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VISUALIZING FEMALE AGENCY:  
SPACE AND GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ART IN MEXICO

By

Jamie L. Ratliff  
B.A., Georgetown College, 2001  
M.A., Tufts University

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Fine Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2012



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WOMEN'S ART IN MEXICO

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 24, 2012

By the following Dissertation Committee:

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**DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to

Walter E. Ratliff

who first planted the seeds of this journey many, many years ago  
with finger paints and No. 1 pencils.

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This dissertation is the result of years of hard work and perseverance, none of which would have been possible without the support and encouragement of the many people who have helped keep this project, and my spirits, afloat for the past eight years.

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## ABSTRACT

### Visualizing Female Agency: Gender and Space in Contemporary Women's Art in Mexico

Jamie L. Ratliff

May 11, 2012

This dissertation outlines a theoretical model for contextualizing contemporary women's art practice in Mexico within the profound socioeconomic and political events that have taken place since 1968, characterized by the steady breakdown and eventual turnover of the Mexican state. Following the spatial theories outlined by Henry Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, this study adopts the logic that social spaces are a direct production of the societies that inhabit them, as well as the social relations, ideologies, and notions of power that are espoused therein.

Focusing on the artists Paula Santiago, the collective Polvo de Gallina Negra, Daniela Rossell, Minerva Cuevas, and Teresa Margolles, I identify within their works the visualization of three critical spaces of intervention: the female body, the familial home, and the streets as a site of protest. Organized according to a framework that emphasizes spatial politics, I argue that such works constitute a feminist production of space that challenges the social relations, hierarchies of power, and gender roles that have been embodied by traditional "spaces of femininity." The artists' respective performances, photography, installations, and sculptures are analyzed according to how they confront traditional definitions of femininity and gender norms that limit and confine women's

accessibility to and social mobility within the spaces of everyday life in Mexico. Strategically engaging with the concepts and effects of the traditional private/public dichotomy as it has been deployed in Mexican national rhetoric, the artists reveal such binary thinking to be false, socially-contrived, and politically motivated. In doing so, they critique the very processes through which gender is constructed and offer new ways to think about womanhood outside of traditional archetypal frameworks. Underscoring the role that bodily action plays in the production of space and transformation of society, these artists are identified as *producers of the spaces of feminism*, a designation that foregrounds contemporary women's social and political interventions, which continue to formulate the new realities of Mexican life, post-1968.

These contemporary women artists speak to a feminist presence in the visual arts that has helped contribute to the growth of a critical civil society, a contribution that has been largely absent from the discourse on contemporary art history in Mexico. What is ultimately revealed is a new understanding of the Mexican nation, borne out through the works of contemporary feminist art and viewed through the lens of female agency. The artists included in this dissertation take advantage of the interactive framework of the production of space as they actively engage contemporary concepts of womanhood and national identity, wherein women are admitted into the national fabric as social agents negotiating new spaces for what it means to be a Mexican feminist.



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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation outlines a theoretical model for contextualizing contemporary women's art practice in Mexico within the profound socioeconomic and political events that have taken place since 1968. Analyzing the ways in which the artworks of Paula Santiago, Monica Castillo, the artist collective Polvo de Gallina Negra, Daniela Rossell, Minerva Cuevas, and Teresa Margolles visually reconfigure concepts of social space in Mexico, this framework emphasizes how each artist confronts the power relations and gender stereotypes produced therein. In doing so, their works come together to constitute a body of contemporary, feminist art that contributes to the production of the social spaces of everyday life in Mexico from the perspective of female agency. The last forty-five years in Mexico have been marked by monumental intersecting changes that have radically altered Mexican history and identity, as it was defined by the nation. The breakdown of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the hegemonic political party that ruled Mexico since 1929, has become the defining theme of the contemporary era. A long, but steady process that began in 1968, the year often referred to as a "turning point in the Mexican psyche," this period in Mexico is characterized by a series of social, economic, and political crises that signaled a crisis of legitimacy for the Mexican state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Cohn, "The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950-1968: Cosmopolitanism, National Identity, and the State," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 21, no. 1 (2005): 179. See also Eric Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow': Mexico and the 1968 Olympics," *The Americas* 61, no. 2 (2004): 187. Zolov also uses the term "turning point" in reference to 1968; he warns, however, that "as we continue to reassess this critical decade in Mexican history, we must be careful not to address '1968' in isolation but to recognize the complex local, national, and global historical forces that gave rise to this critical juncture and later framed it." This dissertation attempts to treat contemporary social, political, and cultural changes in Mexico as an ongoing process, rather than a pivotal switch.

These include: the violent governmental response to a peaceful student protest that left hundreds dead in the Tlatelolco Massacre, the subsequent revelation of the PRI's other repressive, social activities, civil inaction, political corruptions, and financial mismanagement; a series of back-to-back financial crises that plunged much of the country into poverty and diminished already-faltering legitimacy a centralized state; a necessary revision of political and economic policies that opened a once closed and inward-looking national market to foreign investment.<sup>2</sup> Historical logic, however, holds that "as political space closes, civil space opens."<sup>3</sup> While the central authority of the nation's longstanding political regime diminished, Mexico concurrently saw the emergence of a functioning civil society constituted by student, civil rights, feminist, and indigenous rights movements, a free press, and free elections. Characterized as Mexico's eventual transition to democracy, this steady, national transformation of power networks also necessarily reconfigured entrenched social relations throughout the space of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

This study takes up the task of investigating the processes through which social relations have been reconfigured in Mexico since 1968, paying special attention to changing definitions of gender. The methodology of this dissertation is inherently

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<sup>2</sup> The bibliography on the history of Mexico since 1968 is vast, but a concise overview can be found in the following essays: John W. Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 537-68; Roderic Camp, "The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 569-97; Anne Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 589-633.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Shefner, "Rethinking Civil Society in the Age of Nafta: The Case of Mexico," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610(2007): 185.

<sup>4</sup> See Roderic Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Consolidation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Denise Dresser, "Mexico: Dysfunctional Democracy," in *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, ed. Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 242-63.

feminist, informed by deconstructive understandings of feminism that focus on the ways in which notions of gender intersect with constructions of class, race, ethnicity, and politics. This approach examines gender not as an isolated aspect of identity but interrogates the wider ways in which subjectivity is formulated and sustained, specifically through the lens of art and visual culture.

Within the discipline of Mexican art history, the scholarship on women's and feminist art, in addition to methodologies informed by feminist theories, has greatly expanded in the last twenty years. Scholars, curators, and artists alike are engaged in the important "double project" of feminist art history laid out by Griselda Pollock in her essay "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity."<sup>5</sup> This project naturally entails the "the historical recovery of data about women producers of art," a recuperation of the narratives of women in the arts that have been ignored or repressed by masculinist narratives.<sup>6</sup> However, Pollock further argues that this historical reclamation "co-exists with and is only critically possible through a concomitant deconstruction of the discourses and practices of art history itself."<sup>7</sup> This task is dedicated to the critical engagement with the social systems of representation that produce understandings of gender difference as they are produced and reproduced across time.

Pollock's identification of the "spaces of femininity" offers an instructive entrance into this study. Analyzing late-nineteenth century modernist representations of women and the spaces they inhabit, she argues that notions of space contribute to the social relations that produce gender differences. She interprets images of women and

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<sup>5</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 70-127.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

their apparent, differing corporeal demeanor in both social, public spaces and intimate, domestic spaces in order to expose a represented affinity between the female body and the private sphere. As she argues, however, this visual affinity does not reveal the inherent nature and identification of women; instead, such spatial representations were constructed to reinforce traditional gender roles that reinscribed Modern women within the spaces of domesticity. As such, Pollock underscores the *affective* nature of art and its ability to produce social discourse.

The methodology espoused in this dissertation both builds upon and revises the theoretical work of Pollock described above. I also adopt a spatial framework in order to highlight the discursive function of contemporary feminist art in Mexico. Following the spatial politics outlined by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, this study operates under the logic that social spaces are a direct production of the societies that inhabit them, as well as the social relations, ideologies, and notions of power that are espoused therein.<sup>8</sup> As he stated, “There can be no question that social space is the locus of prohibitions and their counterparts, prescriptions.”<sup>9</sup> This is not unlike Pollock’s own assertion that the spaces she analyzes are the product of socially-constructed biases. However, whereas Pollock identifies the private and public spheres as the “spaces of femininity,” this dissertation emphatically recognizes the limits (and dangers) of binary systems of signification.

Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have argued that acts of colonial domination are rooted in binary attitudes that contrast the valued Self

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<sup>8</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

against the polar Other.<sup>10</sup> They each acknowledge how systems of representation (both linguistic and visual) serve to dominate and subordinate by negatively defining an Other against the power-holding subject. Feminist scholars have similarly opposed the binary foundations of Western philosophy rooted in René Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum," the proclamation "I think, therefore I am."<sup>11</sup> Positing an essential power hierarchy that holds the mind as superior over the body, this binary similarly constructed a Self/Other opposition from which was handed down a host of dichotomies that have been used to colonize the (female) body: male/female, mind/body, culture/nature, reason/emotion, public/private.<sup>12</sup> At its core, any binary system of representation reproduces social power relations. Because of this, even deconstructive scholarship like Pollock's, that seeks to disassemble gender differences as they are inscribed within that dichotomy, only reifies the colonizing dynamic if it does not propose alternative models.

This study proposes to combat hegemonic binary thinking by introducing a *theoretical triad* of spaces. Rather than analyzing the private and public spheres, I look to three social spaces investigated by contemporary women artists in Mexico wherein feminist reconfigurations of the traditional spaces of femininity are produced: the female body, the familial home, and the streets as a space of protest. The chapters that follow illuminate the multiple ways in which the structure of a triad of space, and more specifically the introduction of the spatial body, is essential to constructing discursive

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979); Homi Bhabha, *The Locations of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> This proclamation was first published in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, published in 1644. For a more recent reprint, see René Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. John Veitch (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1644/2004).

<sup>12</sup> Feminist theories that critique the Cartesian dualism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. For a succinct summary of this position, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 3-24.

difference. First and foremost, a triad naturally problematizes concepts and ideals that within a binary system would be defined in relation to one another. A triad, or most simply a “group of three,” complicates this system by refusing simple one-to-one (or one-against-one) structuralist meanings. A triad naturally invites comparison, rather than contrast, and incites one to seek out the points of overlap and intersection.<sup>13</sup> Once a third component is introduced, the identification of these items, or spaces, lapses into a discussion of how their individual properties inflect our understanding of all three items. By emphasizing a relationship between the home, the streets, and the body, I set out to reveal the impossibility of the private and public spheres as separate, gendered spaces and to instead, expose the ways in which our understanding of these three constructs are interdependent upon one another. Ultimately, the spatial triad undermines dichotomous social relations and power structures and allows me to introduce what I will outline as *the spaces of feminism*.

The introduction of the body puts forth a second contribution to my arguments. As the body has served as the central site of female subjectivity, any discussion that takes up the issues of representation and identity must also contend with female corporeality, particularly as it relates to space. As the spatial theories outlined by Lefebvre stress that space is produced (and reproduced) through human action and daily practices of behavior, the role of the body is central to the formation of the structures that govern the spaces of everyday life. Here again is a system of inflection: bodies are shaped by the

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<sup>13</sup> For instance (if the reader can forgive a simply analogy): in a binary relationship between an apple and a banana, one can simply assert that an apple is not a banana, and vice versa. However, in a triad involving an apple, a banana, and an orange, one would conclude that an apple is round like an orange, but oranges and bananas have thick rinds, while an apple does not; furthermore, an orange is segmented, apples and bananas are not; oranges and apples both contain seeds, bananas do not, etc.

spaces they inhabit; yet, those same spaces are constituted through bodily actions. Thus, the production of space occurs in tandem with processes of subjectivity-formation, an ongoing exercise that Lefebvre refers to as “becoming social.”<sup>14</sup> Spatial bodies act as agents, actively engaged in the production of space.

Because Lefebvre underscores the role that bodily action plays in the production of space, he recognizes the potential for daily practices to transform social space, or to produce new spaces. He specifically states that social transformation, or a shift from one historical mode to another, requires the new production of space. As this study is rooted in the historical transformations that took place in Mexico between 1968 and the present, it foregrounds contemporary productions of space that continue to take place to formulate the new realities of Mexican life, post-1968. Informed by feminist methodologies and specifically concerned with the changing roles and perceptions of women, this art historical dissertation centers on the social and spatial transformations wrought by the actions and practices of contemporary women, artists in particular. This spatial (and corporeal) focus allows me to describe the way in which a number of contemporary feminist artists in Mexico produce (and reproduce) feminist space through their performances, installations, sculptures, and photographs. I argue that the very creation of feminist art constitutes a production of space that then works to create new social relations, hierarchies of power, and gender roles. The artists included in this study, Santiago, Polvo de Gallina Negra, Rossell, Cuevas, and Margolles, each produce the spaces of everyday life as they occur interdependently in the home and on the streets, disrupting the private/public dichotomy, which has informed non-feminist productions of

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<sup>14</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 199.



space, by emphasizing spatial feminist bodies that transgress these social boundaries to reveal them as false, socially-contrived, and politically motivated.

In order to posit contemporary feminist artists in Mexico as active producers of space, this study is organized according to a thematic (or spatial) approach, which will prove more effective than a chronological or account. Arranged into chapters that reflect the theoretical triad of the body, the home, and the streets, the discussion invites (and requires) the points of intersection between the spaces and more accurately exposes the ways in which the social spaces of everyday life are irrevocably intertwined. The works of art analyzed within Chapters 2-4 provide an entryway into discussions of socioeconomic and political changes in Mexico since 1968; they simultaneously illuminate the triadic theoretical spatial model I propose above. A thematic approach also resists a teleological account of feminist and art strategies. Recognizing that there is no one feminism, but rather multiple and various *feminisms*, this study explores the various strategic approaches utilized by the works under consideration and how they respectively engage with and critique traditional understandings of gender.

Focusing on the deconstructive reformulations of the body, the home, and the streets, the contemporary feminist artists included within this study speak to a feminist presence in the visual arts that has helped contribute to the growth of a critical civil society, a contribution that has been largely absent from the discourse of contemporary art history in Mexico. Critically analyzing contemporary artistic responses to the persistence of this gender-based nationalism will offer an original theorization of feminist art in Mexico that counters the exploitation of womanhood and critically reframe the

works of a number of contemporary artists in order to highlight the sociopolitical significance of its gendered content.

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical and contextual framework for the production of feminist space in contemporary Mexico. It provides a review of the current feminist art historical scholarship as well as a description of how feminist art in Mexico is currently positioned within the discourse on contemporary art. This framework further establishes the terms and processes of nationalism in Mexico and describes the ways in which nationhood has been historically conflated with womanhood. It stands to reason that if nationhood can be constructed upon (symbolic, linguistic, and visual) representations of womanhood, then challenges to these archetypal representations could then be posited as challenges to the nation of Mexico and its national culture of patriarchy and patrimony. Thus, this chapter provides the theoretical background for arguing that the breakdown of the nation entails a reconfiguration of female subjectivity. As that reconfiguration occurs within the spaces of everyday life, Chapter 1 further introduces the spaces of the body, the home, and the streets as viewed through the lens of a contemporary feminist, social history that provides evidence of essential historical changes taking place therein that both informs and is reflected in the artworks that will similarly produce those same spaces.

The spatial framework described in Chapter 1 is implemented throughout the subsequent three chapters, each of which takes one of these spaces as its point of departure. Through the in-depth formal and contextual analysis of contemporary feminist artists in Mexico whose work draws upon these respective spaces, the usefulness of a spatial structure is illuminated. Chapter 2 examines the space of the body. It focuses

primarily on the abject sculptures of Paula Santiago that incorporate the artist's blood and hair, with organic materials such as wax and rice paper, to form small sartorial forms. The sculptures created by Santiago demonstrate an exemplary visualization of the spatial body. The strategies of representing a spatial body will be clarified through a comparison of Santiago's art with the artworks of fellow feminist artist Monica Castillo. As a self-portraitist who interrogates the links between the represented body and notions of identity, Castillo's work does indeed offer a feminist visualization of the female body. However, this chapter analyzes the ways in which a spatial body, rather than the represented body, is a more effective agent because it addresses the ways in which subjectivity is discursively constructed through the actions and appearances of the body. It considers contemporary representations of the female body as they specifically challenge the representation of woman as repository of national character. In contrast to the exploitations of the female body used in the service of nation-building, the artworks in this chapter illustrate the myriad ways in which the spatial body, as produced by Santiago, can serve as a critical site of the inquiry of self and identity. Rather than being employed objectively, the bodies under consideration here both respond to, and comment on, the very processes of subjectivity, presenting a challenge to the body as a fixed site of personal and social identity.

Chapter 3 critiques the ways in which womanhood in Mexico has been constructed with respect to the private space of the familial home and the iconic role of motherhood to which she is often confined within the household. The section analyzes works by the feminist collective Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante and Monica Mayer, before her work in Pinto Mi Raya), whose works between 1983 and 1993 often

tackled themes of motherhood and pregnancy. Their most well-known serial work, *¡MADRES!*, is a humorous critique of traditional motherhood that draws upon their own personal experiences to counter impossible social and mythic expectations. By contrast, the photographs of Daniella Rossell approach the home from a very different perspective. Her series, *Ricas y Famosas*, is well-known for the controversy that it created in 2002. Displaying mostly women, in very often bold and sexy poses, within their opulent upper-class homes in Mexico City, both the subjects of this series, and Rossell herself, were criticized for the display of such lavish decadence. A closer look into the series reveals that many of the women are the daughters and wives of PRI officials; Rossell's photographs were created in the wake of the 2000 election defeat of the party and the economic and political corruption at the turn of the century. Very little of the existing literature on the series critically examines the ways in which traditional understandings of gender inform the public reception of outrage and disgust. The popular reaction to Rossell's photographs constituted the scapegoating of their female subjects to express rage at the sociopolitical and economic situation at the turn of the century. Understanding these images from a feminist perspective can reveal a new, and very different, take on the role of women in the home and family: rather than being solely defined by their role as wife and mother, they are able to express sexuality and the ways in which family and social roles can be shaped by relationships to politics and the economy.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the street as a site of protest by analyzing artworks and actions that offer a departure from traditional ways that public social spaces have been gendered in Mexico. Opposite the constructed image of private-sphere woman construed as passive, domesticated, a bastion of ideal maternity, is the "public woman,"

who is conversely, modern and sexual, deviant and depraved, a threat to social order because of her mere presence in the so-called public sphere. The persistence of this stereotype, which is an expression of male desire, male anxiety, and sexual moralization, has not only ramifications for the perception and expectations of women, but is also intertwined with issues of class distinction as well. As William French has argued, “middle-class Mexicans have always utilized gender and morality to delineate class boundaries and separate themselves from others,” and the female prostitute was one of the strongest symbols of moral warning.<sup>15</sup> The artists considered in this section interrogate social and public spaces within Mexico with individual perspectives on crime, violence, and death in order to question the interplay of gender, economics, class, and morality. Minerva Cuevas has formed the service-oriented Mejor Vida Corp. (Better Life Corporation) and, in her performances and the marketing of public services such as subway cleaning and free products like subway and lottery tickets and cheaply-priced produce bar codes, she offers attempts to correct and call attention to issues of poverty, pollution, and class exploitation. In contrast, Margolles draws upon her background as a forensic pathologist to call attention to the trauma and pain of violent death in Mexico, often incorporating materials from the morgue, such as the water used to wash the bodies, blood, and even severed body parts, into her works. A 2005 exhibition entitled “Cuidad Juarez,” focused on the titular city and the conditions of women working in its *maquilladoras* and the estimated 500 women who have been abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered since 1993. By countering the image of the public woman, who has been desecrated on the streets of Juárez, with the spatial body, Margolles marks these streets as

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<sup>15</sup> William French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 72 no. 4 (Nov. 1992), 529.

a space of not only economic exploitation, but also of violation and death for women. In doing so, she points to the extreme and deadly ramifications of gendered, spatial restrictions based on constructions of nationhood.

A strong current that runs through each chapter is the necessity of deconstructing binary modes of thinking, especially as it concerns our understandings of gender difference. Instead of holding fast to this dichotomy, the works will demonstrate feminist theorist Nira Yuval-Davis' more effective means of dispensing with this binary and instead arguing for the necessity to distinguish between the separate spheres of the state and its institutions, the civil society, and the domain of family and kinship relations, "treating them as three separate if interrelated social and political spheres."<sup>16</sup> These chapters will illustrate how feminist artists are exposing the ways in which the state invades the home, the ways that kinship affects the state, and how both are subject to the criticism of the civil society.

What will ultimately be revealed is a new understanding of the Mexican nation, borne out through the works of contemporary feminist art. The women included in this dissertation have take advantage of the interactive framework of the production of space as they actively engage concepts of womanhood and nationalism. The artworks included in the following chapters admit women not as national archetypes, but as social agents negotiating new spaces for what it means to be a Mexican woman.

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<sup>16</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 12.

## CHAPTER 1

### **From Archetype to Agent** *Producing the Spaces of Feminism*

*"All nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous."*<sup>17</sup>

This chapter outlines a theoretical framework through which to emphasize the cultural and sociopolitical significance of contemporary feminist art in Mexico. It provides a literature review of the current state of feminist art history in Mexico and explores the ways in which theories of nationalism have exploited definition of womanhood to ground Mexican identity in traditional, stereotypical, binary gender relations. In order to produce a methodology that disrupts those hegemonic modes of dichotomous thinking, this chapter proposes the adoption of a theoretical triad composed of three physical, ideological, and discursive spaces: the body, the home, and the streets. Approaching feminist art with regard to the ways in which it comments on and critically engages with the nationally-constructed spaces of this framework calls attention to the ways feminist artists in Mexico are working to produce new (or altered) national spaces in Mexico, by challenging the constructions, and connotations, of both womanhood and nationhood.

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<sup>17</sup> Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89.

Often ignored or dismissed, feminist art and art history in Mexico has a relatively minor public presence, particularly when compared to the impact of feminist art and methodologies in the United States and Europe. The reasons for such an absence are varied, including, but certainly not limited to, the following interrelated factors. First, cultural patriarchy in Mexico persists in prescribing women a limited role in society and the art world, and Mexican society demonstrates a pronounced indifference toward feminism. Writing as recently as 2010, noted feminist Jean Franco refers to Mexico as a “difficult battleground for feminists,” identifying a “deep-rooted misogyny” that accounts for unpunished or ignored violence against women, rape, exploitation in the media and the workforce, and underrepresentation in official networks of political power and access.<sup>18</sup> Despite the devalued status afforded women in Mexico, they nevertheless participate in the articulation of a national identity built on conventional gender roles. Many strides, however, have been made towards women’s equality and self-determination over the past four decades. Since 1970, a second-wave feminist movement has mobilized women beyond their traditionally prescribed roles as wives, mothers, and symbolic repositories of national identity in an effort to redefine womanhood.<sup>19</sup> These

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Franco, "Thinking Feminism from Mexico," in *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

<sup>19</sup> The feminist movement of the second-half of the twentieth-century followed a first-wave movement that continued throughout the first half of the century and focused on women’s suffrage, labor rights, and revisions to family law. A select bibliography includes: Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*, trans. Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Carmen Ramos Escandón, "Women's Movements, Feminism, and Mexican Politics," in *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Participation and Democracy*, ed. Jane S. Jaquette (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 199-221; Gabriela Cano, "Revolución, Feminism Y Ciudadanía En México (1915-1940)," in *Historia De Las Mujeres En Occidente*, ed. George Duby and Michelle Perrot (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1993), 685-95; Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940* (Denver: Arden Press, 1990).



advancements take place alongside—and are inextricably linked to—profound social, political, and cultural changes that similarly challenge monolithic and hegemonic understandings of nationhood that give way to political democratization and economic globalization, both of which radically alter the symbolic roles and lives of women. Such challenges open up a discursive space in which to examine how contemporary discourses on nationhood intersect with contemporary notions of womanhood.

Second, while feminist art historical scholarship contributes to the public recognition of a small circle of female artists in Mexico, only recently has its attention turned to contemporary feminist art, the literature on which has emerged largely in the past ten years. Contributions by feminist artists, curators, and art historians have tremendous potential to add to and reshape current understandings of contemporary art in Mexico since 1968. However, the current state of art historical discourse thus far precludes the incorporation of feminist art into existing narratives. Based on its general lack of interest in exploring the topic, institutional prejudice against feminism seems to exist among the major publishers of art historical scholarship in Mexico, specifically the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México's Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas (UNAM IIE), national arts organizations like Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA) and Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) and the nation's state-run museums, as such establishments have traditionally served as arbiters of the hegemonic national vision.<sup>20</sup> Despite the active publication of feminist texts in the fields of sociology, anthropology, literature, history, and women's and gender studies in Mexico, art history remains a relatively unexamined discipline, a fact that perhaps points

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<sup>20</sup> See Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

to the historical ways in which art and art history have been used by the state to reproduce the traditional spaces of the nation.<sup>21</sup>

Prevalent themes in contemporary art history include a rejection of traditional media, specifically painting; the rise of conceptualism and installation; the use of found or everyday items; and the border, globalization, and the experience of urban space. Most of these themes, however, are discursively configured in terms of their relationship to an overarching ideology that dominates Mexican art history of the twentieth century—"the national."<sup>22</sup> Since the beginnings of modernity in the second half of the nineteenth century, art in Mexico has been used to articulate and promote a cohesive national identity, an ideological thrust that has come to define Mexican modernism.

Contemporary art has responded to the more current national crises by challenging and attempting to deconstruct pervasive constructions of the nation. However, the overwhelming legacy of nationalism and its presence in Modern art and visual culture tends to overshadow and obscure interpretations of art that deviate from a focus on national identity, even as contemporary artists, critics, and curators seek to distance themselves from such narratives, to the exclusion of other theoretical frameworks such as

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<sup>21</sup> Institutionally speaking, the Universidad Iberoamericana is an important exception, where scholars like Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz are actively working to correct this imbalance.

<sup>22</sup> See the following catalogs for recent exhibitions of contemporary Mexican art, each of which contain at least one essay that frames current artistic production in terms of the legacy of artistic nationalism in Mexico: Olivier Debroyse, ed. *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007); Klaus Biesenbach, *Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2002); Betti-Sue Hertz, ed. *Axis Mexico: Common Objects and Cosmopolitan Actions* (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2002); *Moi Et Ma Circonstance: Mobilité Dans L'art Contemporain Mexicain*, (Montreal: Musée des Beaux-arts, 2000); *Mexico Now: Point of Departure*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio Arts Council, 1997). See also the following essays: Rita Eder, "Eternal Mexico: Between Nationalism and Globalization," in *Compression Vs. Expression : Containing and Explaining the World's Art*, ed. John Onians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 120-38; Olivier Debroyse, "Dreaming on the Pyramid: Responses to Globalism in Mexican Visual Culture," *Discourse* 23, no. 2 (2001): 44-60.

gender. While scholarship on women's art in Mexico is growing, it generally confines itself to discussions of art created by a small group of self-proclaimed feminist artists of the 1980s. Moreover, it has yet to fully examine feminism as a critical aspect of national discourse. By challenging Mexican representations of womanhood and traditional femininity feminist artists also challenge ideals central to the mythical identity upon which the nation is shaped.

Building upon existing art historical scholarship, this chapter sets out to expand the consideration of feminist art in Mexico by extending a gender-based analysis to artworks by women artists that address and critique traditional representations and understandings of femininity. Examination of the major trends and debates surrounding Mexican contemporary art of the last three decades reveals how they have largely revolved around the increasingly problematic legacy of modern visual nationalism, as concepts of the Revolutionary state have broken down in the face of political and economic turmoil, more democratic governance, and globalization. Indeed, when framed in the broader discourses of contemporary art, national transformation, and the role that women have played in that transformation, feminist art can be demonstrated to have participated in the breakdown of the hegemonic state. As a result, feminist art in Mexico should be understood not as a finite "movement," but rather as a series of enduring deconstructive strategies that reveal the cultural and sociopolitical significance of gender in the making, and unmaking, of the nation.

In order to highlight ways contemporary feminist art in Mexico contributes to the production of new social spaces that are not dependent upon stereotypical gender and power relations, a conceptual framework that is similarly organized according to the

spatial territories that feminism seeks to redefine must be devised. This dissertation delineates such a framework by revisiting the traditional spaces of femininity as viewed through the lens of contemporary Mexican feminist art. In chapters that are thematically organized around the private space of “the home” and the public spaces of “the streets,” the works of Polvo de Gallina Negra and Daniela Rossell, and those of Theresa Margolles and Minerva Cuevas, respectively, illustrate ways in which contemporary spatial relations incorporate contemporary expressions of gender. Or, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, the works demonstrate the many and varied ways women in post-1968 Mexico embraced their roles as active “producers of space,” rather than the passive “users” of space.<sup>23</sup> By emphasizing not only space itself, but also the social practices that are exercised therein, a third space or site is implicated in the construction, and deconstruction, of femininity: that of “the body” as a vehicle through which one acts and is acted upon by social forces, and through which subjectivity is formulated. The spatial body, as will be elucidated through the works of artist Paula Santiago, however, is implicated by, and even supersedes, both the space of the home and the streets. Thus, by introducing the body as a third space of inquiry, the opposition of the private/public dichotomy dissolves into a theoretical triad of social spaces that are revealed to intertwine and overlap.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, organizing this study into sections focused on the body, the home, and the streets combats essentialist understandings of women that are produced by nationalist discourse. Offering feminist alternatives to the roles of women in Mexico as biological producers (body), cultural producers (home), and civic producers (streets), this

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<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Lefebvre describes social spaces according to the ways in which they “interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another,” *Ibid.*, 86.

dissertation argues that the limited metaphorical and discursive significance of women constructed within nation-building projects is undermined by the lived experiences and everyday practices of Mexico's women. An investigation into the spatialization of gender and the gendering of space allows for both the critique of traditional spatial relations as well as an elaboration of the ways contemporary feminist artists redefine the national terms, and spaces, of the body, the home, and the streets.

### **I. The State of Feminist Art History in Mexico**

There is a small but growing body of scholarship on women's art and feminism in Mexico. The distinction between the two topics is not yet clearly articulated, however, possibly due to the burgeoning nature of the field, but perhaps also due to the negative stigma attached to the term "feminist," which discourages artists as well as some art historians from claiming the title.<sup>25</sup> Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz note that many artists in Mexico whose work could be considered feminist actively deny the label "for fear that their work will be rejected out of hand because of its association with stereotypes of dogmatism, hatred of men, etc."<sup>26</sup> For instance, according to the authors, in 1999 a roundtable discussion on the topic "El arte como representación, La Mujer y la artista" [Art as Representation: Woman and Artist] held at the Galeria X-Teresa Arte Alternativo in Mexico City resulted in little progress when the participants "talked in circles" around the term "feminist" and the symposium produced virtually no audience

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<sup>25</sup> Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz, eds., *Crítica Feminista En La Teoría E Historia Del Arte* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007), 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

for the topic.<sup>27</sup> Historical attitudes toward feminism have viewed as an “imported, bourgeois strategy” that constitutes a divisive and “inauthentic” presence in Mexican society.<sup>28</sup> Even among feminists, artists were not always supported by their fellow activists, and according to artist Magali Lara, who was a member of many feminist social organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, the visual arts were not discussed in meetings because art was viewed as “bourgeois” and “frivolous.”<sup>29</sup>

This dissertation adopts Peggy Phelan’s very broad definition of feminism as “the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture.”<sup>30</sup> This definition permits a wide understanding of feminist art and feminist art history to include expressions that comment on and respond to the experiences of women. However, by stressing gender as an integral element of the “organization of culture,” Phelan also calls attention to the role that it plays in the wider networks of class, race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and politics that govern everyday practices, a contextual emphasis that has not always been afforded to women’s or feminist art in Mexico.

Much of the scholarship on women artists in Mexico is limited to a few important studies of a small handful of artists who have gained global recognition, in addition to broad, nonspecific references in more general art histories. For example, since her

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid; The author’s conclusions of the discussion can be read in Karen Cordero Reiman, “La Mujer Y La Artista; Voces De Una Polémica Silenciosa,” *Curare: Espacio Crítico para las Artes* 14(1999): 78-9. In this article, Cordero Reiman laments both the small number of roundtable participants and audience members, each of which only numbered eleven, despite widely-distributed invitations. Patricia Martín similarly laments a pronounced lack of interest in women’s and feminist art in Mexico, see Patricia Martín, “Horizontal/Vertical: Avoiding Gender,” *Parachute* 104(2001): 94-109.

<sup>28</sup> Lynn Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 140.

<sup>29</sup> Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice*, 34:1 (2007): 55.

<sup>30</sup> Peggy Phelan, “Survey,” in *Art and Feminism*, ed. Helena Reckitt (London: Phaidon, 2001), 18.

“discovery” by (predominantly U.S.) feminists in the late 1970s, the overwhelming majority of scholarship on women’s art in Mexico takes Frida Kahlo as its central focus.<sup>31</sup> Touted over the years as an icon for women, people of color, the queer community, and the disabled, her emblematic status translates into the visual arts as well, where she is often positioned as a solitary female representative of women in Mexican art, particularly from an international perspective. As an artist who explored constructions of female subjectivity through her artwork, Kahlo serves as an important predecessor for subsequent artists who similarly highlight the various ways women construct themselves as subjects. However, as Shifra Goldman points out, Kahlo’s monopolization of the imagination and recognition of a global art world tends to eclipse her female contemporaries and successors.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the majority of the recuperative feminist scholarship focuses on female artists of the first half of the twentieth century, all of whom were associated with art movements and styles that dominated Modern Mexican art. Recent publications on artists such as Maria Izquierdo, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Olga Costa, Tina Modotti, Nahui Olin, Kati Horna, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo,

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<sup>31</sup> As attested by the vast bibliography on Kahlo. Selections include: Joan Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," *Third Text* 12(1990); Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hanover: University of New England, 1999); Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1982); Raquel Tibol and Christina Burrus, *Frida* (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Several recent exhibitions attempt to expand the discourse. In 2007, the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago mounted a survey of female modern artists entitled *Women Artists of Modern Mexico: Frida's Contemporaries*. It subsequently traveled to Mexico and a companion catalogue was published in 2008: *Women Artists of Modern Mexico: Frida's Contemporaries/Mujeres Artistas En El México De La Modernidad: Las Contemporáneos De Frida*, (Chicago: National Museum of Mexican Art, 2008). This exhibition was specifically designed to correct the discursive imbalance that obscured the twenty-six peers included in the display. Similarly, the following year the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO), located in Monterrey, Mexico, mounted an exhibition entitled *Historia de Mujeres Artistas en México del Siglo XX*. On display between February and May, 2008, this exhibition marked the most comprehensive attempt to showcase women’s art in Mexico of the last century. These two exhibitions come nearly twenty years on the heels of the last major exhibition of women’s art in Mexico, which was first presented at New York’s National Academy of Design in 1990, *La Mujer En Mexico/Women in Mexico*, (Mexico City: Fundación Cultural Televisa, 1990).

Grace and Marion Greenwood, Elizabeth Catlett, Aurora Reyes, Lilia Carrillo, and Cordelia Urueta, among others, widen the scope of Modernism in Mexico, for which Kahlo has long been promoted as *the* female subject.<sup>33</sup> Recent studies have begun to shed light on women artists of the nineteenth century as well, bringing into focus artists such as Julia and Josefa Sanroman and Julia Escalante.<sup>34</sup> These studies mark an important contribution to the literature on women artists, as many of these texts combine biographical information, formal and interpretive analysis, and contextual investigation that redresses the many ways Mexican Modernism was constructed as a masculinist narrative.

Yet while feminist methodologies expand the discourse on Modern Mexican art, in the field of contemporary art, post-1968, the literature is even more limited; much of the existing work has been written or published in only the past ten years. Several new publications, exhibitions, and symposia dedicated to women in the arts in Mexico constitute new beginnings for artists who were for so long relegated to the margins, though they do not concentrate on the post-1968 period. These include *Miradas disidentes: géneros y sexo en la historia del arte* [*Dissident Views: Gender and Sex in Art*

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<sup>33</sup> In addition to the still unequal representation of women to men historically, art historical discourse on women in Mexico is further problematized by the fact that of this small number of known Mexican artists, four of them are European transplants (Tina Modotti from Italy, Kati Horna from Hungary, Leonora Carrington from England, Remedios Varos from Spain, the Greenwood sisters and Catlett from the U.S.). According to scholar Shifra Goldman, even more problematic that the most well-known of this small group are recognized because of their associations with (or co-optation by) canonical U.S. and European art movements: Modotti is associated with Formalist Photography through Edward Weston; and Carrington and Varos counted themselves as participants of Surrealism, a movement that claimed Kahlo despite her objections and that also at times colors scholarship on Izquierdo through their associations with Andre Breton and Antonin Artaud, respectively. Shifra Goldman, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall..." *Art Nexus*, no. 32 (1999): 72-6.

<sup>34</sup> Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010); Stacie G. Widdifield, "Art and Modernity in Porfirian Mexico: Julia Escalante's *Graziella* and the *Lechero*," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29, no. 3 (2010).



*History*], edited by Alberto Dallal and published in 2007; this volume contains the papers delivered at the XXIX Coloquio Internacional de Historia Del Arte, held in 2005, the first UNAM Coloquio to focus on gender. Its twenty-two essays address women as artists, women as subjects, revision of the art historical canon, and feminist methodology and perspectives. Most, although not all, take up Mexican or New Spanish subjects, and only one features the work of a contemporary artist—Teresa Margolles and her work with the art collective SEMEFO.

Also published in 2007 was the anthology *Critica Feminista en la Teoria e Historia del Arte [Feminist Criticism in the Theory and History of Art]*, edited by art historian Karen Cordero Reiman and artist and critic Inda Sáenz. Their anthology is the first in Mexico to translate and compile feminist texts (art historical and otherwise) into a visual culture reader. Included are foundational feminist writings such as Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," Griselda Pollock's "Differencing the Canon," and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Other well known feminist authors include Janet Wolff, Whitney Chadwick, Carol Duncan, and Anne M. Wagner, along with texts by Mexican artists Monica Mayer and Magali Lara. These two volumes mark an invaluable contribution as they represent institutional support of feminist methodologies.

While a number of contemporary female artists in Mexico have gained national and international recognition, most critics remain unwilling to examine the works of women artists in light of their potentially feminist or gendered content.<sup>35</sup> Criticism of

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<sup>35</sup> The most recent, and perhaps the most egregious, example is the lack of discussion about feminist art in the landmark exhibition and catalogue of contemporary art, *The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*. This text, created in 2006, is already one of the leading authoritative

such works requires their examination within the context of women's history and an understanding of women's cultural roles, an obligation that few critics are willing to accept.<sup>36</sup> Even writings on women by well-respected art critics often fall short of critical analysis.<sup>37</sup> There are, however, several important exceptions that constitute the small body of feminist art historical studies.

Many of these studies constitute introductory approaches to contemporary art from a gendered perspective. Art historian Gladys Villegas Morales published a book-length text in 2006 entitled *La imagen femenina en artistas mexicanas contemporáneas* [*The Female Image in Contemporary Mexican Art*] that examines stereotypical representations of women from both canonical Western art history and well-known Modern Mexican examples that characterize female subjects according to a simplified "good woman/bad woman" dichotomy.<sup>38</sup> Villegas Morales describes how feminist artists working in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to disrupt this stereotypical iconography by

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resources on Mexican contemporary art; yet while women artists are represented in the text itself, feminist perspectives are granted only scant references and less than a handful of illustrations, all of which go undiscussed. Similarly, while one specific component of the exhibition/catalogue focuses on art and identity (and it is here that feminist art is given a very brief mention), the discussion mostly focuses on the contemporary debates over national identity as expressed in contemporary art and the art of the so-called Neo-Mexicanidad "movement" central to these debates in the late 1980s and 1990s. I argue that the exclusion of feminist art from this text is not necessarily indicative of its presence and impact. Instead, this absence is a by-product of ongoing discourse on contemporary Mexican art that overshadows the potential impact of feminism in the arts, a discourse that includes an analysis of gender alongside nationality, race, and class. Olivier Debrouse, ed., *La Era de la Discrepancia: Arte y Cultura Visual en México, 1968-1997/The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Martín, "Horizontal/Vertical: Avoiding Gender," *Parachute* 104 (Oct./Dec. 2001): 94-109.

<sup>37</sup> One example of this is *Ser y Ver: Mujeres en las Artes Visuales*, by Raquel Tibol (Mexico, D.F.: Plaza & Janés, 2002). A leading Mexican art critic in the second half of the twentieth century, Tibol compiled this narrative survey from her previous articles, essays, interviews, and publications, originally written between 1953 and 1999. While this volume is enormously significant because it is one of the only art historical surveys of women artists in Mexico and because of the authority lent to it by Tibol's position within the Mexican art world, it is largely descriptive in nature and fails to address the works according to any kind of theoretical model.

<sup>38</sup> Gladys Villegas Morales, *La Imagen Femenina En Artistas Mexicanas Contemporáneas: Una Perspectiva No Androcéntrica* (Xalapa, Ver. : Universidad Veracruzana, 2006).

presenting their own, more personalized versions of female representation. A short volume, with much ground to cover, the author draws mainly from interviews with the artists and exhibition reviews to provide an introduction to feminist art in Mexico and its representational objectives. A second article by Villegas Morales, “Los Grupos de arte feminista en México” [Feminist Art Groups in Mexico], published that same year, provides a brief description of the three self-proclaimed feminist art collectives of the 1980s, Tlacuilas y Retrateras, the little-known Bio-Arte, and Polvo de Gallina Negra.<sup>39</sup>

In 2000, Lorena Zamora Betancourt published an investigation into the representation of the female nude, entitled *El Desnudo Femenino: Una Visión de lo Propio* [The Female Nude: A Vision of One's Own]. This text similarly questioned representations of the female body and argued for the agency of both modern and contemporary female artists such as Kahlo, Izquierdo, Rowena Morales, and Carla Rippey, who represent the nude from a female perspective.<sup>40</sup> Sociologist Edward McCaughan's current research on the art of social movements in Mexico led to two articles on Mexican feminist art.<sup>41</sup> Although McCaughan's specific focus is on the work of queer artists, his research acknowledges the role that feminist artists in the 1980s in Mexico played in generating identity-based critiques in the visual arts.

The most significant contribution to art historical scholarship on feminist art in Mexico is Araceli Barbosa's *Arte feminista en los ochenta en México: una perspectiva de*

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<sup>39</sup> Villegas Morales, "Los Grupos De Arte Feminista En México," *La Palabra y el Hombre* 137 (2006).

<sup>40</sup> Lorena Zamora Betancourt, *El Desnudo Femenino: Una Visión De Lo Propio* (Mexico City: CONACULTA/INBA, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> See Edward McCaughan, "Gender, Sexuality and Nation in the Art of Mexican Social Movements," *Nepantla: views from the south* 3, no.1 (2002): 99-142, and "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico," *Social Justice* 34, no. 1 (2007): 44-62.

*género [Feminist Art of the 80s in Mexico: A Gendered Perspective]* (2008).<sup>42</sup> This text focuses on feminist art in the 1980s, but provides a more contextualized look at the development of the feminist art movement in Mexico, analyzing the working conditions of contemporary women artists, as well as the institutional biases expressed by museums, galleries, critics, and their artist peers. As these prejudices led feminist artists to seek out their own organizations in addition to an alternative voice, Barbosa's book cogently analyzes the work of both individual artists and collective feminist groups, as well as the art historical and social climates that led to their creation.<sup>43</sup> However, it remains rooted in the 1980s as the solitary decade of feminist art and only marginally addresses wider, national and political frameworks.

A number of important writings have been published by feminist artists themselves. Mónica Mayer, who works as an individual artist as well as a member of the feminist collective Polvo de Gallina Negra, has contributed most significantly to the scholarship on feminist art in Mexico as a whole. Mayer has published numerous articles on women's art in feminist journals like *FEM* and *n.paradoxa*; penned a regular column in the Mexico City newspaper *El Universal*; organized numerous roundtable discussions, seminars, and workshops on gender and art; and in 2006 published a book-length study/memoir, entitled *Rosa Chillante*, on women and performance in Mexico.<sup>44</sup> Since

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<sup>42</sup> Araceli Barbosa, *Arte Feminista En Los Ochenta En México: Una Perspectiva De Género* (Casa Juan Pablos: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> A significantly condensed version of her arguments can be found in Araceli Barbosa Sanchez, "La Cultural Feminista Y Las Artes Visuales En México," *Inventio* 2(2005): 77-83.

<sup>44</sup> A selection of her writings include: Mónica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres Y Performance En México* (Mexico: CONACULTA, 2004); Mayer, "The Revolution of the Comrades," *n.paradoxa* 10(2002); Mayer, "De La Vida Y El Arte Como Feminista," in *Crítica Feminista En La Teoría E Historia Del Arte*, ed. Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007); Mayer, "Propuesta Para Un Arte Feminista En México," *FEM* 33(1984); Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante, "Arte Escénicas: Archivo Virtual," <http://artescenicas.uclm.es/index.php?sec=artis&id=149>; Clair-Marie

1990, she and her partner Victor Lerma have engaged in a daily ritual of collecting, reading, and archiving every article on contemporary art published in twelve of the major newspapers in Mexico City. This project, which Mayer and Lerma refer to as an ongoing conceptual art project named *Pinto mi Raya [Drawing the Line]*, has resulted in the creation of a physical archive as well as a subscription service that then delivers photocopies of those archived texts to various universities, libraries, and art critics.<sup>45</sup> *Pinto mi Raya* also collates themed albums from their massive archive, on such topics as photography, performance, collective art practices, and women's art. Several albums are specifically dedicated to women's and feminist art, including a three-volume series on contemporary women artists. Although the project is primarily committed to establishing a physical record and a textual presence for neglected non-object-based art practices, it also creates an invaluable resource for scholars whose research focuses on contemporary women in the visual arts in Mexico. Each of the above-mentioned sources benefit from Mayer's writings, her archiving services, in addition to her willingness to personally discuss feminist art via personal interviews or correspondence.<sup>46</sup>

Several of Mayer's colleagues add their own written works to the growing discourse. Maris Bustamante, Mayer's collaborator in *Polvo de Gallina Negra*, has published two essays on conceptual art and the Generation of Los Grupos.<sup>47</sup> Magali Lara,

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Robertson and Mónica Mayer, "Clair-Marie Robertson Interviews Mónica Mayer, Mexican Feminist Artist and Writer on Feminist Issues," *International Arts Therapies Journal* (Online), <http://www2.derby.ac.uk/vart/vol-3-200304-international-arts-therapies-journal/49-interviews-/65-clair-marie-robertson-interviews->

<sup>45</sup> Mónica Mayer, "Archives: Pinto Mi Raya: Drawing the Line in Mexico City," *Performance Research* 7, no. 1 (2002): 121-29.

<sup>46</sup> Mayer and Lerma also maintain a website dedicated to their many collaborative projects. Mónica Mayer and Victor Lerma, "Pinto Mi Raya," <http://www.pintomiraya.com/>.

<sup>47</sup> Maris Bustamante, "Non-Objective Arts in Mexico, 1963-83," in *Corpus Delecti*, ed. Coco Fusco (London: Routledge, 2000), 225-39; Bustamante, "Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies of Mexican

who worked alongside both Mayer and Bustamante, recently published a personal narrative of her experiences as a female artist in Mexico.<sup>48</sup> Artists' writings such as these are instrumental in establishing a history of feminist art, as they provide textual support for artists' works and additional material to be critically engaged by art historians.

The sources discussed above make up the major body of literature on contemporary feminist art in Mexico, and several unifying characteristics help to define this scholarship. First, they lay the foundation for feminist critiques from later decades by stressing the importance of the artists' focus on examinations of the female body, the nature of representation itself, the idea of quotidian acts and objects as a subject of art, and women's experiences. The majority of these sources on feminist art, however, restrict the term to artwork created by the self-proclaimed feminist artists and art collectives of the late 1970s and 1980s. As a result, a limited body of works are included, and the term "feminist" comes to characterize only a small number of artists, including Mayer, Bustamante, Lara, Carla Rippey, Rowena Morales, Lourdes Grobet, and the three feminist art collectives that worked between 1983 and 1993—Polvo de Gallina Negra, Bio-Arte, and Tlacuilas y Retrateras. The general tenor of scholarship on feminist art seems hesitant to extend that designation to more contemporary artists of the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>49</sup>

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Conceptualism, 1921-1993," in *Arte No Es La Vida (Art Is Not Life): Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000*, ed. Claudia Calirman, et al. (New York: Museo del Barrio, 2008), 134-51.

<sup>48</sup> Magali Lara, "La Memoria Es Como Una Piedra Pulida," in *Crítica Feminista En La Teoría E Historia Del Arte*, ed. Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007), 415-20.

<sup>49</sup> The exception to this is Mayer's *Rosa Chillante*, which discusses performances by female artists who worked throughout the 1990s, several of whom will be discussed in later chapters, including Monica Castillo, Teresa Margolles, and Minerva Cuevas. Mónica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres Y Performance En México* (Mexico: CONACULTA, 2004), 44-73.

Secondly, in most sources feminist art is presented as a later variation of the generation of Los Grupos, an approximately ten-year period between 1973 and 1983 characterized by the formation of various art collectives of mutual support and collaboration as artists struggled against institutional constraint and selective endorsement. Greatly influenced by the student protest movements of the late 1960s and the government's repressive responses, the artists who participated in the Generation of Los Grupos shared a widespread disillusionment with the state wrought by the Tlatelolco Massacre.<sup>50</sup> The shattering events of October 2, 1968, and its aftermath, during which the Mexican government sanctioned the death, injury, and imprisonment of thousands of young "dissidents," is regarded as the cataclysmic inauguration of contemporary cultural and political history in Mexico.<sup>51</sup> These events also marked the emergence of new tendencies in art that led artists to seek alternatives to nationalist narratives and the "climate of intolerance, repression or simple indifference" by embracing collaboration

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<sup>50</sup> For scholarship on Los Grupos, see: Maris Bustamante, "Non-Objective Arts in Mexico, 1963-83," in *Corpus Delecti*, ed. Coco Fusco (London: Routledge, 2000), 225-39; Rubén Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon: Adventure in Collectivism During the 1970s," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 163-90; Gabriela Jauregui, "No-Grupo," *Frieze*, March 2011, <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/no-grupo/>; Charmaine Picard, "The Art of Urban Recycling: The Artist Collective *Suma*, 1976-1982," (Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, 1999), <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/ilassa/conference/1999/papers/picard/picard2.htm>; Debrouse, ed. *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*; Maris Bustamante, "Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies of Mexican Conceptualism, 1921-1993," in *Arte No Es La Vida (Art Is Not Life): Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000*, ed. Claudia Calirman, et al. (New York: Museo del Barrio, 2008), 134-51; Cristina Hajar, *Siete Grupos De Artistas Visuales De Los Setenta* (Mexico City: CONACULTA/INBA, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> See Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1975); Diana Sorensen, "Tlatelolco 1968: Paz and Poniatowska on Law and Violence," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 18, no. 2 (2002): 287-321; Evelyn P. Stevens, "Protest Movement in an Authoritarian Regime: The Mexican Case," *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 3 (1975): 361-82.

and independently funded and organized exhibitions of contemporary art.<sup>52</sup> They similarly embraced forms of nontraditional and often ephemeral media such as performance, mail art, street actions, graffiti, and poster/flyer distribution. The varying artist collectives actively challenged the conservative art world as well as an oppressive state, distinguishing themselves as both sociopolitical and cultural activists. Many of the female artists grouped among the feminist generation of the 1980s participated in the respective collectives such as Proceso Pentágono (Morales and Grobet), Grupo Marçó (Lara), No Grupo (Bustamante), and Peyote y la Cia. (Rippey). While these female artists were an instrumental segment of this generation of protest, many of them reported a pronounced gender bias even in an artistic atmosphere that aimed to speak against social injustice and antidemocratic sentiments. Lara, Mayer, Bustamante, and Rippey each commented on the male-dominated art world of the 1970s, both in cultural institutions and academies, and the independent groups, where they were often dismissed because of their gender, treated “as children” by instructors, or as followers or girlfriends in Los Grupos.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, issues of women’s daily life, sexuality, and the body were all themes that found little validation from the male members of the collectives.<sup>54</sup> The simultaneous inclusion in and exclusion from the artistic freedom advocated by Los Grupos was, in many ways, what led feminist artists such as Mayer, Lara, and Bustamante to seek out and create specifically women-oriented exhibition spaces in 1979. This eventually led to the creation of the feminist collectives mentioned above in 1982

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<sup>52</sup> Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Genealogy of an Exhibition," in *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visualen México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debroise (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 28.

<sup>53</sup> Edward J. McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence:Feminist Artists in Mexico," *Social Justice* 34, no. 1 (2007): 50, 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: 53.



and 1983 as a way to navigate what McCaughan has called an “often hostile labyrinth of silence.”<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the beginnings of a feminist movement in art coincided with the last years of the generation of Los Grupos, which has also been dated to 1983. Scholars and artists cite various reasons for the decline of the movement: Bustamante cites the “institutionalization” of the collectives as represented in the exhibition of their work at the Museo de Arte Moderno in 1983; curator Betti-Sue Hertz cites the simultaneous emergence of a privately-funded network of museums and collectors in Mexico that offered an alternative to the state-run art monopoly.<sup>56</sup> Olivier Debroise argues that the dissolution of Los Grupos was a more practical act of self-preservation following the economic crisis of 1982 that “could also be linked to the decline of the very institutions that the groups had targeted.”<sup>57</sup> In any case, and with only one exception (Peyote y la Cia., which continued to work after 1983), the generation of Los Grupos ended just as the feminist movement gathered steam.

Feminist art of the 1980s is certainly tied to the Los Grupos movement, specifically in its articulation of marginalized voices, the spirit of collaboration, and the artists’ initiative in creating exhibition spaces for themselves. However, by exclusively, and discursively, linking together feminist actions and Los Grupos, one runs the risk of characterizing feminist art as derivative of a movement with very clear temporal and contextual significance. Furthermore, to limit the definition of feminist art in Mexico to a

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.: 59.

<sup>56</sup> Bustamante, “Non-Objective Arts in Mexico, 1963-83,” 232; Betti-Sue Hertz, “The Circumstance Is Mexico: Art Practice for the Transitory Cosmopole,” in *Axis Mexico: Common Objects and Cosmopolitan Actions*, ed. Betti-Sue Hertz (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2002), 19.

<sup>57</sup> Debroise, “Dreaming on the Pyramid,” 53.

specific generation or movement of artists is to restrict the potential impact of works of art that can, instead, be contextualized by broader cultural, social, and political changes in Mexico since 1968 (as well as since 1983).

Such a contextualization requires feminist art to be viewed in relation to the project of nationalism that has both guided and plagued art and visual culture for over a century. This is a task that challenges the pervasive nature of nation-building in Mexico, where the idea of the Nation takes precedence over marginalized projects such as gender identity and civil rights. As Nikki Craske argued, at both the beginning and end of the twentieth century, as the Mexican state sought to redefine or reestablish itself, women's rights were exploited without significant gains: "what little space has been available [within nation-building projects] has often been constrained by the needs of other projects leaving women little opportunity to determine their own identities within the construction of nationhood."<sup>58</sup> I argue that this is consistent with art historical discourse, wherein women's subjectivity is sacrificed to the overwhelming task of grappling with the hegemonic discourse of visual nationalism. Furthermore, just as feminist art in Mexico began to make a self-conscious effort to critique social roles and an entrenched art world, a resurgence of national politics, brought about by the slow but steady breakdown of the state over the last few decades of the twentieth century and the encroachment of globalization, pushed gender politics into a once again marginal position. It is thus more urgent than ever that feminist art be included in contemporary discourses on art and nationalism because of the fundamental, inextricable link between nationhood and womanhood.

