cuevas, and the short film *Maxhumain* by Carlos Reygadas, mark the contemporary time in history. At the same, I assert that the year frames the avant-garde, innovation, and the experimental. The watershed year allows me to follow three timelines: the twentieth century, the hundred years between the Mexican Vanguardia of the 1920s till now, and the last twenty years of experimental production. The chronological development of the novel and film in Mexico underlines significant debates that the experimental has sought to expose through critical discourse. Thus, I encourage a new understanding of the flux of the experimental in Mexican history. It is crucial to realize that the experimental is not ahistorical: the experimental manifests itself continuously to frame the issues of the present. I organize the chapters according to a historical timeline. The first two chapters focus on the contemporary experimental in Mexico; the third chapter compares experimental, historical novels, films from early Mexican cinema, archives regarding the history of systemic racism in the Secretaría de la Educación Pública, a collection of short films, and list of film festivals that showcase the experimental. The decision to wait to review archival documents and early cinema until the third chapter allows for more concentration on the contemporary tradition of the experimental. The experimental—in its search for something critical of the present— collapses the historical structure. This notion of timelessness in the act of finding newness calls attention to another critical approach of the experimental. If the

experimental were to have an axis, I believe it would be the moment in time when a form or narrative begins to signify meaning.

I propose an approach to social justice through a path cleared out by women authors to establish feminist conclusion on the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film. Subsequently, a first comparison of critical thinking by women about women's rights defines the social justice themes in question. Clearly, meaningful agreements and disagreements shape the development of feminism. Yet, the sense of concern for the representation of women and their lives in the world presupposes all variations of feminism. By all means, feminism has shaped into a multifaceted ideology that brings misogyny and violence against women to the surface. Also, the imposition of European or Anglo-American feminism on those who do not relate with the realities from where this originated has contributed to critical comparisons. In other words, feminism does not declare a totalization of women's lives and therein lies the genuine concern in the ideology. Rosa Pu Tzunux, for instance, states:

Para principiar, debemos tener claro que el problema original entre una y otra concepción es su fundamento filosófico: mientras que los valores de la sociedad maya se sustentan todavía en la tradición los valores de las sociedades occidentales que impulsan el feminismo se inspiran del 'mundo moderno'. Pero, ¿qué es ese mundo moderno de inspiración occidental? ¿Cómo sus valores definen formas específicas de percepción del individuo y de relación social?" (Pu Tzunux 78).

A description of French feminists in history serves as a way for Pu Tzunuz to remove Mayan gender norms out from under the critical thought of Europe. Pu Tzunuz refers to Olympe de Gouges during the French Revolution, Dominique Fougereyrollas-Schewebel and Simone de Beauvoir from the twentieth century, and the feminist group *Choisir* during the 1970s in France (Pu Tzunux 50-53). The feature of

regionalism, which relates to societal gender standards, comes into question in the text by Pu Tzunuz. Feminism has a far-reaching influence on Mayan communities.

Consequently, I believe the critical thought by Pu Tzunux demonstrates the need for in-depth studies on the conviviality of women and focus for non-Western ideologies.

The term feminism does not align with Mayan communities for Pu Tzunux:

Remarquemos [que] la utilización literal de teorías inspiradas en el mundo occidental puede generar conclusiones que no necesariamente corresponden a la realidad de las otras sociedades. Este es el caso de los estudios feministas sobre la sociedad maya, sobre todo cuando amparándose en sus conceptos ciertas intelectuales pretenden confirmar su supuesta victimización, su pretendido sometimiento y su supuesto estado de exclusión respecto a los hombres” (Pu Tzunux 56).

First and foremost, the argument by Pu Tzunux reveals the dangers of the field of humanities in the U.S. and Europe overlapping with decidedly, non-Western culture.

An ideological stance like the support of women’s rights breaks down when the mere idea of “woman” fractures. I argue that the thesis on the authoritarian features of

Western feminism by Pu Tzunux shares commonalities with black feminism and especially the theory of “intersectionality” by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.³ Pu

Tzunux describes the assumption by French feminists to see Mayan women as women but not Mayan. Equally, Crenshaw points out that the U.S. justice system historically has not considered that African American women correspond to both race and gender identities, simultaneously, African American and woman. Hence, the lives lived by

³ “Discrimination against a white female is thus the standard sex discrimination claim; claims that diverge from this standard appear to present some sort of hybrid claim. More significantly, because Black females' claims are seen as hybrid, they sometimes cannot represent those who may have "pure" claims of sex discrimination. The effect of this approach is that even though a challenged policy or practice may clearly discriminate against all females, the fact that it has particularly harsh consequences for Black females places Black female plaintiffs at odds with white females” (Crenshaw).

Mayan women also involve an intersectionality. The inequality they suffer incorporates the societal injustice toward their Mayan and gender identity. I contend that Pu Tzunux reminds feminists to consider their feminism does not give thought to their non-Western life as women. Multiple theories on gender, not only feminism, establish more points of view and promise a better chance at inclusion. Yet, it requires a notable amount of care to overlay Pu Tzunux's rebuttal, which questions the legitimacy of feminism in Mayan culture, on Crenshaw's interpretation of jurisprudence for women of color. Because Crenshaw maintains that the U.S. justice system fails to respect their African American life as black women, I propose that the parallelism with Pu Tzunux arranges a conversation about the intersections of feminism from non-white women. In addition, I have called attention to these two women writers in order to present comparative feminism with respect to international and regional, heterogeneous cultures. The juxtaposition of cross-cultural understanding of women, and consequently, feminism has animated many questions from theorists. I argue that the questions about the use of feminism demonstrate a concern for the development and history of gender equality.⁶ Engendered bodies relate to regions according to politics, and the history of this relation emerges as a concern as women seek to upend toxic, androcentric power today.

For instance, I underline Emmelhainz's warning of the influence of neoliberalism on women's body experience in their lives. (The #MeToo movement that has taken place in Hollywood and the in the United States film industry would certainly mark a reference point on any given timeline about contemporary feminism. This feminist resistance had not yet taken place when Emmelhainz published her

book).⁴ Largely, Emmelhainz delves into the contemporary circumstances for women and asks feminists to take a look into their past. It is a way to observe what worked and what did not about the feminist movement (Emmelhainz 223). The multitemporal study by Emmelhainz only corresponds to the commonalities between contemporary Mexican feminist writers. In addition, these authors pen their history with public and written manifestations concerning feminism from the U.S. I propose that the symbolic waves of feminism have begun to wash up on the shores of patriarchal literary and filmic analysis partly due to this international and historical approach by Mexican feminist writers.

The 1960s and the 1970s provide a frame for second-wave feminism and the declaration, “The personal is political”.⁵ Carol Hanisch states in the eponymous essay from 1970 that the personal lives of women, which do not directly correspond to political demonstration, still maintain political movement: “What is happening now is that when non-movement women disagree with us, we assume it’s because they are ‘apolitical’ [. . .] What I am trying to say is that there are things in the consciousness of ‘apolitical’ women (I find them very political) that are as valid as any political consciousness we think we have” (Hanisch). The personal is necessarily political even

⁴ On October 15th, 2017, the actor Alyssa Milano wrote on her twitter account the following in response to the sexual abuse Harvey Weinstein carried out against women, “If all women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem” (Loney-Howes 29). The result of this tweet has led to a reckoning of the sexual violence, the rape, and the representation of women in the U.S. film industry along with the universal public. Kaitlen Mendes and Jessica Ringrose state that the empowerment of this moment rests in “affective counter-publics”, which “recognize the ways anger and outrage can be productive emotions when trying to instigate social change” (Mendes and Ringrose 39). The authors proceed to point out the necessity for more attention to women’s voices and the way in which the #MeToo movement has manifested “counter-publics”: “resistant subcultures that go against social norms and forming new languages, vocabularies, and communicative modes or vernaculars of engagement and resistance” (Mendes and Ringrose 39).

⁵ The essay “The Personal is Political” was written by Carol Hanisch and published *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*.

though the former does not openly align with the latter. The Miss America Protest in 1968 serves as an historical event from which Hanisch parts and recommends more inclusivity for the feminist movement, for example, the “pro-women line” that seeks to reach out to the “lives of every woman”. Emmelhainz points to this in her study of women pop icons and maternity during neoliberalism; thus, personal bodies manifest certain political and economic ideologies. Third-wave feminism makes its presence known in the 1992 *Ms.* article by Rebecca Walker.

As a black feminist, Walker points to the misogynist strongholds during the U.S. Supreme Court hearing of Anita Hill’s testimony.⁸ Walker argues that third-wave feminism needs to continue to find the political within the personal in the following generation: “I am ready to decide, as my mother decided before me, to devote much of my energy to the history, health, and healing of women. Each of my choices will have to hold to my feminist standard of justice [. . .] I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave” (Walker 87). The publications by Hanisch and Walker interpret feminism manifestations in public places —the Atlantic City boardwalk and U.S. Supreme Court respectively— to demonstrate women and women’s rights out in front of the masses. Emmelhainz also sheds light on a feminist act in the U.S. at the Columbia University in 2014: the art student Emma Sulkowicz performed *Carry that Burden* when she carried her mattress to campus every time she had class until her rapist was expelled, or one of them graduated (Emmelhainz 224). In chorus with Walker, Emmelhainz advocates for a manifestation of second-wave feminism in power structures: “[N]o se puede acabar con la desigualdad de las mujeres sin cuestionar el capitalismo, porque la desigualdad de género, más que una construcción ideológica o

una situación social, es el elemento fundamental del capitalismo” (Emmelhainz 256). Consequently, third-wave feminism invites women and “pro-women” supporters to pull back the façade of beauty contests, courts, universities, and capitalism in its entirety again and again. Because Pu Tzunix, Walker, and Emmelhainz reference back to the times of Hanisch in the U.S., I emphasize the importance of the shared history between women. There have been significant developments in feminism —most notably the understanding that women of color suffer multiple levels of oppression— and I contend that the juxtaposition of women’s voices, stories, and critical thinking define the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film. In other words, women’s voices galvanize the current, meaningful descriptions of contemporary social justice.

Argument

Again, what is the experimental? The question brings into focus another common classification. What is the avant-garde? Recently, a third term —when discussing “new” forms and narrative in art— has come into question: innovation. I approach the experimental through previous definitions of this loaded jargon. I remark on these two key words to demonstrate, firstly, the experimental provides a unique critical approach. Secondly, the experimental is not absolute. In other words, I claim that the experimental sketches out a selection of art and artists and creates a network; however, neither a literary bibliography nor a filmography synthesizes the experimental. I contend that the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film establish representative indices to better understand and enact social justice. The

contribution of Pierre Bourdieu on 19th century French literature is significant in the analysis of novels and films primarily by Mexican artists because the art world functions on a global system. Bourdieu's thoughts on the development of the avant-garde and experimental, even though it is not prioritized, fosters an understanding of what underrepresented novelists, such as women, must contend while working in the arts.

In turn, I argue that the experimental novel and film originates to subvert power structures of the given time. I put forth that the experimental in the last twenty years has put patriarchal order, systemic racism, and exploitative regionalism in check. The trajectory of the current experimental seek to destabilize the determining power structures. I hold that the experimental today demonstrates the patriarchal and exploitative paradigms in political and national ideologies. Just as the experimental necessarily introduces new form and narrative, it also yields unused methods to reveal totalizing power structures. Critics of sociology and philology have reached back to different meanings and variations of the avant-garde. Pierre Bourdieu explores the interworking of literary and art worlds according to moments of "position taking" during 19th century French literature. *La bohème* and the novelists Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire come into question in Bourdieu's sociological approach. The production of these arts comes into focus, free from fixed national literature and singular periods of time. In other words, Bourdieu denotes that "position taking" happens in real time; therefore, it is applicable to more than just the art world. The relationship between authors, artists, and markets does not differ from other fields because it is a matter of objective positions (Bourdieu 231-232). On one hand, the

experimental incorporates emerging novelists, filmmakers, and all artistic genre, but the experimental can also bring back notions from past political and artistic ideologies. Bourdieu provides theory behind history and the experimental, which he calls the “avant-garde”, “The avant-garde is at any one time separated by an *artistic generation* (understood as a gap between two modes of artistic production) from the consecrated avant-garde, itself separated by another artistic generation from the avant-garde already consecrated when it made its entry into the field” (*Rules of Art* 158-159). The exchange between “generation” and a “consecrated” understanding of the experimental implies time and aesthetic, a constant changing of the *garde*.

The major distinction between the avant-garde and the experimental, hence, denotes the community that questions by using an unused aesthetic. Emilio Sauri demonstrates the neoliberal appropriation of the avant-garde through corporate conglomerates promoting “innovation”. In particular, the following words by Irmgard Emmelhainz inform Sauri’s study of the contemporary Mexican novel, “las corporaciones, la economía y el arte crítico/vanguardista comenzaron a compartir el valor de base de innovación, conocido también como innovación disruptiva o destrucción creativa” (Sauri 280-281). If creativity in novels and film are destroyed by neoliberal entities, terms like “innovación” deserve a second look. Otherwise, as Sauri argues, the logic of the “self-revolutionizing process of valorization” embedded in capitalism becomes more threatening with respect to both the arts and labor in Mexico. I assert that Sauri goes as far back as one can in the allegorical room dedicated to the experimental. If the experimental novelists, filmmakers, and artists turn off the lights, so to speak, then Sauri’s reading of “innovación” turns them back

on. While Bourdieu points to the “consecration” of the avant-garde, Sauri underlines “innovación”, a neoliberal term, to demonstrate the logic of the “consecration”. Sauri asks us to be more apprehensive when declaring that innovation is the solution because the aesthetic deemed “innovative” comes from economically driven forces. As a result, I apprehensively take note of the moments when form and narrative come together and drive in signposts at those intersections to remap the experimental. If the “self-revolutionizing process of valorization” can scramble our understanding of new “innovative” art, I recommend a prolonged pause for contemplation before jumping to conclusions about what is experimental and what is not. Consequently, I determine the focus on social justice in the experimental and “innovative” arts must do more than represent.

Upon leaving one room that represents the experimental in the novel, I imagine it is easy to view adjacent assemblages of experimental film just doors down. In other words, the experimental novel and the experimental film, I hold, can develop in unison. The emphasis on social justice takes up space in the literary genre and the film medium. Hence, I review the black and white short film *Contemporary artist* (1999) by Ximena Cuevas that runs just under 5 minutes. Cuevas has the camera in hand and pointed at John Hanhardt, a well-known curator from MOMA in New York City. The short film demonstrates the very contradiction of being an artist and seeking the attention of an institution like a museum. The artist’s autonomy seems to disappear in the film as the camerawork and the audio depict the traumatizing effect of white men with power. The internal monologue of Cuevas, which is in the form of voice-over, communicates that the artist has paranoid anxiety. Suddenly, Cuevas switches to English in the voice-over. In an accelerated and sarcastic voice, she explains her

decision: “English is always ‘trendier’”. First, the subjective camerawork shows a bookstore in Mexico and a group of people surrounding the white curator; Cuevas goes up the stairs to a bathroom and tries to rehearse what she plans on saying to the curator. Someone attempts to come into the bathroom; Cuevas continues to another bathroom on a higher floor. Finally, Cuevas asks a brown-skinned, woman janitor to stop cleaning and let her close the door. As Cuevas is a white Mexican woman, the interaction offers critique of the exploitation in which an artist is involved when creating. The anti-racist critique of the white artist suggests that there should be more awareness and social justice in making videos. The performance becomes violent as Cuevas removes a brown face from the camera frame, and this engagement aligns Mexican video art with uncompromising anti-racist ideologies. At this point, Cuevas sarcastically speaks of her being a “Mexican artist” and namedrops several people the curator might know. In the bathroom, Cuevas films herself in the mirror (which makes a quick shot reverse shot possible), spins 360 degrees, and sets up point of view shots. Cuevas offers an establishing shot of her on the bathroom floor in front of the toilet. Hurriedly, Cuevas goes back down to the bookstore. The film speed is at a higher velocity, and a sound effect of material film spinning is edited in at this point. Cuevas finds that Hanhardt has already left. At the end, a low-fi voice track of Cuevas saying “Mr. Hanhardt” matches overexposed images of the bookstore. The short film quickly pans the outside street of the Mexican metropolis. The filmmaker and lead role of *Contemporary artist* unexpectedly comes close to a value system that is personified by Mr. Hanhardt. Instead of actually coming before him, Cuevas goes to practice her speech and misses the opportunity.

How does *Contemporary artist* align with the experimental traits? The current experimental lies flush with the traits in Cuevas's short film: the intermediality found in video art, film, and literary subtitles stress heterogeneous artistic practices; the counter-narratology of women filmmakers and a stable future performatively falls apart in the short film; the focalization on a woman artist, who struggles to approach a male curator, speaks to an emphasis on the experimental point of view; the collaboration in the short film takes form when Cuevas lists off her contemporaries while practicing her talk with the curator; Cuevas actually films herself—working as both the actor and the cameraperson throughout the piece—and takes self-inclusion to another degree. Still, I believe the treatment of the brown-skinned woman janitor suffered by the “contemporary artist” reveals the folly of the 21st century art world. Cuevas visualizes artists, curators, authors, filmmakers, and book buyers in the short film circulating all the while the woman just above on the second floor is suffering injustice in the bathroom. As the video concludes, it is evident that Cuevas introduces contradictory filmic language to critique mainstream curation. Consequently, *Contemporary artist* serves as a precursor to the following chapters of analysis of the contemporary novel and film.

The new lens that focuses on social justice unmask the neoliberal tendencies and demonstrates the contemporary artistic-critical function of the experimental. The experimental foregrounds people and their lives to the extent that conversation about representation begin. Here are a few of the narratives by the novelists and filmmakers that press hard against the limits of representing social justice and structure the chapters: a Mayan woman kills her husband in self-defense; a mestiza Mexican woman studies law to improve the lives of Mayan women; four women—a detective, an

academic, a castrator, and a poet— come together and visualize the violence against women in Mexico; a young Mexican woman from a family in exile from Argentina becomes an artist and questions family, institutions, and dictatorship; women smoke cannabis on a rooftop while doing laundry and find solidarity; a mestiza woman goes on the radio to denounce the violence against women and calls for action; an interracial couple separates, and their child begins to live in two different worlds, Italian and Mayan. These contemporary narratives will accompany aesthetic form in the Mexican novel and film to bring the experimental closer to our faces to read, see, and hear better; thus, this interdisciplinary selection of material and analysis will draw out the contours of the urgency of social justice. Here are some examples of the form that are used in the Mexican experimental: productions of novels and films by women, scenes of women of different ages and ethnicities spending time together, prose containing long graphic descriptions of domestic violence against women, bilingual prose in Mayan and Spanish, the description of a castrated penis, close-up shots of hallucinogenic plants, illustrations and venn diagrams, the audiovisual recording of the Mayan language, slow motion shots of men kissing, close-up shots of women's faces, content while defining friendship, sisterhood, and the experimental.

The compound of both form and narrative makes it possible to analyze the experimental according to reoccurring patterns. I repeat the conjunction “form and narrative” to identify the aesthetic (either it be literary or filmic, for example, prose or close-ups) and the storyline (the points of view and the topics considered). The contemporary experimental in the Mexican novel and film question both of these attributes; consequently, the form and narrative informed by social concerns start to

read, view, and sound different at first. As the experimental begins to be published and screened more often, patterns subsequently appear: the experimental in Mexico is making those connections possible in order to signal to the most urgent social justice concerns. Hence, the decision to complicate form and narrative simultaneously to present critical solutions demonstrates the intentionality of the experimental. The collection of moments and subjects of the experimental listed above suggest that more than any one thing the Mexican experimental rests on a foundational and critical intentionality of unjust society.

Chapter I

Feminist Representations in *Novelwriting*: Verónica Gerber Bicecci, Cristina Rivera

Garza, and Marisol Ceh Moo

To better comprehend the feminist ideology in Mexico today, I argue it is necessary to consider the societal structures that limit gender equality. Among the major threats against feminism lies the reification of women in neoliberalism. At the same time, feminism in the arts serves as a counterpoint to hash out the problems and possibly recommend solutions. In this chapter, I will focus on three novels written by Mexican women authors and their feminist literary productions; however, I deem it important to highlight the form of feminism that runs parallel to my critical approach first. To write further away from the reach of influential markets and more commercial literary ventures, consequently, encourages the possibility for these novelists to strengthen their feminist critique of misogynist values in distinct Mexican regions.

Workplaces and Maternity Rooms: Irmgard Emmelhainz's Critique of Neoliberalism and Approach to Contemporary Feminism

La tiranía del sentido común: la reconversión neoliberal del México

published by Irmgard Emmelhainz in 2016 meets head on with the dangers of commercial based value structures in Mexico. In addition, Emmelhainz frames feminist practices within art production. Social structures in the twenty-first century, albeit at the workplace or in the maternity room, near a tragic state in Emmelhainz's critique of ideologies founded on economy. Neoliberalism empties the meaning of

humanity in present-day Mexico according to Emmelhainz: there is no escape from being economized due to a wide range of international and national practices (Emmelhainz 19). I suggest a summary of Emmelhainz's arguments encourages a more in-depth study of contemporary feminism in neoliberal times, and the workplace and the maternity room as space that have been violently handled by neoliberalism.

First, a local workplace as a social structure seizes to promise stable living in neoliberal times. Emmelhainz addresses the link between the international business and the consequential humanitarian tragedies that came from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico in 1994. The importation of agricultural goods to Mexico eliminated the idea of a prosperous workplace in Mexico (Emmelhainz 27). Thus, immigration to the United States begins to serve as a labor refuge for Mexican people. The tragic situation lies in the fact that the imperialism of the U.S. big businesses was the factor that activated the dehumanization of Mexican people in the mid-90s and has remained growing even today (Emmelhainz 17).

Second, the maternity room for Emmelhainz has turned into another space that neoliberalism has determined. This last societal place brings Emmelhainz's critique of neoliberalism closer to her emphasis on contemporary feminism. At the end of Emmelhainz's book, a social science reading of birthing rooms in Mexico demonstrates a final thesis. Without leaving the subject of hegemonic forces in international settings, Emmelhainz decides to conclude the work with several segments regarding motherhood: "Cabe notar que actualmente México es el país con más cesáreas en el mundo y con más baja lactancia maternal de América Latina: 45%

de los partos son cesáreas, mientras que en los hospitales privados el porcentaje de cesáreas alcanza un 70%, solo 15% de las mujeres amamantan a sus hijos exclusivamente los primeros seis meses de vida (Emmelhainz 246). The focus on the treatment of women's bodies and the disconcerting data behind the medicalization of births segues my initial observations. The way in which Emmelhainz makes neoliberalism evident in Mexico and carries this theory over to feminism provides an important introduction for this chapter; nonetheless, the focus on racial inequality between Indigenous, Mestizo, and White Mexicans does not enter directly into the study in this case of maternity. Statistics concerning race and socioeconomic status also inform these findings. Emmelhainz suggests a contemporary feminism without underlining the importance of race, which leaves out the phenomenally important findings from practices of intersectional feminism. Still, Emmelhainz underlines, "Mexico's population is very heterogeneous and is plagued by racist and classist prejudices" (Emmelhainz 193). The woman's body is something that is obviously significant and informative for Emmelhainz's analysis of neoliberalism, yet the absence of the importance of race in Mexican births lacks in the overall project. The focus on neoliberalism, art, and women by Emmelhainz, in this case, accompanies anti-racist texts like that of the Mayan critic, Rosa Pu Tzun; as a result, I observe that the dialogue between women critics permits there to be more coherence in the critical, intersectional feminist ideology.

Feminist Theory and Novelistic Ends

Emmelhainz enlists the following question: "Si el Estado y las corporaciones usan el arte como herramienta para avanzar sus intereses, teniendo en cuenta que la

autonomía del mismo siempre es una cuestión política, ¿dónde queda la autonomía del arte?” (Emmelhainz 151). The question exposes that art always runs the risk of having shallow depths due to other homogenous fields, and Emmelhainz points directly to the governmental, the corporate, and the political as primary influences. In chorus with Emmelhainz, I emphasize that the artistic symbolic value not only distinguishes the field from homogeneous economical practices, but the artistic field —through its determined autonomy— demonstrates what is at risk as well, the neoliberal totalization of human life. More specifically, Emmelhainz describes the life of women in the same neoliberal era as the arts. In other words, her question above can also read, “¿dónde queda la autonomía de la mujer?” The history of transgressive experimental form and narrative in combination with the history of feminism arranges a significant intersection. On the topic of the latter, Emmelhainz writes, “Sin denostar los logros de las mujeres que lucharon arduas batallas a nivel del cuerpo, sexualidad, trabajo y afectos, que deconstruyeron al género y sus arquetipos, permitiendo el ingreso de las mujeres al espacio público [. . .] hoy existe algo que ya no está funcionando del feminismo que heredamos de los setentas” (Emmelhaniz 223). The feminist ideology of the 1970s no longer resists efficiently; Emmelhainz argues for an alternative. Even so, Emmelhainz appreciates the experimental feminism decades before and does not assume to find a superior way to appeal for women’s rights; rather, I argue that Emmelhainz asks for a proportional feminism that relates to that contemporary time. In order to subvert power systems, like that of the patriarchy, Emmelhainz recommends that women must consider the corporal violence they receive daily in form of marketable body standards (Emmelhainz 241). Artistic autonomy

demonstrates the need for feminist autonomy: both fields must sustain their own value system to escape the pressures of the misogynist, neoliberal field.

I return to Emmelhainz's aforementioned emphasis that the autonomy of art is hard to find. In an appeal for a new "autonomous politicized art", Emmelhainz homes in on the fact that feminist approaches from the 1970s no longer have the same affect (Emmelhainz 223). The institution adheres to chronological, generational power; consequently, Emmelhainz demonstrates the movement away from pre-established artistic and feminist traditions. Here again, I make note of the significant histories of feminism and experimental art, and I hold that their strands of epistemological positions —when interwoven— yield experimental feminism. Moreover, I foment a comparison with the generational and feminist logic in play.

Current feminism in the novel and its publication indicates the necessity to deconstruct the form and narration of the neoliberal literary world. The preservation of the literary "ecosystem" in Mexico, according to Sánchez Prado, can actually be seen in the consolidation of publishing houses. Moreover, Emmelhainz explores the relationship between neoliberalism, the arts, and the anthropogenesis in order to define the *being* of the economy, *homo æconomicus*. Likewise, the two critical voices from Sánchez Prado and Emmelhainz seek to demonstrate global markets at work in Mexico to imagine a larger scale of the forces that influence novelists and women. On one hand, Sánchez Prado demonstrates a clearer direction of neoliberalism in the Mexican literary market. The study of contemporary novels by Sánchez Prado takes on attributes not too different from flowchart demonstrations: begin with the publishing house, continue to observe the group of authors, and

finally, consider the novelist's production.

Sánchez Prado clarifies that the *Boom femenino*, which is associated with Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta, “requires [other] women writers to be more reflexive and strategic in their position-takings, because the opening up of visible spaces often levies a backlash against them [possibly] dismissing them for their gendered angles” (*Strategic Occidentalism* 150). Sánchez Prado compares the *Boom femenino* with three that stand outside of the tradition: Carmen Boullosa, Ana García Bergua, and Cristina Rivera Garza. Furthermore, Sánchez Prado introduces “parallactic procedures” and “constellations” to present a more accurate representation of the novelists’ spatial position-taking.⁶

There are similarities in Emmelhainz’s critique of neoliberalism’s deadening affect on humans with that of Sánchez Prado’s commentary on contemporary Mexican literature. Emmelhainz also follows the clues of tragic economy in the arts. To the contrary of Sánchez Prado’s focus on Mexican literature and film, Emmelhainz runs the gamut from experimental art to pop culture icons while bringing to the surface the ill will behind late capitalism. For instance, Emmelhainz breathes air into the debate on the seriousness of capitalism’s effect on the arts and points out that a “sensibilidad neoliberal” of competition and antagonism have taken effect. Furthermore, Emmelhainz defines “necro-capitalismo” in the following terms:

el proceso de producción y valorización fundado en la destrucción de la vida, del medioambiente, del patrimonio y de los comunes. En los medios y en las redes sociales, se promueve la idea que la violencia del país es algo externo al neoliberalismo, una distorsión

⁶ The terms “parallactic procedure” (*Strategic* 163) and “constellations” (*Strategic* 172) for Sánchez Prado imagine the interpretation of eluding meanings and the necessary bibliographies to read Mexican women novelists.

causada por la cultura mexicana —proclive a la violencia y a la corrupción— como responsables de la violencia. (Emmelhainz 53)

The current neoliberalism in Mexico, Emmelhainz contends, can be seen clearly with respect to the reification of women's lives in her book chapter, "Neoliberalism y lucha de mujeres".

What is found in the twenty-first century novel from Mexico, for example, style, topic, form, and point of view, passes through a paradigm of neoliberalism. It is to say that the aspects of the relation between the center and the periphery of literary production, influences of transnationalism, and reactions by novelists to the economy determine the novelistic production. Independent publishing houses in Mexico foment an autonomy from literary conglomerates from Spain and the United States. It is of interest here to pay attention to the institutional determinants when considering contemporary feminist expression. The neoliberal turn that has yielded a totalizing form of capitalism influences institutions, albeit state, national, or independent.

Thus, feminist discourse in the novel also becomes vulnerable in these circumstances. The neoliberal logic does not fail to intervene time and time again. This latest form of capitalism influences all types of publishers, events, and grants. In the last years, Ignacio Sánchez Prado has written on the publishers of Mexican literature in order to understand a tradition that operates according to transnational competition. Sánchez Prado emphasizes "the role played by presses that have either emerged or been consolidated during the neoliberal era in preserving the literary ecosystem in Mexico" (Neoliberal Era 371-2).

Within this "ecosystem" I first highlight two novels from the last twelve years:

La muerte me da published in 2007 by Cristina Rivera Garza and *Conjunto vacío* published in 2015 by Verónica Gerber Bicecci. After these initial two comparisons I present *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* (*Sólo por ser mujer*), a second novel from 2015, published by Marisol Ceh Moo. The connections between the novels, the publishers, and the literary awards provide a profound look into subjects, form, region, and point of view in the contemporary Mexican novel. As a kind of introduction, I comment on the structure of the novels before looking at their larger cultural context and critique, for instance, characters, plot and major themes. The feminist critique by Emmelhainz informs my approach to the three novelists —Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo— and ensures a nuanced place of departure for Mexican women studies. The link between Sánchez Prado and Emmelhainz makes it possible to organize the three novels by Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo with respect to their oppositional moves against commercial publications and patriarchy.

**Interpersonal, International and Intermedial Feminism: *Conjunto vacío* (2015)
by Verónica Gerber Bicecci**

Experimental form, narrative, autobiography and feminism in the contemporary Mexican novel relate to *Conjunto vacío* written by Verónica Gerber Bicecci in 2015. The pages of *Conjunto vacío* imagine nuanced features for the experimental novel in Mexico not only because it questions the contemporary time in which it was written but for the feminist critique it provides as well. Gerber Bicecci collaborates with *Almadía*, the literary press based in Oaxaca, Oaxaca, to publish her

first book *Mudanza* in 2010 and her second, *Conjunto vacío*.⁷

The relationship between Gerber Bicecci and *Almadía* has led to a sequence of works; therefore, it is useful to consider what the creative essay *Mudanza* foment in the institutional context of the Mexican novel. If the literary market in Mexico had a symbolic horizon that represented its reach, *Mudanza* would help trace the most distant lines. Sánchez Prado relates the work to examples that go against “strong forces of homogenization”; as a result, *Mudanza* can be seen as a critical reference to “forms of the literary essay that become more and more hybridized over time” (Neoliberal Era 376). Gerber Bicecci structures the essay with anecdotes and descriptions of artistic exhibitions. Another autobiographic story about Gerber Bicecci as a visual artist emerges in *Mudanza*. The combination of the U.S. artist Vito Acconci and the author Ulises Carrión emphasizes the author’s transnational and comparative point of view.⁸

Apart from some reviews of *Conjunto vacío* and the English translation, *Empty Set* from 2018, there has been little critical thought on the novel from contemporary Mexican literary critics. The magazine *Letras Libres* opts to publish a video of Gerber Bicecci instead of approaching the novel with the intention of interpretation. In the two minute and thirty second clip, there are some shots of the author reading the novel in a studio along with photos of the

⁷ Taller Ditoria and Editorial Auieo first publish *Mudanza* in 2010, and *Almadía* proceeds to do so the same year.

⁸ Vito Acconci (1940-2017) was an American artist who worked with video and installation and often showcased his own performances. Ulises Carrión (1941-1989) was a Mexican conceptual artist and authored *El arte nuevo de hacer libros* (1975).

supplementary illustrations as well. Another important dimension at the Mexican institutional level corresponds to the *Premio Internacional de Literatura Aura Estrada* —an award that *Almadía* presents— and the significance that Gerber Bicecci received it in 2013. The relationship between the publishing house and the author-artist, I argue, begins to point to a collaboration that evades the homogenous global literary market. The initial development of Gerber Bicecci has not had to establish itself through exploitative industrial processes. To the contrary, these two publications come from alternative beginnings and promise a future image of Gerber Bicecci as an artist who has risen without commercial influence. Therefore, the first novel by Gerber Bicecci, which is the second publication by the author with *Almadía* and the recipient of the international award by the publishing house, fosters a unique entryway into the novel as a study of the institutional moves of the literary global market and a larger cultural context.