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<sup>58</sup> Nikki Craske, "Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Making the Nation: Women and Politics in 20th-Century Mexico," *Feminist Review* 79(2005): 117.

## II. The Spaces of a Gendered Nationalism

In order to investigate how issues of nationhood and womanhood have been historically conflated in Mexico, it is first necessary to outline the theoretical terms of this discussion. Following feminist theorists Anne McClintock and Nira Yuval-Davis, this section summarizes the symbolic roles assigned to women within nation-building projects that took place during the modern construction of the Mexican nation. It describes the production and reproduction of gendered social space in Mexico from Independence until the late 1960s, but specifically during the nationalist periods of the Porfiriato (the reign of president-cum-dictator Porfirio Díaz, 1867-1911) and Postrevolutionary reconstruction (roughly 1920-40). Noting the spatial language and concepts that accompany these symbolic roles, I bring this discussion together with notions of space as defined by Lefebvre. What is gained by the addition of Lefebvre's spatial politics is a way to understand women, not as symbolic, passive objects (as they are positioned within the framework of modern nationalism), but instead as active subjects who exert their own agency in the redefinition of the contemporary nation.

In the essay "Nationalism as a Practical System," Claudio Lomnitz offers a critique of the canonical Andersonian theory of nation as an "imagined community."<sup>59</sup> Approaching Anderson's theory from a specifically Mexican perspective, he finds fault with the author's arguments based on several different points: historical inaccuracy, a

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<sup>59</sup> Claudio Lomnitz Adler, "Nationalism as a Practical System: Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism from the Vantage Point of Spanish America," in *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-34. For Anderson's classic discussion of nationhood, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

historicized understanding of time, an emphasis on sacrifice as the quintessential declaration of nationalism, a privileging of language over race, and a limited and exclusionary scope that focuses on citizen fraternity free of hierarchy.<sup>60</sup> According to Lomnitz, Anderson does not account for varying levels of citizenship and instead assumes that an imagined community constructs equitable relationships to the nation amongst all those included. This criticism has been made by feminist historians and political theorists as well. Specifically, in regard to how Anderson envisions the nation as a “fraternity,” feminist scholars rightly point out the discrepancy that exists between male and female relationships to the nation, a concept that is, as Anne McClintock notes, inherently gendered.<sup>61</sup> McClintock defines nations as “systems of cultural representation whereby people imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community” and “historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed.”<sup>62</sup> The term “nationhood,” then, can be used to describe the ways men and women are bound to, recognize, and participate in those representational systems and historical practices. In particular, McClintock and Nira Yuval-Davis each argue for the inadequacy of any theory of nationhood that does not account for gender differences, as the concepts of gender and nation are both “informed and constructed by each other.”<sup>63</sup> In such a homogenizing discourse as nation theory, recognitions of gender differences are

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<sup>60</sup> Lomnitz Adler, "Nationalism as a Practical System," 11. Lomnitz predominantly critiques Anderson's claim that nationalism came on the heels of declining religiosity. Particularly in Mexico, he argues that Spanish colonialism and the very beginning of national identity were founded upon a sense of religious fervor, not secularization. The leaders of the Mexican War for Independence similarly invoked their Christian faith as in need of defense. He also argues that because of this, forms of nationalism began in New Spain well before the end of the eighteenth century, which is where Anderson situates the historical development of nationalism.

<sup>61</sup> McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven'," 89.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 21. See also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

“paltry.”<sup>64</sup> Even in discourse that acknowledges gender discrepancies, the tendency is to simply place women in opposition to men.<sup>65</sup> This oversimplified construct reinscribes women as a homogenous category; however, this can only be the case when factors such as race, class, age, sexuality, and ethnicity are suppressed.<sup>66</sup> Women often hold an “ambivalent” position: they are exploited to symbolize the unification of the nation, and yet at the same time are “excluded from the collective ‘we’ of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position.”<sup>67</sup> Carving out a discursive space in which contemporary feminist art is viewed as both socially and nationally relevant requires a discussion of the ways in which the modern discourse on nationalism engendered a spatial dimension that in turn, characterized how women relate to the terms of citizenship.

According to Yuval-Davis, there are three major (and interrelated) dimensions that constitute all nationalist projects and consequently construct women as national objects: the genealogical dimension, or the formation of a myth of common origin; the cultural dimension, or the creation of a national “essence” based on “language and/or religion and/or other customs and traditions”; and finally, the civic dimension, which “focuses on citizenship as determining the boundaries of the nation, and thus relates directly to notions of state sovereignty and specific territoriality.”<sup>68</sup> Women, she argues,

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<sup>64</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven,” 89.

<sup>65</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 116.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. This classification follows the well-known typology previously outlined by Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias in *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989). In this typology, the authors identified the five principal ways in which women factor into nationalism: as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations); as active transmitters and producers of the national culture; as symbolic signifiers of national difference; and as active participants in national struggles, 7.

are specifically implicated in all three of these dimensions of nation construction, because they are very often called upon to carry the burden of representations that forge communal identifications.

The formation of the myth of common origin is, according to Yuval-Davis, one of the main strategies used to theorize national unity. Women factor here in two specific ways. Physiologically, women's roles in reproduction make them essential players in the biological reproduction of the nation. Thus, political emphases on reproductive rights are seen as expressions of nationalism that specifically speak to the citizenship of women. These include state policies and campaigns that either encourage childbearing or limit the number of children, or eugenics projects that selectively promote procreation in order to enhance the "quality" of the nation.<sup>69</sup> Symbolically, origin narratives are often constructed around mythologized mother-figures who emblemize the birth of the nation itself, a number of which were created in Mexico and used throughout art and visual culture to promote national sentiments of loyalty and cohesion. The genealogical dimension of nationalism, then, in its deployment of both biological and symbolic femininity, depends upon fixed understandings and representations of the female body, traditionally assigned "naturalized" and allegorical meanings.

The cultural dimension of nationalist projects depends upon the ubiquitous creation of the private/public dichotomy, a gendered binary framework that exploits the supposedly "natural" character of social spaces and the social practices, or behaviors, that occur therein.<sup>70</sup> With such a pervasive distinction, where "space embodies social

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 26-38, 116.

<sup>70</sup> See Henri Lefebvre's terms for a "science of space," wherein space is described as politically and ideologically constructed in such a way as to conceal the mechanisms by which those socially-constructed

relationships,” women, who are ideologically and physically charged with the private sector of the “home,” serve as the conduit of biological and cultural reproduction.<sup>71</sup> The home, which is a socially-constructed space, fosters “relations between adults and between adults and children in the family, ways of cooking and eating, domestic labour, play and bedtime stories, out of which a whole world view, ethical and aesthetic, can become naturalized and reproduced.”<sup>72</sup> Women are also tasked with the guardianship of culture and are thus responsible for its transmission from one generation to the next.<sup>73</sup> In doing so, they become repositories of “national essence,” and as such, are used as a resource for “national relations of both domination and resistance.”<sup>74</sup>

Finally, because of their roles as both biological and cultural reproducers, women are implicated in the civic dimension of nation-building, which deals with the quality of citizenship broached by Lomnitz above. In this dimension, women are seen as the yardstick that determines one’s relationship to the nation: “Women, in their ‘proper’ behavior, their ‘proper’ clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity’s boundaries.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, nationalism again situates women in a spatial framework, whereby social practices and propriety are used to embody cohesion and unity: women, in their “proper” space, signify ideal citizenship. Likewise, women who do not display a certain level of national propriety denote the exclusion or expulsion from the national space. Just as women’s designation as biological and cultural conduits helps to produce the space of the home, the image of the alternative and deviant woman helps to delineate a so-called

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spaces are formulated, thus allowing spatial characteristics to seem normalized or appear as a fallacious “true space.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 8-9, and 27-30.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>72</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 43.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 46.

“public” space, hereafter generally referred to as “the streets,” wherein the limits of citizenship are defined. Symbolically, women become the “border guards,” upon whom social order and stability are built, for it is the careful maintenance of those boundaries that ensures a solid polity.<sup>76</sup> Just as domestic femininity represents a national ideal that points to a successful maintenance of social order, the opposite, a deviant or sexualized woman represents social disorder. It is in this purpose as national “border guard” that representations of women in the national imagination often function, often visualized through positive or negative female archetypes that comment not only on women, but have a broader significance in representing the nation as well.

What all three gendered dimensions of national projects—genealogical, cultural, and civic—share is an understanding of women that is largely representational in nature, drawing more from traditional gender norms and societal expectations rather than reflecting the reality of actual women’s lives. Archetypal, idealized, and allegorized, nation-building projects, according to Yuval-Davis, construct women as passive, national objects upon whom the terms of citizenship are inscribed. Although the framework of nationalism projects the illusion of valuing women’s (stereotypical) social functions, such as motherhood, childrearing, housekeeping, even education, the importance of such everyday activities is subsumed by the greater symbolic importance attached to the *idea* of these actions. At the same time, gendered nationhood as described by Yuval-Davis suggests an everyday relevance to the nation and its citizens through its implied spatial dimension: as biological producers, women are spatially tied to the body; as cultural producers, they are situated physically in the home; as civic producers, their importance

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 23.



in public space is merely figurative as they are used to define that space negatively - their worth lies not in themselves but in their opposition to a patriarchal center. Thus, modern nation-building is not only a process that actively promotes state-wide unity and identity, but is also designed to put women in the proper place (or rather, space). Following the spatial discussions of Henri Lefebvre, I argue that the discourse on modern gendered national identity, like much of the Western philosophy with which he takes issue, similarly approaches the idea of space as a theoretical, and thus nebulous, entity rather than a material, built environment that is engaged through everyday activities and practices. Situating women solely in discursive and ideological spaces cements their significance in a realm of ideation and metaphor, rather than one of action and agency.

Additionally, implicit in this framework is the creation of not only gender differences but also culturally-constructed power relations. As Lefebvre stated in his iconic tome, *The Production of Space*: “(Social) space is a (social) product” that “serves as a tool of thought and of action”; “in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power.”<sup>77</sup> The female body, with its attendant “natural” menstrual and reproductive capabilities, has long been used to strip women of reason and agency.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the private-public dichotomy is a distinction between two social spaces traditionally regarded as separate and wholly unequal. The paradox of the so-called separation of gendered spheres, beyond the fact that they are endlessly complicated by a history dotted with examples of women’s work and public service, is that when used as a rhetorical tool of the state, the “private sphere” becomes one of

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<sup>77</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003); Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

national, public importance. The reverse is also true, in that the public sphere is shaped and influenced by what is considered unfeminine, with regard to the femininity of the private sphere. While this binary spatial distinction has had significant currency in the construction of traditional gender roles, feminist activists, scholars, and artists routinely assert that the reality of this problematic division is inherently more complex when both the metaphorical as well as material meanings of space are considered.

Cultural geographer Seemanthini Niranjana suggests that in order to examine the interplay between space and gender, a “*body-space* orientation” should be adopted as a more effective method of analyzing how “considerations of spatiality can inform the *bodily* practices of women within diverse contexts and settings,” a perspective that echoes Lefebvre’s emphasis on everyday social practices.<sup>79</sup> Like Lefebvre, Niranjana acknowledges that many geographers and theoreticians of space tend to differentiate between “metaphorical” and “material” spaces: “that while the former, with its connotations of stable, inert, absolute space, provides a fertile ground for ‘metaphoric appropriations,’ it may be more important to focus on ‘real’ material spaces.”<sup>80</sup> In contrast, however, Niranjana argues against such a separation, stating that:

The point is not simply that the metaphorical and material can never be separated, but that the emphasis can frequently vary, necessitating a constant shift from one register to the other. This is particularly the case if we consider how certain cultural ideas of space feed off and into the bodily practices of women.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, a “spatial perspective must attempt to make clear how spatiality itself participates in the production of gendered bodies while also straddling its flip-side,

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<sup>79</sup> Seemanthini Niranjana, *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2001), 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

namely, how such embodied persons negotiate their very social spaces.”<sup>82</sup> The notion of “womanhood,” as defined by modern nationalism’s traditional spatial relations, posits women as passive “users” of space (instead of active “producers of space”), a role that reifies their objectified status in national culture.<sup>83</sup> Thus, it should follow that changes to the nation be accompanied by changes to the understanding of traditional spaces, and the actions that take place therein. Or, as Lefebvre stated, a “shift from [one historical] mode to another must entail a new production of space.”<sup>84</sup>

### III. The Spaces of Feminism

Indeed, for Lefebvre, a social transformation necessitates a spatial transformation. Since 1968, women have been an instrumental part of monumental social, political, and economic changes that drastically altered how the Mexican nation, and the traditional spaces of femininity, was conceptualized. Therefore, instead of serving as national objects, contemporary historical events demonstrate a decided “focus on agency and the subjectivity of [women as] social actors” that serve as a backdrop for critical feminist representations of womanhood.<sup>85</sup> Because these power relations are found in visual culture that reproduces gendered spatial representations, feminist art that seeks to revise the terms by which womanhood in Mexico is rendered must similarly confront the representational spatial dimensions in which Woman is defined. Lefebvre defines representational space as:

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>83</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 46. This is echoed on page 59 when he states that “new social relationships call for new space.”

<sup>85</sup> Miguel Díaz Barriga, “The Domestic/Public in Mexico City: Notes on Theory, Social Movements, and the Essentializations of Everyday Life,” in *Gender Matters: Rereading Michelle Z. Rosaldo*, ed. Alejandro Lugo and Bill Maurer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 117.

...directly lived through it associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users,” but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.<sup>86</sup>

Such representational spaces hold a “transformative potential” because they “[evoke] the possibility and memory of other ways of living in spaces than those dictated by the dominant order, that is, by representations of space.”<sup>87</sup> Through both their everyday actions as well as their contributions to representational spaces, feminists and feminist artists revise not only popular understandings of womanhood, but more importantly, how women relate to and act within the national fabric. The artworks and artists considered in this study will be examined through a structure that calls attention to the ways in which the spaces of the national imaginary were inherently altered, and necessarily problematized, after 1968.

Indeed, the events of 1968 had an irrefutable, lasting impact on the course of Mexican history, politics, and culture, as they were the first in a series of crises of legitimacy that weakened the authority of the state in the decades that followed. “1968” symbolizes the political awareness of a large segment of the urban population in Mexico, largely young, middle-class, and predominantly university-educated.<sup>88</sup> Opposition to the authoritarian state matured throughout the 1950s and 1960s as financial prosperity and industrial development led to a growing middle class that was nevertheless frustrated by its lack of political recognition and the realization that the majority of Mexicans were not

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<sup>86</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Jenny Robinson, “Feminism and the Spaces of Transformation,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 25, no. 3 (2000): 297.

<sup>88</sup> For a history of the development of the protest movements that led up to the late 1960s, see Stevens, “Protest Movement in an Authoritarian Regime,” 361-82.

benefiting from the so-called economic Mexican “Miracle.”<sup>89</sup> This dissatisfaction coalesced into a series of public protests in 1968 led by the youthful student protest movement. Confrontation between the protesters and the riot police force built over the course of the summer months of that year and quickly escalated into calculated violence as Mexico was poised to host the Olympic Games in October.<sup>90</sup> The conflict came to a head on October 2, 1968 during a demonstration organized at an historic plaza in the Tlatelolco neighborhood of Mexico City. In an attempt to quickly put to rest any further eruptions that would disturb the image of peace and prosperity that the government was hoping to project to the global community, the military surrounded and opened fire on a crowd of roughly 5,000 peaceful protesters at the historic Plaza of the Three Cultures.<sup>91</sup> The subsequent deaths, injuries, disappearances, imprisonment, torture, and media cover-up of what has become regarded as the Tlatelolco Massacre helped to usher in Mexico’s “dirty war” on leftist “subversives,” the extent of which has only recently been officially verified.<sup>92</sup> At the time, however, these crimes, instigated by a president who, in his

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<sup>89</sup> The discrepancy was most acutely felt among rural peasant, farmers, many of who found themselves displaced by increased importation, technological advancements, and the advent of commercial farming. This “green revolution” led to an increased number of impoverished, unemployed farmers who migrated to both the border region and to Mexico City in search of employment. See Sherman, “The Mexican ‘Miracle’ and Its Collapse,” 544-60.

<sup>90</sup> In July, 1968, the Granaderos, or riot police force, took action to squash a local preparatory school rivalry. The resulting protest against the excessively violent police squad kicked off a series of skirmishes and protests, from July through September, that included the occupation of several schools and university campuses, beatings, and a number of city protest marches, in which hundreds of thousands citizens participated.

<sup>91</sup> Select bibliography on the Tlatelolco Massacre include: Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico*; Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*; Michael Soldatenko, “México ‘68: Power to the Imagination!,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 4 (2005): 111-32.

<sup>92</sup> Recovery of information about the Dirty War was initiated in 2002 under freedom of information acts put into effect during the presidency of Vicente Fox. This followed the release of a number of formerly classified U.S. government documents on Mexico in 1998. Information was officially brought to light with the publication of the “Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana” in November, 2006, which systematically outlines the human rights violations that took place from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Research analyst Kate Doyle manages an online archive published by George Washington University called *The National Security Archive: The Mexico Project* that serves as a database of information on the

acceptance speech promised to protect civil liberties, deepened the cracks in the façade of the national regime.<sup>93</sup> The events of 1968 acted as a catalyst for a shift in understandings of the nation and precipitated the subsequent and eventual breakdown of the authoritarian state run by the PRI. The repercussions of these events also called into question the integrity of the spaces upon which national cohesion was built, sending shockwaves through society that reverberated in both the home and the streets, rendering the distinctions between the two spaces increasingly transparent. Following Lefebvre's assertion that a new social order requires a new spatial order, the present, contemporary era since 1968 thus constitutes a time period in which new productions of space are necessary to embody the changing social and power relations that accompany the transformation of the nation. This includes the contributions to the social order that have been made by feminists who have produced altered versions of gender relations that veer away from a strict binary opposition of the sexes. Thus the (feminist) spaces of contemporary Mexico, rather than reproductions of the modern private and public spheres, are instead the interwoven spaces of the familial home, the streets, and, most importantly, the body as a spatial entity that problematizes the supposed opposition between the other two. The following three sections describe the many ways in which feminist social practices after 1968 render the distinctions between binary spaces nearly impossible to maintain.

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dirty war and human rights in Mexico. The "Informe Histórico" is reprinted there in its entirety. See Kate Doyle, "'Forgetting Is Not Justice': Mexico Bares Its Secret Past," *World Policy Journal* 20, no. 2 (2003); Ginger Thompson, "Report on Mexican 'Dirty War' Details Abuse by Military," *New York Times*, Feb. 27 2006; Kate Doyle, "The National Security Archive: The Mexico Project," George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/mexico/>.

<sup>93</sup> President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz had promised to uphold civil rights in 1963. Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," 560.

## A. Visualizing the Female Body

The body is both the “point of departure and... destination” of this spatial framework, which delineates how contemporary feminist art both engages and seeks to transform a tradition of spatial relations.<sup>94</sup> A feminist body as produced by contemporary artists will mark a significant departure from the Modern archetypal and allegorical models previously offered, because of the fundamental ways that a spatial body departs from a represented body.

As Seemanthini Niranjana states, “The body is the central material anchor for discourses on gender and sexuality, we should go on to ask how bodies—particularly female bodies—inhabit and negotiate space, as well as how such spaces are defined, and how space figures in the daily lives of women.”<sup>95</sup> This statement acknowledges the inextricability of the body from the space it inhabits, in which it acts, and is acted upon. This claim also echoes similar assertions made by Lefebvre: “A body so conceived, as produced and as the production of space, is immediately subject to the determinants of that space... the spatial body’s material character derives from space, from the energy that is deployed and put to use there.”<sup>96</sup>

The female body in Mexico is an enduring subject in art and visual culture, an occurrence that helps to cement the metaphorical significance of women in the national imagination. According to feminist scholar Natividad Gutiérrez, the idealized, feminine body serves as “a multiple, creative and adaptable marker with which to construct

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<sup>94</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 195.

<sup>95</sup> Niranjana, *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 195.

archetypal images of national identity.”<sup>97</sup> A number of feminist scholars demonstrate that national rhetoric that relies upon traditional gender roles has had a visual counterpart in art and visual culture throughout the history of Modernism, giving rise to a system of national iconography that exploits the representation of the female body as an allegorical symbol of Mexico. The primary contributors to this line of inquiry are art historians Magali Carrera, Mary K. Coffey, Karen Cordero Reiman, Stacie G. Widdifield, and Adriana Zavala, as well as media historian Joanne Hershfield, whose respective scholarship establishes a problematic historical tradition of nationalistic images of women ongoing since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> As they each argue, the history of Mexican art consistently employs archetypal, stereotypical, and mythical images of womanhood in order to define national identity throughout the construction of the nation itself. From the very initiation of Mexican national culture, the various dimensions of Yuval-Davis’s nationalist projects, as described above, consistently play out in the art and visual culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as artists created a visual narrative of nationalism that relied on existing representations of female personas.

These archetypes often wove together such mythic characterizations as Liberty and the iconic Mexican mother, dichotomous historical and religious figures such as La

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<sup>97</sup>Natividad Gutiérrez Chong, "Women and Nationalisms," in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalisms in Latin America*, ed. Natividad Gutiérrez Chong (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 12.

<sup>98</sup> Magali Carrera, "Affections of the Heart: Female Imagery and the Notion of Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico," in *Woman and Art in Early Modern Latin America*, ed. Kellen Kee McIntyre and Richard E. Phillips (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007); Mary K. Coffey, "The Womb of the Patria: Feminist Interventions on the Theorization of the Nation," in *Miradas Disidentes: Genero Y Sexo En La Historia Del Arte*, ed. Alberto Dallal, *Xxix Coloquio Internacional De Historia Del Arte* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 2007); Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Stacie G. Widdifield, "Modernity and Tradition: Strategies of Representation in Mexico," in *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth-Century*, ed. Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2006); Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*.



Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe, and cultural “types” such as *la tehuana*, *la china poblana*, and “*la chica moderna*,” creating a complicated, and often contradictory, understanding of womanhood. Often used as a foil for the patriarchal masculinity that characterized the governing body of the nation, the image of woman is alternatively construed as passive, domesticated, a bastion of ideal maternity, racialized and indigenized, the ultimate Other. Conversely, negative representations of womanhood are employed as well: a woman who was modern and sexual, deviant and depraved, represented the less-than-ideal citizen, and at times, a threat to public order. While these dichotomies are impossibly simplistic, each multifarious and “interdependent” archetype is reliant upon representations of the female body, its appearance and actions, onto which these characterizations and their role in the national fabric are inscribed.<sup>99</sup> As a biological and cultural reproducer, as well as a metaphorical “border guard,” women represent both the production and compliance of national citizens. As recent feminist art historical and visual culture studies reveal, visual representations of women throughout Mexican art history are part of a complex and varied history of the use and abuse of female archetypes wherein women serve as symbols and as objects of the nation.

The focus on archetypal representations of women is a methodological trend continued by feminist studies authors who write about contemporary feminist art in Mexico. Villegas Morales’ *La imagen feminine [The Female Image]* begins with a catalog of visual and textual female stereotypes, images of women perpetuated throughout Mexican art and culture, framing the contemporary works that follow according to how they disrupt those pervasive representations with more personal and

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<sup>99</sup>Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 25.

varied images of womanhood. Zamora Betancourt similarly takes her cue from the female nude, reclaiming feminist versions of the female body. While these modern and contemporary feminist studies are instrumental in identifying and even refuting an objectifying visual tradition in Mexico, this dissertation departs from an analysis of strict bodily representation to instead consider the body as “that space where gender difference seems materially inscribed” and simultaneously as a site for the construction of subjectivity.<sup>100</sup>

This approach, which emphasizes the “spatial body,” as opposed to the represented body, considers corporeality as a dual process. As cultural geographer Kirsten Simonsen states, Lefebvre posits the body at the intersection of personal and social forces:

On the one hand... each member of society relates itself to space, situates itself in it. This is part of the process of constitution of the self—of designating oneself to an individual as well as a public identity. On the other hand, space serves an intermediary or mediating role through which “one” seeks to apprehend something or somebody else.<sup>101</sup>

And it is the lived body that discourse, nationalism included, seeks to deny:

Western philosophy has *betrayed* the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has *abandoned* the body; and it has *denied* the body. The living body, being at once “subject” and “object,” cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of “signs of non-body.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>101</sup> Kirsten Simonsen, “Bodies, Sensations, Space and Time: The Contribution from Henri Lefebvre,” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 87, no. 1 (2005): 5-6. Simonsen argues that, because of Lefebvre’s understanding of the spatial body, *The Production of Space* should be included in the discourse on theories of the body and embodiment although it is traditionally overlooked in favor of the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michele Foucault. For Lefebvre’s discussion of the spatial body, see Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 194-207.

<sup>102</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 207.

The stakes are even greater for the betrayal and abandonment of the female body, as it traditionally serves as the locus for female subjectivity, with an intensity and pervasiveness that the male body has not always been subject to. An analysis that views the body not in terms of its representation, or ideation, but instead in terms of its spatial qualities and social practices affords a perspective that comments on both the historical and cultural significance of women, as well as contemporary everyday realities. Focus on the spatial female body constitutes viewing corporeal representations through the lens of embodiment, which emphasizes the “tension between women’s lived bodily experiences and the cultural meanings inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences.”<sup>103</sup> An embodied perspective that rejects traditional Cartesian notions of self—because it analyzes the body as both object and subject—allows for the deconstruction of pervasive tropes that are assigned to the body and the reconstruction of the body as a site for personal identification. As art historian Marsha Meskimmon argues, “thinking through the notion of embodiment, rather than any particular definitions of body types or ... tropes of ‘woman’ ... is a more useful move to make in exploring the ways in which women’s art can address sexed subjectivity, situation and knowledge.”<sup>104</sup> As such, the artworks analyzed in Chapter 2: Thinking through the Body, demonstrate the ways in which contemporary feminist artists in Mexico “propose the body as a privileged site of political intervention, precisely because it is the site of repression and possession.”<sup>105</sup> In doing so, the female body comes to be viewed as a space in which

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<sup>103</sup> Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2003), 75-6.

<sup>105</sup> Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 122.

individual agency directly confronts a national legacy of objectification and corporeal co-optation. As contemporary feminist artists explore an embodied perspective of subjectivity, they offer a model through which to consider historical representations of the female body (portrayed as passive objects of culture) in marked contrast to their own recent reclamations of corporeality and establish a new tradition of women in art who perform as active subjects producing their own social spaces.

### **B. Redefining the Biological and Cultural Dimensions of Womanhood**

In Mexico specifically, the construction of woman as a biological and cultural transmitter of citizenship tied to the spatial constraints of a domestic sphere has been strategically employed throughout modernity by the state. A feminist reconfiguration of the space of the home marks a departure from a private sphere because it critically engages the ways in which a supposedly “private” domain was, in part, manufactured by political rhetoric that made use of familial metaphors. As such, the familial home is employed here to reveal the social intervention of the state even in supposedly feminine spaces.

The term “state,” while not a unitary label, is useful for the way that it describes the mechanisms that establish the terms of Mexican nationhood. According to Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias:

The term refers to a particular “machinery” for the exercise of “government” over a given population, usually territorially and nationally defined, although the definitions of what constitutes these boundaries etc. will shift and change depending on what it [has] government or power over and what is being managed or negotiated. Hence we can specify the state in terms of a body of institutions

which are centrally organized around the intentionality of control with a given apparatus of enforcement at its command and basis.<sup>106</sup>

In Mexico, over the course of the twentieth century, “state” became synonymous with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI), the political party that established hegemonic one-party rule between 1929 and 2000.<sup>107</sup> The PRI has been referred to as “the official party,” “the party of the government,” and “the party of the state.”<sup>108</sup> According to Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter M. Ward, “there are many reasons why this perception of overlap between the PRI and the government exists and why some politicians should seek to perpetuate it, both in reality and in the people’s minds.”<sup>109</sup> These reasons include the domination of elections at the presidential, federal, state, and municipal levels until 1983. Even throughout the 1980s, political losses were short-lived and won back in subsequent elections. Additionally, the party was widely recognized throughout its dominance to have been supported financially by the executive

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<sup>106</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 5.

<sup>107</sup> One-party rule dates to 1929, when the state party was officially founded as the the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party, or PNR); the name of the party was changed to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional with the reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934. Larissa Adler-Lomnitz, Rodrigo Salazar-Elena, and Ilya Adler, *Symbolism and Ritual in One-Party Regime: Unveiling Mexico's Political Culture*, trans. Susanne A. Wagner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>108</sup> Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter M. Ward, "Disentangling the Pri from the Government in Mexico," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 10, no. 1 (1994): 164. See also Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Consolidation*. The long-lasting success of the Mexican state, what often distinguishes the country’s relatively stable political situation over the twentieth century as compared to more unstable authoritarian regimes throughout Latin America, is often credited to the system of political corporatism that was instated by the PRI in the 1930s. Corporatism is an inclusionary policy, which, according to Roderic Ai Camp, “means that the government took the initiative to strengthen various groups, creating umbrella organization to house them and through which their demands could be presented. The government placed itself in an advantageous position by representing various interest groups, especially those most likely to support opposing points of view. The state attempted, and succeeded over a period of years, to act as the official arbiter of these interests (Camp, 2007, 12-3). Corporatism succeeded as a reciprocal relationship between the government and special interest groups, whose loyalty was often exchanged for political consideration of their interests, subsidies, protection, and appointment to political positions. This system was used to strengthen the PRI itself as a political party by creating an environment within which separation between the state and the political party was nonexistent. It was also used to include any individual or group that would challenge the national hegemony of the PRI.

<sup>109</sup> Rodríguez and Ward, "Disentangling the Pri from the Government in Mexico," 165.

branch of the government. Economically and politically, the PRI “worked hard to cultivate the illusion of overlap” between itself and the state.<sup>110</sup> Symbolically, the PRI also adopted gendered rhetoric that cast the nation’s women into a spatially-confined role that emphasized their ability (or necessity) to reproduce national culture.

In 1964, historian Frank Brandenburg coined the phrase “Revolutionary Family,” which he used to refer to the system of power in modern Mexico. This Family, he stated, was “composed of the men who have run Mexico..., who have laid the policy-lines of the Revolution, and who today hold effective decision-making power.”<sup>111</sup> Brandenburg argued that the “Family” was a small, elite, male fraternity, with the President posing as the father surrounded by his inner council of favorite sons, whose biological and political descendants influence the lives of the Mexican population. Since he termed the phrase, numerous scholars of Mexican history have found the term an apt metaphor to describe the oligarchic and corporatist structure that has ruled Mexican politics since the Revolution. Brandenburg begins his history of the term with the outbreak of the Revolution and the presidency of Francisco Madero (1910-13); however, the “Revolutionary Family” as a descriptor has had specific resonance since 1929, with the founding of the PRI. The establishment and subsequent growth of this political party resulted from strong efforts by its members to unify the rival interests of national

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.: 167-8.

<sup>111</sup> Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 3. He describes this family as united by five central objectives: “(1) dedication to the Revolutionary past, present, and future, and to the proposition of building a better nation; (2) friendship forged on the battlefields and sports fields, in the halls of government and in army service, in the public schools, technical institutes, and universities, in Masonic lodges, in the business community, in civic affairs, and in the intermarriages among Revolutionary families; (3) self-interest in accumulating and retaining power, prestige, and wealth; (4) fear of political defeat, of anti-Revolutionaries coming into power, of losing everything gained, and in the last instance, of actual physical elimination; and (5) the inertia of being an integral part of a working mechanism, of going along with what exists, and of not wishing to risk disturbing the Revolutionary setup” (4-5).

revolutionaries and thus consolidate the state.<sup>112</sup> The creation of a “single national front” constituted the institutionalization of revolutionary rhetoric and the installation of the president as the supreme national patriarch, “institutionalized” as the father of the country by the process of *dedazo*, or the privilege to personally name their successor, as if from father to son.<sup>113</sup> The president as symbolic father figure, however, hinges upon the successful image of a stable matriarch: “the vision of the mother figure as saint and sufferer, whose moral superiority and spiritual strength acted as glue for the ultimate stability of the family—and by extension the nation.”<sup>114</sup> Historian Eric Zolov explains how the figure of the mother, or of a feminized figure more generally, was employed as a punitive measure: threats posed to the nationalistic culture were feminized with words such as *desmadre* (disorder; literally, a “de-mothering”) and *malinchista* (betrayal) in order to mediate public behavior through shame and humiliation.<sup>115</sup> Thus, while the symbolic patriarch and his “sons” constituted the public face of Mexico, women represented an implicit, potentially threatening, and private counterpart, whose behavior

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 93-4.

<sup>113</sup> Alan Knight, "Mexico's Elite Settlement: Conjuncture and Consequences," in *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, ed. John Higley and Richard Gunther (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 116-7; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>114</sup> Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 5.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* Both terms have gendered linguistic origins: *desmadre* signifies a literal lack of a mother that results in social chaos; *malinchista* is a term that derives from the shameful way the historical figure Malinche, the indigenous interpreter and companion of conqueror Hernán Cortes, is regarded. For a specific example of how these terms were employed to feminize counter-cultural movements, Zolov describes how Elvis Presley's masculinity was challenged after he publicly insulted Mexican women. Presley's "feminine gestures" were mocked and he was accused of homosexuality (42-3); hippies were mocked for their inability to adhere to strict gender codes (105). Later, Zolov also mentions how the countercultural movement was different for men and women based on prevailing gender stereotypes and constraints. But most effectively, his examples of the ways in which counter-national elements were labeled as "desmadre" or "malinchista" show how political disorder in a patriarchal nation was consistently characterized as female. For a discussion of the nature of gendered language in Mexico, see Liza Bakewell, *Madre: Perilous Journeys with a Spanish Noun* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

was more carefully monitored through social and rhetorical surveillance measures in order to ensure national stability.<sup>116</sup>

This kind of gendered iconography and the metaphor of the Revolutionary Family, however, have profound reverberations beyond the characterization of political structuring. Feminist historians recognize the family as the basic social unit of governmental order and control.<sup>117</sup> While binaristic gender roles were not created wholesale in Revolutionary rhetoric, they were nevertheless institutionalized through both symbolic and legal measures that reinforced a gendered private-public dichotomy. Just as the corporatist government structure created hierarchies of subordination that operated at political and economic levels, it infiltrated the real family, establishing the father as a minor proxy for the presidential patriarch, overseeing his household of compliant citizens. This familial ideal also determined the traditional role of women with regard to the Mexican state—a role that locates them squarely within a domestic sphere, responsible for both childcare and the upkeep of the family living space. This rhetoric was conversely used as the pretext for denying women access to the public sphere, a space characteristically occupied by those involved in politics, economic sectors, and other traditionally masculine social spaces. According to Nikki Craske, policies

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<sup>116</sup> These surveillance measures include state-sponsored efforts to domesticate women in post-Revolutionary Mexico through public rhetoric and official organizations that defined ideal femininity in terms of motherhood. See Nichole Sanders, "Improving Mothers: Poverty, the Family, and 'Modern' Social Assistance in Mexico, 1937-1950," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 187-204; Sarah Buck, "Activists and Mothers: Feminist and Maternalist Politics in Mexico, 1923-1953," (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2002); Jocelyn Olcott, "'Worthy Wives and Mothers': State-Sponsored Women's Organizing in Postrevolutionary Mexico," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 106-31; Alexandra Minna Stern, "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (1999): 369-97.

<sup>117</sup> Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).



influenced by such ideals “expressly excluded women from civil citizenship” and simultaneously reinscribed feminine virtues as essential to the nation.<sup>118</sup> As Craske states, women’s

exclusion from key aspects of citizenship and the holding of public office was counterbalanced by gains in the shape of paid maternity leave and similar benefits. This trade-off indicates the way in which women were seen..., that is, the centrality of motherhood to the construction of femininity, and how issues of equality in principle took second place to consolidating the regime.<sup>119</sup>

This is borne out in the fact that Mexico was one of the last countries in Latin America to grant women the right to vote. During his term as President from 1934-40, Lázaro Cárdenas notoriously and repeatedly made reference to granting women the right to vote. However, public (political) sentiment believed that women’s greater loyalties rested in the Catholic Church, who opposed the PRI. In order to ensure PRI electoral success, women were not granted full suffrage until 1953.<sup>120</sup>

Contrary to social expectations, women were active participants in the student protest movement of 1968 as well as the organized efforts that followed. Their roles in those movements, however, were often subject to gender restrictions. As Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen describe, many women were treated as cooks and secretaries for their male counterparts and felt as if they were only considered adjuncts to the movement.<sup>121</sup> In 1971, when a feminist group entitled *Mujeres en Acción Solidaria* (Women in Solidarity Action, or MAS) planned a demonstration on Mother’s Day to protest myths of motherhood, the action was misrepresented by the press and promoted as

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<sup>118</sup> Craske, "Ambiguities and Ambivalences," 125.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> See Sarah Buck, "The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico, 1917-1953," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 73-98.

<sup>121</sup> Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, "Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and 'Women' in the Streets," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 4 (2003): 641-2.

a celebration of Mexican mothers.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, participation in demonstrations and feminist unions contributed to the “evolving consciousness of Mexican women.”<sup>123</sup> This consciousness was formed in large part against established gender roles; as Lamas explains, “these new feminists formed a social movement based on their critique of the sexual double standard and the role of the housewife, who was oppressed with the burden of housework and raising children.”<sup>124</sup> The nature of these protests upset the symbiotic relationship between womanhood and nationhood by challenging the spatial boundaries that confine the domestic sphere as inherently removed from a space of protest and public concern.

Feminists were not the only segment of the population alienated from the state in the years following the eruptions of 1968, a period of crisis marked by massive inflation, foreign debt, and economic restructuring of government-owned industries that occurred between 1970 and 1982.<sup>125</sup> It was during this period of deepening crisis that the

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<sup>122</sup> Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico*, 180-1.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>124</sup> Marta Lamas, *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions*, trans. John Pluecker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16.

<sup>125</sup> By 1970, state economic policies that during the 1940s and 50s created the “Mexican Miracle,” a period of economic growth and rapid industrialization, were beginning to backfire, a situation that compounded the disillusionment of society. Accelerated growth of state-owned industry, an unstable and neglected agricultural sector, and the “wooing of foreign investors,” resulted in increased class discrepancies and a displaced rural population who flooded into Mexico City, an urban capital that was unprepared to accommodate the poor, unemployed masses. Inflation and foreign debt rose as employment rapidly fell. In an attempt to regain control over the declining peso, Echeverría nationalized a series of industries, adding industries such as steel, energy, copper, and telephone to the already long list of parastate firms, and borrowed heavily from foreign markets to fund both these and as well as social programs. After the value of the peso dropped drastically between 1976 and 1982, Echeverría’s successor José López Portillo (president, 1976-82), opportunistically cabbaged on to a boom in the international petroleum market, putting most of the national eggs in an oil barrel he hoped to export for a high profit. When oil prices fell in 1981, Mexico plunged into the “worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s” (Camp, 2010, 572). In a last-ditch effort, Echeverría nationalized the banking system, a move that further chipped away at the central authority of the state regime. See Sherman, “The Mexican ‘Miracle’ and Its Collapse,” 544-65; Alexander S. Dawson, *First World Dreams: Mexico since 1989* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 7-9; Dag MacLeod, *Downsizing the State: Privatization and the Limits of Neoliberal Reform in Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 33-68.

generation of Los Grupos operated and the feminist art movement began alongside a culture of organized urban protest movements. An increasingly urgent demand for autonomy from the state led to the growth of a civil society, which Yuval-Davis and Anthias define as

those institutions, collectivities, groupings and social agonies which lie outside the formal rubric of state parameters as outlined but which both [inform] and is informed by them. This includes the family, social strata, ethnic and national groupings to note some of the most significant, as well as institutions like those of education, trade unions, and the means of communication like the media.<sup>126</sup>

Paul Lawrence Haber refers to the years from 1979 to 1984 as the “golden age” of coordinated activity and the formation of various collectives whose mission was to “promote a democratic discourse and establish collective voices in civil society that were in direct competition with official regime discourse,” according to Roderic Ai Camp.<sup>127</sup> Collaborative demands for housing, education, and health care proliferated, constituting the beginnings of a true, autonomous civil society, one of the hallmarks of the transition to a functional democracy.

The second-wave feminist movement made up of mostly “young professionals, students, and middle-class women” continued to gather steam during this time.<sup>128</sup> During the mid-1970s, more than a dozen new feminist organizations formed and, despite the largely middle-class base, most of these organizations were committed to creating alliances across class lines, often specifically reaching out to groups of working-class

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<sup>126</sup> Paul Lawrence Haber, *Power from Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 63-4.

<sup>127</sup> Camp, “The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution,” 572. This five-year period saw the formation of the National Coordinating Committee of the Plan de Ayala (CNPA), the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE), and the National Coordinating Committee of the Urban Popular Movement (CONAMUP), an umbrella collective which worked to organize and mediate between a number of smaller urban protest movements. See also Haber, *Power from Experience*.

<sup>128</sup> Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

women.<sup>129</sup> A unifying objective between these varying groups was the search for supra-state autonomy. In the corporatist structure of the state, such movements toward independence continued to weaken the already faltering weight of state power.<sup>130</sup> The mobilization of women and feminist groups in the late 1970s and 1980s became one of the most significant forces of the popular challenge to the state. Political historian Victoria Rodríguez has stated that women “have invariably been the backbone of urban social movement and other organized forms of protest that demand basic services for their neighborhood, pay equity and better working conditions through labor unions, and in many cases simply equality and fairness from the state in the delivery of goods and services.”<sup>131</sup>

The struggle for autonomy was reflected in artists’ desires for independent venues of display and the rejection of traditional media such as painting and sculpture in favor of performance, installation, and video art, trends that continued beyond the 1980s. Such public proclamations and tangible expressions of protest that breached traditional social boundaries offered women new ways to relate to both the space of the home as well as that of civil society. In doing so, feminists produced the home as a site for political and social intervention, a fact that is borne out by considerations of domestic space in contemporary feminist art in Mexico.

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<sup>129</sup> Yuval-Davis and Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> The growth of nongovernmental agencies also increased during this time period, also representing a significant sector of political and social autonomy. Escandón, "Women's Movements, Feminism, and Mexican Politics," 205-6.

<sup>131</sup> Victoria E. Rodríguez, "The Emerging Role of Women in Mexican Political Life," in *Women's Participation in Mexican Political Life*, ed. Victoria E. Rodríguez (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 5; for a thorough discussion of women's increased participation in formal politics, see Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

### C. Recognizing the Civic Dimensions of Womanhood

As an ideological social space, the home works in congress with the space of the streets. As feminists worked to change popular and official understandings of “private” space since 1968, they also revised the terms by which the public sectors of politics and the economy were constructed with regard to gender. Literally taking to the streets as part of the wider protest movements of the 1970s and early 1980s, feminists paved the way for women since 1985 to participate in both the unofficial and official channels of traditionally masculine “public” social spaces.

The larger sociopolitical changes that have occurred in Mexico since 1968 are tied to the country’s transition to democracy, an historical trend that has come to characterize a number of Latin American countries in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>132</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell typologized the various political and social institutions and policies that constitute a democratic society, which include, but are not limited to, fair elections, participatory rights, an active civil society with autonomy from the state, and the freedom to voice oppositional positions. However, at the core of such a regime is individual agency, which O’Donnell argues, is the basic premise of a democratic society.<sup>133</sup>

Feminist political theorists argue that, though the traditional literature on democratic

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<sup>132</sup> Forrest D. Colburn, *Latin America at the End of Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter, eds., *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Kevin J. Middlebrook, *Conservative Parties, the Right, and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Guillermo O’Donnell, Jorge Vargas Cullel, and Osvaldo M. Iazzetta, eds., *The Quality of Democracy: Theory and Applications* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Howard J. Wiarda, *Dilemmas of Democracy in Latin America: Crises and Opportunity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2005); Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, *A Concise Introduction to Latin American Politics and Development* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, "Human Development, Human Rights, and Democracy," in *The Quality of Democracy: Theory and Application*, ed. Guillermo O’Donnell, Jorge Vargas Cullel, and Osvaldo M. Iazzetta (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 9-92.

transitions is predominantly gender-neutral, a true democracy must include an acknowledgment of women's agency.<sup>134</sup> As Vatsala Kapur stated, a two-way process was at work in Mexico: "women serve as catalysts for democracy and democracy, in turn, fosters greater representation and equality for women. Through this process, women have found new and creative ways to organize and to make their collective and individual voices heard."<sup>135</sup>

Jean Franco characterizes second-wave Mexican feminism as maintaining a strong interest in the democratic rights of women. In writing about leading feminist Marta Lamas' work as an activist and writer, she stated that the adopted slogan "the personal is political" was problematic in Mexico in that

it allowed women to evade the broader political problems by opting out of the public sphere. This is why [Lamas], from the very beginning, proclaimed democracy to be an urgent issue in Mexico, a work in progress, and insisted that it was crucial for women to become involved in questions of class, ethnicity, health, employment, and religion as well as those specifically women's issues such as abortion, inequality, and male supremacy.<sup>136</sup>

As democracy developed and was accompanied by the concurrent process of globalization, the public-private dichotomy became more and more inappropriate as a framework of gender analysis. Women continued to assert their own subjecthood in Mexican society, causing divisions that traditionally sustained separate gendered spheres to fall away in favor of frameworks that emphasize the multiple intertwined social spaces

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<sup>134</sup> See the essays in Jane H. Bayes, Mary E. Hawkesworth, and Rita Mae Kelly, "Globalization, Democratization, and Gender Regimes," in *Gender, Globalization, and Democratization*, ed. Rita Mae Kelly, et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2001); as well the following articles: Vatsala Kapur, "Women's Contribution to the Democratization of Mexican Politics: An Exploration of Their Formal Participation in the National Action Party and the Party of the Democratic Revolution," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 14, no. 2 (1998): 363-88; Georgina Waylen, "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics," *World Politics* 46, no. 3 (1994): 327-54.

<sup>135</sup> Kapur, "Women's Contribution to the Democratization of Mexican Politics," 364.

<sup>136</sup> Franco, "Thinking Feminism from Mexico," 4.

in which women perform. As such, a structure that analyzes the interrelated arenas of the body, the home, and the streets is more effective as the national rhetoric that formulated the previous binary opposition was rendered obsolete with the breakdown of the one-party Mexican state. Tessa Cubitt and Helen Greenslade identified two major reasons why the national transitions made such a construction untenable:

First, economic restructuring has brought about a conceptual blurring of boundaries between domestic space and the labor market. Second, women's participation in social movements made them agents of collective action in the political arena.<sup>137</sup>

Jane H. Bayes, Mary Hawkesworth, and Rita Mae Kelly echo this sentiment when discussing a global turn. They argue that,

globalization represents a set of economic forces that changes the division of labor between the sexes in many different contexts as well as the nature of the state, creates enormous social disruption and dislocation, and because of this, can change established gender regimes... [which] have been altered as the wage labor force has become feminized and women have for the first time in large numbers been drawn out of the household or the family farm into the waged economy.<sup>138</sup>

In the last few decades, Mexico has experienced a confluence of democratization, globalization, and women's agency that weakens the state's hold on its ability to define womanhood for its own purposes.

Women entered the workforce en masse during the economic crises of the 1980s, as households found themselves unable to survive with single incomes. Accordingly, companies hired more women as a means of minimizing their labor costs, paying women

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<sup>137</sup> Tessa Cubitt and Helen Greenslade, "Public and Private Spheres: The End of the Dichotomy," in *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice*, ed. Elizabeth Dore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 60.

<sup>138</sup> Bayes, Hawkesworth, and Kelly, "Globalization, Democratization, and Gender Regimes," 3.

significantly less than male employees.<sup>139</sup> Work outside the home increased the burden on Mexican women, for there was little to no reciprocal movement of men assigned to household chores or child-rearing.<sup>140</sup> Despite the growing need, of women to either fully support themselves as heads of their own households, or to supplement a family income, they nevertheless “enter the workforce on unequal terms.”<sup>141</sup> Often relegated to “feminine” sectors of the economy such as education, domestic service, nursing, and clothing manufacturing, they are often subject to conditions that limit their agency within the space of the labor market, as they are routinely restricted to half-time status, low wages, and little physical protection or job security.<sup>142</sup>

State economic policies compounded the burden placed on women through a “reduction in state expenditure thereby placing increased burden on the family and, more particularly, on women.”<sup>143</sup> The loss of public aid was felt sharply in September 1985, when Mexico City was hit by an 8.1 magnitude earthquake that leveled whole neighborhoods, nearly 400 public buildings, significant sections of public infrastructure and numerous housing units, and killing upwards of 15,000 people.<sup>144</sup> The year 1985 became, like 1968, another benchmark year in the breakdown of the state’s legitimacy. While the government was reluctant to enact a national emergency response for several days, individual citizens, neighborhood societies, and community and church groups led

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<sup>139</sup> Sylvia Chant, "Women, Work and Household Survival Strategies in Mexico, 1982-1992: Past Trends, Current Tendencies and Future Research," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13, no. 2 (1994): 207-9.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Rachel K. Brickner, "Mexican Union Women and the Social Construction of Women's Labor Rights," *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 6 (2006): 58.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Craske, "Ambiguities and Ambivalences," 127.

<sup>144</sup> Dawson, *First World Dreams*; Haber, *Power from Experience*, 74.



the rescue efforts.<sup>145</sup> In the months that followed, new community and grassroots organizations emerged and existing protest movements were strengthened by multiclass unification and fueled by state apathy and ineffectiveness. Governmental ineptitude in the wake of the earthquake led to increased political participation among women as a response to the thousands of women who were killed, injured, or left unemployed by the earthquake and to the formation of the first female-led labor union.<sup>146</sup>

The 1990s were marked by democratic competition in the form of viable, more feminized political opposition to the one-party system. Transnational and globalized politics and economic policies brought with them the introduction of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to Mexican social movements, which furthered the cause of feminist autonomy. NGOs acted to bolster the efforts of popular feminism: many NGOs broke with social movements to concentrate solely on women of the popular classes, helping to forge previously unachieved levels of solidarity.<sup>147</sup> Under the aegis of democracy, “NGOs and movements adopted and elaborated feminist discourse..., bringing self-defined feminists into direct contact with women from across a wide range

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<sup>145</sup> For a journalistic account of the earthquake, based on firsthand experiences of the survivors, victims, families, and rescue workers, see Elena Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake*, trans. Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Arthur Schmidt (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

<sup>146</sup> Among the parts of the city most affected by the earthquake was the area that contained the garment district. Many were lost among the rubble and because they were undocumented workers, employers did not report them missing. Teresa Carrillo wrote of the moral indignation and need to protect themselves that led women in the garment industry to form the famous Nineteenth of September Union. Unionizing efforts, according to Rachel K. Brickner, have been essential to gender revisions in recent decades because they mark women as “political agents with a keen interest in contributing to the redefinition of citizenship in a rapidly changing political and economic context” (70). See Brickner, “Mexican Union Women,” 70. See also Teresa Carrillo, “Women, Trade Unions, and New Social Movements in Mexico: The Case of the “Nineteenth of September” Garment Workers Union” (Stanford University, 1991); see also Escandón, “Women’s Movements, Feminism, and Mexican Politics,” 210.

<sup>147</sup> Victoria E. Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 108. Rodríguez states that during the 1980s, “fifty-one new NGOs were established, the majority of which worked with popular women’s groups on gender-related issues.”

of social movements, including organized rural and indigenous women.”<sup>148</sup> As such, the tenor of the feminist movement in Mexico slowly transitioned away from a singularly-focused “personal” agenda of the 1970s to a broader political agenda focused additionally on democratic inclusion, formal representation, and finding economic security in the changing national climate.

The economic policies of neoliberalism began to fracture the ruling party from within just as official opposition to the PRI infiltrated the polls and elected positions. Significant mayoral losses and the exposure of fraudulent election tactics throughout the 1980s allowed opposition parties to gain an electoral foothold.<sup>149</sup> Faced with a changing economic system, an active civil society, political opposition that shattered nearly 60 years of corporatism, and his own publicly-acknowledged fraudulent election process, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) began his tenure as president of a different Mexican state than his predecessors, and yet, his attempts at national rebuilding contained cultural echoes of the past.

Salinas was tasked with reversing decades of inward-looking development and a monumental economic recovery attempt, which was relatively successful during the first

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<sup>148</sup> Lynn Stephen, "Rural Women's Activism, 1980-2000: Reframing the Nation from Below," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 253.

<sup>149</sup> Dawson, *First World Dreams*, 17-18. Mayoral losses in Chihuahua City and Juárez occurred in 1983. Northern territories were hit hardest by the economic crisis of the 1980s because of their proximity to the U.S. and their dependence on the value of the peso compared to the dollar. In 1986, in the state of Chihuahua, an obviously fraudulent election maintained a PRI governorship and public protests called national attention to the upset. In 1987, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano was expelled from the PRI for leading an inner-party challenge to the designated successor of De la Madrid. A strong nationalist, Cárdenas opposed the neoliberal opening of the Mexican economy to private sector and foreign investment. Capturing a larger percentage of both public and formerly PRI-allied votes, Cárdenas nearly upset the election of PRI presidential candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In what most consider an election fraught with fraudulent tactics, Salinas assumed the presidency in 1988, a year that Camp identifies as, like 1968, a “benchmark” year for contemporary Mexico. Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Consolidation*, 208-9; Camp, "The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution," 574.

five years of his presidency.<sup>150</sup> To that end, Salinas signed a number of debt-reduction plans with the U.S. and negotiated trade agreements with many Latin American countries. The most significant trade agreement conceived during his administration was the planning of the North American Free Trade Agreement, implemented on January 1, 1994, which removed tariff barriers between Mexico, the United States, and Canada.<sup>151</sup> This economic policy precipitated the public uprising of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) on New Year's Day, 1994; the movement's emergence was also important for women's visibility as it demonstrates significant participation at grassroots and informal as well as formal political levels in this decade.<sup>152</sup> Despite these globalizing efforts and challenges to state hegemony, Salinas continued to hold onto nationalizing rhetoric to soften the opening of the Mexican economy. According to Nikki Craske, the president returned to traditional discourses of gender as a way to recapture a national façade built around the idea of the revolutionary family as the last bastion of the revolutionary regime.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> He continued his predecessor Miguel De la Madrid's example in believing that "a neoliberal approach stressing greater foreign capital investment, declining tariffs, increased trade, competitive industries, and economic blocs would be the long-term solution to Mexico's persistent economic problems. [Salinas] further believed that a smaller role for the state... was essential," Camp, "The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution," 578.

<sup>151</sup> For a more thorough description of Salinas' term in office see the chapter entitled "Salinastroika" in Dawson, *First World Dreams*, 23-45.

<sup>152</sup> The Zapatista movement provided women opportunities to mobilize around social issues replete with ethnic, class, and racial concerns. In addition, the Zapatista rebellion developed strong initiatives that provided women a space of autonomy and empowerment based on gender as well. The strongest statement of gender made by the EZLN is the Revolutionary Law of Women. Ratified on January 1, 1994, this veritable bill of women's rights consists of 10 rules that declare the equality of women, including their right to participate, work and receive a fair salary, decide their own number of children, hold community leadership positions, access to health and nutrition care, education, to marry freely, and to live free of physical and sexual violence, which must be severely punished if enacted against them. See Stephen, "Rural Women's Activism," 242-54.

<sup>153</sup> Craske, "Ambiguities and Ambivalences," 126.