Conjunto vacío approaches the life of the autobiographical protagonist to give a sense of the advance of women in the arts despite the collapse of nations and the traumatic exile that follows. Feminism promises a human element because it tells the story of struggle and determination. Furthermore, women studies that promote inclusivity adds an additional feature of anthropogenesis. The conviviality between contemporary experimental *novelwriters* in Mexico has begun to make diversity a requirement; hence, the inclusion of Gerber Bicecci frames to imagine displacement

in the Americas comes from a formerly excluded point of view. The intersection between race, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic class, which is crucial for intersectional feminism, depicts Gerber Bicecci as a white woman in exile with the financial ability to travel freely. Both the privilege and the hardship that pertains to Gerber Bicecci shows how the contemporary experimental novel in Mexico promotes feminism and imagines the coming diversity and inclusion of demarginalized *novelwriters*.

Interpersonal and International Feminism

There are not encounters at the border, nor is there a focus on the systemic classism and racism aligned with travel to the U.S. Vero, as a white Argentinian-Mexican woman, lives a privileged life even though she is the first generation to live outside of a country her relatives deemed absolutely necessary to escape. The social hierarchy of the protagonist is relevant throughout my analysis because I attempt to locate an understanding of just how experimental a novel without criticism of racism and classism is still experimental. Irmgard Emmelhainz signals to the distortion of feminism by the neoliberal system and remarks on the depoliticization of the ideology and the body of the woman's body under attack. The experimental bifurcations in form and narrative, I find, demonstrate Gerber Bicecci as both an author willing to look back into her past even though she seems to be selective about what is around her in Mexico City, a large Mestizo and Indigenous population. Commentary on the systemic racism that also determines women's professionalization in the arts, and certainly the ability to travel to the U.S. and Argentina, does not come into question in *Conjunto vacío*. The mirroring of Vero's grandmother's house and the bunker in Mexico City demonstrates

the horrors of dictatorship and the improvised installation into the largest Latin American city. Mexico City, regardless, operates differently for the white demographic compared to that of the Indigenous or Mestizo population. Given these intersections that involve race and gender, I will also give context to the anti-racism and feminism practiced by Emmelhainz. The form of the novel *Conjunto vacío* is constituted of prose, passages of poetry, and illustrations. Véronica, the protagonist, remembers a romantic relationship, hangs out with fellow artists, and travels between Mexico, the U.S., and Argentina. The movement between these three places establishes a transnational logic. Because the storyline in the novel revolves around the life of a young artist, there is reason to view Gerber Bicecci's first novel as a variation of the *Künstlerroman*. As the novel develops, it is apparent that Gerber Bicecci's intention encompasses more than a singular story of an artist; although, the author ensures that the readership always occurs alongside viewership. The result of the intermedial *Künstlerroman* references another experience.⁹ Gerber Bicecci instates the movement of floating genres that meet on both pages and canvases, so the artistic lens always covers the different novelistic shots.

Besides telling a story about artists and their sexual relationships — one that develops along with subtle hints at the history of American immigration in the background— Gerber Bicecci places the debate on novelistic aesthetics and feminism in the foreground. The author-artist's decision to alternate between illustration and printed word advances a nuanced image of language and prose. Carlos Pardo explains:

⁹ With the shared German etymology of the bildungsroman, this subgenre of the novel focuses on the formation of an artist. *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) by James Joyce serves as another example. With the focus on the development of a young person trying to find their unique aesthetics the genre often provides remarks on the contemporary Avant Garde.

Conjunto vacío apunta a lo esencial de cualquier relato: dar sentido a un tiempo fortuito, en este caso habitar la propia vida a través de una historia. Gerber juega con las expectativas de una lectura lineal (si la novela comienza con una ruptura debería finalizar con un nuevo amor, otro comienzo) y las enfrenta a irónicos juegos circulares” (Pardo).

In other words, Gerber Bicecci decides not to stop at the novelistic prose with illustrations.

Given the number of illustrations, the words frame each image and vice versa.

Between “observaciones”, epistolary, emails and short questions that give some order to the novel, the fragmentation still operates at a high level. In fact, it might be difficult to categorize *Conjunto Vacío* in the literary genre of the novel. Gerber Bicecci’s intermedial production highlights new forms of feminism; therefore, Mexican *novelwriting* guides literary and artistic genres to shared spaces, like that of feminist discourse, and to their aesthetic limits.

The illustrations by Gerber Bicecci in the novel pass the prose through another artistic epistemology, drawing, which is equally reflected in the prose. Gerber Bicecci structures the form of *Conjunto vacío* with prose and illustrations. In other words, *Conjunto vacío* is made up with primarily illustrations and some prose. Gerber Bicecci edits a heterogeneous amount of black and white drawings: graphics of dendrochronology (the study of time through interpreting the rings in tree trunks) nodes, uses of negative space, vectors, curved abstractions, and smears. These illustrations prioritize another sequence of events that weave into the sequence found in the prose. Second, the plot about the first-person narrator, I suggest, foments observations about the quotidian life of artists and literary minded immigrants. Vero,

the protagonist, is an art student at la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Through this omniscient voice, Vero reflects on the aesthetics of language while she remembers a brief relationship that she had with a professor that moves to New York City. Either the passages about her brother—a filmmaker that documents city stories—or her friends—artists who do not know how to draw— *Conjunto vacío* explores the avant-garde arts that emerge in Mexico, D.F., in the beginning of this century.

Third, the portrait of the family in the novel provides a study of the affect that immigration and travel induce in the characters. The abbreviation (H) for *hermano* (brother), (M) for *mamá* (mom), (Ab) for *abuelita* (grandma), and (Y) for *yo* (me) demonstrates the way in which Gerber Bicecci seeks to change and displace the semiology of basic signs. Consequently, this leads to an abstraction of the representations of immigration that hinge upon narratives that rely on normative gender and family models; for example, the lack of hyper-masculine characters in the novel instills a narrative that takes place on a matriarchal plane. The language about the family mutates into metonymy; thus, the family and their geographic movements create a *poiesis* within the formal aspects of the novel. A fourth nuance in the novel are the comments about the neoliberal institutionalization in Mexico. The scenes and the memories that take place in the Biblioteca Central de la UNAM along with the improvised trips to the U.S. and Argentina highlight a negotiation of the Mexican arts in the global market. There is no commentary about the impossibility of getting visas to the U.S. or the poverty caused by U.S. hegemony; however, Gerber Bicecci critiques the Dirty War of Argentina (1974-1983) serves as the traumatic backdrop of

this narrative; nonetheless, Gerber-Bicecci's story does not propose questions about some of the most pressing topics today, for example, race relations, poverty, economic inequality, restrictive travel due to immigration, and equity in general.¹⁰ The political and historical commentary by Gerber Bicecci goes on to underline the importance of finding other aesthetic options. Hence, I focus on the form and narrative by Gerber Bicecci that intervenes in the literary format in order to sketch out feminist ideologies.

The novelistic approach by Gerber Bicecci, along with the essayistic style in *Mudanza* contributes to the comparison with the feminist theory by Emmelhainz. The political and historical commentary by Gerber Bicecci goes on to underline the importance of finding other aesthetic options in illustrations and metonymic language. The term "necropolis interior" serves as a descriptor of Argentina, for Emilia Deffis, due to the suspended heartache and trauma. In addition, Deffis states that the novel proves to "deconstruct false explanations and denial, that prevails today in Argentina about the topic of the disappeared during the last dictatorship" (Deffis 30).¹¹ The approach by Gerber Bicecci contributes to the retelling of State violence in the analysis by Deffis. The comparison of the feminist theory by Emmelhainz with that of *Conjunto vacío* to further advocate that this experimental novel gives dimension to the empowerment of women.

I compare the novel by Gerber Bicecci with the theory by Emmelhainz to

¹⁰ The importance of Gerber Bicecci's family and their exile from Argentina to Mexico is the basis of a comparison with another Argentinean and Mexican author, Tununa Mercado, "Verónica Gerber nombra otro silencio construido por la dictadura: no es el de la censura, sino el que se crea en torno a la memoria doliente, el que se produce cuando la generación anterior de *argenmex*" (De la Cruz).

¹¹ Deffis clarifies, "sirve para la destrucción de las falsas explicaciones y las negaciones, que imperan todavía hoy en la Argentina sobre el tema de los desaparecidos durante la última dictadura" (Deffis 30).

explore the relationship between neoliberalism, the arts, and anthropogenesis. I emphasize the significance of *homo æconomicus*. Emmelhainz writes that it is “el producto final del proceso productivo como máquina de subjetiivación y sujeción” (the final product of the productive process like a machine of subjectivation and subjection (Emmelhainz 100). Emmelhainz critiques the neoliberal logic in Mexico and places doubt on the paradigms that control women according to economic practices. Furthermore, Emmelhainz problematizes the beauty standards for women and the medicalization of giving birth in Mexico today. The different dimensions of the arts and popular culture —from Lady Gaga to Kim Kardashian— project a representation of women in Emmelhainz’s critical theory. Concerning “la espectacularización de la feminidad” and its totalizing influence in the arts, Emmelhainz remarks that women turn into a mannequin and “la subjetividad del maniquí es su espectacularización” (the subjectivity of the mannequin is its spectacularization) (Emmelhainz 53). If the point of view of women is defined by the interpretation of spectacles in the global mass media, as Emmelhainz suggests, the circulation of “alternative” forms and narratives becomes an urgent matter. The history of feminism from the seventies hinges on the politics associated with women’s bodies, but Emmelhainz comments that while under the neoliberal order of this century, this ideology is under attack.¹² If “alternative” Mexican novels seize to

¹² The second wave of feminism in Mexico is framed in the publications *La Revuelta*, *Fem*, and *Editorial CIHUAT*. The focus on women’s bodies as a key point for feminism can be seen in the following: *La Revuelta*, No. 7, octubre de 1976 (concerns rape and psychology); *Fem*, Vol.1 No. 1, octubre-diciembre 1976 (contains 24 articles from different writers about sexuality); *CIHUAT*, Año 1-Num. 5, septiembre de 1977 (describes the current political situation regarding the right for abortion). *Archivos-Feministas*. <http://archivos-feministas.cieg.unam.mx>.

emerge in the conversations of readers, it is only a question of time when late capitalism will determine the literary world to the point of no return.

Due to the disorganization of the aesthetic and narratological contours in the novel, Gerber Bicecci signals a critique of literature and offers other options for authors and readers. I propose that *Conjunto vacío* disrupts the “espectacularización de la feminidad” in following the movements of the artist-author, Vero. Gerber Bicecci does not focus on the way the character appears to others, nor does she fill the prose with interior monologue about how the character sees herself. The point of view from the protagonist incorporates other artists’ and academics’ ideas of creative and professional advances. Although the narrator makes it clear that almost every character thinks about how the world looks and sounds, there is little attention to how they look or sound. The world becomes the “spectacle” in lieu of the subjects themselves, and this novelistic reality steps far back from feminine stereotypes. Vero contemplates the double lives of two boyfriends: one is a professor, and the other is a graduate student. Given that the boyfriends take their absence or turn into “fantasmas” (ghosts) in the U.S., like Gerber Bicecci describes, it is an opportune and urgent moment to demonstrate women socializing. In the drawings, Gerber Bicecci projects the independence that the protagonist maintains despite exterior factors, for example, the expectation of immigrants to uphold relationships and matrimonies even though that could mean years, even decades, of separation. The abbreviation aforementioned, (Y), for *yo* stands in place of the actual word, which also occurs for the graduate student Alonso (A). At this moment, the neoliberal academic system in the U.S. that provokes the immigration of Mexican academics

leads to a visualization of feminist spaces and relationships.

The importance of political and family history deserves attention in order to better comprehend the multidimensional novel. The two types of history meld into one in *Conjunto vacío*; however, Gerber Bicecci digs deeper with respect to the latter. The novel explores the interactions between a woman artist-novelist and her family. It is important to remember that Vero's Mom(M) is both a professional woman that disappeared during a dictatorship. The definition of "necro-capitalismo" points to the violence against women under capitalistic nations, for Emmelhainz, and this observation is also key for Gerber Bicecci's retelling of the loss of her mother due to dictatorship. The feminist proposal in the novel hinges upon a woman and the evolving of interpersonal relationships. Memories of affective moments in the protagonist's life structures the arch of the narrative; the brother (H) and the mother (M) interweave distinct times and places. The portrayal of grandparents in Argentina sheds light on a past generation, but it also puts in perspective Vero's life as a woman artist. The ebb and flow of *Conjunto vacío* moves according to the artistic curiosity of the protagonist. Rather than separate the role of family from her development as a visual artist, Gerber Bicecci envelops novelistic aesthetic with these personal relationships. Political and family history influence many moments in the novel, for example, their house in Mexico City: "Una cápsula de tiempo donde todo permanece en perpetuo abandono" (*Conjunto vacío* 19). Vero's research on dendrochronology, the study of the rings imprinted within tree trunks, also emphasizes the importance of time: "No se trata solamente de saber su dad, en los dibujos de la madera se queda marcada la historia de su bosque" (*Conjunto vacío*

62). The Mexican-Argentina ties in the novel adjust the historical features into national discourses many times in the novel.

Argentina's Dirty War leads to the exile of the family. Even though the novel captures much more than families in national crisis, I recommend a reading of *Conjunto vacío* that first considers the cut and dry reason for splitting up a family. By taking note of the fear of political violence manifesting within tightly knit relationships, I suggest the novel oscillates between personal philosophies and national ideologies. A group of individuals with shared stories—a simplified definition for family—must answer to exterior power that threatens their existence. As the most intimate and personal institutions, the family naturally divides into nuanced representations in contemporary literature. Twentieth and twenty-first century socio-political truths, like that of exile and the separation of family, emerge as major themes in *Conjunto vacío*. The protagonist explains this overlap of family and political turmoil towards the beginning of the novel:

En la primaria entendí que en México vive mi 'familia nuclear', y la idea me convenció porque imaginaba una explosión que nos esparció a todos por el mundo. Esa bomba, en nuestro caso, se llama dictadura. Y el estallido, exilio. Mamá (M) también confesó que papa estaba en la lista negra y después, indignada, dijo que todo mundo estaba en la lista negra. Ahí quedó. Lo que oíamos llegaba así, de forma desordenada, montones de anécdotas sueltas que en mi cabeza no eran más que puro caos. (*Conjunto vacío* 33)

The younger version of the protagonist struggles to make any sense of this world where a family has two choices: face extemporaneous immigration or certain violence. It is worth noting that the father figure rarely appears in the novel; however, it is sensical to mention his absence while on the topic of exile. Even after displacement occurs, personal relationships succumb to precarity, and the after-effects

can compute into the erasure of figures. Yet, while the disappearance of the father allows for the voice of women, for example, the (M), to stage more of the novel's feminist base, Gerber Bicecci carefully signals to the human consequences of dictatorship and exile. In other words, people simply seize to exist within the general makeup of a society hardened by political violence. It is relevant to observe the “caos” felt by the young Vero in hearing random and contradictory stories; by and large, *Conjunto vacío* narrates the abbreviation of lifestyles in the upheaval of national identities.

Toward the end of *Conjunto vacío*, the attention to a family, who still live past political events, remains a significant topic. The disorientation of the “forma desordenada” and the “montones de anécdotas sueltas” results from nation-states in crisis and causes the family timeline to fragment when Vero and (H) go to Argentina together:

Los árboles del jardín del abuelo están secos. Cuando veníamos de visita comíamos duraznos y ciruelas [. . .] A la tumba de mi abuelo fui solamente una vez [. . .] La tumba tiene una placa pequeña con su nombre y a un lado hay un pequeño agujero para poner flores. ¿Cuándo fue la última vez que estuvimos aquí, en Argentina? En 1993, me dice mi Hermano (H). ¿Y qué año es este? 2003. (*Conjunto vacío* 191).

The family history in *Conjunto vacío* depicts the scrambled reality of exiled groups of people. Gerber Bicecci does not miss the opportunity to carry this splitting of time over to the structure of the novel. Consequently, the characters ostensibly travel through time to make sense of the chronology of their history. I argue that it is necessary for the reader to give in to this constant inquiry about the causality of events unique to the group of tight-knit people; otherwise, the stories are undermined

by superficial analysis. Vero and her family do not have the privilege of a stable and consistent history. Instead of lamenting this jolted reality completely, Gerber Bicecci gathers the many pieces to advocate for a feminist ready-made visual novel. In other words, the separation of nations and family already existed: *Conjunto vacío* takes the “caos” and spins her own succession of stories to focus on a woman’s development as an artist.

The numerous descriptions of artists in *Conjunto vacío* echoes Gerber Bicecci’s first book, *Mudanza*. The artists set forth experimentation in their own projects and establish a thematic format for both books. While Gerber Bicecci describes the trajectory into aesthetics in various artistic traditions, the idea of imperfect production underpins her subjects. Although these literary characters in the books run parallel in many ways, there is a noticeable difference. *Mudanza* frames the story of well-known artists and writers: the narration in *Conjunto vacío* approaches the lives of artists close to the author. A short list of some of the artists and their approaches to the arts provides an intelligible summary of artistic perspectives in the novel:

Yo (Y)- “quería ser artista pero casi todo lo pensaba en palabras” (35).

Hermano (H)- “Está obsesionado con el alto contraste, con cómo una imagen pierde definición y se vuelve abstracta al convertirla en dos tonos. Hace pruebas con pequeñísimos extractos reencuadrados de los documentales en los que ha trabajado” (170).

El Tordo (T)- “es artista visual, pero le hubiera gustado ser escritor” (35).

Ella (E)- “a diferencia de mí, sí era fotógrafa profesional” (51).

Marisa (M_x)- “recortaba de revistas y periódicos: desayunos, entradas, platos fuertes, postres, etcétera” (127).

The various artists in the novel suggest Gerber Bicecci is less concerned about

literature and more about visual artists; however, the traits of these arts align to counteract one another. In particular, Yo (Y) and El Tordo (T) inhabit this type of artistic process. Depending on how the subject relates to art production will determine their meaning in the novel. I observe that the novel constructs not only the narrative with the protagonist's and secondary characters' art, but the decision to comment on many artists allows for a less quality orientated understanding of creative production; therefore, the experimentation by the artists emerges as a key feature of *Conjunto vacío*.

Intermedial Feminism

Random places do not set the scenes in *Conjunto vacío*. On the contrary, Gerber Bicecci charges her novel with iconic places. The inclusion of an alternative depiction of the Biblioteca Central de la UNAM in the novel exemplifies the counternarrative Gerber Bicecci recounts. The description of Vero's childhood in *Conjunto vacío* also incorporates the library. The protagonist remembers, "Parece el mismo lugar al que entraba con Mamá(M) cuando era chica: los bibliotecarios malhumorados del sindicato de la UNAM [. . .] como Mamá (M) no tenía con quién dejarme, me llevaba a sus clases con un estuche de lápices de colores y un libro de pintura abstracta para iluminar. Hacíamos una parada obligatoria en la biblioteca" (Gerber Bicecci 125). The focus on women characters in the passage frames maternity, and Gerber Bicecci provides another subversive feature of the library when she avoids narratives organized by men's points of view. The male canon in literature, I observe, builds the library systems; however, Gerber Bicecci visits the library with a friend:

“Violeta era mi amiga desde la preparatoria. Fue una de las pocas personas con quien crucé palabra en esos meses. Tomaba una clase de oyente en la UNAM que era exactamente sobre el tema de su tesis. También pasaba mucho tiempo en la Biblioteca Central” (Gerber Bicecci 45). Vero, Violeta, and Mamá (M) come together to do investigative research, work, and spend time with other women; consequently, the library becomes a space for women’s conviviality. Nevertheless, it is also significant that Gerber Bicecci frames the research of indigenous languages in the description of Violet’s boyfriend and complications between relationships, “Él iba a la Biblioteca de Estéticas, estaba analizando un códice mixteco o zapoteco (nunca lo tuve muy claro) para su tesis de licenciatura. Solían discutir sobre mí” (Gerber Bicecci 45).¹³ The description of Violet’s boyfriend adds vague ideas about the knowledge of Mexican indigenous codex and places this epistemology within a jealous relationship. At the same time, Vero’s memory does not allow for the distinction between one indigenous text with another. Despite the heavy weight of the disappearance of the mother and father, the intersections of gender still play out to the extent that Vero has chosen to fill the pages with stories about the lives of women at professional. Gerber Bicecci forgoes the decision to focus on the disappearance of men in her family, for example her father; instead, the life of the mother takes on many complex dimensions. For instance, the memories of the mother lecturing at the university indicates complicate her tragic experience of dictatorship and State violence. Consequently, the experimental novel serves as a way to make it known that there will be never before read or seen narratives.

¹³ Instead of arguing that Gerber Bicecci’s autobiographical character does not care about the recognition of different indigenous peoples, I suggest that the novel could be exposing the character’s ignorance. Still, it is significant to underline that the novel does not offer critical thinking on the marginalization of non-white Mexicans or indigenous peoples.

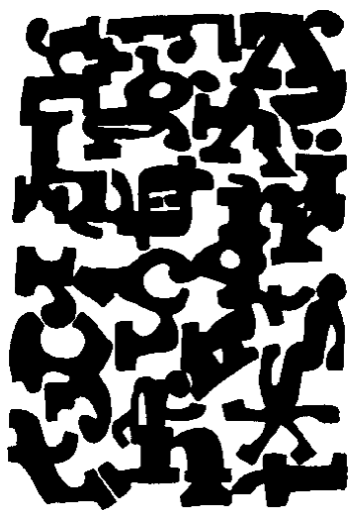


Fig. 1 (Gerber Bicecci
119)

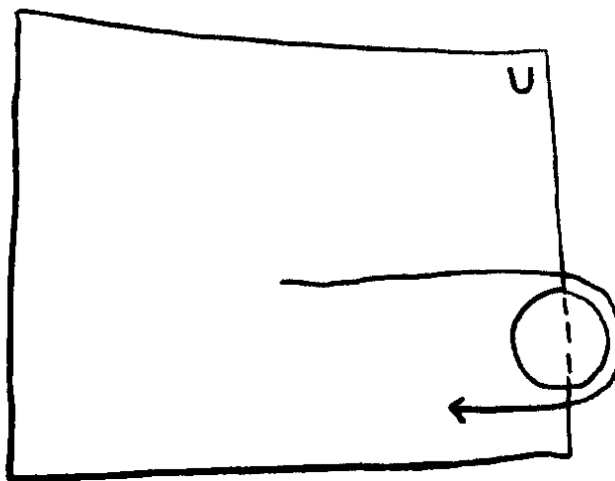


Fig. 2 (Gerber Bicecci 181)

Conjunto vacío fosters ideas about semiology and alphabetic signs. Hence, Gerber Bicecci explores the form of the novel itself when considering its supplemental features: it is an illustrative work apart from being a prosaic work. Through this intermedial approach, the illustrations complement and supplement the prose in a narratological sense. In a review of the novel Marta Macho Stadler writes, “Cada personaje se identifica con una letra (ella es Y –de yo–, M es su madre, A es su hermano, etc.). Cada encuentro, cada abandono, cada relación con uno u otro personaje se expresa a través de [estas] imágenes geométricas” (Macho Stadler). It is clear that these abbreviations of the characters’ names and other actions coincide with the illustrations as seen in figure 2 below. The “U” in the top-right corner of the illustration references the time the first-person narrator returns to Argentina, where her grandmother lives, from Mexico. It is possible to interpret the turn-around at Tierra del Fuego provides another language to travel literature: “*El Faro del fin del mundo* no existe y en realidad, es el título de una novela de Julio Verne, dice la guía. Qué desfachatez. Lo más patético es que el barco da vuelta en U en el supuesto fin del mundo y regresa como si nada” (Gerber Bicecci 181). Since Gerber Bicecci offers critical thinking on the function of the novel, this “desfachatez” by Julio Verne exemplifies what type of novel *Conjunto vacío* is not.

Magdalena Perkowska has signaled that in the literature by Mario Bellatin, a relative contemporary of Gerber Bicecci, the mixture of prose and other media can subvert the verisimilar logic of each expression and range between what is considered a complement for the text and a supplement for the text (Perkowska 187). It should

not be surprising that the obfuscation of the narrative results in creativity and productivity when the intermediality explores the genre of the novel instead of restraining it. Therefore, I call attention to the way *Conjunto vacío* welcomes distortion through prose and illustration. When Gerber Bicecci interweaves the two mediums, the meaning of both alternates. A long list of patterns exists that can categorize a novel within the experimental tradition; it is only natural that when an artistic vanguard emerges so does critical experimentation.

Moreover, Carolyn Fornoff suggests that *Conjunto vacío* resonates in the genre best defined as experimental autofiction.¹⁴ The telling of a woman's story about exile and art underlines the expected and unexpected struggles; on one hand, I recall the importance of race relations socioeconomics, intersectional feminism for the experimental today. Gerber Bicecci's novel, possibly, falls short of the experimental according to race relation and anti-racism, even though the intermedial and the story of exile underlines hardship. Consequently, the new narratives and forms in the contemporary experimental novel from Mexico will begin to address this inequality.

Literary Crime and Feminism: *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza

La muerte me da follows the story of five characters: an assassin who castrates men, the detective in charge of capturing the assassin, the detective's assistant, Professor Cristina Rivera Garza, and a woman newspaper reporter. The first-person narration is interwoven with third person omniscience. The arrangement of points of view explores the author herself. Consequently, this self-inclusion adds

¹⁴ Fornoff, Carolyn. "Isolation and the Incomplete". Public Books.
<http://www.publicbooks.org/isolation-and-the-incomplete/>.

a deep focus effect in Rivera Garza's novel through passages by Alejandra Pizarnik and essayist prose about violence against women in México, D.F. The novel takes on the traits of women intellectuals and feminist activism when Rivera Garza decides to meditate on other women literary authors to frame her own expression in the field. Oswaldo Estrada remarks, "es innegable que tanto la presencia literaria de la poeta argentina como la construcción que Rivera Garza realiza de un lenguaje poético-novelístico, con las cualidades violentas, transgresoras y fragmentarias que su antecesora buscara en la prosa, crean el ambiente propicio para nuevos e inciertos hallazgos de identidad" (Estrada 194). Rivera Garza gets to know the limits of "la novela negra" (hardboiled fiction) when pushing the envelope with respect to plots that run their courses in accordance with the lives of women. In addition, the graphic scenes, which portray the assassin's decision to oppose men, add transparency to the distortion of women's lives. The following is a telling example: "Vi eso. Ahí donde deberían estar el pene y los testículos se encontraba, en su lugar la carne mancillada, terrena. La falta en rojo. La castración. Todo eso envuelto en el aroma ácido de la sangre" (*La muerte me da* 23). The topic of violence functions as a pillar in the contemporary Mexican novel. In this way, contemporary *novelwriting* follows the sociopolitical concern; the literature from the North of Mexico and its production of the narco-narrative is case in point.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the approach to violence in the

¹⁵ In addition, the historical fiction and the narco-fiction present in these novels have been valid since the latter years of the twentieth century. *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) by Rivera Garza offers a portrait of a woman that lives in Mexico City during the Mexican Revolution and on into the 1950s. From the protagonist's point of view the Mexican Revolution plays a secondary role. Rivera Garza opts for a plot structure that rests on the character's psychology, which resonates from flow of consciousness techniques, in place of political jargon and war underpinnings. Ten plus years later, the novel *Fiesta en la madriguera* (2010) by Juan Pablo Villalobos proves to show further exploration on

form of castration fosters a distinct symbolic value once compared to other representations. The style of Rivera Garza, while never completely leaving “la novela negra” model, facilitates an academic and novelistic gesture, and as a result suggests other subgenres, for instance, metafiction and autobiography. *La muerte me da* sprawls out into other tones and approximations in literature and upends prior notions of mixed-genre productions. In fact, the style in *La muerte me da* includes a heterogeneity of other trajectories —apart from feminist activism and the critique of Mexican literary institutions. Among them, performative art and Mexican and Latin American literature also pass in front of the vision of a character that has the name and profession of the real-life author.

La muerte me da situates the frame of “la novela negra” and structures a story about a criminal that is loose in a major city. Simultaneously, the subgenres like detective fiction and the *thriller* also play a role in the narrative. The observations made by Glen S. Close have instigated my approach to *La muerte me da*: “[T]he novel’s own attributes: broken syntax, frequent disruptions of narrative continuity, major and unresolved gaps in information, and impenetrable passages, all of which fly in the face of genre convention” (Close 408). While Close focuses on a rereading of the *narconovela* I advocate for more contemplation on the feminist discourse *La muerte me da*.

the representation of political and national violence. Villalobos unsettles established truths with storylines driven by the surroundings of a drug lord’s child. The novelist takes a step back from both heartbreaking testimonial and commercial shoot-em-up fiction. Villalobos enters into the psyche of the child. Here again, the character’s point of view affords another visualization of the novel. Hence, the social elements —the sense of loss that comes from violence reaches to a young innocent child in *Fiesta en la madriguera*— reshape the novel for contemporary times.

There are three dimensions of the novel that demonstrate an effort to stretch these genres out: 1) the castration of the victims; 2) the focus on women's literature; 3) the representation of mass media. The three themes function as a hinge that facilitates an entryway into another type of crime novel. In the following pages, I will bring more attention to each one of these dimensions and how they refract the normative projection of the contemporary Mexican novel. Still, I emphasize the importance of the crime of castration in the novel. Rivera Garza puts the hypermasculine detective literary world upside down when descriptions of excised penises, which clearly interweaves phallic symbols within the style, appear with detail throughout the novel.¹⁶ The decision to pause and reflect on the graphics of genital mutilation scenes interrupt the logic of action that is associated with the crime novel. Instead of approaching the violence towards women in Mexico via this subgenre, which has served a variety of novelists from the *Literatura del Norte*, Rivera Garza alternates the norms of the literary model. The castration in the foreground of the crime novel changes the limits of the work. Due to the sexism present in the genre, albeit during the beginning of the twentieth century until now, Rivera Garza makes a feminist point that begins with the criminal violence and extends out to question patriarchal forces in the literary field. Emily Hind addresses the *poiesis* that occurs in the novel that subverts language with gender violence in mind, "La técnica poética de contemplar de manera no-denotativa el lenguaje extrae las formidables contradicciones del idioma, como la de escribir la palabra 'femenino'

¹⁶ Roberto Domínguez Cáceres explains that Rivera Garza's stories complicate singular conclusions when the narratives "bordean las razones de sus personajes, disimulan las intenciones de los efectos retóricos de su escritura o difieren la revelación del mundo que narran" (Domínguez Cáceres 449).

en el masculino o como nota la novela, siempre escribir *la* víctima sin importar a quién se refiera” (Hind 328). In a performative sense, Rivera Garza writes *La muerte me da* and at the same time asks the readership if it is possible for *novelwriting* to function according to the subversion of misogyny.

The detective structure of *La muerte me da* respects traditional forms of the genre to some degree. The novel involves desk work and street work. In the first type of work, readers of detective fiction expect to see the case appear for the first time in the police station. Maybe the detective receives a phone call or possibly she is called into the chief’s corner office. The crime first takes form as a document for the detective —albeit sometimes the readers will have an antecedent glimpse of the criminal—. On page, violent crimes are made up of lists, boxes, and short informative paragraphs: an experienced detective interprets the harmed bodies through words. Novice readers of the detective genre might find the fragmentation in the case notes too abstract. In the instance that the police paperwork comes in complex prose, for example, dialogue between characters, there is an underlying intention to confuse the reading. The narrator of this literature fleshes out loose ends and surprising twists not only for the reader but for the detective as well. More often than not, an open area with a dozen or so people comparing notes on other mysteries serves as the detective’s place for organizing the criminal narrative. Rivera Garza does not miss the opportunity to complicate her feminist novel with spaces that run counter to the traditional office of the detective. *La muerte me da* functions both as a feminist and a detective novel. I contend that the description of where the desk work takes place, which occurs early in the novel, provides initial evidence that this piece

of literature is a feminist-detective novel. When the Dra. Rivera Garza —the character— first meets the detective, I suggest, the first-person narration connects the two genres:

Estábamos dentro de la oficina de la Detective -un sótano cimbrado por el ruido de voces desiguales y la velocidad blanca de papeles que van de mano en mano- y, tal vez por eso, las minúsculas palabras en esmalte de uñas parecieron más amenazadoras y más cómicas. Un cuento infantil. Ese tipo de crueldad. En este lugar adonde no parecía llegar otra luz más que la artificial, en donde los ojos de la Detective se acostumbraron seguramente a su propia opacidad, las palabras de Alejandra Pizarnik hacían que el mundo de allá afuera, el mundo que la mató, pareciera benigno o banal.
(*La muerte me da* 25)

Here in the basement of polyphonic sounds, women fulfill professions in society usually designated for men: the detective, the Doctor of Literature, and the poet. The assassin, who never is said to necessarily to be a woman, animates another inversion despite their gender neutrality (*La muerte me da* 30, 126, 220). The castration of men is substituted for the more common crime of feminicide. The assassin seen as a feminist demonstrates the boundaries of feminism and clarifies that the critique of violent feminism, for example, militant feminism, does not hold strong. Rivera Garza supplies responses to the common critique that feminism exaggerates by legitimizing the most violent act to a man, castration. If it were not for the castrations, the poet and the two readers would not have ever aligned with another to observe the real tragedy of misogyny. The varying voices and the passing of papers, like any other detective's office, serves as the diegetic sound. Dr. Rivera Garza finds the poetry written in coral colored nail polish more "threatening" and more "comical". The first-person narration places emphasis on the surroundings and

makes it possible for the three women to jointly occupy the office. It has been noted by Alejandro Palma Castro and Cécile Quintana that Rivera Garza prioritizes the human experience; however, in *La muerte me da*, I insist that it is the woman's experience in a Mexican city to which the author plays closer attention.¹⁷ The detective's office yields a sensorial atmosphere with audio and visuals. The artificial lighting with which the eyes of the detective have become accustomed has resulted in the obscurity of her own desk work. Pizarnik's words, for Doctora Rivera Garza, make the world outside of the detective's office seemingly harmless and simple; however, the narration points out that it is the same one that killed Pizarnik. The desk work by the woman detective first appears jaded by the expected sounds and the bad light. Usually, the headache provoking space only reflects the violent world outside: Doctor Rivera Garza thinks differently. While the detective and the doctor look at the criminal's citations of Pizarnik, the doctor realizes that their collaborative work demonstrates that the seemingly harmless world is actually the one that murdered the poet. In other words, the desk work in this office permits the analysis of poetry and the discovery of subtle violent realities. Despite the poor lighting and generic background noise, the three women —the detective, Dr. Rivera

¹⁷ The critical thinking by Palma Castro and Quintana provide telling commentary on the difficulty of deciphering Rivera Garza's literary production, "[L]a prolífica obra de Rivera Garza se distiende hacia varios modos expresivos pero se contiene bajo las mismas propuestas que se toman obsesiones: el lenguaje, la escritura, la compleja y plural subjetividad femenina, los traslpos de la ficción con la realidad y la sensibilidad social del escritor. Pero todo ello, que bien pudiera ser parte del repertorio de muchos escritores actuales, enunciado desde una situación impropia; es decir, fuera de todo lugar común —con Rivera Garza nada es sencillo—, y con un sentido de extrañeza que nos obliga a desconocer nuestra más cercana realidad para cuestionar lo más fundamental de nuestra existencia humana" (Palma de Castro and Quintana 4)

Garza, and Pizarnik— come together to take over the hypermasculine criminal sciences.

This office throughout the novel allows the detective to time and time again recreate the feminist approach to solving the case; for example, the detective loses interest in finding the killer to help the castrated men. Even though the detective is taken off the case, the novel places emphasis on the continued unofficial investigative work. When a partially castrated man makes a visit to the office and shows the detective new wounds on his body, the detective reminds him that she is no longer working on the case. Neither the police administration nor the newspapers have let her do her job: the powers that be empty the detective office of the feminist point of view. The detective with a sardonic tone asks, “¿Violencia doméstica? [. . .] Una sonrisa oblicua en el rostro. La indiferencia, expedita. Deberías escoger mejor a tus amantes” (*La muerte* 254). Hoping to dispel any more conversation with a man, who considers himself a victim, the detective states, “Te equivocaste de oficina”. Again, the office, where desk work occurs, comes into question. The detective dismisses the man, but the debate of professional space continues, “- O tú te equivocaste de oficina -contesta él, partiendo” (*La muerte* 255). The world outside of the office applies pressure on the desk work to conform to gender norms. The random man is “partiendo” to a world outside of the detective’s office. Since the men of this world establish a reality based on misogynist, pseudo truths the detective’s office undeniably offers an alternative. The desk work in *La muerte me da* produces poetic analysis and a concrete understanding of the injustice women in the city suffer. The epistemology that stems from the collaboration between the assassin, the detective, Dr. Rivera Garza and

Pizarnik informs the feminist narrative. At the root of this novel, a sincere study of readership exists in order to give clarity to the way women can work with literature.

My analysis homes in on the feminist more than the detective features because the former promises a better understanding of important contemporary debates on women's rights. There is more to be gained by looking at feminist moments in the novel than taking note of the transcendence of the patriarchal detective storyline. Moreover, I relate the desk work and the street work of the detective with all women's private and public life. I decide to observe the detective in an office and on the street primarily to link the novel's intent to tell a more universal woman's story of making their own space. The desk work in *La muerte me da* exemplifies collaborative activity around a real, tangible object. Following this line of thought, I suggest that the novel is a feminist novel first and foremost. Rivera Garza never lets the narrative stray from advocating a story by women for women. On one hand, the critical approach towards Latin American women's literature preconceives the story between the readers historically.¹⁸ Pizarnik's poetry cited in nail polish at a castration crime scene brings two women readers and a gender-neutral reader together. Consequently, I put forth that the four characters sketch out nuanced literary and criminal ideologies through basing their findings on women studies. The chronology in the novel proves this heterogenous effort: first, Pizarnik writes; second, the assassin reads and castrates; third, the detective reads and investigates; fourth, Dr. Rivera Garza publishes and counsels on the reading.

¹⁸ Alejandra Pizarnik writes from 1955 to 1978. The first piece of poetry that the detective finds is from the poem "Arbol de Diana" (1962). It is this writing that makes the meeting with Dr. Rivera Garza possible.

On the other hand, Rivera Garza represents the barrage of everyday misogyny when she explains the way in which random men promote violence against women. These random men have a general term in the novel: “el Hombre-Que-Era-A-Veces-Él” (the-Man-That-Was-At- Times-Him). The detective’s encounters with these men flatten men into an unstable character who is at odds with women. The character “El Hombre-Que-Era-A-Veces-Él” that believes a woman should not be a detective, or make the mistake for assuming the office, demonstrates Rivera Garza’s novelistic precision. Despite that *La muerte me da* addresses murder cases of women—the small number of castrations painstakingly emphasizes the high number of feminicide—the novel also pauses to make it known that men’s violence can manifest in subtle, uninvited banter. The two passages above make reference to the desk work that leads to street work; thus, Rivera Garza demonstrates collaboration between women “allá afuera” of the detective office.

The women characters and the gender-neutral assassin in *La muerte me da* support one another to distinguish cities from being a one-dimensional patriarchal metropolis. Each character claims the city as theirs by their street work. Because I have explained the feminist links between the readers that allow women to interpret interior space, I seek to enter the street work into this same approach. The following observations seek to compare women readers in predetermined indoor workspaces with outdoor public places. In doing so, I argue that Rivera Garza’s novelistic world in *La muerte me da* advances a multidimensional prose for readers to engage with the feminist-detective genre. I make note that the street seems to be substituted for the

desk by imagining an “allá afuera”. Within this framework, the switch of one for another consequently are equal; therefore, the woman is at work against the misogyny regardless of the space.

When the detective appears for the second time in the novel, an interior monologue points to the reason for her activity of running in the city: “Corría. Corro usualmente al atardecer. Corro en la pista de tartán. Corro de la cafetería al apartamento [. . .] No, no corro para hacer ejercicio. Corro por placer. Para llegar a algún lado. Corro, si así lo quiere ver, utilitariamente” (18). The pleasure that the detective feels while running, in my opinion, also speaks to the feminist work they enjoy and seek out. The detective, for example, runs in the streets of the city to see the crime scene of an adolescent in daylight: “Una caterva de pájaros la obliga a volver la cabeza hacia el cielo: la noche está por llegar. El frío la despabila. Tiene que ver la escena antes de que la oscuridad sea total y, por eso, corre, aprisa. Corre *como si* huyera; como el actor que escenifica su propia huida. Prófuga teatral. De la ciudad ésa. De la adolescente ésa” (*La muerte* 127). The street work requires the detective to run through the city before it is too dark. With this specific light, the detective can better comprehend the death of the female adolescent. The lighting in the street, like at the desk, sets the scene, and the detective also creates her own space in a darkly lit bar for dancing:

Es un bar. Un lugar donde ha encontrado una esquina, un pliegue, un refugio. Un lugar oscuro donde baila, apenas, una mujer que piensa en otra cosa. Algo más. Cuando sale del lugar coloca las manos en los bolsillos de su pantalón y camina, en zigzag, por las banquetas de la noche. El leve ruido de los pasos. El salto súbito sobre los rieles. El viento a través de las frondas. Lo que no se ve: Piensa en los muertos. (*La muerte me da* 104)

This passage specifies that a private corner of a bar, where someone can dance to

their own rhythm, goes even further to emphasize the importance of feminist space. The dance allows for the detective to move from the public-private bar to the street with a clear mind; as a result, thoughts about the dead come easily. In addition, the description of what is heard —footsteps and wind— provides outdoor effects as the novel is quick to enter into omniscient narration about the detective's thought process.

Street work for the detective consists of walking and dancing, and the quality of this work appears to depend on the amount of feminist space that takes form. *La muerte me da* matches the assassin, the detective, the doctor, and the poet with scenery and collaboration on the street. In a note Dr. Rivera Garza receives, the assassin writes of a running scene:

Te dejo esta página debajo de tu zapato, pegada con goma de mascar. Caminarás. Darás solo dos o tres pasos y te darás cuenta. La arrancarás de un súbito movimiento desesperado. Me leerás. No tendrás alternativa. Saldrás corriendo, como siempre [. . .] Cuando te detengas quiero que pienses esto: piensa que alguien te observa desde tu punto ciego que es el único lugar que tú no puedes ver. Piensa que no tienes escapatoria. Y luego, cuando hayas pensado todo esto, piensa, y piénsalo bien, piensa que siempre te querré. (*La muerte* 93)

The assassin describes the Doctor of literature as an avid runner as well, and the note juxtaposes the act of women reading with the activity of running. The collaboration between these women at the desk mirrors the words of encouragement and sincere care they have for one another in this epistolary. Hence, the assassin holds space for Dr. Rivera Garza through her love because the streets do not organize the city in an equal and safe manner. Because the assassin asks Dr. Rivera Garza to “think” and “think again”, feminism is the fruit of this street work. Rather than leave the feminist

thought at the office, the detective and the Doctor of literature take their work to the street.

Literary Practices and Feminism

I find that some novelists's dedication to the field bridges age differences. I observe that Rivera Garza's prolonged feminist critique since 1999 and up to the present-day overlaps with more than one generation of experimental prose writers.¹⁹ Thus, I remark that the extension of the contemporary experimental to incorporate the last twenty years facilitates a representation of the intergenerational artistic field in Mexico. Rivera Garza has published many of her novels with Tusquets Editores: *Nadie me verá llorar* in 1999, *La cresta de Ilión* in 2002, *Lo anterior* in 2004, *La muerte me da* in 2007, *Verde Shanghai* in 2011 y *El mal de la taiga* in 2012. In 2009, Rivera Garza receives the Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz for *La muerte me da*. In 2001, the author had received the same award for *Nadie me verá llorar*.²⁰ La Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara (International Book Festival in Guadalajara) has granted the award each year since 1993 to recognize Latin

¹⁹ The novels, for example, by Margo Glantz, Jorge Volpi in comparison to Rivera Garza and Ceh Moo, demonstrate the way in which authors are capable of continuously entering into the most cutting-edge form and content.

²⁰ In another act of position-taking, Cristina Rivera Garza's two awards of the *Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* stand out here. The function of the historic novel from Mexico echoes in a fashion which brings to mind what Rivera Garza decides to do with "la novela negra" eight years later in *La muerte me da*. In this sense, Rivera Garza begins a new position in the commercial literary world in Mexico with the award. The experimental form in Rivera Garza's novel turn of the century *Nadie me verá llorar* rests in the use of historical archives, and the experimental narrative surfaces in the telling of a woman's life during the Mexican revolution. I argue that the avant-garde approach fosters the position in other fields for the novelist, like the economic and the academic; though Rivera Garza continues to seek out transgressive novelistic aesthetics.

American women authors. Rivera Garza has been celebrated for testing the limits of literary genres and arguing for women's rights. At the same time, the *Premio Aura Estrada*, which Gerber Bicecci received for *Conjunto vacío*, serves as another arguing point because it relates to the *Premio Sor Juana*, which Cristina Rivera Garza has received twice. The two awards celebrate women's writing; while the first one is presented at the Feria Internacional del Libro de Oaxaca, the second one is given at the Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara. Rivera Garza appeals for feminism at many levels through her writing. In an interview in 2014, Rivera Garza remarks on an experimental approach to the novel:

Como con los así llamados subgéneros, hay un sentido de familiaridad; es un patrón que reconocemos y que hemos compartido. Eso ayuda, especialmente cuando lo que estás intentando hacer es subvertir la forma, pero es importante anclarlo en una forma conocida porque ayuda a que el juego genere una complicidad entre autor y lector. Entonces, habiendo generado esa complicidad tú puedes llevar al lector al lugar donde quieres llevarlo, que es fuera del género a otros lados. ("Cristina Rivera Garza" 56)

With this interview passage in mind, Rivera Garza clarifies a certain approach to experimental *novelwriting*. Moreover, the "complicit" relationship between the reader and writer proves to set the scene for the necessary split in experimental novels. The personification of the literary language in the interviews (a game in between author and reader, a feeling of closeness to books) invites an imaginative understanding of literature. Carlos Abreu Mendoza points out that he is aware of these ludic and metafiction techniques. Additionally, the following interpretation brings attention to another perspective: "pero lo que me interesa en este trabajo es la manera en que estos [técnicos metaficcionales] trascienden los límites del lenguaje narrativo a través

del poético y crean al mismo tiempo una poética de la lectura que nos ofrece una clave para entender la novela” (Abreu Mendoza 302). I argue that the “key” in which Abreu Mendonza refers underlines experimental feminism. The points of view accumulate to add perspectivism and better comprehend the real-life violence women face. Rivera Garza goes against the grain in her transgressive *novelwriting*. For example, it is easy to think of a cinematic like scene where an author ventures to confront literary figures. It is not at all unlike the imagery of Rivera Garza’s reference to “following one’s own rules”. Given that there is a collaborative notion of what is “experimental” between women authors in the interview, form and content change with respect to women’s voices for Rivera Garza. Following this line of thought, the collaborative *novelwriting* found in networks of women bibliographies formulate a singular “experimental”. After all, it is important for Rivera Garza to keep authors like, Pizarnik and Hofer close when trying to explore novelistic autonomy.²¹

Graphic Feminism

The detective novel along with the crime novel that Rivera Garza offers applies to avant-garde and narration at many levels. The distortion of the subgenre provides significant deviations, for example, the artistic figures of Marina Abramović and Alejandra Pizarnik. The minimalist art by Abramović and the fourth crime of castration occurs in front of the detective during a daydream. The poetry by Pizarnik goes from hand to hand in *La muerte me da*, and the poet’s biography juxtaposed

²¹ Pizarnik problematizes misogyny in her collections. Jen Hofer translated *Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (2003). Her own poetry collections include *As far as* (1999), *Slide rule* (2002), and *One* (2009).

with Rivera Garza's fiction relates the hardboiled narrative structure to even traits of *true crime*. Nevertheless, the violent castrations and the feminist conclusions point to the most pertinent experimental forms. Through attention to details along with the fragmentation Rivera Garza constructs complex scenes of violence. The mass media add more dimensions when the detective's investigation appears in the newspaper, ““«¡HORROR! HOMBRE CASTRADO EN UN CALLEJÓN»” (*La muerte me da* 215). At the same time, the third-person omniscient narration fosters a psychological understanding of Valerio, a helper to the detective, when reacting to the castration.

The description exemplifies the interpretation of violence and the resulting affect:

Había algo en la castración que lo obligaba a pensar en el peligro personal, en la amenaza contra el propio cuerpo. Una escena primigenia. El miedo fundacional. Mi nombre no es Valerio. Eso lo enunció en silencio, dentro de su propia cabeza, a medida que se internaba mas y más en la escena del crimen [. . .] La sangre, roja y pesada, parecía artificial. Y los genitales, ausentes, cortados con rigor quirúrgico, comandaban la atención y la vista. (*La muerte me da* 210)

The audiovisual experience of the passage underlines Rivera Garza's intentionality to analyze the affect of violence. Between details about the “silence” and the “view”, Rivera Garza manifests a morbid, sexual, and criminal scene. Valerio's reflection on the castration joins the masculine subject as it recognizes his own expiration; therefore, the enunciation of this negation makes it true (the focus on poetry in the novel suggests that Rivera Garza hoped to make this moment epiphanic).

Additionally, the “horror” of the decapitated individual demonstrates a cultural context of the detective novel in la Literatura del Norte. Rivera Garza foments a style that oscillates from one subgenre to another without ever losing touch of a feminist ideology. *La muerte me da* refocuses on the violence against these castrated men only to portray the inequality women suffer daily in the city. The chapter entitles “83

¿Quién carajos habla?” presents this intentionality, “VI LA VÍCTIMA SIEMPRE ES FEMININA. En el Ministerio (que es un lugar de los hechos) (un lugar de helechos) (de lechos). En el cuerpo (que es público (que está abierto) (que es un muerto))” (*La muerte me da* 316). The polarization of genders does not correspond to Rivera Garza’s approach to problematizing misogyny. The violence against women does not only negatively, and toxically, affect women in Rivera Garza’s novels, but everyone, independent from their gender, is in a worse place due to the hate women feel from men. Oswaldo Estrada comments, “Por todos estos motivos, leer a Rivera Garza es traspasar los límites del lenguaje, cruzar las fronteras de diversos géneros y quedar al filo del suspenso con muchas preguntas y pocas respuestas” (Estrada 252). The abstraction of the language plays a role of resistance; consequently, Rivera Garza’s *novelwriting* pertains to a concerted effort to alter literary genres and question sociopolitical gender violence.

Women’s writing and feminism, which are constituted by many, in the form of singular activism constitute the base of Rivera Garza’s literary production, and this *novelwriting* comprehends the violent binaries at stake between gender identities. Different than *Conjunto vacío* by Gerber Bicecci, the use of graphics for Rivera Garza refer to the violent representations of castrations. Nonetheless, the use of “graphic” still coincides with the comparison because these two novels either propose what words cannot illustrate or spell out undesirable images. The final novel I consider in this chapter, *Chen tumeen x ch’úupen*, will align with the latter when the reader must follow the words painfully to comprehend gender inequality in the Yucatán Peninsula.

Feminisms in Gender and Racially Divided Legal Systems: *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*

(*Sólo por ser mujer*) (2015) by Marisol Ceh Moo

Marisol Ceh Moo tells the story of Honorina, a Mayan woman who suffers domestic violence and extreme poverty in modern day slavery. The novel was published in 2015 *Chentumeen x ch'úupen (Sólo por ser mujer)*, and the year prior, Ceh Moo was awarded the Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas. On one hand, the experimental aesthetic in the violent scenes demand an extended amount of time in depravation. On the other, the representation of the linguistic terrorism with which Mayan people come face to face also pushes the experimental to address several social issues. As a result, I contend that the counter-narratological and the change in focalization connect Ceh Moo with the traits of the current experimental. The novel by Ceh Moo, which is made up of two chapters, or parts, rearranges the pressures from institutional standards by printing in both Yucatec Maya and Spanish in its first edition. I also make note of the story behind the Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas.²² The prestigious award distinguishes itself from other institutional recognitions because it directly relates to indigenous populations in Mexico.²³

²² Since 1993 the award Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas has been granted 11 times. Ceh Moo was the last to receive the recognition for *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*.

²³ It is significant to come to make note of the population of indigenous population in Mexico when considering the award Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas, “A partir de la Encuesta Intercensal realizada por la Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblo Indígenas (2015:1) y el criterio de hogar indígena, se cuantifica la población indígena en un total de

The award, consequently, represents a largely underrepresented voice in the Mexican literary world:

Instituido en 1993 por la Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Indígenas y Urbanas (DGCPIU) de la Secretaría de Cultura con el propósito de estimular la creatividad literaria de los escritores indígenas de México, así como su contribución a la literatura nacional por medio del reconocimiento de los creadores que han incorporado la riqueza expresiva de las lenguas y culturas indígenas a los géneros de la literatura contemporánea, el Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas se lleva a cabo cada año en el marco del Día Internacional de la Lengua Materna. (*Enciclopedia*)

The award builds a space for non-Spanish written literature from Mexico. In this vein, Ceh Moo writes along with a countercultural literary movement in Mexico that hinges on languages other than Spanish. The Yucatec Maya language in Ceh Moo's novels complicates the monolingual homogenous art market in Mexico.²⁴ The experimental feminist representations correspond to the lesser mainstream value systems to those of other more commercial markets, such as the publishing house Alfaguara and its Premio Alfaguara de Novela. The award was recently given to the Mexican novelist Jorge Volpi, and in turn allows for a distant but suggestive comparison.²⁵ I put forth that the experimental form and narrative, which the avant-garde community puts into practice, manifests a resistance to totalizing structures.

12 millones 25 mil 947 personas, que constituye 10.1% de la población. Del total de la población indígena estimada, 6 millones 146 mil 479 son mujeres (51.1%) y 5 millones 879 mil 468 son hombres (48.9%). En la distribución de la población indígena a nivel geográfico en números absolutos, de cada 100 personas indígenas” (Higuera Sánchez 141). I offer a disclaimer here to make note that the study does not consider non cis-gender individuals.

²⁴ Ceh Moo has published four novels: *X-Teya, u puxsi'ik'al kooel* (in Spanish and Yucatec) (2008); *Sujuy K'iin* (2011); *T'ambilak men tunk'ulilo'ob* (in Spanish and Yucatec) (2011); *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* (in Spanish and Yucatec) (2015).

²⁵ The recipient of the Premio Alfaguara receives \$175,000 U.S. Dollars. The Mexican novelist Jorge Volpi was the awardee in 2018 for *Una novela criminal* (*El Economista*). It is of considerable interest of mine to signal the disparity in monetary recognition depending on the award. The difference is not small when we look into the amount attached to the the Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas: \$7, 635 U.S. Dollars. Another way to imagine the difference Jorge Volpi received more than twenty times than that of Marisol Ceh Moo.

Narratives in other novels from or about the Yucatán Peninsula fail to address the Mayan population, and this is a truth about the cultural context in which Ceh Moo writes *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*.²⁶ It is telling to remark on other literary productions in the region; a clearer layout of the literary trends demonstrates the varying novelistic approaches to feminism. When writing on poetry by Francisco Morales Santos from Guatemala, Emilio del Valle Escalante points out that there is intentionality with respect to nuanced gender norms that underpin contemporary Mayan literature. The poem *Madre, nosotros también somo historia*, written by Morales Santos in 1988, presents a first person narration focused on a woman's perspective, and Del Valle Escalante explains the critical effect as, "La experiencia del yo poético dentro del espacio urbano en particular manifiesta la alienación como una de las características definitivas del capitalismo" (El viaje a los orígenes 367). Despite that the work is poetry from the 1980s, the style and social elements yield a critical approach similar to *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*. In addition, the decision to tell

²⁶ The protagonist of *Palmeras de la brisa rápida* (1989) by Juan Villoro seeks to chronicle his family in the Yucatán Peninsula, and in the first page states, "For us Yucatán was a very peculiar way to talk about our grandmother. We knew that she came from a remote place and that many of our relatives had died fighting against Mexico" (Villoro 17). The historic past of the Yucatán Peninsula echoes out into the genre of the novel and highlights wartime scenes alongside the representation of Mayan indigenous peoples. However instead of national bibliographies, it is the *Diccionario de escritores de Yucatán* that offers a more transparent view of the narratives in the region. In other words, not until the national component is put aside does the region's novel, literary tradition take form. The author Joaquín Bestard Vásquez and his more than twenty novels demonstrate that there is prolific depth to the indigenous and historic features in the Yucatán literary canon. The critic Margaret Shrimpton problematizes Villoro's cosmopolitan approach from Mexico City to the Yucatán Peninsula, "Villoro's reaction is one of confusion, understanding the recognition of difference, but not the rejection of someone from Mexico City. Villoro's discomfort is not surprising, however, and responds again to the Nation/region tension that characterizes the pendulum-like position of the Yucatán" (Shrimpton 22). The juxtaposition by Shrimpton of novelists from the Yucatán with those who come from outside the region lays out the foundation for further research. In addition, this last reference emphasizes the significance of utilizing more representative bibliographies in order to depict the relationship between region and nation, center and periphery, and local and cosmopolitan. Therefore, *Palmeras de la brisa rápida* serves as an exception to Shrimpton's findings.

the story of a mother in the poem, by Morales Santos, anticipates the plot structure in the contemporary Mayan novel.²⁷ For example, the Yucatecan writer Isaac Esaú Carrillo publishes the novel *U yóok'otilo'ob áak'ab* (*Danzas de la noche*) in 2011. A year before Carrillo Can received the Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas, which Ceh Moo receives for *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* in 2014. With these literary examples, awards, and artistic forms in mind, I propose that the cultural context around Ceh Moo and the story about Honorina functions within an experimental trajectory of Mayan contemporary literature.²⁸ Arturo Arias gives a succinct analysis of what Ceh Moo's protagonist is up against: "Honorina, is the victim of an entire social structure. Domestic violence is brutal but normal for her. In her eyes, Indigenous men are also victims of their own gender situation. They have been devalued by historic racialized traumas" (*Recovering* 172). Given that Ceh Moo problematizes gender roles and sociological themes, for instance, the effect of domestic violence and sex slavery on a Mayan community; there is a sense of sociological urgency. With this in mind, Arias explains that the racialized tensions that Horonina and Florencio, suffer as Mayan people lead to the most tragic circumstances. As a result, Horonina's "sole escape is murdering her husband" (*Recovering* 172). In order to come to terms with these types of narratives, it is necessary to consider a heterogenous number of bibliographies in

²⁷ *U yóok'otilo'ob áak'ab* (*Danzas de la noche*) by Isaac Esaú Carrillo Can revolves around the story of a young Mayan girl who escapes a violent, adoptive household to find her father. A comparative study of CehMoo and Carrillo Can, by Arturo Arias, proves to offer first studies on gender in these contemporary Mayan narratives ("Tradition versus Modernity").

²⁸ The article "Modernity in Contemporary Yucatecan Maya Novels? Yuxtaposing *X-Teya, u puksi'ik'al ko'olel* and *U yóok'otilo'oba 'ak'ab*" by Arturo Arias underlines the formal structures behind engendered narratives.

the Yucatán Peninsula. Ceh Moo, along with Morales Santos and Carrillo Can, have ensured that their narrative does not put the Mayan community in the countries of Mexico and Guatemala simply as a background.²⁹ To the contrary, the writers compose stories about Mayan people who confront social violence in their regions. The experimental narrative by Ceh Moo places the impoverished situation for non-Spanish speakers in the foreground without exception; additionally, *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* focuses on the hypermasculine men that women confront in a quickly globalizing Mayan world.

Apart from the institutional autonomy present in the Premio Nezahualcóyotl, I also remark on the descriptions of women subjects in *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*. Throughout the novel, Ceh Moo puts individuals in front of institutional powers, for example, el Ministerio Público, secretaries, government agents, lawyers, and judges. In my exploration of the experimental, I observe the superposition of feminism, regionalism, critique of power, and alternate groups of authors. The following two passages frame a general understanding of my interpretation of the experimental feminism. First, Ceh Moo alters the focalization

²⁹ In the same fashion as critiquing Juan Villoro's chronicle *Palmeras de la brisa rápida*, it is important to point out a novel that differs greatly from Ceh Moo's novel *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*. Hector Aguilar Camín was born in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, in 1946, and structures *Adiós a los padres* on his family's patriarchal history. Two examples of the geographical importance in the novel are the following: first, the frequent references a photo of his young bourgeois mother and father on a beach in Campeche throughout the novel suggest that the story never completely leaves the peninsula; second, the unstable logging industry in Quintana Roo during the first half of the twentieth century signals an economic study of the geography. From this focus on the Yucatán Peninsula during the first half of the century Aguilar Camín continues on to historicize the family's migration to Mexico City and its consequences up to the present time. The novel becomes more autobiographic when Aguilar Camín appears as a Mexican intellectual who lives in the capital that must aid his ageing father, further complicating the representation of the peninsula. The case of Aguilar Camín and his novel *Adiós a los padres* foment a point of departure because it demonstrates how an author, who is both from the region and who writes on the region, subjects the Yucatán Peninsula to the aesthetics of wealthy patriarchs; hence, the importance of Ceh Moo's and Carrillo Can's literature on the subject of sociopolitical concerns the Yucatán Peninsula.

of the character to demonstrate sociolinguistic pressures:

U yilik le ma'alob màake', tu béetaj ba'ax tu tukláj ka'achi, p'aat k'as chi'chnak. Ich u túukule' tulàakal u muk' tia'al u k'aasike', kex wa táan u ts'aik tulàakal u muuk'e ma' tu naajaltaj u nup'ik mix jun p'éel chowak t'aaan ich kastelan t'aaani' (La presencia de la autoridad surtió el efecto de ponerla nerviosa. En su memoria las palabras en español se cubrieron de cenizas de olvido, por más que lo intentó no logró, a pasar de todos sus esfuerzos, bordar una sola frase en castellano" (Ceh Moo 208)).

Secondly, Ceh Moo describes a woman being sentenced in court:

U takattakatakataka le màaskabil chowak kisbut's'o', ku bin u laj xixkunsik u siisilo'ob ma' jum, ka'alikil le ko'olello' yèetel u jo'ol u chinmaj, sa'aatal ich u yotsil kuxtal ku bin u jaykubaj ti' tulàakal tu'ux yook'ol kaab. Tulàakal le màaxo'ob ku meyajo'ob te'elo', u laj yoojelo'ob tulàakal ba'alob k'astak ku yuuchul ichil lelo', ti' bix u yantal màak, ba'ale' lelo', mix ba'al u k'àat u ya'alej. (Ceh Moo 144-145) (El taca-taca de la maquina rompía todo los hielos del silencio, mientras la mujer con la mirada baja, perdida en su propia miseria se extendía por todos los confines. Todos los protagonistas de la justicia tenían cabal conocimiento de su ilegalidad en la aplicación de la justicia, pero eso era lo de menos (Ceh Moo 257)).

Ceh Moo advances countercultural literature by describing key moments of social justice for marginalized women; therefore, I argue her approach to the novel underlines the traits of the experimental feminism. The counter-narratology, I observe, revolves around a narrative that does not leave the side of a woman who suffers domestic and institutional violence.

Feminism and Two Different Points of View

Chen tumeen x ch'úupen, despite its description of crime and court cases, does not adhere to a chronological series of events. Ceh Moo fragments Honorina's story when employing an objective third-person narration. In that way, the novel corresponds to social discourse because it seeks to inform through a complex oscillation between time and place. The novel begins with Honorina being hit to be woken up in the morning: from her jail cell she goes to a courtroom in the state of

Yucatán. There she listens to a testimony of a Mayan woman, like herself, grapple with defending her case after receiving a twenty-year jail term for homicide. In the first twenty pages of the 123-page novel, *Ceh Moo* describes the interpersonal relationship between Honorina and Delia Castillo Garma, her Mestiza defense lawyer. The novel considers both Honorina's and Delia's points of view; for example:

U muuk'il ku jets'ik tu yook'ol u winkilil bey xan u kuxtal XHonor le x k'aalpaach XDelia Castillo Garma, tu béetaj ku k'aam ka bisa'ak takt u yiknal nojoch Jalaach u lu'umil, tu yo'olal u xak'altik ba'ax ku yuuchul bey xan tia'al u yilik wa yèetel u paajtalil aalmajt'aane' je'el u beytal ku yàantej (*Ceh Moo* 27) (La ascendencia que la joven abogada [. . .] tenía sobre ella fue determinante en el convencimiento de aceptar el acudir al Gobernador del Estado para examinar su caso y persuadir con argumentos al mandatario a usar con discreción el atributo que le confería la constitución local. La joven abogada ejercía una rara influencia sobre ella, le fascinaba mirarla de pies a cabeza (*Ceh Moo* 161)).

Honorina's view of the lawyer demonstrates an appreciation of intellect and appearance in general. The "strange influence" the lawyer has on Honorina could be read as one-sided at first; however, twenty-pages later, the third person omniscient narration provides Delia's reaction to hearing about Honorina's case. In Delia's family 75oon ar, *Ceh 75oon arrates*, a conversation between three lawyers (father, mother, and Delia, the daughter). After discussing the commonplace topic, for this particular family, about "attorney-housewives" with the family, Delia opens the newspaper and reads "'Maya Tzotzil da muerte a su esposo, en el pueblo de Xtujil'". The narration qualifies the headline:

Bix ts'íibta'al le tumben t'aano', ku bèetik u seten ya'alal ba'alo'ob ku nojochkinsik ba'ax ucha'an, yèetel lelo' ku bèetik màas taalamil ba'ax k'aabet u ya'alik" (*Ceh Moo* 48) (En el Desarrollo de la nota, el periodista hacía gala

de su sensacionalismo mercantil, reportando de manera amarillista la nota de sangre (Ceh Moo 179)).

The reading of the newspaper article leads to Delia contemplating on the matter both at dinner and in her room later in the evening. The narrator summarizes Delia's reading and informs us of the newspaper's angle on the story. Delia learns that Honorina is part of the indigenous group Tzotzil and comes from Chamula, which is in the mountainous region of Chiapas. Moreover, Delia reads that Honorina:

chen ich tzotzil ku t'àan, ts'ó'okole' ich Yucatane' mina'an mix jun tùul màax kansa'an tia'al u t'aanik tulàakal ba'al yèetel seten ba'axo'ob u yoojel ah k'aal paachilo'ob ich aalmaj t'aanilo'ob (Ceh Moo 48). (no pudo declarar porque sólo hablaba el idioma tzotzil, y al menos en la península, no existía un traductor calificado que pudiera interpretar los tecnicismos que orlaban a las leyes judiciales) (Ceh Moo 179)).