As Craske argues, Salinas was forced to acknowledge the new roles that Mexican women had adopted over the past two decades, specifically as political participants.

However, given his agenda of economic restructuring,

it was [women's] economic participation that concerned him most. In Salinas' view of modern Mexico, it was the neo-liberal citizen (worker and consumer) who was at the center of the new state; however, for women this was an ambiguous and ambivalent shift since they were also expected to continue with their reproductive role.<sup>154</sup>

Salinas hypocritically exploited women's gains as a way to promote a globalized national image, without acknowledging any real transformation in gender roles:

Salinas used women as a symbol of modern Mexico, emphasizing their increased political participation and various policy initiatives to demonstrate Mexico's commitment to democratization. Yet, at the same time, his project depended on culturally conservative images of traditional caring roles to absorb the costs of adjustment and needed women to become more deeply inserted into the paid economy... Salinas promoted, simultaneously, progressive images of women as political activists and modern workers, alongside traditional roles of mother, carer and bastions of the nation.<sup>155</sup>

To this end, Salinas launched a social program known as the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program, or PRONASOL), which included a subgroup called Mujeres en Solidaridad (Women in Solidarity), that focused on women and a "recasting of citizenship" to include recognition of women's contributions, but also relocate women to their traditional-gendered domestic space by offering programs that were mostly related to household chores such as cooking and sewing, an ideological backlash to women's growing participation in public social spaces.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.: 126-7.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.: 127.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.: 129; see also Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 70-73. Craske quotes the following passages from the PRONASOL documents that demonstrate an acknowledgment of women's service to the nation: "The integral development of the community is only possible if it stems from the premise that the daily activity of women, as social subjects, is an essential part of the productive process of each community and of the Nation as a whole"; and "Mexican society as a whole should be aware that the

The fraudulent election of Salinas, however, did serve as a “wake-up call” for feminists who realized “the importance of coalition building and the need to work with more mainstream parties,” which led to an increase in women’s participation in official politics throughout the 1990s.<sup>157</sup> This increase coincided with the growth and viability of opposition parties that challenged PRI hegemony, an aspect of official politics tied to women’s mobilization.<sup>158</sup> Vatsala Kapur focuses on women in Mexican politics with regard to democratic transition by examining how opposition parties speak to women as a specific electoral constituency, integrating them into the party through women’s councils and quota systems. She argues that, in addressing the issue of women’s equality, significant inroads into a more structurally sound democracy in Mexico were made while revising the role of women by allowing current and future generations of women a publicly active role in democratic politics.<sup>159</sup>

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daily work of women, in their homes and in their communities, is socially productive and therefore it is important that we should give it its just value, so that Mexican women can confront, without shackles, the challenge set by the Nation’s development.” However, she ultimately concludes that the state’s commitment to women’s rights were “not whole-hearted.”

<sup>157</sup> Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 109. I use the term “official politics” here to refer to elected state and governmental networks, rather than informal, grassroots, NGOs and other autonomous organizations.

<sup>158</sup> Throughout the Salinas term, the PRI was forced to concede a number of governorships and other elected positions throughout Mexico to elected members of the opposing PAN and PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) parties. Camp, “The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution,” 582-3.

<sup>159</sup> Kapur, “Women’s Contribution to the Democratization of Mexican Politics,” 368. Despite obvious ideological differences in their party’s understanding of the role of women in Mexico, both the conservative PAN and the leftist PRD strove to bolster a female electoral base between 1988 and 2000. In 1989, the PAN created the Oficina para la Promoción Política de la Mujer (Office for the Political Promotion of Women) and in 1996 added the Commission on Women’s Issues, both of which were designed to promote official representation of women in the political sphere. The more progressive PRD, which formed in 1989, promotes a state reform policy based on 14 reforms that specifically include: full incorporation of women into politics, full access for women to education, health, culture, and information, equal pay for equal work, responsible maternity and paternity, proportional representation of women in the government, nonsexist education, a new image of women in the media, elimination of all forms of violence against women, right to plan the number and spacing of children, and a plan for equality of opportunities; see Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 121. The PRD was also the first party to institute a quota system that required a percentage of positions to be held by women. The PRI and the PAN have both since followed suit; see Kapur, “Women’s Contribution to the Democratization of Mexican

Gains for women in both the PRI and opposition parties continued throughout the decade, no doubt a significant contribution to the eventual state turnover in 2000.<sup>160</sup> By most accounts, the 2000 presidential elections are heralded as a crucial moment in the democratic transition of Mexico. While the “quality” of Mexico’s democracy is debated, many of the aspects that define a democratic society—free elections, a strong party system, and an active and autonomous civil society—have only been in place since the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>161</sup> Through a series of legitimacy crises, civil society and protest challenges, economic disasters and the resultant restructuring, and the integration of new social and political actors, including women, the terms of the nation-state as established by the PRI have been largely rewritten. Recent events since 2000, in particular the contested presidential elections of 2006 and the ongoing drug wars along the northern border, reveal that in Mexico these terms are still actively being produced. A feminist history of Mexico demonstrates that women are an active part of that reconstitution. While there is still work to be done in achieving full gender equality, there

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Politics,” 379. The PRI itself, which has had a “feminine sector” within the party since 1934, saw growth in the 1990s within its Congreso de Mujeres por el Cambio (Congre of Women for Change, or CMC) and its Consejo para la Integración de la Mujer (Council for the Integration of Women, CIM), Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 116-7.

<sup>160</sup> Gains for women in the PRI made history during Zedillo’s tenure as two women were elected party president, María de los Angeles Moreno in 1994 and Dulce María Sauri in 1999, and Zedillo appointed Rosario Green as his secretary of foreign affairs, Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 118. Between 1996 and 2000, the PRI eventually lost control over Chamber of Deputies, ten governorships, elected positions that governed sixty percent of the population, and eventually in 2000, the presidency, when PAN candidate Vicente Fox was elected, the first time since 1929 that an opposition party held the highest office. For literature on democratic consolidation and the question of Mexico’s transitions see: Steven Barracca, “Is Mexican Democracy Consolidated?,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 8 (2004): 1469-85; Domínguez and Shifter, eds., *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*; Dresser, “Mexico: Dysfunctional Democracy,” 242-63; Matthew C. Gutman, *The Romance of Democracy: Compliant Defiance in Contemporary Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Donald C. Hodges and Ross Gandy, eds., *Mexico, the End of the Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); Chappell Lawson, “Mexico’s Unfinished Transition: Democratization and Authoritarian Enclaves in Mexico,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 16, no. 2 (2000): 267-87; Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*; Martin C. Needler, *Mexican Politics: The Containment of Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

is no doubt that the terms of womanhood in Mexico have also been revised to include a critical attitude towards social expectations and the roles that women play throughout a number of social spaces, including the work force and official politics. Because of their contemporary inclusion as social actors and subjects in these public “street” spaces, women in Mexico are producers of official sociopolitical spaces, affording them a voice in the creation of new national policies. This active position is borne out in recent examples of feminist art that take to task these spaces in which a national identity is still being publicly negotiated, specifically on the streets of Mexico City and along the border with the United States. In contributing to the redefinition of both a female and a Mexican identity, feminist art is then afforded the role that it deserves for its engagement with the long-standing tradition of articulating national identity.

### **III. Conclusion**

Following Lefebvre’s discussion on the production of social spaces, this chapter outlines the ways in which national rhetoric in Mexico constructs an ideological space for women that defines them as national objects, or passive “users” upon whom biological, cultural, social, and political codes are inscribed. In order to demonstrate the ways feminism in Mexico challenges and rewrites those codes from a position of increased female agency, a similarly spatial framework has been devised that can be used to highlight the varied and intertwined realms of reality in which Mexican women assert their subjecthood. This structural framework can likewise be used to organize and interpret the ways in which contemporary feminist artists both assess and help to produce the conditions of new post-1968 social realities.

As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, the spaces used to confine and define Mexican womanhood can no longer be understood as neatly divided along gender lines. They are instead inherently complicated by the realities of contemporary women's varied roles in society. Just as women and feminists actively reconstitute their own roles in relation to the nation, feminist artists who challenge the representation of the female body, the home, and the streets do so deconstructively, not as national objects, but as active subjects in the construction of their own agency, helping to redefine the terms of nationhood and womanhood as they have been visualized over the past forty years. The chapter that follows focuses on representations of the female body as a contested site of female subjectivity. By focusing on two artists who emphasize the discursive and spatial nature of the body, their artworks point to the ways in which hegemonic nationalism is inscribed upon, and thus can be erased from, the female body.



## CHAPTER 2

### Thinking through the Body

*Paula Santiago*

*“Beginning from the lived experiences of women in their currently constituted bodily identities—identities which are real at the same time as being socially inscribed and discursively produced—feminist artists and cultural workers can engage in the challenging and exhilarating task of simultaneously affirming those identities, questioning their origins and ideological functions, and working towards a non-patriarchal expression of gender and the body.”<sup>162</sup>*

This chapter delineates the body as a space of intervention in the visual arts that can be produced by contemporary feminist artists in Mexico in order to disrupt the pervasive exploitation of female corporeality as a symbolic object of nationhood. In Mexican art and visual culture since the nineteenth century, representations of the female body have served as objectified signs of national identity. The legacy of this iconography within the space of the nation has reinscribed stereotypical definitions of femininity and offered limited models for understanding female subjectivity outside of archetypal restrictions. If contemporary artists are to work, as feminist scholar Janet Wolff states in the quote above, towards a “non-patriarchal expression of gender,” an approach is necessary within feminist production that subverts not only a history of representation but also the social and cultural processes through which the female body came to signify the character and concerns of the state. As such, this chapter posits a “spatial body” as one that is

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<sup>162</sup> Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, 138.

understood to be a locus of both self and social subjectivity, a body that is acted upon by the cultural and discursive forces of its environments but that also, and more importantly, enacts its own cultural force to produce new social spaces wherein women are afforded the ability to act as subjects, rather than objects. In order to illuminate how the spatial body can be visualized in contemporary art, I look to the works of artist Paula Santiago as models of a feminist approach to the body in Mexico.

### **I. Introducing The Spatial Body**

Although a multimedia artist, Santiago's most well-known artworks consist of small-scale sculptures of clothing sewn together with hair and colored by the artist's own blood, created between 1996 and 2002. *Ch'ulel* (Figure 1) is a small, tunic-like garment, no bigger than 24 inches in height, made of thin layers of rough-edged rice paper stitched together by threads of human hair. Gathered under the arms to suggest a waistline, the sides of the tunic have been dipped in blood that has soaked into the paper and crept inward in irregular patterns before drying into dark reddish brown stains. Around the neckline and down the front is a tightly-woven, intricate web of embroidered hair. Suspended within a glass case from thin braids of hair, the sculpture is seemingly both archeological relic and contemporary fetish. In *Ch'ulel*, as in many of Santiago's works, the body is represented by the tension between corporeal absence and the presence of the artist's own bodily fluids and materials. By presenting to the viewer a series of binary contradictions, tangible and immaterial, real and imaginary, inside and outside, she images the body as a liminal space, and in doing so, questions the boundaries that exist between self and other. Santiago's abject sculptures present a challenge to the body as a

fixed site of both personal and social identity, adopting instead the spatial body in order to demonstrate the ways in which it negotiates the boundaries between the personal and the cultural, and engages feminist issues of gendered identity.<sup>163</sup>

Such works stand in close relation to a familiar discourse, common to contemporary art, which examines the significance of the body and feminist contributions to articulating a theory of the “body politic.”<sup>164</sup> As a contested site of identity, the female body has been at the heart of debates surrounding the nature of female representation, objectification, and subjectivity.<sup>165</sup> Because it is biologically bound to reproduction and

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<sup>163</sup> While Santiago’s artwork has been discussed in terms of her personal identity, as referenced through her bodily materials, and a few critics have superficially mentioned gender as a potential area to be explored, these references are brief and left unexplored to any satisfactory degree. Zictor Zamudio-Taylor, in the brief essay that accompanied the exhibition *Numen* (1996), ended his discussion of Santiago’s works by acknowledging points of “reference from different socio-cultural locations that include but are not limited to sexuality, gender, and cultural geographies,” a quote that is, unfortunately, never elaborated. Victor Zamudio-Taylor, “Paula Santiago: *Numen*,” in *Paula Santiago: 96.4* (San Antonio: ArtPace, 1996), 2. References to her personal identity are similarly frustrating. They often over-sentimentalize her work as an expression of her most inner self. Laurel Reuter, the Founding Director of the North Dakota Museum of Art and author of the mostly biographical essay “Paula Santiago: Moving Into Light,” refers to Santiago as an artist “who was compelled to sink deep into her own essential being in order to locate herself,” Laurel Reuter, “Paula Santiago: Moving into Light,” in *Septum* (Los Angeles: Iturralde Gallery, 2002), 1.

<sup>164</sup> The phrase “body politic” is employed as it was introduced by feminist art historian Lisa Tickner in her significant essay of the same name from 1978 to refer to the social concerns surrounding the representation of the female body. Lisa Tickner, “The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970,” *Art History* 1, no. 2 (1978): 236-51.

<sup>165</sup> Early feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Josephine Butler, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth seem to have regarded the body with suspicion as it was a marker of difference and thus, female limitations. See Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” in *The Feminist Papers*, ed. A. Rossi (Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1792/1988); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Mrs. Stanton’s Address to Legislature in 1860,” in *History of Women*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and M.J. Gage (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1881); Sojourner Truth, “Speech at Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio ” in *History of Women*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and M.J. Gage (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1881); and Jane Jordan, *Jospehine Butler* (London: John Murray, 2001). In *The Second Sex*, however, Simone De Beauvoir establishes a foundation for embodiment theory when she, following the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, asserted that “to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world,” Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 39. Radical feminists in the 1970s and 1980s celebrated the sexual and maternal female body as a liberating source of identity and autonomy from its male counterpart. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1979); and Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984). Feminist psychoanalysts such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous turn to the female body in order to propose alternatives to the traditional realms of the symbolic and the imaginary, wherein the female body is defined by its lack of a phallus; see Luce

sexuality, and culturally bound to emotionality, inferiority, and passivity, the female body is the nucleus around which discussions of sexual and gender differences orbit. A multifaceted and complex debate, arguments range from celebrations of the body as a unique means to female experience and knowledge, to arguments that situate the female body outside of patriarchal imaginaries and language, to renouncements of the body in order to stress a mental and rational capacity that transcends corporeal limitations. Feminist scholarship includes a full spectrum of defining the body as alternately biologically determined and/or socially constructed, offering divergent pathways to an understanding of how female subjectivity comes to exist and the degree to which the self is formed by its relation to the body, others' bodies, and surrounding environments. A

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Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Irigaray, "The Sex Which Is Not One," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 248-56. Similarly, Julia Kristeva posits the maternal body as that which pre-figures the semiotic, or the realm of language, a pre-existence that is found in the materiality (abjection) of the body; her work also serves an important touchstone for the social understanding of the body as corporeality in her discussions helps to establish boundaries between self and other. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. In the 1990s, societal regulation of female bodies and the ways in which dominant discourses come to materially affect the corporeal appearance and behavior became a central issue for feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo and Sandra Lee Bartky, who made use of Michel Foucault's discussions of power relations and surveillance. See Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25-45. Judith Butler's work on performativity outlines the ways in which normative practices and bodily actions construct gendered subjects; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Butler, *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993); Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Finally, feminist phenomenology has been a strong current since the 1990s, with scholars like Iris Marion Young, Gail Weiss, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, and Moira Gatens each stressing the lived experience of the body as central to both self and social subjectivity formation. See Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Moira Gatens, "Power, Bodies, and Difference," in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 120-37; and Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996).

central tenet of these debates, however, is to challenge the pervasiveness of the Cartesian mind/body opposition as the foundation of knowledge in Western philosophical thought, a fundamental assertion that has problematized the nature of female identification with bodies that, according to Elizabeth Grosz, are “somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men.”<sup>166</sup>

To focus on the body within a theoretical framework based on space is to invoke Lefebvre’s understanding of the “spatial body,” a body that like social space itself, is subject to a dual process of constitution. For just as “space embodies social relationships” in such a way as to have been created by and at the same time re-create power relations and social ideologies, the spatial body is simultaneously produced by and also in the process of producing the spaces in which it acts.<sup>167</sup> Lefebvre characterizes the spatial body as one that is “becoming social,” a phrase that highlights the constitutive and constituting process of subjectivity:

For the spatial body, becoming social does not mean being inserted into some pre-existing “world”: this body produces and reproduces—and it perceives what it reproduces or produces. Its spatial properties and determinants are contained within it.<sup>168</sup>

The spatial body actively participates in the processes of becoming and producing both itself and its world. Thus, in “becoming social,” the body becomes a (social) space, a concept that can have positive, wide-reaching implications for a re-theorized female (or feminist) body. However, because Lefebvre does not directly acknowledge the inherent ways in which gendered bodies are different, it is necessary to bring Lefebvre’s notions

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<sup>166</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 4-12, 14.

<sup>167</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 27.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

of the spatial body together with feminist discussions of embodiment, which similarly posit the “social body” as a major objective.<sup>169</sup>

Building upon the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as Michel Foucault’s discussions of power and the manipulation of a “docile body,” feminist theories of embodiment “propose the body as a privileged site of political intervention, precisely because it is the site of repression and possession.”<sup>170</sup> Since the late 1980s, theorists such as Sandra Lee Bartky, Susan Bordo, Iris Marion Young, Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, and Elizabeth Grosz have each stressed the lived experiences of women wherein the body is understood as “the site from which [women] construct, structure, grasp and know the world.”<sup>171</sup> Directly opposed to the classical Cartesian mind-body dualistic thinking that has traditionally associated femininity with the body and therefore inherently base and inferior to the reasoned and masculine mind, embodiment recognizes that there is a “tension between women’s lived bodily experiences and the cultural meanings inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences.”<sup>172</sup> Although the language of embodiment prefers the term “site” to “space,” a terminological difference that will be dealt with at the end of this chapter, what it shares with spatial politics is an understanding of a spatial body (or an embodied

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<sup>169</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, 122. For individual citations, see footnote 4, this chapter, above; for relevant anthologies on feminist theories of embodiment, see Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*; Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Rose Weitz, ed. *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin, eds., *Embodiment and Agency* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

<sup>171</sup> Raysa E. Amador Gómez-Quintero and Mireya Pérez Bustillo, *The Female Body: Perspectives of Latin American Artists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>172</sup> Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, 1.

subject) that both inhabits and produces the interstitial spaces between pervasive dichotomies that have influenced our understanding of gender differences.

Beginning from an emphasis on lived experience, which is “located at the ‘mid-point’ between body and mind,” the spatial body challenges Western Cartesian dualisms that create a gendered hierarchy of male/mind and female/body.<sup>173</sup> As Elizabeth Grosz has stated,

the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition.<sup>174</sup>

The spatial body acts as both subject and object, constituted by its corporeal actions and the ways in which the world (social spaces) act upon it and simultaneously re-constituting those same social spaces, resisting fixed temporal and discursive fixity.<sup>175</sup> Because it is always in the process of “becoming social,” the body is the locus where both personal and cultural subjectivities (where forces of the self and the social, nature and culture) constantly negotiate each other. Thus, for feminist theorists, embodiment theory becomes a way to turn the body from a space of feminine confinement into an active body that inhabits space and time and actively contributes to the production of social spaces in which it acts, allowing the female body to become an active “user of space.”

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<sup>173</sup> Kirsten Simonsen, "Practice, Spatiality and Embodied Emotions: An Outline of a Geography of Practice," *Human Affairs* 17(2007): 171-2.

<sup>174</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 19-20.

<sup>175</sup> This is similar, in many ways to Judith Butler's notion of "performativity"; however, while Butler focuses on the performance inherent in constructions of gender in a manner that is also termed a process of "becoming," she pays less attention to performativity's ability to transform social space and as such, her arguments are more discursive. See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-56.

Feminist artists likewise seek out ways to use the body as a means to become social. This objective manifests in discussions of media such as performance, whereby the body of the artist literally becomes both the subject and object of the work, and even installation, a medium that similarly invokes the physical space of an artistic environment and the bodies that move throughout it.<sup>176</sup> However, as literal medium-based translations of a “spatial body,” these attempts can fail to illuminate the process of “becoming social” if they do not sufficiently problematize the physical presence of the body. Representation of the female body remains an even more difficult issue, bringing with it concerns of overt objectification, consumption, and voyeurism/scopophilia as forms of “preexisting” frameworks to which the female body is subject and often incapable of overcoming. Imaging the female body can have negative repercussions on construction of personal identity and notions of the self, but it also poses a danger to national understandings of womanhood. This is particularly true in Mexico where the representational female body has been used as allegory and archetype to represent national identity, or as a prevalent sign of the body politic.

What follows offers an approach to the spatial body that can be used to inflect feminist representations of the body in order to argue that it is the spatial body (or the embodied subject), even as it is visualized through representational strategies, that offers feminist artists a means to act as “producers of space” by reshaping personal and cultural subjectivities through the space of their own bodies. The primary focus will be the sculptures of Santiago, as an artist whose work is situated in the space between the self and the social, both of which are negotiated through her physical use and representation

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<sup>176</sup> See Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).



of the body. However, a second artist, Monica Castillo, will be introduced in comparison to Santiago, in order to further demonstrate the usefulness of the spatial body. Castillo takes the genre of self-portraiture as an entry point into a critique of female representation. In a series of paintings and sculptures completed between 1993 and 2000, she started with the image of her own face and body, and over the course of seven years, consistently broke down its surface, shattering and rearranging facial features and displacing them onto unexpected objects. In doing so, she interrogated the conventional narrative and autobiographic meanings usually associated with portraiture. Santiago and Castillo both work with feminist visions of the self and reclamations of the body, but Santiago presents the body as it acts within, enacts, and is acted upon by social spaces by creating works that embody the tensions and dichotomies inherent within the spatial body. As such, the comparison is an instructive example of how the spatial body (Santiago) is visualized as an alternative to the representational body (Castillo). By producing a spatial body, Santiago offers an alternative to woman as national object, a passive subject upon whose body ideal femininity and national identity is written. Santiago constructs a national subject from the space of the female body, a process that is borne out through an analysis of how her works produce both the self and the body politic.

## **II. Producing the Self**

Santiago was born in 1969 in Guadalajara, Mexico.<sup>177</sup> She spent two years studying industrial engineering before she left school in Mexico and traveled to Paris where she studied literature and art history at the Sorbonne. She learned painting and drawing from private tutors, in artist studios and museums, in Paris and later in London, before eventually returning to Mexico in 1996. Santiago continued painting until 1992, when she decided to abandon the medium in favor of working with materials and techniques she felt were more autobiographical.<sup>178</sup> For example, she began using family heirloom handkerchiefs, embroidered by her great aunt 80 years before, as material components within her artwork, as she does in *Mandalas 4 Bath*, of 1996 (Figure 2). Supplementing her great aunt's embroidery with her own floss, along with seeds that eventually stained the cloth, these new "canvases" created a union of the original stitches and her own additions, and formed an early reference to the intertwined themes of history and memory that would permeate her later works.<sup>179</sup>

It was in 1996, during a six-week artist-in-residence stint spent at ArtPace in San Antonio, Texas, that Santiago began to experiment with organic materials and plastic forms. She traded the flat cloth for the more sculptural rice paper and began to incorporate natural materials such as wax, flower petals and seeds, her own blood and human hair. *Imperial Coat*, a suit from 1996 (Figure 3), was one of her first garment pieces constructed from these materials. In the installation view, it hangs among other

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<sup>177</sup> All biographical information, unless otherwise cited, is provided by Laurel Reuter in her essay "Paula Santiago: Moving Into Light," written to accompany the exhibition "Septum," which was installed at L.A.'s Iturralde Gallery, which represents Santiago. Although I have previously criticized this essay for its sentimentalized interpretations of Santiago's work, it is nevertheless useful in providing details about her education and process. Reuter, "Paula Santiago: Moving into Light," 1-2.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Reuter, Santiago stated: "I didn't want to work with concepts; I wanted to work with my life": 1.

<sup>179</sup> Dan R. Goddard, "New Works: 96.4: Latest Artpace Residency Exhibit an Eclectic Mix of Symbolism," *San Antonio Express-News*, Sunday, December 15 1996.

paper and multimedia works installed at the San Antonio gallery. It was after this 1996 installation at ArtPace that Santiago began exhibiting, almost exclusively until 2001, the sculptural garments for which she became conventionally-identified.<sup>180</sup>

Works such as *ANAM*, from 1999 (Figure 4), embody a series of contradictions that are present in most of Santiago's sculptures. The primary contradiction captured is the simultaneous presence and absence of the human body. The hair and blood Santiago used to construct the piece form indices of the human body, through which it becomes materially present and tangible. Indeed, the presence of human hair is impossible to overlook within this particular sculpture, where layered tufts of white hair cover almost the entire back of the garment, and *ANAM*'s mottled, muted color is the direct result of the blood Santiago used to dye the paper encased in wax. At the same time, however, the body within this garment is demonstrably absent. The wax-coated paper is sculpted to give the appearance of volume; the arms of the garment and the torso of the shirt are inflated. *ANAM* does not hang formless as an empty garment would but instead it is filled up by emptiness, as if instantaneously evacuated by a body. This presence and absence, fullness and emptiness, wholeness and hollowness, remains an unresolved tension within the work.

Further oppositions exist within this work. Isolated within glass and marble vitrines, which are very often listed among the artist's materials, garments such as *ANAM* become signifiers of both contemporary sculpture as well as ancient artifacts, remainders from a temporally unspecified past. Stained and bloody, torn and ragged, the clothing, though newly made, appears frayed and worn. The often-tattered appearance, as well as

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 7F.

the delicate nature of the rice paper, makes this work seem poignantly fragile. In this regard, the organic materials reference and reinforce associations with decomposition, an inevitable biological process the work shares with its viewers. On the other hand, the blood and hair maintain connections to the notion of “life blood” as a conduit for eternal and familial continuity, as well as to the notion of extension or extendedness, as hair continues to grow after death, an uncanny process that evokes the tenuous border between life and death. In addition, many of the garments include wax as an encapsulating material, covering the blood-soaked paper as if to preserve it. In *ANAM*, the wax is utilized in such a way as to embalm the garment, a quality that offers a reference to the contradictory process of the conservation of the body beyond the expiration of life. One only need look at various photographs of the images in order to see the contradiction between life and death that exists within the works. A comparison between photographs of *ANAM* (Figure 5) published in 1999 and 2007, respectively, reveals the aging process of the works. Whereas in the earlier images, the blood-soaked rice paper retains its redness, by 2007, the blood has darkened to an aged and faded brown. In some cases, the blood has faded beneath the wax, becoming barely perceptible. The shriveled paper is torn in places and the hair strands are broken and frayed. Despite the living materials used within the works, they are decomposing, which is a paradoxical tension in creating works of art that have a limited lifespan. The ambiguities of the sculpture—from the implied body to the work’s temporal indeterminacy—suggest themes of history, death, and memory, both personal and collective. It is these multiple ways in which the theme of memory is implicated in the sculpture that invites dialogue with discourses on feminism and abjection familiar to contemporary art.

Santiago's sculptures engage with several feminist strategies, specifically through explorations of the self and subjectivity. In one instance, for example in *Mandalas 4 Bath* (Figure 2), Santiago very directly makes autobiographical references through her choice of materials and facture, which touches on one of the fundamental approaches of feminist art.<sup>181</sup> In appropriating her great aunt's handkerchiefs and embroidery techniques, Santiago draws on her familial heritage. Santiago herself was interested in forging a connection to her aunt by using the handkerchiefs as her primary material. Just as the handkerchiefs carried, for Santiago, the memory of her aunt, they likewise, for that aunt, carried the memory of a fiancé who was killed in war. In an exhibition review published in the *San Antonio Express-News*, Santiago is quoted as saying, "[my aunt] was a widow who never married...By creating these works, I feel close to her. These handkerchiefs have always been what I owned of her, and now they have some of my memories on top. I am interested in the way memory works."<sup>182</sup> The artist also mobilizes the hair that she uses in place of embroidery floss as a unifying element: it reinforces the ties between the women in her community—including herself, her aunt, her grandmother, and her friends. Santiago references, indexes, and even celebrates a women's collective bound together by the intertwined threads of materials and traditional 'feminine' techniques.

In another way, Santiago also works more explicitly with notions of self through the incorporation of her own bodily matter and fluids, as she does in *Ch'ulel* (Figure 1).

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<sup>181</sup> The issues and debates brought up by early feminist artists included the discussion of a "female sensibility," the high art/low craft dichotomy, and the privileging of personal experiences of both oppression and aspiration, Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987): 330. Over the course of the 1970s, feminist artists furthered an exploration of difference that became increasingly focused on the female body, an emphasis that steered artistic strategies toward the bodily 'actions' traditionally associated with women, including such activities as those Santiago appropriated from her female relatives, Amelia Jones, "Representation," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 35.

<sup>182</sup> Goddard, "New Works: 96.4," 7F.

The constant tension in her sculptures between presence and absence in many ways relies upon the body of the artist herself, a strategy that taps into feminist debates about the female body as an essential signifier of identity.<sup>183</sup> Although Santiago does not represent her body, she is nevertheless materially present in her sculptures by means of her inclusion of her own blood and hair. The title *Ch'ulel* even ambiguously refers to the sculpture's ability to embody the artist herself, as *Ch'ulel*, according to Mayan belief, refers to a soul or the "individual spirit represented in the living human body," as described by anthropologist Gary H. Gossen.<sup>184</sup> These materials carry in them not only traces of the artist's DNA and medical identity but also implications of her psychological status.<sup>185</sup> During a lecture on contemporary women artists in 2002, for example, a prominent Latin American art critic suspiciously relayed a popular rumor that Santiago had taken her artwork so far as to pluck out all of her own hair; in the repetition of this romanticized myth, the rumor implicates the artist's mental stability—or lack thereof—an example of the damaging stereotype often propagated about artists who use or picture their own bodies.<sup>186</sup> It is true that Santiago has shaved her head in order to use her hair; she in fact shaved her head during her residency at ArtPace in 1996 in order to provide

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<sup>183</sup> The debate over the role of the body in feminist scholarship has become well rehearsed. See Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 326-57; see also Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 53-59. For a discussion of these debates within a specifically Mexican context, see Martin Martín, "Horizontal/Vertical," 98-9. For a nuanced discussion of this debate see Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, 133-38.

<sup>184</sup> Gary H. Gossen, "From Olmecs to Zapatistas: A Once and Future History of Souls," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1990): 563.

<sup>185</sup> Pointed out by Victor Zamudio-Taylor, "Paula Santiago: *Numen*," 1.

<sup>186</sup> This rumor was described by art critic Mary Schneider Enriquez, during a lecture delivered at Tufts University during the Fall Semester 2002, to a Latin American art history course taught by Professor Adriana Zavala. Although this example is anecdotal, such a rumor assumes that the artist's use of her own hair reveals her mental status.

herself with embroidery floss.<sup>187</sup> However, the fact that her baldness has been perceived, by some, to be an irrational act of sacrifice or self-defacement, forecloses any intellectual or symbolic intention behind the decision to use her hair.<sup>188</sup>

This stereotype has also surfaced with regard to her physical health: sometime around the year 2001, the artist was diagnosed with cancer. Curator Laurel Reuter addressed this life-changing event in a biographical essay on Santiago in 2002, claiming that the artist would never again draw her own blood. Instead, Santiago's work would "miraculously" take "a new direction: toward the light, toward wellness."<sup>189</sup> Reuter's implication is that the works created previously, which incorporated the artist's blood, are therefore to be associated with darkness and with illness, physical but perhaps also mental.<sup>190</sup> Subsequent reactions to her diagnosis carry with them the suggestion that her bodily materials reference an essential Santiago: advised by her doctors to discontinue painting with her own blood for the purposes of self-preservation, Santiago has since ceased drawing new samples, which has made her works created before this time incredibly valuable and very difficult to procure, as if they are endowed with a certain aura lacking in her works created after this time. Both critical positions—one grounded in myth-making, one grounded in biographical fact—contribute to the same conclusion:

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<sup>187</sup> Goddard, "New Works: 96.4," 7F.

<sup>188</sup> Here I would point out the significant differences between the descriptions of Santiago 'plucking' her hair versus shaving. Plucking carries with it the implication of pain, which suggests a more masochistic action, whereas shaving is a more benign characterization of the event.

<sup>189</sup> Reuter, "Paula Santiago: Moving into Light," 2.

<sup>190</sup> Maria Lluïsa Borràs, *Mexico, Identidad Y Ruptura* (Madrid: Fundación Telefonía, 2003), 98. Even scholarship on Santiago reflects this trend. The small amount of scholarly attention that Santiago's work has received focuses on the blood-dyed garments produced between 1996 and 2001. It is difficult to come by images of works produced since then, a fact that no doubt hinders further discussions of her work. However, perhaps the fact that the works that do contain the artist's own blood are so much more highly valued over those that do not is telling in its perception of what is (quint)essential Santiago art.

artists who breach the separation between selves and their work enter a dangerous realm of instability, irrationality, and disorder.

Because of the ways in which they are taken to represent both her bodily and psychic subjectivity, Santiago's sculptures could be interpreted as reconceptualized "self portraits." Infused with elements of autobiography, in the form of physical traces of the artist and also narrative traces of family history and traditional media, the works do indeed index Santiago. This presence of Santiago's material self, however, is at the same time mitigated by the conspicuous absence of a physical body. As empty garments, the sculptures explicitly indicate the lack of a body with which to fill them. The small size of the clothing removes them from an adult human scale, likewise distancing the garments from the adult body of the artist herself—it is not, in fact, the artist's body that is supposed to fill the lack within. Santiago's body thus forms a trace, an implicit memory, much like the artisanal references to her great aunt. As "portraits," the sculptures offer a nuanced understanding of subjectivity that does not hinge upon a more literal representation of the body but are, instead, products of her own lived experience, even as they implicitly reference her decision to discontinue using bodily materials in 2001.

Beyond their references to the artist's self, the sculptures also mediate the artist's personal experiences and subjectivity by opening up a space in which to address a wider notion of shared subjectivity. As works of art that both do and do not signify the body of the artist, they call more attention to the generalized body, indexed by the universalizing presence of hair and blood. Santiago's decision to work more directly with bodily



materials such as blood and hair as universalizing elements during her stay in San Antonio was, in some ways, a reaction to the social memory of the city itself. She stated,

San Antonio was like a body and I was flowing through it like blood. I was thinking about the blood of the Alamo. How German, French, Irish and Mexican blood was spilled in battle. I used my blood and a friend's blood in my series of Alamo drawings [a series included in the exhibit *Numen* held at ArtPace]. It's just something that all human beings have in common.<sup>191</sup>

Turning to the domain of her own life through autobiographical and bodily references propels Santiago's works into the realm of social significance, offering a means to "become social." In the quote above, Santiago imagines herself as embodying the city, flowing through the social spaces of the urban landscape (and of time) "like blood." The body that is imagined (and imaged) by Santiago is not exclusively her own, nor is it exclusively a literal body, but a space of corporeality that retains the potential to negate its own existence.

The impact of Santiago's version of the spatial body can be better grasped if it is contrasted with feminist representations of the body that do not utilize strategies of embodiment, specifically those of Monica Castillo, an artist who also takes the "self" as a subject and seeks a way to engage the politics of female representation.<sup>192</sup> Castillo's

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<sup>191</sup> Goddard, "New Works: 96.4," 7F.

<sup>192</sup> Born in Mexico in 1961 and educated in Italy and Germany, Castillo returned to Mexico in 1985 after a period of nine years abroad, arriving home to a revival of neo-expressionist, figurative painting that would come to characterize Mexican contemporary art of the 1980s and early 1990s. Christened as a member of the Neo-Mexicanist movement, her early works display the ironic understanding and deployment of Mexico's historically nationalist iconography that came to characterize the movement. Her paintings before 1993 are parodic compositions that contain pastiche-like arrangements of Catholic, Pre-Colombian, and Post-revolutionary images that gently mock the ways in which iconic symbols in Mexico have been used to signify an essential Mexican character. Her turn to self-portraiture, in 1993, similarly resulted from her interest in engaging with the visual traditions of her native country. Recognizing that the genre to had a long tradition among her national predecessors, Castillo viewed the self-portrait as a specifically "Mexican tradition," and her works after 1993 continue to be a critical investigation of national forms. And just as her Neo-Mexicanist works explore the ways in which cultural symbols can be disconnected from their culturally-constructed meanings, her examples of self-imaging similarly addressed the nature of

work, between the years 1993 and 2000, prominently employed the genre of self-portraiture to critique pictorial conventions normally associated with the representation of women. She stated, “The challenge was to represent a self-portrait that wouldn’t be charged with ... metaphorical content.”<sup>193</sup> In doing so, her self-portrait series has commonly been identified as a visual examination of how to divest the “self portrait” of the “self,” questioning traditional notions of mimesis, subjectivity, and “reality.” Of all the artists included within this study, Castillo is the one who has been most readily identified as a “feminist artist.” As such, her work stands out for its wide recognition as addressing feminist concerns. However, I would argue that her strategies of representation are not as effective as those that embrace the notion of the spatial body.

For instance, in *Self Portrait of Skin*, of 1993, Castillo presents her own visage, a squarely close-up view that fills the entire pictorial surface (Figure 6). This early example from her series of self-portraits, in some ways, marks her departure into the in-depth study of her face/body and establishes what becomes the iconic image of Castillo to be investigated. This portrait focuses solely on the face of the artist, depicted in a frank, unadorned manner against a stark, fleshy-pink background. The oval face, slim neck, and blunt-cut hair style are hallmarks of her image, forming a unique shape that repeat throughout the series. However, in this portrait, there is specific emphasis on the features of the face, as the artist paints each detail and imperfection of the skin, disproportionately exaggerates the size of her eyes, and draws attention to the wrinkles, veins, stray hairs and whiskers that grow on her shiny, oily skin.

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representation. Bill Kelley Jr., "Interview with Monica Castillo," LatinArt.com: An Online Journal of Art and Culture, <http://www.latinart.com/transcript.cfm?id=18>.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

Although this is a seemingly straightforward self-portrait, according to one critic, what is often surprising about Castillo's portrayal is the "honesty" with which she presents herself.<sup>194</sup> According to Luz Maria Sepulveda, Castillo "opens herself and is vulnerable to the gaze of an observer who has before him or her a portrait of a face with open pores, unkempt skin, wrinkles, pimples or hair—marks which are erased from images shown in the public."<sup>195</sup> While Sepulveda rightly notes the natural quality of Castillo's face, it is this notion of vulnerability that initiates Castillo's dialogue with women's representation. I argue, however, that rather than displaying vulnerability, Castillo's deliberate focus on such facial features sets the tone for her series by declaring the level of scrutiny with which she intends to approach her image. Her features are not displayed "honestly," but instead with an expressionistic over-emphasis that distorts the image, challenging traditional conventions of women's portraiture that constructs their subject as an object of beauty for a male audience.

While a painting such as *Self-Portrait with Skin* deflects a patriarchal gaze, it does depend, however, on the artist's purposeful objectification of her own body. To some degree, objectification is necessary to feminist deconstructions of representation wherein, according to Marsha Meskimmon, the artist must establish her "body as a paradox," positing "woman as [both] subject and object," in order to investigate the ways in which self-portraits traditionally imply a fixed impression of self.<sup>196</sup> As a representational strategy employed by Castillo, such an objective mimics the language of embodiment, without fully implementing its methods. Art critic Magali Arriola points out that the

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<sup>194</sup> Luz Maria Sepulveda, "Monica Castillo: Ace Gallery," *Art Nexus*, Feb.-Apr. 2001, 142.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, 76.

name of Castillo's 1994 solo exhibition "I am an Other" takes its name from a quote by French poet Arthur Rimbaud who

wanted to demarcate the body from the mind in an attempt to explore the depths of the soul and achieve a universal language. The splitting of the persona through a long, immense and profound dysfunctioning of the senses would enable him to unravel the relationship between the I and the world.<sup>197</sup>

As Castillo's oeuvre illustrates, she employs the self-portrait to, in fact, separate the quality of the surface from personal identity: "By treating the effigy of her own persona with a cold sense of distance, the artist...breaks the traditional meaning of the self-portrait genre as a psychological mirror of being."<sup>198</sup> Art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina identifies these works of Castillo's as portraits of "disidentification," or works that "open up a space of difference between the image and its referent."<sup>199</sup> He stated that by working over and over again with her own image, Castillo worked "to force the portrait to act against what had seemed its own immanent logic," namely that of mimesis and a seemingly automatic reference to its subject.<sup>200</sup> Castillo's 'space of difference' disrupts the traditional link between image and subject by creating distance between what is presented and what is represented.

She accomplishes this distance through the repetition of the face, the repetition of the portrait. Throughout her work, her face, or some manifestation thereof, occurs so often that eventually it is dehumanized so as to exist merely as a repeated image, a dominant sign in a system of highly consistent imagery. Two paintings, also from 1993, use repetition to diminish the singular significance of Castillo's face. *Self-portrait with*

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<sup>197</sup> Magali Arriola, "Monica Castillo," *Art Nexus*, Jan.-Mar. 1997, 126.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, "The Duplicity That Is a Face," in *Monica Castillo: Yo Es Un Otro*, ed. Galería OMR (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

*Individual Details* (Figure 7) is a painting that consists of sixteen faces arranged on a grid of grey boxes and thick red lines. Among the faces portrayed, each is unique, painted with variations of skin tone, hair color, and individual details that imply different physical and emotional conditions. The portraits are respectively presented with bloodshot eyes, a runny nose, pimples, dripping saliva, dandruff, bloated skin, a forehead laceration, a bloody nose, blushing cheeks, tears, and pouring sweat. The composition challenges the veracity of the image, and any potential narrative that could be inferred by the state of these personages by presenting a catalog of possible facial appearances. Instead of reading the image for its possible content, the repetition and discrepancies encourage the viewer to concentrate on the formal and descriptive qualities of the work, a visual approach that is emphasized by the analytical grid of shapes and lines onto which these images are placed. Together, the faces become another formal element in an overall pattern.

The pattern-like employment of the artist's face is even more pronounced in the painting entitled *56 Self-Portraits* (Figure 8). In this painting, Castillo's images appear again, 56 times, in a repeating, grid pattern of eight columns and seven rows. As in *Self-portrait with Individual Details*, each face is unique, each version of Castillo painted on a different, consecutive day that is noted below the face. Again, the faces are formalized, each one inscribed within a flat circle of color which is, in turn, inscribed within a tonally-different square. All of the shapes, circles, squares, and the familiar Monica-shaped silhouettes are painted in varying shades of fleshy pinks and tans that help create a nearly-uniform, overall surface quality not unlike a textile or quilt.

These two works display an inherent contradiction in terms of how they represent Castillo as a subject of her own art. There is a tension between an apparent lived experience suggested by the works in their depictions of emotional states, and the dates included in *56 Self-Portraits*, which outline a specific time period and repeated action performed by the artist as part of her artistic process, and the simultaneous anonymity created by a sea of Castillos. The contradiction therein creates a paradox within the portrait that calls into question the representation of the body and the way it traditionally serves as a signifier of identity. Paintings like these attempt to make a distinction between the image of the body, or the imagined body, and the actual body as the vehicle through which identity is constructed. However, this is a distinction or demarcation that works against a theory of embodiment. For as the Rimbaud quote from which Castillo adopted her exhibition theme stated, his objective was to separate the body from the mind, an act that for women within a hegemonic Western philosophical framework, has always-already been accomplished. As discussed above, women were solidly positioned with the body. In restaging a mind/body split, Castillo runs the risk of further objectifying her own body.

This risk, as suggested by Castillo's works, is especially salient when considering the representation of the female body and the way it has been traditionally objectified and packaged, both in art and visual culture as well as the history of material culture that seeks to manage the real bodies of women as well. In a series of sculptural self-portraits, Castillo further emphasized the imaged objectification of her own portrait by literally displacing the features of her faces onto various objects, which take the place of the canvas. In one instance, *Box with Rocks*, 1994, she painted her facial features onto

volcanic rocks and loosely arranged them to recreate her face inside a fur-lined box (Figure 9). The box is shaped like the silhouette of her face and neck and covered, inside and out, with black and white fur. Hinged, and featuring a clasp, the box is exhibited in its opened condition to reveal nine rocks, of various shapes and sizes, arranged within. On each rock, a portion of Castillo's face is painted, the stones grouped to loosely piece together a rough sketch of the artist's portrait. The rocks, however, and Castillo's face, do not perfectly fit together. Elements are repeated, such as her left eye which appears on three different stones, and other features, such as her cheek, are imperfectly placed. The effect creates a version of her portrait that appears broken and fractured, as if viewed in a shattered mirror. As such, the surface of her face cannot be read as a singular, discreet image but one that is multi-perspectival and complex. At the same time, the artist places these features neatly inside a confining space that can be closed, clasped, and put away. The use of a case with which to contain the broken self-portrait recalls the "classical" notion of the body, or what Mary Douglas called the body as a "perfect container," a term that denotes a wholeness or completeness, rarely afforded to the understanding of Woman often associated with established representations of the female body.<sup>201</sup> *Box with Rocks* is a sculptural work fraught with contradictions that challenge the traditional conventions of self-portraiture: a broken surface that is placed within an interior space, denying the corporeal integrity of the face as a vision of external identity, playing with notions of internality and exteriority.

This tension between interior and exterior is further highlighted in *Box with Rocks II* (1994, Figure 10), a similar composition of rocks painted with facial features organized

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<sup>201</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 53.

in a fur-lined box. In this case, however, the standard shape of Castillo's head as the contained is distorted to allow for a greatly enlarged right eye. As the only discernible facial detail (the other rocks appear to be painted simply with skin texture), the "surface" depicted here is even more intangible, although the large eye is allowed to breach the barrier of its container, as suggested by a large hole cut in the top of the case that, when closed, reveals the artist's iris and pupil. These two works, *Box with Rocks I and II*, conjure a series of oppositions that question the nature, and the integrity, of the body: open and closed, interior and exterior, whole and broken.

Like Santiago, Castillo also works to imply a series of contradictions, disruptions to the overwhelming legacy of binary dualisms that have produced hegemonic notions of gender. However, when compared with an *Untitled* dress of Santiago's (1999, displayed in the exhibition "Hair Raising" at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art in 2006, Figure 11), the disparities between each artist's corporeal approach is more clearly articulated. In contrast to Castillo's use of solid objects, the base fabric of Santiago's dress is a large-weave kitchen fabric, similar to cheese cloth. Even embroidered with hair and colored with blood, the fabric hangs with an ethereal quality, nearly transparent in places, and seems to float with its own buoyancy. In contrast, the rocks, fur, and box used by Castillo display a pronounced weightiness, a heavy presence whose materiality seems bulky when compared to the lightness of Santiago's dress. While the textural quality of the fur and the hair-embroidered cloth perhaps share tactile suggestions of softness, the downy property of the fur in *Box with Rocks II* is at odds with the dominating sharpness of the firm stones.



Santiago's dress also contrasts with the element of containment inherent in Castillo's use of a case. For although the *Box with Rocks II* is displayed in its open position and the lid is perforated by openings, the sculpture as a whole is a closed form, compact and neat. The qualities of the dress give it an open form: in addition to the loosely-knit fabric and the emptiness of the shape itself, the edges of the garment are blurred by hundreds of broken and protruding strands of hair. The pattern also alludes to diffusion as the grid design is more densely concentrated at the waist of the dress and then disperses into lighter effects at the hem and neckline, above and below. As *Untitled dress* and *Box with Rocks II* each reference the body of its maker, they communicate two very different accounts of the body. Santiago's body is one that dissolves, or dematerializes, despite the use of actual bodily materials. Castillo's, on the other hand, is solidified and inwardly-situated. Castillo presents the body as a confinement, which could be seen as a reinscription of women's discursive ties to the body. The fact that she serially uses her head, the location of the brain, as the casing also hazards rehearsing a traditional submission of the body to the mind, as her body pieces, the rocks, are literally contained within her head (case). Interpreted in this way, relative to Santiago's sculptures, Castillo's self-portraits objectify her own body and while they subvert traditional modes of female portraiture and, in some ways, female representation, they do not necessarily allow her to position herself as an active constituting (spatial) body. For a contemporary visual tactic better suited to art production and growing women's agency in Mexico since 1968, it is the spatial body, rather than the represented body, that provides women a vehicle to subjecthood, precisely because of the ways in which it both employs and yet transcends the body of its author, in order to undertake a "cultural politics of the

body, based on a recognition of the social and discursive construction of the body.”<sup>202</sup> Such a body must strike a balance between the body itself as a marker of individual identity, or a subject, and also the body as a cultural object; strategy that mediates pervasive feminist debates over the representation of the female body that are too often simplified to a binary opposition between an essentialist feminine identity and the social construction of gender. To speak of a critical body politics then, is highly problematic. The body cannot be implicated within arguments that posit ‘woman’ as a stable, fixed category, but the body also cannot be viewed as so discursively and socially constructed that “the subject is irrevocably dispersed.”<sup>203</sup> While feminist art and criticism generally embraces a variety of textual strategies and representations, feminist art that shies away from any and all representations of the body suffers the inability to deconstruct the body in any profound way. An effective feminist critique, particularly in the arts, “eschews a naïve essentialism and incorporates the self-reflexivity of a recognition of the body as an effect of practices, ideologies, and discourses.”<sup>204</sup>

Wolff outlines a continuum of corporeality between a literal embodiment and the purely discursive, a dichotomy that Santiago manages to balance through the simultaneous presence and absence found in her works. Whatever identity is presented within her sartorial sculptures is not anchored to the representation of her physical body, because it is constantly denied as much as it is affirmed. Castillo, however, tends toward an over-determination of the female body through the ways in which she reenacts an isolation of the body from the self. In doing so, she points to the limits of corporeal

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<sup>202</sup> Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, 120.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5.

representation and becomes vulnerable to the co-optation of her body by extramural forces, a discursive pitfall into which her modern predecessor Frida Kahlo at times lapsed, in having her body appropriated and exploited as a symbol of the nation.

The comparison between Castillo and Kahlo is inevitable, and there is little doubt that Kahlo was a large part of what made self-portraiture a specifically “Mexican tradition” in the eyes of Castillo, as she once called it.<sup>205</sup> Of the roughly 150 works created during Kahlo’s lifetime, between fifty and sixty of them are self-portraits, and both the critical and popular attention lavished on her in the past thirty years has made the image of Kahlo one of the most recognizable icons of Mexican, if not Latin American, culture.<sup>206</sup> Taking up the subject of her own life and image, the sensational events of Kahlo’s biography, her health, and her personal relationships constitute a central concern of much of the literature on her art works, a methodological trope to which many female artist are vulnerable.<sup>207</sup> There are, however, a number of critical feminist interpretations of Kahlo’s paintings and drawings that view her self-portraits as a sophisticated “reworking of the personal, ignoring or minimizing her interrogation of sexuality, sexual difference, marginality, cultural identity, female subjectivity, politics, and power.”<sup>208</sup>

Weaving together a deeply personal iconography that revolved around her own body but that was steeped in indigenous and colonial Mexican forms, post-Revolutionary politics,

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<sup>205</sup> Kelley Jr., "Interview with Monica Castillo."

<sup>206</sup> See Oriana Baddeley, "Reflecting on Kahlo: Mirrors, Masquerade and the Politics of Identification," in *Frida Kahlo*, ed. Oriana Baddeley and Tanya Barson (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 47-53.

<sup>207</sup> See Griselda Pollock, "Artists, Mythologies and Media," *Screen* 21(1980): 57-96.

<sup>208</sup> Borsa, "Frida Kahlo: Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," 26; see also the essays in Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson, eds., *Frida Kahlo* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005); Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*; Liza Bakewell, "Frida Kahlo: A Contemporary Feminist Reading," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13, no. 3 (1993): 165-89; as well as Oriana Baddeley and Valeria Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (London 1989); and Mulvey and Wollen, *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti*.

as well as an understanding of Modern avant-garde experimentation, “Kahlo’s paintings coalesce into a visual discourse on identity, teaching us that identity is neither a static nor a monolithic ‘given,’ but rather a complex construction and a shifting configuration.”<sup>209</sup> Like Castillo, Kahlo used the genre of self-portraiture to investigate notions of self, but also cultural and social identity.

In the iconic self-portrait *The Two Fridas* (1940, Figure 12), Kahlo offers a characteristic examination of the artist’s intertwined understanding of her European and Mexican heritage, her relationship with Diego Rivera, post-Revolutionary nationalism, colonialist pressures on national identity, and her psychological positioning as the nexus of these overlapping forces. The doubling of her own body, dressed respectively in “Mexican” and “European” dress, hearts exposed, linked and bleeding, and set before a desolate, stormy background, demonstrates an ambiguity and complexity that is rarely resolved or simplified in Kahlo’s works. This painting, Kahlo’s most discussed work, is emblematic of her oeuvre for the ways in which she visually and conceptually interrogated an iconography of personal, social, cultural, national, and political identities upon the surface of her body. While she effectively demonstrates that identity is not a “static or monolithic” entity, the image of her body nevertheless remains a stable image, not entirely unlike the ways in which Castillo repeats her face over and over again in her process of “disidentification.”

Self-representation allows the respective artists an element of individual agency in their pursuits of identity assessment. However, Kahlo’s visual dependence upon the image of her body as a site of identification is subject to limiting effects. On one hand,

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<sup>209</sup> Gannit Ankori, “Frida Kahlo: The Fabric of Her Art,” in *Frida Kahlo*, ed. Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 43.

this was Kahlo's greatest strength as an artist, especially in formulating an activist model for those minority groups that identify with her perseverance, her frankness, and her refusal to uncritically adopt social, gender, and sexual norms. As such, she is a cultural icon for individuals and artists associated with the feminist and Chicano/a movements, and the struggles for queer and disability rights.<sup>210</sup> However, this dependence on the representation of the body and its repetition, like Castillo's repeated use of her own image, similarly objectified the body of Kahlo. However, whereas Castillo's self-portraits repeatedly stress the separation between self and self-image, Kahlo's works consistently return to this point. The union of self and self-imaging was specifically underscored by the well-known self-fashioning of Kahlo in native-inspired dress, and the decoration of her various body casts, as a kind of performance of her cultural and political convictions.<sup>211</sup> Through both her own "investment in the body" and the discursive identification of "artist=oeuvre" that has surrounds the artist's growing celebrity since the late 1970s, Kahlo herself is, according to Margaret Lindauer, a "fetishized object" for public consumption whereby her works are "consciously reproduced and displayed in order to construct, produce, and distribute a 'Frida' commodity."<sup>212</sup> And while Kahlo imbued her paintings with a sense of a constructed self, her body has since been colonized by popular culture, fashion, and a material culture industry that ironically

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<sup>210</sup> Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry, "Frida Kahlo: The Creation of a Cultural Icon," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 29(2002): 3-12; Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, 2.

<sup>211</sup> Rebecca Block and Lynda Hoffman-Jeep, "Fashioning National Identity: Frida Kahlo in 'Gringolandia'," *Women's Art Journal* (1998-9). Adriana Zavala and Joanne Hershfield point out that Kahlo's adoption of specifically Mexican folk clothes was by no means unique, and instead a part of modern fashion trends among a middle-class, intellectual community. However, Kahlo's repeated appearance in both fashion and art photography wearing such sartorial choices emphasizes her individual commitment to personal style as an artistic expression, and it is widely discussed in the scholarly discourse on Kahlo and remains part of the artist's mythology. See Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 2; Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna*, 128-9.

<sup>212</sup> Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, 160-72.

dislocates Kahlo as subject from Kahlo's body as object.<sup>213</sup> While Castillo and Kahlo, both self-portraitists, approach self-representation from divergent perspectives, one to specifically divorce the self from the body and the other to unite self and body, similar self/body dislocations occur, as a pronounced representational body subsumes female agency and individual subjectivity. When viewed within the context of a problematic history of the national appropriation of women's bodies, the example of Kahlo demonstrates the dangers of such an over-determination of the body.

One of the most egregious national appropriations of Kahlo occurred in 1990, with the organization and promotion of a government-sponsored cultural project called *Mexico: A Work of Art*, composed of "more than 150 art exhibitions and cultural events in dance, theater, music, film, literary symposia, fashion shows, culinary arts, and more," mounted throughout various New York City venues that summer.<sup>214</sup> Intended to encourage touristic interest and economic investment in Mexico, the project attempted to recuperate Mexico's international public image in the wake of devastating economic downfalls, political faltering, and widespread corruption that characterized the 1980s. In addition, the project would boost public support for the upcoming ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, a central platform of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration (1988-1994).<sup>215</sup> The centerpiece of *Mexico: A Work of Art* was an art exhibit presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entitled *Mexico: Splendor of Thirty Centuries*, that replicated a curatorial model devised by the post-

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<sup>213</sup> Oriana Baddeley, "'Her Dress Hangs Here': De-Frocking the Kahlo Cult," *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1991): 16.

<sup>214</sup> The showcase traveled to Los Angeles in October of that same year. Teresa Eckmann, *Neo-Mexicanism: Mexican Figurative Painting and Patronage in the 1980s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 52.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

Revolutionary regime at the height of Modern attempts to forge a cohesive national identity through a shared visual language constructed around the notion of *Mexicanidad*.<sup>216</sup> Salinas' attempts at cultural diplomacy showed little deviation from the exploitation of art and visual culture to define the nation that was employed by the state sixty years previously. It is perhaps then, not surprising, that a woman's body was chosen to visually represent Mexico throughout this cultural campaign. As Lindauer noted, the promotional materials for *Mexico: A Work of Art* prominently featured Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Monkeys* (1943), a painting that shows a bust-length representation of Kahlo with four pet monkeys in front of a lush background of tropical foliage (Figures 13 and 14). Billboards, pamphlets, and magazine advertisements announce the importation of Mexican art and culture with Kahlo's characteristic unaffected gaze and omnipresent unibrow, bearing the tag-line "New York will be more exotic this season," a phrase that reduces the Kahlo (and Mexico) to stereotypical associations between the female body and nature.<sup>217</sup> Like earlier state appropriations of the female body, the use of Kahlo's self-portrait to project an image of official state culture feminizes the country, positioning Mexico itself as the feminine, maternal counterpart to the masculine patriarch embodied by the Mexican president, under whose paternal care she passively lies, as is aptly imaged

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<sup>216</sup> Olivier Debroise, "Mexican Art on Display," in *The Effects of the Nation: Mexican Art in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Carl Good and John V. Waldron (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 20-36.

<sup>217</sup> As Lindauer states: "In order to emphasize the connection between Mexico and Kahlo, her self-portrait was repeated, cut to shape the 'M' of Mexico. Kahlo's painting situates her, and therefore also Mexico, in a lush jungle where her presence is so 'natural' that a monkey sits on her shoulder and another peers from the vegetation behind her. The presence of the monkey implies that Kahlo herself in a 'natural' element of the exotic, as represented by the exhibition. Other letters in 'Mexico' are formed by a pre-Columbian ballcourt ring and a contemporary ballet dancer whose costume recalls a traditional Yaqui deer dancer. Through this pastiche of imagery, the billboard insinuates that modern Mexico is a continuum of the 'primitive,' the 'tribal,' and the 'exotic' that, when shipped, transforms the host city into a site where people worn down by an urban environment can escape, as Kahlo has done in her self-portrait. Thus, Kahlo's self-portrait, along with the other objects depicted, signifies Mexico, which in turn is represented, not as a society, nation, or culture, but simply as 'a work of art.'" Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, 174.

by a second advertisement authorized by the presence of President Salinas himself (Figure 15).

There are, of course, substantial differences between the self-portraits of Kahlo and Castillo that inhibit such overt national appropriations of Castillo's body. Most notable is Castillo's divestment of her represented body of national signifiers in favor of an unadorned body. However, the very aspect of her art that exempts her from national appropriation is also what disallows her work from critically engaging with this same problematic history of appropriated female representation. Because she presents an objectified body that is divorced from notions of the self, and does so in a non-cultural (non-social) manner, Castillo's portraits, in my opinion, cannot effectively deconstruct national representations of woman. This is certainly not to discount the significance of the contribution to women's artistic production made by Castillo, or even Kahlo. But, in an attempt to recast the terms of Mexican feminist art as that which produces new national, cultural, and discursive spaces, it is necessary to introduce new actors and artistic strategies to the accepted feminist models. Here again, the works of Santiago serve as crucial models for deconstructing pervasive representations of women because they not only embody notions of self, but because they also offer a method embodying the cultural and social means of subjectivity.

### **III. Producing the Body Politic**

The spatial body (or the embodied subject) exists, as described above, at the intersection between the lived experiences gleaned through personal, everyday actions and the social and cultural constructions of the society which helps to shape the



experiences of those who inhabit its spaces. Santiago's sculptures are formed through references to her life, her personal history, and even her contemporary health changes. However, because they do not represent her body overtly, they are interpreted as referencing a broader, social field inferred through her use of human bodily materials as universalizing media that signify the lived experiences of the social body. In their capacity to comment on collective subjectivity, Santiago's sculptures open onto another prevalent discourse of contemporary art that similarly critiques the means by which individual and shared subjectivities are established, that of abjection.<sup>218</sup> Predicated upon the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva, abjection is rooted in a confrontation with the base materials of the body; at stake are both the maintenance and the disruption of the identity of the subject. In being presented with bodily materials that either permeate the physical boundaries of the body—blood, urine, excrement, semen, menstrual fluid, saliva, tears, hair, skin—or materials that once existed within the body and yet are inexplicably found outside of it, the subject is horrified, *abjected*, by the recollection of the fragility of the body and the memory of a time when there existed no discrete sense of self. Drawing on the abject's in-between and marginal spaces, 'abject art' is generally characterized by its incorporation of (real or simulated) bodily fluids that simultaneously attract and repel the viewer. Building on the explicit Body Art of the 1960s and 70s, which used the artist's body as a direct medium of expression, abject art of the 90s retained from Body Art its ability to critique social concerns through the presence of 'real' bodies. Because it

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<sup>218</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. For a more detailed discussion of abject art, see the initial catalogue that sought to define and characterize these themes: *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1993).

presents a disruption to normative corporeal and social boundaries, the abject also undermines cultural binary dualisms.

Thus, by working with the base materials of her body, Santiago negotiates the fragile borders by which subjectivity is formulated when drawing on Kristeva's argument that the abject interferes with a normally defined inside/outside dichotomy. As Kristeva states:

The body's inside...shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents.<sup>219</sup>

Santiago references abjection in that her work disturbs the physical borders of the body, by literally presenting and representing the inside on the outside. Works such as *Consolations: PINK* and *Consolations: RESP*, both from 1999 (Figures 16 and 17), are simple, white, two-piece outfits. The decorative embroidery that adorns their fronts, respectively, however, is ambiguous. The hair embroidery of *PINK* begins at the neckline and traces a winding path down the body, forming a tight network of thick lines ending below the crotch of the pants, almost as if outlining an intestinal tract. The embroidery of *RESP* also begins at the neckline but concentrates itself in the middle of the torso, creating a dark, lop-sided, bulbous shape that resembles a stomach. Looking at these two garments is like looking through or into the body to view the isolated organs that are here paradoxically located not only outside the body but on top of a layer of clothing. Santiago also challenges the function of clothing, in and of itself, as a border, or an "envelope," which according to Kaja Silverman, constructs "even the most rudimentary distinctions

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<sup>219</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 10.

between self and other, inside and outside,” articulating a metaphor for both the body and the psyche.<sup>220</sup> The artist similarly acknowledges the liminal functions of clothing. In an article in the *Mexico-City Times* she is quoted as saying that she specifically chooses as her subjects articles of clothing and other “protection-giving objects that separate us from each other, that separate us from the air.”<sup>221</sup> The transgression of such bodily boundaries creates a subjective disturbance in the way that it is tied to a similarly disruptive memory.<sup>222</sup>

Triggered by the abject materials of blood and hair, is a subject’s psychoanalytic memory of the pre-Oedipal reliance on the maternal body, a memory that threatens to again dissolve subjective independence. By assuming an abject reaction to her work, the sculptures put pressure on the ways in which subject identity is affected and constituted, not simply through the “memory” of a developmental fracture but through the ongoing reconstitutions of both personal and social borders, endangering the precarious boundaries that we use to distinguish ourselves from others.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 147.

<sup>221</sup> Eugenia Montalván Colón, "More Symbolism, Less Realism: Paula Santiago's Visual Experience in San Antonio, Texas," *Mexico-City Times*, Tuesday, February 4 1997.

<sup>222</sup> Kristeva draws on Mary Douglas’s studies on social pollution in *Purity and Danger*, to describe this “matter out of place,” the presence of which “implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order.” It is this transgression of order that is upsetting and even dangerous: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 48.

<sup>223</sup> This trend in art was consistent with similar moves in political realms whereby marginalized social groups that viewed themselves as ‘abject,’ as ‘other’ (particularly women, the queer community, ethnic minorities, and those with AIDS), began to appropriate the term to describe themselves in their positions. Many groups embrace the theory in order to subvert the powerlessness of their marginalization by questioning the social regulations and rules that cast them out as such. Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 374. See also Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

Memory, in this way, is referenced in two ways by Santiago's works. The small size of the garments often leads to the conclusion that Santiago created doll or children's clothing and some of the works lends themselves very directly to this conclusion. At or just under 20 inches tall, *IV* (1996, Figure 18) and the sculpture *BOM*, from the series "To Protect Oneself from History" (1999, Figure 19), resemble infant jumpsuits or "onesies." Such references locate the viewer back onto the body of the 18-month-old child in the throes of the Lacanian mirror stage, one who is first coming to recognize a distinction between his or her own body and that of the maternal figure.<sup>224</sup>

The second reference to memory is that of a social or cultural memory. Santiago credits much of her artistic process to her Catholic upbringing, which supplied her with a "feminine education" that emphasized the "handicrafts" that she incorporates into her work. She also references the indigenous past of her native country; *BOM* is part of a series of works entitled "To Protect Oneself from History" (Figure 20). After returning to Mexico from Europe, Santiago took a particular interest in the pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico, studying the Olmec, Maya, Toltec, Mixtec, and Aztec cultures, often mining their art and language for both garment types and titles. *GUE*, (Figure 21) for instance, takes the form of a pre-Conquest warrior costume.<sup>225</sup> This series as a whole was created for an exhibition named after a mythical Mayan bird.<sup>226</sup> Through these references,

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<sup>224</sup> Jacques Lacan defines "the mirror stage" as an essential developmental stage whereby upon recognition of oneself in a mirror reflection (*imago*) sparks the ongoing formation of the subject as an independent being. This stage begins as early as the age of 6 months and becomes fully realized by 18 months. It is at this point that the infant enters into the world as a socially independent subject, Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977), 5.

<sup>225</sup> *GUE* also strongly resembles other suits made by Santiago that are named *Guerrero* and *Warrior*, respectively.

<sup>226</sup> Santiago, in *Paula Santiago: [Moan]*, (Los Angeles: Iturralde Gallery, 1999), 1.

Santiago expands the notion of subjectivity to include social, or even historical, identities, and continues to disrupt them by dismantling borders.

In this series, Santiago makes a departure from using rice paper as her base of construction. She instead takes advantage of a heavier, web-like paper to create the effect of protective chain mail. Reminiscent of chain link fencing, the implication here is that this is a material that protects the body from mortal injury. However, the net paper negates, or makes ironic, the purpose of these suits—they do not cover or shield the body, but rather reveal it—the suggestion here being, I would argue, that one cannot be protected from history, from memory. Instead, one must negotiate a border that is permeable, open and fluid, a threshold between the materiality of the body and the external social and historical forces that act upon it. With regard to subjective identity, the construction and maintenance of self exists across this boundary, where neither social directives nor subjectivity can be denied or exclusively privileged. Identity, then, is located not only in the body, but also in how the body is regulated within the world. The constant push and pull of these forces across the permeable threshold of the body is a constant practice, as these forces inflect one another in the constant process of “becoming social.”

While the cultural citations of the series “To Protect Oneself From History” point to an ancient indigenous past, they also make reference to the more recent past and modern national rhetoric that used (and abused) Mexican history for strategic purposes. At the beginning of the twentieth century, official narratives of *mestizaje* exploited the idea of Indianness as a national heritage in order to overcome political and class-based

fragmentation.<sup>227</sup> Iconic texts such as Manuel Gamio's *Forjando Patria/Pro-Nacionalismo* (1916) and Jose Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cosmica* (1925) sought to re-articulate for the revolutionary generation the need for cultural homogeneity by symbolically promoting an essentialist image of the native roots, while subsuming them into a modern, progressive nation, a process that Mary Kay Vaughan has termed "the browning of the nation."<sup>228</sup> Women played an essential symbolic role within the modern nation and its cultural efforts to forge a unified nation, a discourse that "resignified" womanhood "in terms of race, class, and culture," according to Adriana Zavala.<sup>229</sup> Women's roles in society were, as Zavala states, remade through the official discourses of *indigenismo* and especially *mestizaje*, or the racial miscegenation that became the "mainspring of Mexican nationality."<sup>230</sup> And while the seeds of this racialized discourse were sewn much earlier than the revolutionary decade, it is in the postrevolutionary period where they found their most fertile ground.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> For a more positive perspective on the role of the Indian in postrevolutionary Mexican political life, see Alexander S. Dawson, "From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the 'Revindication' of the Mexican Indian, 1920-40," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998). Dawson reads, somewhat against the grain and finds, within the discourse of *indigenismo*, a space for the Indian to participate as a national political actor.

<sup>228</sup> Rick A. López, "The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2002): 293; Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*, 197.

<sup>229</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 112-13.

<sup>230</sup> D.A. Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988): 75. The bibliography on this topic is immense. Some other key sources include: Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria: Pro-Nacionalismo/Forging a Nation*, trans. Fernando Armstrong-Fumero (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010); Ana María Alonso, "Conforming Disconformity: 'Mestizaje,' Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (2004): 459-90; Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Martin S. Stabb, "Indigenism and Racism in Mexican Thought: 1857-1911," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 1, no. 4 (1959); José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: The Bilingual Edition*, trans. Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>231</sup> The rhetoric of *mestizaje* reaches back into the nineteenth century and can be found in the writings of essayists, nationals, poets, and historians such as: Andrés Molina Enríquez, Justo Sierra, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Guillermo Prieto, and Franz Boas. See Stabb, "Indigenism and Racism."

Historian Alan Knight has argued that the transformative goals of the Revolution, to “homogenize the Mexican population,” itself failed. This objective then fell to the cultural and economic projects that would follow the decade of battle and actually succeed in the construction of a national identity and a consolidated state.<sup>232</sup> He states that “the project of the revolutionary state of the 1920s and 1930s contained a strong cultural element: more than it represented any hegemonic *class*, the state propounded a would-be hegemonic *culture*.”<sup>233</sup> Much of this culture came in the form of the visual arts, which were already established arbiters of national iconography, often relying on female archetypes, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, the *china poblana*, the Tehuana, the *soldadera*, and Malinche, who share an ethnic or racial heritage, as either Indians or as *mestizas*.<sup>234</sup> The years of political and social reconstruction after the Revolution would continue and amplify that tradition, grafting seamlessly together the visual discourses on race and gender. But as the visual arts took on an increased dimension of national importance in the postrevolutionary period, these archetypes would be deployed with a renewed sense of importance, and even urgency. During the years after the war, images of *mestizaje* would be taken up as banners of national character and used in the consolidation of the political party that would fashion itself to become, over the course of the twentieth century, synonymous with the nation, weaving together history, gender,

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<sup>232</sup> Alan Knight, "Revolutionary Project, Recalcitrant People: Mexico 1910-1940," in *The Revolutionary Process in Mexico: Essays on Political and Social Change, 1880-1940*, ed. Jaime O. Rodríguez (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1990), 230.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> See Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*; Analisa Taylor, "Malinche and Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2006): 816-40; Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "The China Poblana as a National Emblem," *Artes de Mexico* 66(2003): 74-77; D.A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Andrés Reséndez Fuentes, "Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution," *The Americas* 51, no. 4 (1995): 525-53.

race and ethnicity to strategically further the objectives of a state that repeatedly repressed the agency of women and people of color.

By creating garments whose form or title references an indigenous past, Santiago calls upon the cultural currency of Mexico's history in a way that acknowledges the complex process of social identity construction. Her ironically "protective" garments simultaneously reference the ways in which identity is both corporeally-centered as well as socially constructed, as demonstrated through the use of symbolic *mestizaje*, a rhetoric that exploited notions of both race and gender to construct a national identity.

The regulation of the body by the exterior forces of the world is also a concept that tackled by Castillo and here again, the comparison between Santiago and Castillo is useful for illuminating the particularities of the spatial body. *Alphabet* (1996, Figure 22) and *Curriculum* (1997, Figure 23) are two works that create a dialogue with one another and engage the viewer in an act of translation in order to "read" the autobiographical narrative that is "written" across the surface of Castillo's face. *Alphabet* is an oil painting that takes its format from the anatomy textbook illustrations to which the artist was drawn.<sup>235</sup> Using her face as a backdrop, Castillo diagramed the individual features of her face, creating a chart by which each distinctive mark corresponds to a letter of the Spanish alphabet. Criss-crossed with thick, black labeling lines that draw links between the face and the letters and features that are transposed from the body to the flesh-colored background, the composition is an alphabet soup of floating signifiers. *Curriculum* is a diptych of computer-generated portraits that each show the bust of Castillo, her skin wiped clean of its normal appearance but printed with rows of facial "letters," with

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<sup>235</sup> Kelley Jr., "Interview with Monica Castillo."



minimal punctuation and ambiguous organization. Here, an encoded text is literally inscribed upon Castillo's body. But translating the message requires careful decoding using *Alphabet* as a primer. When translated, the glyphs reveal uncharacteristic details about Castillo herself, offering the viewer a biographical narrative that is absent from the majority of her self-portraits: she was born in Mexico City; spent her childhood in the D.F.; lived in Ramsau, Germany between the ages of thirteen and fifteen; and returned to Mexico between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. She spent a year in Sienna and Rome, where she took drawing and painting classes for two years; she then studied at the national college in Stuttgart, Germany until she was twenty-five, and then returned once again to Mexico.<sup>236</sup> Castillo makes clear the difference in the way she understands the body as a marker of autobiography and narrative that is not always configured according to personal agency.

Instead, she invites the social re-construction of her narrative. As Medina stated, "Biographical information is indeed made available, but it is shorn of all the connotations that previously satisfied the voyeuristic spectator."<sup>237</sup> Her narrative is gleaned through a process of "reading" that deliberately foregrounds the mediation of the viewer, implicating the social audience in its use of language methods and by actualizing the ways the body is "read into." The narrative, however, is her own and it is one that portrays her in terms of mobility and agency, by emphasizing her transnational background as well as the scope of her training as an artist. The balance that is struck between artist and viewer, self and other, personal and social, demonstrates the artist's critical acknowledgement of the female body as a text subject to a number of constituting

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<sup>236</sup> *Curriculum*, 1997, my translation.

<sup>237</sup> Medina, "The Duplicity That Is a Face," 21.

discourses. Like her previously discussed portraits, it is a work that suggests a more embodied, dual approach to subjective understanding that values the body as the vehicle through which one acts and is acted upon through lived experience. However, her continued reliance on the representation of her own body (whether by her own hand or through the readings of others) downplays her own experiences in favor of others' perceptions of her.

This is even more explicit in Castillo's *Spoken Self-Portraits* of 1997 (Figure 24), a series of five digital renditions of the artist's face based on memory descriptions of Castillo by five of her friends. The images share enough details to be recognized as imaging the same face, but vary in terms of individual features such as bone structure, shape of the chin, size of the nose and forehead, and skin tone. The viewer is faced with multiple versions of the artist. Based on the words and memories of others, Castillo's image has been largely constituted by the perceptions of those around her, an interpretation also leveled at *The Two Fridas*, through oft-repeated identification of the Tehuana version of Frida as the one that Diego "loved," a perception that the painting implies contributed to how Kahlo imagined (or imaged) herself.<sup>238</sup> Castillo's work, however, offers little indication that any of these images represent a "real" or at least psychologically accurate portrait of the artist. By isolating her image, or images, from any narrative or external referents, Castillo's body is presented as almost entirely discursively formed. While she confronts notions of social construction, the delicate balance necessary to the positioning of a spatial body, central to Santiago's art, is simply

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<sup>238</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 89. This description is noted in Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, 144. See also pages 152-57 of the same source. This same phrase is also repeated in the KET biographical film *The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo* (2005), by noted Mexican cultural critic Carlos Fuentes.

not present within Castillo's work. As such, Castillo's self-portraits are not as effective in confronting a *social* history of female representation in Mexico, which means that they do not address nor critique the social and cultural factors that have influenced female representation (and thus social understandings of and spatial prohibitions on women) in Mexican visual culture.

#### **IV. Inhabiting a National Space**

Lefebvre has stated that, "there can be no question that social space is the locus of prohibitions and their counterparts, prescriptions."<sup>239</sup> In Mexico, the social space of prescriptions for women includes historical images that produce stereotypical understandings of women acting within the national fabric. In contrast to this iconography of social prohibition, Santiago posits a discursive spatial body that negotiates the permeable boundaries between interior and exterior, presence and absence, tangible and ephemeral, life and decomposition, the personal and the cultural. In doing so, her work engages contemporary and feminist interpretations of bodily discourse that stress the constructed nature of personal, cultural, and national identity. Her resistance to such binary categorizations constitutes a fluid strategy that stands in direct contrast to Modern representations of women that fixed the female body as a signifier of Mexican national identity. This strategy allows her work a wider, sociopolitical significance that directly challenges the ways the female body has been consistently exploited in the visual arts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an embodiment of the nation itself.

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<sup>239</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 201.

According to art historian Magali Carrera, independence from Spain and the establishment of an independent Mexican nation in 1821 coincided with the creation of a female allegorical type that proliferated throughout the coming century. As Carrera describes:

Always dressed in flowing robes, these figures are also often associated with a bow and arrow and a cornucopia that overflows with fruits and vegetables, denoting the natural fecundity of the land, along with tri-colored feathered costume elements such as skirts and headpieces. An eagle, a flag, drums, and an indigenous weapon, which refer to different aspects of Mexican independence as catalysts of national identity, sometimes surround the figure as well. ... these allegorical figures indicate instead that a new phase of Mexican corporeal imagery has dawned.<sup>240</sup>

Examples such as Petronilo Monroy's painting *Allegory of the Constitution of 1857* (Figure 25) and Enrique Alciata's *Winged Victory*, better known as the "Angel of the Republic," the crowning sculpture of Antonio Rivas Mercado's public *Monument to Mexican Independence* (Figure 26), were created in 1869 and 1910 respectively, and speak to the presence that national allegorical figures maintained as Mexico continued to articulate a newly-burgeoning national identity.

Swathed in flowing fabric, Monroy's *Allegory* embodies the Constitution ratified in 1857, which is directly symbolized by the inscribed stone tablet in her left arm. Her raised right arm holds an olive branch aloft as she hovers amongst the clouds in a bright blue sky. First exhibited in 1869, the painting was created in response to a call for national art that was issued the same year by the director of the National Academy of Fine Arts. The national appeal itself was most likely a response to recent political events that had posed a threat to Mexican sovereignty. The previous decades were filled with

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<sup>240</sup>Carrera, "Affections of the Heart," 61.

ongoing civil strife as factions fought over whether to govern Mexico as a monarchy or a republic, through war with the United States, and finally, with the French Intervention from 1863-1867, during which Mexico was ruled by Austrian Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian. Mexican Republican leader and later President Benito Juarez led the overthrow of Maximilian in 1867 and successfully restored the Mexican Republic, reinstating the national Constitution which had been drafted a decade before. Monroy's *Allegory*, painted two years after Juarez's reinstatement of the Constitution, symbolically inscribes Mexico's return to sovereign rule onto the female body.

In Monroy's *Allegory*, which Widdifield calls the ultimate "conflation of racial otherness and gender difference," the artist represents the founding document as a classicized mestiza, draped in fluttering cloth, holding a tablet bearing the name and date of the constitution and an olive branch, floating against white-clouded blue sky.<sup>241</sup> As Widdifield argues, the critical response to Monroy's depiction reveals pervasive attitudes about the role and place of women in the nation. Viewed as too sexual, too dark, too feminine, and too "real" to represent the nation within a public historical narrative, she was, according to critics, better suited to private and decorative images.<sup>242</sup> The public image of the nation, instead, should have been a "reposed and serious matron," a distinction that no doubt would have produced a female body different in age, type, stance, and perhaps even skin color.<sup>243</sup> This response in 1869 reveals that notions of

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<sup>241</sup> Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>242</sup> As Widdifield explains, Monroy's *Allegory* was created specifically in response to a call for nationally-themed history paintings to be exhibited at the annual exhibition of 1869 at the Academy of San Carlos. The image is largely based on depictions of Pompeian women that Monroy and fellow artist Santiago Rebull executed within the private dwellings of the Palace of Chapultepec in 1865, at the time the residence of the Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlotta, *Embodiment of the National*, 153-6

<sup>243</sup> Quoted in Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*, 153.

womanhood and nationality had already coalesced around pervasive traditional understandings of gender, race, and appropriate social roles that governed female behavior that were spatially inscribed. This criticism also reveals that the notion of Woman as Nation had, in some ways, fractured into a complex web of prescriptions: she was to be maternal and yet still desirous, but not too desirous; she should reference the indigenous past of the country, but at the same time maintain a pronounced sense of Eurocentric classicist beauty and symbolism; if she strays too far from the national ideal, perhaps she is better suited to be contained in a private setting, for the public image much be the exact fusion of eroticism, syncretism, and patriotism.

The golden *Angel of the Republic* is part of a public monument completed in 1910 to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the first cries for independence. The monument is part of a larger civic works project sponsored by the president-cum-dictator Porfirio Diaz, whose campaign to remake Mexico City as a world capital led to the renovation of the city's central thoroughfare and the installation of numerous public sculptures that glorified key moments of Mexican national history dating back to the Spanish Conquest. The gold, winged Angel is the crowning victory of the monumental column. In one hand she holds a ring of laurels and in the other, a broken length of chain, commemorating Mexico as a victorious and liberated nation.

Both allegories represent a type of national iconography that are, according to art historian Mary K. Coffey, "homilies to feminine beauty and national sovereignty"<sup>244</sup> Implicit in their feminine beauty, however, is an element of sensuality, and even

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<sup>244</sup> Coffey Mary K. Coffey, "'Without Any of the Seductions of Art': On Orozco's Misogyny and Public Art in the Americas," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 83(2003): 116.

eroticism, that makes the female allegory a particularly apt embodiment of the nation.<sup>245</sup> The Angel's bare breasts symbolize her sexualized fecundity; and although the Allegory of the Constitution is fully clothed, her voluptuous form is nevertheless suggested by the wind-swept drapery that clings to her body, accentuating her breasts and the curve of her hip and leg. As Carrera argues, sexualized allegories like these become crucial components during nationalistic articulations of unity and cohesion, important to the "arousal of patriotic affection." The symbolic representation of the nation must become an object of desire in order to inspire its citizens to love, honor, and protect it, a visual agenda that allows nationalism to construct traditional gender roles based on one's position in the space of the nation.

Allegories that gender the nation as a desirable female body ask for the allegiance of desiring male citizens. Coffey investigated how the image of woman figured into the construction of a post-revolutionary nation by the Mexican muralists, where through the official, state-sponsored culture created by the "Big Three," Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the female allegorical image of Mexico was institutionalized.

Examples such as Rivera's 1926 mural cycle at the National Agricultural University at Chapingo, outside of Mexico City, and Siqueiros's *New Democracy* of 1944-5, speak to the continued use of the desirable female body to symbolize national agendas. At Chapingo, Rivera painted a series of murals on the theme of the bounty and ownership of the earth. This cycle, which covers the walls and ceiling of a barrel-vaulted, former chapel, is populated with monumental female nudes that represent natural processes such

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<sup>245</sup>Carrera, "Affections of the Heart," 61.

as flowering and germination. On the two end walls are personifications of the earth itself, each depicted as a soft, round, fleshy nude whose body is laid upon the earth in such a way that her bodily curves mimic the rolling landscape upon which she is set. In *The Liberated Earth and the Natural Forces Controlled by Man* (Figure 27), the female nude literally fits into the Mexican earth, becoming a part of it, as the ground has been carved to accommodate her shapely figure. Thus, the female earth becomes one of the natural forces, represented alongside wind, fire, and water that must be “controlled” by man, as indicated by the title. Painted on the walls of a federally-funded institution that teaches its students to reap the benefits of the land, Rivera’s murals conflate the national allegorical tradition with Revolutionary emphasis on agricultural land reform as a form of social and political transformation. The mural is based upon a statement by Revolutionary general Emiliano Zapata who said: “Here it is taught to exploit the land and not the man,” although Karen Cordero Reiman has pointed out that could just as well be: “Here it is taught to exploit the woman, not the man.”<sup>246</sup>

In Siqueiros’ *New Democracy* (Figure 28), the figure of democracy is pictured as a bare-breasted woman who bursts forth from a volcanic landscape, the torch of liberty in one hand, the flower of art and peace in the other. She wears the red Phrygian cap of the French Revolution and struggles to free herself of the chains that bind her wrists. Characteristic of Siqueiros’ polemical attitudes toward politics, below her lays the defeated, faceless, male, body of fascism. The iconographic elements (the cap, the torch, even her naked torso) are common attributes of lady liberty; however, the artist’s formal

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<sup>246</sup> Karen Cordero Reiman, "Los Espacios De Chapingo: Apuntes Hacia Una Relectura," in *Arte Y Espacio, Coloquio Internacional De Historia Del Arte*, ed. Oscar Olea (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1995), 250.



composition seems to overtly emphasize the sexualized nature of her body. The dynamically foreshortened figure of Democracy lunges toward the viewer, her outstretched arms creating implied diagonals that lead the audience's eye to her prominent breasts. Moreover, this focal point is emphasized by the repetition of rounded forms, which can be seen even more clearly in Siqueiros' preparatory sketch. The composition is loaded with circles that echo the curve of her breasts in the iron manacles, in the mouth of the volcanoes, the shape of the torch, and the hands and limbs of the various figures, many of which form a deliberate horizontal axis that frames her naked body as the centerpiece of the mural. And although Siqueiros employs an allegorical body to represent a more abstract notion of freedom, its situation in the Mexico City Palace of Fine Arts, the "official location of national culture," the mural no doubt resonates with national significance, once again symbolized by a desirable female body.

And yet, a neighboring mural by Jose Clemente Orozco, also in the Palace of Fine Arts, illustrates the ways in which the female body came to represent more negative abstract ideas as well. Located within clear view of *New Democracy* is Orozco's *Catharsis* (Figure 29), a mural painted a decade earlier that depicts the potential evils of modern society. A surface densely packed with references to violence, corruption, death, and destruction, this mural also contains a prominent allegorical woman: in the left foreground is a nude figure readily identified as a prostitute. Lying on her back, her knees raised and legs splayed, decked in jewels, she maniacally laughs amidst the chaos and destruction that surrounds her. The pink flesh of her torso gives way to the putrid yellow of her lower body, an acidic color that seems to fester with disease. In this instance, the horrific body of a prostitute is exploited as an emblem of decay, a threat to the modern

Mexican nation. This allegory by Orozco demonstrates how the female body became a convenient, and even adaptable, vehicle for the articulation of national ideals, as it could be used in both affirmative and negative ways.<sup>247</sup> When considered alongside the works by Rivera and Siqueiros, the message is clear: the national body must be an object of desire, but only within certain, acceptable standards of propriety: sexualized, but not too sexualized. These limits of desire are further emphasized in the scholarly discourse on muralism, wherein Rivera's model for this Chapingo mural is frequently identified as Guadalupe Marin, his first wife; Siqueiros's model identified as his wife, Angelica; and Orozco's figure is only identified by her sexual profession. Thus, despite the seeming flexibility in the meanings signified by the female nude, woman is nevertheless fixed by the desires of others that are projected onto her body.

This is a dilemma that, as outlined in chapter one, plagues women in all nation-building projects as they are seen as the standard that determines one's relationship to the nation. Yuval-Davis stated: "Women, in their 'proper' behavior, their 'proper' clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity's boundaries."<sup>248</sup> Likewise, women who do not display a certain level of national propriety signify the exclusion, expulsion, or *abjection* from the nation. It is through their bodies that citizens must pass, as women are biologically, culturally, and symbolically situated as mythological, national mothers. Thus, for both Kristeva and Yuval-Davis, in their respective theories of abjection and nation-building, it is the maternal body that is used, exploited, and then discarded in identity formation, whether personal or national.

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<sup>247</sup> Adriana Zavala has argued that both positive and negative images of the female body were, in fact, dependent upon one another in establishing the appropriate limits for female representation, and thus, female behavior. See Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 5-15.

<sup>248</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 46.

It is the integrity of the national female body that is challenged by Santiago's contemporary sculptures. Her small-scale, fragile, decomposing shells contrast greatly with the monumental, timeless and permanent allegories captured in modern paintings, murals, and monuments. Moreover, by creating these bodily coverings from abject materials, Santiago presents the viewer with the abjected reality of women's marginalized roles within the patriarchal culture of nationalism. Finally, she references the female body in such a way as to allow herself a position as *subject* rather than *object*, the crucial element that distinguishes her work from each of the national allegories discussed above, Castillo, and Kahlo.

Like Castillo, Santiago's artwork is compared to that of Kahlo, again based on their shared expressions of female subjectivity, but also because of the frankness and perceived abjection with which Kahlo pictures her body.<sup>249</sup> One final comparison reveals how Santiago's corporeal strategies reject female objectification, and reiterate the need to distinguish between a post-1968 feminist identity and the pervasive, and at times oppressive, legacy of Kahlo. Santiago's *Cefal* (1999, Figure 30) and Kahlo's *My Birth* (1932, Figure 31) create a striking visual and contextual dialogue: read within the frameworks of feminism and abjection, both works address the central trope of the maternal body, a threshold that the subject passes both through and away from.

*Cefal* is a woman's blouse, whose title refers to "the opening of the dress where the head must pass." However, inverted and flattened in such a way as to reorient this opening, it visually "[suggests] the female birth canal," and the woven threads that

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<sup>249</sup> Salomon Grimberg, "Frida Kahlo: The Self as an End," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 102. Although a distinction must be made between the ways in which Kahlo *pictures* abject materials and conditions of the body, and the ways in which Santiago *incorporates* same abject matter.

emanate from it fall like drips of blood.<sup>250</sup> While Kahlo's more explicit work centers on the head of Kahlo herself emerging from her deceased mother's vagina, both are composed with a strong sense of symmetry arranged around a vertical axis, focused on the would-be birth canal, and highlighted by the respectively tipped-up perspectives. Moreover, both works also suggest violence, Kahlo's very directly and Santiago's more indirectly. Kahlo presents a horrific scene of what Barbara Creed has termed the "monstrous feminine": the artist pictures herself as literally reattached to the maternal body; she is subsumed within it, unable to separate from it, and thus undergoes a complete destruction of her self, her subjectivity, and ultimately, her life. The mother figure in this image is, as Creed would say, "a negative figure, one associated with the dread of the generative mother seen only as the abyss, the monstrous vagina, the origin of all life threatening to reabsorb what it once birthed."<sup>251</sup> Kahlo pictures her own "primal scene" that identifies the maternal body as an object of horror, a body that must be rejected as the ultimate Other by which we define ourselves. However, as Creed points out, behind each primal scene "lurks the figure of the archaic mother," a pre-Oedipal figure that stands not as a figure of difference and disgust but of ambiguity.<sup>252</sup> Creed argues that

if we posit a more archaic dimension to the mother—the mother as originating womb—we can at least begin to talk about the maternal figure as outside the patriarchal family constellation. In this context, the mother-goddess narratives can be read as primal-scene narratives in which the mother is the sole parent. She is also the subject, not the object, of narrativity.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Charmaine Picard, "Art 1999 Chicago," *Art Nexus* 33(1999): 99.

<sup>251</sup> Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-53.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

In terms of representing the archaic mother, then, Creed's maternal figure is not represented by the image of lack; she is not represented by the castrated (and castrating), bloody vagina, but rather more so by the womb, which "signifies 'fullness' or 'emptiness' but always as its own point of reference."<sup>254</sup> Although *Cefal* resembles the bloodied genitals represented in *My Birth*, it nevertheless calls attention to the unoccupied space within. *Cefal* exhibits simultaneous emptiness and fullness, suggested by the airy form that exists within the vacant garment. Utilizing the womb as a signifier of the archaic mother rather than castration "allows for a notion of the feminine that does not depend for its definition on a concept of the masculine."<sup>255</sup>

If a third work is introduced into this comparison, an even stronger case can be made for a clearly articulated contemporary feminist approach to the body. *Motherland* (1986, Figure 32) by Nahum B. Zenil, a Neo-Mexicanist contemporary of Castillo who also predominantly painted self-portraits, is a composition that also visualizes a vaginal birth of sorts. A mixed media work consisting of actual fabric and painted self-portrait, Zenil covered the surface of the canvas with a Mexican flag, ripping a slash through the central emblem of the eagle and cactus. Between the sides of the opening, now sewn open, is a portrait of Zenil himself, "peering out from within the womb of the patria."<sup>256</sup> The painting is a self-portrait of Zenil who, as an openly gay artist in Mexico, adopted the representational strategies of Kahlo to critique a national culture of patriarchy. According to Eckmann, the painting represents "the artist's desire to be accepted as part of the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Eckmann, *Neo-Mexicanism: Mexican Figurative Painting and Patronage in the 1980s*, 73.

national fabric.”<sup>257</sup> Here, however, the artist has rendered the image with an essentialism that literally transforms the female body into the flag, and his desire to be borne into Mexican culture comes at the expense of a female, allegorical and maternal body, which is rendered as an inanimate, national emblem. Thus, this comparison demonstrates that even within a painting anti-national in spirit, the female body is again appropriated and objectified by a patriarchal, and patrimonial, gaze.

*Cefál*, however, rejects such a gaze by rendering the body as both immaterially absent and yet imminently present, a paradox that defies the logic of an objectified female body. *Cefál*, to my mind, is not an image of the maternal body by which the other is signified. Rather, the sculpture pictures the tenuous border between the fullness of the womb, the absent body that exists inside the garment, and the presence of discourses that pressure it from the outside. *Cefál* embodies the positive space of a sculpture whose integrity is threatened and maintained by the negative space both within and without.

## **V. Embodied Subjects**

This chapter argues for the adoption of a spatial body as an effective strategy for contemporary artists in Mexico to produce and re-produce feminist understandings of the body, representation, and the ways in which national womanhood is inflected by the visual field. Such a construct requires the reconciliation of Lefebvre’s spatial politics with feminist theories of embodiment in order to posit a spatial body that is personal and social, essential and discursive, a body that is

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

neither brute nor passive but is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation. On the one hand it is a signifying and signified body; on the other, it is an object of systems of social coercion, legal inscription, and sexual and economic exchange.<sup>258</sup>

Taking into consideration this dual process of subjectivity formation allows the body to be viewed as “the crucial term, the *site* of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual, and intellectual struggles.”<sup>259</sup> The conflation of spatial and embodiment theories share an understanding of the body as it exists at the intersection of both interior and exterior forces. They tend to differ, however, in their use of terms: the notion of “*space*” is the essence of Lefebvre’s arguments while feminist discussions use the word “*site*” to designate the location of an embodied subject. While “*site*” is a term with spatial properties, I would argue that there are fundamental distinctions between the terms that inform this study. Contemporary art historian Miwon Kwon, in her reconsiderations of site-specific art since 1960, argues that site is not defined exclusively on spatial and physical terms, but also “as a cultural framework defined by the institutions of art.”<sup>260</sup> Because of this institutional focus, in contemporary art, site and site-specificity signifies “a relay of several interrelated but different spaces and economies, including the studio, gallery, museum, art criticism, art history, the art market, that together constitute a system of practices that is not separate from but open to social, economic, and political pressures.”<sup>261</sup> In doing so, such artworks decode and recode artistic conventions, expose the hidden operations of the art world, and undercut aesthetic autonomy by revealing the institution’s relationship to socioeconomic and political processes. Operating under the

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<sup>258</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 18.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>260</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

notion of site, contemporary projects expose the cultural confinement of art and are “concerned to integrate art more directly into the realm of the social.”<sup>262</sup> Approaching the body as a site no doubt allows for the consideration of the body as a discursive entity, affording artists and art historians the means to investigate the contemporary body as it critically engages a history of corporeal representation. However, considerations of space permit the artist to critically act outside of art institutions, broaching real boundaries into the spaces of everyday life achieved through lived experience, the crucial element of embodiment that occurs within the social spaces of everyday life.

For Santiago and the other artists in this study, both site and space are significant in terms of reconfiguring women’s roles in Mexican social and political space. But, as Simonsen stated, “the meaning of a woman’s body is connected to her projects in the world—to the way in which she uses her agency—but it is also marked by all her other life-situations.”<sup>263</sup> Paula Santiago created a body of works that hinge upon a number of tensions that work to “unfix” notions of self and other. Both personal and cultural, she visualizes a version of embodiment that is ephemeral and evolutionary, not fixed in time or space but *inhabiting* space and time. This distinguishes her from peers like Castillo, whose work I would argue approaches the body as a *site*. By materially playing with the boundaries between interior and exterior (bodily, psychically, and socially) Santiago approaches the body as a liminal space, a threshold, and a site that negotiates her own individual subjectivity as well as social pressures and experiences that help to shape her identity. As such her works constitute an effective feminist strategy for reproducing the female body within the context of contemporary Mexican art, allowing her to imagine

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>263</sup> Simonsen, "Practice, Spatiality and Embodied Emotions," 173.



(and image) spatial corporeality in such a way as to project upon it her own discourse on memory, history, and autobiography while at the same time engaging with the national corporeal tropes that have plagued female representation throughout the twentieth century.

Visual art projects that engage notions of subjectivity and womanhood constitute actions that help to not only expose institutional prejudices, but to actively reconstruct, or produce, art and curatorial institutional practice in Mexico—a realm that, because of its general apathy toward feminism and gender, has traditionally been a masculinized space. Feminist artists like Santiago produce that space in a way that deconstructs pervasive biases and prevailing stereotypes in order to undermine social proscriptions inherent in visual culture archetypes. Thus, feminist artists become social actors—producers of social space. This chapter argues that that process begins with the feminist spatial body, whether conceived of in physical terms, as literal embodied subjects, or in representational terms, informed by or interpreted with regard to theories of embodiment. This study begins with the supposition of a spatial body, or the positioning of feminist artists as active producers of space, so that it can take stock of the multiple social spaces produced by Santiago as well as the artists whose work is analyzed in the following chapters. In doing so, this study will ultimately offer a cumulative account of how contemporary feminist artists in Mexico are working to produce the spaces of feminism.

A spatial body is an active body, and a feminist methodology that hinges on spatial politics and metaphors activates the female body to move freely throughout the social spaces where bodily prescriptions and restrictions are so tightly enforced—namely, the “private” and “public” spheres. By introducing the spatial body alongside (and prior

to) the spaces of the home and streets, the chapters that follow assume the spatial significance of the artists—both their bodies and their representations—discussed therein as they work to produce the social spaces of Mexican everyday life.

## CHAPTER 3

### In the Family Way

*Polvo de Gallina Negra and Daniella Rossell*

*“We pride ourselves that in Mexico women have been traditionally incomparable mothers, sacrificing and diligent wives, loyal sisters, and modest daughters... The laws of the revolution have pledged to preserve the legal and social conditions that form the basis of women’s natural sensibility. These conditions reside in the home.” (President Miguel Alemán, 1946)<sup>264</sup>*

This chapter examines feminist reproductions of a space that has been fundamental to the construction of traditional gender roles in Mexico: the familial home, a construct that has literally and discursively confined women to acting primarily within a so-called private sphere. As a traditional space of femininity, where women are tasked with the maintenance of the household and the family, it represents a space with not only personal but also national significance as the family serves as a model for the ideological structure of the patriarchal state. Thus, the home as a “representational space” suggests the ways in which the power and authority of the state invades the personal lives of its citizens, and allows for the reproduction of state power as traditional gender roles are perpetuated.<sup>265</sup>

As such, the home serves as much more than a functional space in which to live. As the quote above by former President Alemán illustrates, official rhetoric has made use of the space as an ideological emblem that symbolized the cornerstone of a stable nation and traditionally defined what it meant to be a woman. Identified only by their familial

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<sup>264</sup> Quoted in Sanders, “Improving Mothers,” 187.

<sup>265</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

relations—mother, wives, sisters, and daughters—women were to be commended for the services they provided, to their families and to their state. In this way, it is a “space that embodies social relationships” and is revealed to be a social space, or a “public” space, masquerading as a “private” space, a reality that negates the binary opposition of the traditionally opposed social realms.<sup>266</sup>

Lefebvre denounced the seemingly “natural” illusion of a private/public dichotomy. He stated:

Social space contains—and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to (1) the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family; and (2) the relations of production, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions. These two sets of relations, production and reproduction, are inextricably bound up with one another: the division of labor has repercussions upon the family and is of a piece with it; conversely, the organization of the family interferes with the division of labor. Yet social space must discriminate between the two—not always successfully, be it said—in order to ‘localize’ them.<sup>267</sup>

Although Lefebvre does not speak of these social levels in gendered terms, the concept of localization has profound implications for the role that gender plays in the division of labor, as reproduction has been historically localized within the home and the actions of women and production has been localized in a “public sphere” produced by the actions of men. However, Lefebvre further adds to this dichotomy a third “interlocking” factor of social space in the modern era, which he calls the “reproduction of the social relations of production.” This third level consists of actions and symbolic representations that maintain and reinscribe the social (and gender) relationships produced by the division of production and reproduction. As he states, architecture, monuments, and *works of art*

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 32.

serve as important examples of the system of “symbolic representation [which] serves to maintain these social relations in a state of coexistence and cohesion,” alongside state rhetoric such as the address by President Alemán quoted above.<sup>268</sup> As a system of representation “which conceals more than it reveals” these divisions become naturalized as they have produced and reproduced outmoded definitions of gender and social roles.<sup>269</sup>

This chapter looks to three feminist artists, Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante working together as collective Polvo de Gallina Negra, and Daniela Rossell, who works with and within the ideological and physical space of the home in order to reveal concealed mechanisms (of symbolic representation) through which traditional gender roles and relations of power are produced. Because these artists approach the home as a space (rather than a *site*, see Chapter 2), they work beyond simply exposing the “reproduction of the social relations of production” that characterize the home as a feminine location. Instead, as will be delineated in this chapter, the artists work to actively produce new symbolic representations of the home by revealing the discursive nature of the “feminine” character, employing feminist protest strategies to confront that social discourse, and ultimately appropriating the methods of the mass media in order to reverse its direct complicity in constructing prevailing social and gender relations. This chapter examines how the home as social space determines relations of reproduction and production and how Rossell and PGN work to produce the space of the home as one that more accurately represents the realities of women’s lives in contemporary Mexico.

### **I. Building a Gendered Foundation**

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 32-3.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 32.

The presidential statement that began this chapter clearly localizes the contributions of Mexican women in the home. Yet, such a statement fails to acknowledge the many ways in which Mexican women act both within and without the home; additionally, the words only nominally recognize woman, traditionally defined by the limits of her gendered sensibilities, as a matter of national significance. Thus, Alemán confines the value of women to what they represent for the state and not how they act within that state, an objectification that carried as much weight post-1968 as it did in 1946. The two extended art projects introduced in this section each deconstruct the idea that a woman's "natural sensibility" resides within, and is defined by, domestic space. This is accomplished through reproducing the home, in divergent ways, thus affecting the way in which contemporary women in Mexico act within it.<sup>270</sup> Although they display two very different approaches to the physical space of the home, both projects nevertheless communicate the ways in which the home has been identified as a feminine space, taking the symbolic, gendered space as their starting point, or foundation.

*¡Madres!* (1987) was an ongoing art project by the feminist art collective Polvo de Gallina Negra [Black Hen's Dust], founded by artists Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante. Working together between 1983 and 1993, Mayer and Bustamante created thoughtful critiques of traditional expectations of motherhood in Mexico.<sup>271</sup> In *¡Madres!*,

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<sup>270</sup> Aleman, quoted in Sanders, "Improving Mothers," 187.

<sup>271</sup> Mayer and Bustamante met and became friends in 1979.<sup>271</sup> Four years later they began creating art together, but even before their official meeting, the two traveled in the same artistic circles in Mexico City, often creating work that laid the foundation for the feminist actions to be undertaken by PGN. In 1983, they held a meeting, invited nearly eighty women, and pitched their ideas for a socially motivated, creative activist collective. Interest in joining the group, however, was limited to Mayer, Bustamante, and one other artist, Herminia Dosal, who participated in the first few performances but soon left the group because of stylistic differences. Taking on the name of Polvo de Gallina Negra (PGN), they invoked the apotropaic power of a traditional herbal remedy against the Evil Eye to empower themselves as women artists in a patriarchal society. Their mission was to both promote women in the arts and critique the dominant images

a series of performances that took place over the course of several months in 1987, the artistic duo donned prosthetic pregnant bellies, participated in public street protests, and created their own demonstrations in various galleries and street festivals.<sup>272</sup> Their most public performance of *¡Madres!*, during which they “impregnated” a well-known male television celebrity, was broadcast on a popular evening talk show to an estimated 200,000 viewers. This action successfully breached both the public-private and male-female boundaries that have maintained the revered status of motherhood in Mexico for centuries, a status that the artists do not wholly deny. By redefining the terms of maternity, the role most closely associated with the space of the home, Mayer and Bustamante reconfigure the domestic as a space of both private and public importance. In dealing with themes that traditionally define womanhood in the domestic sphere, their

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of women in society. The stated objectives of PGN were to “analyze the image of women in art and the mass media; to study and promote the participation of women in art; and to create images based on the experiences of women from a feminist perspective with the goal of social transformation in the art world and society.” They formed with the mission to meet these goals “by means of non-objective art pieces, using themes such as domestic work, motherhood, the age of 15, etc.,” themes which, according to Bustamante, “were scorned with contempt as ‘a woman thing.’” Much of their work focuses on the role of women generally and the culturally-situated role of motherhood more specifically. For more background or general information on PGN, see the artists’ writings: Bustamante, “Non-Objective Arts in Mexico, 1963-83,” 225-39; Mayer, *Rosa Chillante*.

<sup>272</sup> Mayer and Bustamante appeared in several versions of a performance called *Mother for a Day (Madre por un día)* performed at various locations throughout Mexico City: at the Museo de Carrillo Gil; at the art institute La Esmeralda; as part of a larger street art festival in the Narvarte neighborhood; and in its most public format, broadcasted on the Televisa talkshow, *Nuestro Mundo* with Guillermo Ochoa. *¡Madres!* also included seven mail art projects that drew upon women’s experiences as mothers and daughters. In one mailing, Mayer and Bustamante sent a letter to members of the art community, the press, and feminists in Mexico City, in which they described their relationships with their own mothers and also, according to Mayer, envisioned an “imaginary event in the year 5000 in which our descendents finally succeed in destroying the archetype of the mother.” In another mail art project, “Letter to my Mother,” PGN collected seventy letters from women to their respective mothers containing various sentiments that either would not or could not be delivered to their recipients. The responses were organized into a monument to mothers, a public homage to the iconic Mexican figure. The letters, however, revealed varied concepts of motherhood that are not wholly celebratory, but that are complicated by the realities of love and honor as well as anger, resentment, sadness, and regret. Mayer, *Rosa Chillante*, 40. My translation.

work can also be viewed with respect to the home's characterization as both a space of identification and intervention.

It was Mayer's and Bustamante's appearance on the Televisa-broadcast talk show *Nuestro Mundo* that best exemplifies how *¡Madres!* offered a feminist critique of the traditional spatial strictures of femininity. Although the segment began as a typical guest interview, as it continued, it gave way to performance: the props came out and the mild-mannered behavior of the artists took on a characteristic humor. This segment is now known as *Madre por un día* (*[Mother for a Day]* Figure 33). What distinguishes this one particular performance from the larger project of *¡Madres!*, however, is its use and manipulation of mass media communication, which broadens the audience as well as the potential critique offered by the artists. While maternity is still the central theme addressed by Mayer and Bustamante, I contend that this performance necessarily expands the significance of their objectives. When viewed with regard to how it enters into dialogue with feminist discourse in Mexico, *Mother for a Day* can be understood with regard to the political mobilization of women in the 1980s and realistic challenges to the mythic understandings of womanhood and motherhood. By exploiting a public venue, the artists suggest the role played by both the media and women during the country's political transitions at the end of the twentieth century. Finally, by reconfiguring a new vision of maternity within public view, they also reconfigure the space to which it is normally confined, the home. As I will argue, PGN employed maternalist strategies not to completely divorce motherhood from the familial home, but to revise the ways in which the mother relates to that space. In doing so, *Mother for a Day* is assessed for the ways in



which the artists challenged definitions of art, perceptions of women, and a national culture of patriarchy.

On the evening of Friday, August 28, 1987, the Mexican daily news-talk show, *Nuestro Mundo*, began in typical fashion: the host, Guillermo Ochoa, welcomed his guests. The seventeen-minute segment followed the traditional set-up: Ochoa was seated behind his desk, and Mayer and Bustamante sat on small sofa to his right. As Ochoa interviewed his two guests, Bustamante did most of the talking, the camera cutting back and forth between fairly tight shots of Ochoa and Bustamante (Figures 34 and 35). Occasionally, the camera opened to a wider shot that included Mayer and gave the viewer quick glimpses of a variety of undistinguishable props that surrounded her and Bustamante. The artists sat side-by-side in everyday, unassuming clothing; with proper posture, their feet on the floor and crossed at the ankles, and their hands folded neatly in their laps, both artists were calm and well-mannered, or as Mayer told me, on their best behavior (Figure 36).<sup>273</sup> Answering Ochoa's general questions at the beginning of the segment, Bustamante explained the goals of PGN and promoted their activities. The informational quality of the interview provided the artists the opportunity to disseminate details about themselves, their art, and their advocacy for women. It offered Mayer and Bustamante the opportunity to speak from a position of personal experience and showcase their humor: the artists, in part, decided to explore the theme of motherhood because they both became mothers for the first time in the early 1980s. As they explained to Ochoa, they felt that as women, they were best qualified to approach the topic of motherhood from a position of privilege and insight. Mayer informed Ochoa that

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with the artist, August 2008.

numerous artists, both men and women, take mothers and children as their subjects, but only female artists can explore the theme to its fullest, and only Mayer and Bustamante were so committed to the theme to actually embody it. Mayer explained how, in 1984, they both embarked on a “scientific experiment,” assisted by their husbands, in which they had children as a visual art project. This tongue-in-cheek revision of their concurrent pregnancies three years earlier gave Ochoa pause, but he then inquired about the nature of pregnancy as art. This question provided the perfect segue into Bustamante’s announcement that they had, in fact, come on air to “impregnate” Ochoa.