Hence, it is again significant to make note that the novel's first edition comes in both the Yucatec Maya and Spanish. The Tzotzil language spoken by the Tzotzil people in Chiapas plays another linguistic role in the development of the plot, sociopolitical commentary, and the publication. The exclusion of the language and impoverished in the court system demonstrates the inability for the marginalized to practice their rights; as a result, the society does not recognize the non-Mayan and the non-Spanish speakers as a part of defendable humanity. Then the narrator describes Delia as she interprets the newspaper literature:

Tu tsik tselil ts'alaje' ku chikpajal u yoochel le x ko'olel tu kimsaj u yichamo'. XDeliae' ka tu yu'ubaj ku kikilaankil u winkilil le ka tu kaxtaj ich le yoochelo' jun p'èel paakat chuup yèetel muk'yaj ti' le ki'olelo', bey tak t'àan u mansik u taatil le ju'un tu'ux bona'ano' (Ceh Moo 48-49). (En la columna de la izquierda del periódico se mostraba la foto de la presunta asesina. Delia se estremeció al encontrar en la mirada de la mujer una veta de infinita tristeza que traspasaba el papel) (Ceh Moo 180)).

Consequently, the omniscient voice provides multiple viewpoints on a court case that involves a woman thinking about the wellbeing of another woman. Within the cultural context of Mexican arts, Ceh Moo stresses the stark differences in monetary wealth, community, language, and race between her two women characters. Nevertheless, the photo of Honorina and the hurried newspaper article provides enough information for the lawyer to try to better understand the details. The attorney-client privilege for Delia and Honorina goes beyond the expectation, and Ceh Moo highlights the imperfect hierarchical system that should by all means recognize and eliminate slavery in form of arranged marriages. Ceh Moo's *novelwriting*, with respect to the coupling of Delia and Honorina, takes advantage of pages to give space for women from different socioeconomic backgrounds to create empathy. Although heavy contradictions permeate in conversations with a privileged Mexican Mestiza woman and a poor Mayan woman, Ceh Moo is careful not to sidestep the controversy.

The Representation of Domestic Violence as a Feminist Gesture

The fragmentation in *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* manifests suspense to the novel; therefore, the *novelwriting* by Ceh Moo introduces a variety of literary subgenres, including courtroom dramas and true crime, to call attention to the depravity present in misogyny. In the second part, the third-person omniscient narration alternates to the first-person voice of Honorina; then it moves on to another first-person voice of a Mayan woman in the state of Yucatán that knew Honorina

before going to jail; finally, the novel concludes with a return to the third-person omniscient focalization. It is also important to note that not until the last twenty pages does the narration recount the domestic violence that leads to Honorina killing Florencio in self-defense with a knife. Yet, while Ceh Moo allows the narrative to take first-person narration during the first part of the novel, it is through experimental feminist *novelwriting* that Honorina tells her story to Delia in testimonial discourse.

The scenes of domestic violence that Honorina gives in testimony form to Delia allows for more omniscience and affective writing. Additionally, the chronological order of the testimony clashes with the fragmented temporality in the other passages of the novel. The tragedy Honorina lives through seems to happen almost simultaneously when the storytelling logic foments more causality. Because Honorina shares her story with Delia in a private moment, the language refers to the horrors in a short number of pages. Nevertheless, these descriptions organize the causality in the storyline; thus, the act of self-defense functions as a narrative hinge. *Sólo por ser mujer* (the Spanish version of *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*) is printed on pages 155-264 and the Yucatec Mayan on pages 23-155. There is a prologue by Dr. Felipe Hernández de la Cruz, and ironically, an errata slip from the Secretaría de Cultura – DGCP accompanies each book. The note apologizes to the readers for a misspelling of the novel's Mayan title on the front cover. The cultural context, even in the printed title, of the publication invites commentary on linguistics and the literary representation of indigenous people in Mexico. Consequently, the domestic violence and slavery Honorina goes through on pages 186 and 187 in Spanish yield representations that enact an experimental feminist ideology. In order to relate the affect

that Ceh Moo's prose provokes, I will cite three passages consecutively from these two pages:

- i. Kala'an wa ma'kala'ne' ku setèn koolken tu tsootsel in jo'ol, yèetel u k'aa naak'e k usen jats'ken, mix tu k'iinilo'ob yomchaja'anen tu yo'olal in wak tùul paalalo'obe', ka 'alake' wa tin maansaj jets' òolil (Ceh Moo 56). (Borracho y en sus cinco sentidos, me jalaba de los cabellos, me pegaba con su cinturón, ni cuando estuve embarazada de mis seis hijos tuve un poco de sosiego (Ceh Moo 186)).
- ii. Jun p'è el k'iin tune', tàan u meyaj ti' beet [. . .] Chen u komken yèetel u yet meyjilo'ob. Tu ya'alajtene', tu yo'olal taak'in bin, k'abeet bin ti' tu yo'olal u jetsik jun p'èel meyl koono (Ceh Moo 56) (Un día estaba trabajando de albañil, y pasó a buscarme a la esquina [. . .] Se trataba de alquilarme con sus compañeros de trabajo. Me dijo que era por el dinero, que necesitaba algo para un negocio y no había otro modo, pues) (Ceh Moo 186)).
- iii. Ma' in wwojel betasa' ba'axa ku bèetik in màas muk'yaj, wa u setèn jats'keno', aba'axo'ob ku bèetik in bèetik yèetel u yet meyjilo'ob. Jach jun puli' ya'abchaj le mukyajilo'ob tu ts'aj in kucho tin paacho', jach jun puli' ya'abchajo'ob, tak in paakate' tin wu'uyaj jach aal, ba'ax u jel tun, chen ku beytal in bèetik ka ximbalnak in paakat tu yook'ol lu'um. Jach k'asa'an J Florencio, ma' chen tin weeteli', yèetel tulàakal máak beyo' (Ceh Moo 57) (Ya no sé qué me dolía más, si los golpes que me daba de a diario o lo que me hacía hacer con sus amigos. Fueron un titipuchal de dolores los que me cargó en la espalda, eran tantos que la mirada me pesaba, que más pues, solo podía pasearla por los suelos. Era malo el Florencio, no únicamente conmigo, con todos era así. (Ceh Moo 187)).

These excerpts make it impossible for the reader of contemporary Mayan narratives to look past the feminist critique present in the genre. And yet, Ceh Moo also scrutinizes the system as a whole. For that reason, the representation of the domestic violence and slavery a Mayan woman suffers references the feminist concern for all humankind, regardless of gender.

As we have seen Ceh Moo decides to base her novel on the retelling of scenes of extreme violence. The scenes give way to a feeling of relief for Honorina, but Ceh Moo ensures to represent the domestic violence practiced by Florencio as an

example of a much larger problem. In an anti-capitalist vein, Ceh Moo introduces the personification of pigs to imagine the way the Mexican society mistreats and reifies Mayans. Following this line of thought, the final scene between Honorina and Florencio registers as another painful moment in the woman's life; however, the major difference is the sense of freedom through putting an end to the domestic violence. In first-person narration, Honorina remembers:

Mix jun ten ti tuklaj wa u yot'èl winike' jach taj jay, bey jun chan xoot'ju' une'. Ya'ab teeno'ob in wilmaj bix u kimsa'al k'eeek'en tu taajil X ma Tiba, leti'je'e bix suka'an u konik tulàakal ba'alo'obe' [. . .] Layli' leti' tin wu'uyaj tin puxsi'ika'l ka tin wilàj u paakat Jflorencio (Ceh Moo 124) (Nunca me imagine que la piel fuera suave como papel. Muchas veces vi como mataban cochino en casa de doña Tiba, ella como comerciante de todo, cebaba sus animales que cuando estaban ya crecidos, los convertía en carne de venta [. . .] Esa sensación se vino de repente cuando vi la cara de sorpresa de Florencio (Ceh Moo 242)).

The description of the act of self-defense takes on an objective tone, and Ceh Moo, I suggest, switches Honorina's voice in a moment of feminist realism. Honorina's seemingly still voice and her ability to compare real-life through metaphor frames the second when a woman's life persisted to exist. The story is later told by Delia in court and by Delia's mother with her bourgeois friends, so the representation of the domestic violence, even if at a seemingly superficial level, influences heterogeneous groups of women. To close, I insist the next and last section of this chapter situates Ceh Moo's *novelwriting* along with Gerber Bicecci's and Rivera Garza's. Form and narrative for Ceh Moo animate stories about womankind and feminist approaches to humanity in my conclusions; thus, it is telling to consider the other novels along with contemporary feminist theory.

Sets of Women: First Links between the Novels

I group Gerber Bicecci with Emmelhainz to frame the injustice of gender inequality, and I suggest that the women writers demand a form of feminism that digs deep into the current neoliberal surface in the literary world to uproot anachronic artistic methods. The threat of greater neoliberalism in the artistic field takes hold in the press, the book festivals, and the funding grants. In the last two years, Ignacio Sánchez Prado has written in particular about the Mexican literary publishing houses in order to understand a tradition that converses with transnational competition. Sánchez Prado emphasizes the importance of “alternatives” for the literary “ecosystem.” The following independent publishing houses —Era, Sexto Piso, Tumbona Ediciones, Libros Magenta, Sur+ y Periférica— give form to an archive apart from the more homogenous ones, for example, Editorial Planeta y Alfaguara. The connections between the novels, publishing houses, and the literary awards provide a more precise look at the subjects, the form, the region, and the point of view of the contemporary Mexican novel. For instance, I contend that the award Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Mexicanas along with the award Aura Estrada stand out as less commercially vulnerable and adhere to more autonomous forms from the Alfaguara annual award not only due to the amount of monetary funds, but I also pay attention to the Mexican origin juxtaposed to the Spanish origin.

The approaches to critical theory, the arts, and feminism by Emmelhainz signal to the literary meaning of *Conjunto vacío*. Emmelhainz underlines the twisted view of feminism by the neoliberal system when remarking on the depoliticization of the ideology and the attack on the woman’s body. Equally, the critical layer of

Emmelhainz's discourse animates the next question: How does the contemporary Mexican novel critique "la espectacularización de la feminidad"? I hold that a trope in Gerber Bicecci's writing and others's artistic expressions — like Marisol Ceh Moo, Cristina Rivera Garza— revolves around a gesture of auto-inclusion. For instance, Rivera Garza's role in a detective narrative in *La muerte me da* (2007) and the emphasis on the act of reading in Ceh Moo's novel *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* indicate that they go beyond a mere look at the life of an artist. The contemporary experimental tradition specifically depicts the presence of women in academic and artistic spaces. The critical observations by Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza and Ceh Moo have two sides: first, it questions neoliberal institutionalization found in the university, museum, and legal system; second, feminism informs their critique of power. Gerber Bicecci opposes a "toxic" representation of the women when she chooses to privilege the focus on the autonomy practiced by a Mexican woman artist. As a result, the contemporary experimental arts, I argue, intervene in the "espectacularización femenina" and this massive toxicity, superimposes feminism with less neoliberal features, and sketches out places for conversation between women. As aforementioned, the economy behind the publication of the three novels proves to be starkly different than those from larger literary conglomerates.

Upon comparing Gerber Bicecci's writing with other literary feminist and experimental traditions, it is important to underline Rivera Garza's and Ceh Moo's contribution to artistic and feminist production in Mexico. *Conjunto vacío* frames the process of an artist in an institutional reality: it is constituted by an internationally recognized university in the U.S. academic system and cosmopolitan travel across the

American continents. On the other side, *La muerte me da* focuses on how a professor of literature can understand the violence towards women in an unidentified city by being indirectly involved in a serial case of castrations. Ceh Moo brings attention to the institutional opposition her protagonist feels in the Mexican state of Yucatán by third person limited omniscient narration. Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo coincide in their *novelwriting* that hinges on women protagonists. The meaning behind “la novela negra” for Rivera Garza, the intermedial production for Gerber Bicecci, and the observational account of institutional law processes for Ceh Moo specify a certain use of literary form for me in this chapter. Either it be a city in Mexico, New York, or the state of Yucatán, I argue that the novelists home in on feminism and the representation of the ideology. Along with the critique of misogyny, these novels scrutinize the neoliberal pressures in the Mexican literary world. In my approach, the overlapping of the novels, the publishing houses, and the institutions that grant funding for the *novelwriting* to take place provide a visualization of Mexican-feminist novelists. Irmgard Emmelhainz points to the distortion of feminism by the neoliberal system in Mexico when underlining the ideology’s fading radicalism and the current attacks on the woman’s body in mass media. Hence, Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza and Ceh Moo use their literature about women to indicate a larger problem, the normalization of anti-feminist representations through late capitalism. In this vein, the following question groups the critical theory by Emmelhainz with the novelists in order to observe the commonalities to their approaches: what comes of assuming that the novels by Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo, not only work together at a feminist

level, but also as a bibliography that reveals the neoliberal exclusion that takes places in Mexican literature? Even though it might be best to leave this question as a rhetorical one, the network of these three women novelists organizes a better understanding of the cultural context. In order to find a symbolic value—which greatens the distance between art and economy—the arts need to sustain themselves, I suggest, without turning into another commercially driven artist product. As a result, it is key for these novelists to increase their autonomy from patriarchal economies if they are to bring about productive, feminist representations.

De-fabrication of Feminism via Contemporary Mexican Novels

Upon interweaving the literary movements from Mexican novelists, as I do with the comparison of Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo, the essayist tone of Emmelhainz raises awareness for need of a clearer Mexican, feminist epistemology. By juxtaposing the novels by Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo, the timelines of various feminist ideologies begin to line up; hence, it is more feasible to take note across of counter aesthetics across a wide range. I argue that the sequence of novels by Rivera Garza animates Sánchez Prado's analysis of the current literary market trends. These approximations by Sánchez Prado, along with the commentary by Abreu Mendoza, Estrada, and Hind aforementioned, draw out networks of feminist thought, and their critical intentionality informs this chapter. At the root of Mexican *novelwriting* by women, there is a sense of understanding of what Emmelhainz denounces as the substitution of economy for politics: “Esto se debe a que el feminismo bajo el neoliberalismo ha tomado un giro que podríamos llamar

distópico, el cual, por ejemplo, considera que la desnudez pública es empoderamiento personal y hasta declaración política” (Emmelhainz 223). Emmelhainz goes on to write:

Aunado al feminismo de consumo y a la feminidad consumible, existe un feminismo prefabricado y paternal derivado de la globalización del feminismo de los ochentas y noventas, mismo que busca conferirles autodeterminación a las mujeres pobres como paliativo a los ataques devastadores de las reformas económicas, medidas de austeridad, desruralización del campo y otro tipo de ataques de corporaciones, crimen organizado y el mismo Estado. (Emmelhainz 233)

The historic frame of feminism translates into the comparison between Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo. In other words, the different generations of the novelists run parallel to the development of a new consciousness regarding gender. This arrangement of women novelists clarifies that *Conjunto vacío*, *La muerte me da*, and *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* challenge the tendencies of readers when they publish subversive discourse in a market “derived from paternal” power, like Emmelhainz suggests. In lieu of sacrificing their critical thoughts, which would change the feminist value found in the novel for an economic profit, Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo write on marginalized women. Emmelhainz describes neoliberal pressures women come close to, and this concerted effort in the collection of the novels considers the inequality women suffer. In consequence, they instigate rising feminist epistemologies across Mexico and de-fabricate undermining feminist aesthetics. The novelistic expression in this comparison is composed of point of view, form, style, and region. Hence, *de-fabrication* occurs in the novels to unhinge the prefabricated feminism in the neoliberal era. Moreover, the act of *de-fabrication* for me deconstructs late capitalistic aesthetics in hope to seize any future fabrication of

feminism. The superficial creation, which happens in fabrication, does not have a place in feminist thought; therefore, *pre* does not lead to *post* in my analysis. The three novels subvert the current “toxic” images of Mexico and put forward the “alternative”, as Sánchez Prado claims. As mentioned above, *Conjunto vacío* by Gerber Bicecci involves various nations; *La muerte me da* by Rivera Garza occurs in an anonymous city, and *Chen tumeen x ch’úupen* by Ceh Moo takes place in the states of Chiapas and Yucatán. The feminist divisions found in the novels and enacted by the novelists encourage a serious split not only in their fictional worlds, but also in their national literary worlds. It is important to account for the history of feminism if we hope to put into practice the most empowering social reforms; Gerber Bicecci, Rivera Garza, and Ceh Moo index women stories and encourage more than literary activism. Their bibliography promotes feminist activism in as wide of a range of situations as take shape in the three novels.

Chapter II

Regionalism from Feminism and Gender: *Las buenas hierbas* (2010) and

***Alamar* (2009)**

What is regionalism according to the film analysis of *Las buenas hierbas* and

Alamar?

Feminist ideologies correlate directly with areas in Mexico and consider both national and gender related epistemologies. Consequently, the distinction of regions leads to a better definition of feminism. For instance, the debate on women's rights between the mayor of Mexico City and its population of women during the last months of 2019 and the first months of 2020 exemplifies the correspondent nature between women and region. First, I suggest that regionalism according to feminist ideologies identifies the empowerment of women. Second, I point out that feminism has extended out to conceptualize more humane filmmaking and introduce theories developed in the tradition of analyzing gender. Because feminism leads to more comprehension about the way gender appears on screen, I observe the representation of masculinity in order to notate the social development of gender identity. By identifying characteristics of feminism and gender equality, any given Mexican region takes on significant dimensions. Feminism and gender serve as critical ideologies, and I remark that regionalism can serve the purpose of creating an index for representations of feminism and gender equality in Mexican film. I contend that regionalism and feminism provide significant references to analyze the film *Las buenas hierbas* (2010), directed by María Novaro. Still, I go further and remark that feminism and regionalism foster a critical understanding of masculinity and gender in *Alamar* (2009), directed by Pedro

González-Rubio. Thus, feminist principles and theory from gender lead to a clearer depiction of masculinity in regions in Mexico. The term “critical regionalism,” I find, foments a first notion in this chapter of regions and their respective feminisms; on the other hand, I point out that my use of “feminist regionalism” inherently employs critical thought and gender. Regionalism by itself—if imagined for the purpose of organizing feminist ideologies—comes off as subversive; therefore, an outline of “critical regionalism” and the subsequent theory of feminist and gender conscious regionalism outline conclusions on experimental, contemporary Mexican film.

Elsa Muñiz portrays the development of feminism in Mexico City from the late 1960s to the 2010s in the form of a first person “confesión”: “Esta es una confesión y como tal ha de tomarse. Las presentes son reflexiones que han encontrado un momento adecuado para ser compartidas, como se hacía en los pequeños grupos de autoconciencia, cuando las mujeres se atrevían a contarse sus más íntimos pensamientos” (Muñiz 21). At the root of the confession by Muñiz, feminist organization through interregional and international collaboration underscore the significance of multifaceted methods. Distinct approaches with relation to region specific concerns about gender equality grow from the ground level in the writing by Muñiz. In turn, I interlock feminist and gender conscious regionalism to the appeals of these women authors to provide analysis of *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar* within their value system.

Muñiz publishes the chapter “Del feminismo combativo al ‘feminismo líquido’. La historia reciente de un sueño añejo” in 2009. Although her argument emphasizes international collaboration when taking on contemporary patriarchy,

Muñiz frames the development of feminism in Mexico. The writing by Muñiz constitutes the first of eleven chapters in total of the book *Lo personal es político. Del feminismo académico a la presencia pública* (2009). The introduction describes the intention of the text: “dialogar y debatir lo más profundamente posibles todos los temas y problemas teóricos, metodológicos y epistemológicos relacionados con el feminismo y el género, desde nuestras fronteras disciplinarias y, sobre todo, desde la interdisciplina” (Ravelo Blancas 11). Muñiz’s social history of women foment another point of view on contemporary feminism in Mexico in addition to the critical theory by Emmelhainz.

Equally, I make connections between Muñiz and Emmelhainz as I link my approach to the novel with my approach to film. I propose that the shortest and most logical path between artistic expressions must be the line that underlines gender. I understand the film in the second chapter in the same way I do with the novel in the first chapter; experimental production depends on feminist contribution. In other words, the more feminist and gender conscious the art is in form and content, the more experimental the production. Equally, experimental form encourages contemporary understandings of gender.

The text by Muñiz arranges the analysis of the films *Las buenas hierbas* (2010), directed by Maria Novaro, and *Alamar* (2009), directed by Pedro González-Rubio. Moreover, the overlay of another significant example of contemporary Mexican feminist writing fosters a reading of the role of distinct regions. I select passages from Muñiz’s and Emmelhainz’s texts that contextualize the influence of a region on the feminist ideology. As a result, I ask the following questions: Where does gender meet

regionalism in the films? How does gender look in Mexico City through the lens of a woman director? How does gender look in the Yucatán Peninsula through the lens of a male director? The comparative reading of Muñiz and Emmelhainz animates another parallel feature of this chapter. It is important to anchor the feminist thought to contemporary matters in order to anticipate future practices in gender.

First, I report on the feminist protests that occurred in Mexico City and throughout the country on August 12th and August 16th, 2019, to better introduce what is at stake in the film *Las buenas hierbas*. I make note of sisterhood and the ritual of women smoking marijuana presented in the film. At the same time, I bring forward the notion of perceiving Mexico City as its own region altogether to the effect that feminism takes on both particular and heterogenous characteristics. My second current event considers the construction of the Tren Maya and its well documented controversy for which I deem paramount in comprehending *Alamar*. The way that feminism factors into the edification of a railroad might seem distant; however, González-Rubio represents one woman's experience during a time of commercializing tourism in the Yucatán Peninsula. Because González-Rubio underlines the significance of the concrete decision of a woman to become a single mother, womanhood in the film does not perpetuate stereotypes of women only fulfilling the role of a wife and mother. The "contemporary" film, I maintain, must lead to further thought on present day concerns. The films premiered ten and eleven years prior to the most recent feminist protests in Mexico City and the debate on the Tren Maya.

Nevertheless, Novaro and González-Rubio imagine an alternative to the polemics of today. Rather than perpetuating standardized practices of filmic

representation, there are no studios, and the story arcs depend on diverse narratology in the two films. For all of these reasons, I conclude the second chapter with observations on the experimental characteristics of *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar*. Consequently, I preface my analysis of the “experimental” and its contingency on feminism and gender, to which I dedicate the third chapter, when I recommend that Novaro and González-Rubio be considered part of the avant-garde. I explore the productivity in fitting the films within an “experimental” tradition to demonstrate the effect of contemporary feminist and gender criticism.

A study of regionalism that is determined by feminism and gender means shooting locations or the language spoken by the actors not only orientates the film in a region along with equality, but my analysis projects the two simultaneously. The superimposition of regionalism and gender does not allow the viewer to see the ideologies separately; therefore, I hold that the films resonate within an experimental genre that exemplifies the contemporary state of gender. The third chapter addresses these between ties between feminism and regionalism. I gather arguments about the novels from chapter one (*Conjunto vacío*, *La muerte me da*, and *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen*) and the films from chapter two (*Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar*) in hope to draw out what I call the Mexican Experimental. Muñiz bridges feminism and regionalism through remarking on the history of women in collaboration for the empowerment of themselves and gender equality across the board.

In the 2000s and 2010s, Mexican feminist writers have crafted more strongholds in their history and voiced their concern. I contend that *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar* serve as representations of this concern for feminism and

gender. The collaborative effort to rehash important moments in the feminist movement has led to a clearer timeline for gender in general. For instance, the project “Digitalización de los Archivos Históricos del Feminismo Mexicano” from 2015 to 2017 exemplifies the reasoning behind the historical approach:

Este proyecto tiene como propósito dar visibilidad a los archivos históricos del feminismo en México y, de manera particular, a las revistas que aquí mencionamos. La colección de archivos de las publicaciones y su disposición al público está dirigida al movimiento feminista, así como a investigadoras y personas interesadas de México y el mundo en el movimiento feminista mexicano. (Archivos Históricos del Feminismo)

The movement in feminist ideology from one feminist magazine to the next allows for a followable line of thought for researchers and interested people alike. The website for the Archivos Históricos del Feminismo allows one to scroll and access the magazine *Revuelta* from the 1970s and the magazine *La Correa Feminista* from the 1990s. Because the films by Novaro and González-Rubio digitally conserve thought on feminism and gender, I argue that the act of digitalization occurs in both archives and films. I observe that Mexican feminist writers, and in the case above, archivists and filmmakers as well seek to bring more “visibility” to their movement and do not want to stop at the act of remembering. On the contrary, the history of feminism encourages further reformations for women’s rights based on the fact that it has happened before. The concern for the preservation of feminism’s history drives much of the critical thought found in contemporary projects on gender.

For instance, I underline Irmgard Emmelhainz’s warning of the influence of neoliberalism on women’s body experience in their lives. Largely, Emmelhainz delves into the contemporary circumstances for women and asks feminists to take a look into their past. It is a way to observe what worked and what did not about the feminist

movement (Emmelhainz 223). The multitemporal study by Emmelhainz corresponds to commonalities between contemporary Mexican feminist writers. In addition, these authors pen their history with public and written manifestations concerning feminism from the U.S. I propose that the symbolic waves of feminism have begun to wash up on the shores of patriarchal literary and filmic analysis partly due to this international and historical approach by Mexican feminist writers. Furthermore, I contend that contemporary Mexican films illustrate a feminist movement that has commonalities with gender.

In short, regionalism and gender trace the lines between geography, history, economy, gender equality, and activism.³⁰ Undoubtedly, the concern for the lives of women and the protection of gender equality ranges in all regions. What seems to be a promising way toward reducing violence against women in one region will not necessarily square up with another. Thus, I hold that regionalism plays out in a montage fashion for feminism and provides critical features of *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar*. Rather than the superimposed effect of regionalism determining ideologies linked with feminism and gender, I provide filmic coordinates to increase “visibility,” in the words of the Archivos Históricos del Feminismo, and put up signposts that point to the variations of the Mexican Experimental. The notion of contemporaneity serves as a significant factor in my approach. Furthermore, I suggest the compilation of online publications and consideration of real-world stories adds a necessary social justice dimension to the research on the Mexican film. Before I delve into film analysis on

³⁰ A news brief on the current feminist activism in Mexico City follows this conclusion and prefaces the analysis of *Las buenas hierbas*. Mexico City, perceived as a region, proceeds to demonstrate the particularity in feminist expression.

regionalism, feminism, and gender, I deem it advantageous to consider the relationship between feminism and gender. Not only do I believe this next part on gender introduces regionalism to a more nuanced shape, but I argue that it better orientates conclusions on the experimental.

How does a reflection on gender take shape in *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar*?

While feminist regionalism focuses wholly on women's rights, the theory still results in further exploration in gender. Feminism paves the way for more complex notions of gender because it's the women's movement that has called attention to the sociological disparities between gender. I remark that experimental film in a formal sense leads to representations of gender equality. Equally, I contend that gender equality encourages experimental form in film. Four sources support my approach to a gender conscious critical regionalism. First, Judith Butler explains how feminism has furthered a value system of gender in general:

Although the unproblematic unity of 'women' is often invoked to construct a solidarity of identity, a split is introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender. Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed. (Butler 50)

Feminism serves as a starting point for Butler. Given that feminism animates gender, scholars have returned to produce critical thought about masculinity. In other words, feminism has proven to yield subversive thought about society's formation of masculinity. Thus, masculinity becomes clearer thanks to the feminist lens that has been polished over the years. *Las buenas hierbas*, on one hand, introduces feminist thought that hinges on mise-en-scènes with women. *Alamar* also explores gender

variations and generations in the non- European, Mayan society.

Second, Rita González and Jesse Lerner remark on the influence of indigenous arts and feminist theory in the experimental during the twentieth century and redefines “critical regionalism”. The result supports my contention that the critical regionalism now does not operate without attention to regionally constructed genders. In their study of the first generation of experimental cinema (1920s-1950s) in Mexico, they write, “The artists culled from the folk and the indigenous to create a visual culture that aspired to be populist, echoing the nationalist spirit of the times” (*Cine mexperimental* 35). I suggest that the experimental filmmaking in *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar* scrutinize the national distortion of indigenous culture in cinema and gender with its specific gender and region-specific frames.³¹

An article from 1966 Vivan Lash remarks on the experimental film tradition that fosters a critical understanding of Mexican masculinity.³² Furthermore, Lash addresses the violent characterization of Mexican people by Anglo-America, which emphasizes gendered representations within an international framework, in this third source. The first lines of the following excerpt use derogatory terms for indigenous people and other marginalized demographics in Mexican society. The article points to the fact that the very depiction perpetuates the toxic imagery associated with men from Mexico:

Un [. . .] con un sombrero grande durmiendo la siesta en una tarde soleada. Un charro vestido de traje bordado y un sombrero elegante ejecutando proezas a caballo. Un mariachi con un sombrero grande y elegante con cara de palo toca la guitarra, cantando canciones de amor frustrado. Un campesino, con su

³¹ *La casta divina* (1977) by Mexico City born Julián Pastor tells the story of a hacienda during the Mexican Revolution. The Spanish film *Yucatán* (2018) directed by Daniel Monzón tells the story of wealthy European vacationers and produces an image of neoliberal, exploitative regionalism.

³² The article by Lash was originally published in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Summer, 1966.

burro al lado, enmarcado en un cielo nublado y un cactus de muchas ramas. Todos con bigote. Todos varoniles. Todos pintorescos. Así son los mexicanos para muchos estadounidenses. Y para muchos mexicanos también. Observen las películas mexicanas” (Lash 132).³³

Here again it is noteworthy that the 1966 article sets the scene for international reflection because it tips the value system over to geographic logic. The racist and xenophobic individual from the United States fails to comprehend the multifaceted identity of a Mexican man; however, the logic takes on exploitative regionalist overtones when Lash states that Mexican people themselves have lost a sense of what masculinity signifies. If this can be seen in Mexican films for Lash, it is productive to remark on a more contemporary discourse on the subject.

Finally, I consider the commentary by Óscar Misael Hernández a key precursor to my analysis of *Alamar*. Similar to my deductions above, feminist studies make it possible to arrive to a new conclusion about the construction of masculinity: “Al partir de los planteamientos teóricos del feminismo y los estudios de género, pienso y propongo que los estudios sobre los hombres más bien deben analizar el proceso de construcción de diferencias y desigualdades sexuales entre hombres y mujeres y hombres entre sí en tiempo histórico y espacio social” (Hernández 235). In addition, Hernández relates that masculinities foster new manifestations depending on the ever changing socioeconomic and cultural situations at a local and regional level (Hernández 241). As we have seen, networks of economy also determine my remarks on feminist and critical regionalism.

³³ I have omitted a derogatory word for indigenous people in the article. The article was published in 1966; therefore, there the language is anachronic. The decision by Lash to spell out the word shows the difference in critical thinking from the 1960s to today.

Despite these similarities, I do not find that masculinity is absolutely determined by local and regional influences because I highlight the far-reaching pressure of globalization and commercial exploitation in form of hegemonic neocolonialism. Hernández makes note that there are various economies in Latin America; however, the conclusions in the article present the South of Mexico in a limited way as if neoliberal business did not also have define the regional masculinity. Hernández states, “los hombres del sur del país que pertenecen a grupos étnicos aluden más a la tradición comunitaria y a ‘el costumbre’ de ejercer poder y subordinar a las mujeres en la casa; son ellos quienes detentan la autoridad pública en asuntos relacionados con la comunidad, aunque en ocasiones las mujeres intervienen confrontando la hombría, la violencia y la autoridad de estos hombres ante otros” (Hernández 204). While the description of the man from the South of Mexico does not assume that all Mexican men go through the same social construction of gender, Hernández does not remark on the neoliberal and global characteristics at play in the region. The film *Alamar* addresses these relationships with a multigenerational portrait of men from a southern state in Mexico and demonstrates the necessity to remember the affect it has on the men from the region. With these four sources in mind, I believe the understanding of masculinity through feminist and gender spells out the contemporary theory of critical regionalism. The critical understanding of masculinity in *Alamar* comes off differently in *Las buenas hierbas* because women fill the shots and supply the dialogue in the latter. The four sources above outline a logic of gender along with Novaro’s and González-Rubio’s film participate in the conversation on gender that originates from women’s studies.

A Chronology of Cinematography in Mexico

The number of ways to stand a camera up and begin to film has increased according to advancements in technology and steps towards gender equality in the movie industry. María Novaro, who exemplifies this double move toward technology and gender equality, has spoken about the evolution from a 35mm format to digital and the importance of women in filmmaking.³⁴ Moreover, the director has lamented the painful realities that women do not receive the same “encouragement” as men in the practice of film.³⁵ Filmmaking has emerged as an artform that receives social commentary about its production well before the endpiece has premiered. The process of filmmaking can involve varying types of collaboration; therefore, the cinematography adheres to the work between the filmmakers. Given that some films have designated cinematographers while others only name the director, it is clear that cinematography can come from different sources. Directors, cinematographers, set designers, editors, and many other positions inform the cinematography of a film. Hence, observations on the use of the camera lay out the computable input of a single director or many directors without mitigating the importance of the cinematographer. Novaro worked with the cinematographer Gerardo Barroso for *Las buenas hierbas*, and González-Rubio did his own cinematography in *Alamar*. There are differences in how large a role the cinematography plays in the films. On one hand, Novaro as the

³⁴ Novaro spoke about the cost effectiveness of digital formats that were used in *Las buenas hierbas* in 2010 (“Convoca María”). Innovative filmmaking techniques also inspires Novaro when she recalls the production of *Tesoros* in 2017 (“Mexico’s María”). These films resonate with gender equality first and foremost because María Novaro has risen from her first short film *Conmigo la pasarás muy bien* (1982) to a woman director of 6 feature length films and ten shorter length features.