The artists then brought forward the basket of props, and to Ochoa’s obvious surprise and apprehension, Bustamante and Mayer outfitted him in an apron affixed with a prosthetic pregnant belly (Figure 37). Although he was being taunted by another man in the background and the studio audience, Ochoa, for his part, was a very good sport: rubbing his belly, holding his aching back, making an effort to awkwardly sit down in his chair, and at one point, loudly exclaiming the movement of his “baby.” Once he was outfitted, Mayer and Bustamante then donned their own aprons, Bustamante placing hers over her already biologically-pregnant belly. With all three sufficiently “pregnant,” Bustamante placed a gold crown on Ochoa’s head and appointed him “reina de hogar,” or queen of the home (Figure 38).

As they represent childcare and housework, the apron and the belly constituted a visual shorthand that symbolized the stereotypical role of women within the home and transformed all three into expectant mothers. However, PGN did not endow Ochoa with the title of “mother for a day,” as the name of the performance suggests, but “queen of the home,” a designation that not only has bearing on his new identity but on the space he

inhabits as well. With the new title, he was altered from host (*el conductor* who presides over the broadcast) to a hostess, who took cues from his similarly impregnated peers. This change, which called Ochoa's authority into question, as he was laughed at, whistled at, and heckled by the audience and a second male anchor who sat off-screen, created a new gender dynamic in the studio and obliged Ochoa into a more ambiguous role. Although the artists placed a gold, handmade crown upon his head, which signified his elevated status, the gesture was an ironic one because the crown, along with the belly and the apron, gave him the attributes that indicated the contradictory values endowed upon women. As Araceli Barbosa points out, while the crown symbolized the ways in which women are nominally revered within the home, the apron nevertheless represented the duties placed upon them there that liken them to "slaves and serfs."<sup>274</sup>

The objects that Bustamante then gave to Ochoa also placed him in a position of subordination, as he is taught by the artists how to experience his new condition. He was presented with a small box, or kit, that contains his pregnancy accoutrements: pills that reproduce the effects of being pregnant—sickness, pain, nausea, and cravings; a small mirror, so that he can focus on his face instead of his rapidly changing and ballooning body; and a small book of advice, the "gold book" as the artists called it, that was a journal full of the differing advice, superstitions, and old wives' tales heaped upon women to ensure a successful pregnancy (Figures 39-42). According to Rosana Blanco Cano, the

objects serve two functions: on the one hand, they establish [Ochoa's] new role because they help him complete his gender reassignment and maternal

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<sup>274</sup> Barbosa, *Arte Feminista En Los Ochenta*, 131-2.

experience; on the other hand, they serve as a parody of the objects and ideas that legitimate the social immobilization of mothers.<sup>275</sup>

While the performance as a whole offered some form of visibility to the process of maternity and a demystification of iconic motherhood, the satirical objects and their explanations also commented on the ways in which pregnancy is a process viewed in relation to the vanity, emotionalism, and superstition of women.<sup>276</sup>

Toward the end of the segment, Mayer and Bustamante introduced their negative, maternal counterpart: an unkempt, eye-patched puppet they called “The Bad Mother” (Figure 43). The puppet is a parody of the villainess matriarch Catalina Creel on the classic Mexican telenovela *Cuna de Lobos* [*Den of Wolves*], which was produced by Televisa and aired in 1986 and 1987 (Figure 44).<sup>277</sup> Creel’s character typified the conniving mother character often seen in popular Latin soaps. Using this puppet in many of their performances, they often mocked social expectations of maternal actions propagated by the mass media.<sup>278</sup>

Building upon Blanco Cano’s analysis of the props used by PGN, I offer a third function fulfilled by the props, in that they help to feminize the space of the studio. Once all three participants were outfitted, Ochoa was instructed on how to use his new maternity kit, and Mayer introduced the Bad Mother puppet, the entire space of the stage

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<sup>275</sup> Rosana Blanco Cano, *Cuerpos Disidentes Del México Imaginado: Cultura, Género, Etnia Y Nación Más Allá Del Proyecto Posrevolucionario* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2010), 65. My translation.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>277</sup> The popular production received the “Best Telenovela of the Year Award” in 1987, by the annual TVyNovelas Awards; as well as “Best Novela Ever” in 2007. Currently, the telenovela is reportedly being reproduced under the name *La Derecha de Sangre* (Entitlement of Blood), to be broadcast in the summer of 2011.

<sup>278</sup> On *Nuestro Mundo*, Mayer brought forth the puppet in order to introduce an additional action that was part of the larger *¡Madres!* project, inviting their national audience to submit written letters to their own mothers, offering the bad mother as a symbol that gave their audience permission to defy the sacred status of motherhood.

was littered with feminine props, including the floor and Ochoa's desk, onto which he lined up his pills, mirror, and book (Figure 45). By the end of the performance, the space was also peopled with mothers: two good mothers, Bustamante and Mayer, one new mother-in-training, Ochoa, and their negative counterpart, the Bad Mother puppet. While the artists do not transform the space of the studio into a home proper, it does morph into a feminized space whose liminality allows the artists to then to also begin to construct different versions of motherhood and womanhood.

The liminal nature of the space produced by Mayer and Bustamante, as it was both home and public “not-home,” was an artistic characteristic that permeates PGN's oeuvre as they repeatedly questioned the “localization” of femininity and motherhood. The first performance by PGN, entitled *El respeto al derecho al cuerpo ajeno es la paz* [*Respect for another's rights to the body is peace*], took place on October 7, 1983 during a public demonstration against rape and violence against women. In front of the Hemiciclo a Benito Juarez in downtown Mexico City, they prepared their Black Hen Dust potion and distributed it in small pouches to the crowd. The recipe for the powder (Figure 46) was recited during the performance and later published in the feminist journal, *FEM*. Additional works created or performed by PGN were aimed at a much wider audience, which led to their experimentation with various types of media art: mail and fax projects, articles and manifestoes published in newspapers and feminist journals, appearances on TV and radio programs, and a series of educational slide lectures sponsored by the Department of Public Education called *Las Mujeres Artistas Mexicanas o Se Solicita Esposa* [*Mexican Women Artists, or Wife Wanted*]. In 1987, *Mother for a Day* was performed at various public venues throughout Mexico City: at the Museo de

Carrillo Gil; at the art institute La Esmeralda; and as part of a larger street art festival in the Narvarte neighborhood.<sup>279</sup>

Each of these works, like the Televisa-broadcast performance of *Mother for a Day*, deliberately makes use of spatial juxtapositions of the so-called “private” and “public” spheres. Based on the personal experiences of women both in the home and on the streets, PGN characterizes the “home” as a space where the personal is political. By physically broaching the (false) separation between these two social spaces, Mayer and Bustamante open their homes onto the spaces of protest, politics, and institutional critique. As such, they reconfigure the “home” as a space for political intervention, a critical juncture that allowed them to employ the same strategies that mobilized thousands of women during the feminist movement in Mexico in 1980s and ultimately produce more contemporary social relations of both reproduction and production.

PGN’s counterpart in this study, Daniela Rossell, similarly utilizes the space of the home as the conceptual and visual foundation of her work. *Ricas y famosas* ([*Rich and Famous*] 1998-2002) is a photographic series created by Rossell that showcases the opulent settings of some of the most lavishly decorated private homes in Mexico City, as well as the elite occupants who dwell therein, the vast majority of whom are women. These photographs offer a rare view into the homes and lives of Rossell’s subjects, who pose in bold and often sexualized ways alongside arrays of luxury items that are no less

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<sup>279</sup> Even Mayer’s individual works before she joined Bustamante illustrated a concern with the social relations of gendered space: *El Tendadero* (*The Clothesline*, of 1978) dealt with the individual experiences of women. For this piece, she distributed small pink cards printed with the phrase “As a woman, what I dislike the most about the city is.” She then recollected the cards and hung them on clotheslines strung on a pink framework, which was displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City. According to Mayer, many women visiting the exhibition also added their own experiences to the cards, writing on the backs of the cards. Many of the cards revealed the daily discomfort of being harassed and objectified by men on the masculinized streets of the capital.

provocative in their sheer materiality and often the servants who work to maintain these extravagant environments. On their surface, the photographs seem to resemble the glossy spreads found in international fashion magazines. These displays, however, are constructed in such a way that they work as deeper investigations into the nature of female representation, attempting an ironic commentary on the visual “eye candy” in which it revels. The image of the “home” presented by *Ricas y famosas* defies the stereotypical expectations of the private sphere, and its elite female inhabitants, as nurturing and maternal. In doing so, Rossell offers a version of the home that does not necessarily align with the prescribed “social relations of reproduction.” To accomplish this, Rossell creates a spatial dissonance between the space of the home and the bodies that inhabit it. As it is the bodies that defy traditional “private” actions, *Ricas y famosas* depends upon an established feminine-identified space, which is constructed throughout her photographic series.

Taken over a seven-year period, from 1994 to 2001, *Ricas y Famosas* consists of eighty-nine photographs of mostly interior shots of elaborate and richly decorated houses and the women and men who own them, their friends, their children, and members of their domestic staff (Figure 47, a typical example). *Ricas y Famosas* revolves around the space of the home, which, throughout the series, acts as a central subject. Despite the variety of people, poses, clothing, possessions, and architecture represented in the series, the common thread that binds the photographs together is the situation of their sitters either within or on the grounds of a private dwelling space. The images capture a feast of colors, textures, fabrics, and subjects who occupy fantastically ornate domestic spaces. The photographs clearly embrace visions of wealth and status, displaying an unabashed

representation of opulent surroundings and sheer abundance of material wealth evident in nearly all of the images. In doing so, Rossell sets the stage for an investigation of the feminized domestic space by putting the home and its contents/occupants on display. The artist stated that the project's sole mission was to document "the objects that this particular group of people decide to bring into their homes, the personal environment they inhabit and the style they choose to identify with."<sup>280</sup> However, to my mind, a further objective of the series was to construct a visual identification, achieved through compositional arrangement, between the objects found in the homes, the style of the décor, and the specifically *female* inhabitants as they relate to their surroundings.

For instance, in Figure 48, Mexican actress Itatí Cantoral sits alone at a long empty dining room table. A replica of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* hangs on the wall behind her, while a candelabra with five long red tapers burns, and a solitary tear runs down her face, highlighted by the photographer's flash. As befits the melodramatic style of *telenovela* acting, both the photographer and the subject appear to knowingly parody her apparent sadness. Yet her exaggerated melodrama contrasts almost humorously with the large plastic sheeting that covers the floor of the room. The rippling of the plastic sheet created by the indentation of the legs of the table and chairs creates a wave-like effect that almost suggests a pool of water. One wonders if this plastic permanently protects a valuable carpet or whether it was placed there by the artist. In either case, it adds to the melodrama performed by the subject who sits at an empty table, seemingly surrounded by a sea of her own tears.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Daniela Rossell, *Ricas Y Famosas* (Madrid: Turner Publications, 2002), n.p.

<sup>281</sup> This scene with Cantoral could almost be a play on the title of another popular telenovela, *Los Ricos También Lloran* (*The Rich Cry Too*). Although Cantoral did not star in this program, another well-known



This photograph offers an interesting commentary on the ways in which women have traditionally been identified with the space of the home. The scene takes place within a dining room, a space that often involves eating as a communal, family activity. Historical understandings of women's domestic tasks would locate the preparation and serving of meals as a feminine duty to her husband and children, as she is tasked with their well-being in the home. Cantoral is dressed in a long, pure white gown that plays off of the Christian reference that hangs behind her. Seated meekly at a demonstrably empty table, she is the virginal (almost bridal), sacred, self-sacrificing mother gazing wistfully to the side, presumably lamenting a loss of her familial responsibilities. Her mourning, however, is interrupted by her obvious sensuality, the exaggerated melodrama of the lone tear, and the baroque artifice of the décor, not to mention the plastic sheet upon which the entire scene rests. This is a tableau that parodies its own sense of drama, satirizing the authenticity of the feminine qualities suggested by the space.

This interaction between the performance of the sitters and their decorative settings is integral in revealing the home as a contrived feminized space. A number of images contain portraits of the subjects themselves, which forms a juxtaposition between the sitters and representations of those same sitters: sharing the same domestic space, the sitters are often posed in ways to recall their previous likeness. This picture-within-a-picture technique constitutes a loose form of what Jennifer González and Adrienne

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female telenovela star, Verónica Castoral who also lives in a Mexico City mansion where "her living is jammed with chests from India, ceramics from Czechoslovakia, an enormous stuffed tiger, a stuffed leopard, a bearskin rug, sofas with towering backrests shaped like seashells, and bronze statues of Neptune and Arabs with sabers and upturned shoes, like something out of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*," Sam Quinones, *True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 65.

Posner refer to as “recursion,” a type of visual repetition.<sup>282</sup> According to the authors, a critically recursive image is one that employs “a simulation or parody of hegemonic signs that produces new signs to stand in their place and usurp their positions of power.”<sup>283</sup>

Figures 49 and 50 each contain a recursive image, in which the primary subject is posed in front of his or her own portrait. Figure 49 recreates her portrait by donning a one-shoulder gown and allowing the sofa on which she sits, with one knee elevated, and the pillows that surround her to cradle her as the shell does in the painting behind her. Her appearance also recalls the second portrait of the sitter that appears in the hallway to her left, which focuses on the strong features of her face and whose touches of red are echoed in the subject’s dress, the only pops of color in an otherwise neutral room. Figure 50 shows a subject lounging on the floor next to a stuffed leopard, wearing a sleeveless black gown with her legs bent to one side. In the center of the composition, reflected in a large mirror, hangs a portrait of the sitter in a white gown, her legs curled to the opposite side, leaning on a piece of furniture carved in the shape of a feline animal. These mirrored images are representative of many in the series that likewise offer multiplied images of their sitters—representations within representations.

The lines between the recursive subjects are even furthered blurred in examples that use architectural or decorative features in the settings to frame the sitters, such as in Figures 51 and 52. In Figure 52, one views the sitter through the framing mechanism of a mirror. She is seen in reflection, distanced from the photographic capture of her likeness. The mirror in which she can be seen hangs below a painting of her. In this composition,

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<sup>282</sup> Jennifer González and Adrienne Posner, “Fracture for Change: U.S. Activist Art since 1950,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 225.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

the subject competes with her own image as subject matter, as it is the painting that becomes most readily seen; the sitter as seen in the mirror appears secondary to her representation. This slippage between recursions also occurs in the two elaborate harem scenes that occur towards the end of the book (Figures 53 and 54). In these images, which recall the Orientalist harem scenes and Odalisques of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a group of women and then a single woman lounge on patio couches, swathed in colorful fabrics. Placed before a backdrop of a painted harem interior with similarly dressed figures, the saturated colors and glossy appearance of the photographs create an illusion in which, at least at first, it is somewhat difficult to distinguish illusion from “reality” as they seem to merge into one painted/photographed representation. The technique of using recursive images allows the space of the home to subsume its female occupants. Recursion permits one sign to replace another, usurping its power. However, in Rossell’s photographs there is no indication of which image is the usurpation, the primary subject. Instead, the two representations, the sitters and the portraits, compete with one another, demoting the actual beings to an objectified status within the home.

A visual likeness between subjects and other non-art objects is apparent in many of the singular images. This occurs in the second image of Cantorel (Figure 55), when she is posed in a white dress beneath a white, marble, Venus-like statue. The tendency of the subjects to adopt the appearance of objects can also be seen in Figure 56 as the sitter takes on the stiff, bow-legged posture of the non-jointed male doll to her right while she also adopts the blank, glassy-eyed non-expression of the two female dolls on either end of the settee. Figure 57 shows a fur-clad woman dressed all in white, with long, curly white-blonde hair in a room full of stuffed game animals. She leans back seductively and

grabs her own breast, displaying an exaggerated pose of animalistic desire. In images like these, as with the portrait examples, Rossell draws a comparison between her own collaborative subjects and representational objects in their surroundings. She declares this outright: stating that her subjects are “part of the decoration, like the delicate ostrich eggs in a bowl or the rare African artifacts. Their clothes are an extension of the architectural décor; they just continue like wallpaper.”<sup>284</sup> Again, in these instances, the so-called subjects, or sitters are assimilated into the space of the home, which becomes the actual subject of the series.

The artist objectifies the sitters, turning them into yet another decorative object that occupies these ornate spaces, an objectification that is further served by the performances of the subjects themselves. The contrast between the subjects and the objects that are placed around them and with which they interact is also emphasized by the exaggerated poses and parody-like arrangement of the interiors. In doing so, Rossell draws the viewer’s attention to the act of representation, which highlights the performative aspects of her sitters’ attitudes and appearances, and the constructed nature of the series itself. Given the elaborateness of the photos’ careful staging, it is surprising that “even the most astute commentators appear to forget that what Rossell sets before us is not women but objects, images of women acting as images, as something else, in order to become (they imagine) more fully themselves.”<sup>285</sup>

It is the deliberate play between subject and object that, according to Anny Brooksbank Jones, allows the sitters to use the act of collaborating with Rossell as an

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<sup>284</sup> Rainald Schumacher and Matthias Winzen, *Just Love Me: Post/Feminist Positions of the 1990s from the Goetz Collection* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2003), 148.

<sup>285</sup> Anny Brooksbank Jones, "Photographing the Habitats of Objects," *Romance Studies* 22, no. 3 (2004): 231.

opportunity to construct their own subjectivities. Analyzing the series with regard to what she refers to as the logic of “serial objectification,” she states:

This logic presents women widely perceived as trophies, ‘barraganas,’ the wards or consorts of powerful men, as they manipulate and define themselves through other objects, and objectify other subjects, in an attempt to realize themselves fully as subjects.<sup>286</sup>

Thus, in *Ricas y Famosas*, as collaborators who played an active role in the construction of such elaborate visual fantasies, the sitters were offered an opportunity to reconstitute themselves as subjects through the ironic objectification of their bodies. However, the supposed subjectivity offered to them, or constructed by them, in the project only reinscribed the objectified status of the female sitters, a point which was often noted by critics of the series. The female sitters are denied subjectivity as they are (visually) made to be part of the house and its belongings. This, in many ways, demonstrates how the home functions more as a fixed symbol in ideological discourse that reinscribes gender ideals and less of a real space in which women (and men) act. By likening her female sitters to the decorative objects, Rossell visualizes how hegemonic rhetoric similarly equates women as objects that signify the home, and not as subjects.

The objectification of Rossell’s female subjects, and their apparent rightful situation within the house, is emphasized by a comparison to the six images in the series that prominently feature solitary male figures.<sup>287</sup> Treated as a sub-group of the series, each photograph of a male sitter contains visual exceptions that prohibits its masculine subject from being fully incorporated into the feminized space of the home. Figures 58 and 59 are portraits that depict Emiliano Salinas, son of President Carlos Salinas de

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> There is a seventh image that contains only a male figure, but it is an exterior view of a house and the subject is barely visible only through an upper-floor window.

Gortari (1988-1994), photographed once standing outside his familial home and once inside it. In the exterior image, he is positioned at the very center of the composition, surrounded by the twisted, knotted limbs of the tree on whose trunk he stands. A house is seen behind him through the branches. However, because the brown brick and stone of the house are similar in color to the natural surroundings in the foreground, the domestic space is diminished by the exterior landscape that dominates the composition, with Salinas at its center. While this is not the only image in the series that makes use of exterior space (others include balconies, rooftops, and driveways), it is the only photograph that hinges on a prominent natural (outside) feature to visually divorce the subject from the home. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the tree that separates Salinas from the home is one that can be interpreted as a symbol of a complex familial lineage.

The interior shot that features Salinas also places him in a central position, head bowed slightly, hands clasped together around a rosary as if in prayer. He stands in front of a large bay window affixed with a stained glass Mexican flag. It is unclear from the photograph whether the flag is actually a physical part of the stained glass or whether it has been digitally inserted by the artist. Regardless, the impact of the photograph is clear as Salinas is posed with totems of *Mexicanidad*. Most striking about this image, however, is the emptiness of the room in which Salinas stands, a characteristic that distinguishes it from the object-laden interiors that dominate the series. Just as the room appears emptied of its possessions, Salinas himself is not fully present either. By employing a double-exposure technique that overlays two different photos of Salinas, the artist has captured the subject as a transitory, ghost-like inhabitant, not fully materialized within the interior space of the house. Salinas' representation in this photograph distinguishes it from the

others in the series and suggests a difference in the ways in which the home constructs masculinity. As the only element within this space, Salinas is not objectified like his female counterparts; instead, the multi-perspective and immaterial nature of his portrait dominates the scene, offering him a subjective complexity not presented by the female sitters. The photograph suggests that Salinas' subjectivity is not anchored in the space of the home, but that it is just one of the spaces through which he is constituted.

The other three adult male portraits, I would argue, similarly distance their subjects from fully identifying with the interior space of the home, reinscribing the feminine character of the space.<sup>288</sup> Figure 60 features Alinur Velidedeoğlu, a prominent Turkish advertising executive, who stands in a modern room with panels of brushed steel covering the walls and a ceiling that appears to be decorated with enlarged newspaper clips that tout his business acumen.<sup>289</sup> Headlines read, "Velidedeoğlu's new plans to make money out of dirt"; "NBC declares Velideoğlu as one of the 17 most successful businessmen in Europe"; and "Velidedeoğlu is looking for a digital wife." The most revealing headline, however, is "Velidedeoğlu directs the decoration of his homes just as he would a commercial, The Sunday Times reports." This headline, which directly addresses Velidedeoğlu's home, makes it clear that even in a domestic space, Velideoğlu operates as an executive, treating his private space no differently than his public workspace. Unlike in the images discussed above wherein the repetition of recursive images call into question the subjectivity of the female sitters, in this male space, there is

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<sup>288</sup> The sixth image of a male sitter shows a teenage boy lounging on a bed in a three-piece suit, licking a cigar. Like Salinas and Velidedeoğlu, he is dressed professionally. However, his round, youthful face and his bare feet give him the appearance of a boy only playing at adult masculinity.

<sup>289</sup> The appearance of the ceiling in this image is also somewhat ambiguous, leaving the viewer to wonder if the photographic ceiling has been manipulated to include the newspaper text. Lighting and shadows on the ceiling seem consistent with the lighting in the room, but could also be an artificial creation by the artist.

no confusion as to who or what is pictured here. The decorative surroundings do not compete with the subject, nor do they objectify him; rather, they reference and develop him into a more complete character.

Figures 61 and 62 are the final two male portraits of the series, each containing visual signs that disrupt an association between a masculine subject and the interior space of the home. Figure 61 includes the second and only other ghost-like, trace of a portrait. Here a man is shown dressed only in black underwear, a belt, and leather boots. His head back and his hands outspread, he is depicted as if falling back on, or rising from, the sumptuous, satin-covered bed behind him, the visual ambiguity again portraying a certain amount of male mobility within the space of the home. Figure 62 also shows a man on a bed, beneath a wall of crucifixes, his arms outstretched and his head thrown back in an approximation of the crucified bodies behind him. His right hand is flexed to show off long, painted and manicured fingernails. These two male portraits stand apart from the other four in several ways. First, they are distinguished by their dress, which separates them from the elite, upper-class, public realm suggested by the clothing of their counterparts. Figure 61's state of undress places him squarely within private-realm activity, and Figure 62 is dressed in a basic white T-shirt and ragged overalls, clothing that symbolizes working-class status and sympathies.<sup>290</sup> Secondly, they are both pictures in bedrooms, unlike the other images of men. Finally, they are also distinguished by their references to sexuality and objectification, and Alberto McKelligan has argued that they might even be identified by their references to sadomasochistic photography and drag,

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<sup>290</sup> The overalls' political and class implications were commonly exploited by muralist Diego Rivera in a number of his murals, both in Mexico and the U.S.



respectively.<sup>291</sup> I argue that these two photographs are visually likened to the female portraits in the series through the objectification, and thus feminization, of the male subjects. This argument, to my mind, is supported by the fact that in the book, these two portraits are the only male portraits to occupy two-page spreads, a visual presentation that is much more commonly used in the female portraits. The four “masculine” images above each occupy one single folio page, preceded by a blank, white verso. In doing so, Rossell has demoted the significance of the male portraits, placing them as secondary to the female portraits that outnumber them. The male portraits appear to be utilized only as foils, or oppositional counterparts, to the female portraits.

In identifying its female subjects with objects inhabiting interior space and distancing its male participants from that same space, *Ricas y Famosas* identifies the backdrop of the series as a domestic, feminine domain, a presentation that seems to uphold the traditionally gendered private-public dichotomy. Unlike PGN, who seek to expand the discursive understanding of the home, Rossell achieves the opposite, a collapsing of the space to re-indicate its “feminine” nature. Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell start with two divergent symbolic representations of the social space of the home; yet they work towards similar feminist goals of disrupting prevailing stereotypes and ultimately producing altered social relations, objectives that are borne out through their incorporation of Mexican feminisms.

## **II. Feminism on the Ground Floor**

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<sup>291</sup> Alberto McKelligan, "Daniela Rossell's Male and Female Portraits in the *Ricas Y Famosas* Series as Camp" (M.A., University of Texas Austin, 2005), 36, 51.

PGN and Rossell each begin their art projects by reconceptualizing the space of the home. The objectives for the artists are to, ultimately, re-produce the space from a feminist perspective in such a way as to disrupt the prevailing social relations produced therein that have historically isolated a feminine sphere from a so-called masculine, public sphere. In seeking to undermine this spatially-inscribed gender binary, the artists' works are also able to challenge representations of women that similarly follow from this dichotomy. Thus, their spatial perspectives allow both PGN and Rossell to reconfigure feminine archetypes as they relate to the space of the home. As their approaches to the space of the home take divergent paths, the ways in which the artists explore the roles of women who inhabit their spatial constructs is also very different. A comparison between the two art projects is instructive because it illuminates the ways in which women in Mexico have been culturally subject to dichotomous public models of feminine identity as well as how feminist artists attempt to redefine those strictures. As Yuval-Davis described the roles played by women in nation-building projects (see chapter 1), two of the three roles are spatially localized within the home: women as biological and cultural reproducers, responsible for the production and raising of "national citizens." By re-populating their "home" spaces with alternative archetypes, Mayer and Bustamante, and Rossell each call into question the models of the appropriate "woman of the house," a task of national importance.

By choosing impregnation as an act of feminist intervention, Mayer and Bustamante take on the role that serves as the most profound social influence on perceptions and prescriptions of women in Mexico: motherhood. PGN projects such as *Mother for a Day* challenged the monolithic archetype of the mother in Mexico by

offering representations of motherhood that could be critical without being entirely derisive, a strategy that aligned them with maternalist feminisms common throughout Latin America. The discussion of their own personal experiences (and at times, the incorporation of their own children into their performances, Figure 63) illustrated that motherhood was not something they sought to reject. At the same time, the use of the Bad Mother puppet allowed them to parody social expectations of maternal actions. Thus, while embracing and exploring the themes and roles of motherhood, the artists were able to express their frustration with pervasive essentialist notions that maternity lay at the core of womanhood.

In their introduction to *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*, authors Victoria Gonzalez and Karen Kampwirth identify maternalism as one of the main recurrent themes in discourses on women in Latin America. Employed by women in Argentina, El Salvador, Chile, Uruguay, and Nicaragua since the nineteenth century, maternalism is a form of strategic essentialism whereby feminists embrace motherhood in order to protest and fight for civil rights that enable them to better fulfill their roles as women, the most well-known example being the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.<sup>292</sup> Gonzalez and Kampwirth acknowledge the inherent problems of this stance, as motherhood is used to limit the social and political roles of women. Nevertheless, maternalism, defined as “the use of motherhood to justify political activism,” has a strong history in many Latin American countries, and the theme of motherhood is one that permeates feminist discourse and problematizes the nature of

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<sup>292</sup> Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991), 74, quoted in Victoria Gonzalez and Karen Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 23.

female identity in Mexico, an identity which is too often reduced to the mythic dichotomy between the virginal Guadalupe, a sacred vessel, and the traitorous Malinche, the translator and companion of conqueror Hernán Cortes, both symbolic mothers of the Mexican nation.<sup>293</sup>

PGN offered an alternative mother, one who was neither sacred and transcendental, nor depraved and incomplete. Theirs was a symbolic mother who could be mocking of herself, varied, and even divorced from a passive female body that served only as a vessel of motherhood. PGN drew upon the element of carnival and the “genres of laughter” to present themselves as what Kathleen Rowe refers to as “unruly women,” who deliberately turn to humor and laughter to “help loosen the bitter hold of... social and cultural structures.”<sup>294</sup> The response to the televised performance was varied, as viewers expressed both amusement and outrage. *Mother for a Day* nevertheless did leave a lasting impression on many, and helped to ‘loosen up’ at least one viewer who phoned Televisa nine months later to inquire as to whether Ochoa had had a boy or a girl.

In this and other performances, Maris and Bustamante employed the prosthetic apron belly as a tool of their own agency, ‘impregnating’ via a symbolic prop. They transferred it amongst themselves in a rally in 1991 (Figure 64), and offered it to others, both women and men, as documented in an event where they impregnated designer Luis Soto and performance artist César Martínez at the Museo de Carillo Gil (Figure 65). In the Colonia Narvarte performance, the option to impregnate oneself was left open to anyone willing to accept it (Figure 66). Mayer and Bustamante presented pregnancy, and

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 25. Gonzalez and Kampwirth, 25. For a list of sources that focus on maternalism see page 24, footnote 36.

<sup>294</sup> Kathleen Rowe, *Unruly Women: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 3.

thus motherhood, as something that could be put on and subsequently taken off again. This notion of pregnancy as a masquerade was underscored by the fact that during the Televisa broadcast and later performances, Bustamante was visibly biologically pregnant, though she continued to wear the prosthetic belly.<sup>295</sup> The new space they created allowed the artists to conceive as themselves, as mothers, as agents, rather than as cultural or national symbols. By impregnating Ochoa, they became the active subjects in the talk show's gender dynamic. They physically changed the appearance of his body and it is to Mayer and Bustamante's knowledge and experience that Ochoa had to submit as they instructed him how to awkwardly sit in his chair, where to comfortably place his hands, and how to respond to his new corporeal state (Figures 67-69). In addition to the kit of maternal objects, Mayer also, at the end of the segment, awarded Ochoa with a diploma of maternity, as he had passed their tests and graduated an honorary mother for a day and queen of the home (Figure 70).

The notion of pregnancy as both masquerade and empowerment also bridged the gap that existed between feminist artists and feminist social movements, which had limited interaction in Mexico in the 1980s. Artists were not always supported by their fellow activists, and according to Mayer, who was a member of many feminist social organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, the visual arts were not discussed in meetings because art was viewed as "bourgeois" and "frivolous."<sup>296</sup> A work like *Mother for a Day*, however, could be interpreted as a visual expression of the same central platform of

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<sup>295</sup> Building upon Mary Anne Doane's discussions of masquerade, Mary Russo stated that for a woman to "act like a woman" is "the critical and hopeful power of the masquerade...For a woman, a...flaunting of the feminine is a take-it-and-leave-it possibility. To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off." Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 331.

<sup>296</sup> McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence:Feminist Artists in Mexico," 55.

issues being lobbied for by political women's groups: namely, access to birth control, abortion, and support for working mothers, issues gathered together under the general title of "Voluntary Motherhood."<sup>297</sup> Feminist scholar Marta Lamas identifies Voluntary Motherhood as the central organizing platform of the Mexican feminist groups that made up the Feminist Women's Coalition, a public campaign that was hard-fought throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The stated objectives of Voluntary Motherhood emphasized: "sex education specifically developed for different age groups and social sectors, reliable and inexpensive contraceptives, abortion as a last resort, and rejection of forced sterilization."<sup>298</sup> However, as Lamas explains, this discourse, in public opinion, was often reduced to an oversimplified debate concerning abortion that was frequently posed as the misleading question "Are you for life or against life?," a line of inquiry that sidesteps the issue of choice.<sup>299</sup> She describes how feminists, dismayed at the ways in which their objectives were being misrepresented, sought, at the beginning of the 1990s, to steer public discourse toward a more nuanced understanding of Voluntary Motherhood that more rightly focused on the *decisions* surrounding sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>300</sup> In this context, the masquerade of a transferable and non-compulsory pregnancy, as performed by PGN in *Mother for a Day*, is seen as a visual play on words, with a humorous, yet critical undercurrent that operates within a paradigm predicated on maternal choice and a more democratic position of women in Mexican society.

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<sup>297</sup> Marta Lamas, "The Feminist Movement and the Development of Political Discourse on Voluntary Motherhood," *Reproductive Health Matters* 5, no. 10 (1997): 58-67.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*: 58.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*: 60.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*: 61.

*Mother for a Day* also creates inroads into cooperative efforts between the visual arts and social feminism in that it makes use of a popular media format in order to reach a wider audience. Unlike the feminist movements of the decades that came both before and after, Mexican feminism in the 1980s is often characterized as “popular feminism,” a term that distinguishes it from what is sometimes viewed as the middle and upper-class academic feminism of the 70s and the professionalized, NGO-affiliated feminism of the 1990s.<sup>301</sup> Popular feminism focused on meeting the practical needs of women from various social classes, both urban and rural, instead of lobbying for formal political participation or theorizing the role of women in society. In the 1980s, precipitated by economic downturn after 1982, the influx of women into the workforce, and the devastation of the 1985 earthquake, feminists in Mexico set out to cross class boundaries, with the intent to reach and offer aid to a wider range of women and to lobby for more democratic social rights.<sup>302</sup> Women who, before 1985, were unlikely to join the feminist movement found that “popular organization after the 1985 earthquake did become a viable means of social and political participation.”<sup>303</sup> In a mobilization that aligns with the nature of maternalist feminism, women’s political participation during the 1980s often stemmed from their gender roles and the role they played in the space of the home.

Feminist scholar Maxine Molyneux, who laid out the theoretical groundwork for women’s organized protest in Latin America, suggested that women in the 1980s often

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<sup>301</sup> Martha Zapata Galindo, "Feminist Movements in Mexico: From Consciousness-Raising Groups to Transnational Networks," in *Feminist Philosophy in Latin America and Spain*, ed. Maria Luisa Femenias and Amy A. Oliver (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 4.

<sup>302</sup> Stephen, "Rural Women's Activism," 251.

<sup>303</sup> Lamas, "The Feminist Movement and the Development of Political Discourse on Voluntary Motherhood," 59.

organized on behalf of “practical gender interests.”<sup>304</sup> These interests included the basic needs of families, such as water, food, and childcare, welfare concerns that were directly related to the maintenance of a healthy home and the fulfillment of their roles as biological and cultural reproducers. As Nikki Craske, Vivienne Bennet, Paul Lawrence Haber each point out, practical gender interests largely precipitated women’s active membership in protest groups and neighborhood associations (*colonias*) that advocated for civic improvements and public welfare initiatives that were being ignored or dismissed by the state.<sup>305</sup> Immediate needs often governed feminist organization, which meant that these women were less concerned with the institutional ways in which gender roles and social power relations were constructed. This is not to say that their social mobilization on behalf of “everyday struggles” did not lead to what Molyneux calls “strategic gender interests,” which stem from an interest in larger social and cultural changes. As Bennett has stated, “women participate in protest or popular movements for practical gender interests, but their participation leads to an awareness of their strategic gender interests” because such radical everyday practices reconfigure “feminine space”

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<sup>304</sup> Molyneux outlined the related notions of “women’s interests,” “strategic gender interests,” and “practical gender interests” as the three distinct justifications for women’s political organization, each based on different appropriations of gender roles. Her framework has been employed as an exemplary account of characterizing women’s protest participation in Latin America. Maxine Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua,” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227-54. See also Vivienne Bennet, “Everyday Struggles: Women in Urban Popular Movements and Territorially Based Protests in Mexico,” in *Women’s Participation in Mexican Political Life*, ed. Victoria E. Rodríguez (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 116-30.

<sup>305</sup> Nikki Craske, “Women’s Political Participation in *Colonias Populares* in Guadalajara, Mexico,” in *Viva!: Women and Popular Protest in Latin America*, ed. Sarah A. Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (1993), 112-35; Craske, “Women and Regime Politics in Guadalajara’s Low-Income Neighborhoods,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13, no. 1 (1994): 61-78; Bennet, “Everyday Struggles: Women in Urban Popular Movements and Territorially Based Protests in Mexico,” 118-19; Paul Lawrence Haber, *Power from Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 130-34.



outside of the home proper.<sup>306</sup> As PGN alluded to an expanded notion of “home” in their appearance on *Nuestro Mundo* and their “home” space surpassed the actual, physical boundaries of a “private” house, so too is the model of feminist social relations expanded to include a home-based public dimension of protest that problematizes the fallacy of separate gendered spheres. In protests such as the ones discussed above, the home becomes the very reason behind the protest, for female presence on the streets.

As previously mentioned, the expanded understanding of the home that is presented by PGN stands in direct contrast to the contracted version of the home that is visualized by Rossell’s *Ricas y famosas* series. Rather than extending women’s roles outward from a domestic space, Rossell turns her photographic lens inward, examining the home as it serves as a microcosm for social gender relations produced by the Mexican state. Like PGN, Rossell also addresses an archetypal representation of Mexican women. However, just as their notions of “home” are divergent, Rossell’s series features a number of subjects who embody a very bold and emblazoned sexuality, an attitude that, according to traditional constructions of gender, is upheld against “feminine” ideals. Rossell visualizes the space of the home as one that is more socially limited to the upper echelons of Mexican society, but no less essentializing in the way that it characterizes Mexican women. In her photographs, the home functions in a more literal sense as a richly elaborate backdrop for an array of material objects, its female inhabitants included. Here, in *Ricas y famosas*, the inherent “maternalism” and abnegation of her subjects normally invoked by a domestic space has been replaced by overt displays of sexuality,

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<sup>306</sup> Bennet, "Everyday Struggles: Women in Urban Popular Movements and Territorially Based Protests in Mexico," 117.

luxury, and defiance.<sup>307</sup> These displays constitute an assault on the numerous feminine archetypes that inhabit the respectable space of the home: the housewife, the mother, and especially, the *mujer abnegada*. The *mujer abnegada* is a salient trope in Mexico that characterizes “good” women as self-sacrificing, self-denying martyrs for their families and husbands. According to Jocelyn Olcott, it was a trope that, like motherhood, “undeniably informed the ways that ordinary Mexican women constituted themselves as political subjects, simultaneously elevating and subjugating them.”<sup>308</sup> Abnegation, like maternalism, was also a tactic of strategic essentialism. However, Rossell parodies this model by her extravagant displays of riches, both material and bodily. She replaces the domestic female archetype with one more closely associated with “the streets”: one that is young, single, sexualized, and bold.<sup>309</sup> By replacing one trope with another, she moves these female objects around the house as easily as she does the other decorative articles that surround them. In doing so, she exposes an artificiality that unsettles understandings of both women and the home.

One of the most well-known and commonly reproduced photograph from the series shows a young, blonde woman outfitted for tennis standing next to a black-and-gold lacquered credenza (Figure 71). Looking somewhat seductively and coyly towards

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<sup>307</sup> Here, “maternalism” refers to the social expectations of maternity that accompany traditional understandings of femininity, rather than the feminist strategy discussed above.

<sup>308</sup> Olcott, *Revolutionary Women* 16. For a fuller discussion of the *mujer abnegada*, see pages 15-17.

<sup>309</sup> Adriana Zavala, in her discussion of early modern female archetypes identifies one of the competing images of the domestic woman as the “woman liberated from the confines of domestic space,” a “woman/mistress consumed by sexual passion and the desire to please men.” Similarly, William French argues that such a boldly sexualized characterization of women has been used to reinforce the necessity for adherence to feminine ideals. He states that “Mexicans have always utilized gender and morality to delineate class boundaries and separate themselves from others,” and the female prostitute was one of the strongest symbols of moral warning. As such, she represents perhaps the opposite of the “good woman,” an intertwined relationship that Zavala argues was essential to the construction of ideal femininity, i.e., this is what a good woman is, this is what a good woman is not. See Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 98; and William French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1992): 529.

the camera, she is standing in a room filled with oversized ornately-carved furniture, as she props one foot on the head of a stuffed lion. One shoulder is bared by a yellow shirt that reads "Peep Show \$1.00," and her pose offers a view up her tennis skirt to reveal the hidden shorts below. She is, in this case, surrounded by furniture and objects that would read as items of luxury: the furniture, the stuffed game animal, gold and crystal vases, a gold and silver rooster, and commissioned portraits of her mother, her sister, and herself. However, as with many of the other photographs, the cheekiness of the composition is also apparent. Standing in front of her own fresh-faced portrait, she leans her head and looks upward in a similar fashion. However, the figure greatly exaggerates her pose as if to parody her own portrait. This sense of parody is also seen throughout the room as the golden accents of the furniture and accessories contrast with the golden hue of her t-shirt that touts its own cheapness. The peep-show itself is parodied in the way that both the subject, in her posing, and Rossell, in her choice of framing, suggest sexual exhibition. At first glance, the skimpy clothing and raised leg of Rossell's model do suggest her own overt sexuality. The angle at which she holds the tennis racquet handle is also suggestive, holding it net-down with her fingers wrapped around the handle shaft. The stuffed lion is positioned in such a way as to be afforded a view directly up her skirt. However, closer examination reveals more ambiguous signs of sexuality. The viewer can see that the subject is entirely outfitted for sport, including wrist sweatbands and an ace bandage wrapped around her right knee, and the lion's show, as well as the viewer's, is directly impeded by her tennis shorts. The subject is additionally shielded from the viewer by the tennis racquet itself, which creates a kind of screen. This contrasts with the fact that the lion is fully exposed to the viewer as he is positioned in a way that literally foregrounds

his masculine assets. Coupled with the golden cock sitting on the table to the right of the composition, Rossell then presents to her viewers an arrangement of ambiguous sexual symbols and a subtle humor at play in this domestic environment. The sexually-charged atmosphere of the scene is unmistakable in the confident pose, defying gaze, and suggestive clothing of the subject as she stands in a room literally flanked by a cock and balls.

To compare this representation of femininity to that embodied by PGN's *Mother for a Day* is a study in contrasts and, in many ways, mirrors a reductive dichotomy of female stereotypes that has plagued Latin American women throughout the modern era, but which has been especially salient in Mexico. The problematic female identity in Latin America was captured in 1973 by Evelyn Stevens in her so-called analysis of *Marianismo*, which she defined as "the cult of feminine superiority," a ubiquitous stereotype that situates women as "semidivine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men," and as patient, submissive, complacent, reincarnations of the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>310</sup> Pervasive across social class and position, Stevens allowed that the image of *Marianismo* was not adopted by all women, but nevertheless it continues to serve as an image that "dominates the television and cinema screens, the radio programs, and the popular literature, as well as the oral tradition of the whole cultural area."<sup>311</sup> Opposite this Madonna, not unsurprisingly, was situated the whore, who shuns moral purity and sacred motherhood for her own sexual freedom. Far too simplistic in its analysis of a paradigm that actually structures the identity of women in Mexico, this

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<sup>310</sup> Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc. , 1994), 4-9.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

essay nevertheless repeats a dichotomous trope that posits woman at either end of a long spectrum organized by a woman's relation to maternity. This theory rehearses the well-worn juxtaposition of Guadalupe with Malinche, as the two seemingly opposite poles of feminine and maternal worth.

As Marit Melhuus pointed out, Stevens' depiction of "these stereotypes—although they are vivid in people's minds—are no more than stereotypes."<sup>312</sup> Melhuus provides a much more sophisticated and effective discussion of the construction of gender in Latin America, and in Mexico more specifically, by examining certain representations or "myths" of gender in order to analyze them as a dominant discourse that informs both femininity and masculinity. She takes *machismo*, and subsequently *Marianismo*, as one of these myths, but, rather than expounding upon the so-called natural and universal gender differences between them, discusses the ways in which the discourse of *Marianismo* is constituted by and with regards to *machismo*. As such, *Marianismo* is reliant upon it and only to be understood as it relates to definitions of masculinity. As Melhuus points out, *Marianismo*, as a secondary concept, is much more decisive in its judgments:

Whereas women appear to be classified discretely, as either decent or not decent, men are classified along a continuum, in positions relative to each other, as either more or less a man. Hence masculinity can be—and is—continually contested. Femininity (in women) seems to be a non-issue: it is, rather, the moral character of each woman which is at stake.<sup>313</sup>

This exploration of femininity then, serves only to define masculinity as a woman's perceived virtue either bolsters a man's reputation and apparent masculinity, or by

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<sup>312</sup> Marit Melhuus, "Power, Value and the Ambiguous Meanings of Gender," in *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery*, ed. Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stølen (London: Verso, 1996), 240-1.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

contrast, a woman's lack of virtue threatens the men who come into illicit contact with her.<sup>314</sup> Likewise, "ascriptions of feminine attributes are often used to denote the unmanly male," used to connote homosexuality or cast doubt on his virility. Additionally,

Attacks on a man's masculinity may also be conveyed by throwing doubt on the virtue of his female kin (in particular his mother) or pointing to his inability to provide. All such insinuations subtract from a man's manliness and can be apprehended as a challenge to his respect, and ultimately his honor.<sup>315</sup>

Each of these determinations, however, depends upon the image of a woman or the invocation of the "feminine." It is her behavior that is monitored and judged, her femininity contingent upon her "daily conduct, in particular in what she refrains from doing—casual visiting, loitering and gossiping are all considered negative—and through what she is expected to do: preparing meals, doing housework, and taking care of the children."<sup>316</sup> It would seem that, within this framework, where her behavior is subject to careful scrutiny and viewed dichotomously, it is the woman who truly makes, and maintains, social gender roles. And just as PGN highlighted the national importance of maternal femininity in their conflation of motherhood and social protest, Rossell similarly examines the political ramifications of deviating from ideal femininity grounded conceptually in maternity and spatially in the home.

Rossell achieves this by directly implicating the state mechanism through references to the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, that are found in the content of the homes and also through the identity of several of her models. Although Rossell did not label her portraits with the individual identities of her sitters, many of them were identified by the media and art critics. The sitters who received the most attention were

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 245.

the young women who have familial connections to the prominent political party.<sup>317</sup> For instance, the young blonde woman featured in the above-described photograph (as well as three others in the series) was revealed to be Paulina Díaz Ordaz, whose ties to high-ranking PRI officials and their respective crimes against the nation were stressed in media descriptions of *Ricas y famosas*: Díaz Ordaz's grandfather, former President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), was responsible for the army's attack against the protesting students at Tlatelolco in 1968; and her stepfather, Raúl Salinas, (the brother of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 1988-1994) was suspected of having participated in money laundering, drug trafficking, and conspiracy to assassinate political opponents during his brother's presidential term. Governmental ties are not explicit in each of the photographs; however, the images from the series that garner the most public attention are those in which the sitters have such connections. In my opinion, the politically-tinged images contain the most potential for reproducing social relations because they visualize the home as an inherently political space.

Figure 72 is another example that explicitly features political PRI-related iconography. It depicts a young woman in a cowboy hat looking at the camera and extending her right arm to tap the ashes of a lighted cigarette with her forefinger. She sits astride a leather saddle on a wooden stand placed on top of a desk, presumably in a home

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<sup>317</sup> In 2002, the connections of the subjects to the PRI, as well as the decidedly un-feminine representation of those female sitters led to a public controversy that overshadowed, and surpassed, the critical, artistic achievements of the series. For a description of the controversy see Juan Villoro, "Ricas, Famosas, Y Excesivas," *El País Semanal*, June 9 2002, 42-50; Rubén Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47-69; Cuahtémoc Medina, "Private Worlds, Public Delusions," in *Witness to Her Art: Art and Writings by Adrian Piper, Mona Hatoum, Cady Noldan, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker, Daniela Rossell, and Eau De Cologne*, ed. Rhea Anastas and Michael Brenson (New York: The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2006), 332-3; Lorenzo Meyer, "Scandal," in *Witness to Her Art: Art and Writings by Adrian Piper, Mona Hatoum, Cady Noldan, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker, Daniela Rossell, and Eau De Cologne*, ed. Rhea Anastas and Michael Brenson (New York: The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2006), 328-30.

office space, with its double desks, fax machine, and row of books lined up in a niche above the desk. The scantily-clad woman, identified as Paulina Banuet Roviroso posing in her father's office, is situated among the many objects gathered and carefully positioned on the desk: a stuffed alligator, a ballot flier that endorses the campaign of her father, the prominent PRI politician Don Beto Banuet, a second portrait of Beto Banuet placed in front of a screenprint of Revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, and a framed photograph of an elephant's rear end. Rossell's photograph contains many of the series' most salient characteristics: a deliberate and self-conscious arrangement of the photographic field, an accumulation of objects that possess a conspicuous semiotic multivalency, and an element of performance by the subjects pictured within these arranged spaces. In this example, as in many others, these characteristics together form crafted photographs that establish a dialogue of critique.

In particular, the objects in the Banuet photograph were deliberately arranged and juxtaposed to suggest a visual dialogue with one another. Despite the artist's claim that the series represents "actual settings," and while this photograph may indeed picture an actual office within the Banuet house, it appears that some items were rearranged by either Rossell, Banuet, or both. Perhaps most obviously, for instance, the saddle and stand are quite out of place on top of the desk, and the ballot flier is balanced atop a gold star that has been laid against the leg of the saddle stand. Both the framed photograph and the portraits of Banuet and Zapata (which looks curiously like a customized computer mouse pad) are turned around to face the camera, as opposed to whoever might sit at the desk. The Banuet/Zapata portraits are also propped up in front of an obscured object on top of which is perched a bowl of fruit. The legitimacy of the office space as an "actual setting"



is further called into question when one considers these objects in relation to those placed in the background and the sitter herself. Behind Paulina Banuet, hanging on the wall, is a large, painted portrait of Zapata, whose image is repeated a third time in the bronze bust sitting on a pedestal in the left side of the composition. The many references to Zapata frame Paulina, whose demeanor could be described as “unapologetic” or even “irreverent,” given the historical and mythological status of Zapata and La Revolución, as well as the PRI, the “revolutionary” party of which her father is a member.

Banuet is seated in front of the painted Zapata portrait, in such a way as to echo the portrait of her father on the desk below. But instead of representing heroicized masculinity, she presents herself as an object of overt feminine sexuality. Banuet is dressed in revealing clothing: a sparkly blue halter top held together by thin strings that leave her entire back bare; red faux snakeskin hot pants; red high-heeled sandals. Her face is heavily made up with electric blue eye shadow and bright red lipstick, and her naked limbs are highlighted by the strong spotlight trained on her body. Her appearance suggests a cheapness that contradicts her known social status. The space in which the photograph is staged is significant because it represents a space of work in a domestic setting, implicating the ways in which the two supposedly separate spheres are inherently intertwined, particularly PRI rhetoric that makes use of familial metaphors.

The primary metaphor was that of the Revolutionary Family, the ideological construct that likened the male president to the familial patriarch ruling over a nation of political sons and domesticated daughters. As discussed in Chapter 1 (pages 61-2), the metaphor primarily characterizes the authority of the patriarchal state; however, such definitions of masculinity are dependent upon converse versions of feminine behavior

and character. Like the stereotypical construct of *Marianismo*, the female aspect of the Revolutionary Family also relies upon a dichotomous opposition of types based on the quality of ideal femininity, which was used to instill civic values. Feminist historians have long recognized the family as the basic social unit of governmental order and control.<sup>318</sup> While binaristic gender roles were not created wholesale by Revolutionary rhetoric, they were nevertheless institutionalized through both symbolic and legal measures that reinforced a gendered private-public dichotomy. Just as the corporatist government structure created hierarchies of subordination that operated at political and economic levels, it infiltrated the real family, constructing the father as a minor proxy for the presidential patriarch, overseeing his household of compliant citizens. Thus, while the symbolic patriarch and his “sons” constituted the public face of Mexico, the Revolutionary woman, represented an implicit, supportive, but also potentially threatening, and private counterpart. By featuring Banuet as a sexual object in her father’s home office, this photograph is interpreted as a direct challenge to the Revolutionary Family, a construct that traditionally paints her as a dutiful daughter. Instead, she mocks the political legacy to which she and her father belong, literally looking down on the historical and familial figures that surround her.

The photograph of Banuet, with its play on female sexuality and political references, makes clear that the home has been constructed as a so-called “private” space outside of a complementary “public” space of politics and the economy. However, as is revealed through the *Ricas y famosas* series, as well as PGN’s *Mother for a Day*, the home is nothing more than a social space that masquerades as an arena of isolated female

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<sup>318</sup> Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*; Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857*.

identification. Created by symbolic representations that constitute Lefebvre's "reproduction of the social relations of production," a "symbolism that conceals more than it reveals," this masquerade hides the multiple ways in which politics and the economy are situated within the home. And just as *Mother for a Day* makes use of the feminist public protest strategies in order to expose those concealed moments of overlap, *Ricas y famosas* similarly alludes to them as well by suggesting both the symbolic as well as actual roles played by the female inhabitants of these elite homes.

In a rare series of studies of upper class women in Mexico City, sociologists Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lizaur address this often-ignored section of the public. They stated that "because the vast majority of Latin Americans live in poverty, upper-class women have not been the preferred subject of social scientists"; even among a more objective community of scholars, "frequently dismissed as superficial women who spend their day talking on the phone, playing cards, shopping, and generally wasting their time."<sup>319</sup> However, Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur found that women often played an integral role in maintaining business contacts among elite circles often connected through networks of enterprise, blood relations, and marriage.<sup>320</sup> In a corporatist arrangement,

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<sup>319</sup> Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lizaur, "Kinship Structure and the Role of Women in the Urban Upper Class of Mexico," in *Confronting Change, Confronting Challenge: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1994), 177. This statement is also supported by Roderic Ai Camp's study of the "power elite" in Mexico contains almost no references to women as being counted among the politically and economically authoritative. See Roderic Camp, *Mexico's Mandarins: Crafting a Power Elite for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>320</sup> In their research, Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur determined the "grand family," a network of familial relations that extends over three generations, to be intertwined with the success of family enterprise. Headed by "father-entrepreneur," aided by sons and trusted relatives, it is network of family solidarity, whereby the less-wealthy members are expected to pay allegiance to the wealthier, more in-control members in exchange for "economic support, participation in family rituals, and social recognition." While it is traditionally the men of these families who participate in the more business-oriented activities, the women also play an integral role in the association: "Information, the most elementary and basic type of exchange within the clan, involves a wide spectrum of facts, ranging from family gossip to knowledge

elite “centralizing women” are usually aware of business goings-on and background information on specific individuals and act as “brokers” in establishing contacts and speaking on an individual’s behalf.<sup>321</sup> Women are expected to uphold the familial connections; “the business of asserting and reasserting one’s status and position in the family is almost a full-time occupation for a woman,” much of which occurs at social functions held within their homes as opposed to board rooms.<sup>322</sup> Even this estimation does not account for the variety of roles that women assume in contemporary elite society. In more recent years, the role of women in family business has expanded, giving women the opportunity to contribute capital of their own and to even acquire and maintain ownership of familial enterprises. At the same time, more traditional expectations persist in requiring women to assume the role of mother, housewife, and behind-the-scenes partner.<sup>323</sup> Yet, the multifaceted aspects of women’s lives are obscured by symbolic representations produced by the private/public dichotomy and its resultant binary gender constrictions.

A second concealment that is revealed by Rossell’s photographs, one that branches outside of the upper-class strata of subjects portrayed, is suggested by the four images that contrast the “rich and famous” with members of their domestic staff. As seen in Figure 47, the contrast between the two women pictured is striking. One is

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about relatives and ultimately to clan ideology. Women have always played a large role in the transmission of such information, which is on the main mechanisms of clan solidarity. Prominent female figures, who devoted their lives to creating and transmitting a clan ideology, established information networks over certain branches of the family kindred, often across generational and socioeconomic boundaries. The personal prestige of these centralizing women was based on their authoritative knowledge of the family history, including the personal backgrounds and relationships among individual members, within an ideological framework of family values and family solidarity.” Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur, “Kinship Structure,” 178-80.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

exceptionally casual, splayed out on the couch in a gold lamé dress, light-skinned with blonde hair; the other, wearing a uniform, has dark skin that nearly matches the tone of the wooden column next to her, both in sharp contrast to the light uniform she wears. This photograph suggests an often unrecognized social reality for women in Mexico, as “Latin America ‘leads’ the Third World in both the size of the domestic service sector and the percentage of women in the occupation”<sup>324</sup> Yet, the photograph captures a similarity between the two women as they formally relate to their surroundings as objects. The woman on the couch assumes a languid pose, blending in with the couch on which she lays. The fabric of her dress is echoed by decorative pillows beside her, making her a decorative element as well. Similarly, the domestic worker to her right stands as tall and rigid as the faux Solomonic column next to her, her usefulness ironically compared to the useless architectural element that supports nothing. As different as the two women appear in terms of class and status, in this room, they are both presented as furniture, the objectification of women cutting across class lines. Nevertheless, the two subjects in figure live different realities, and thus Rossell demonstrates that there are at least two significant forces inhabiting this gilded world: those who live in these domestic spaces, and those who work in them. The photographs simultaneously display these two kinds of domestic inhabitants and point to notions that the home is a social space whose true nature is veiled behind pervasive gender stereotypes. The so-called domestic, feminine, private sphere that is constructed by Rossell’s photographs is a parody of the way that sphere has been used as a national building-block. Thus, the series, especially in book form, can be read as a sardonic photo

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<sup>324</sup> Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 39.

album that exposes the artificiality of the Revolutionary Family through “strategic gender interests,” or an awareness of how gender inequality structures the everyday lives of women.<sup>325</sup>

Both the *¡Madres!* and *Ricas y famosas* series offer revisions of traditional gender roles in Mexico by challenging notions of ideal femininity that define women as maternal, pious, chaste, and submissive, all qualities that accompany a woman in her rightful, or “natural” space of the home. Whether humorous and mocking or sexualized and audacious, Mayer and Bustmante, and Rossell each visualize alternative representations that call into question the dual nature of dominant female stereotypes. In doing so, the artists reveal the symbolic representations that have worked, in Mexico, to maintain the pretense that the “social relations of reproduction” are separate from the “social relations of production,” via a private/public dichotomy that is maintained by not only gendered female/male oppositions, but also a positive woman/negative woman antagonism. Both series, therefore, undermine the “naturalized” quality of gender and spatial separation through the ways in which they carefully construct the spaces of the home and the actions of those who inhabit it. However, there is a third aspect that is crucial to understanding each series, and each artist, as actively *reproducing* the space of the home. *Mother for a Day* and *Ricas y famosas* not only reveal normative gender constructs, but they also implicate the processes by which gender relations become naturalized when the artists appropriate mass media tactics in order to redeploy their unfeminine ideals.

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<sup>325</sup> Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation?," 232-4.

### III. Dismantling the Master's House with the Master's Tools<sup>326</sup>

Mayer and Bustamante, and Rossell each make direct reference to the ways in which female stereotypes are widely disseminated through mass media outlets such as magazines, radio, television, and film. As these stereotypes have been central to the creation of national identity, media outlets thus serve as tools of patriarchal power relations. By referencing and appropriating the communicative styles and distribution of the mass media in Mexico, *Mother for a Day* and *Ricas y famosas* recuperate a process through which representations of space are upheld, thus using the "master's tools" to dismantle the national home.

In *Mother for a Day*, PGN called upon a satirical portrayal of the good mother/bad mother trope in order to dismantle the stereotypes that continue to hold specific currency in public representations of women, as commonly circulated archetypes presented on wildly popular Latin American soap operas and melodramas.<sup>327</sup> PGN's use and explanation of the Bad Mother puppet exposes this dichotomy for the caricature that it is, as it is pervasively represented in the *telenovela*, a type of television programming still largely identified as a "women's genre."<sup>328</sup> Mayer and Bustamante cast themselves

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<sup>326</sup> The subheading is taken from the title of a brief essay by feminist Audre Lorde in which she argues that in order to actually deconstruct power relations, feminists cannot rely on the tools of patriarchy. Lorde was specifically speaking to racism and homophobia that prohibited a more allied feminist front; here, the title has been appropriated to refer to the ways in which PGN and Rossell employ mass media techniques (state tools of patriarchy) in order to reproduce their visions of identity and the home. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110-13.

<sup>327</sup> Julee Tate, "The Good and Bad Women of *Telenovelas*: How to Tell Them Apart Using a Simple Maternity Test," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 26(2007): 97-111.

<sup>328</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that in Mexico, and throughout Latin America, the telenovela audience is diverse and watching the programs is often a familial or even affair. As such, telenovelas are not exclusively targeted toward a female viewing public. However, according to Cynthia Duncan, the genre usually implies a female spectator, based on character identification, themes, and advertising. Cynthia Duncan, "Looking Like a Woman: Some Reflections on the Hispanic Soap Opera and the Pleasures of Female Spectatorship," *Chasqui* 24, no. 2 (1995): 84.

as the “good mothers,” those who are, according to Julie Tate’s “simple maternity test,” exemplary mothers: “self-sacrificing, decent.”<sup>329</sup> They embraced their motherhood and presented it as the ultimate “inspiration” for their artwork. In contrast, the bad woman “does not view being a wife and mother as her primary roles. She does not base her-self worth on the attainment of motherhood and rarely expresses the desire to have children.”<sup>330</sup> If she does have children, the “bad woman” has relegated her maternal role as only secondary to her own, often antagonistic, agenda and is commonly depicted as the villainess of the narrative. The Bad Mother puppet represents such a foil: an unkempt, eye-patched puppet that parodied the villainess matriarch Catalina Creel on the classic Mexican telenovela *Cuna de Lobos* ([*Den of Wolves*] Figure 44).<sup>331</sup> *Cuna de Lobos* told of the rise and eventual downfall of an ambitious woman and her dynasty, brought down by lies, abduction, and murder. Creel’s character was the ultimate “bad mother,” an exaggerated portrayal of evil womanhood. The implications of such pervasive stereotypes are clear in their maternal directive: femininity is positively defined by the qualities of ideal motherhood. Any deviation from that track is suspect. Similarly, this maternal stereotype is used to reinscribe women in the space of the familial home.

In her analysis of Mexican telenovelas, Adriana Estill describes the genre as overwhelmingly characterized by excessive use of melodrama, distinguished not only by

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<sup>329</sup> Tate, “The Good and Bad Women of *Telenovelas*: How to Tell Them Apart Using a Simple Maternity Test,” 97.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*: 99.

<sup>331</sup> The popular production received the “Best Telenovela of the Year Award” in 1987, by the annual TVyNovelas Awards; as well as “Best Novela Ever” in 2007. Currently, the telenovela is reportedly being reproduced under the name *La Derecha de Sangre* (Entitlement of Blood), to be broadcast in the summer of 2011.



its emphasis on emotion, but also its focus on domesticity—the home and family life.<sup>332</sup> Most novelas portray what she calls a “tidy” world, a closed community, wherein traditionally “the entire telenovela [takes] place in the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, maybe in the car.”<sup>333</sup> As Melhuus states, it is the woman’s behavior that is monitored and judged, her femininity contingent upon her “daily conduct, in particular in what she refrains from doing—casual visiting, loitering and gossiping are all considered negative—and through what she is expected to do: preparing meals, doing housework, and taking care of the children.”<sup>334</sup> Thus it is in the space of the home that ideal femininity, or the quality of maternity, is determined. The home, however, implicated within this emphasis on femininity, is two-fold: telenovelas often portray a home that is then broadcast into actual homes across the nation.

Mass media with close ties to the PRI, first radio and then television, offered up ideological programming that carried the political vision of the state into the space of the home, enacting influence at all levels of society through linked discourses of knowledge. The concept of the imagined political community, first introduced by Benedict Anderson, has been expanded by media scholars as well as art historians to include radio, television, film, and the visual arts, which may provide more direct translations of these links. As John Hartley argued, “television may be more than merely a metaphor for imagined communities; it is one of the prime sites upon which a given nation is constructed for its

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<sup>332</sup> Adriana Estill, “Closing the Telenovela’s Borders: “Vivo Por Elena’s” Tidy Nation,” *Chasqui* 29, no. 1 (2000): 77.

<sup>333</sup> The quote was stated by Pedro Fonte, president of a Televisa subsidiary, when speaking of the differences between classic telenovelas, like those that would have been common in 1987, and more recent telenovelas that have begun to break with genre standards. Fonte is quoted in Sam Quinones, “Las Nuevas Marías: Telenovelas in a Changing Mexico,” *L.A. Weekly*, Jan. 16 1998. *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.

<sup>334</sup> Melhuus, “Power, Value and the Ambiguous Meanings of Gender,” 245.

members.”<sup>335</sup> Perhaps in Mexico, where the state-encouraged media monopoly of the Azcárraga family (who founded Televisa and dominated radio broadcasting before the advent of TV) is well-documented, mass media has even more purposefully been used to create a sense of nationhood that hinges on traditionally gendered familial roles. It is with regard to the metaphorical construction of the Revolutionary Family that PGN’s *Mother for a Day* presents a counter-national feminist protest. Performed on a television program on the monopolistic Televisa broadcasting channel, the reversal of gendered roles presented by Guillermo Ochoa’s “impregnated” male body exploits the corporatist ties between Televisa and the Mexican state, whose relationship was one of “mutual support and ideological consensus.”<sup>336</sup> Maturing alongside the PRI, the Azcárraga family media empire grew from a radio empire into a television conglomerate, and its monopolistic authority similarly expanded. As John Sinclair has noted, in the 1980s, Televisa was producing between 60-80 percent of its own programming, and attracting 93 percent of the television viewing audience.<sup>337</sup> Televisa’s capabilities, then, to create and control the mediated experience of an imagined community, with the near-full support of the state, were certainly significant.<sup>338</sup>

Throughout the twentieth-century, the PRI employed Azcarraga media outlets to broadcast the “voice of the nation,” a masculinized voice of the state, with the president

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<sup>335</sup> John Hartley, "Invisible Fictions: Television Audiences, Paedocracy, Pleasure," *Textual Practice* 1, no. 2 (1987): 124.

<sup>336</sup> Sinclair, 38. See also John Sinclair, *Latin American Television: A Global View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 34-38; Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 30-38.

<sup>337</sup> Sinclair, *Latin American Television*, 39.

<sup>338</sup> Sallie Hughes and Chappell Lawson similarly argue that Televisa, in exchange for “relentlessly positive coverage” of the PRI, the network received special consideration and privileges from the government that included: “preferential tax treatment, subsidized access to communications infrastructure, and protection from commercial competition.” Sallie Hughes and Chappell Lawson, "Propaganda and Crony Capitalism: Partisan Bias in Mexican Television News," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 3 (2004): 85.

as patriarch, that heavily relied on gendered rhetoric that valorized the home as the symbolic mainstay of the nation.<sup>339</sup> The usefulness, however, of mass media to carefully control mediated experiences to the popular masses began to wane in the post-1968 political climate in Mexico, as the legitimacy and authority of the PRI began to crumble as well. As Chappell Lawson has argued, the development of the state and the mass media at the end of the twentieth century was intricately intertwined, linked together in a mutually reinforcing reciprocal relationship that worked simultaneously to bring about a more democratic society in Mexico.<sup>340</sup> The more the central authority of the PRI diminished, the more liberated the media became.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Gendered programming throughout the twentieth-century became a part of media-sponsored nation-building. Jocelyn Olcott sites a radio address broadcast in December, 1936, which touted the *Ligas Femeniles'* objectives to produce "worthy wives and mothers responsible for the future of their children," Gabino Vázquez, "Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Lic. Gabino Vázquez" in *La resolución del problema agrario en la Comarca Lagunera* (Mexico: n.p., 1937), 37-38; quoted in Olcott, "Worthy Wives and Mothers," 118. Nichole Sanders cites two separate radio addresses, one dated June-July 1939 and one dated April 30, 1939, made by Silvestre Guerreo, then secretary of the Ministry of Public Assistance. These addresses both strongly advocated for the family-based social welfare programs discussed above, focusing on the Mexican mothers' natural needs to provide for her children; Sanders, "Improving Mothers," 191. Hayes similarly argues that radio operated under a heavy-handed system of paternalism, which she defines as "a system of social power relations based on a model of male control over, and responsibility for, both male and female dependents" (80) The system of power she describes is almost identical to the construct of the Revolutionary Family, which subsequently relied on radio for the expression of a "single paternal voice: the voice of the Mexican president" (81) As she states, Cárdenas made specific use of his radio presence to address himself to his nation of citizen children; his example was followed by his successors, Ávila Camacho and (initially) Alemán. Although Alemán abandoned the tradition after 1947, his parting address nevertheless emphasized the nuclear family as the basis of stability and character: "The Mexican home is the nation itself—not in its political meaning—but in its moral significance" (94), See Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 80-94. Anne Rubenstein has also argued that telenovelas in the 1980s were so popular that they became a common way for the PRI to "use them to address social problems," Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era," 626.

<sup>340</sup> Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>341</sup> One of these changes included the emergence of institutionalized feminist challenges to the state-dominated media sources. The first feminist publications appeared at the end of the 1970s and the first feminist radio programming began in 1980. In 1976, the feminist journal *Fem* was founded to foster an international discussion on women's rights and debates about identity, sexuality, violence and other abuses against women, motherhood, and citizenship. The journal, which publishes original content as well as reprints of well-known feminist texts authored by Mexican as well as U.S., Latin American, and European feminists, is still published today. Mayer has been an active contributor to the magazine since 1984, when the journal dedicated one issue to the topic of women in art. Additionally, one of the largest newspapers in Mexico City, *La Jornada*, began publishing a feminist supplement [*La Doble Jornada*] in 1987. The

The appearance by Mayer and Bustamante, as part of the developing civil society, on *Nuestro Mundo* in 1987, symbolically challenged the patriarchal state at a crucial historical moment, just as the ‘Golden Age of Televisa’ was coming to a close at the end of the 80s.<sup>342</sup> Televisa’s hegemonic control over television broadcasting faltered alongside the state. Given the close ties between the two institutions, and the ways in which their histories intertwine, Televisa can be seen, within the paradigm of *Mother for a Day*, as a symbolic representation of the patriarch, an explicit sign of the type of discursive control enacted by a monopolistic governing structure. Although they do not gain access to a scripted, pre-filmed telenovela, Mayer and Bustamante, do gain access to an evening broadcast program (*Nuestro Mundo*) that presumably addresses a similar audience as the narrative novelas.<sup>343</sup> Through their use of props, they are able to transform the public space of the studio into one that offers an alternative view of womanhood to the private spaces of the viewers’ homes. The impregnation of television host Ochoa, then, feminized the patriarchal order in Mexico, claiming a public space as a maternal space, enacting a role reversal by which Mayer and Bustamante reclaimed the historical connotations of “maternity.”

Although presented in exhibition and book-format, *Ricas y famosos* also makes reference to the mass media dissemination of gender stereotypes. For Rossell, the participation of Díaz Ordaz, Banuet, and her other models is central to the critical

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development of feminist press outlets, concurrent with the turn toward practical Popular Feminist activist efforts in the 1980s, largely supports Lawson’s claims that social history and media history evolve symbiotically. See Tim Hodgson, "Fem: A Window onto the Cultural Coalescence of a Mexican Feminist Politics of Sexuality," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 16, no. 1 (2000): 79-104; and Rebecca Biron, "Feminist Periodicals and Political Crisis in Mexico: "Fem, Debate Feminista, and La Correa Feminista" in the 1990s," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 1 (1996): 151-69.

<sup>342</sup> Sinclair, *Latin American Television*, 41.

<sup>343</sup> Duncan estimates that half of all telenovelas in Mexico and throughout Latin America are broadcast after 6 p.m. Duncan, "Looking Like a Woman," 83.

significance of the photograph in which she is pictured. In a statement issued on August 28, 2002, Rossell identified the sitters' complicit participation as a key component of the project.<sup>344</sup> The sitters' participation, or "performance" in the series, allows the artist to comment more widely on the representation of gender by examining the traditional ways in which woman (and to a lesser extent, men) are portrayed by the mass media. Rossell has stated in interviews that her subjects often play into popular expectations: "The women figure out from magazines and television what they think a photographer should snap, and they start performing."<sup>345</sup> Many of the photographs take their style from glossy fashion magazines, as the subjects strike dramatic and unnatural poses that, like the photograph of Banuet, often trade on their sexuality. In an interview, Rossell described her artistic process as follows:

I like collaborations. First I get a tour of the house, and then I interview the women. They can suggest a dress or a favorite room. Each is acting out her personal fantasy... Many times they're kind of laughing with me. The women are playing a game too. They are doing things that are empowering to them... Many are very smart women who are cynical about the fact that they're so privileged, but they don't want to change anything...<sup>346</sup>

What the quote above illustrates are the ways in which, for her subjects, femininity, domesticity and status are intertwined. The subjects identify with their surroundings, and find within them a space to visualize desire. The homes afford a sense of both security and playfulness, which leads to certain amount of liberation for the women to act out identities otherwise not available to them in public, despite the pervasiveness of such

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<sup>344</sup> Daniela Rossell, "Statement for Presentation of *Ricas Y Famosas*," in *Witness to Her Art: Art and Writings by Adrian Piper, Mona Hatoum, Cady Noldan, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker, Daniela Rossell, and Eau De Cologne*, ed. Rhea Anastas and Michael Brenson (New York: The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2006), 331.

<sup>345</sup> Rossell, quoted in Hilarie Sheets, "Material Girls," *ARTNews*, February 2001, 176.

<sup>346</sup> Quoted in Schumacher and Winzen, *Just Love Me: Post/Feminist Positions of the 1990s from the Goetz Collection*, 149.

models. As Rossell states, her subjects “really want to look American, like what they see on TV, and they go to a lot of work to accomplish that.”<sup>347</sup> The appearance and poses of the subjects, then, reveal an acknowledgment of public gender archetypes. However, with this acknowledgement comes the realization that those expected representations are exaggerated and even parodied. Although Rossell states that many of the women recognize that the space of the (upper-class) home is a space of financial and social privilege, it is also a space that, because it is feminized, her subjects are unwilling to reject because of the freedoms it does provide.

Ironically, it is because the home is a feminine-identified space that the subjects are given the liberty to playfully perform stereotypes, or at least culturally dominant images, perpetuated by the popular media.<sup>348</sup> Many of the images were influenced by the types of images found in Mexican soap-opera magazines, and the series title itself references *Ricas y Famosas*, a popular *telenovela* from South America.<sup>349</sup> The reference to soap-opera aesthetics is further reinforced by the appearance of *telenovela* actress Itatí

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<sup>347</sup> Rossell, quoted in Sheets, "Material Girls," 176.

<sup>348</sup> Parody is achieved not only by the exaggerated performances of the participants, but is fed even more so by the curious public persona she cultivates for herself. By many accounts, she is part of the same circle as those she photographs, “having grown up on a very ornamented estate with fiberglass replicas of Olmec heads in the garden,” Blaffer Gallery, "Daniela Rossell: Ricas Y Famosas," Blaffer Museum of Art, [http://www.class.uh.edu/blaffer/exhibit\\_daniela\\_rossell.html](http://www.class.uh.edu/blaffer/exhibit_daniela_rossell.html). She has, likewise, acknowledged “being driven by her own love-hate feelings about her upbringing. She recalled how her nanny lived with unfinished floors in a room that was half the size of her mother’s closet,” Ginger Thompson, "The Rich, Famous and Aghast: A Peep-Show Book," *New York Times*, September 25 2002, 4. Yet in one early interview, she stated that she “grew up in the servants’ quarters of a mansion where her mother worked as a maid,” Sheets, "Material Girls," 176. Throughout the controversy that followed the public release of her images, she actively maintained her rights as an artist to be outspoken and confrontational and yet at the press release of her book, refused to appear as herself when slated to speak. Having persuaded a friend to appear as her, Rossell herself sat in the audience in disguise, watching as journalists and photographers “swarmed” her body double (Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s*, 52.). Rossell’s masquerade has been interpreted as her own fear and apprehension about being confronted by a hostile press. However, as Cuauhtemoc Medina points out, her decision to be represented by another woman (who herself was a subject within the series), may simply be another manifestation of the project itself: a deliberate attempt at representation, at performance, at acting.

<sup>349</sup> Sheets, "Material Girls," 176.

Cantoral in two of the photographs (figures 48 and 55, discussed above). However, it is the book form of the series that repurposes the media format Rossell seeks to deconstruct.

The images in the book are reproduced almost completely without text, save short passages at the end of the book and a two-line introductory statement that reads: “The following images depict actual settings. The photographic subjects are representing themselves. Any resemblance with real events is not coincidental.”<sup>350</sup> This statement has been taken as a declaration of the anthropological character of the series; however, it also reads as a version of the boilerplate disclaimer that often precedes fictionalized accounts of true events. It alerts the viewer to the idea that the photos may be “based on a true story,” however, as is often the case, what follows is a sensationalized, Hollywood-version of those supposedly “true” events, carefully edited for public consumption.

The next page (Figure 73) features a brown-skinned woman wearing a freshly-starched pink maid’s uniform. She stands beneath a monumental archway to a covered patio space. The patio is filled with upholstered furniture arranged to resemble an indoor living room. However, the subject stands at the threshold between interior and exterior, occupying a liminal space that serves as the gateway into the book, and into the home as well. A large curtain is gathered in folds at the top of the arch, almost as if the scene itself constitutes a stage whose velvet curtain has just been lifted to signal the start of a play. With her hip cocked and her head tilted back towards the house, she welcomes the viewer into the performance that unfolds within.

The photos are then presented in succession wholly without interrupting text. Many fill the entire two-page spread, bleeding to the borders of the pages. As the viewer

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<sup>350</sup> Rossell, *Ricas Y Famosas*, n.p.

moves through the book, the eighty-nine images form a sequence that steers its audience through the fantastically rendered scenes, a structure that is echoed by the gallery exhibition of the images that show them tacked to the wall in a manner that recalls a film reel (Figure 74). The book even builds cinematically to a narrative climax as the last fourteen images showcase what is, by far, the most extravagant setting of the entire setting: a seaside house, the famed Villa Arabesque, which is integrated into the rocky cliff of Acapulco Beach. The Villa Arabesque, which was built as a winter home by the late Baron Enrico di Portanova, has its own cinematic history, famous for being featured in the James Bond movie *License to Kill* (1989). Featuring massive white ogival arches, multi-level pools, and expansive patios that contain the painted harem decorations, this home of truly palatial proportions fittingly brings the book to a close.<sup>351</sup>

The final image of the series (Figure 75) is unique in its presentation: it shows the staff presumably employed to maintain this structure. A staff of thirty-six cooks, housekeepers, drivers, bodyguards, secretaries, repairmen, and landscapers are seated on a marble staircase, each holding a tool of their respective trades. A thirty-seventh figure, Rossell, is seated among them holding her camera. This final image continues the filmic presentation of the book. Here, the behind-the-scenes crewmembers are portrayed in successive rows as the figurative credits roll on *Ricas y Famosas*.

By appropriating the narrative format of a film or television program, the book-form series, splayed out across ninety pages, reads as an amalgam of popular culture

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<sup>351</sup> It is also possible that the structure of the book is meant to mimic the narrative comic books, or *historietas*, that were a popular form of entertainment at mid-century in Mexico. Historian Anne Rubenstein has argued that the comics, and debates about their content and censorship, constitute an important site of national discourse on social and gender norms. The relationship between Rossell's book and the history of the *historieta* format is one that requires further investigation. See Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, & Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).



forms. It is at once a gossip tabloid (exposing the “private” lives of political elites), glossy soap-opera digest, narrative comic book *historieta*, melodramatic telenovela, voyeuristic reality show (Robin Leach’s *Lifestyles*, MTV *Cribs*, or “The Real Housewives of Mexico City”), and a panoramic cinematic achievement. Devoid of text, the series’ (aural) volume is muted, allowing the visual language to speak loud and clear. The space of the home serves throughout this series as an elaborate stage set, albeit one with very high production values. It is revealed, in the end, to be just as contrived as the performances of the actors themselves. By revealing the feminine space of the home as an artificially constructed atmosphere, *Ricas y Famosas* creates a discursive space in which to discuss how boundaries of male-female, public-private binary distinctions begin to break down.

#### **IV. Re-Making the Home**

This chapter analyzes the space of the Mexican home as a social construct that was strategically employed to bolster state solidarity by maintaining familial stability, a responsibility that largely fell upon the shoulders of the nation’s women. Thus, the iconic Mexican mother and the domestic sphere became powerful reminders of the need to shore up any perceived national vulnerabilities. As the state began to falter at the end of the twentieth century, cracks began to form in the foundation of the state-sponsored home, which opened the doorway for feminist artists to tear down the façade of passive maternity and domesticity. Each project analyzed above confronts such representations of women, which are pervasive in art history as well as the popular media, thus attacking not only the archetypal construction of women in “high art,” but they also condemn the

image of woman as it is disseminated to a wider, national audience. In problematizing the public-private dichotomy, Polvo de Gallina Negra and Rossell each point to the ways this binaristic construction of traditional gender roles has been exploited as a metaphor for the “familial” nation itself. They do so by taking up the home as a subject and a space that allows for the critical inquiry of womanhood using two very different feminist strategies.

Mayer and Bustamante visualize the home as a space that has traditionally confined women to stereotypical domestic roles but also as a space that can also serve as a source of empowerment and self-identification. They approach the home as an ideological construct that governs the responsibilities and social interests of women. By addressing the theme of motherhood, they assume the role most closely identified with and confined to the home. Mayer and Bustamante embraced this strategic essentialism as a way to transgress the boundaries that have been historically built between the home and civic space. Adopting a classic “the personal is political” stance, the artists use their own experiences to stage a public critique of the patriarchal authority of the ruling part, altering the ways in which they, as women and mothers, relate to the home. Using humor and the celebration of maternity to gain access to a national audience on a televised broadcast, the artists find a way to allow the mother to reenter the home via the public sphere.

Like Mayer and Bustamante, Rossell’s work depends upon deeply-ingrained representations of the home and the women who are supposedly tied to it. The image of the “home” presented in *Ricas y famosas* defies the stereotypical expectations of the private sphere, and its female inhabitants, as nurturing and maternal. Rossell “stages” a critique of traditional representations of women and their place in the home. By focusing

her lens on a rarely-discussed and rarely-photographed group of subjects, she defies photographic expectations and the Mexican ethnographic tradition by creating highly composed, multivalent images that provide a visual feast of symbolic readings. Although the artists approach these representations from differing perspectives, using different media (performance vs. photography), what both works ultimately point to are the pervasiveness of the spatial construct as it inflects women's realities in Mexico and the multiple strategies used to challenge a space largely produced for, and not necessarily by, women. In doing so, Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell each reveal and blur the limits of such spatial confinements and offer feminist visions of subjectivity that extend well beyond the home.

Thus, both series call into question the supposed integrity of traditionally gendered roles and spaces. As the nation-building projects of the twentieth century were built upon such gendered bedrock, the significance of artworks such as *Mother for a Day* and *Ricas y Famosas* holds the possibility of national reverberations. Both artistic projects reconfigure the space of the home through its relationship with and representation through mass media formats. They each acknowledge the media as an entity that in Mexico traditionally straddles the public/private dichotomy in its representation of women. Through politically relevant broadcasts and publications that portray and define the role of women in the home and thus, the nation, the media is also proven to be a social space as defined by Lefebvre. I argue that the media also constitutes what Lefebvre refers to as an agent in the "reproduction of the social relations of production." In its ability to produce the gendered, spatial distinctions that serve as the basis of national rhetoric and social frameworks, such symbolic representations literally

build (or produce) the space of the home. As employed by the state throughout the twentieth century, the media and the home come together to mutually reinforce the power relations embodied by public/private dichotomy. By appropriating these media techniques, and producing the space of the home, Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell not only present alternatives to archetypal images of women, but they also deconstruct the process through which the feminine character of the home is fabricated. Thus, they rebuild the home from the ground up, producing and reproducing it as a space that challenges the social and political interventions of the state and that similarly encourages a feminist blurring of domestic/public social boundaries.

As Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell reconfigure the home as a feminist (as opposed to feminine) space, they become active “producers of space.” Through an emphasis on the processes of female representation, they implicate the role of the body, lived experience, and social practice in both the prescriptions of the home but also the practices (and protests) by which those prescriptions are dismantled. Spatially, they visualize the ways in which these bodily practices transgress the formerly-held separations between private and public space, revealing them to be intertwined with each other and also with the space of the body. As the load-bearing walls of the home are dismantled and the space is revealed to exist in nexus with the body and those everyday practices previously believed to exist outside its walls, the obverse must also be verified. As such, the so-called “public” space of the streets must also be reconfigured to examine the ways in which it also exists in tandem with the spatial body and the social practices once believed to be sheltered exclusively in the home, an objective that will be undertaken in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Zone of Tolerance

*Minerva Cuevas and Teresa Margolles*

*“The political realm within which women struggle for equality, such as democracy, must be disarticulated, not presumed a priori to be a ‘neutral’ system, except for its inability to grant women equality.”<sup>352</sup>*

This chapter examines “the streets” as a social space in contemporary Mexico that continues to have a profound impact on shaping traditional gender roles and influencing pervasive notions of spatial restrictions and accessibility to a so-called public sphere. The public realm as an ideological construct has been traditionally defined as constituted by the “state and labor market,” or more generally, the arenas of economics and politics, both historically masculine pursuits.<sup>353</sup> However, as has been a central assertion throughout this study, the fallacious character of a gendered private/public dichotomy naturally conceals the multiple ways in which stereotypical gender roles and spatial constraints are mutually constitutive. As Moira Gatens argued,

the public sphere is dependent upon and developed around a male subject who acts in the public sphere but is maintained in the private sphere, traditionally by women. This is to say that liberal society assumes that its citizens continue to be what they were historically, namely male heads of households who have at their disposal the services of an unpaid domestic worker/mother/wife.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Helen Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” *October* 92(2000): 75.

<sup>353</sup> Cubitt and Greenslade, “Public and Private Spheres,” 55.

<sup>354</sup> Moira Gatens, “Power, Bodies, and Difference,” in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 124.

The above quote demonstrates the complexity inherent in notions of work that go beyond labor markets to include the often unpaid and unrecognized work that occurs in the home. Similarly, contemporary Mexican politics are also multifaceted, as both men and women have found various ways to operate as social agents in Mexico since 1968, both within and without the space of formal political participation. This distinction is often lost in oversimplified understandings of gendered space. As such, the notion of a contemporary “public realm” is one that requires feminist reconfiguration in order to illuminate the various ways in which women are producing new spaces in previously restricted arenas of social life. The artists analyzed in this chapter, Minerva Cuevas and Teresa Margolles, operate as two such producers of a reformulated public sphere, taking up the spaces of work and politics as their realms of artistic and spatial production. Often working directly on the streets, the artists each draw upon the long tradition of the street as a space of public protest and social critique in Mexico. Employing this (literally) public space as a “zone of tolerance” in which a certain level of social subversion is allowed, they each strategically perform actions that problematize the supposed integrity of a (discursive) public sphere traditionally gendered as a masculine space. In doing so, Cuevas and Margolles each produce “the streets” as a social space within which spatial binaries begin to break down.

### **I. Employing the Streets**

In 1998, artist Minerva Cuevas founded a non-profit organization named the Mejor Vida Corp. (Better Life Corporation, or MVC), an ongoing art/activism project that provides services and products that mock capitalism’s promises of a “better life.” Her

actions and artworks range from publicly-distributed “magic” sustenance seeds to public billboards that expose the unethical practices of global industries. Offered free of charge, Cuevas attempts to subvert prevailing modes of commodification and economic exploitation in favor of activist interventions that comment on national and international financial systems. Working as an ironic corporation herself, Cuevas appropriates the logic of capitalism in order to call attention to institutional corruptions.

Teresa Margolles is an artist who, since the early 1990s, has consistently drawn upon her background as a forensic pathologist to call attention to the trauma and street crime in Mexico. Her often controversial works, first as co-founder of the artist collective SEMEFO (named for the Mexico City morgue) and later as an individual artist, incorporate abject materials, bodily fluids and traces from the morgue or crime scenes, such as the water used to wash bodies, blood-soaked fabrics, fat and oil collected from human skin, and even severed body parts. By displaying physical bodily remains and the remnants of crime, Margolles’ works bear witness to a culture of pervasive street violence in Mexico that continues to plague the anonymous poor and marginalized.

Cuevas and Margolles each enter art-making through actual means of production, Cuevas through her legally-established economic entity, and Margolles through both physically working in and using materials from the state mortuary. Their works also share a quality of social critique, as they speak out against inequalities, exploitation, corruption, and violence. As such, the artists position themselves as social actors on the streets, producing a space that reconfigures a traditional public sphere into one that, as art historian Helen Molesworth calls for in the quote that begins this chapter, “disarticulates” the gender biases of economic and political space. Therefore, this chapter proposes “the

streets” as an ideological alternative to the “public sphere,” as a space produced that, through the activities of Cuevas and Margolles, re-articulates the national significance of feminist contributions to the interrelated arenas of the economy and politics.

The transition from a public sphere to the space of the streets is one that consciously involves the act of protest. Cultural geographer Gareth A. Jones argues that, in Latin America, the urban space of the streets has specific significance for the ways in which it has served as a locus for social and political activism, a space of “contestation.”<sup>355</sup> Jones and Lefebvre agree on the historical and transformative potential of social spaces in Latin America, each citing the monumental mobilization of popular groups and their efforts to bring down authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in the latter half of the twentieth century. Lefebvre views these protest movements as a continuation of the class struggles that accompanied the logic of modern capitalism:

During the first half of the twentieth century, agrarian reforms and peasant revolutions reshaped the surface of the planet... In more recent times, urban guerrilla actions and the intervention of the ‘masses’ even in urban areas have extended this movement, particularly in Latin America.<sup>356</sup>

In Mexico City specifically, the streets have served as an important locus for the expression of public dissent, a space for the organization of both local and national popular movements, the mobilization of the urban poor, and occupation by those whose presence visualizes a near constant series of opposition against hegemonic power structures.<sup>357</sup> The spatial nature of protest itself and its ability to effect social and political

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<sup>355</sup> Gareth A. Jones, "The Latin American City as Contested Space: A Manifesto," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13, no. 1 (1994): 1-12.

<sup>356</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 55.

<sup>357</sup> See Haber, *Power from Experience*; Gutman, *The Romance of Democracy*; Bennet, "Everyday Struggles: Women in Urban Popular Movements and Territorially Based Protests in Mexico," 116-30; Kathleen Logan, "Women's Participation in Urban Protest," in *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*, ed. Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), 150-9.



change is emphasized by Lefebvre when he stated that “today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space... The forms of class struggle are now more varied than formerly. Naturally, they include the political action of minorities.”<sup>358</sup>

In Mexico, the class struggles of the past forty-five years have included the political actions of women, as they have struggled for economic parity, democratic rights, and recognized spatial subjecthood. However, as will be illuminated by the works of Cuevas and Margolles, even the spaces of protest and activism in contemporary Mexico are predominantly gendered as masculine and subject to stereotypical spatial constraints that color women’s economic and political concerns as residing “in the home,” where their work goes unpaid and historically unrecognized. Outside of the home, women’s work is traditionally associated with the lower classes and the notion of a “public” woman is influenced by a strong sexual and anti-moral prejudice as a foil to the ideally-feminine wife and mother. According to feminist political theorist Nikki Craske, even the scholarship on women in social movements tends to default to the perspective of women working outside of an institutional framework.<sup>359</sup> Women are an active force in contemporary protest and union labor movements, participation that is often downplayed by their noticeable lack of leadership roles and the fact that they are often relegated to marginalized roles based on traditional everyday practices of femininity and involvement in informal, grassroots organizations outside of the realm of formal political participation.

In this way, through sexual, moral, class, and even practical associations, women in the streets are reminded of the so-called natural affinity to their own Cartesian

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<sup>358</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 55.

<sup>359</sup> Nikki Craske, "Women and Regime Politics in Guadalajara's Low-Income Neighborhoods," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13, no. 1 (1994): 62-3.

(inferior) bodies. There occurs an overdetermination of the female body in social space, whether through a rehearsal of feminine actions or through sexuality which, as will be explored later in this chapter, can have profoundly dangerous consequences for women in the social spaces of the national public. Bearing this in mind, this chapter describes “the streets” as an ideological space that promotes an intersection of class, politics, gender, sexuality, and culture. Through their performances and installations, Cuevas and Margolles each employ the space of the streets in such a way as to re-define the gendered limits of this spatial territory. Redefining the ways in which women relate to a public arena in Mexico, their works call attention to how these gendered spaces exploited notions of womanhood negatively, or punitively, in order to bolster national stability built on strict gender roles. Simultaneously, Cuevas and Margolles visualize, and in some cases actualize, a space in which women actively renegotiate their place in the public, national fabric. By analyzing how their works subvert the “private” biases against women in “public,” this chapter looks to each artist for the ways in which her actions and artworks transgress this binary opposition, produce spatial bodies that combat the objectified female body, and intervene in the various institutional and informal channels of a nation in the midst of a democratic, neoliberal, and globalized transition.

## **II. Women at Work**

The space of the city and the realities of urban life are among the most prevalent subjects for exploration by contemporary Mexican artists since the mid-1990s. Artists such as Melanie Smith, Francis Alÿs, Santiago Sierra, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, and Gabriel Orozco have each responded to the current conditions of living and working in

Mexico City through installations, photography, and performances that emphasize the often overwhelming size and chaos of Latin America's largest megalopolis.<sup>360</sup> Often incorporating or picturing the physical, and at times human, refuse of the city, representations of urban space tend to concentrate on the depiction of social and economic hardships faced by those living in the nation's capital.<sup>361</sup> In this regard, Cuevas and Margolles are no exception. The narratives of poverty and struggle, crime and death, respectively told in their works speak to the cruel urban conditions in contemporary Mexico. However, what distinguishes Cuevas' and Margolles' works from that of their peers are the ways in which each artist engages not only with the actual space of the city, but also with the historically gendered notion of separate spheres of activity that governs perceptions of the city. Both Cuevas and Margolles approach art-making through the spaces of work outside the home, exercising everyday practices that provide an entryway into critiques of gendered, spatial confinements.

The origins of the gift-giving and service-providing structure of the Mejor Vida Corp. (hereafter, MVC) were conceived by Minerva Cuevas in 1997 while riding the New York City subway. There, the artist came across a campaign poster for subway safety.<sup>362</sup> The poster (Figure 76) sports the slogan "Awake is Aware" and bears an illustration of a woman in a black dress wearing large, conspicuous, gold jewelry seated next to an oversized purse on the subway alongside a tagline that reads "Whenever, or wherever, you're traveling—please don't fall asleep on the train." Sponsored by the MTA

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<sup>360</sup> Two exhibitions of contemporary art curated around the theme of the city include Biesenbach, *Mexico City: An Exhibition*; and *Metropolis Mexica: Aspects De L'art Contemporain Au Mexique*, (Amiens: Musée de Picardie à Amiens, 2002).

<sup>361</sup> See Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Mutual Abuse," in *Mexico: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values*, ed. Klaus Biesenbach (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002), 38-47.

<sup>362</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México," *irational.org*, [www.irational.org/mvc/cuauh2.html](http://www.irational.org/mvc/cuauh2.html).

New York City Transit agency, the poster and brochure campaign implied guarding oneself against theft, as represented by the emphasis placed on the subject's belongings; however, the gender implications of such a campaign should not be overlooked, as it is an image that specifically warns against dangers posed to women in the transit system. In a move that would preempt the parasitic nature of her later actions, Cuevas began attaching small packets of "safety pills" (caffeine pills) to the publicly-displayed posters (figures 77 and 78) as well as brochures that were left throughout the subway cars (figure 79). Cuevas' distribution of "safety pills" as an actual safety measure is a notion that is fraught with absurdity. Ingesting small, white, otherwise unidentified pills found taped to the subway walls with a homemade label or left in a seat certainly rivals, if not surpasses, the dangers of falling asleep on mass transit. Nevertheless, as a symbolic gesture, the project anticipated the anti-commodity foundation turned activist project with the "goal of achieving public good by means of art practice" that would characterize her work with MVC.<sup>363</sup>

Cuevas launched MVC in Mexico the following year as, in the words of the artist, "a series of public interventions, nourished by a blend of provocation and hope that reacted to the context of Mexico City."<sup>364</sup> As a legally-incorporated non-profit agency, MVC offers products and services that are meant to impact the everyday lives of those who live in the capital city. Cuevas established a website, hosted by an international, online collective of art activists called irrational.org, now defunct, although the MVC

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<sup>363</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México," irrational.org, [www.irational.org/mvc/cuah2.html](http://www.irational.org/mvc/cuah2.html).

<sup>364</sup> Minerva Cuevas, "For a Human Interface- Mejor Vida Corp.," irrational.org, [http://www.irational.org/minerva/cuevas\\_interface-EN.pdf](http://www.irational.org/minerva/cuevas_interface-EN.pdf).

website is still maintained (Figure 80).<sup>365</sup> The site lists available products such as pre-stamped subway tickets for the Mexico City metro, pre-stamped envelopes for national or international use, the aforementioned safety pills, similarly unidentified “magic seeds” with growing instructions, lottery tickets, and tear gas (available for distribution only in Mexico City). Available services include a questionnaire that can be used to report occurrences of violence, public cleaning, and the provision of student ID cards and recommendation letters that can be supplied on demand. The variety of goods and benefits available through MVC are, in many ways, no less absurd than the subway safety pills offered in NYC. Nor are they any less randomly, or irregularly, distributed: the “magic seeds” were left on ATM machines throughout the city, the envelopes were left “periodically” in “public places,” and lottery and metro tickets were simply handed out to “passers-by.”<sup>366</sup> Rather than a systematic solution to providing a “better life,” art historian Cuauhtémoc Medina called MVC’s catalogue a “small compilation of contemporary dreams and antidotes to frustration.”<sup>367</sup> Yet what distinguishes these products and services from an earlier action like the distribution of safety pills is the guise of corporate authority under which they were/are available.

With the adoption of legal business status, the widespread use of a branded logo (Figure 81), an interactive website complete with online order and request forms (Figure 82), and even (for a period of five years from 1998-2003) a brick-and-mortar office

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<sup>365</sup> The functionality of the website and the corporation, however, is unclear. Minerva Cuevas still performs certain MVC actions for art exhibitions—as recently as August, 2011, Cuevas set up a MVC kiosk making and distributing student ID cards in Frankfurt, Germany for her participation in the exhibit “Playing the City 3,” sponsored by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. In order to test the status of the website, the author submitted an online request for a MVC student ID card in December, 2011. As of February, 2012, it has not arrived.

<sup>366</sup> Minerva Cuevas, “Mejor Vida Corp.,” <http://www.irational.org/mvc/english.html>.

<sup>367</sup> Medina, “Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México.”

space, Cuevas sought to organize her actions under the aegis of a “corporate structure.”<sup>368</sup> However, as is repeatedly emphasized throughout the website, and by Cuevas herself in the organization’s mission statement, the corporate structure of MVC is undermined by the fact that goods and actions are provided free of any charge or expectation of reciprocity, and that the corporation consists solely of Cuevas herself, who is responsible for the financial upkeep of the office space and website, as well as purchasing, packaging, distribution, and public relations of the company. Because of these contradictions, MVC has been referred to as an “economic fiction,” a corporation/charity consciously doomed to inevitably fail:

Part of the conceptual structure of the project is, in fact, to deal with the necessary bureaucratization and productivity crisis of the corporation. Since MVC can’t by definition grow, its success is at the same time its decadence. The more customers the company draws, the more likely it will be to end up leaving them unsatisfied and, eventually, even close down. Working on the basis of one person’s budget, donations from members of the public, or institutions that might want to endorse it, MVC’s economies are always leading to built-in bankruptcy.<sup>369</sup>

According to many critical accounts of her work as MVC, this inherent contradiction is what lent the greatest strength to the project, at least in terms of its ability to comment on the economic and political strictures that characterize a failing Mexican system that, by 1998, had suffered through a series of economic collapses and a complete neoliberal restructuring in the past two decades.<sup>370</sup> Indeed, MVC adopted from the outset a

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<sup>368</sup> Cuevas, "For a Human Interface- Mejor Vida Corp.."

<sup>369</sup> Medina, "Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México."

<sup>370</sup> This is an interpretation offered by each of the following art critics/art historians: Olivier Debrouse, ed. *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997* (Mexico Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 435; Vania Macías, "Alternative Spaces in the 1990s," in *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Medina (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 375; and Patricia Martín, "0-2\*," in *Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values*, ed. Klaus Biesenbach (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), 53.

deliberately anti-capitalist position by appropriating the structure of capitalist enterprise yet maintaining its oppositions to commodification and profit, an aspect of Cuevas' work that will be discussed below. But it is important to first emphasize how the very structure of her work as an incorporated entity frames the products and services that the artist offers as MVC.

Art critic Patrician Martín writes that,

It is through its symbolism that the project connects to reality, and its fragility and naivete gives it strength. In a sense, MVC can only function in the realm of the symbolic. One critic asked Cuevas if “mejor vida” was synonymous to “welfare,” and she replied: “there is no relation. MVC has precise fields of work, and what we give away, in economical terms, is not what gives our activities their value.”<sup>371</sup>

There can be no doubt that the value of MVC's actions should not be measured in economic terms; in that sense, the individual projects undertaken by the corporation can be said to function only with “symbolic” significance.<sup>372</sup> However, I would emphasize that the very construction of the corporate structure of MVC constituted a performance by Cuevas that carries the impact of the project into the very real space of the everyday, or “reality.” Therefore, Lefebvre's understanding of space as both tangible *as well as* ideological/discursive is a more effective framework for understanding how Cuevas interrogates “public” space. As José Cruzvillegas pointed out, to call MVC an economic “fiction” is to deny its incorporation as an action itself:

MVC assumes a corporate image not in order to falsify it, but to apply its organizational structure—one that works efficiently toward its goals, which means there is a certain rationality behind its actions. The corporate image is a support. It suggests reliability, providing MVC with an identity more seductive

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<sup>371</sup> Martín, “0-2\*,” 53.

<sup>372</sup> It is possible that Martín is speaking of Jacques Lacan's order of “the symbolic,” which marks a subject's entrance into the social realm of language and signification. However, I would argue that the term “symbolic” here undermines the active potential of MVC to exercise change rooted in the space of everyday life than in an abstract, linguistic model.

than the typical non-profit, pamphlet-based activist groups we are so bored with.<sup>373</sup>

Cuevas adopted the organizational and rational purposefulness of incorporation in order to construct a public identity that lent her goods and services credibility, as they would be accompanied by an official MVC logo. Figure 82 shows the Product page of the MVC website that lists both the Safety Pills and the Magic Seeds, both of which have been packed in clear cellophane bags and labeled with a tag that states “M.V.C.” And while the product is still somewhat unclear in its intent, the inclusion of a logo does add an informational quality that is lacking in the nondescript Safety Pills from 1998. The branding allows a viewer/recipient an opportunity to discover the existence and purpose of the Mejor Vida Corp., making use of basic advertising principles.

The deliberateness she displayed toward the process of corporate identification may also demonstrate her move to secure actual office space for the MVC operations. Figure 83 is a photograph of the interior of the MVC corporate office, staged for business. On the desk is a typewriter, a number of large hand-stamps and ink pads, and two display racks, one holding fliers and brochures (such as the subway safety pamphlet) and the other stocked with pills, seeds, and an MVC-produced student ID card. Beginning in 1998, Cuevas rented this commercial space on the fourteenth floor of the Torre Latinoamericana, one of the most iconic skyscrapers of the Mexico City skyline (Figure 84). Despite the limited workforce of one (Cuevas herself), the artist maintained the rental space for five years, which she has characterized as

part of the whole strategy behind this corporate image and as a way to target different audiences. I think that the first year I had the office I didn't invite any art

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<sup>373</sup> Jesús Cruzvillegas, "The Ups and Downs of Mejor Vida Corp.," in *Corporate Mentality*, ed. Aleksandra Mir (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001), 55.



curator there, it was only the people that were going into the building, and then I started having exhibitions with the project, first outside of Mexico, and then the artists and curators in Mexico were interested in the work and started going to the office, but that was a secondary side of the this project.<sup>374</sup>

By 2003, when the office rental was discontinued, Cuevas and MVC had gained such an international reputation that perhaps the necessity of keeping up the appearance of an authentic office-front was no longer necessary. However, I argue that the establishment of a physical, commercial space was central to the construction of her corporate identity. Cuevas, in the MVC mission statement, spoke of the corporation in spatial terms when she referred to Mejor Vida Corp. as “an anarchist enterprise that belongs to, and freely takes place in the public realm, in the streets, without frontiers of time or space.”<sup>375</sup> As an activist art project that takes the form of an economic entity, Cuevas conflated “the streets” with the spaces of both the labor market and the institutional art world, producing a physical and discursive space from which to act.<sup>376</sup> In doing so, Cuevas constructs not only a corporate identity, but she also constructs a personal identity forged through a corporation whose abbreviated name recalls her own, which functions through her social activities alone, and whose “corporate” nature metaphorically references her own corporeality. As such, I would argue that the establishment of MVC (or Minerva Cuevas as MVC) constitutes Cuevas’ production of a spatial body that inhabits a space of work

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<sup>374</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Conversation between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Minerva Cuevas at the First Event of the Project 'Information/Misinformatiaon' Part of the 24th Graphic Biennial in Ljubljana, Slovenia," *Irrational.org*, <http://www.irrational.org/mvc/hans/html>.

<sup>375</sup> Cuevas, "For a Human Interface- Mejor Vida Corp.."

<sup>376</sup> Cuevas has commented on the space of the art world in an interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. When asked about her interventions in the art world, Cuevas responded: "I don't believe the gallery space is outside the "real" world, the gallery and the museum are cultural institutions with their own politics as well, and you can always try to use and interfere their structures. I work with the museums because it means you will target a specific audience. I feel Mejor Vida Corp. is a parasite project that uses the museum because of its production facilities and public presence, so far that's one way the corporation can be massive, in that sense the net has been a very powerful communication tool." Ulrich Obrist, "Conversation between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Minerva Cuevas."

(or work space) that allowed her to gain access to not only a set of rules and practices governed by the corporate world but also to a discursive space that considers the role of women in the realm of the corporate economy and political/protest participation. As a result, the actions undertaken by MVC and the products it provided can therefore be viewed for how they “work” to comment on and provide access to a newly-produced space of equality on the streets.

Teresa Margolles similarly constructed an artistic identity that is grounded in the space of “work.” Known for her use of bodily materials culled from the Mexico City morgue, the artist has since 1990 created sculptures, installations, performances, photographs, and video works that explore the gruesome effects of death on the human body, or as she has called it, the “life of the corpse.”<sup>377</sup> It is a body of work that relies upon the actual materiality of abject fluids and corporeal matter being presented to (and in some cases, forced upon) her audience in such a way as to impose an interaction between the living and the substances of death that are usually thought to be carefully cordoned off from the public, sequestered in the morgue, and eventually discarded. For Margolles to brazenly exhibit such normally inaccessible material is evidence of her entrance to a space where human bodies both expire and are subsequently prepared for preservation and/or disposal. Clearly, Margolles’ artistic process is dependent upon her work as a forensic pathologist, the qualifications for which she secured during her early years as an artist. Her certification, however, should not be viewed simply as a means to materials. Instead, her background as a pathologist should be viewed as an essential

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<sup>377</sup> Amy Sara Carroll, “Muerte Sin Fin: Teresa Margolles’s Gendered States of Exception,” *TDR* 54, no. 2 (2010): 104. According to Carroll, Margolles used this phrase when speaking of her work in an interview with the author that took place in Mexico City on September 11, 2000.

conceptual aspect of her work as an artist, because it establishes that, like Cuevas, Margolles approaches her artistic process from a space that allows her to act in the space of the streets characterized by the intersection of the economy, politics, and protest. Her presence in the streets is borne out quite literally in her work of the past ten years as she has gathered materials left behind at public crime scenes: broken glass shards from drive-by shooting incidents, that she then incorporated into installations or made into jewelry; and blood pooled on the ground after murders, that she soaked up with fabric that would hang as sanguine, stained canvases. However, I would argue that the spatial parameters of her work within an expanded understanding of the streets is established from the very beginning of her career as an individual artist, as can be demonstrated by a series of photographic self-portraits created by Margolles just as she began to distinguish herself from the artist collective with whom she first began creating art.

*Autorretratos en la morgue* (Self-Portraits in the Morgue, 1998, Figure 85) is a series of five color photographs that visually locate Margolles in the morgue. Standing squarely upright in each image, she is surrounded by the tools and materials that she worked with as an artist—the autopsy tables, mortuary coolers, barrels for storing cleansing chemicals, and the lifeless bodies. Dressed simply in black shirt, pants, and a silver necklace, the photographs show Margolles moving throughout the morgue, as if leading the viewer on a tour of the space, donning a white laboratory coat and thick, black rubber gloves as her engagements with the cadavers increase. Displayed in 1998 at the Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro (Queretaro City Museum in Queretaro, Mexico), the series is not among her most well-known or frequently exhibited works. It marks, however, one of her first exhibits as an individual artist, having been created during a

period of overlap in her career as she was concurrently involved in the performance collective known as SEMEFO.

Margolles is one of the founding members of SEMEFO, a death-metal rock band and performance group that came together in 1990.<sup>378</sup> Named for the Servicio Médico Forense (Medical Forensic Service, the central morgue of Mexico City), their presentations combined music with visual displays that often incorporated blood, mud, and animal cadavers.<sup>379</sup> SEMEFO performed mainly at underground venues until 1994, when they had their first exhibit at a well-known Mexico City art museum, the Museo Carrillo Gil. The exhibit, which consisted of an installation of cleaned and preserved colt cadavers arranged into a carousel, dissected horse heads, and sculptures that contained shriveled horse fetuses, marked the collective's (and Margolles') initial entrance into institutional art circles and established a stylistic precedence for working with abject materials which would continue until the group dissolved in 1999.

Margolles, however, would persist with the practice after she began working independently, perhaps owing to her extended experience in forensic pathology. In 1993, while still a member of SEMEFO, Margolles enrolled in an academic course for medical students and doctors, where she learned how to perform autopsies. She eventually earned a diploma in science of communication and forensic medicine from the National Autonomous University (UNAM).<sup>380</sup> This educational supplement, and her resultant

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<sup>378</sup> Other participants of SEMEFO's large, rotating membership included Carlos López, Juan Manuel Pernás, Juan Luis García Zavaleta, Arturo Angulo, Arturo López, Victor Basurto, and Antonio Macedo.

<sup>379</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Semefo: The Morgue," in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. Rubén Gallo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 311. Critics cite the Viennese Actionists as potential influences on the collective work of SEMEFO. Brief clips from some of their performances that include simulations of violence, sex, and ritualized actions can be found online at <http://vimeo.com/2228724>, a documentary uploaded by one of the founding members, Juan Zavaleta.

<sup>380</sup> Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s*, 117.

access to the Mexico City morgue, no doubt had a profound effect on the direction of her artwork, and may have also guided the direction of SEMEFO from 1994 to 1999.