³⁵ Novaro expresses frustration with the absence of women cinematographers in a 2001 interview and points to sexist inequality as a major problem in the world of filmmakers, even at the level of excluding women from film schools (“*Lola and Danzon*” 210).

director will still influence the cinematography. And González-Rubio holds the position as director and cinematographer. I choose to follow the cinematography by Novaro and González Rubio. The work by Gerardo Barroso does not go underappreciated in my analysis; rather, I contend that the cinematography—with respect to a general sense of the word—in *Las buenas hierbas* connects more with the feminist arch put forth by Novaro.³⁶ Instead of overanalyzing technical specs of cameras, I am interested in offering remarks on the composition of shots as a precursor to my film analysis of *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar* in the coming section of this chapter. Equally, I will call attention to a scene from *Las buenas hierbas* and a scene from *Alamar* that demonstrates the way contemporary cinematography has led to critical representations of gender.

Critical film analysis by Traci Roberts-Camps, Isabel Arredondo, and Elia Hatfield, who write about the representation of women through the filmic language by Novaro, allows for me to remark on the chronology of cinematography in the films directed by Novaro. Their approach to Novaro's *Danzón* (1991) informs my decision to consider both cinematography and gender. Roberts-Camps summarizes the issue about Novaro's role as a "feminist" director or a "feminine" director after the premiere of *Danzón*. Because the definition of "feminism" has also evolved, Roberts-Camps goes beyond the conversation that started nearly thirty years ago to point out, "Whatever their label, Novaro's films highlight the fact that there are no official institutions in place to support the female protagonists and so they must create their

³⁶ Cinematography comes from ancient Greek κίνημα, *kinema* "movement" and γράφειν, *gràphein* "to write". Despite the importance of the knowledge of cameras required for technical cinematographers, I make that Novaro clearly puts her own "writing" in "movement".

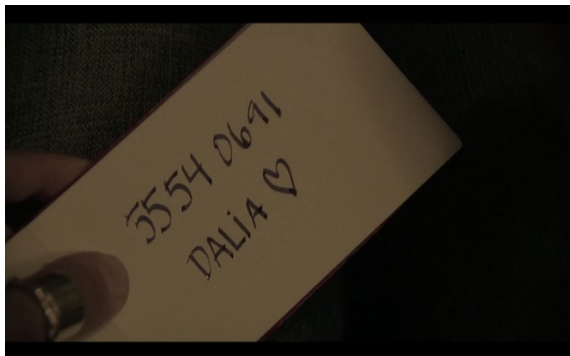
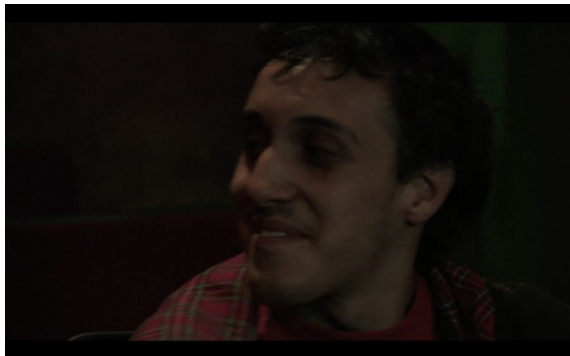
own networks of support, which they do quite successful at times” (Roberts Camps 54). Arredondo signals to the way the film *Danzón* began to take on “feminist” characteristics as feminism itself developed: “Si hablamos del tercer feminismo, una película puede ser feminista sin denunciar el machismo. A una década de su estreno, *Danzón* pasó a los estudios de cine mexicano como una película feminista. (Arredondo 397). In other words, the chronology of cinematography, consequently, develops in accordance with gender and vice versa. This type of critical film analysis creates connections between the representation of women in spaces. Hatfield states that Novaro intentionally intervenes in patriarchal ambiances:

Como en las películas que construyen un discurso del cuerpo femenino, *Danzón* ofrece, ante todo una visión de éste desde la mirada femenina, misma que narra y dicta sus acciones, su temporalidad y su percepción, dejando un sentido abierto de la mujer y su cuerpo a los espectadores, lo que trastoca el poderoso constructo masculino que lo ha situado por generaciones entre el cabaret, el melodrama o los espacios bien demarcados y controlados, como los ámbitos familiares, los religiosos y en ocasiones también los hospitales mentales, al actuar los personajes de Novaro dentro de un contexto del siglo XXI, en el que trabajan, viajan, disfrutan de su sexualidad y no temen expresarla. (Hatfield 148-149)

If *Danzón* deconstructs hypermasculine dance floors by following a woman dancer with agency, I argue that *Las buenas hierbas* disrupts the sometimes-heteronormative space at the movie theater.

The 8 still frames below that compose Montage 1 portray a counter-narrative in a place with heteronormative overtones. Montage 1.1 begins the sequence and frames two young men talking about women. However, the conversation is not exactly typical, except for some of the slang used. The two young men try to support one another in a non-competitive and non-hypermasculine fashion with advice on dating. Dalia, the protagonist in the film, appears in Montage 1.2 sitting alone in the movie

theater. The shot presents Dalia listening to the two young men talk albeit immaturely, not offensively. In a moment of dramatic irony, the viewers know that Dalia, who is an empowered single mother, will find the conversation between the two young men as naïve. Montage frames 1.3 and 1.4 focus in on the homosocial conversation between the two young men and anticipates the twist found in frame 1.5 and 1.6. Novaro directs the scene to show that Dalia overhears the young men and writes her number down on a piece of paper. The final two shots in 1.7 and 1.8 demonstrate Dalia handing the young man her number with confidence. The facial expressions by Dalia represents experimental facial expressions for women. Dalia's smile and physiognomy draw out an image of self-esteem, usually afforded to representations of men in film. Novaro and Barroso use the camera to capture the progression of gender equality with the advances in digital cameras. The cinematography based in the movie theater with varying planes, over-the-shoulder shots, low-key light, and intermedial b-roll home in on the gender roles in a public place like the movie theater. Novaro does not intend on showing a world-upside down where men help one another navigate romantic relationships, and women frequent movie theaters to seek out future lovers. On the contrary, Novaro hopes to show the reality that there are homosocial relationships between men that touch on personal topics and there are women that enjoy being single.



Montage 1 (*Las buenas hierbas* 00:19:15 – 00:21:07)

The chronology of cinematography in *Alamar* also refers to technological advancements and gender. It is significant to make note that González-Rubio acts as both the director, the cinematographer, and cameraperson in the majority of the film.³⁷ The high-quality image of *Alamar* shows the improvements in cameras in two ways. First, the dots per inch are high; therefore, the viewer sees the images that compare to contemporary, high-budget projects. Second, González-Rubio fulfills more than one position without the cinematography suffering. Since it is feasible for a director to act as a cinematographer simultaneously, González-Rubio demonstrates his autonomous decision-making process. Despite that González-Rubio's films have not received the critical analysis on gender like those of Novaro, I point out that the former still holds an important place in the experimental film tradition. The focus on three generations of Mayan/Spanish-speaking men by González Rubio constitutes a significant contemporary film since I argue that experimental film in Mexico must concern gender.

González-Rubio comments on the way he thought out the cinematography in *Alamar* when he describes the relationship between Jorge, the father, and Natan, the son, in an interview:

I wrote down an outline of key scenes, key factors that I wanted to achieve. I knew it was going to be a farewell trip, and so at the beginning I wanted Natan and Jorge to be less close with each other. That's why when you see the bus ride, Natan is thinking about being with his mother. And then, little by little, the bond begins get closer" ("A Conversation").

The 4 still frames of Montage 2, which are below, visualize the bus ride: the four

³⁷ The credits of *Alamar* name David Torres Castilla and Alexis Zabe as the underwater photographers.

shots that I have used appear in order. Thus, the distant relationship, on which González-Rubio remarks in the interview, comes across the first moments the son spends on an imminent, several night trip with his father and away from his mother. Moreover, the travel will incorporate another archetypical representation of gender, the grandfather. Gustavo E. Ramírez Carrasco affirms that the films by González-Rubio explore societal elements surrounding subjects with more than one cultural position. The son/father/grandfather relationship not only animates critical thinking about overarching, traditional family structures, the emotive effect of the film, according to Ramírez, also encourages a singular narrative:

Su disposición es etnográfica desde un cierto ángulo, latente en una observación rigurosa del ritmo de la vida y el discurrir existencial, pero su acercamiento al entramado cultural (eje del discurso y la búsqueda antropológica) no parte del análisis o la teorización, sino de la fascinación emotiva y estética, plasmada en sus películas del acercamiento a un sujeto de estudio que deja de serlo para convertirse en un reflejo complejo de la naturaleza humana” (Ramírez Carrasco 99-100).

As a result, the cinematography in *Alamar* orientates the subject in a human world where gender determines a child’s life. In this film, a trip with his father to the Yucatán Peninsula means less time with his mother in Rome. The problems for the mother, father, and son in *Alamar* stand for the universal difficulties that families face. What Ramírez calls “la fascinación emotiva y estética” that runs through *Alamar*, correlates to the relationship between cinematography and gender. The emotive features in *Alamar* relate to the documentary for Ramírez. The son/father/grandfather relationship fosters an emotional effect because the cinematography dials into the viewers’ perception. Ramírez finds that *Alamar* builds a human world by putting in order montages according to emotion, which confirms what other critics like, Cynthia

Tomkins, has stated about Latin American experimental film and film theory by Gilles Deleuze.³⁸

The sequences of shots lead to a filmic language that rests on syntax. The order of the shots reveals a fragmented representation of family. Montage 2.1 presents the father and son with their hands in their laps, sitting apart from one another. The following shot of the mother and child without the father in Montage 2.2 not only runs parallel to the distant relationship between the father and son, but it could symbolize the son's separation anxiety from not being with his mother as well. Then, the fast-moving landscape in Montage 2.3 prefaces Montage 2.4: the child son is hanging on to the window and trying to peer out by himself. As González-Rubio states above, the cinematography articulates the notion that the son does not feel close to his father. This is especially noted when the first sequences of the film, which run right before Montage 2, provide shots of the mother and son preparing for their separation with a last hug. The contrast between mother-child and father-child in the beginning of the film serves as the first clue that gender will constitute a major feature of the narrative. For that reason, the montage sequences and the overall filmic language in *Alamar* deserve a viewer that appreciates both the advances in camera technology and gender. As a result, I emphasize that *Alamar* like *Las buenas hierbas* hold a place in the experimental filmography from contemporary Mexico given that Novaro and González-Rubio decided to employ higher quality cameras to better represent gender roles.

³⁸ Cynthia Tomkins's analysis of affective close-ups emphasizes faces that present "intensive expressive movements that contrast with a closer implied corporeality" (Tomkins 32).



Montage 2 (*Alamar* 00:06:43 – 00:06:03)

Experimental film can sometimes become confused with a genre that solely questions form and not ideological arguments, for example, the struggle for gender equality. Consequently, Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza emphasize the broadness of Latin American experimental film in the first comments in a 2017 collection of essays:

De subversiones radicales del lenguaje cinematográfico a la poética *queer* de objetos abandonados y arrastrados por la corriente en la playa, de celebraciones eufóricas de la vitalidad de la ciudad a una narrativa surrealista sobre un agente extranjero obsesionado con una langosta, de abstracciones cromáticas a reconstrucciones épicas de la conquista europea de las Américas, el cine experimental en América Latina nunca ha podido ser reducido a un solo asunto, a un problema formal, a una estética o a una causa política. (Lerner and Piazza 3)

I argue that the language construction by filmmakers in Mexico from the last twenty years has formed timely commentary that addresses social struggles. There are many factors of which one could remark to better comprehend current Mexican filmmaking. For example, the intersections of film, theater, and telenovelas in Mexico encourages an additional perspective on the development of cinematography. Nonetheless, the changes in cameras and inclusive practices demonstrate a chronology that concerns the art on-screen and off-screen.

Yet, the coupling of camerawork and critique of social structures does not only pertain to these last twenty years or even the last fifty years. The reflective properties of the film medium blur the lines between what came first: the form or the social content of the moving image? This question is also relevant for the history of film in this case because Mexican directors from the beginning have tethered reality with the projection of it. Instead of making references to early Mexican cinema, I consider two from the last decades of the twentieth century in order to give an idea of where the

films *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar* part in their national representations. The films *La ley de Herodes* (1999) directed by Luis Estrada and *Rojo amanecer* (1989), directed by Jorge Fons, arrange a history that further contextualizes the experimental work by Novaro and González-Rubio. A quick summary of the four films makes a point about the social difficulties of their corresponding times: Novaro directs a film about the diverse lives of women in Mexico City; González-Rubio films a family that lives their lives according to Mayan, Mexican, and Italian culture; Estrada's direction results in a critique of contemporary Mexico through a historical lens and with a kitsch tone; Fons directs a historical reproduction of a massacre and utilizes methods from the melodrama and documentary film genres. Each film addresses points that do not fit in traditional frames; therefore, the social issues then come from off screen—they have never appeared in the film frame before—make the work experimental. Consequently, the work the director or filmmaker must do with cameras to bring the social issue within the parameters of the frame defines the experimental in a few words. What Estrada and Fons had to do has been recognized as this type of avant-garde work by Salvador Velazco:

Los dos films comentados [*La ley de Herodes* y *Rojo amanecer*] están marcados por una época de cambio, de transición a un nuevo orden político y cultural, generada por el reclamo democrático de la sociedad mexicana. Son trabajos pioneros en el sentido de que se atrevieron a abordar dos temas políticos prohibidos en el cine nacional. Ambas cintas pudieron verse por la presión social de una sociedad civil fortalecida y un Estado autoritario en vías de transformación democrática. (Velazco 78)

Given that filmic projections in Mexico historically have drawn out lines of social critique, it is suggestive to identify past arguments and anticipate future directions. Massacres and scandals, such as the murder of Mexican students and citizens on the

October 2, 1968, in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, the scandal of the devaluation of the peso, and consequential poverty set in movement by the Mexican political Part PRI in the 1990s frame former contentions that have led to an urgent production of film. I argue that the experimental contours now follow women movements and contemporary indigenous culture.

Feminist regionalism and *Las buenas hierbas*

Fourth-wave Feminist Protests in Mexico City

On August 16th, 2019, hundreds of feminists in Mexico City met to protest at the Glorieta Insurgentes to call attention to recent institutional attacks against women (“Protestar no es provocación”). A sequence of tragic events during the months of July and August convinced feminists to present physical opposition to the perpetrators. On July 10th, two policemen from the Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana stopped a twenty-seven-year-old woman on the street, took her to a hotel, and raped her. On August 3rd, four policemen from the Azcapotzalco Township stopped a seventeen-year-old, forced her into an official police car, and raped her. Between these two cases, two policemen have since been charged. On August 8th, a policeman sexually assaulted an underage woman in the bathroom in the Museo Archivo de la Fotografía (“Protestar no es provocación”).

On August 9th, the Procuraduría General de Justicia (PGJ) announced that the victim from August 3rd and her mother had decided not to proceed because they had lost confidence in the system (“Al menos 3”). Jesús Orta Martínez, the Secretario de Seguridad Ciudadana, promised they would continue with the investigation; however, he and the PGJ underlined the rights of the policemen and sidelined those of the victim

in an official statement.³⁹ The police continued to work because there was no longer an accusation from the victim (“Lo que sabemos”). The following Monday, August 12th, a group of feminists met Orta Martínez outside of the Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana (SSC). These protesters were able to get close enough to throw pink brilliantine into the official’s hair (“Lo que sabemos”). Furthermore, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the response of these institutions when they broke glass windows at the PGJ (“Diamantada CDMX”). Claudia Sheinbaum, the mayor of Mexico City, responded to the protests and instantly caused a controversy. At a conference about the protests, and in front of cameras, Sheinbaum states, “Esto no fue una protesta, fue una provocación (...) Querían que contestáramos con violencia, pero nosotros no somos así, pero tampoco hay impunidad, hay justicia (...) No se pueden fabricar culpables” (“Lo que sabemos”). The backlash to this distrust of feminism left Sheinbaum without any option, except to apologize and promise better communication. Still, the hundreds of feminists on August 16th increased to thousands (“Protestar no es provocación”) in order to prove as to what the demonstrations pointed exactly. The orchestrated feminist protests have animated viral hashtags, organized dialogue with officials, and brought women together to plan future protests and collaborate.⁴⁰

³⁹ Orta Martínez told reporters, “Hoy no hay una imputación, entonces es muy importante entender que si no hay una imputación, no se pueden violentar sus derechos laborales” (“Lo que sabemos”). In a correspondence to the media the PGJ wrote, “Cabe subrayar que las investigaciones se están realizando por esta institución de manera diligente en coordinación y colaboración con la SSC para esclarecer los hechos. En este sentido, la Procuraduría reitera que citará a declarar en calidad de testigo a quien sea necesario y recabará los datos de prueba, respetando en todo momento los derechos humanos de la víctima y de la ciudadanía” (“Lo que sabemos”).

⁴⁰ In addition, the hashtag served as an alarm for protests and marches on August 12, 2019, in several cities in México: Querétaro, Puebla, Toluca, Monterrey, Xalapa, Mérida, y otras. The hashtag #Nomecuidanmeviolan respond to the following statistics that have been published recently, “En México,

The feminists in the protests have fostered pointed opinions about Mexico City's justice system. Primarily, the outrage has come from three horror stories of police sexual violence against women. The experiences of the three attacked women have informed feminists of the real violence to which women are vulnerable day in and day out in Mexico City. Given that the stories tell of assaults and rapes in the Mexico City area, features of regionalism define the protests. Mexico City women address the problems specific to them; for example, the harmful condescension pronounced by Mayor Sheinbaum. Nevertheless, the *Restauradoras con Glitter* clarify the national importance when they emphasize the importance of the graffiti and paintings on the *Ángel de Independencia*, a national monument.⁴¹ The hashtags #MeToo, #Nomecuidanmeviolan, and the online presence of groups like *Restauradoras con Glitter* signal to characteristics of fourth-wave feminism. Ruxandra Looft, who writes about a social media project that is dedicated to women photographers, explains the latest form of feminism with these words:

the fourth wave, dated from 2008 onwards, works with the understanding that intersectionality is the common thread between the different communities and groups that link under the term 'feminism'. [A] distinctive trait of the fourth wave movement is its [*sic*] reliance and usage of technology and social media to connect and reach populations across cultural and national borders. (Looft 893)

el 41.3% de las mujeres ha sido víctima de violencia sexual y cada cuatro minutos ocurre una violación sexual. En su forma más extrema, nueve mujeres son asesinadas al día. Basta mencionar que sólo de enero a junio de 2019 suman mil 800 denuncias por abuso sexual en la CDMX; de seguir esta tendencia, se rebasará el número de 2018, cuando fueron dos mil 518 víctimas" ("#Nomecuidanmeviolan").

⁴¹ On November 25, 2019, close to 3,000 protesters met at the Ángel de la Independencia and marched to the Zócalo. The hashtag #NiUnaMenos brought attention to more stories and statistics: "Suman casi 3 mil mujeres asesinadas en México en 2019; solo 726 se investigan como feminicidios" ("Marcha del #25N"). The group *Restauradoras con Glitter* are a group of professional women who have made a point to document the feminist protests in Mexico City. Their Twitter page, @RGlittermx, states that they are a "Colectivo independiente conformado por profesionales de diversas especialidades asociadas al patrimonio cultural". This the group that has spearheaded the conversation with Mayor Sheinbaum with their public letters and updates on the feminist protests.

The amount of organization by women during the protests in August 2019, through social media and the various Mexican cities that participated, line up with the definition by Looft. Furthermore, the intersectionality found in social media suggests that there are many forms of feminism in dialogue: these hashtags and webpages from Mexico adhere to this logic.

***Las buenas hierbas*: Experimental Aesthetics in Three Scenes**

Novaro's film *Las buenas hierbas* (2010), I argue, foments an analysis of regionalism and feminism in this chapter; moreover, I will demonstrate that these characteristics align with an experimental form and narrative. Novaro, actors, and cinematographers received several awards; including Mejor Efectos Visuales (Alejandro Valle) and Mejor Coactuación Femenina (Ofelia Medina) at the 2011 Ariel Awards; and Best Actress (The entire female cast) at the 2010 Rome Film Fest. Novaro directed and wrote the film. Consequently, Novaro provides *auteur* filmmaking that allows the director to have more influence on the final outcome. The film homes in on the relationship between daughter and mother. The daughter, Dalia, who is played by Úrsula Pruneda, has the leading role. The relationship with her mother Lala, who is played by Ofelia Medina, evolves into a multitemporal and interdisciplinary bond. The two live out their relationship while Lala lives with Alzheimer. Dalia raises a daughter, dates, and volunteers at a radio station; however, the scenes dedicated to Lala portray a fragmented time plane. The sense of chronological time does not always guide the narrative. The sequences of close-ups, subjective camerawork, and long takes demonstrate Novaro's intention to see a daughter and mother relationship through slow

cinema and a contemplative lens.⁴² The focus on mothers and children gives way to a dramatic and yet psychedelic plotline. Furthermore, the secondary characters Lala and Ana shed light on the urgency for more effective feminism in Mexico City.⁴³ The multiple plotlines (Dalia's life as a single mother in Mexico City; Lala's approach to death and work in botany; Blanquita's mourning for the murder of her granddaughter; Ana's activism to call attention to violence towards women) illustrate the diverse and complex lives of women in Mexico City. Neither the narrative, which questions heteronormativity with feminist commentary, nor the slow sequences in the film fulfills the expectations of a typical drama. I observe that Novaro seeks alternative forms and narratives in her approach to regionalism and feminism. My conclusions and comparisons come after a notable article by Sofía Ruiz-Alfaro. As a result, I follow some ways of thought already noted by Ruiz-Alfaro while I recommend a few distinct entries into the film.

Because Novaro is a prolific filmmaker, it is possible to look at her filmography and make note of the varying film language. Equally, Novaro's films also create a network of signposts that define feminist regionalism.⁴⁴ There are connections

⁴² Tiago de Luca explains "slow cinema" and states "Through its contemplative mode of address, slow cinema elicits a heightened awareness of the viewing situation" (De Luca).

⁴³ Blanquita is played by Ana Ofelia Murguía, and Ana is played by Miriam Balderas.

⁴⁴ Novaro has directed six feature length films nine shortfilms, and an episode for a documentary. Regions and the lives of women stand out as major themes in the filmography by Novaro. Most recently, Novaro filmed *Tesoros* (2017) about children trying to navigate a treasure map on the Mexican Pacific Coast. Even more aligned with the two motifs of feminism and regionalism, Novaro's film *Sin dejar huella* (2000) narrates the story of two women, who live in Ciudad Juárez, and travel to Cancún to escape from imminent violence from drug traffickers and federal police officers. A third instance of this theme is underlined in *Danzón* (1991): Novaro tells the story of a woman who leaves Mexico City to travel to Veracruz. Upon her return back to the city, the heroin, who Novaro frames with close-ups, noticeably has found independence away from societal expectations as empowering. The facial expressions of contendedness and assurance, I propose, demonstrate the affect of traversing regions for Mexican women.

between the alteration of the audiovisual effects and the social commentary on women's lives in particular places throughout Mexico in Novaro's filmmaking. The long takes of dance scenes that begin and end *Danzón* (1991) and the shots of a dance hall in Veracruz, I believe, foster an experimental mode. Moreover, the focus on music and the lack of verbal language suggests an artistic performance when Novaro frames her subjects with fixed shots or slow pans. The experimental camera language in Novaro's films, like these of the early 90s, lead to nontraditional narratives and vice versa. Yet, while Novaro has maintained a constant interest in feminist regionalism by casting women and shooting in named locations in Mexico, I hold that the experimental film language by Novaro has ensured the attention to the social cause as well. In order to introduce three experimental scenes in *Las buenas hierbas*, critical theory on the subject of Mexican filmmaking and the avant-garde foment links between Novaro and the tradition.

Even though *Las buenas hierbas* does not present women organizing at computers, other places provide a scene for action, for example, rooftops, radio stations, movie theaters, and deathbeds. Novaro brings different feminist worlds together in these mise-en-scènes and through the conviviality between women actors, along with her own filmmaking; therefore, the influence of fourth-wave feminism develops into an identifiable feature. Since the primary contribution of feminist regionalism rests in a purview that highlights the lives of women, I believe that Novaro exemplifies the rereading of critical thinking and regions. The traits of the experimental, I describe, resonate with other theorists who have sought to make a comprehensive projection of the experimental tradition in Mexican film. Cynthia

Tompkins's, Rita González's, and Jesse Lerner's Mexican experimental cinema inform my conclusions on contemporary Mexican film.

Rita González and Jesse Lerner in the book *Cine mexperimental: 60 años de medios de vanguardia en México*, which is the sole book dedicated to experimental cinema in Mexico, reference the experimental approach in representing women and indigenous people in Mexican film history by analysis and indices (*Cine mexperimental* 28).⁴⁵ The history of the the avant-garde tradition in Mexico signals to a wide range of counter representation. For instance, the film *La mancha de sangre* (1937) by the director Adolfo Best Maugard, according to González and Lerner, emphasize the performance element in a nude woman dancer that fades in and out over a close-up shot of a male spectator (*Cine mexperimental* 28). The melodrama that takes place between the men and women in this particular scene hinges on a European, surrealist form; however, the result underscores gender roles and inequality in Mexican society. González and Lerner remark that the superposition of images and the black backdrops run parallel with images by the surrealist visual artist Man Ray (*Cine mexperimental* 28). The inclusion of a nonprofessional actor for the role of the dancer sheds light on another characteristic of experimental filmmaking in Mexico. González and Lerner inform that Best Maugard decided to work with María Soledad García Corona, the striptease dancer in *La mancha de sangre*, after the director saw her dance

⁴⁵ Some important remarks on experimental film in other more encompassing studies of Mexican and Latin American tradition have proceeded to define transnational aesthetics. Cynthia Tompkins also has provided meaningful entryway into the the study of the films by Carlos Reygadas. Film theory by Gilles Deleuze, for instance the "crystal image", and national epistemologies interest Tompkins; consequently, the affective impact though contributes to the definition of the experimental in Mexican film (Tompkins 184-185).

in a clothing lent to her by a prostitute (*Cine mexperimental* 27).⁴⁶ The representation of the erotic dance with the combination of real clothing from a sex worker establishes an intentionality behind the Best Maugard's intentionality. However, it is important to remark, as González and Lerner do, that García Corona would later imitate indigenous dances in commercial productions, like *La noche de los Mayas* (Chano Urueta, 1939). Hence, it is evident that there is a fine line between what appears to be experimental and its rapid evolution into exploitation.

González and Lerner layout a history of experimental film in Mexico; on the other hand, the critics create an index of women filmmaking. Thus, the conclusions about *La mancha de sangre* and the representation of women in Mexico by a male director eventually led to commentary on women directors who make films about women several decade later. The medium-length film *Medias mentiras* (1995) by Ximena Cuevas films cartoon images about 1950s middle-class Mexican culture and the “deberes” of women.⁴⁷ In addition, Cuevas offers critique of the exploitative imaginations of the Mexican middle class. The depiction of the relationship between women from Chiapas and the distortion of the value of indigenous culture come together at a personal level for the video artist. By inserting herself and her own family, Cuevas creates a self-reflexive envision of the economically privileged Mexican class and their understanding of indigenous lives (*Cine mexperimental* 96). González and Lerner interpret *Medias mentiras* with a focus on gender and points to the

⁴⁶ This scene in *La mancha de sangre* happens runs from 00:22:08 to 00:23:27. There are also shots of womens' faces producing an erotic way expression. Best Maugard ends the sequence with a woman covering the eyes of the man to her side.

⁴⁷ The film has a duration of 36 minutes, 5 seconds. The length is considerably long in comparison to her film *Contemporary Arstist* (1999) that runs just under 5 minutes. In the following chapter, I will return to this short film to flesh out the importance in the experimental direction by Ximena Cuevas.

heteronormative relationship between Cuevas's mother and father. It also significant that other critics have highlighted the point of view of the lesbian director in the film along with the formal fragmentation of the film medium: "[Cuevas] deconstructs the family, gendered roles, the mass media and notions of femininity through a deliberate and ironic layering and juxtaposing of images, either those recorded by Cuevas herself or those that are readily available to her" (Gutiérrez 88). A clear history of Mexican cinema also orientates my understanding of the experimental aesthetic.

Cynthia Tompkins analyzes the experimental in Latin American cinema by distinguishing national examples of the aesthetic.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the history of film in Latin America —mainly, the political underpinnings of the New Latin American Cinema during the 1960s— reveal that the experimental reflects social unrest according to Tompkins. The institutional moves in the Mexican film industry, Tompkins argues, point to presidents' eagerness to sway the masses to one way of thought. After the Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968, President Luis Echeverría Álvarez meddled in the Banco Cinematográfico. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari put NAFTA in practice and privatized the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (Imicine) (Tompkins 21). In addition, Tompkins highlights the impact of film schools like the Centro de Capacitación (CCC) and the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) on New Mexican Cinema.⁴⁹ The experimental ethnographic aesthetics —for instance, montage editing of pre-Columbian architecture and close-ups

⁴⁸ Cynthia Tompkins studies experimental cinema in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru in *Experimental Latin American Cinema* (2013).

⁴⁹ Tompkins frames Alfonso Cuarón, a graduate from CUEC, Guillermo del Toro, a graduate from the Centro de Investigación y Estudios Cinematográficos, and Alejandro González Iñárritu within a category of Mexican directors who have entered into Hollywood with commercial success (Tompkins 22).

of faces— in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Que viva México* (1932) make polemical waves in the development of the experimental.⁵⁰ The influence of the Mexican film industry and institutions on the experimental aesthetic should not be ignored. To the contrary, I emphasize that experimental film encourages critical ruptures from totalizing markets and national organizations that fund production; consequently, Novaro’s current role as the director of IMCINE complicates her role in an experimental tradition. Since I highlight the importance of feminism when defining the experimental movement, I approach *Las buenas hierbas* as a clear example of the avant-garde even if it stands on institutional groundwork.

Scene 1: Blanquita and Ana



Despite that the stories of Blanquita and Ana play a secondary role, I choose to comment on these narratives first. I also interlock two scenes to create a filmic conversation between them; thus, I place both scenes under this first category. Ana is both a victim of domestic violence and an activist against the mistreatment of women.

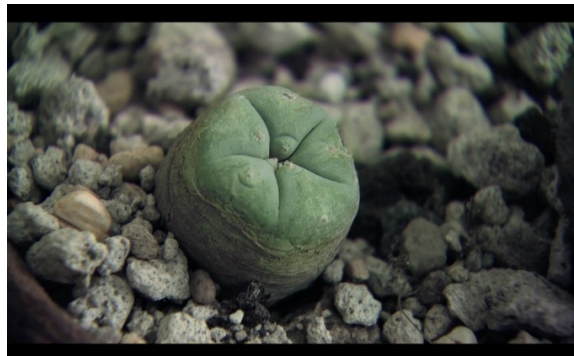
⁵⁰ Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez, for example, analyzes and emphasizes the experimental form and narrative in *El automóvil gris* (1919) (Schroeder Rodríguez 37-40); *Que viva México* (1932) also comes under Schroeder Rodríguez’s critical lens (Schroeder Rodríguez 50-60).

Scenes at the radio station present Ana in close-up shots speaking about recent statistics of rape and feminicide. In addition, Ana speaks about a specific case in Atenco, State of Mexico, which is Northeast of Mexico City. There are medium shots of friends and people at the radio station, and these sequences generate a social scene in urban Mexico City. I suggest that Ana's rhetoric reflects the regionalism and feminism discussed in this chapter. Blanquita's granddaughter, Citlali, was killed in an act of feminicide on the same year she turned fifteen-years-old. Novaro's representation of Citlali as a spectral presence in a bloodied dress peels back the pains of loss and violence. Ruiz-Alfaro comments, "Citlali aparece también en varias secuencias de la película como un personaje 'diferente': visible para nosotros los espectadores e invisible para los personajes, es 'real' e 'irreal' al mismo tiempo" (Ruiz-Alfaro 124). I contend that Novaro employs an altered sequence to encourage a critical viewership. Furthermore, the various types of shots (close-ups and medium shots) and narrative intercuts (fragmented time and place of characters). These secondary characters' narratives, I put forth, run parallel to critique on regionalism and feminism, and the polyphonic nature of Novaro's narratology in the film depends on them.

With an experimental context in mind, the dark backdrop behind Blanquita frames the social commentary similar to the surrealist approach. Before I underlined that González and Lerner signal to the use of this effect in the photography by Man Ray. Since I interpret the scenes between Ana and Blanquita in the same sequence, I remark that the indexical background behind Ana when she speaks in the radio station underlines the darkness behind Blanquita. Consequently, Novaro renovates the scene to illuminate a more contemporary social problem. Elia Hatfield writes about Novaro's

films and comments on *Danzón*, “La película de Novaro es primordial en los discursos de género porque marca la presencia de la mujer en el cine como agente activo que registra su cotidianidad tanto publica como privada, adoptando los personajes femeninos más actuales que rompen con los estereotipos previamente establecidos” (Hatfield 148). Although the critique concerns *Danzón*, the comment demonstrates what happens in Blanquita and Ana’s scene. Ana’s fight for women’s rights suggest that women will no longer let other women suffer gender violence without raising their voices on the matter. In other words, Ana is “breaking” with traditional roles of women and standing up against the misogynistic powers in Mexico City.