The self-portraits in the *Autorretratos en la morgue* series suggest Margolles' ownership over the practice of incorporating morgue materials into her work, as if "she were placing herself within the SEMEFO proper, rather than collectively taking on its name."<sup>381</sup> Her posture and gestures suggest a business-like affinity to the space in which she is pictured and her clinical gaze and expressionless face betray no emotion. *Self-Portraits No. 2* and *No. 3* (Figures 86 and 87) emphasize her facility in the space. *No. 3* shows Margolles standing next to a body that has been halfway extracted from a mortuary cooler, her hands blithely in her pockets. In *No. 2* she stands beside a metal gurney that carries the naked body of a man whose limbs are awkwardly stretched and twisted with rigor mortis, his flesh dirtied with what are presumably patches of blood or mud. Margolles stands behind the gurney, her eyes trained on the camera, with one hand placed almost affectionately (and proprietarily) on the hip of the man's body. In each of these photographs, her nonchalance of being in close proximity to the dead is clearly pronounced. In displaying Margolles' familiarity and comfort within the space of the morgue, the artist's position as a forensic specialist is naturalized. Like Cuevas' move to incorporate her actions with Mejor Vida Corp. as an act of legitimization, Margolles' *Autorretratos* can also be interpreted as a series of images that establishes artistic as well as professional credibility in the way that they visualize Margolles' spatial inhabitation of her workspace.

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<sup>381</sup> Carroll, "Muerte Sin Fin," 109.

*Self-Portrait No. 5* (Figure 88) perhaps makes the strongest statement in communicating Margolles' situation in the morgue. Wearing her white lab coat and medical gloves, this photograph shows her most intimate physical engagement with the cadavers, as she holds the naked and bloodied body of a young girl in her arms. It is the only image in the series to deviate from a straightforward vantage point. Instead, the viewpoint is elevated, looking down on Margolles as she displays the prostrate body to the camera. While the pose is reminiscent of archetypal mother-and-child or Pieta iconography, the photograph also plays on a different standard art historical trope, that of the self-portrait of the artist in his/her studio.

Artist self-portraits that either take place in the studio, or feature the artist with the tools of her or his trade, are an established subject matter in Western art.<sup>382</sup> Art historian Marsha Meskimmon has noted that while a standard genre, these “occupational self-portraits” have been historically male and “the very presence of women as artists was and still is a challenge to common assumptions about the sex of cultural producers.”<sup>383</sup> Given this tradition, depictions of women at work in the studio continue to exert a “powerful and challenging model” for visualizing female subjectivity as they constitute women artists “coming into representation.”<sup>384</sup> *Self-Portrait No. 5* is an example of Margolles coming into representation. Like the other photographs in the series, this portrait situates Margolles in the space that serves as workplace and studio, with the tools of her craft,

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<sup>382</sup> Omar Calabrese argues that the first artist self-portraits date to fifteenth-century Florence. It is true that the genre became more widespread during the Renaissance, but there are some examples of author portraits in illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages that can be considered in this category. This includes the notable female self-portraits by Herrad of Landsberg, in her *Hortus deliciarum* (ca. 1180 CE) and Hildegard of Bingen, in her *Scivias* (1142 CE). See Omar Calabrese, *Artists' Self-Portraits* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2006).

<sup>383</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

medical instruments and corpses. The elevated perspective of the camera looks down on Margolles in a way that anchors her to the space itself, visually communicating her presence in and among her surroundings. The localization of the artist within the morgue holding a dead child creates, at first glance, a juxtaposition of both traditionally feminine and un-feminine attributes. On the one hand, Margolles is shown at work, wearing lab coat and gloves, and holding a recently-autopsied corpse. On the other hand, it is a portrait of a woman seeming to “cradle” the young girl, as one scholar described, a term that implies a maternal connotation.<sup>385</sup> Superficially, the portrait appears to embody a spatial contradiction that Meskimmon has identified in a number of female self-portraits from the twentieth century. As she stated, many women’s occupational portraits picture them in a space that is both work studio and domestic home; this concurrence, which constitutes “the very statement of professionalism, juxtaposed with expectation about feminine domesticity, means that these works cross traditional boundaries between the public and private spheres.”<sup>386</sup> However, in the case of *Self-Portrait No. 5*, this spatial juxtaposition is a charade. A closer examination provides details in the photograph that reveal that Margolles is not, in fact, cradling the child. Instead of grasping the corpse and holding it to her own body, Margolles’ hands are actually held away from the body, as her right hand is angled down away from the child’s head and her left palm is turned away from the artist’s body, so that the corpse rests on Margolles’ wrists and forearms. Additionally, Margolles does not even bear the full weight of the body but, instead, places the upper half of the corpse on a low, stained, and crumbling cement wall. The

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<sup>385</sup> Carroll, "Muerte Sin Fin," 109.

<sup>386</sup> Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 29.

position of Margolles in relation to the body is much more clinical and detached than the act of “cradling” would allow.

The perspective also adds to this detached character. The vantage point highlights the body of the young girl, affording the viewer a look at the entire terrain of the body. As the torso is fully visible, the autopsy stitches are clear, forming a dark red line that bisects the girl’s chest and belly. The head is also tipped up, giving a view of the stitches that were made in order to inspect the skull and brain during the posthumous examination. Taken thus, the photograph actually emphasizes the acts of forensic science that take place in this space, the practices of work that Margolles herself is trained to perform. The apparent “juxtaposition” is revealed to be more of an assumption of maternal instincts based on the gender of the artist. The choice to pose with a child was no doubt practical in part, because of the lesser weight of the body; however, it also makes Margolles’ disidentification with a feminine attitude that much more emphatic.

The medium is also important. Taken in documentary form, the photographs are a departure for an artist who is known for creating multisensory installations that viscerally assault her viewers with their unrepentant transgression of respectable social, if not ethical, boundaries. The series, which is not exhibited as often as her more sensationalist, materially abject works, reads as a documentation, either of a performance or of her involvement with these unexpected materials. They provide empirical “proof” of her work and her rightful presence in the morgue.

The series *Autorretratos en la morgue*, and *Self-Portrait No. 5* especially, fully establish Margolles within a space of professional work. Additionally, the fact that she often works with unclaimed bodies or those from the poorest spectrum of society speaks



to an economy of death, whereby some bodies are more highly valuable than others.<sup>387</sup>

Because the series establishes her professional qualifications and practices, it aligns with the numerous examples of female self-portraits from throughout the twentieth century identified by Meskimmon, who argued “by producing such occupational portraits, women asserted their professionalism and, in some cases, their economic independence.”<sup>388</sup> In Margolles’ case, the portraits assert her artistic independence as well. By presenting Margolles as an individual acting autonomously from SEMEFO, the defacto announcement of her solo artistic career acts in concert with her assertion of her professional forensic capabilities. Like Cuevas, who creates a hybrid personal/corporate identity, Margolles also establishes herself as an artist/civic worker.

It is significant to emphasize the ways in which each artist began her subsequent body of work. Acknowledging from the outset that both Cuevas and Margolles deliberately highlight their involvement in the spaces of the economy and civic duty sets a tone for interpreting their actions and installations with regard to how they defy traditionally gender spatial restrictions. By entering into art-making through professional work, the artists produce a context for their respective practices that take place on the streets of Mexico.

## II. Cleaning Up the Streets

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<sup>387</sup> The clearest example of this economy of death provided the material for her work *Lengua [Tongue]* of 2000, which consisted of a decomposing pierced tongue removed from mouth of a young heroin addict whose body she encountered in the morgue. When his family was unable to pay for burial services, Margolles agreed to provide for his funeral arrangements in exchange for a piece of his body. The family agreed to give her the boy’s tongue so that he could be put to rest, a financial exchange that put a price on the integrity of his body.

<sup>388</sup> Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 28.

Cuevas and Margolles each purposefully stress that their artwork inhabits a space governed by what Lefebvre would describe as the “relations of production.”<sup>389</sup> That these women were operating in the professional sphere is not noteworthy in and of itself, for despite traditional stereotypes, women have constituted a significant percentage of the public workforce in Mexico since the nineteenth century.<sup>390</sup> However, what is remarkable about each artist’s approach is the manner in which she uses her artwork to position herself at an intersection between the two supposedly separate spaces of the public and private spheres. By underscoring their work-based artistic protocol, both Cuevas and Margolles pointedly contrast their own public-sphere actions with performances that rehearse traditionally feminine activities, more specifically, acts of cleaning or mopping, in public venues. In doing so, each artist is able to re-purpose domestic chores as what conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles termed “maintenance labor,” actions that, when performed publicly, breach the private-public divide by calling into question the ideological and real-world institutions that produce gender and spatial differences.<sup>391</sup>

Both Cuevas and Margolles have either performed or arranged cleaning actions as works of art. Cuevas, no stranger to subway interventions, located her domestic performance in the Mexico City metro. The Mejor Vida Corp. website offers a service known *Servicio de limpieza STC* ([*STC Cleaning Service*] Figure 89). This section of the website displays a photograph of a woman pushing a wide broom along the platform of a Mexico City subway station. The face of the sweeper has been pixilated, but other

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<sup>389</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 32.

<sup>390</sup> For a history of working women in Mexico, see Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); and Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico*.

<sup>391</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Maintenance Art Manifesto," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969/1996); Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," 83-4.

versions of this photograph clearly show that it is Cuevas herself sweeping the area, an action that is consistent with her mission of a one-person workforce.<sup>392</sup> Underneath the photo, a caption reads “An MVC representative has cleaned—during rush hours—the platforms of stations in the Mexico City subway system (STC)” (Figure 90). As an act of public cleaning, the action purports to be a performance of public assistance, an attempt to maintain a public space and keep it clear of the infinite amounts of detritus that accrue at well-traveled spots in one of the most populated cities in the world. However, the value of this service must be questioned when the artist emphasizes that this service has been performed “during rush hours.”

Despite the caption’s claim, there can be little doubt that the platform-sweeping photograph was *not* taken during rush hours. The image shows that the subway train has arrived and a number of people are in the process of entering and exiting the cars; maybe thirty people appear to mill about as Cuevas pushes a broom that measures over half of the width of the platform itself. The thought of Cuevas performing this act during rush hours roundly defies common perceptions of the Mexico City subway system during high-traffic times of the day, in a metro that “serves some four to five million passengers daily (who transfer within the system for an estimated additional two million trips daily).”<sup>393</sup> This concentration of passengers makes the Mexico City metro the third-largest public transportation system in the world, behind only New York City and Tokyo, and often creates situations—during rush hours—that look more like Figures 91 and

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<sup>392</sup> Gallo reprints a version of the image that shows Cuevas’ face more clearly. Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s*, 103.

<sup>393</sup> Clifford J. Wirth, “Transportation Policy in Mexico City: The Politics and Impacts of Privatization,” *Urban Affairs Review* 33, no. 2 (1997): 159.

92.<sup>394</sup> Cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis identified the metro as a place where people occupy the same space, pushing and shoving, squeezed into train cars where “one can assert that where a thousand fit, ten thousand will be crammed.”<sup>395</sup> Some representations of the subway are less than favorable, emphasizing the crowdedness, filth, and even danger of the system. Ricardo Garibay described the experience of riding the trains in negative terms:

step, for your misfortune, into the deep expressway of neurasthenia... You will emerge black and blue, smelling to high heaven, your clothes in rags, your money gone, your umbrella and briefcase after it, half suffocated, furious, frightened by what you've seen down there, and grateful to have resurfaced in more or less one piece: a miracle wrought from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week.<sup>396</sup>

Despite representations such as this, Clifford Wirth stated in 1997 that “both the general public and transportation experts generally view the metro as the most rapid, the most reliable, the most convenient, and the safest form of transportation in Mexico City.”<sup>397</sup>

While the subway is notorious for petty theft and pick-pocketing, especially during crowded hours, it nevertheless provides a crucial service for the everyday functions of the megalopolis. As a public space to be interrogated by Cuevas, it can also be viewed as one that suggests the socioeconomic changes that have occurred in Mexico over the last forty years, and the social relations produced therein.

Inaugurated in 1967 while still under construction, the Sistema de Transporte Colectivo (STC) was a part of the city's widespread campaign to ready itself as a modern,

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, "A Voyage to the End of the Squeeze," in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. Rubén Gallo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>396</sup> Ricardo Garibay, "Voyage to the Center of the City," in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. Rubén Gallo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>397</sup> Wirth, "Transportation Policy in Mexico City: The Politics and Impacts of Privatization," 168.

progressive, and developed nation worthy of staging the 1968 Olympics.<sup>398</sup> Opened in 1969, journalist Juan Villoro has described the metro as a “utopian project,” the “first major public work unveiled after the Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968.”<sup>399</sup> He went on to depict the metro as a public concession to the atmosphere of repression present at the end of the 1960s: “Totalitarian states create an ‘impossible,’ atemporal zone to replace lost freedoms.”<sup>400</sup> Construction continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the number of lines and stations were increased to service the entire city. Alongside the bus system, trams, and state investments in highway networks, the federal government attempted to meet inflating transportation needs but, in the 1980s, found itself unable to keep up with capitol and population expansion.<sup>401</sup> Precipitated by the economic crisis of the 1980s, the state drastically reduced federal spending on the bus fleet and highway development, allowing privately-owned minibuses and taxis to take over the lion’s share of public road transit, a move that mirrored the neoliberal trend towards privatization occurring simultaneously as the government (under the directives of President Miguel de la Madrid, 1982-88) unloaded many of the more than one thousand state-owned industries, such as natural gas, electricity, railroad and air travel, and satellite communication.<sup>402</sup> State subsidies remained in place for the metro, however, as the state invested in its continued development at huge capital costs, in order to keep it priced as

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<sup>398</sup> See Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow'," 159-88; Soldatenko, "México '68," 111-32; and Claire Brewster, "Changing Impressions of Mexico for the 1968 Games," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29, no. 1 (2010): 23-45.

<sup>399</sup> Juan Villoro, "The Metro," in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. Rubén Gallo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 98.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> Wirth, "Transportation Policy in Mexico City: The Politics and Impacts of Privatization," 159.

<sup>402</sup> Dawson, *First World Dreams*, 9-10; see also MacLeod, *Downsizing the State*.

one of the cheapest rail services in the world.<sup>403</sup> Citing the near impossibility of privatizing a municipal subway system, the metro eventually suffered the same funding restrictions that befell other state services and welfare programs during the last two decades of the twentieth century, as subsidies drastically decreased.<sup>404</sup> The loss of subvention has made maintenance repairs and renovation difficult and in order to recuperate some of these costs, fares have been dramatically increased: fees were raised 150 percent in 1995 (from forty centavos to one peso), they were raised again to two pesos in the early 2000s, and in January 2010, the fare was raised to 3 pesos. As state and public subsidies for civic highway infrastructure have been supplemented by private investments, Wirth argued that the privatization of transportation favors more affluent segments of society while contributing to “congestion and safety problems but also insubstantially higher fares and multiple negative externalities, including air and noise pollution, economic stagnation, esthetic degradation, tourism reduction, political corruption, and income disparities.”<sup>405</sup> Because of these changes, the metro has come to “disproportionately” serve a low-income population, a class-based factor that perhaps contributes to its negative standing.<sup>406</sup>

    Servicing the capital’s urban population through a network that transverses the entire urban area of Mexico City, the metro represents an essential space of access and movement through a functioning city. But, because of the ways in which the recent history of the metro reflects the larger socioeconomic and political changes that took place at the end of the twentieth century in Mexico, it is possible to view the space as a

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<sup>403</sup> Wirth, "Transportation Policy in Mexico City: The Politics and Impacts of Privatization," 167-8.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.: 169.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.: 173.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.: 169.

microcosm of urban space and the social relations produced therein. It is a social space that embodies class differences and, at times, gender differences as well, as during rush hours, men and women are encouraged to segregate into separate cars, in order to protect the safety and bodily security of female passengers. As a public space imbued with the ramifications of historical, economic and political policies that potentially threaten its female inhabitants, it thus represents a traditionally masculinized arena, a characterization that provides the context for Cuevas' "domestic" interventions.

The subway cleaning service is not the only act by Cuevas to involve this space. As previously described, her Safety Pills were a response to a NYC safety campaign also targeted to women in the subway. Additionally, MVC has given away "thousands" of pre-stamped subway tickets, according to the website (Figures 93 and 94). Cuevas has written about distributing these tickets to people inside the stations, as an act of convenience, to allow recipients to avoid the long lines that would delay their travel.<sup>407</sup> However, I argue that, like her act of sweeping, this is an action that could be interpreted with regard to Cuevas' gender and read for the ways in which it disrupts normative associations with the public space. In handing out the tickets, Cuevas assumes the cost herself (as MVC); in doing so, she subsidizes the fares of the passenger with whom she comes into contact. She takes on the role of providing the service of transportation, allowing her one-woman corporation to stand-in for a municipal governing body. She also takes on an active role in granting access to the public space of the metro. In bestowing tickets, she grants admittance into a public space, a power not discursively afforded to women in traditional constructions of a "public sphere," where their actions

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<sup>407</sup> Cuevas, "Mejor Vida Corp. ."

are limited. The action, however, is not a simple role reversal. If her ticket distribution is also viewed as a form of “provision” or “welfare,” words with traditionally female connotations, then perhaps this action, like her act of sweeping, can be interpreted as a performance that bridges the supposed divide between female/male, private/public spaces and practices.

Likewise, Cuevas’ act of sweeping the subway platform is not a simple reversal of spatial spheres, a domestic act of cleaning relocated into a public space. By purporting to clean the stations during rush hours calls the very act into question by making the viewer interrogate the efficacy of her actions. The sheer size and scope of the transit network and the dirtying effect of millions passing through the spaces each day render such maintenance absurd. Additionally, to imagine a solitary petite young woman attempting to maneuver a wide broom down a platform as thousands of people fight to inhabit the space also conjures an incongruous picture. The action takes place in a space of everyday life; and because it physically inhabits that space, however practically ineffective it may be, the contradictions inherent in the act call into question the discursive or ideological connotations of the space as well.

Margolles’ act of cleaning similarly complicates the boundary between domestic actions’ confinement within the home and the practice of such activities outside of the home. In 2009, she was chosen as the sole representative artist to participate at the national Mexican Pavilion in the Venice Biennial international art exhibition. Margolles’ presentation was entitled *¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*, or *What Else Could We Talk About?*, which alluded to the overwhelming psychological and emotional toll taken by the endemic violence that characterizes Mexico’s northern border regions. Since the



early 1990s, drug trafficking, gang wars, official corruption, organized crime, kidnapping, murder, torture, and systematic violence against women have drastically escalated in states like Sonora, Chihuahua, and Tamaulipas, and in cities like Juárez, which has in recent years come to be regarded as one of the most dangerous city in the world.<sup>408</sup> With a number of cartels vying for territorial dominance, a deeply flawed war on drugs launched by President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and a largely impoverished community tied to low-wage employment in the city's industrial sector or immediately across the border, Juárez routinely sees several thousand reported homicides each year (although the number of unreported murders and disappearances each year is inevitably higher).<sup>409</sup> The danger posed to men and women on the streets of Juárez and other border towns constitutes a bodily threat that is steadily encroaching upon national security.

*What Else Could We Talk About?* is a multimedia exhibit that responded to the current culture of trauma that exists in Juárez. Through a number of "extramural activities" that took place before the opening of the Venice Biennial, Margolles and a team of workers spent time in and around the city collecting their materials: glass shards collected from the streets after shoot-outs and pools of blood that were absorbed by sheets of canvas that were then transported to Venice to be included in this global

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<sup>408</sup> A report recently released by Mexico City's Citizens' Council on Public Security and Criminal Justice rated Ciudad Juárez as the second most dangerous city in the world, behind only San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Press Release, "Es Juárez La Segunda Ciudad Más Violenta Del Mundo, Asegura Informe," *El Diario*, January 12 2012, <http://www.diario.com.mx/notas.php?f=2012/01/12&id=8f7f669a486043d5913d0ffc2d54170a>; Julian Cardona argues that it is highly possible that the statistics used to identify Juárez as the second most dangerous city were actually underestimated: Julián Cardona, "Juárez, Todavía La Más Violenta Del Mundo," *Juárez Diálogo*, February 6 2012, <http://juarezdialogo.org/ls-articulistast/juarez-todavia-la-mas-violenta-del-mundo/>.

<sup>409</sup> Howard Campbell, "No End in Sight: Violence in Ciudad Juárez," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (2011): 19. For a more extensive account on the northern War on Drugs, especially as it has affected Ciudad Juárez, see Campbell's longer study: Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). See also Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

exhibition. The Mexican Pavilion was located away from the main Biennial campus, in an historic palace, the Palazzo Rota Ivancich. Margolles' works were spread throughout the first and second floors of the previously residential building, empty save for Margolles' art. *What Else Could We Talk About?* consisted of "paintings" or "tapestries" of blood-stained canvas (Figure 95), a Mexican flag made of the same material displayed outside of the building (Figure 96), a locked safe built into one wall that contained jewelry made from the collected glass shards (Figure 97), and a sound piece that played audio recordings made at the site of murders in Juárez and the surrounding areas (Figure 98). A large mechanical apparatus, called *Recovered Blood* (Figure 99), was also central to the exhibit: a massive blood- and mud-stained canvas hanging from a metal frame concealed a machine that repeatedly sprayed the back of the fabric with water, reconstituting the dried and caked materials, which were then collected, along with the water, as they fell off the hanging canvas into a metal gutter below (Figure 100). The centerpiece of the exhibit, however, was a performance that took place daily for the six-month duration of the Biennial, during which the floors of three second-story rooms were ritually mopped with water that contained traces of blood and dirt from the Juárez streets.

The performance, *What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning*, reenacted a daily domestic chore (Figure 101). However, like Cuevas' *Cleaning Service*, the domesticity of this action is also complicated by a series of oppositions that present a complex interweaving of ideas and contexts that are traditionally considered as either "public" or "private." Margolles' *Cleaning* makes such segregations inextricable, so that it would be impossible to separate these ideas into a set of correlating binary oppositions. The performance thus produces a new space that is neither public nor private. Instead, those

seemingly contrary notions inflect one another to allow the act of *Cleaning* to be viewed in a new context.

The preparation for *Cleaning* began months before the beginning of the Biennial. Margolles, whose recent work has moved outside of the morgue, collected the materials for the performance directly from the streets. As she has stated, instead of collecting bodily remnants from the SEMEFO, she now scours news reports to determine the specific locations of violent crimes and homicides.<sup>410</sup> She waits for the bodies and evidence to be removed by the official forensic team and then moves in with her own team of collaborators to absorb what remains with damp rags. Figures 102 and 103 show Margolles' assistants using a thin canvas to soak up the blood that has seeped into the dirt road on which a crime has taken place. The performance begins with an act of cleaning, ridding a public space of the remnants of violence and in Mexico, the act of cleaning is a removal:

The idea emerged from the question of who cleans up the blood left by someone who's murdered on the streets. When it's one person, it might be the family or a neighbor, but when it's thousands of people, who cleans up the entire city's blood? ... When it's a body, or three, or when 6,000 people get murdered in one year, who cleans up the remains that are left behind? Where does the water, where does that blood/mud agglutination go? It goes into the city's sewers, so the city grows more and more saturated in that blood.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> She describes her process in an interview included in the exhibition catalog that accompanied the show. Taiyana Pimentel, "Conversation between Taiyana Pimentel, Teresa Margolles, and Cuauhtémoc Medina," in *What Else Could We Talk About?*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Medina (Mexico: CONACULTA, 2009), 83-100.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

The dried fabrics, which removed bits of Mexican soil and memory, were transported to Venice, and put through a series of rewetting exercises: some were dipped in the sea water on the shores of Venice and then wrung out to collect whatever particle-infused water fell from it (Figure 104); others were hung on *Recovered Blood*. The collected water was then used in *Cleaning*, making the act of mopping in Venice an ironic action that, instead of actually lifting grime or dust from the floors of the palace, actually layered the floor with the traces of the murders that pollute the streets of Mexico.

Contradiction permeated the entire exhibit, a fact that was made viscerally clear upon entering the Pavilion palace. Stepping inside the palace, a sixteenth-century residence that is falling into disrepair, one was transported from the dry, hot, Italian summer sun into a dark and cool interior. The residence was a damp space characteristic of Venice's constant high water table, made dank because of the rewetting machine that gave the space a slightly misty quality. The viewer was immediately aware of the threshold crossed upon entrance into the building, a multisensory experience that corporeally signaled the transition between spaces. The atmosphere in the building was also noticeably different from the busy and bustling streets of the tourist mecca. The space of the exhibition was very quiet and solemn, a mood that was enhanced by the ritual of the mopping performance.

At 4 p.m. each day, *Cleaning* was enacted by at least one performer employed by Margolles to participate in the exhibition, some of them Mexicans whose own family members were victims of street violence. The sweepers started in separate rooms and in far corners of their respective spaces (Figure 105). The mopping was slow and methodical, as the cleaners made uniform strokes back and forth, cutting a roughly 4-foot wide swath of “cleanliness” across the room, stopping only to move the bucket. When the sweeper reached the other side of the wall, he or she picked up the bucket and mop and returned to the other side of the room where they began to cut another path with the unclean mop water (Figure 106). Figure 107 shows a female cleaner in the middle of a performance; the damp floor shows that it has been portioned off in discrete and orderly sections. *Cleaning* showcased a ritual action, executed in a way that was mesmerizing and almost meditative, which produced a further contradiction of responses in the viewer. The abject nature of the action was reduced to tranquility, which at once negated the violence embodied by the action but also magnified the significance of that trauma with its solemnity.

This atmosphere was created in part because of the exhibition’s isolation from the main Biennial venue, a situation that adds to the contradictions of the show. *What Else Could We Talk About?* was part of the public, city-wide art festival and yet as a national pavilion, it did not take place on the Biennial campus, where a number of permanent, national exhibit-spaces are built. Because Mexico has only recently begun to participate on a regular basis (since 2003), its exhibitions are held elsewhere. This is not unusual; during the Biennial, artworks and exhibitions are spread throughout the entire city and large directional kiosks and banners hang on the facades of buildings along the Grand

Canal to point the way. Margolles' venue was much more inconspicuous, as the works were sequestered in a building whose entrance was nearly hidden down a small alleyway behind St. Mark's Square. The only indication for the exhibit was a small sign bearing the Mexican national emblem that hung above the door (Figure 108). Its remote location afforded the viewer a chance to further contemplate the contrary quality of the space: standing in an intimate residence of historic wealth and power, surrounded by the forgotten remains of lives of little value to the contemporary drug war that wages on; situated in one of the safest cities in the world infected with the perils of the most dangerous; clean but carefully layered with a filth that dirties the streets of Juárez on a daily basis.<sup>412</sup>

The characteristics of Margolles' *Cleaning* performance implicate the tensions that exist between clean and polluted, safety and danger, as well as the spaces inside and outside and "public" and "private." Like Cuevas' *Cleaning Service*, these notions are not necessarily treated as fully separate spaces that exist apart from one another. Instead, the importance of the exhibit is found in how the performance and installations inhabit both spaces *simultaneously*, an inhabitation that reveals them to be part and parcel of the same system of signification.

The fact that acts of cleaning are used in both instances to reveal this spatial inflection recalls the work of feminist and conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles who, in 1969, wrote the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, a document that outlined her argument that Modern human labor consisted of two types of actions: development and

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<sup>412</sup> Martin Garrett, *Venice* (Oxford: Signal Books Limited, 2001), ix.

maintenance.<sup>413</sup> Development signaled the active ideals of modernity such as progress, change, and innovation; maintenance, however, supported such objectives: “Keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.”<sup>414</sup>

The manifesto asserts that systems of maintenance are essential for the success of progress, although they are activities that are often denigrated, spatially oriented, and gendered as female:

Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials...I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order.) I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I “do” Art. Now I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, as Art.<sup>415</sup>

By recasting domestic labor as “maintenance labor,” she reveals the ways in which these supportive, “behind the scenes” activities actively sustain social structures that would more closely resemble a “public sphere.” A number of her maintenance art performances took place in a museum setting; in 1973, she was granted access to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut in order to clean the entrance and exhibition spaces. In one of these works, *Hartford Wash* (Figures 109 and 110), she spent hours on her hands and knees scrubbing the exterior entrance steps to the museum. This maintenance was carried out not after hours, by a janitorial staff, but during open hours with visitors present. This move jarred the public, as it was forced to consider menial labor as an aesthetic performance. According to Miwon Kwon, “Ukeles posed the museum as a

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<sup>413</sup> Laderman Ukeles, “Maintenance Art Manifesto,” 622-3.

<sup>414</sup> Ukeles, quoted in Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” 78.

<sup>415</sup> Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, quoted in Patricia Phillips, “Maintenance Activity: Creating a Climate of Change,” in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 6.

hierarchical system of labor relations and complicated the social and gendered division between the notions of the public and the private.”<sup>416</sup> In doing so, she exposed, in the words of Lefebvre, the social relations of reproduction and the relations of production. However, by problematizing the supposed (spatial and gendered) separation of these relations, Ukeles produced a new space inhabited by non-binary social relations.

Cuevas and Margolles achieve the same production of space. Reading their respective *Cleaning* performances as works of maintenance art, or politically-charged domestic labor, affords them the potential to disrupt the traditional restrictions of social spaces and the power relations produced therein. Knowing that each artist approaches this maintenance labor from the perspective of work recontextualizes these everyday practices as acts that can then interrogate the process by which such distinctions come to have gendered currency in Mexican society. Thus, their artistic activities are imbued with an agency that accompanies one’s status as an active producer of space. Because this agency reconfigures binary understandings of space, it is then also possible to look at the ways each artist works to combat an overdetermination of the passive, female body that historically occurs on the streets by introducing the spatial body as a meaningful alternative.

#### **IV. Employing the Spatial Body**

The presence of the female body on the streets has a checkered history that is connoted by concerns of overt sexuality and questionable morality, an attribute that has profoundly negative ramifications for women who inhabit other traditionally-public

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<sup>416</sup> Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 19.



spaces, such as work. According to Adriana Zavala, one of the urban female archetypes to emerge in the early Modern imagination was the “woman liberated from the confines of domestic space,” a “woman/mistress consumed by sexual passion and the desire to please men.”<sup>417</sup> The persistence of this stereotype, which is an expression of male desire, male anxiety, and sexual moralization, has implications not only for the perception and expectations of women, but is also intertwined with issues of class distinction as well. As William French argued, “middle-class Mexicans have always utilized gender and morality to delineate class boundaries and separate themselves from others,” and the female prostitute was one of the strongest symbols of moral warning.<sup>418</sup> Perhaps it is a telling coincidence that in an early article on Margolles’ work with SEMEFO and in the state forensic studio, art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina used the title “zone of tolerance” to describe state negligence as evidenced by the artist’s use of bodily materials taken from the morgue.<sup>419</sup>

The phrase is a loaded term in Mexico, where it was most notably used to refer to a state-regulated space for prostitution and permissive sexual behaviors in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>420</sup> This “brothel zone,” was a geographically demarcated zone of city blocks that was used to confine such public women and to shield respectable society from their “deviant” behaviors. By appropriating the term and applying it to Margolles’s art, Medina drew comparison between the artist’s presence in the morgue, her act of work, and female sexuality. Furthermore, as “attitudes toward morality and sexuality

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<sup>417</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 98.

<sup>418</sup> William French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 72 no. 4 (Nov. 1992), 529.

<sup>419</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Zones of Tolerance: Teresa Margolles, Semefo, and Beyond,” *Parachute* 104(2001): 31-52.

<sup>420</sup> See Katharine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

often express, in symbolic and cultural terms, fundamental social and economic divisions,” a discursive and ideological connection between the working class and the sexualized, female body threatens to undermine the perception of women who inhabit the spaces outside of the “confines of domestic space.”<sup>421</sup> The conflation of the working class, suspicious morality, and the sexualized female body is the direct result of binary gender definitions meant to reinscribe women within the space of the home. As the artists of this chapter, and the previous two chapters, have demonstrated, such binary constructions have no place in a reconfigured understanding of feminist space. Combating notions of the public woman, Cuevas and Margolles instead employ the spatial body in their works. This allows them to not only visualize a new feminist model, but simultaneously reconfigure the process by which women “become social,” rather than public, in Mexico. For both artists, this entails exploiting the tensions between the presence and absence of the body, albeit in very different ways.

For Cuevas, constructing a spatial body meant balancing the presence of her own body on the streets with an absence that is filled by granting access to the movement of others. While her *STC Cleaning Service* and the distribution of subway tickets are actions that require her to physically interact in public spaces, MVC offers other services from which Cuevas is demonstrably absent. For instance, *Barcode Stickers* is a service that involved Cuevas scanning the retail barcodes on common grocery items generally priced per weight, such as fruits and vegetables, and some meats (Figures 111 and 112). Cuevas replicated the electronic prices placed on low-weight produce and, as the website states, “pasted the MVC cheaper barcode stickers over the original labels at several

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<sup>421</sup> French, "Prostitutes and Guardian Angels," 530.

supermarkets.” In doing so, Cuevas purports to offer discounts of around 40% off of basic food staples (Figure 113). These “trompe l’scanner” images, as the artist calls them, are intended to provide a social service that circumvents basic societal rules of capitalism and the law.<sup>422</sup> The action is akin to theft as it gives the purchaser an unauthorized discount, while the store loses a profit. But conceptually, the placement of the new codes is distinguished from a simple act of theft or robbery, because of how Cuevas distances her own person from the act. Although she physically enters the store to place the barcodes, she is not the intended benefactor, nor was there any guarantee that the newly-stickered products would even be purchased. The shoppers who benefit from the barcodes, and commit this fraud, do so unknowingly. As such, the stealthy intervention is a physical act of illegality that was committed neither entirely by Cuevas, nor by a fully-aware grocery buyer.

A second incarnation of the *Barcode Stickers* removes the artist even further from the discounting process (Figure 114). Reprinting low-price barcodes on the MVC website, or providing them on specific request, Cuevas provides her “customers” with the option of printing them out and physically replacing the stickers themselves. In doing so, Cuevas offers them access to a daily discount, an action that must be completed by the customer/viewer’s own participation in a performance that takes place in a social space of everyday life. MVC’s most well-known service, the *Student ID*, similarly authorizes physical access to social spaces and economic discounts (Figure 115). A laminated card that is issued by the MVC “University Extension,” each card features a photo-ID of the person to whom it is issued, the MVC logo, and the credentials and signature of “Carmen

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<sup>422</sup> Medina, “Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México.”

Macazaga Valencia,” who, according to Cuevas, was the first name she came across in the dictionary who had shared initials with her corporation.<sup>423</sup> Although its validity is counterfeit, the card can be used to take advantage of student discounts, even internationally, and gain entry into student-only or academic spaces, such as hostels and universities. In 2011, as part of a city-wide art installation sponsored by the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, Germany, Cuevas set up an MVC kiosk (in a Frankfurt subway station) where she made and distributed the free access badges. A video uploaded onto YouTube by the museum documents the action as well as one recipient’s successful use of the card to purchase a discounted ticket to a theater production.<sup>424</sup>

The notion of access is an essential component to the artworks of MVC, and why a discussion of space is especially salient in recasting Cuevas as a contemporary feminist artist. The concept of access necessarily involves a spatial component that references the ways in which women are discursively (and physically) denied access to a public sphere, their bodies only granted access to the spaces of the labor market or formal politics with certain provisions that call into question a woman’s character and social standing. Activist MVC services like *Barcode Stickers*, which are based on granting access, offer a critical commentary on the efforts of Mexican women to gain entrance to historically masculine social spaces, a contemporary movement also subject to gender prejudices.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, women have actively participated in the protest movements and struggles for democracy in Mexico for the past four decades, where they

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<sup>423</sup> “Minerva Cuevas—Student Identification Card,” *Immigrant Movement International*. <http://immigrant-movement.us/2011/03/minerva-cuevas-student-id-card/>

<sup>424</sup> The video can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGCTLaQ2PII>

have invariably been the backbone of urban social movement and other organized forms of protest that demand basic services for their neighborhood, pay equity and better working conditions through labor unions, and in many cases simply equality and fairness from the state in the delivery of goods and services.<sup>425</sup>

However, even in the spaces of protest, essentialist notions of gender roles impacted the capacities in which they were permitted to act. This was evident in the spaces of protest produced by women in the 1980s where strategies such as maternalism guided their efforts in neighborhood associations (*colonias*) and welfare organizations (see Chapter 3). Perhaps the success of women in the 1980s calling upon traditional home-based duties was in part the result of the character of women's protest a decade earlier.

In analyzing the student movements of 1968, historians Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen argue that the act of protest became gendered as male, represented by male leaders who were the "spokesmen of a generation."<sup>426</sup> Based on interviews with sixty female participants, the authors found that a spatial, gendered logic directed the women's accounts of and reasons behind their own experiences in the movement. Expectations of filling the traditionally domestic roles of women in the protest movement often led to unpredicted forms of intervention. Their interviews revealed that:

Many women volunteered as cooks in the collective kitchens established to feed hungry activists. Mealtimes afforded these women an opportunity to listen to other tales of political adventures. Newer recruits found themselves deciding to go... "into the brigadistas' streets and learn." As they haggled over fruits and vegetables, they would hold extemporaneous meetings or talk with the market shoppers and vendors they encountered. The interchanges that occurred during these moments became a space in which women exercised political initiative. In these forays into the street, women too-often barred access to the formal political arena challenged the definition of the street and politics as (exclusively) male.

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<sup>425</sup> Victoria E. Rodríguez, "The Emerging Role of Women in Mexican Political Life," in *Women's Participation in Mexican Political Life*, ed. Victoria E. Rodríguez (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 5; for a thorough discussion of women's increased participation in formal politics, see Rodríguez, *Women in Contemporary Mexican Politics*.

<sup>426</sup> Frazier and Cohen, "Defining the Space of Mexico '68," 618.

They pushed beyond the protected, semidomestic space of the university to claim the street and politics—and thus full citizenship—as their own physical space and intellectual domain.<sup>427</sup>

Women thus provided an indispensable service to the movement—cooking, shopping, cleaning—activities “recalled as devoid of significance to the movement and seen as ‘women’s work.’”<sup>428</sup> For the purposes of this study, these were contributions that should be recast as Maintenance Labor because they sustained the protest and the protesters. Furthermore, Frazier and Cohen argue that the “street initiatives” of these women were essential to the success of the movement, in that they “engaged a world of broader social relations” beyond the protest leaders and the state bureaucrats to whom their official missives were addressed.<sup>429</sup> The character of women’s involvement often went unnoticed or ignored, operating in a covert manner that conflated so-called domestic chores with public protest.

Frazier and Cohen go on to state that, because they were not assigned leadership roles in the protest movement, women participants were “further feminized” and their actions often deemed as “apolitical.”<sup>430</sup> Ironically, this restriction on the significance of their actions often granted the women greater physical access to certain social spaces:

Because they were not defined as political actors or seen as threatening to the state, women could infiltrate spaces cordoned off to their recognizably political male counterparts. In full view of the police, they would easily slip in and out of occupied universities and were often assigned to deliver messages or transport activist leaders. Elite young women also mobilized the privileges of class, deploying their family cars or extra apartments to hold meetings or hide people.

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<sup>427</sup> Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohn, “Talking Back to ‘68: Gendered Narratives, Participatory Spaces, and Political Cultures,” in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, ed. Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 158.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

These upper-class women thus used their social contacts and posture as properly socialized, nonthreatening, young women.<sup>431</sup>

Owing to their social class and also their gender, women protesters were afforded mobility in social spaces when men were not, a curious reversal of gender localization in public space. Conceptually speaking, these women were a present part of the group's progress, although they were absent in official narratives.

Perhaps the circumstances described above are not unrelated to the concepts broached by Cuevas' *Barcode Stickers*, which combined maintenance activities like shopping (for fruits and vegetables) with acts of (clandestine) legal and economic defiance. Stealing into grocery stores with fraudulent price codes, Cuevas facilitates everyday practices that are traditionally associated with women in order to maintain a home; however, as is characteristic of Cuevas' work as MVC, she does so from the perspective of work, and uses her non-profit corporation to interfere with the profit of others. The illegality of this deed also problematizes traditional definitions of womanhood that characterize the presence of women in the spaces of politics and labor, which are rooted in understandings of women's morality.

Historian Susie S. Porter argued that the mobilization of women into the Modern, public workforce in Mexico was accompanied by growing concerns that questioned women's role in potentially threatening spaces, as "a discourse of female sexual morality and honor became a language or way of talking about social relationships that set out the central terms by which [public] interaction occurred."<sup>432</sup> She stated:

in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Mexico, working women acted within a discourse of female honor, the meaning of which was tied to shifts in

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>432</sup> Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions*, xx.

women's participation in the workforce. As increasing numbers of women worked in mixed-sex environments, the factory (and work spaces more generally) came to represent a sexualized space. And female honor was one of the concepts... used to map out the space available to women in the work environment.<sup>433</sup>

This mixing of the sexes was regarded as a moral danger, not only posed to the women working in the factories and public spaces, but also to men, whose socially-dominant positions were threatened to be overturned, and society as a whole as “the existence of working women signaled the overturning of class and gender hierarchies.”<sup>434</sup> Porter argues that “within an emerging middle-class identity, the virtue of the working woman served as metaphor in the service of class distinction.”<sup>435</sup> The mere presence of the working woman threatened to upend entrenched notions of class and gender identity.

Paradoxically, however, this same discourse on morality has been used by women to justify their presence in social spaces outside of the home. Catholic women's groups and female activist organizations have each proclaimed the inherent morality of women, whose access to social arenas would necessarily clean up the dirty spaces of corrupt business and politics.<sup>436</sup> Speaking in relation to “the powerful poles of discursive constructions of Mexican femininity as the public woman and the angel of the domestic sphere,” the working woman was therefore “a discursive construction... located between these poles and embodied the evolution and contradictions of Mexican industrialization.”<sup>437</sup> As such, the Modern working woman was a spatial body, as she

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Carmen Ramos Escandón, "Challenging Legal and Gender Constraints in Mexico: Sofia Villa De Buentello's Criticism of Family Legislation, 1917-1927," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 58; Olcott, *Revolutionary Women* 20.

<sup>437</sup> Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions*, xxiv-xxv.



both inhabited the social spaces of industrialization but she also signified the discursive process by which she was becoming a social being. The public woman would remain a social threat throughout the twentieth century, as her position at work, and her participation in the feminist struggles for suffrage and equal rights (the struggle to formally enter in to the realm of politics) steadily increased. For as Rachel Brickner points out, for women, employment has historically provided a means of individual agency and an avenue through which to organize for rights and better material conditions.<sup>438</sup> The space of labor, then, is inherently linked to the space of politics, a correlation that was even stronger in post-revolutionary Mexico because of the nature of official state policies of corporatism.

Corporatism/clientelism was an institutional practice employed by the PRI that closely aligned the Mexican economy with the political interests of the regime in an intensely intertwined “public sphere.”<sup>439</sup> Corporatism entails an inclusive, reciprocal relationship between a centralized, authoritarian regime and its governed body; it “incorporates” social organizations and opposition groups into the state apparatus through the trade of social services and/or privileges in exchange for state loyalty. This incorporation severely curtails civil society and discourages actual opposition to the state. Clientelism (based on patron-client relations) is an inward-focused economic policy that

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<sup>438</sup> Brickner, "Mexican Union Women," 55-74; see also Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions*, 73-95; and John Lear, "Mexico City: Popular Classes and Revolutionary Politics," in *Cities of Hope: People, Protests, and Progress in Urbanizing Latin America, 1870-1930*, ed. Ronn Pineo and James A. Baer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 53-87.

<sup>439</sup> Bryan W. Husted and Carlos Serrano, "Corporate Governance in Mexico," *Journal of Business Ethics* 37, no. 3 (2002); Robert R. Kaufman, "Corporatism, Clientelism, and Partisan Conflict: A Study of Seven Latin American Countries," in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, ed. James M. Malloy (London: Feffer and Simons, Inc., 1977); Howard J. Wiarda and Carlos Guajardo, "Mexico: The Unraveling of a Corporatist Regime?," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 4 (1988-9).

similarly established alliances between the state and economic sectors by promoting the patronage of local and national business and offering government protectionism to corporate elites, also in exchange for political security. The “symbiotic” relationship between both corporatism and clientelism results in a hierarchical structure whereby the patriarchal state is privileged above and placed into a position to demand allegiance from both economic elites and civil society opposition groups largely composed of the middle and lower classes.<sup>440</sup> Working in tandem, these state operations, which ensured the political hegemony of the PRI throughout the twentieth century, constructed a public sphere that was firmly placed in the hands of the state. Contemporary Mexico, post-1968, began to see significant challenges to both corporatism and clientelism as both political and economic security began to break down simultaneously at the end of the twentieth century. Mexico’s eventual transition to democracy involved both a government party turnover and neoliberal policies that weakened both the authoritarian and financial control of the government.

A third and final MVC service specifically references access to spaces of employment as they relate to the nation. In addition to the MVC-(un)authorized *Student ID* cards, Cuevas also offered *Recommendation Letters* that could be provided to business owners in order to secure employment (Figures 117 and 118). Cuevas has, at times, provided letters under the aegis of the Mejor Vida Corp., but she also collaborated with a number of art-world institutions to distribute recommendations that were slightly more legitimate. In 2000, she collaborated with the Lisson Gallery in London and the Gallery Chantal Crousel in Paris; in 2006, the Hartware MedienKunstVerein in Dortmund,

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<sup>440</sup> Kaufman, "Corporatism, Clientelism, and Partisan Conflict: A Study of Seven Latin American Countries," 110-11.

Germany agreed to authorize recommendations. Although the letters' ability to speak to the qualifications of the recommended persons was phony, they were nevertheless issued by functioning businesses other than MVC, which lent them an air of legitimacy. As with the Student ID cards, Cuevas assumed an authoritative position, not only using her own position within the art world to advocate on behalf of others but also in seeking out meaningful networking connections that corroborate activism. She authorizes without authority; yet, she simultaneously asks her audience to believe in the promises offered by MVC, as an animated GIF on the *Recommendation Letters* website page flashes "Unemployed?" > "Mejor Vida Corp. Recommendation Letters" > "We trust you, trust us..." (Figure 119). The last statement is left hanging, its ellipses casting doubt on the social contract being negotiated between Cuevas and her audience.

The recommendation service as a whole calls into question the idea of "public trust," and the extent to which institutions can be assumed to act in the interest of those they claim to support. The existence of the Mejor Vida Corp. and the services it provides requires considerations of public trust. In creating works of art that implicate the realms of labor and politics, the "public sphere" is interrogated as well, directing suspicion towards ideological ideals based on its supposed integrity. A desirable component of democracy, according to historian Niels Uildriks, "public trust" goes hand-in-hand with state legitimacy, as both are "heavily dependent on the level of institutional integrity and the degree to which the state is able to fulfill its promises, for example, by providing an acceptable level of crime control and security."<sup>441</sup> Based on the clientelist nature of the PRI, I would add that in Mexico for most of the twentieth century, public trust, or the

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<sup>441</sup> Niels Uildriks, *Implementing Human Rights in Police and Judicial Reform under Democratization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 232.

lack thereof, was also specifically related to promises of employment and the ability to provide for one's family, or the *maintenance labors* promised by the state.

In analyzing Cuevas' *Mejor Vida Corp.* in relation to Mexican declining corporatism, Medina stated:

The Mexican state was characterized by a combination of the arbitrariness of its services, the routine exercise of politically motivated charity and its paternalistic halo of miracle-making. When global capitalism and the advance of electoral democracy is about to erase the last remnants of the old paternalistic state, MVC somehow has built a dialectic image of it. This is a corporation that recuperates the hopes of a population that has been equally betrayed by the promises of the former social structure of political clientelism and the untenable dreams of world-class development. Despite its mocking of corporate culture, and the radical and anarchist leanings of its creator, one can credit MVC with having replicated the unconscious structure of this fake version of the welfare state.<sup>442</sup>

I would add to his account, however, the crucial dialog on gender that her work also promotes. For Cuevas not only mocks corporate culture and the corporatist nature of domineering state devices but she also reveals how these mechanisms define the terms by which women act in and relate to the spaces of labor and politics in Mexico. In doing so, Cuevas positions herself as a "working woman," a spatial body who inhabits realms between spatial dichotomies that are filled with the processes through which social spaces are produced. Cuevas, through the use of her corporate structure, the website she still maintains, and her services of authorization and access, produces a new, "virtual public sphere," from which her physical body is removed but is produced by her everyday practices.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Medina, "Recent Political Forms. Radical Pursuits in México."

<sup>443</sup> Langman discusses the use of virtual media by various social movements in order to reconfigure imagined communities and create new spaces of action, Lauren Langman, "From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice: A Critical Theory of Internetworked Social Movements," *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 1 (2005): 54-60; the most well known example of a social movement's virtual impact in Mexico is the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), Oliver Froehling, "The Cyberspace "War of Ink and Internet" in Chiapas, Mexico," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 2 (1997): 291-307.

Teresa Margolles employs a spatial body in order to disrupt the gendered restrictions of a traditional public sphere in a series of works from 2005 entitled *Ciudad Juárez*. These works, which draw upon Margolles' use of abject materials, address the intersections of the female body, the working woman, and the dangerous repercussions of the discourse surrounding women, sexuality, morality, and the public sphere. Like the works featured in *What Else Could We Talk About?*, Margolles looks to Juárez as what Alice Driver has called a "locus of ever-multiplying forms of horror."<sup>444</sup> These earlier works, however, focus more specifically on what those spaces of horror mean for the women on the streets of Juárez.

Often referred to as the "city of dead girls," Ciudad Juárez has gained international notoriety for the gruesome violence and violation that has been perpetrated on women's bodies as they have been raped, stabbed, strangled, burned, mutilated, and discarded in alarming numbers since the early 1990s. Data as of May 10, 2010 estimated that 751 women have been murdered in Juárez since 1993; the numbers for those disappeared in the same time period fluctuates between 1000 and as many as 3000.<sup>445</sup> Feminist scholars term the situation in Juárez an episode of ongoing "femicide" (or "femicide") in order to stress the specific targeting of women because of their gender,

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<sup>444</sup> Alice Driver, "Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence in Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future: An Interview with Charles Bowden," *Hispanic Research Journal* 12, no. 4 (2011): 370.

<sup>445</sup> Accurate estimates are difficult to measure as the actual population of Juárez constantly fluctuates and few systematic census efforts are undertaken. Additionally, the large number of migrants, impoverished, homeless, and those who live in temporary structures can not be quantified. Statistics for the number of murdered and/or missing women vary greatly. However, I chose to cite the work of Molly Molloy, a reference and research librarian at New Mexico State University. Molloy maintains a comprehensive database of international journalist references to Juárez, femicide, the border region, and the drug war in Mexico. This database, the FRONTERA LIST can be found on Google Groups, at <http://groups.google.com/group/frontera-list>. Quoted statistics are from: Molly Molloy, "Juárez Murders: Impunity Regardless of Gender," *Grassroots Press* 12(2010): <http://www.grass-roots-press.com/2010/05/12/3615/>.

violations that have only recently been recognized as a “crime of the state,” a phenomenon of national significance.<sup>446</sup> In order to meaningfully address the cruelty that has been carried out on women’s bodies along the border, Margolles represented these crimes in a way that privileges space over the material body. In doing so, the video, sound, and sculptural installations included in *Ciudad Juárez* make use of a spatial body that is signified by the tensions between corporeal presence and absence, invoking techniques that are similar to those used by Paula Santiago (see Chapter 2).

For instance, the video *Lote Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra y Cerro de Cristo Negro* (2005, Figure 120) consists of a grainy video projected onto the wall of a gallery, in a darkened room. Trained forward from a moving vehicle, the video records the dry, dusty roads located in remote areas around Ciudad Juárez (Figures 121-123). Named for outlying sites that serve as dumping grounds for the female victims of the city’s rampant violence, the continuous 40-minute loop cuts a never-ending line through the deserted Mexican countryside (see map, Figure 124). Accompanying this video work are two similarly looped audio recordings that replay the sounds of the Juárez deserts at night (Figure 125). Dogs bark in the distance, over a high, constant roar. In the background, just beyond the scope of intelligibility, are sounds that might be voices or music, issued from a radio or speaker. Like the video’s movement, the pulsing sound is constant and endless, an oblique reference to the seemingly never-ending violence in the city itself.

The emphasis on space is seen in the visual passage along the dirt paths and heard in the audio recordings of the desert night. The sights and sounds are further tied to location as the titles recall neighborhoods whose names are continually referenced in

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<sup>446</sup> Federal Deputy Marcela Lagarde, quoted in Kathleen Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juarez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 4-5.

journalistic reports of bodies found. Lote Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra and Cerro de Cristo Negro, or the Black Christ mountains: the repetition of these sites, named in both text and media accounts, is echoed by the constantly-looping video journey through these areas, a reinscription of these sites as spaces of death. What is demonstrably absent from the work is the female body.

Rather than present physical remnants of the bodies themselves in her characteristic artistic style, it is the lack of a corpse or abject material that is most striking in Margolles' Juárez works. In fact, in the video *Lote Bravo*, very few signs of life are indicated at all. While in some stretches of terrain, industrial features can be seen, the majority of the video has the camera directed downward, focusing on the dirt-worn paths, the earth itself occupying most of the view. By focusing her lens downward, she instead pictures the physical earth of the nation, a perspective that could be interpreted as implicating Mexico itself and the numerous state injustices that have been perpetrated against the victims. These include: official disinterest in detaining actual suspects, the arrest of a succession of unlikely scapegoats; the mishandling and destruction of crime scene evidence; the misidentification of victims; and the flat-out denial of the act of femicide.<sup>447</sup> The state representatives' repeated mishandling of the crimes has demonstrated, at best, complete investigative ineptitude, and at worst, criminal complicity

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<sup>447</sup> The research on the femicide is extensive but two excellent anthologies were released in 2010 that offer a comprehensive discussion of the phenomenon: Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano, eds., *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán, eds., *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). See also Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border*.

as the murders have been allowed to continue for 17 years, with a near absence of resolution.<sup>448</sup>

The significance of space or location is also emphasized as pieces of Juárez were literally placed in the gallery in the form of transported earth. In addition to the video and audio works, the series also consists of hundreds of mud bricks, exhibited under the name *Lote Bravo* (2005, Figure 126). Margolles spent time in Juárez in 2004 and collected handfuls of sand from locations where various victims' bodies were found. She then incorporated the Juárez sand into hand-formed bricks that were distributed throughout the gallery floor, standing upright like rough-hewn tombstones (Figure 127). This field of quiet monuments evokes the desert cemeteries and the scores of crosses erected throughout Juárez by feminists, family, and community groups who seek justice for the unsolved murders (Figure 128 and 129). Like the crosses that stand in place of a lost individual, each brick represents an otherwise unremarkable site now only marked by the absence of a previously murdered victim (Figures 130 and 131). By diverting from her characteristic reliance on the body, Margolles uses the bricks to recreate constructed environments that instead privilege space. The body is only present in the traces that may remain in the soil, traces that like her mop water from the Venice Biennial, physically transports the absent body away from the scene of the crime. This spatial approach is significant because it mirrors ongoing media and academic discussions that locate the

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<sup>448</sup> A number of proposed explanations for the femicide and a number of false arrests have been made over the years, including an Egyptian chemist, several bus drivers, and members of street gangs. For an account of the attempts to identify individual people as responsible for the widespread violence, see journalist Teresa Rodriguez's summary of the murders and their aftermath: Teresa Rodriguez, *The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border* (New York: Atria Books, 2007).



causal factors of the Juárez femicide within the broad spaces of globalization and its violent effects on the border.