Scene 2: Mother, Child, and Psychedelia



The relationship between mother and daughter in the film carries along with it a depiction of mortality and the use of alternative medicine. Feminist regionalism, I propose, organizes this main plotline with three main connections. First, the mother studied in the Huasteca, located in the state of Hidalgo, and there are shots of the *Códice de la Cruz-Badiano* in her study space there.⁵¹ Second, Dalia accompanies her

⁵¹ This is an Aztec herbal manuscript that is about Nahua medicine and botany. The illustrated, Latin translation from 1552 is from the original Nahua text and was entitled *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis* (*Little Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians*).

mother near the end of her life to Oaxaca where María Sabina, a psychedelic healer, lived and worked. Third, I comment that the sterile hospital space in Mexico City orientates the film in the Westernized capital. The setting contrasts with the images above. Dalia and Lala lay together as living and dying and beings. Shortly before, Dalia had to cut a peyote button, and we assume Lala has chosen a psychedelic experience in mortality. Ruiz-Alfaro writes, “Aceptar la muerte con todas sus consecuencias y ayudar a su madre a ‘bien morir’ a morir con dignidad, representan la parte final del viaje personal de Dalia en *Las buenas hierbas*” (Ruiz-Alfaro 132). I make the point that regionalism not only fosters critique on ways of living but also dying. Furthermore, I observe that Novaro varies her filmic language with medium, plongée shots of the mother and daughter and repeats plongée shots with selective focus on the peyote plant. I suggest the sequence allows for natural and smooth editing, and as a result, the scene develops calmly into the moment of mortality.

Scene 3: Disarticulating Smoke Sessions



I consider history and its ties with films like *Las buenas hierbas* to provide a functional timeline of the representation of women smoking cannabis in Mexican cinema. In May of 1995, movie theaters in Mexico screened a scene between two

youths in Mexico City trying to imagine their lives together. The obstacles were not few. However, at that moment, the lack of experience in the world along with unemployment does not keep them from dreaming about matrimony. Maybe the light tone and romance signals to the influence of romantic comedy genre. Links with the *cabaratera* category also emerge as the narrative proceeds to frame a story of prostitution. A third reason for their hopeful fantasy is more viable: Alma and Abel de *El callejón de los Milagros* (1995) are smoking marijuana in the scene. A courageous moment comes to fruition upon smoking the joint. Salma Hayek, who plays the role of Alma, recently acted as the eponymous protagonist Beatriz in the film *Beatriz at Dinner* (2017). Through the film, Beatriz does not identify with a woman in love. On the contrary, Beatriz is a healer who seeks to bring down a capitalist hotelier at a dinner party in Los Angeles. Like Alma, Beatriz smokes marijuana and later faces her circumstances from an alternate point of view. Clouds of smoke add a texture to the environment of the scene. The smokers' facial expressions relate both levity and epiphany. I remark on these Hayek films for two reasons. First, I believe Hayek outlines a unique artistic arc in the Mexican and U.S. film industry; as a result, the use of cannabis in her early and latest work demonstrates an unblemished trope. Hence, the protagonists Alma and Beatriz, who are Mexican and smoke marijuana on the big screen, provide a context for the conviviality between women in *Las hierbas buenas* (2010).

I also argue that Novaro films women smoking marijuana in opposition to Julio and Tenoch, who share the lead role, from *Y tú mamá también* (2001) directed by Alfonso Cuarón. The two young men smoke marijuana and our blatantly

misogynistic. Consequently, I conclude Novaro and Cuarón share the interest in representing the use of cannabis by different subjects. And yet, both directors either direct their films to critique the sometimes toxic, homosocial behavior between men or advance the sisterhood in the smoke sessions between women. Óscar Robles explains:

Este *cine de mujeres* pertenece a la generación de los noventa. Estos cineastas reaccionan contra los esquemas y fórmulas del cine dominante, participan de formas más democráticas de producción cinematográfica y crean personajes multidimensionales y temas más cercanos a la sociedad contemporánea [. . .] El cine de Novaro es un discurso que muestra la crisis del nacionalismo mexicano y la crisis de las identidades modernas. Esta crisis se manifiesta en la revalorización de la mujer como un sujeto independiente y de profunda densidad psicológica. (Robles 216)

Las buenas hierbas was released after Robles wrote this analysis; however, I believe they also correspond to Novaro's later work. The decision to give time for women actors to smoke cannabis and show one another support certainly goes against the grain of dominant cinema practices. Consequently, the medium and close-up shots of the women passing the joint, inhaling, laughing, and genuinely accompanying one another manifests a contemporary feminist moment.

The physiognomy of the women as they smoke marijuana foments experimental form because the actual lines on the faces draw out contemporary contours. I recommend that the facial lines on the women as they smoke, after hanging laundry on the rooftop, etch in avant-garde overtones. In resistance to the patriarchal order, the women make facial expressions that suggests the marijuana affects the women in a lighthearted way that animates sisterhood. Early experimental film in Mexico exemplified in *La mancha de sangre* critiques the male gaze with close-ups of

men watching a nude woman dancer. Novaro employs close-ups of the women smoking in *Las buenas hierbas* to represent an improved place for women. Even if they are doing laundry, the women have claimed the space by enjoying a joint. To the contrary, Best Maugard decides to scrutinize the space of the striptease with lustful faces of men smoking.²⁷ Rather than experimental film language focusing on dismantling the way men see women as objects, I argue that Novaro's decision to present strong relationships between women in Mexico City, who come from different ethnic backgrounds and are at different ages in their life, registers in the contemporary understanding of experimental Mexican film. I also argue that Novaro disarticulates the preestablished filmic language involving cannabis in Mexican film with feminist critique. Women marijuana smokers traverse regions and find sisterhood in Mexican films. Hence, as these empowered women alter their points of view, the viewers also learn a new filmic language, which splits into three visions: the feminist, the regional, and the experimental.

Critical Representations of Masculinity and *Alamar* El Tren Maya in the Yucatán Peninsula

President López Obrador commenced formal documentation of El Tren Maya only weeks into his presidency ("México. Tren Maya").⁵² In order to begin the process, López Obrador traveled to Palenque—where the station the furthest South could possibly be built—and asked permission from the land to build El Tren Maya in a ceremony. Over the last year, the debate on the potential benefits of the railroad has

⁵² On December 16th, 2018, López Obrador broke ground at the Palenque Airport before asking permission to build El Tren Maya in the ceremony.

postponed any certainty. In December 2019, there will be more formal meetings between President López Obrador and the indigenous communities, who would be directly affected by the construction (“Si la gente dice no”). Nonetheless, the conversation on the topic has demonstrated the dangers of neoliberal development for non-Western cultures, especially the Mayan culture in the Yucatán Peninsula. Given that the train would primarily pass through the peninsula, there has been a pointed reaction from the opposers of its construction.⁵³

Because the impact on the indigenous communities, primarily Mayan, appears to promise serious changes, it is impossible to measure how much its construction and then service would alter the lives of the residents. The Agreement 169 from the *Organización Internacional del Trabajo*, which was signed in 1989, adds an historical logic to the treatment of regions according to labor developments where indigenous people live. The Mexican government must consult the citizens before beginning the planning and construction of megaprojects (“Tren Maya”). The 1,500-kilometer track with 15 stations would traverse through the Peninsula (Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche), in addition to the states of Tabasco and Chiapas. Literary figures that also identify as activists from the Yucatán, like the poet Pedro Uc Be, has remarked on the plan and the conditions of labor if the proposal were to be carried out:

No se vale hacer ningún desarrollo si no tiene zona de la gente más modesta ubicada dignamente en las cercanías de las áreas de producción. ¿Para qué? Para que puedan ir a trabajar a pie. Hasta pedir limosna si hace falta, pero a pie. [Debe haber preservación de] lo que nos queda, el monte, nuestra forma de vivir, nuestra organización, nuestra lengua y nuestra cultura” (“México. Tren Maya”).

⁵³ There have been alterations to the route of El Tren Maya; however, it is clear that Palenque, Chiapas would be the station furthest South; Mérida would be the station furthest Northwest; and line would run up the Eastern side of the Peninsula through the cities of Felipe Carrillo Puerto and Tulum (“Mapa del Tren Maya”).

Politics, economy, activism, and literature join together to put forth critical opinions about the Southern region of Mexico. The lives of not only workers but their families, could change to an extreme degree. Hence, the outcome depends on the effectiveness of regional demarcations to prove the value of standing up to neoliberal exploitation. *Alamar* visualizes the problematic moment in the Yucatán Peninsula with representations of a personal and political meeting between Western and indigenous cultures.

Scene 4: Critical Regionalism and Documenting Parenting



(*Alamar*)⁵⁴

Pedro González-Rubio's *Alamar*, which literally translates to "to the sea," received the Audience Award at the Morelia Film Festival and a nominee for Mejor Ópera Prima Award at the Ariel Awards in 2009. The film demonstrates the relationship between parents and a child in the drama, ecological documentary. The movement between Rome, Italy, and Banco Chinchorro, Quintana Roo, Mexico,

⁵⁴ The scene to the left shows one of the last shots of the film after the visit to the Yucatán Peninsula. The scene to the right shows the two going to the grandfather's home.

frames a real family as they accommodate distances and cultures. I propose that the film complicates the representation of feminism because men are the only subjects except for at the beginning and at the end. The child only takes a short trip to where the father lives, the Yucatán Peninsula. Consequently, the fact that the lives Italy means that the couple ultimately decided their child would live with the mother. Genres can overdetermine the poetics behind the production of the moving image, and this is the case for *Alamar*. The film does not fit neatly within the categories of ecological or drama documentary due to the author like role of the director.

The father in the film must say goodbye to his young son for a period of time because the child's mother lives in Italy. A week off the coast of the Mexican state Quintana Roo serve as the time and place for the father and son to prepare for their separation. During this week, the child learns how to fish, snorkel, and essentially live away from Western civilization. In the grandfather's house—a home on stilts that rests above the water—the three generations come together, and a familial tone emerges. Let us look at the shot sequence at the beginning of *Alamar* to better understand how water encourages critical thinking. González-Rubio could have emphasized the hardship of separation anxiety between something as traditionally sacred as the relationship between father and son. In addition, the director could have offered direct critique of neoliberal paradigms more and more present in the Yucatán Peninsula and the consequential families. In other words, the white mother from Rome and the non-white, Mayan father who decide that Italy is the better place for their child produces an incredible amount of critical analysis. Nevertheless, I argue the documentary is not actually a style, it is more of a method because it approaches to the effect of being a

real-life mirror. For these reasons, the interracial family cannot be taken for granted as simply tropes for filmic interpretation. The documentary takes an experimental turn when what we find on the screen underlines something even more *a priori* than regionalism and parenting. A feminist overtone drives the ending of the film. The last shot portrays mother and child together. I maintain that the film does not attempt to create a dialectic model. For example, González-Rubio keeps distance from the conclusion that time spent with an Italian mother is better than time spent with a Mexican father. Obviously, reductive analysis simplifies the complications in the interregional and international parenting situation. Nevertheless, I believe the regionalism and feminism involved in the film coordinate telling axes about gender roles and the significance of non-Western culture.

Languages, Audio, and Ecocriticism

Cultural realism, specific to Quintana Roo in Mexico and, by means of water, takes form in *Alamar*. Along with González-Rubio's use of the subjective camera, the narrative motor of water depicts a verisimilar realism. At the same time, the sound of the Mayan language in *Alamar* instills a sense of true cinematic representations. Similar to the sound of indigenous languages, González-Rubio consciously decides to insert the sound of water in his film to create a truer counter reality to the real world.⁵⁵ In like manner, the author like participation of the director, which is another product of realism, points to another film genre apart from the documentary, the essay film. Laura

⁵⁵ Rolfo Romero and Manuel Carranza were nominated for the Premio del Mejor Sonido at the Ariel Awards in 2011.

Rascaroli writes that essay films produce a personal reality and are “capable of significantly connecting with that reality” (*The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* 5). The essayistic features of *Alamar* rest upon the realism it suggests. I recommend that *Alamar* also creates a realism through the overlays of language. The grandfather, father, and son speak and/or hear Spanish and Mayan on the Banco Chinchorro. Back in Italy and at the end of the film, the child and mother speak Italian with a view of Rome. González Rubio pays close attention to language again when he puts final notes in English. González-Rubio inserts the following epilogue, in the form of an intertitle, about the region’s environment: “Banco Chinchorro is the richest coral reef site in Mexico and is part of the second largest coral reef barrier in the planet. Birthplace and home of a unique wildlife, efforts are being made to declare Banco Chinchorro a World Heritage Site”. The film falls, in some instances, under the category of World Cinema, and it is logical and poetic for the film to reach out to its viewers who threaten the well-being of the region most. If Mexican cinema hopes to instigate a serious rebuttal to politically biased film traditions; for example, studio films from Mexico City, it must put forth a cultural realism to empower humanity and not compress it at the cost of cultural identity.

Scene 5: Experimental, Indigenous, and Ecological Views



The ecosystems around the father and son from *Alamar* follow a geography much larger than the Yucatán Peninsula. González and Lerner point to how avant-garde aesthetics have revealed the struggle of indigenous peoples in the national setting. Because the father and the grandfather speak the Mayan language to one another, the role of language accompanies the importance of habitat; therefore, *Alamar* casts off the family dynamic commonly anchored to drama. The filmic language found in the camera shots of water home in on humans that live within a planetary ecosystem. Similar to the genre of the family drama, the World Cinema genre also has its own tropes, for example, the use of non-professional actors, the little use of special effects like CGI, and the employment of critical thinking about crimes against humanity; nonetheless, the genre considers the world without taking for granted the nature of the specific region. Tiago de Luca, a critic who writes about World Cinema, delves into an international filmography to speak about what he calls “environmental sensibility” (*Realism of the senses in World Cinema* 73). González-Rubio puts into practice a variety of filming techniques, for instance, extreme close-

ups, limited dialogues, voice-over, subjective camera use, and a mix of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and reflect on an array of traditions to spell out the directors' understanding of different geographies.

For González-Rubio, Italian Neorealism and Cinema Novo stand out as catalysts of the filmic semiology. Certain camera work renders a “sensitivity” that allows *Alamar* to project critical thinking despite that the respective environments do not overlap succinctly. Thus, the critical work in World Cinema pertains to just how different environments may seem and to aesthetics that jointly manifest the following thesis: listen to and watch the crisis and the beauty of humanity not necessarily of the nation. It is not a coincidence that the films utilize water to get their point across. Let us remember it is the contamination of water, the melting of glaciers, the search for water on different planets, and many other topics of water politics that puts human life in danger and makes human life possible. Ecocriticism creates this “sensitivity” to interpret the ocean views in the film.

Nevertheless, contemporary, experimental Mexican films consider gender along with ecocriticism in my findings, and this assertion creates a conversation with an article concerning *Alamar* by the film critic Gustavo E. Ramírez Carrasco. Ecocriticism and ethnographic, documentarian film practices inform Ramírez Carrasco's conclusions: “[*Alamar* es] un ejercicio difícil de clasificar que hibrida una de las formas tradicionales del documental (cámara en mano, cierta visibilidad de los dispositivos y el equipo de grabación) con un argumento ficcionado en el que sin embargo, un ambiente natural incontrolado reluce a lo largo de la trama” (Ramírez Carrasco 93). The formal aspects of *Alamar*, to which Ramírez Carrasco signal,

correlate with the same realism created by Best Maugard's employment of nonprofessional actors.

Alamar also reinvents the social critique of gender roles in the film by focusing on how men see one another instead of concentrating on the misogyny men practice against women. A reflective look at men surfaces when we see the generations evolve from grandfather to son and from son to grandchild. Before, I commented that Novaro does something similar when she decides to show the empowerment of women instead of the violence men apply on women. Ramírez Carrasco argues for a more humanistic understanding of González-Rubio's direction, "[parte] de la fascinación emotiva y estética, plasmada en sus películas a partir del acercamiento a un sujeto de estudio que deja de serlo para convertirse en un reflejo complejo de la naturaleza humana" (Ramírez Carrasco 100). Despite that there is a certain look at anthropocentrism, I disagree with Ramírez Carrasco at this juncture. I believe the study of masculinity draws González-Rubio to greater filmmaking and evokes feminist regionalism within the contemporary, experimental Mexican film tradition.

Conclusions:

Feminist regionalism, I have maintained, serves as a valid entryway into understanding the limits of the experimental. In this second chapter, I have concentrated on the history of feminism in different texts both from Mexico and abroad. Moreover, I have highlighted the regional features of feminism in the confession by Muñiz. These themes support the interpretation of the contemporary

Mexican films *Las buenas hierbas* and *Alamar*. At the same time, I have introduced contemporary issues: the feminist protests in Mexico City and the construction of El Tren Maya. I believe these current events allow for a better orientation of the films. In other words, I comment that the films from ten years ago might not register in the contemporary category in a historical sense. Although, I contend that Novaro's and González- Rubio's films provide superb critical thinking for these important humanitarian concerns in Mexico today.

Chapter III

The Mexican Experimental: Creating Space in History, *Novelwriting*, and Filmmaking

Irmgard Emmelhainz and Emilio Sauri have exposed the neoliberal appropriation of the avant-garde through corporate conglomerates promoting “innovation”.⁵⁶ Sauri addresses Valeria Luiselli’s self-referential process of publishing her novel *La historia de los dientes* (2013) by receiving funding from the drink manufacturer Grupo Jumex. The novel engages with a neoliberal company to upend the neoliberal ideology. “Carretera”, who is the protagonist in *La historia de mis dientes*, is developed by Luiselli involving texts and mp3 audio tracks of the employees of the Jumex factory. The different false teeth tell the story of “Carretera”; consequently, there is an alternative narration that originates from the difference in socioeconomic class in Mexico.⁵⁷ Hence, Carretera is able to employ the act of curating—which is usually reserved for upper class societies—and reverse the entire *novelwriting* process. The innovative constantly come into question because the funding comes from the Jumex factory. There are at least two sides to this subversive progression: the focus on contradiction demonstrates the challenge of actually producing creative and crucial literature. And the direct relationship with workers in the factory in order to create a novel promises a collaborative

⁵⁶ Sauri cites Emmelhainz to unearth the nature of Luiselli’s novelistic world in *La historia de mis dientes*. If creativity in novels and film are destroyed by neoliberal entities, terms like “innovación” deserve a second look. Otherwise, as Sauri argues, the logic of the “self-revolutionizing process of valorization” embedded in capitalism becomes more threatening with respect to both the arts and labor in Mexico (Sauri 280-281).

⁵⁷ Marco Ramírez Rojas states, “El núcleo de articulación de la colección de Carretera, no obstante, parece difuso. Toda colección se organiza siguiendo un principio que rige tanto el proceso de escogencia como el de curaduría y catalogación” (Ramírez Rojas 341).

relationship.⁵⁸ In the end, the line between creativity and economy is tested; yet, a focus on intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, or critical regionalism does not enter into the novel's logic. Contemporary times demand the experimental novel and film to critique late capitalism's totalizing force; however, I recommend that there is more to the "experimental" today than the critique of capitalism. As a result, I make note of the moments when form and narrative come together and coordinate signposts at those intersections to remap the experimental.

The codependence of time and aesthetic, for example, aesthetics and storyline, provides the opportunity for many definitions of the experimental to emerge. Past and current approaches about the history of the experimental foster a cohesiveness to comprehend the trends and patterns over the years. Rita González and Jesse Lerner reference to the experimental usage of different women's and indigenous peoples' roles in Mexican film history by analysis and indices (*Cine mexperimental* 28). These examples of subjects and sociopolitical topics make it possible to refocus the experimental from the form to the narrative.

Given that the experimental rests on the most urgent issues of the era, social justice for marginalized people —albeit by gender, color of skin, sexual orientation, able-bodied standards— in the production and the representation of artistic works needs to be an important starting point. The marginalized people in Mexico deserve *novelwriting* and filmmaking to share the stories humanity requires to press forward towards social justice. The "experimental" has been often aligned with cosmopolitan artists; however, the current definition of this genre suggests that the social platform of the artist, main themes,

⁵⁸ It is important to make note that Valeria Luiselli is also a white Mexican woman novelist who resides in New York City; thus, her privilege also complicates the process of working with laborers.

and participants must reflect an inclusive logic. What is the story behind the *novelwriter* and filmmaker? How privileged of a life has the individual had according to race, class, gender, and able-bodied lives? The answers to these questions are crucial. I argue that experimental novels and films should come from voices who are able to personally access the realism they are creating through first-hand experience. The nomenclature of “experimental,” nonetheless, still takes on Eurocentric dimensions on a regular basis in Mexico.⁵⁹ The theme of national emancipation can be confused for a necessary feature of the “experimental” in all mediums; however, the logic of the experimental is not contingent on the problematization of the State. The history of the Mexican novel and film do not altogether have different origins when considering the productions that have received institutional support. I depict that there are determinant systems around race and gender in one of the most significant institutions in the history of Mexican cultural production, the Secretary of Public Education. Patriarchy, systemic racism, and propaganda filmic beginnings in Mexico come to light in the examples I provide below. The history behind the following literary and audiovisual texts in this chapter frame a look back at the avant-garde movements in the Mexican art world: *Nadie me verá llorar*, archival papers on José Vasconcelos, *Que viva México!*, and *El automóvil gris*. I reference photography, illustrations, and archives from the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN); thus, this chapter adheres to both a visual and critical outline in order to explore the contemporary production by looking back at past traditions of the arts in Mexico.

The Position of Experimental *Novelwriters* and Filmmakers in Mexico

⁵⁹ For example, Samuel Steinberg states that Francis Alÿs, who is a Belgian artist and has lived in Mexico throughout his adult life, produces experimental artwork (Steinberg 170-172).

The experimental novel and film are contingent on generations and the passage of time. I argue for an extension of a few years to incorporate other novelists and filmmakers in what I consider to be the experimental today. At the same time, I propose that it is important to enlarge the time frame in order to ensure the experimental does not simply become the “new”. Despite the influence of time on the experimental, I believe the period for the contemporary experimental needs to begin from as far back as 1999: Cristina Rivera Garza’s novel *Nadie me verá llorar* and Carlos Reygadas’s short film *Maxhumain* came out the last year of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ I view the experimental video art by Ximena Cuevas (from the 1980s till the present) as a significant addition to the history of the Mexican experimental. In this same vein, Roger Bartra’s anthropological approach, I propose, orientates the beginning of a new period in Mexico when he asks, “¿No podemos esperar que el nuevo siglo atraiga nuevas miradas que descubran dimensiones sociales desconocidas?” (Bartra 305). “Unknown” socio-anthropological approaches go hand in hand with experimental form and narrative. Apart from the experimental form and narrative in the novel by Rivera Garza and the film by Reygadas, I organize my analysis with the calendar year of 1999. The watershed year

⁶⁰ *Maxhumain* (1999) has a running time of 00:06:19. The depiction of a twenty-something tied to a post on the beach prepares for his imminent suicide. Before this ending, he thinks about a past memory of his mother on the beach in a revealing bathing suit. Equally, it shows the adult son’s hands undo his mother’s bikini strap. Inexplicably, the brown skinned and dark-haired adult son appears as a white adolescent. The sequence cuts to the adult man lighting a joint and waiting for the tide to end his life. Reygadas alternates between black and white and color filters according to the present and past, respectively. The reversal of the black and white image to show the present and the color image to show the past demonstrates Reygada’s intention to employ aesthetics in both the form and narrative. This film resonates with both *Las buenas hierbas*, *Alamar*, and *Semilla* (a film from the Yucatán Peninsula which I will consider in the third chapter) given that there is a focus on posing questions about familial relationships. Moreover, French is the language spoken between the two, and as a result, the dynamics of race and region lead to more audio and visual than dialogical sequences. Coherent narratology is not the underlying feature in *Maxhumain*; in lieu, I suggest that a sense of urgency to use film to subvert family and filmic archetypes (like the neocolonial presentation of the white, all-consuming vacationers on the beach) is one of the real cruxes in the film.

allows me to follow three timelines: the twentieth century, the hundred years between the Mexican Vanguardia of the 1920s till now, and the last twenty years of experimental production. Another voice on sociology and humanities comes from Claudio Lomnitz when he states that events of violence in contemporary times, like in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, displays “una crisis de representación” (Lomnitz 41). The socio-anthropologists and chronicler that write on Mexico inform the logic behind experimental novels and films; “alternative” literature and cinema can be critical of “alternative” times in history. Given that I address the relationship of generations, the corpus not only gives way to a cohesive index of novels and films, but I too point to a nuanced form of the experimental in general via form and narrative from Mexico.

It proves to be exceptional for the experimental to directly engage with the factor of time. Like the juxtapositions of “colonial” and “postcolonial” literature or the dialectics of “modern” versus “postmodern” art, the experimental always parts from a tradition.⁶¹ In other words, the experimental should not be confused with a form of alchemy. That being said, the experimental, unlike the “postcolonial” or the “postmodern”, suggests a moment in history when either the form or the narrative stands on its own to some degree. “Postcolonial” studies can offer acute readings and filmmaking of resistance to empires and follow historical timelines: the experimental — in its search for something critical of the present— collapses the historical structure. This notion of timelessness in the act of finding newness calls attention to another critical approach of the experimental. If the experimental were to have an axis, I believe it would

⁶¹ The focus on colonial periods in the Yucatán Peninsula for Tsubasa Okoshi Harada brings attention to the importance of understanding experimental documents of resistance in the article “Construcción del ‘futuro pasado’: una reflexión sobre la elaboración y *traslado* de los títulos de tierras mayas coloniales”, *Cuadernos de Lingüísticas* de El Colegio de México 5(1), ene-jun 2018, pp. 286- 330.

be the moment in time when a form or narrative begins to signify meaning.

Consequently, I remark on the direct connection between the experimental and historical in Mexico to make note of social justice concerns; for example, anti-racism, I infer that there is a “consecrated” narrative, along with the form, in the contemporary Mexican novel and film to add another angle to Bourdieu’s theory.⁶²

The intermedial novel *Conjunto vacío* by Gerber Bicecci follows the first-person woman writer who is all of the below: an artist, a student at UNAM, and an immigrant. Gerber Bicecci turns the university into a memory of her childhood with her mother in UNAM’s Biblioteca Central (Central Library); therefore, the woman artist, who immigrates from Mexico to the United States and to Argentina all while working on art, transcends traditional institutions and cuts her own lines into the experimental. The disconnection fosters an anti-institutional, feminist ideology. Rivera Garza, like Gerber Bicecci, writes herself into her novel *La muerte me da* (2007); although, Rivera Garza is a professor and not a student at UNAM. The novel focuses on a woman professional at the university and fragments the story with violence and misogyny. Through the experimental Rivera Garza critiques the institution. I suggest that Oswaldo Estrada’s depiction of Rivera Garza crossing “fronteras” also pertains to the group of experimental novelists and filmmakers (Estrada 252).

Mexico, as a nation-state, adheres to geographical lines and physical hegemonic structures in the form of walls from neighboring countries. I assert that the context of the

⁶² Sánchez Prado states, “[T]he Mexican literary field is of special interest to Bourdieusian theory, given that it overlaps the structures inherited from twentieth-century dynamics of autonomy and symbolic value with the sustained transformations brought about by neoliberal cultural policy, and with the paradoxical intervention of state-centered, quasi-welfarist structures of subsidy” (“The Public Economy of Prestige” 194). The current experimental critiques the symbolic value and autonomy of the arts, and as a result foments clearer representations of feminism and regionalism.

Mexican experimental have considered intersectional feminism, anti-racism, gender, indigenous peoples' rights, and critical regionalism; moreover, I claim it distinguishes the particularity of each topic from other national traditions. Furthermore, a comparison of novels with similar undertakings but from other nations, I conclude, calls attention to the way national ideologies infinitely leave their mark on contemporary narrative. I suggest that it is crucial to identify this counter example of the experimental novel in Mexico because it provides an outline of the genre. Therefore, the experimental memoir *Blue Nights* by Joan Didion, who is from the United States, does not register in this network of texts. The daughter in the memoir is named Quintana Roo because her parents vacationed there. The text explores the relationship between mother and daughter along with the experience of being a woman writer. The similarities between the Didion's memoir with some of the novels in my corpus seem to offer critical points of comparison. Nonetheless, the idea that a vacation to Mexico ends up giving one of the character's names perpetuates a neoliberal, globetrotting lifestyle. The trajectory by Didion animates important observations about feminism and regional exploitation in an international setting; however, I put forth a national and regional understanding of the experimental to foster more geographical and sociopolitical specificity.

Mexican History and the Contemporary Experimental Novel

The novel *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* (*Sólo por ser mujer*) by Marisol Ceh Moo and *La muerte me da* by Cristina Rivera Garza unhinges patriarchal arrangements of the role of women. Ceh Moo narrates the story of an empowered Mayan woman who moves from Chiapas to Yucatán without any decision of her own. After the woman kills her husband

in self-defense, she must converse with non-Mayan women in the court system to eventually gain her freedom and walk away with some form of justice. Rivera Garza creates a network of woman characters (castrator, detective, professor) to better examine the misogyny that debilitates the Mexican City society. The novels deal with crime and social issues; at the same time, the importance of justice highlights the narrative arcs. I argue the form and narrative that Ceh Moo and Rivera Garza compose gives definition to avant-garde *novelwriting*. These two social, experimental novels come into focus even more when other novels by these women authors are considered as well.

I argue two contemporary novels by Ceh Moo and Rivera Garza, apart from *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen* (*Sólo por ser mujer*) and *La muerte me da*, serve as additional contributions to the experimental novel. Moreover, I include a longer historical framework in order to conclude that throughout the development of Mexican arts institutionalism has been questioned by *novelwriters*. Given these two women novelists identify the patriarchal institutionalization in Mexico City and the Yucatán Peninsula in these novels, it is significant that both novelists have also written a historical novel. The historical and the experimental genres pertaining to the novel overlap in this comparison; a critical look at the past allows for a reorganization of the present.

Ceh Moo imagines the point of view of Mayan people 8 years before the Caste War of Yucatán (1847-1901) in the novel *T'ambilák men tunk'ulilo'ob* (*El llamado de los tunk'ules*) (2011); consequently, the narrative of a leader of Mayan rebellions signals to a version of history too often erased by institutions.⁶³ Scott Hadley points out the following in a review, “although this is a novel about a historical event, it does not

⁶³ See footnote 27 *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: Un viaje a Yucatán* (1989) by Juan Villoro and *Adiós a los padres* (2014) by Hector Aguilar Camín.

confine itself to strict historical discourse by any means and becomes a work that also experiments with the fantastic” (Hadley 205). *Ceh Moo* complicates the narrative with multiple genres along with the telling of counter chronicles of the Mayan resistance to white Mexicans leading up to the Caste War of Yucatán. Furthermore, the prologue by Felipe Hernández de la Cruz emphasizes this context in the novel: “la contraposición de poder de los blancos de Campeche y Mérida encontró en los indios el material idóneo para jugarlos como peones en un ajedrez de intereses, pero el blanco no entendió que el indígena era en realidad un infiltrado en sus reyertas” (Hernández de la Cruz 182). Thus, *Ceh Moo* demonstrates that the past and the institutionalization correspond to two distinct notions. By altering the idea of the Mayan history in the Yucatán, I observe that *Ceh Moo* makes a relationship with an anti-racist Mexican history possible, on one hand; I also remark that this counter chronical and critique originates from the Mayan characters in the novel.

In the midst of military history the novel retells the efforts by the real-life Santiago Imán and his collaborators to keep Yucatán independent of the Mexican republic in the 1840s. Hadley underlines the way Imán loses his white man’s soul only to have it replaced with a Mayan soul and concludes that in general “the reader is constantly reminded of the cruel reality of the Mayans at the hands of the church and secular authorities” (Hadley). I argue that the anti-racism practiced in *T’ambilák men tunk’ulilo’ob* provides meaningful bridges to better understand the current race relations in Mérida. Not only does *Ceh Moo* work with contemporary themes in other novels for example, *Chen tumeen x ch’úupen*, the prose in *T’ambilák men tunk’ulilo’ob* also foment a point of view that is reflective of the contemporary experimental novel from

Mexico. Ceh Moo suggests how the Mayas plan to dismantle systemic racism in the novel:

Ichil u ts'uil u k'aaxilo'ob Ebtune' tun betchajal jun p'éeel much'támbal tu yo'olal ba'atel. Ma'alob máako'ob ku bin u yilik'ob bix ken u toopo'ob sak máako'ob [. . .] ichil u jelo'ob ul'aakalo'ob yéetel u yuumilo'ob lu'um ku bin u ch'aiko'ob t'aanil tu yo'ola ba'ax kuxtal ku kaxtiko'ob ti' máaya máak. Tuláakalo'ob máako'ob ya'ab ba'alo'ob u yoojelo'ob, ya'ab ichilo'ob ku xookiko'ob kastelan t'aan, u jelo'obe' u yoojelo'ob bix najmal u ba'atelo'ob (*T'ambilák* 141) (En lo intrincado de los montes de Ebtún se efectuaba una reunión subversiva. Importantes caciques mayas confabulaban contra la civilización de los hombres blancos [. . .] establecían acuerdos sobre el futuro del hombre maya. Todos eran hombres con sabiduría. Los más sabían leer las letras castellanas, los menos conocían las artes de la guerra (*T'ambilák* 288)).

Ceh Moo coordinates a scene with Mayan men who were not only aware of their own importance in history but also understood the threat of white men. In addition, the scene describes the Mayan men learning techniques to challenge the power from the white men through linguistic knowledge and war tactics. History in *T'ambilák men tunk'ulilo'ob* serves as a way to remember significant resistance in Mayan history, yet, Ceh Moo encourages a critical look at the present with focusing in on the “white” identity that threatened Mayan history in the 19th century and threatens the Mayan present today.

Nadie me verá llorar (1999), written by Cristina Rivera Garza, looks back at the life of a woman that lived during the first half of the twentieth century. The feminist ideology, I underscore, sharpens the critical discourse found in this experimental novel.

Nadie me verá llorar, for Sánchez Prado, exemplifies an “embrace” of feminism and deconstructs historical novels in an “experimental register” (*Strategic* 147, 176,).

Furthermore, I hold that the topics on “the self-reflective position” of being a woman writer and the study of women in the archive found in Rivera Garza’s novel manifest a feminist tilt to the form. Sánchez Prado states that these two approaches “cut across

avant-garde conceptions of literature” (172). In addition, I observe that Rivera Garza’s prolonged feminist critique since 1999 and up until the present-day illustrates a prolonged avant-garde approach to the novel. Rivera Garza offers a novel with critical thought directed at Mexican history from the first half of the twentieth century when she publishes *Nadie me verá llorar*. The novel tells the story of Matilde Burgo. At first Matilde is a patient at a mental institution in Mexico City at the turn of the 19th century; however, Rivera Garza goes on to depict her life around a close photographer friend, prostitutes, revolutionaries, gringos, and poverty up until the 1950s. Because Rivera Garza obtains archival documents to learn more about the individual and the photographer, the novel 144ubli a nonfiction element into its fiction.⁶⁴ Hence, Rivera Garza takes a position on the representation of Mexican women in history while simultaneously upending traditional literary practices. Sánchez Prado clarifies that the *Boom femenino*, which is associated with Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta, “requires [other] women writers to be more reflexive and strategic in their position-takings, because the opening up of visible spaces often levies a backlash against them [possibly] dismissing them for their gendered angles” (*Strategic Occidentalism* 150). Sánchez Prado compares the *Boom femenino* with three that stand outside of the tradition: Carmen Boullosa, Ana García Bergua, and Cristina Rivera Garza. Furthermore, Sánchez Prado introduces “parallactic procedures” and “constellations” to present a more accurate representation of the three novelists’ spatial position-taking.⁶⁵ In another act of position-

⁶⁴ Julia Érika Negrete Sandoval affirms that the role of the archives also proves to be an opposing force for Rivera Garza’s fiction (Negrete Sandoval 97).

⁶⁵ The terms “parallactic procedure” (*Strategic* 163) and “constellations” (*Strategic* 172) for Sánchez Prado imagine the interpretation of eluding meanings and the necessary bibliographies to read Mexican women novelists.

taking, Cristina Rivera Garza received the “Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” which is only granted to women writers from Latin America, in 2001 for *Nadie me verá llorar*. In this sense, Rivera Garza begins a new position in the commercial literary world in Mexico and Latin America with the award. The experimental form in *Nadie me verá llorar* rests in the use of historical archives, and the experimental narrative surfaces in the telling of a woman’s life during the revolution. I argue that the avant-garde approach fosters the position in other fields for the novelist, like the economic and the academic though Rivera Garza continues to seek out transgressive novelistic aesthetics.

Beyond Prose: Visual arts, “Negat-ive” Space, and Body Politics

The use of intermediality in contemporary Mexican narrative determines the trajectory of the aesthetic found in novels, film, and audiovisual projects. The appearance of a heterogenous number of mediums in a single work not only comes out in the content; the influence on the form as well is evident. Intermediality results in a loosening of artistic traditions. Given that the intermediality is not a new technique, by any means, it is necessary to point out some instances in Mexican literature from other periods of time. Hence, the art from Mexico during the twenty-first century and the varied manifestations that pertain to the era stand out from other traditions. The amalgams of artistic representation from Mexico in the last twenty years, makes an exploration possible for the illustrated novels, photographic novels, and the essay films. On the other hand, the approach leads readership and the literary market in Mexico towards novels that do not lose track of the interest in prose, film, and the moving image. Upon observing one novel that is publishe a mix of publish can be in dialogue with a similar novel, equally diverse

in approaches, demonstrates the commonality of multimedia in the contemporary Mexican novel. The illustration and the photography in the three intermedial novels *Conjunto vacío*, *Jacobo el mutante*, and *Jacobo reloaded* provides a space for the negotiation of the work at the same time it presents it. In addition, I argue that the illustrations and the photography use the prose on the page as a canvas or frame; consequently, the border of negative space surrounding the photography and the illustrations allows for another dimension. As I mention in Chapter 1, additional media have taken on a complimentary disposition in the critical conversation on Mexican novels with the written word.⁶⁶

Figs. 1-3 feature illustrations by Gerber Biececci and speaks to the naming of women artists from Mexico. The abbreviation of character names in Gerber Biececci's novel *Conjunto vacío* provides a point of departure that addresses the relationship women have with Mexico and its institutions. Gerber Biececci employs experimental *novelwriting* with the intermedial and feminist critique. The diagrams show Mx (México), A (Alonso), Y (Yo), and U (Universo). The contoured lines portray Mexico as another universe and a place distant for Alonso. The circle around (Y) is autonomous and even projects lines of thought, possibly, to the idea Mexico in another (U). The character Vero travels between Argentina, Mexico, and the U.S.; however, Gerber Biececci is equally careful to show an airplane with ample negative space in Fig. 3. The obfuscation of a clear image of a woman artist performs a significant role in the logic of Gerber Biececci's novel.

⁶⁶ Perkowska, Magdalena. *Pliegues visuales: narrativa y fotografía en la novela latinoamericana contemporánea*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2013.

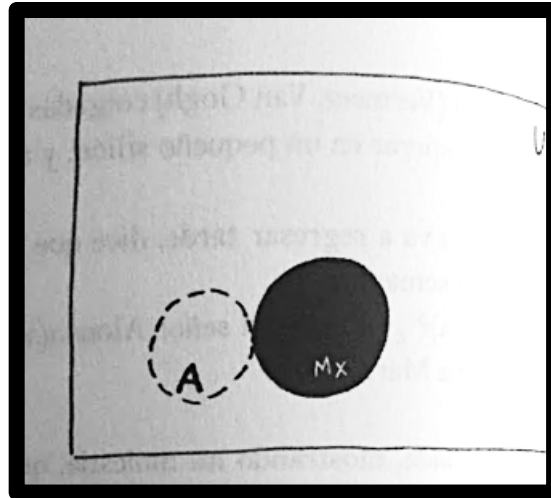


Fig. 3 . Verónica Gerber Bicecci. (*Conjunto vacío* 86)

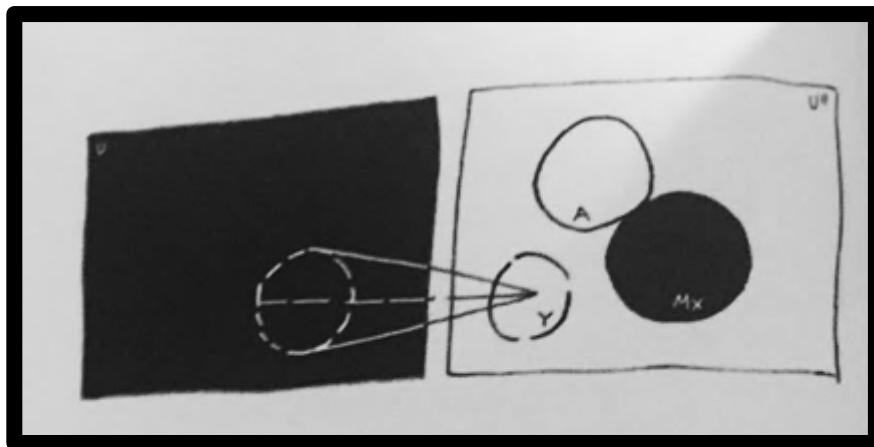


Fig. 4. Verónica Gerber Bicecci. (*Conjunto vacío* 102)

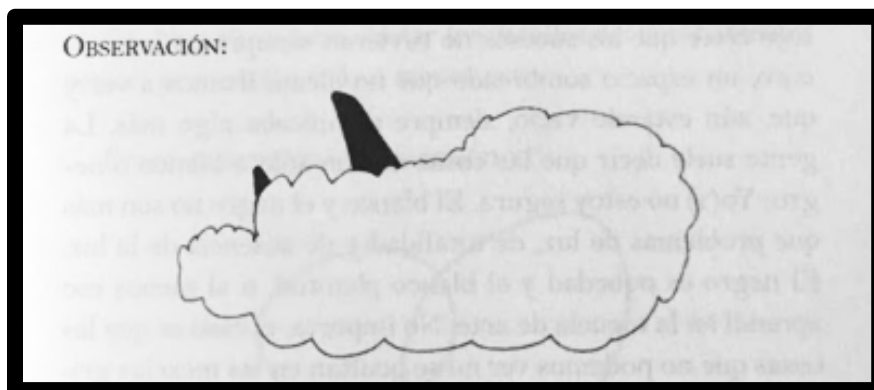


Fig. 5. Verónica Gerber Bicecci. (*Conjunto vacío* 25)

Gerber Bicecci's intermedial production highlights new forms of feminisms; therefore, Mexican *novelwriting* guides literary and artistic genres to shared spaces, like that of feminist discourse, and to their aesthetic limits. Thus, Gerber Bicecci exemplifies this intention to write with illustrations; consequently, a term more representative of the contemporary experimental novel gives a clearer sense of the genre's extensions. A relative contemporary of Gerber Bicecci provides another production of multimedia novels and fosters more dialogue about critical *novelwriting*.

The novels *Jacobo el mutante* (2002) and *Jacobo reloaded* (2014) by Mario Bellatin, who is a Mexican-Peruvian novelist, demonstrate a paradigm of the experimental and the institution. Both novels introduce visual design to the prose, photography, and illustration respectively; I indicate that the collaboration between novelist and artists renders a cinematographic effect. The transition from one novel to another in the series puts the novel in movement as film puts the image in movement. Thus, the relationship between novel and film—at the intermedial level—reaches new depths in this part one and part two of Bellatin's *Jacobo* novels. Analysis concerning intermedial productions demonstrate the importance of pointing to formal approaches, for example, the use of photography and illustrations in a two-volume novel. By involving a heterogeneous number of artists from different fields, I find the power of institutions decreases. In the *Jacobo* double feature, the narrative about Joseph Roth, an experimental author himself, leads to feminism and a new awareness of disability studies.

The history of Joseph Roth (1894-1939) and his process of writing the fictional novel *La frontera* serve as a *mise en abyme* throughout *Jacobo el mutante*, published in

2002, and *Jacobo reloaded*, published in 2014. It is significant to highlight that Roth lived during the same time period as the genocide carried out by the Nazis and the mass exile of Jews across Europe. Bellatin documents the life of the author; however, the primary story follows two protagonists that mutate from the same character. Jacobo Pliniak, a rabbi who lives in the contact zones of Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, turns into Rosa Plinanson, who is a ballerina that protests the dance academies in the U.S. The division of the characters form the story of the two novels because *Jacobo Reloaded* reminds the reader about what was originally narrated in *Jacobo el Mutante*. The first part has less than a hundred pages, and the second part is made up of more than two-hundred pages. The repetitions of the novel offer a memorable gesture to Roth's struggle. In lieu of proceeding with another author — or a different theme altogether— Bellatin makes the decision to return to the story of exile and literature. Having said that, it is important to point out that *Reloaded* adds the narratives about the Jacobo's cousin, who practices taxidermy in Mexico City, and Jacobo's grandfather, who tells stories about Bruce Lee's films. It is of interest to observe the role of intermedial narrative that links metafiction, the references to film, and the study about the memory of Jews during the Second World War. The photography by Ximena Berecochea constitutes part of the *El mutante* and the illustrations by Zsu Szkurka in *Reloaded*. The collaboration the *Jacobo* novels consists of are the sequence of the genres of art, history, religion, and fiction. What photography, illustration, and prose suggest in my analysis revolves around the cinematic experience; as a result, *El mutante* and *Reloaded* begin to correspond to a phenomenological affect and to establish the form of a novel in movement.

The experimental form and narrative seek to reveal the totalizing consequences of what Bourdieu calls the “institutional concept”:

[A] dealer or publisher who once played the role of discoverer may let himself be locked within the *institutional concept* [. . .] that he himself helped to produce, according to the social definition applied among critics, readers and even younger authors, content to apply the schemas produced by the generation of initiators” (Bourdieu 156).

The continuation of artistic directions through institutionalization contextualizes the *novelwriting* by Bellatin. The *Jacobo* novels frame a period of early twentieth century Mexican literature and uses intermedial techniques to challenge established norms.

Bellatin collaborates with Berecochea, who is a woman photographer from Mexico, on *Jacobo el mutante* and begins the logic of the intermedial telling of the unfinished piece by Joseph Roth. Figs. 4-6 show present photography that do not have individuals, which is true for all of the photos; thus, the collaboration with Berecochea functions without being indexical. Still, it is noticeable that Berecochea does not only avoid photos of people, but she also has few objects in the photos. The landscapes and bodies of water suggest a negation of a human world; consequently, I argue that the collaboration emphasizes the act of interpretation (almost as if you were to be at a mixed-media art show).⁶⁷ Bellatin repeats an intermedial format for *Jacobo reloaded* with Szkurka, who is an illustrator from Hungary. The anti-racist, feminist, and gender centered ideologies in the novels come from the history of Jewish people escaping Nazis and Russian pogroms. The alliance between Bellatin, Berecochea, and Szkurka allows for more critical analysis of fascism, exile, institutionalization, Jewish studies, and gender.

At the same time, the approach by Bellatin makes it possible for more critical research work with archives concerning the history of the Secretary of Public Education.



Fig. 6. Ximena Berecochea. *Jacobo el mutante*.

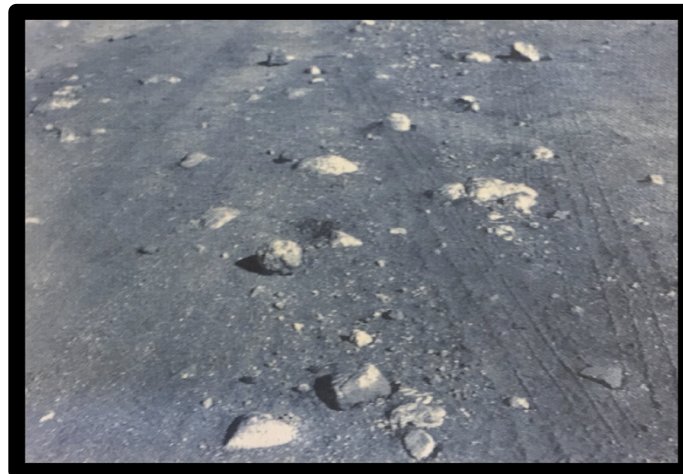


Fig. 7. Ximena Berecochea. *Jacobo el mutante*.



Fig. 8. Ximena Berecochea. *Jacobo el mutante*.

Apart from my argument for the experimental features of *Conjunto vacío*, the *Jacobo* novels suggest that there is corporal and literary development in moving away from racist authoritarianism. The concentration on Jewish history and suggestion of “mutant” bodies by Bellatin permits the inclusion of the theory by Emmelhainz that adds more comparative critical thought about the current avant-garde novel from Mexico. Bellatin’s *novelwriting* questions Mexico’s body politics in the novels despite that they tell of a Hungarian’s exile to the U.S. The intermediality in the novels correspond to literary history with a visual response.⁶⁸ The collaborations with Berecochea and Szkurka provide interdisciplinary novels that challenges the representation of literary history and archives.

The critical analysis on disability studies has underlined the connection of photography and the representation of bodies.⁶⁹ Rosemarie Garland Thomas states:

As a culture, we are at once obsessed with and intensely conflicted about the disabled body. We fear, deify, disavow, avoid, abstract, revere, conceal, and

⁶⁹ Rosemarie Garland Thomson remarks, “As a form of representation, photography carries more truth value than other images; in other words, we think of photographs as being closer to reality, as more reliable sources of truth than, say, drawings or even verbal representations” (335)

reconstruct disability—perhaps because it is one of the most universal, fundamental of human experiences. After all, we will all become disabled if we live long enough. Nonetheless, in representing disability in modernity, we have made the familiar seem strange, the human seems inhuman, the pervasive seem exceptional. (Garland Thomas 337)

The focus on disability studies has a personal connection with Bellatin. Because a part of Bellatin's right arm is missing, the novels by Bellatin contain autobiographical components that facilitate disability studies. The use of an orthopedic arm by Bellatin also aligns the *novelwriter* with narrative arcs found in his novels.⁷⁰ The personal reflection on the way bodies move and respond to a world prejudice of disability creates another dimension of humanity in the Mexican experimental novel. Jennifer Thorndike has pointed out that the disabled bodies in the novels by Bellatin come together to manifest resistance against State and economic systems.⁷¹ I argue that it is significant to consider the idea of the “mutante” and the way the bodies of Jacobo Pliniak and Rosa Plinanson change in form and identity. In addition, I emphasize that the continued intention by Bellatin to address disabilities in his novels deserves attention. I agree with Ignacio López Calvo's observation that “His characters may struggle to have a complete body again [. . .] a situation that produces constant frustration guilt and existential angst” (López-Calvo 341). Thus, Bellatin valorizes what could be considered “mutante” or “disabled”, and reimagines the Jewish author Joseph Roth in his collaboration with Szkurka.

⁷⁰ Bellatin publishes *Salón de belleza* in 1994 about a man who runs a house for the dying and *Perros héroes* in 2003 about the life of a paraplegic man and his many dogs.

⁷¹ Thorndike, Jennifer. “Alternative Body Owners and Their Machines: The Acquisition of Dominant Subjectivities by Sick/Disabled Individuals in Mario Bellatin's *Perros Héroes*”. *Disability in Spanish-speaking and U.S. Chicano Contexts: Critical and Artistic Perspectives*. Eds. Dawn Slack and Karen L. Rauch. Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2019, pp. 92-108.

I note that Bellatin composes the novels with the intention to historize and fictionalize literary history; furthermore, the life of Roth during the rise of antisemitism in Europe is framed in the *Jacobo* novels. Szkurka's illustration of Roth below signals to the intersections Roth was crossing during wartime as Jewish Hungarian. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that Bellatin decides to highlight literary history outside of Mexico in the *Jacobo* novels.

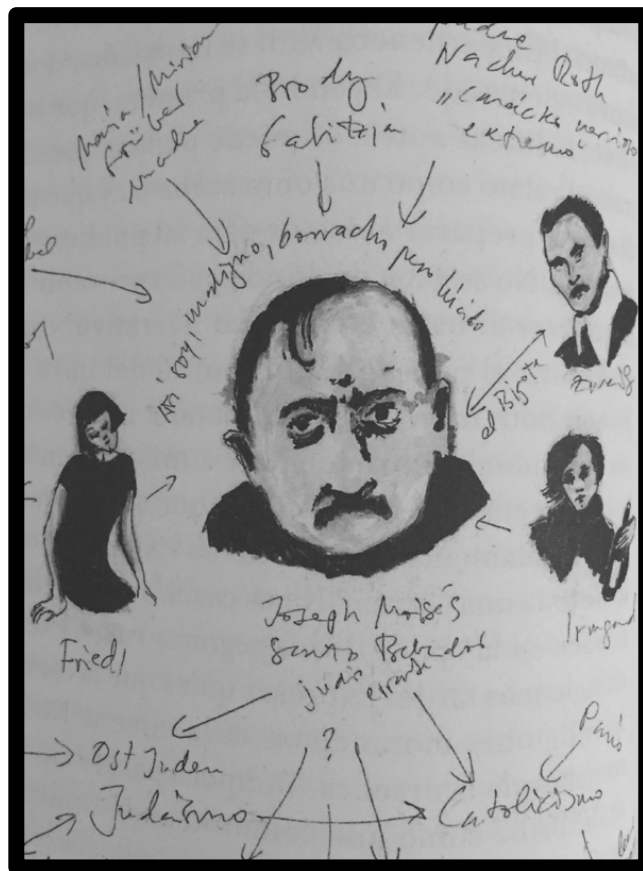


Fig. 9. Zsu Szkurka. *Jacobo reloaded*.

The written work by Roth exemplifies the following juxtaposition: a Jewish author who wrote of the dangers of antisemitism and contemporary Mexican novelwriting. These conclusions about representation in Mexican literature and archives

signal to the importance of following marginalized *novelwriters* to better understand the contemporary social justice problems. Bellatin does not write about indigenous communities in Mexico, like Marisol Ceh Moo, or about women's literature, like Cristina Rivera Garza; still, Gerber Bicecci and Bellatin give form to an example of *novelwriting* that hinges on intermedial components and underrepresented figures in exile.

The experimental novel from Mexico prioritizes a concentration on social justice in my analysis of narrative and form. Hence, the *novelwriting* by Bellatin about disability studies while he himself operates in this world of body politics, I conclude, defines another parameter of the experimental. I comment on conclusions by Emmelhainz to highlight how the novel and critical essay follow common threads. Social justice becomes possible in an autonomous expression for both Emmelhainz and Bellatin. The significance of a singular voice in social movements stands out in the critical theory by Emmelhainz, "Mexico's population is very heterogeneous and is plagued by racist and classist prejudices, hence the country has not been able to coordinate claims in solidarity or civil movement projects that could cover all the sectors of the population or instigate self-organized collective projects" (Emmelhainz 193).⁷² Even though Emmelhainz points to some promising progressions of activism, for example *#YoSoy132*, the institutional influence from the Mexican State and corporations is inevitable (Emmelhainz 209).⁷³ I observe that Bellatin's own relationship with national institutions in Mexico serves as another complexity given that his intermedial collaborations question *novelwriting*

⁷² "La población de México es demasiado heterogénea y está plagada de prejuicios raciales y de clase, por lo que no han logrado programar demandas solidarias ni proyectos de movilización civil que pudieran abarcar a todos los sectores de la población ni instigar proyectos de auto-organización colectiva" (Emmelhainz 193)

⁷³ *#YoSoy132* focused on the 2012 elections in Mexico and attempted to reach out to marginalized populations, including indigenous communities, to advocate for more transparency during the voting process.

standards.⁷⁴ Two messages are sent out when considering the literary move by Bellatin: first, Bellatin makes it a point to visualize stories about the disabled and the exiled. Second, Bellatin was the director of the Fondo para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA) from 2018-2019. The introduction of need changes regarding representation in the novel and the polemical relationship with a major art institution in Mexico provides an additional dimension of the experimental. I argue that the comparison between Emmelhainz below signals to the experimental genre's relationship with institutions. It is not enough for the experimental to be autonomous; the genre also must make it known what it is not.

The corporal representation in the arts, I suggest, creates perspectives of the world and demonstrates how a society sees oneself. At the same time, a better comprehension of corporal representations in the arts informs the experimental genre. It is of interest here to consider intermediality and nationality. Because the approaches to intermediality are interwoven to those of nationality in the novels, it is significant to note that Bellatin presents an abstraction of Mexico in the *Jacobo* novels just once. I observe that the abstraction of Mexico encourages additional attention; therefore, Bellatin seems to make it known that his country of origin constitutes a feature of the novels. The two passages below come from the first novel, followed by the second novel, and underline body politics in the experimental novel by Bellatin. The violence and fear attached to exile appear in the experience of Joseph Roth:

Since the time he lived in his native Galicia, the writer felt like he was living out the last phases of the Jewish spirit. His past appeared to be getting placed on trial by history, he implied in one of his letters—lost in our times—warning, a bit later on, of the complete obviousness of his interpretation of what had occurred. The deepest evil was not necessarily the one that had put the pogroms into play, he

⁷⁴ Bellatin retired from his position as the director of the Fondo para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), which he held for a year, after receiving critique from artists and author (<https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/03/mario-bellatin-fondo-cultura/>).

pointed out, but rather the one that would attack the faith of the generations who survived them” (*Jacobo el mutante* 12).⁷⁵

Bellatin decides to reference the inhumane immigration system in the U.S. and the separation of a cousin in the second novel:

But something happened in the high seas. In the middle of the trip the news was received that Jacobo’s ship was going to be the last that would be permitted to transport passengers without visas to enter in the United States. His cousin’s ship therefore went to Mexico and not to the United States like Jacobo’s (*Jacobo reloaded* 164).⁷⁶

The initial passage references the “evil” involved in the provoking exile and the aftermath that can seek to delegitimize the history of that “evil”. It is evident that the body takes on a new definition when the notion of “evil” affects its politics.

Consequently, the result Jacobo’s cousin being taken to Mexico instead of the U.S. indicates that Bellatin intends on critiquing the prejudice of bodies due to politics. The passages about Jewish people’s exile during the Second World War and the current injustice carried out by the U.S. immigration system sets out a history of social justice that is needed to be better understood today. The *Jacobo* novels tell the story of Joseph Roth, who was a Jewish Hungarian, and the exile to the U.S. by a mutating character. The movement of politicized bodies arranges the narratives arcs in the novels by Bellatin, Berecochea, and Szkurka and provides a view of injustice at the intersection of nationality, gender, socioeconomics, and disability. Body politics in the experimental novels by Bellatin permit an additional perspective on the experimental novel coming from Mexican women *novelwriters*.

⁷⁵ Galicia refers to the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria of the Austrian Empire.

⁷⁶ “Pero algo sucedió en la altamar. En pleno viaje se recibió la noticia de que el barco de Jacobo iba a ser el último al que le sería permitido transportar pasajeros sin visa a los Estados Unidos. El barco del primo llegó por eso a México y no a Estado Unidos como el de Jacobo” (*Jacobo reloaded* 164).

Women's *novelwriting* defines the experimental genre in the coming years, and the inclusion of Verónica Gerber Bicecci, Cristina Rivera Garza, and Marisol Ceh Moo will provide key points of reference to acknowledge the approaches. I observe the narrative and form in the novels by Bellatin demonstrate that the experimental genre is not exclusive according to gender identities. Consequently, I argue that women's experimental *novelwriting* provides voices to encourage more equal praxis according to gender in Mexican literature. It is vital for the Mexican *novelwriting* community to streamline the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ voices, and women have historically been a large part of creating space for diversity. The inclusivity from women's *novel writing* creates literary space for underrepresented people in literature and also question patriarchal traditions in the publishing trends. The importance of Bellatin's voice speaks to the disabled/sick community at a worldwide level given that his work has been translated to English, German, French, and Malayalam. The junctures of language and the history of social intersections fosters more points of view and clearer directions to proceed with care; subsequently, more diverse perspectives and inclusive practices will require the participation of the marginalized populations in Mexico. Women constitute most of the body of Mexican literary and filmic work—the exception, considering both chapters I and II is Pedro González-Rubio. I consider Bellatin to be a *novelwriter*, like González-Rubio is a filmmaker, who complements the critical work on underrepresented populations in Mexico.

Creating Experimental Space: Early to Contemporary Mexican Films

I attempt to locate an understanding of just how experimental a film without criticism of social injustice is still experimental. *El automóvil gris* (1919) directed by Enrique Rosas depicts the Mexico City police force in search for bandits that burglarize the wealthy citizens. The marks of distinction at play in the film relate to key observations: first, Rosas's decision to insert video documentation of a firing squad upends the feature length, French *Fantômas* like production; second, the prejudiced reference to Zapatistas points to the outlandish projections of indigenous cultures in Mexico (Schroeder Rodríguez 37). The racist bias and shallow critique of bandits in *El automóvil gris* prefaces Eisenstein's polemical *¡Que viva México!* (1931). The experimental ethnographic aesthetics—for instance, montage editing of pre-Columbian architecture and close-ups of faces—in Sergei Eisenstein's *Que viva México* (1932) make polemical waves in the development of the experimental.⁷⁷ I signal to moments in history of the “experimental” to indicate the role of historical time and tradition. It is evident that the use of cameras and direction does not suffice in producing an experimental production: an intention to reciprocate with all the participants must be present in the production and presentation.

The arrival of a Russian filmmaker to Mexico in 1931 to start a production that would be entitled *Que viva México* does not seem to promise more than an outsider's reaction to a faraway place; as a result, it has caught the attention of film theorists over

⁷⁷ Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez analyzes the form and narrative in *El automóvil gris* (1919) (Schroeder Rodríguez 37-40) and *Que viva México* (1932) (Schroeder Rodríguez 50-60).

the years.⁷⁸ Paul Schroeder Rodríguez explains, “[*Que viva México!*] offer[s] a coherent critique of the interconnected ideologies and practices of racism, heteronormativity, androcentrism, and capitalism” (Schroeder Rodríguez 50). Furthermore, an illustration of Eisenstein’s use of the dialectic in the film serves the argument by Schroeder Rodríguez (Schroeder Rodríguez 56). This analytical approach according to the organization of sequence-shots does not always receive very positive attention. On the other hand, Andrea Noble writes:

[The] precedence of referent over representation has vanished, and instead the film-image has metaphorically taken on material form in the shape of the glossy picture postcard, with all its connotations of the tourist fetish-object. Eisenstein and his film-fragment have become a degree zero for how *not* to represent Mexico. Cast in the role of the archetypal cultural tourist, Eisenstein and his film [*Que viva México!*] have become shorthand for the clichéd, the stereotypical, and reductive. (Noble 174)

The distinct viewings of *Que viva México* —one being more interested in the form, while the other finding more problems in the content— present a scale according to experimental film in Mexico. Given that Eisenstein films brown bodies with a formulaic and concerted intention, the film is lost in the category of exploitative and racist projects. It is evident that *Que viva México* does not meet a principal standard of the contemporary experimental: the representation of anti-racism must be a leading characteristic. At the same time, I contend that the critical conversation about Eisenstein during the 1930s in Mexico connects with the analysis of the film *El automóvil gris* and archives pertaining to José Vasconcelos. Schroeder Rodríguez and Noble offer observations about the film from nearly 100 years ago to contextualize the history of artistic decisions, and I follow

⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *La imagen-movimiento: estudios sobre cine*, Trad. Irene Agoff, 1983, Paidós Iberica, 2017, p. 19.

this line of thought in my arrangement of historical texts and contemporary definitions of the experimental.

Given that Enrique Rosas complicates the form (video footage of fictional police quarters and documentation of executions appear in the film) and the narrative (indigenous bandits do serial acts of crime), I suggest that *El automóvil gris* explores cinematic limits without meeting experimental standards. I argue that the indecent representation of Zapatistas compromises the film to stand out as an experimental signpost to follow. Schroeder Rodríguez speaks to the questionable practices, for example, the white-washing of the actors that played the bandits, “[The] real-life bandits, however, do not look anything like the ones played by European-looking actors in European-looking clothes, but rather like indigenous and Mestizo Zapatistas in their signature wide-rim hats and tight pants” (Schroeder Rodríguez 38). Rosas went to great lengths to mesh fiction and nonfiction; still, the approach instigated sociopolitical clashes. Schroeder Rodríguez goes on to write, “In addition, they are dehumanized by the way the execution is filmed and edited to show only the moment of death from a full-shot perspective. Viewers are thus positioned to see not the likable individual who robbed for love and glory, but a faceless, indistinct mass of falling bodies” (Schroeder Rodríguez 38). *El automóvil gris* might not seem to fit within the experimental tradition at first; for instance, Rosas predicated its filmic language on Hollywood and European filmic techniques (Schroeder Rodríguez 39). These arguments might suggest the film does not belong in the experimental genre despite the critical thought of politics through the video editing of documentary footage and fictional sets.

Nonetheless, the real reason why *El automóvil gris* does not correspond to the experimental tradition is decidedly the use of white face for indigenous and Mestizo Zapatistas and the footage of the execution of brown men. The film serves as an antithesis of the experimental for this representation of racist killing by institutional forces. The brutality that the Mexican City police, which are white men in both the fiction and the real footage, employ against the thieves ultimately provokes sensational horror. The attempt at anti-racism in the history of the experimental reveals the blatant racial prejudice in *El autmóvil gris*; consequently, the experimental serves its analytical purpose by delineating generic characteristics.

Rielle Navitski comments on the nuances in the experimental film and disagrees with Schroeder Rodríguez's interpretation:

[W]hat [Schroeder Rodríguez] interprets as a dehumanization of the bandits can be more adequately explained as a strategic use of the reality effects of cinematic convention, a shift from fictional codes that entertain, to actual conventions that document (or construct) a display of capital punishment exercised on actual bodies. (Navitski 148)

Racist and prejudiced filmmaking underpin *El automóvil gris* for Schroeder Rodríguez; in opposition, Navitski argues that the execution scene signals to a didactic use of documentary. Maybe it goes without saying; film in Mexico before *El automóvil gris*, mainly from 1911-1916, consisted of newsreels (Navitski 133). It might have been a profitable film, but it was the first fiction to hold this title (Navitski 134). I find that Navitski's conclusion with respect to cutting to documentary filmmaking at the end — even though it might seek to inform the viewers about different types of violence— does

not adequately dispel the racist and prejudiced images in the film.⁷⁹ All the while, I do not claim that the experimental does not run the serious risk of promoting atrocious productions. The prejudices and hegemonic moves, for example, found in *El automóvil gris* and *¡Que viva México!*, demonstrate that even experimental reflections do not escape unethical practices. In this way, I consider both of the films experimental and culpable of cultural appropriation and far from my definition of the “experimental”. At the same time, the lack of sound technology in 1919 means that *El automóvil gris* was first released as a silent film. It is not until 1933 when dialogue and sound effects add to the screening experience. As a result, I agree with Noble’s affirmation that “the precedence of referent over representation has vanished” with respect to *Que viva México* and believe it is applicable to an understanding of *El automóvil gris*. The formulaic use of white bodies and brown bodies, similar to the dialectic put forth by Eisenstein, does the opposite of create space: these cinematic moves deconstruct representation and the Mexican population’s self-reflection.⁸⁰ Because the recent critical conversation about racist and reprehensible filmmaking practices has turned to early Mexican cinema, I believe the theories can also provide a framework for analyzing contemporary film.

The importance of collaboration in filmmaking might seem obvious given that movies usually have many participants. Nonetheless, the reduction of film projects often is noticed when entire collaborations are remembered by the actors’ or the directors’ names. Guillermo del Toro, Alfonso Cuarón, and Alejandro González Iñárritu, for

⁷⁹ Schroeder Rodríguez offers empirical evidence of the stereotypes of Mexicans as dangerous bandits in Hollywood; thus, the representation of the Zapatista comes off as visual slander (Schroeder Rodríguez 39-40).

⁸⁰ I also want to make note that *Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffith, released in 1915; consequently, the filmic representation of blatant and horrendous treatment of bodies of Mestizo and African descent occurred in the same years in both Mexico and the U.S.

example, are three Mexican directors' names that have emerged in theaters all over the world for decades; now, María Novaro, as the director of the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE), is advocating for more diversity in the Mexican film industry.⁸¹ On one side of the matter, Novaro introduces a prolific amount of alternative *mise en scène* of women sharing stories through objective camerawork in *Las buenas hierbas*; on the other side, the director is one of the few women directors of her generation that has reached considerable recognition. Consequently, this observation about the exclusion of filmmakers —marginalized due to their gender or race— reimagines the significance of the New Mexican Cinema movement and the “Three amigos”.⁸² I will highlight three short films below in order to present the emergence of experimental narrative in form. Furthermore, I will introduce a second archival document regarding the beginning of national filmmaking in Mexico.

Creating Experimental Space with Actors and *Mise en Scène* from the Yucatán Peninsula

The time duration determines both the form and narrative of film given that the stories can either be long, medium, or short. Subjects and social issues can seem even compressed if a short film is compared to a feature length film. Nonetheless, I suggest that the presentation of actors and the use of *mise en scène* in short films provide the logic of a longer film. The conversation and body language in populated frames

⁸¹ Novaro, María. “Imcine busca impulsar el cine de comunidades indígenas, mujeres y afrodescendientes”. *El Heraldo de México*. Digital Heraldo Radio. 8 octubre 2019.

⁸² Shaw, Deborah. *The Three Amigos: the transnational filmmaking of Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Alfonso Cuarón*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

encourages a plurality of voices and quick exchange of ideas. I provide a selection of short films from the last four years to foster a comprehensive proposal of the contemporary experimental film from the Yucatán Peninsula. Because many social justice concerns in the short films constitute signposts in *Alamar* (2009) and *Las buenas hierbas* (2010), I observe that the focus on feminism, gender, critical regionalism and anti-racism are lasting components of the contemporary experimental film. *Semilla* (2017) and *Silente* (2018) received organizational and public relations support from a national organization — Polos Audiovisuales is managed by IMCINE and focuses on diversity in Mexican filmmaking communities.⁸³ However, there was no financial compensation to the filmmakers, actors, and other on-location creators. *Helio* (2018) was an independent production that came from voluntary collaboration and funding. *Semilla*, *Helio*, and *Silente* bifurcate in their own directions to instill an important film theory based on social justice in the Yucatán Peninsula. The production of these short films also permits a better understanding of moviemaking for low-income filmmakers.

***Semilla* (2017). Directed by Pepe Perruccio. (00:14:55).⁸⁴**

The short film is directed by Pepe Perruccio, who is originally from Patagonia, and produced by Jorge Novelo, who is from Mérida. The tragic consequences of neoliberal farming practices in the Yucatán Peninsula leads to the death of a young Mayan boy in the film *Semilla*. The digestion of the pesticide demonstrates that there is a

⁸³ <http://www.imcine.gob.mx/convocatoria-de-polos-audiovisuales-capacitacion-comunitaria-en-yucatan-2019/>

⁸⁴ Jorge Novelo, who is the producer of *Semilla*, speaks about the importance of “teoría”, “preparación”, and “significación” in filmmaking in the the following video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90rDyTALy5w&t=258s&ab_channel=Sedeculta. Moreover, Jerry Rojas, who is the cinematographer, offers commentary about how to make film that is “correcto” according to the social focus when speaking about *Semilla* (see same video from above).

real violence behind the transnational corporations' appropriation of Mayan land. The use of the Yucatec Maya language and the decision to work with an all-Maya cast in the film establishes a dialogue on screen that oppose linguistic terrorism, racism, and the exploitative farming methods. Not only does the film portray the relationship between father, mother, and son, a grandfather also underlines the history that is at stake with the arrival of “necro” companies.⁸⁵ While the father must continue to work with his child suffering, the mother waits by his hammock. The scenes demonstrate a Mayan family go from the fear of losing a young child to the family mourning the death of the child. Given that the family must see their child die from a toxic, international pesticide, the representation of transgenic mass farming on Indigenous land in Mexico leads to nothing less than the utter destruction of humanity in form of neocolonialism. The father has a nightmare as his son passes away. The dream sequence depicts a pool of red water, which clearly symbolizes the blood of the child, when the child picks up a piece of corn and on the husk, it reads “NONSANTO”. The final scenes of the film portray the family in their home during the wake, and there are women singing prayers in Spanish. The emphasis on a tragedy caused by corporate farming demonstrates a critical point of view and the representation of the Maya language and of brown people on the screen fosters this effect. The film is about people's well-being even though it is not possible for the family to maintain their health. The premature death of the child ends a generation and leaves the young parents without their child. The concentration on parenting —as I refer to in my analysis of *Alamar* in chapter 2— does not happen only because we know that they are afraid of losing their child. The filmic language provides experimental form when it

⁸⁵ This term returns to the analysis by Irmgard Emmelhainz of “necro-capitalismo” (See Chapter 1).

visualizes the social justice issues. The use of depth of field and a profile shot in the *mise-en-scène* in Fig. 9 demonstrates that the parents are so preoccupied with keeping their family together and alive that there will not be any possibility for the audience of comprehending their worry. The camera frames the family in desperation; however, the experimental utilizes an objective camera to limit the ability to feel empathy. Perruccio's direction does not commit to accommodating an optimistic message for the viewers outside of Mayan communities. The pain and injustice seem to be so great that the experimental logic seeks to present the loss of young life on mass farming locations and engulf the viewers with emotion and anger with the injustice.



Fig. 10

***Helio* (2018). Directed by Lorena Barrera. (00:16:47).**

The short film directed by Lorena Barrera and produced by Mario Galván addresses the murder of a gay light-complected man by the hands of his lover, a brown-skinned man during a robbery of alcohol. The intersections between gender, racial violence, and addiction point to contemporary social inequalities. Barrera juxtaposes the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community in Mérida with that of a sexually curious couple; as

a result, *Helio* problematizes heteronormative standards in Mérida, Yucatán. At the same time, the camerawork by Mario Morales in addition to the direction by Barrera provides a complex story about an interracial relationship between two men who have kept their relationship secret. The presentation of two men kissing in slow-motion emphasizes the critical voice Barrera uses to introduce film supportive of LGBTQ+ rights. Society's definition of hate crimes and intimate partner homicides come into question in *Helio*, and those affected in the narrative must mourn a son or move out of the neighborhood for safety reasons. The many mise-en-scènes in the film show couples together and people talking about social issues. Barrera illustrates the characters as racist. Nonetheless, given that the brown man is someone close to one of the main characters, the race relations are not straightforward. The conversation that takes place between these three main characters in the mise-en-scène in Fig. 10 leads them to declare the brown man as “cabrón” with the translation as “evil”. Still, the three characters are noticeably uncomfortable talking about the brown character. It might be clearer that the experimental in the film hinges on the sexual exploration; although, the Mexican experimental emerges in the film when the conversation leads to subtle racism without anyone attempting at correcting the racist overtone as well. Barrera represents an unsettling realism that complicates gender, race, and regional social justice.



Fig. 11

***Silente* (2018). Directed by Camila Balzaretti. (00:12:03).⁸⁶**

The short film comes from a co-direction between Camila Balzaretti and Paolo Giovanni Novaro. *Silente* represents a Mayan Mexican woman and her experience of being hearing-impaired. The intention to problematize the way the Mexican State resolves social injustice; for example, the accessibility to new medicine for the disabled takes on experimental form in the film. The woman protagonist finds that the promised change in her hearing, although significant for her personal relationships, results in unexpected challenges in other aspects. Sounds from her family and the city distort her former relationship with the world. The woman's face goes from being noticeably content in the beginning to one of more and more disappointment. The range of different emotions shown by the woman protagonist creates an understanding of the fragility of our connection with the world. *Silente* frames Mexican women bodies in a space that is not dependent on traditional ableness hierarchies. Additionally, Balzaretti and Novaro

⁸⁶ Ernesto Arteaga recognizes “the collective voluntary efforts” that made the production of *Silente* possible. At the same time, Camila Balzaretti comments about the critique of politization of public life in the short film and the difficulties of production, namely the financial support and the time for preproduction. The main actress Asunción Haas, who has a career in theater, states that there are similarities between theater, film, and “creativity” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrQw0rzoadU&ab_channel=Sedeculta).

organize sequences of both Yucatecan and Mexican places — the cenote, the fair, and the tortilla shop, —; hence, the critical look involves pre-Colombian epistemologies that run against Western ideas of progression. The representation of the woman with the hearing impairment in the newspaper, for example, encourages a reflexive visualization of social justice. Balzaretto and Novaro suggest that the woman in the film finds dignity in the root of her identity as an autonomous individual. The hypermasculine poses by the men in the *mise-en-scène* in Fig. 11 provide a visualization of the social pressures felt by disabled, Mexican-Mayan women. The experimental narrative and form lead the story to end with the woman protagonist taking a swim in a cenote alone. The inner peace at that moment also comes from the actor's facial expression; as a result, the experimental also fashions the return to judge the scene by the approval or disapproval by the woman. Balzaretto and Novaro employ the use of the experimental by orchestrating their film on the focalization of a woman with hearing impairment and critiquing patriarchal state powers attempt to control her body politically. Nonetheless, the story of women empowerment about making autonomous decisions encourages a step towards social justice.



Fig. 12

The three short films are from the only ones that have come from the Yucatán Peninsula and have sought out methods of filmmaking while practicing social justice approaches as well. The connections between these critical films provide cross analysis of representations of women and marginalized individuals. Whether or not viewers of Mexican film see all of these emerging Yucatán projects or just one, it has been necessary for film festivals to begin to frame their projects within and outside of regional categories. These filmic representations in the Yucatán Peninsula demonstrate the efficacy of filming and screening social justice; as a result, these approaches have served as comparative points for filmmakers throughout Mexico. Furthermore, these filmmakers constitute a significant and watershed generation because they make up some of the first Yucatán artists to use film. Even though there are more and more opportunities in the film industry, the primary reason young filmmakers around the world are considering the medium is the accessibility of cameras. Nonetheless, the lack of funding still continues to limit feature-length films and the collaboration between the community.

Creating Critical Spaces: Mexican Film, Archives, and Festivals

The creation of indices of experimental festivals has fostered a conversation about the relationship between the film medium and contemporary aesthetics. The release of experimental productions serves as quick reflections of the themes they address; as a result, the festivals and categories dedicated to this genre arrange a projecting screen where the moviegoers can see themselves in the moment. Yet, the experience can even lead to the idea that the viewers are seeing the world outside of the theater instead of watching an actual screen or even an image altering scrim. I contend that the historiography of the experimental allows for this type of analysis because there is a

record of people going to watch a moving image that directly problematizes the contemporary time. The indices that pertain to the experimental signal to the event of groups of people taking it upon themselves to sit and watch critique of their present lives, for example, in the form of feminism, gender, anti-racism, anti-classism, and critical regionalism. This type of social reckoning that occurs in the movie theaters makes it possible for an indexical history of critical thinking through the experimental. Not only will an archive from the AGN, dating back to 1922, about the construction of a movie studio give detail to the history of Mexican film, but I also make the argument that the short film *Helio* creates experimental space on screen and in festivals.

Rita González and Jesse Lerner bring attention to experimental film events in order to emphasize the collective, social critique that happens in Mexican movie theaters.⁸⁷ The first Bienal de Video de México takes place in 1990, and González and Lerner point out the following:

El éxito continuo de los festivales regionales (como el de León, Guanajuato) son testigos de la vitalidad del video como medio actual para la experimentación. Cada Bienal sirve como un escaparate de una amplia gama de estilos, incluyendo el documental, el drama corto, el trabajo experimental y las series especiales, como por ejemplo, los temas ambientales o en 1992, un programa sobre el Quinto Centenario” (*Mexperimental* 86-88).

Moreover, González and Lerner underline that the festivals encourage a clearer understanding of the development of artistry and social intersections:

Lo accesible y el bajo costo del video ofreció a muchos artistas una oportunidad, de otra manera impensable, de trabajar con imágenes en movimiento. Algunos artistas de video escogieron este medio tras desertar del cada vez más inaccesible super-8 [. . .] Otros llegaron al video con bastante experiencia en formatos profesionales (*Cine Mexperimental* 88).

⁸⁷ The text *Cine mexperimental* has also been the underlying ideology behind other projects. “A Closer Look at Mexican Experimental Cinema”, which presents an interview between Cristina Alemán and Angélica Portilla Cuevas, informs that the text was vital for the organization of Mex-Parismental, a Paris based Latin American film festival.

The social framework according to economy presupposes the production of the experimental. Thus, the meeting of filmmakers from different socioeconomic classes at festivals and within categories that regard the experimental initiates a conversation already highlighted by social concerns. Given that there is a social and economic determinant of the identity of the filmmakers, additional critical themes about injustice and inequality take shape in the selections. González and Lerner comment on arguments on the environment and the reflection on 500 years since the arrival of Hernán Cortés, which have framed the experimental genre in Mexico, in order to exemplify the constant contemporary approach found in the experimental. Because of the critical logic of the experimental, such projects have garnered little funds. González and Lerner, while on the topic of the experimental film genre in the 1960s, explain that “los intentos para crear los mecanismos de apoyo necesarios para sostener la cinematografía experimental fueron de corta duración o en vano”.⁸⁸ Again, the tie between the economy and the establishment of experimental film production adhere to contemporary notions. Due to the urgency of social issues that alter film production time, the experimental problematizes the limitation of economic stability by making it known that filmmaking can always be by the people at large for the people at large. Experimental filmmaking cuts financial corners in order to make sure their critical moving image releases to the public even if it is a small collective of viewers, and there are funding difficulties. Since the technology experimental

⁸⁸ Still, Antonio Reynoso, Archibaldo Burns, and Walter Reuter are three filmmakers that address the oppression that indigenous communities in Mexico suffer from the 1950s-1970s. González and Lerner indicate that there have only been exceptions to the rule that the experimental does not provide funded projects (*Cine Mexperimental* 32-36). Also, the two experimental film “concursos” in 1965 and 1967 which were put on by El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica did not ever produce a platform from which filmmakers could part (*Cine Mexperimental* 52).

filmmakers utilize does not always promise the most current image quality, the indices of experimental festivals and categories demonstrate that content has more worth than expensive form in the genre. The themes that come under analysis in experimental film in Mexico have drawn moviegoers to theaters, not the hi-tech and expensive industrial cameras. In conclusion, Mexican audiences have existed since early cinema that question filmmaking processes and demand for filmmaking that engages with social criticism.

Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza proceed —nearly twenty years after *Cine Mexperimental*— in analysis of experimental filmmaking; however, their collaborative work connects more than thirty authors together to think critically about the genre in Latin America. A historical focus similar to the first text demonstrates the multivalent meaning of film festivals. The importance of camera technology and the international exchange of filmmaking aesthetics provide some defining lines of film festivals. The 2017 publication of *Ismo, ismo, ismo : cine experimental en América Latina = Ism, ism, ism: experimental cinema in Latin America* contains two articles that concentrate entirely on the importance of film festivals: “Quinto Festival Super 8 de Caracas” and “El Tercer Festival Internacional de Cine Documental y Experimental”. The first article is a reprinting of the original flyer from 1980 and a description by the organizers Julio Neri and Mercedes Márquez (*Ismo, ismo, ismo* 104-107). The second article features a manuscript, posters, and documentation of the participators in the “V Festival Internacional de Cine Documental y Experimental” in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1958 (*Ismo, ismo, ismo* 264-269). González, Lerner and Piazza suggest that the elusive features of the experimental can come into focus when the history of the contemporary is in the foreground. The second text states, “Trabajar dentro de este amplio panorama histórico, y

teniendo una visión inclusiva del estado actual del cine experimental latinoamericano, hace difícil establecer una definición consensuada sobre lo que se entiende por ‘experimental’, así como limitar (o expandir) lo que significa ‘latinoamericano’” (*Ismo, ismo, ismo* 3). The critical frame put forth in this text clarifies that the experimental also contains ideas of what is Mexican, like the meaning of Latin America. Consequently, I will give two examples of the importance of the experimental when considering film festivals and the projection of films in Mexico. I follow a similar approach to my analysis as González, Lerner, and Piazza; however, I look at two articles that are dated 96 years apart from another. My comparison of a correspondence from José Vasconcelos about a national movie theater in 1922 and the inauguration of the art collective Feminasty in 2018 does more than just gesture towards early cinema or contemporary film space. Equally, I want to signal to the development of the institutionalization of Mexican films that has required organized resistance from the beginning.

The record of people sitting down to come to experimental terms about social inequality makes it clear that Mexicans have time and time again shown an earnestness to develop a critical, filmic language. The institutionalization of cinema in Mexico began early on: I provide the archival document below written by José Vasconcelos in 1922, while he was fulfilling the first tenure as the Secretary of Public Education, directed to Fernando Torreblanca and Mexico’s president at the time, Álvaro Obregón.

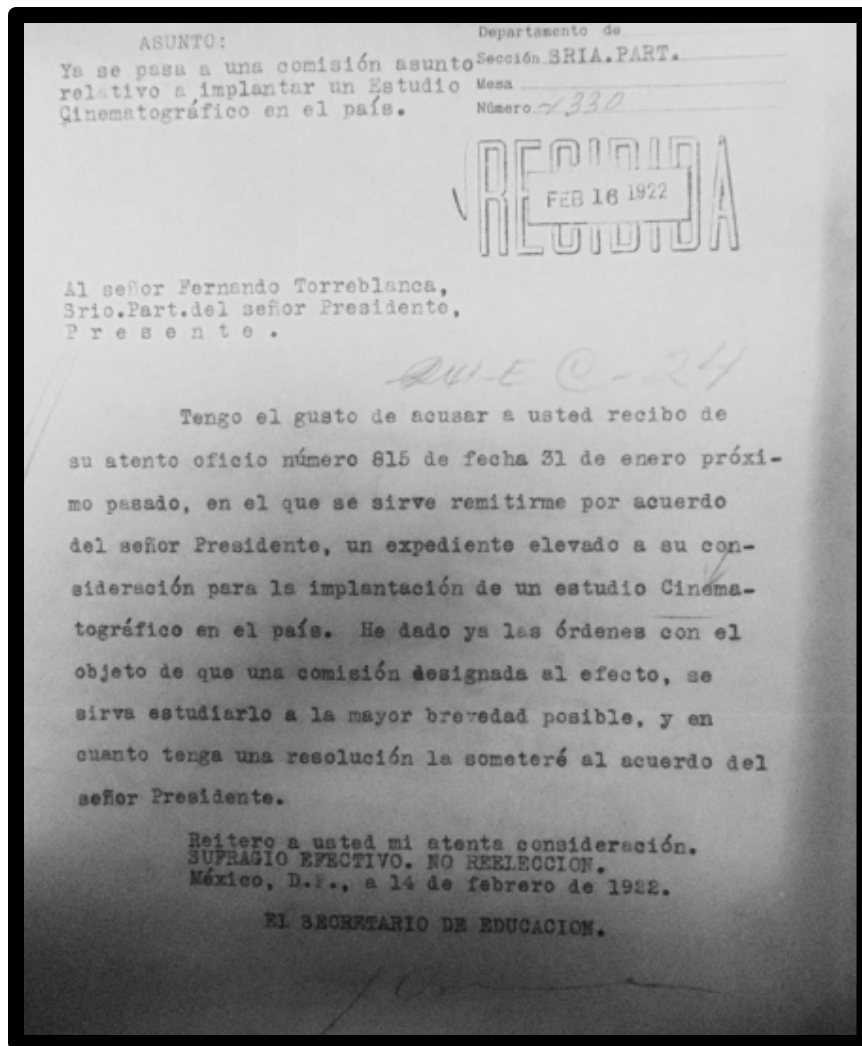


Fig. 13. José Vasconcelos. AGN. 1922.

La raza cósmica serves as a vehicular document of institutional racism and calls for *mestizaje* in order to genealogically create a superior race. Consequently, the descriptive racism in the essay by Vasconcelos points to a prejudiced point of view that alters the idea of representation in the arts in Mexico. The link between Vasconcelos and a potential “estudio cinematográfico en el país” precedes the Cineteca Nacional, which opened their first theaters in 1971. The “implementación” seems to directly align filmmaking and film screening to social ordering. The correspondence by Vasconcelos

fleshes out the connections between documented racists and the development of the movie industry in Mexico City.

This archive in a portfolio dedicated to Vasconcelos also orientates the significance of experimental film screenings at the mobile organization Feminasty. The “Qué es Feminasty” page states:

Feminasty is a collective that takes space to put together art exhibitions created by women and trans persons, in order to build community and dialogue. Since 2018 we have organized 5 exhibitions of national and international art with the participation of 500 artists, where we all create a space to learn, explore, and deconstruct ideas concerning topics of great importance about women and the LGBTTTIQ+ community, which include violence, discrimination, exploration of gender, the redefinition of beauty, and feminicides. (Feminasty)⁸⁹

The focus on gender to create safe spaces for marginalized groups of people, for example, people who identify as women and trans, illustrates the directions experimental film can take the notion of Mexican arts. I propose that Feminasty demands social justice with regard to gender and takes back what artistic organization means in Mexico. Although Feminasty opposes the oppression of women and trans people, the humanistic advocacy stands up to the Secretaría de Educación Pública and the correspondence above that clearly notes a racist’s intention to nationalize film viewing with the idea of building a movie theater. The intersection of race and gender over 96 years —also a comparison of early cinema viewing space with contemporary cinema viewing space— creates transparency with regard to the meaning of the experimental. The screening of the aforementioned experimental short film *Helio* (2018) at Feminasty and other

⁸⁹ “Feminasty es una colectiva que toma espacios para generar muestras de arte hecho por mujeres y personas trans, con la finalidad de construir comunidad y diálogo. Desde el 2018 hemos realizado 5 muestras de arte nacional e internacional con la participación de más de 500 artistas, en donde juntas creamos un espacio para aprender, explorar y deconstruir ideas alrededor de temas de suma importancia sobre las mujeres y la comunidad LGBTTTIQ+, como son la violencia, discriminación, exploración del género, la redefinición de la belleza y los feminicidios”.

experimental shorts in 2019 exemplifies the inclusiveness this collective connects with the idea of alternative Mexican institutions.



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

Mexican experimental filmmaking has made it possible for audiences to walk into independent screening spaces to not only look at a reflection of the contemporary world but also a reflection of themselves. *Helio* prioritizes the visualization of two men kissing and a couple reflecting on their sexuality; as a result, the film creates a space where non-heteronormative sexual practices are acknowledged and valued. The kiss between men in the film reorganizes the expectations of Mexican cinema and exemplifies beauty that does not pertain to a man and woman romance. At the same time, the woman corrects the man when he uses a slur against gay men in the scene that corresponds to Fig. 14.

Moreover, Lorena Barrera identifies the real danger involved in sexual exploration in the Yucatán Peninsula. The narrative about a couple moving in and moving out of a department registers with more universal storylines of migration and young love. Although Barrera dedicates much of the film about sexuality, the topic of racism is still at the forefront of the overall argument.



Fig. 16

The racist trope of the dark complected murder is not perpetuated in *Helio* because Barrera makes it evident that the oppression of the LGBTQ+ community causes serious fractures at a societal level. In other words, Barrera demonstrates the intersection of being gay and dark complected in Mérida. In addition, the film concludes that the social stress can totalize people's lives leaving them no other choice but to act against what is considered socially appropriate. The decision to show a brown individual, as seen in Fig. 15, without a shirt juxtaposed with a primarily light-complected cast sends the message that the critical analysis of body politics characterizes the experimental.

Consequently, I contend that *Helio* demonstrates the contemporary Mexican experimental film might home in on local or regional social justice, but the genre also makes connections with all communities that are demanding solutions to their real

problems. In conclusion, I believe it is meaningful to remember *Helio* has screened for diverse audiences and brought to the surface questions about the communities that face race, gender, and sexual orientation discrimination. González, Lerner, and Piazza clarify that the history of the experimental serves an important guide to comprehending the crucialness of film festivals. In this same vein, I argue that the creation of space in Mexican history is seen in the historical novels by Cristina Rivera Garza and Marisol Ceh Moo. The *novelwriting* community takes on diverse forms with the inclusion of authors who focus on disability studies and the tragic stories behind exile. Furthermore, filmmakers in the Yucatán Peninsula have produced film based on the reflection of social justice for their communities most at risk. These *novelwriters* and filmmakers challenge the definition of the experimental when they demand new attention to intersectional feminism, critical regionalism, anti-racism, gender, and social justice.

List of Festivals with Spaces Dedicated to the Experimental in Mexico⁹⁰

Tlanchana Fest Festival de Cine y Arte Digital	Metepec, Estado de México
Festival Internacional De Cine Independiente OftÁlmica	Xalapa, Veracruz
KINÉ Muestra Internacional de Cortometrajes	Puebla, Puebla
Baja CineFest California	Mulege, Baja
Festival Internacional de Cine de Horror Aurora Guanajuato	Guanajuato,
Shorts México – Festival Internacional de Cortometrajes de México	Ciudad de México
Veracruz Short Film Festival	Veracruz, Veracruz
Oaxaca FilmFest	Oaxaca, Oaxaca

⁹⁰ Descriptions of these festivals can be found at Filmfreeway.com and Festhome.com. Both of these film festival search engines allow you to select categories and countries.

CONCLUSION: Experimental Concern in Allegorical Spaces

Mexican contemporary novels and films can approach current social issues through many genres and traditions. The experimental in this selection of novels and films underlines the following contemporary artistic concerns: intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, and critical regionalism. The emphasis of these ideological dimensions in the experimental puts the artists *avant* a neoliberal *garde*; thus, the risk of symbolic value for economic value runs along a thin line that ultimately defines our understanding of social justice. *Novelwriters* and filmmakers become a part of the larger population of Artists when there is a decisive action to produce work autonomous of already established form and narrative. Nevertheless, their artistic attributes also are apparent in their humanitarian stance. In rejecting the production of representations that safely promise economy, these *novelwriters* and filmmakers enter into conversations that scrutinize neoliberalism and promote methods to practice self-worth collaboratively. At the bedrock of the experimental genre, these Mexican artists rests a contemporary notion of concern for oneself through the concern for other people. As a result, the collaboration represented in the novels and films do not bring many voices together to only ensure the wellbeing of a community: the shared experience also encourages self-assurance. These *novelwriter's* and filmmakers's artistic identities complicate the neoliberal standards today in Mexico in order to demand national attention to social stratification. Consequently, the novels and films are experimental; however, their production registers far from any type of social experiment. In other words, the *novelwriters* and filmmakers state that the social experiment of neoliberal power that begets misogyny, racism, and regional inequality is precisely from where they part. Their work is experimental because

it questions the notion of experimenting while representing humanity. These artists affirm that value in the Mexican experimental pertains to the care for marginalized populations and the urgency in recognizing the contemporary social problems.

The experience of experimental *novelwriters*, filmmakers, readers, and viewers bring social injustice up close. Given that I began writing about allegorical rooms to explain the process of the experimental, it is suggestive to return to this mise-en-abyme dimension now. I believe the Mexican experimental in the contemporary novel and film could be divided into four large viewing galleries in order to come to terms with what is at stake in this tradition today. A space dedicated to each critical concept outlines the elusive idea of the experimental: in this case, they are for intersectional feminism, gender, anti-racism, and critical regionalism. In this allegory, it is possible to pass through these galleries and read, view, and hear what the experimental is advocating for the wellbeing of humanity. These spaces encourage experimental conclusions and following actions that directly undermine harmful standards. Because these spaces of critical thought constitute an allegory, the distance between story and real life is short. The arrival to galleries dedicated to novels and films makes it plausible for the arrival to actual experimental action in life. As such, I present the analysis of novels and films in the three chapters to adjoin contemporary Mexican arts with social justice.

The first chapter outlines critical thinking on contemporary feminism, neoliberalism, and the experimental novel. Irmgard Emmelhainz advocates for a better understanding between *necro-capitalismo*, the representation of women in entertainment, and the experience of maternity for women in Mexico. Moreover, it is important to continue to actualize “arte comprometido” that subverts the patriarchal, neoliberalism,

according to Emmelhainz, in order to stress equality in gender, race, and class. The supposition that art must manifest a commitment to humanity aligns with the Mexican experimental *novelwriting*; and I consider three examples: *Conjunto vacío* (2015) by Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza, and *Chen tumeen x ch'úupen (Sólo por ser mujer)* (2015) by Marisol Ceh Moo. I conclude that the novels complicate genres, for example, the *Künstlerroman*, the detective novel, and the courtroom drama, respectively, in the descriptions of women's rights and workspaces. The representation of strong Mayan and Mexican women corresponds to art with intention to commit to social justice. I also emphasize the significance of the bilingual novels by Ceh Moo and recommend that the inclusion of indigenous women's voices in Mexican literature will create more intersectional feminist viewpoints.

The second chapter compares the history of regional feminism to better understand the experimental features of the films *Las buenas hierbas* (2010) by Maria Novaro and *Alamar* (2009) by Pedro González Rubio. A focus on the study of feminist journals from the 1960s to the present by Elsa Muñiz fosters conclusions on the practice of gender in Mexico. At the same time, the reference to different Mexican regions informs my film analysis. Novaro frames the solidarity between diverse sisterhood and the representation of independent women in Mexico City. González Rubio outlines the representation of masculinity in a Mayan family in *Alamar*. Consequently, the expression of separate gender identity in distinct regions in Mexico emphasizes divisions that read national levels. Novaro represents empowered women recovering from violence, and González Rubio represents men fishing their threatened ecosystem. Gender and humanitarian concerns are compounded in the films. Given that feminism historically has

permitted better understanding of gender, I note that the representation of Mayas and masculinity in *Alamar* is predetermined by a mother figure. Even though *Alamar* is not a feminist film—it has a male director and most of the film only has men in the frame—the beginning and end of the film present a mother and a child. As a result, the two films indicate connections between critical regionalism, feminism, and gender in the contemporary experimental film from Mexico.

The third chapter addresses the contemporary positions that experimental *novelwriters* and filmmakers take when they question form and narrative. I reference two more novels by Ceh Moo —*T'ambilák men tunk'ulilo'ob* (*El llamado de los tunk'kules*) (2011)— and Rivera Garza —*Nadie me verá llorar* (1999)— to identify the efforts to represent the empowerment of marginalized groups in the historical novel as well. Furthermore, I analyze two additional intermedial novels, *Jacobo el mutante* (2002) and *Jacobo reloaded* (2014) by Mario Bellatin. The novels include collaborative projects with photography by Ximena Berecochea and illustration by Zsu Szkurka. Finally, I point out that there is an emerging experimental film scene in the Yucatán Peninsula. I signal to experimental features that pertain to the three short films: *Semilla* (2017) directed by Camila Balzaretti, *Silente* (2018) directed by Pepe Perruccio, and *Helio* (2018) directed by Lorena Barrera. The reception of these films has allowed the artists to stand up for social justice and create social awareness about marginalized populations: I suggest that the contemporary definition of the experimental in Mexico is outlined in this collection of filmmaking.

The Mexican experimental points to this selection of novels, films, and critical thinking that originates from women primarily. Still, the inclusion of Mexican women in

these fields does not constitute the experimental; however, the appreciation for the real value of Mexican women in solidarity, and in direct resistance against white patriarchal norms, does make their collaboration avant-garde. To improve the lives of indigenous and mestiza women in Mexico, it is necessary for men and white women to advocate for their equality. Rosa Pu Tzunuz reads against the application of Eurocentric feminism on the identity of Mayan women. For Pu Tzunuz, Mayan history and the role of women presupposes French feminism from the 1960s, which is known in women's studies around the world. Moreover, Pu Tzunuz argues that Mayan women have practiced their rights throughout their history and have a history that is not the same as those of Europe. The vital intersectional feminism proven by Kimberlé Crenshaw also informs the necessity to find concrete moments in society to improve the lives of women. Crenshaw proves that her legal research identifies that African American women are excluded for their color of skin and their gender by the U.S. court system. By eliminating systemic racism and questioning misogynous standards, I consider the focus on women's rights by Emmelhainz, Muñiz, Pu Tzunuz, and Crenshaw necessary to comprehend the backdrop of the experimental. The marginalized peoples are terrorized by systems of power put in place by the privileged. Thus, it is evident that privileged peoples will need to work in contradiction with the very system that has given them a sense of entitlement. I have selected novels and films that problematize social justice and advocate for their forms and narratives to manifest in the world. The Mexican experimental in the novel and the film starts an emancipation from lives that have been determined by inequality. It states that through solidarity between races, genders, regions, and classes there are more humane decisions to make in the world. The representation of social justice shapes the

aesthetics and tells the stories in the Mexican experimental tradition; hence, these *novelwriters* and filmmakers make up another generation that has developed a heightened concern for humanity. Through this practice of representing compassion in the novel and the film, it is evident that there is an underlying implication: read, screen, write, produce, and converse about critical social problems and solutions.

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