The most well-known proposed explanations for the occurrence of femicide in Juárez connect the murders with the maquiladora industries, the export-processing plants that populate the border region. This explanation, which Rosa Linda Fregoso has called the “myth of the ‘maquiladora killings,’” often claims that most, if not all, of the victims are young, poor maquiladora workers who have been murdered or taken on their way to and from work in the foreign-owned factories. These numerous reports find fault for the violence in the global economy and its capacity to allow international corporations to seek out more efficient modes of production, i.e. a cheaper, more compliant, and specifically female, labor force.<sup>449</sup> Katherine Pantaleo clearly articulates the “maquiladora argument” when she argues that the

increase in the maquiladora industry along the border, fueled by NAFTA, indirectly led to an increase in women working outside the home. This disrupted the patriarchal social fabric of Mexican society and resulted in a backlash against women and the targeting of these women for murder by unknown suspects.<sup>450</sup>

This explanation acknowledges that “gender restructuring was a crucial element of industrial restructuring,” as capital and gender are inextricable in Mexico.<sup>451</sup> Just as women’s entrance into the workforce at the end of the nineteenth century significantly altered understandings of the home, social class, gender relations, and labor, similar

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<sup>449</sup> See Rosa-Linda Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>450</sup> Katharine Pantaleo, “Gendered Violence: An Analysis of the Maquiladora Murders,” *International Criminal Justice Review* 20, no. 4 (2010): 350.

<sup>451</sup> Altha J. Cravey, “The Politics of Reproduction: Households in the Mexican Industrial Transition,” *Economic Geography* 73, no. 2 (1997): 166.

discussions of morality and female sexuality inflect the working woman in the second half of the twentieth century.

The maquila industry, from its beginnings in the 1960s, has always been a highly gendered trade. It has also generally been a racialized trade, as the region is home to a largely indigenous population that has, over the course of the last half of the twentieth century, migrated to the northern border in search of industrial employment.<sup>452</sup> Although emphasized less often than the gendered nature of the work, the racial/ethnic makeup of the workforce (and the femicide victims) is no doubt a relevant factor in the disposability of female bodies along the border. In many ways, the maquiladora industry is the natural successor to the clothing, silk textile, knitwear, and cigarette factories built at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, production spaces developed specifically as female-dominated industries.<sup>453</sup> The maquiladoras were built in the 1960s as part of the beginnings of a mid-century industrial transition in Mexico “from state-led import substitution industrialization to foreign investment for export production.”<sup>454</sup> Planting the seeds of neoliberal reform, the state instituted the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) “to facilitate foreign investment and expanded with foreign export-processing factories (maquiladoras) and global free-trade regimes.”<sup>455</sup> This marginal site of labor was further bolstered in 1994 by the North American Free Trade Agreement, which advanced globalization in Mexico.<sup>456</sup> Since that time, “the border generally and

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<sup>452</sup> Elizabeth Maier, "The Unsettling, Gendered Consequences of Migration for Mexican Indigenous Women," in *Women and Change at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Doreen J. Mattingly and Ellen R. Hansen (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2006), 19-35.

<sup>453</sup> Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions*, xiii.

<sup>454</sup> Cravey, "The Politics of Reproduction: Households in the Mexican Industrial Transition," 169.

<sup>455</sup> Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border*, 7.

<sup>456</sup> Jane H. Bayes and Rita Mae Kelly, "Political Spaces, Gender, and Nafta," in *Gender, Globalization, and Democratization*, ed. Rita Mae Kelly, et al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2001), 147-70.

Juárez particularly have become a visible frontline site of the global economy. The city is Mexico's maquila capital, home in 2004 to three hundred factories and more than 200,000 workers, over half of them women."<sup>457</sup>

The maquiladoras, like their predecessors, originally targeted women specifically for assembly line work, citing nimble fingers and an obedient nature that would make them ideal workers.<sup>458</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, women made up over 80 percent of the maquila workforce; today, women still comprise about 50 percent of factory workers and maquiladora work is still regarded as a feminized trade.<sup>459</sup> Kathryn Kopinak identified two distinct discursive perspectives on women working in maquiladoras, apologists and critics:

With regard to women workers, the critics have argued that foreign capital has taken advantage of Mexican patriarchy to exploit women, while the apologists have countered that women's employment has provided them opportunities to increase their power and status and improve their economic situation.<sup>460</sup>

Despite whatever gains might be made because of women's access to the labor market, most scholars agree that the "maquiladora industries... were found to structure the labor market so as to channel women into the least desirable jobs."<sup>461</sup> Critics of globalization routinely cite the environments of exploitation that exist in the maquiladoras: low wages, long work weeks, underpaid overtime, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions,

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<sup>457</sup> Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border*, 7.

<sup>458</sup> Leslie Salzinger, *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14. See also Cravey, "The Politics of Reproduction: Households in the Mexican Industrial Transition," 170.

<sup>459</sup> Salzinger, *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories*, 36, 48-9; Susan Tiano, "The Changing Gender Composition of the Maquiladora Work Force Along the U.S.-Mexico Border," in *Women and Change at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Mobility, Labor, and Activism*, ed. Doreen J. Mattingly and Ellen R. Hansen (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 84-5.

<sup>460</sup> Kathryn Kopinak, "Gender as a Vehicle for the Subordination of Women Maquiladora Workers in Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 22, no. 1 (1995): 31.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*: 41.

increased pressure on productivity, strict workshop control, as well as the historical absence of independent unions.<sup>462</sup> Additional pressures are placed on women: forced pregnancy tests, widespread distribution of birth control pills and even so-called abortion pills actively discourage pregnancy in an attempt to subvert maternity labor laws.<sup>463</sup> Such economic exploitation contributes to the construction of what Melissa Wright calls the “disposable woman,” who, through her work in factories, evolves into a “living state of worthlessness,” and becomes “industrial waste,” as she is eventually discarded and replaced.<sup>464</sup> It is no wonder that the transnational maquila industry has been a prime culprit in the search for explanations for the feminicide in Juárez.

However, as Fregoso argues, while the maquiladora industry contributes to a culture of women’s devaluation and even violence against women, the exploitation of gendered bodies cannot be conflated with the extermination of gendered bodies.<sup>465</sup> A more accurate portrait of those disappeared and murdered in Juárez, in fact, represents a much wider section of the female border population. According to Julia Monárrez Fragoso, maquiladora workers make up only 15 percent of those murdered, alongside students, sales clerks, housewives, sex workers, domestics, and drug traffickers.<sup>466</sup> It bears repeating that the socially marginalized position of the victims, as poor women of color, also greatly contributes not only to the devaluation of the victims’ bodies but also the state impunity that has allowed these crimes to continue with no resolution. National

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<sup>462</sup> Paul Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom: A Paradox of Development or the Logic of Neoliberalism?," *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (2001): 64.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*: 73.

<sup>464</sup> Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>465</sup> Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters*, 8.

<sup>466</sup> Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, "The Victims of the Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities," in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*, ed. Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 15; Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters*, 8.

attitudes of not only misogyny but also racism are central to an understanding of the crimes. Thus, Fregoso argues that a more “nuanced” understanding of the murders in Juárez must identify the multiple ways a culture of violence against women is produced through not only global, transnational channels but also within local and national spaces as well.<sup>467</sup> Given these arguments, perhaps Margolles’ works on Juárez can be viewed with regard to the ways in which the images of women are traditionally exploited in service of the nation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Yuval-Davis outlines the three dimensions of symbolic womanhood in the spaces of the nation. Women, in their capacity as both biological and cultural reproducers, are seen as the standard that determines one’s relationship to the nation: women who embody the traditional and appropriate gender role signify the boundaries of the collective nation.<sup>468</sup> Likewise, women who do not display a certain level of national propriety signify the exclusion or expulsion from the nation. Symbolically, women become the “border guards,” who represent social order and stability through the careful maintenance of those boundaries that ensure a solid state.<sup>469</sup> In this way, women as “border guards” fulfill a role that is very similar to the discursive role played by the working woman discussed above. Just as the working woman, according to Susie S. Porter, embodied the evolving social spaces that undermined national faith in separate, gendered spheres, the border woman similarly signifies a contradiction. Tryon Woods stated that “globalization includes a set of spatial rearrangements, and second, space is reconfigured through race and gender formation”;

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<sup>467</sup> Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters*, 19.

<sup>468</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 46.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

he also stated that “far from signaling a diminution of boundaries, globalization more often than not reinforces and fortifies geo-political and racial borders.”<sup>470</sup> The border woman thus embodies a liminal discursive space between the processes of globalization localized at the literal boundary of Mexico and the forces of nationalism articulated through the spatial practices of gender that confront the breakdown of the centralized state at the border.

Indeed, the state’s approach in dealing with femicide has minimized the crimes and, I would argue, continually reifies the bond between womanhood and nationhood.<sup>471</sup> A second installation of Margolles’ murder-site bricks from 2006, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, showed more than 400 bricks stacked and arranged into two imposing walls standing side-by-side (Figures 130 and 131). This installation visualized a nation built on objectified womanhood. As each brick represents one site, or one fallen victim, the walls are a powerful reminder of the mounting body count. The installation, however, also points to the ways in which the murder victims have been used as national objects to construct a punitive double bind that haunts the women of Juárez.

The myth of the maquiladora murders is a strategic explanation for the femicide because it serves to shore up traditional constructions of womanhood in Mexico that would seek to confine her within a private, domestic sphere. The transgression of the carefully-guarded private/public boundaries by the predominantly female workforce of the maquiladora industry is countered by a cautionary threat of extreme violation to the public female body, which is sexualized, and thus trivialized, by both the maquiladora

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<sup>470</sup> Tryon Woods, "Globalizing Social Violence: Race, Gender, and the Spatial Politics of Crisis," *American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2002): 127.

<sup>471</sup> Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters*, 4-6.

managers and police. Female maquila workers, according to the independent findings of Jessica Livingston and Melissa Wright, are derided as sexual beings: in her on-site study, Livingston found that the mostly male managers repeatedly attempted to sexualize and feminize the female workers by encouraging them to “dress fashionably, to participate in beauty contests, and to go dancing in the clubs.”<sup>472</sup> Wright similarly stated that that she commonly heard “the message that you cannot tell the difference between a prostitute and a female maquiladora worker.”<sup>473</sup> In doing so, women’s work, so heavily-relied upon in the maquila industry, is tempered by her deviant sexuality. The myth of the maquiladora murders also draws upon this supposed connection between work and overt sexuality. Many of the families of the Juárez victims report being told by police that the young missing and murdered women were most likely leading a double life, working in the factories during the day and walking the streets at night; citing their painted fingernails, thong underwear, and short skirts as proof.<sup>474</sup> When one 10-year-old girl was kidnapped, the first question police asked her family was about the girl’s willing participation in sex acts.<sup>475</sup> The “*doble vida*” excuse was provided by state authorities over and over again to discredit the victims, to negate the significance of their deaths, and indirectly imply that their violation was the result of their public, sexual lifestyles. In Juárez, the discourse on gender, class, labor, morality, and sexuality takes a dangerous

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<sup>472</sup> Jessica Livingston, "Murder in Juárez: Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Global Assembly Line," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004): 68.

<sup>473</sup> Melissa Wright, "Maquiladora Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics: Revisiting Anzaldúa," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 119-20.

<sup>474</sup> Alive Driver, "Ciudad Juárez as a Palimpsest: Searching for Traces of Memorable Lives," (Toronto, Canada: Paper prepared for delivery at the 2010 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, 2010), 11.

<sup>475</sup> Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, *Trama De Una Injusticia: Femicidio Sexual Sistémico En Ciudad Juárez* (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2009), 264; quoted in Driver, "Ciudad Juárez as a Palimpsest: Searching for Traces of Memorable Lives," 11.

turn because at the border, the stakes involve both the literal and figurative integrity of the nation.

Margolles' Juárez works disrupt the use of the feminicide victims as national objects. By focusing on the sites and sounds of Juárez, she refuses to participate in the further objectification of the women that has been perpetuated by sensationalistic recounting of their mutilated bodies and photojournalism that features photos of the discarded victims. Figure 132 is an example of the type of photographs that are regularly included in newspapers and on television news programs in Mexico; the representation of the discarded and violated bodies now commonplace. Margolles purposefully diverts from what Alice Driver referred to as the "porno-misery" of journalist Charles Bowden's photo-essay account of border crime, entitled *Juarez: The Laboratory for our Future*, which features and fetishizes detailed, close-up images of the dead and decaying bodies (Figures 133 and 134).<sup>476</sup>

The implications of the double-life accusations and the double bind in which women in Juárez find themselves constitute an example of how Mexican women serve as symbolic border guards, used to reinforce the boundaries of the nation. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the murders and their connection to the maquiladoras began during the period of state crisis that saw the significant political and economic weakening of the

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<sup>476</sup> In an interview with Bowden, Driver specifically asks Bowden about the possible exploitation of death and women in Juárez that is communicated by the photographs included in his book. She uses the term "porno-misery" and cites it as a term used in Colombian cinema that is used to "discuss the voyeuristic exploitation of misery," Driver, "Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence in Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future: An Interview with Charles Bowden," 378. See also Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters*, 15. The term could certainly be used to describe a number of Margolles' own works, specifically the *Morgue Self-Portrait* series discussed earlier in this chapter. While the artist's participation in this type of exploitation and objectification is problematic to her characterization as a feminist artist, it does not negate the importance of the earlier photographs in establishing the labor-perspective of her early work. Additionally, the complete absence of the body and the emphasis on space in the Juárez series is even further underscored by such a radical shift in the artist's treatment of the human body.



semi-authoritarian political party that had ruled Mexico since 1929. Financial crisis in the 1980s and early 90s radically decreased state-owned enterprise and increased dependence upon the foreign-owned maquila industry. This was aided greatly by NAFTA, which was officially voted into effect in 1993, the same year that the femicide in Juárez is said to have started, or at least, the same year that the murders began to be counted. The state, however, denies a national problem: in 2006, the Final Report on Women's Homicides stated: "Femicide does not exist in Ciudad Juárez; there are no serial murders; the number of disappearances is insignificant; instead, there is a serious problem of domestic violence; and, finally, this is all a myth created by women's NGOs and academics."<sup>477</sup>

The murders do indeed point to a serious problem of domestic violence. However, the characterization of "domestic" must also include the national forces that are at work to maintain a constant misunderstanding of the femicide that continues to occur in Juárez. The state authorities allow these very public murders to continue with impunity. Like Margolles' wall of bricks, state authorities in Juárez are building, brick-by-brick, female body-by-female body, a national border that pushes back against the encroachment of globalization and its perceived threat to national integrity.

One final work by Margolles perhaps best expresses this tension between the objectives of the nation and inevitable economic global intrusion. In 2006, Margolles created a piece entitled *Cimbra Formwork*, which consisted of two wooden panels that were latched together to create a rough trough (Figures 135-137). The space in between was filled with a mixture of cement and 546 articles of female clothing. These garments

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<sup>477</sup> Adriana Carmona López, alma Gómez Caballero, and Lucha Castro Rodríguez, "Femicide in Latin America in the Movement for Women's Human Rights," in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, ed. Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 163.

were both gathered from women who currently live in Juárez as well as given to her by the families of murder victims, bringing to mind a number of interconnected associations. They may suggest the maquiladoras themselves, a number of which produce clothing and apparel. The clothes may also reference the deliberate destruction of crime-scene evidence, as more than 1000 pounds of clothing collected from victims was inexplicably burned in 1999. Finally, the cemented apparel may be a reference to the ways in which many bodies were identified, evidence that many families find inconclusive and which leads to even greater mistrust of state authorities and a continued sense of confusion and disbelief.

Cemented together, these garments represent a tangle of absent female bodies, trapped by fear and constant bodily threat, visually recalling the language of ditches and dumps that are commonly cited in reports of the murders. Imprisoned between the two pieces of wood, which resemble two fences or even the two walls of bricks created by Margolles the previous year, the in-between space could be said to represent the Mexican women caught in the crossfire of nationalism and globalization as they confront one another in Ciudad Juárez. However, instead of representing this confrontation as a single line or border, Margolles produces the space of the border as one understood as the site where these competing forces intersect and overlap to exploit the female body as the battleground onto which the dangers of nationalism and globalization are simultaneously mapped.

## **V. Producing the Nation**

This chapter has analyzed the artworks of Cuevas and Margolles as these artists have each acted as producers of space. Approaching their respective works from the perspective of participating in formal labor networks, they each negotiate their own presence as women in the social spaces of the economy and politics. Creating works that rehearse traditionally-domestic practices both outside of the space of the home and within the context of employment, they enact performances of maintenance art, a concept that interrogates assumptions that presume the public exclusion of home-based activities and concerns. Such actions, although they are grounded on the streets, “remind us that democracy should begin at home and that a more just society cannot be built if women continue to be excluded from power.”<sup>478</sup> For each artist, deconstructing this public/private dichotomy requires revealing the social prejudices that define how women both moved into and related to a socially-constructed public sphere. As this sphere reified woman’s “unnatural” attendance in public, she was reminded of her sexual body and her morality, both of which were threatened by her presence in the labor market and politics, but also threatening to the social order founded on gendered spatial distinctions.

Cuevas and Margolles each combat this construction by reproducing the space of the streets. Cuevas produces a virtual sphere in which she, as a woman, is empowered to grant access to others and to critically comment on how spaces of work and protest have never been gender-neutral. The corporatist nature of the Mexican state under the PRI conflated economics and politics in order to effectively control the nation for over seven decades; because PRI rhetoric was rooted in stereotypical gender relations, the state produced and reproduced its authority as exclusively masculine. By appropriating and

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<sup>478</sup> Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, "The Indigenous Movement in Mexico: Between Electoral Politics and Local Resistance," *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2006): 126.

mocking the institutional structure of an arbitrary and favor-based system of relations, Cuevas reveals the gendered power relationships that characterize the nation. Through a series of services that problematize and authorize access to public spaces, she reconfigures the ways in which women relate to and make use of those networks of national power.

Margolles' work exposes the more immediate dangers of those same social relations. Her installations about Ciudad Juárez from both 2005 and 2009 expose the grim realities of how gender roles are still an integral element of Mexican identity, as it strives to redefine and reassert itself in the face of the challenges to national integrity. In recent years, hegemonic financial control has been weakened by the effects of globalization and neoliberalism, which have invited private and foreign ownership into Mexico's financial sectors, particularly the ones situated at the border. Social control has more recently been threatened by the dangerous drug wars that, according to at least one journalist, threaten "all sectors of civil society."<sup>479</sup> The fact that both of these national threats are concentrated in a region, and a city, that is now the notorious site of widespread, systematic violence against women is evidence of the intersections of sociopolitical, economic, national, and gender constructs. Margolles produces the dangerous public spaces of the nation in a way that removes the desecrated and violated female body with which it is conflated, simultaneously offering a quiet memorial for the victims and a powerful indictment of the state's unwillingness to protect its citizens, especially women, on the streets.

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<sup>479</sup> Tim Wilson, "Mexico Violence Threatens All Sectors of Civil Society," *In Sight: Organized Crime in the Americas*, <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2023-mexico-violence-threatens-all-sectors-of-civil-society>.

## CONCLUSION

### I. Feminist Artists as Producers of Space

This dissertation has delineated a theoretical methodology for reframing the works of contemporary feminist artists in Mexico in order to highlight the sociopolitical significance of their gendered content. Focusing primarily on works by artists Paula Santiago, Polvo de Gallina Negra, Daniela Rossell, Minerva Cuevas, and Teresa Margolles, I argue for the adoption of spatial politics as a strategy that highlights each artist's contributions to the production of contemporary, feminist space in Mexico. Focusing on deconstructive reformulations of the body, the home, and the streets, these artists speak to a feminist presence in the visual arts that has contributed to the growth of a critical civil society. Analyzing their respective works through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's spatial theories, I have argued for the recognition of each artist as an active producer of space, a social agent participating in the ongoing reconfiguration of the nation. Contextualized within the monumental historical, socioeconomic, and political changes that have reconstituted the nation since 1968, these artists actively reconstitute their own roles in relation to the national social fabric. The spaces they inhabit, the feminist spaces of the female body, the home, and the streets, are thus produced (anew) with the express intent of redefining the terms of nationhood and womanhood as they have been visualized over the past forty-five years.

Paula Santiago has created a body of works that produce the social space of the body. Hinging upon a number of tensions that work to “unfix” notions of self and other, her spatial body is both present and absent, interior and exterior, personal and cultural; she visualizes a version of embodiment that is ephemeral and evolutionary, not fixed in time or space but *inhabiting* space and time. Santiago produces the body as a liminal space, a threshold, and a site that negotiates her own individual subjectivity as well as social pressures and experiences that help to shape her identity. Her sculptural works give form to an effective feminist strategy for reproducing the female body within the context of contemporary Mexican art, allowing her to imagine (and image) spatial corporeality in such a way as to project upon it her own discourse on memory, history, and autobiography. Conversely, the works also permit the artist to engage with the problematic iconography of national archetypes that have plagued female representation since the formation of the nation.

By visually articulating the process through which female subjectivity is formulated (with regard to both personal and social histories), Santiago produces a spatial body. This body is conceived as an active, embodied subject, which can be distinguished from feminist representations of the body like those created by Monica Castillo. Although Castillo’s work effectively addresses a number of feminist concerns about the representational body, such as objectification and the self-imaging of individual subjectivity, her work does not adopt a spatial approach because it does not fully engage the social history of female representation in Mexico. A feminist methodology that hinges on spatial politics and metaphors activates the female body to move freely throughout the social spaces where bodily prescriptions and restrictions are so tightly

enforced—namely, the “private” and “public” spheres. Introducing the spatial body alongside (and prior to) the spaces of the home and streets, however, allows artists whose work engages with and critically reformulates those spaces to do so from a privileged position of protest as they work to produce the social spaces of Mexican everyday life.

In problematizing the public-private dichotomy, Polvo de Gallina Negra and Rossell each point to the ways this binaristic construction of traditional gender roles has been exploited as a metaphor for the “familial” nation itself. They do so by taking up the home as a subject and a space that allows for the critical inquiry of womanhood using two very different feminist strategies. Mayer and Bustamante visualize the home as an ideological construct that has governed the responsibilities and social interests of women. By addressing the theme of motherhood, Mayer and Bustamante embraced strategic essentialism as a way to transgress the boundaries that have been historically built between the home and civic space, rehearsing throughout their performances the iconic “the personal is political” viewpoint. Drawing on personal experiences to stage a public critique of the patriarchal authority of the ruling party, altering the ways in which they, as women and mothers, relate to the home. Using humor and the celebration of maternity to gain access to a national audience on a televised broadcast, the artists, as both mothers and agents, reenter the home via the public sphere reproducing their own social relations to a space traditionally conceived of in terms of confinement rather than access.

Rossell’s work similarly engages with deeply-entrenched understandings of the home and the women who inhabit it. The image of the “home” presented in *Ricas y famosas* defies the stereotypical expectations of the private sphere, and its female inhabitants, as nurturing and maternal. Like PGN, Rossell also visualizes contemporary

women's relationship to the space of the home as one that is complex and multifaceted, which stands in direct contrast to the manufactured image of the private sphere woman construed by national rhetoric. In both projects, Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell each reveal and blur the limits of such spatial confinements and offer feminist visions of subjectivity that extend well beyond the home.

Both artistic projects also reconfigure the space of the home through its representation by mass media formats. They each acknowledge the media as an entity that in Mexico traditionally straddles the public/private dichotomy in its representation of women. The artists demonstrate the ways in which the so-called private sphere they inhabit and visualize is also a social space that masquerades as a supposedly transcendent feminine realm. Exposing the methods through which the state infiltrates the space of the home, however, denies all possibility of a separation of a domestic from a public sphere. In revealing this process of spatial production, and offering an alternative, Mayer, Bustamante, and Rossell also become active "producers of space," producing the home as a feminist space for identification and intervention.

Conversely (or similarly), Cuevas and Margolles produce the space of the streets as a feminist space for identification and intervention, against the patriarchal logic that have characterized a Mexican public sphere as "off-limits" to women. Seeking out and/producing spaces of employment, these artists each negotiate their own presence as women in the social spaces of the economy and politics. Creating works that rehearse traditionally-domestic practices both outside of the space of the home and within the context of employment, they produce acts of maintenance art, which combat assumptions



that presume the public exclusion of home-based activities and concerns. Just as PGN and Rossell reveal the home to inevitably be informed by national, political concerns, Cuevas and Margolles uncover the ways in which the streets are upheld by the supposedly “private” nature of women. As woman’s “unnatural” attendance in public threatened a social order founded on gendered spatial distinctions, society was reminded of both woman’s sexual body and her morality, a binary paradox that exploits women’s “private” nature as the foundation of society.

Cuevas and Margolles each challenge this construction by reproducing the space of the streets. Cuevas achieves this through the production of a virtual sphere in which she, as a woman, is empowered to grant access to others and mock the state institutions of the PRI that rested on gender dichotomies to maintain hegemonic, patriarchal control. Margolles’ work exposes the more immediate dangers of those same social relations that conflate woman, sexuality, and morality on the streets. Employing similar abject visual strategies as Santiago, Margolles visualizes the spatial body as an alternative to the violated body on the streets of Juárez, simultaneously memorializing the victims of gendered violence and indicting the processes of nationalism that are exercised on the terrain of the female body.

Finally, what is produced by this study is a discursive space within art history. The artists and artworks analyzed within this dissertation elucidate a women’s history from 1968 to the present, wherein the terms of the nation are reconfigured from a feminist perspective. As these terms have traditionally adopted spatial frameworks to create physical and ideological confinements and limit women’s spatial access. By employing the spatial body and dismantling the boundaries between the spaces of the

home and the streets, the artists/producers of space discussed here open wide the channels of access for women in the everyday spaces of Mexican life. There is, however, a fourth space that still requires reproduction, one that has also been produced according to the gendered foundations of nationalism and that reifies binary social relations: the discursive space of art history.

## II. Seeking Space within the Pervasive Legacy of Nationalism

Official narratives in Mexican art history were created in large part by the legacy of nationalistic efforts to use the visual arts as a platform for historical revisionism and the construction of a utopian syncretic national identity. Traditional accounts specifically discuss the nation-building programs that proliferated after the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution; however, the legacy of nationalism through art and visual culture can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, when the Academy of San Carlos, the national art academy, issued calls for “national art” in the 1860s.<sup>480</sup> A comprehensive national agenda in the arts, however, is illustrated throughout the long reign of president-cum-dictator, Porfirio Díaz, who opportunistically united the visual arts, public planning, and nationalism as the central tenets of state-sponsored, “official” Mexican modernity. This programmatic advance resumed with fervor in the decades following the Revolution as art and visual culture became essential to the consolidation of one-party rule and the articulation of a national essence. Included among this governmentally-sanctioned agenda for *Mexicanidad*, or “authentic” Mexicanness, were such visual programs as state-sponsored art exhibitions, capital-wide monuments, national pavilions in worlds’ fairs,

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<sup>480</sup> See Escandón, “Women’s Movements, Feminism, and Mexican Politics,” 207.

public parades and festivals, the development of a national photographic archive, Mexican muralism, educational programs that were instituted in primary schools across the nation, and the creation of a national cinema industry.<sup>481</sup> The comprehensive, public, and didactic nature of these efforts are central to the hegemonic discourses of Mexican art history and, in many cases, produce a polemical narrative often constructed around the distinctions between national and avant-garde impulses. This contrast is supported by discussions that pose the social visions of Muralism and the Mexican School against the individualistic and personal expressions of such movements as Modernismo, Estridentismo, the Contemporáneos, Surrealism, and La Ruptura. Art historical discourse

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<sup>481</sup> The bibliography on this topic is extensive. Relevant sources include: Karen Cordero Reiman, "Constructing a Modern Mexican Art, 1910-1940," in *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947*, ed. James Oles (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1993); Olivier Debroise, ed. *Modernidad Y Modernización En El Arte Mexicano (1920-1960)* (Mexico City: INBA/Conaculta, 1991); Susan Dever, *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas: From Post-Revolutionary Mexico to Fin De Siglo Mexamérica* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Rita Eder, "Modernidad Y Modernización: Piezas Para Armar Una Historia Del Nacionalismo Cultural " in *El Arte En México: Autores, Temas Y Problemas*, ed. Rita Eder (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001); Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Lynn Gipson, "Mexicanidad and the Monument to Cuauhtemoc on the Paseo De La Reforma," *SECAC Review* (1989); Michael J. Gonzales, "Imagining Mexic in 1910: Visions of the Patria in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39(2007); Edgar Alejandro Hernández, "Ofende a Díaz Ordaz Que Publiquen Ses Fotos," *Reforma*, August 30 2002; Rick A. Lopez, "The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts: Two Ways of Exalting Indianness," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Culture in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Luis-Martin Lozano, ed. *1900-1950: Mexican Modern Art* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2000); John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); James Oles, "For Business or Pleasure: Exhibiting Mexican Folk Art, 1820-1930," in *Casa Mañana: The Morrow Collection of Mexican Popular Arts*, ed. Susan Danly (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. , 2008); Fausto Ramírez, *Modernización Y Modernism En El Arte Mexicano* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM); Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (London: Lawrence King, 1993); Roberto Tejada, *National Camera: Photography and Mexico's Image Environment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Barbara Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo De La Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876-1910," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William French (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1994); Maurice Tenorio-Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996).

often portrays a vacillating tension throughout the twentieth century that continues even after the year 1968.

As discussed in Chapter 1, artists responded to the events that took place in 1968 by staging a boycott of the national cultural establishment and turning to guerilla art tactics. As the artists of Los Grupos organized Independent Salons, issued manifestoes, and performed actions against institutions such as the Museo de Arte Moderno and the Palacio de Bellas Artes, tensions arose between a young generation of dissenters and an old guard of painters and sculptors who relied on institutional networks to promote their careers.<sup>482</sup> Pilar García de Germenos describes how artists active in the Ruptura and Nueva Presencia movements of the 1960s helped to organize the first Independent Salon but withdrew their participation at the last minute, leading to a generational, and ideological, split that mirrors the national/anti-national artistic oppositions of earlier years.<sup>483</sup> While the protests of Los Grupos certainly constituted a political and cultural anti-national sentiment, their discursive treatment, however limited, carries a well-worn debate into the period of contemporary art.

The national framework in art history was complicated even further by Salinas' attempts to create a campaign of cultural diplomacy. To complement the new international connections he made with NAFTA and perhaps counter the necessary move toward globalization, a so-called "new national art" that developed in the 1970s and 1980s alongside nontraditional media and experimental forms was championed and

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<sup>482</sup> Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*. This defection included Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Merida, Gunther Gerzo, and Jose Luis Cuevas.

<sup>483</sup> Pilar García de Germenos, "The *Salón Independiente*: A New Reading," in *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Medina (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 49-57.

publicly promoted by his regime. Loosely grouped together under the term Neo-Mexicanidad (or Neo-Mexicanism), the artists of this neoexpressionist movement of painting and sculpture returned to the familiar forms of a national iconography culled from pre-Columbian and colonial art, popular culture and folk crafts, and essentialist symbols such as corn, nopales, sombreros, and sarapes. What distinguished Neo-Mexicanidad from its modern predecessors, however, was the postmodern attitude with which its practitioners deployed “pastiche and parody as tools of a deliberately anti-cultural strategy.”<sup>484</sup> Unfortunately, the “globalist delusions” of the decade and the state’s cooptation of the movement as a recycling of an “authentic” national identity ultimately overshadowed the potential for significant change in the representation of Mexican art.<sup>485</sup> In a strategy reminiscent of post-Revolutionary attempts to employ art and visual culture to construct a utopian national identity, Salinas countered the political and economic globalization of Mexico by reaffirming an artistic national identity.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> According to Teresa Eckmann, the Neo-Mexicanists came of age during the widespread movements of protest and social change of the 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by these formative experiences, the movement maintained an “undercurrent of disenchantment and an acknowledgment of failed political and economic systems,” reflecting a “certain discontent in the wake of the Mexican ‘fading miracle’ of modernity.” Like the artists of Los Grupos and feminism, artists such Julio Galán, Nahum B. Zenil, Enrique Guzmán, and Dulce María Núñez continued to strive for expressive autonomy with explorations of personal sexual, religious, and emotional identity. Contextualized by the decomposition of the state and the crises of economic and political legitimacy, such personalized expressions often took on and parodied the discredited iconography of nationalism. Neo-Mexicanism critiqued the artificiality of modern *Mexicanidad* in order to implicate the ways in which the hegemonic state identity sublimated marginalized and potentially subversive subjectivities. As such, it was a movement that should be examined alongside the feminist art movement in Mexico with regard to a broader investigation of identity politics in the 1980s. See *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>485</sup> Eckmann, *Neo-Mexicanism: Mexican Figurative Painting and Patronage in the 1980s*, 4.

<sup>486</sup> Olivier Debroise, “I Want to Die,” in *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debroise (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 279-81; Alejandro Navarrete Cortés, “Symbolic Production in Mexico in the 1980s,” in *La Era De La Discrepancia/the Age of Discrepancies: Arte Y Cultural Visual En México/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debroise (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 289-95. The art world was similarly affected by the economic crises of the 1980s. Between 1982 and 1992, cultural institutions under the aegis of the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) suffered severe budget cuts that rendered them all but inoperable.

In an effort to both reaffirm national sentiment and diplomatically appeal to a U.S. audience in the years leading up to international connections forged by NAFTA, a “marathon” cultural explosion of art, music, dance, and theater was mounted throughout New York City in the fall of 1991, entitled “Mexico: A Work of Art.”<sup>487</sup> The centerpiece of this cultural campaign, which according to advertising material was touted as “an ambitious series of events designed to promote culture, tourism and trade, and better acquaint the American public with the rich cultural identity of its neighbor,” was the blockbuster exhibit *Mexico: Splendor of Thirty Centuries* mounted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1991 (the exhibit discussed in Chapter 2 whose advertisements appropriated Kahlo’s body to “sell” Mexican culture).<sup>488</sup> This encyclopedic exhibition attempted to characterize and display Mexican culture from the earliest Pre-Columbian artifacts through modern (national) art, triumphantly ending with paintings by national treasures Rufino Tamayo, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo. The exhibit presented a teleological narrative of Mexicanidad, conveniently omitting the more recent ruptures of abstraction and the ideological challenges of conceptualism. A network of Mexico City

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Museums like the Museo de Arte Moderno “survived in hibernation, kept breathing mostly to its unionized staff,” for nearly a decade. Yet the state refused to surrender control over the nation’s cultural establishment and the institutions that were, for so long, instrumental in the articulation of national propaganda: “More than any other dimension of Mexican life, the establishment’s refusal to allow even minimal private sponsorship of government cultural institutions shows the insistence with which the governing party continued to cling to its obsolete notion of the nation-state.” Soon after Salinas was elected, his administration expanded the state’s cultural influence by establishing the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Fund for Culture and the Arts, CNCA) and the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Fund for Culture and the Arts, or FONCA) both of which were designed to promote and fund artists projects. However, according to Vania Macías “state interests in the arts at the time was primarily centered on using visual culture to edify and exalt the nation, as a strategy to position the country for its entrance into a free market economy, or what was just beginning to be called ‘globalization.’” See Osvaldo Sanchez, “Out of Bounds?,” in *Mexico Now: Point of Departure*, ed. Ohio Arts Council (Columbus, OH: Byrum Lithographing Co., 1997), 25.

<sup>487</sup> The exhibit subsequently traveled to Los Angeles and San Antonio. Debroise, “Dreaming on the Pyramid,” 51.

<sup>488</sup> Debroise has analyzed the ways in which this exhibit recycles earlier, Modern cultural diplomacy strategies by replicating the curatorial direction of exhibits from the 1930s and 1940s. See Macías, “Alternative Spaces in the 1990s,” 372.

galleries organized a complementary exhibit of art by twenty-three contemporary artists called “The Parallel Project,” which was largely composed of Neo-Mexicanist works.

“The Parallel Project” could have presented a subtle counter-narrative to the *Thirty Centuries* exhibit, for many of the Neo-Mexicanists attempted to reference the past in order to undercut the essentialist notions of *Mexicanidad*. The “authenticity” of the revived forms, however, fed into the needs of an exoticizing art market that subscribed to reductive models of national identity presented by Revolutionary nationalism and the similarly nationalistic intentions of Salinas. Neo-Mexicanism, then, “fit well into an art-as-cultural-ambassador agenda” and therefore did not effectively disrupt the narrative of national identity that it sarcastically presented.<sup>489</sup> Instead, the movement was assimilated into that trajectory and Neo-Mexicanidad was widely misperceived as a positive reinscription of nationalistic art. Thus, instead of helping to dismantle the pervasive legacy of national frameworks, it inevitably contributed to the revaluations of national identity that continued to plague art historical discourse in Mexico well into the 2000s.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Bernice Kanner, “The Art of Tourism,” *New York Magazine*, November 26 1990, 16.

<sup>490</sup> Operating in an international art market, cultural distinctions and the specifics of identity are sacrificed to expected national stereotypes and myths. The emergence of Neo-Mexicanism coincided with an explosive international interest in Latin American, and specifically Mexican, art in the so-called “boom” of the 1980s and early 1990s. Under the banner of growing multiculturalism, traveling blockbuster exhibitions and Latin American art sales proliferated throughout the 80s. The sudden visibility was a phenomenon that was met with both praise and critique but nevertheless, has had profound reverberations for the reception and curation of art from the Americas in the past twenty years. One side of the debate cites much needed recognition and revision of the art historical canon; the other questions whether such curatorial practices are capable of appropriately handling the complexities involved in representing other cultures, or “brokering identities.” Curator and critic Mari Carmen Ramirez identifies a common flaw in surveys of Latin American art such as the *Thirty Centuries* exhibit as the application of Western Modernism, “predicated on the tenets of a rational society, progress, universality, and autonomy of the aesthetic,” to countries and cultures who experienced modernism in different ways, where “modernity has been at best delayed or incomplete, and artistic developments have frequently evolved in tension with the prevailing mode of Western modernism.” She states that “such practices invariably replicate the us/them perspective whereby the achievements of the colonized subject are brought up for objective scrutiny to determine their degree of rationality or authenticity, thereby reducing them to derivative manifestations or variations of already existing tendencies.” These practices invoke a classic Center/Periphery model that, as Nelly Richard states, posits “the Original as a unique and founding concept of the Center and the copy as a mimetic reproduction

The ramifications of this intersection of cultural diplomacy, visual nationalism, and political and artistic globalism have had a profound impact on contemporary Mexican art in the years since 1991. According to curator Magali Arriola, “such a strategy managed to open the doors of the international art scene to a type of Mexican art that responded to market speculation. But it also reduced it to certain iconographic codes that, rather than associating with an ever-changing reality, tied them to a type of nationalism that was aged and anachronistic.”<sup>491</sup> The cooptation and promotion of Neo-Mexicanism as another state cultural vehicle influenced a backlash in the early 1990s among an “underground” movement of new artists and critics, who set out “in search of an alternative to the overwhelming presence of marketable *mexicanidad*.”<sup>492</sup> Reaction against the success of the state’s cultural campaign was not the driving force of a new wave of neo-conceptual practices in the 1990s, but it did refuel anti-establishment sentiment. It also renewed interest among artists, critics, and curators to seek artistic autonomy, a movement that included feminism and feminist art despite its near absence in contemporary art historical discourse.<sup>493</sup> Efforts such as these established in the contemporary art scene in Mexico City a strong current of institutional critique that teemed with frustration at being lodged between both nationalist and globalizing

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in a subordinated language.” In order to avoid labels of inherent inferiority, artists or curators are then encouraged to “stage [cultural or artistic] ‘authenticity,’” a strategy that runs the risk of recycling the prejudices of the past. See Debroise, “Mexican Art on Display,” 20-36.

<sup>491</sup> Eckmann, *Neo-Mexicanism: Mexican Figurative Painting and Patronage in the 1980s*, 26.

<sup>492</sup> MariCarmen Ramirez, “Beyond the Fantastic: Framing Identity in Us Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (London: The Institute of International Visual Arts, 1995), 232-40; and Nelly Richard, “Postmodern Disalignments and Realignments of the Center/Periphery,” *Art Journal* (1992): 240.

<sup>493</sup> The 1990s saw a proliferation of new exhibition spaces, many of them operated by artists themselves including La Quiñonera, Salón des Aztecas, Zona Gallery, Temístocles 44 and La Panadería. In 1991, a group of independent critics, curators and art historians devoted to transforming the art scene formed Curare, Espacio Crítico para las Artes, a non-profit association that organized exhibitions, artist lectures, film series, workshops, and published a biannual journal that greatly contributed to critical art historical discourse.



interests. This careful negotiation of a national identity on an international stage has dominated contemporary art history since the early 1990s and led several to claim curatorial fatigue at the repetition of “the Nation” as a constant theoretical touchstone for Mexican art.<sup>494</sup>

This dissertation has contended with the idea of the Nation as a theoretical framework that should not be discarded, but broken down and examined for the ways in which nationalism intersects with issues of race, class, and especially gender, a discourse that is conspicuously absent from the discussions of contemporary art. Feminist art does not easily fit into the national/anti-national debate, because it is both of a product of and a challenge to the framework of “the national.” An investigation of gender problematizes the national discourse in ways that are ambiguous and uncertain. In addition, as a movement in Mexico, definitions of feminist art have been limited to the late 1970s and the 1980s. The movement is capped at the point when the national was revived in the narrative of art history: the tendency to identify a clearly-defined “feminist” art fell away at roughly the same time that, during the Salinas regime, a new allegedly “pro-national” art was branded and promoted, recycling essentialist constructions of Mexican identity. The implications of this discourse being that once again, feminist issues were sacrificed to the larger concerns of the nation and thus, the discourse seems to suggest that feminist art simply ended around 1990-1993.

This suppression of feminist art occurred at the same time that feminism as a social movement, transitioned from highlighting a personal agenda to adopting a wider,

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<sup>494</sup> For a more on this, see Magali Arriola, "Hopscotch: Between Heaven and Earth," in *Axis Mexico: Common Objects and Cosmopolitan Actions*, ed. Betti-Sue Hertz (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2002), 34.

national, socio-political emphasis. The significance of this expansion in the feminist movement as a whole perhaps illuminates the ways in which Mexican art history has been conditioned by a now-outdated private/public dichotomy. In art historical discourse on contemporary art, the personal and the political are still treated as two separate spheres: domestic and public, individual and collective, feminine and masculine (or at least, gender-neutral). It seems that Mexican art history was prepared to discuss feminist art as a representation of women's subjectivity, their bodies, housework, everyday activities, and even their sexuality, as themes that help to define women's situation in "private" spaces, the subjects often lauded as the primary concerns represented by feminist artists in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mexican art history was not prepared, however, to discuss feminism as it represented a comment on the nation itself, on politics and democracy, and on economics and globalization. To do so would require the discipline of Mexican art history to call into question not only the framework on which its modern and contemporary narrative was built, but also the methods by which that narrative has been challenged, both of which employ stereotypical understandings of gender. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, a theoretical framework that acknowledges the spatial organization of gender and national identity fully demonstrates the latitude of feminist art in Mexico and highlights its potential to both comment on and visualize the ways in which gender is being produced (and reproduced) on a national level.

The transition to democracy, in some ways, created new challenges that prove the need to recognize that the course of gender re-definition and subject-formation is an active process. While the monumental social and political changes that took place over

the last three decades of the twentieth century entailed significant changes in the actual and perceived roles of women in Mexico, the works of Santiago, Mayer, Bustamante, Rossell, Cuevas, and Margolles demonstrate that the necessary work of feminists is still ongoing. Such necessary economic and political changes have had profound effects on the everyday lives, homes, and the bodies of Mexican women. Therefore, feminist artists who work on the streets, as well as in the home and with the spatial body, must also combat the interdependence between these spaces that produce gender restrictions and prescriptions.

The artists in this dissertation expose the ways in which the terms of national sovereignty are still exploiting women as national objects. The year 2000, the governmental turnover of the PRI, and the transition to democracy was not an endpoint for feminist activism. Instead, like 1968, 1985, 1994, the year 2000 served as another benchmark year for contemporary Mexico. With new threats to the nation come new threats to the nation's women, which is why the need for feminist art that both visualizes and actualizes women as social actors and spatial producers is greater and more urgent than ever.

FIGURES



FIGURE 1. Paula Santiago, *Ch'ulel*, 2000

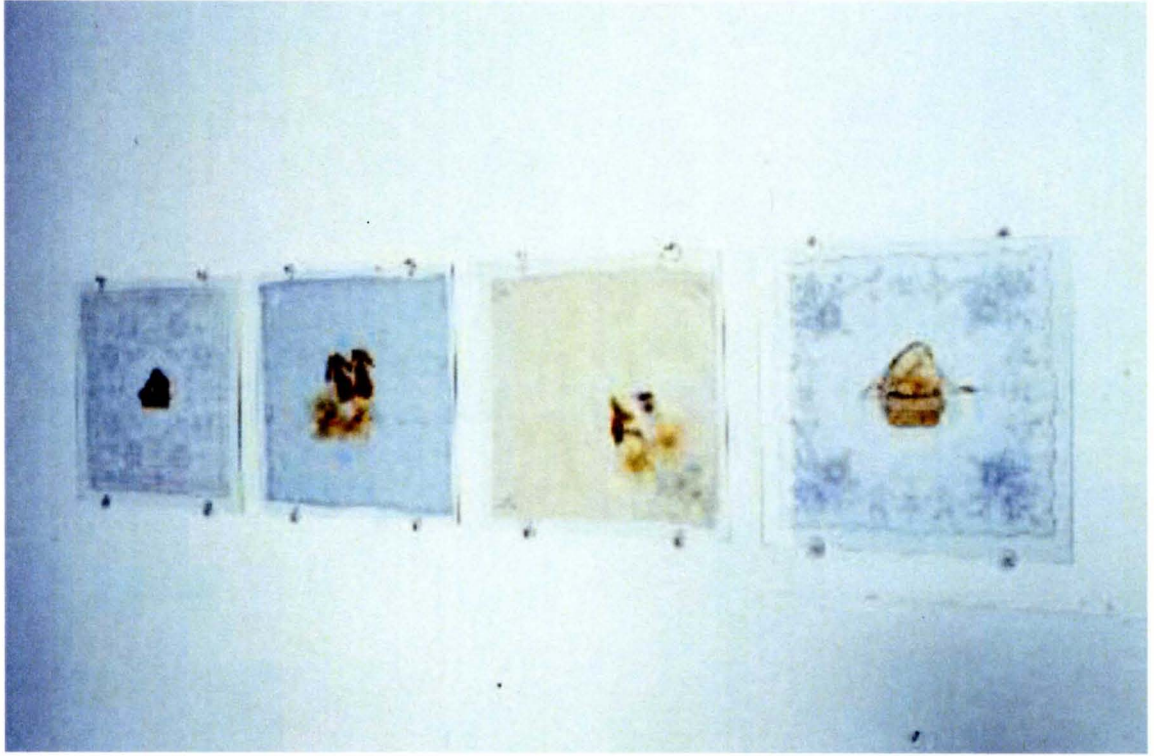


FIGURE 2. Paula Santiago, *Mandalas 4 Bath*, 1996

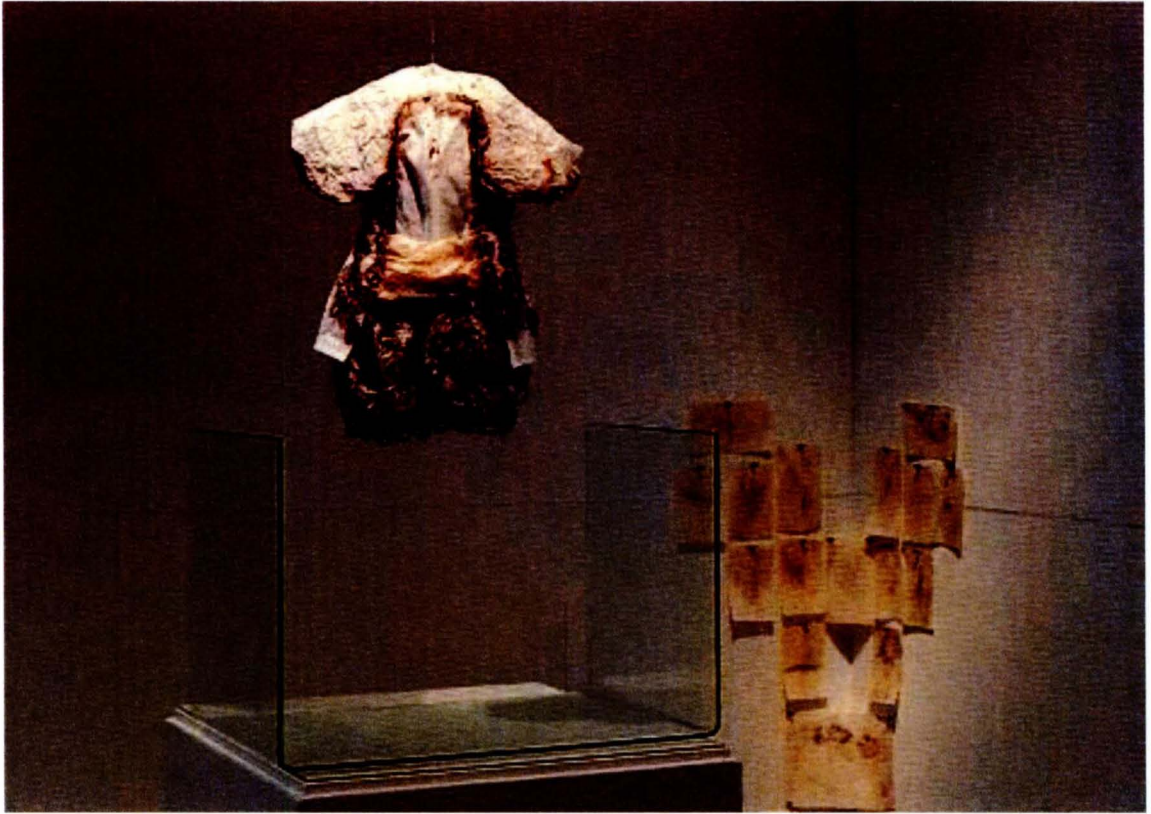


FIGURE 3. Paula Santiago, *Imperial Coat*, 1996





FIGURE 4. Paula Santiago, *ANAM* (front and back), 1999



FIGURE 5. Paula Santiago, *ANAM* (back), 1999, photographed 2007



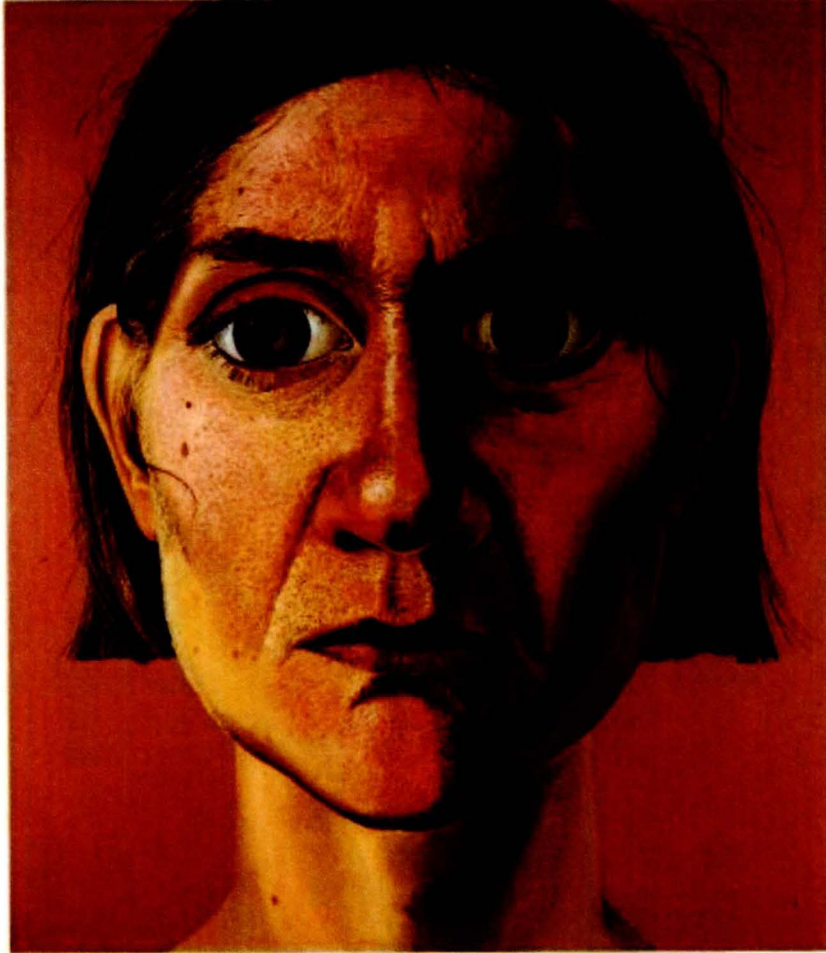


FIGURE 6. Monica Castillo, *Self Portrait of the Skin*, 1993



FIGURE 7. Monica Castillo, *Self-portrait with Individual Details*, 1993



FIGURE 8. Monica Castillo, *56 Self-Portraits*, 1993



FIGURE 9. Monica Castillo, *Box with Rocks*, 1994



FIGURE 10. Monica Castillo, *Box with Rocks*, 1994





FIGURE 11. Paula Santiago, *Untitled*, 1999



FIGURE 12. Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, 1940



FIGURE 13. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkeys*, 1943





FIGURE 14. Advertisement for *Mexico: A Work of Art*, printed in *New York Magazine*, Oct. 15, 1990

# Mexico: Celebrating Thirty Centuries of Culture



*Mexico Distant, by Juan de la Cruz (1989), is a classic example of the surrealistic style which was influenced by the country's Golden Age of Cinema in the thirties and forties.*

**M**exican history is a conversation with the past that continuously shapes the culture of a free and vigorous nation. For three millennia, Mexico has awakened each day to face new creative challenges. Its history is an unbroken chain of cultural successions and political upheavals, of restorations and rediscoveries of the past, of uncanny parallels between Aztec emperors and Spanish conquistadores, between indigenous myth and Catholic piety, between the ancient capital of Tenochtitlan and its physical and political heir, the modern metropolis of Mexico City.

The creative dialogue of Mexican culture is the subject of a new exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Running from October 10, 1990 through January 13, 1991, *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* will feature 600 relics, artifacts, pieces of furniture, sculptures and paintings that date from the days of the monolith-raising Olmecs, who reigned over the Gulf Coast jungles from 1500 to 500 B.C., through the colonial Baroque culture transported by the conquering Spaniards from Europe, to artistic stirrings in the early part of our century as Mexico attempted to weave the threads of its fine historical tapestry into the fabric of an evolving modern culture.

The exhibit serves as the axis for *Mexico: A Work of Art*, an ambitious series of events designed to promote culture, tourism and trade, and better acquaint the American public with the rich cultural identity of its neighbor. Marked by over 150 activities that will take place in New York during the fall, *Mexico: A Work of Art* celebrates the country's creativity and expresses the abundance of forms, colors and ideas of Mexico's most prominent artists and thinkers.

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## MEXICO A WORK OF ART



### MEXICO SPLENDORS OF THIRTY CENTURIES

October 10, 1990-January 13, 1991  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York, New York

April 6-August 4, 1991  
The San Antonio Museum of Art  
San Antonio, Texas

September 28-December 28, 1991  
The Los Angeles County  
Museum of Art  
Los Angeles, California



*"Mexico has a culture of its own  
of which we are all proud.  
Knowledge of other civilizations  
enriches us. Sharing  
humanity's efforts toward peace  
and progress stimulates in us  
an awareness of what is Mexican,  
and of our contributions  
to the world's cultural legacy."*

—President Carlos Salazar de Gortari

FIGURE 15. Advertisement for *Mexico: A Work of Art*, printed in *Time Magazine*, Oct. 15, 1990



FIGURE 16. Paula Santiago, *Consolations: PINK*, 1999





FIGURE 17. Paula Santiago, *Consolations: RESP*, 1999



FIGURE 18. Paula Santiago, *IV*, 1996

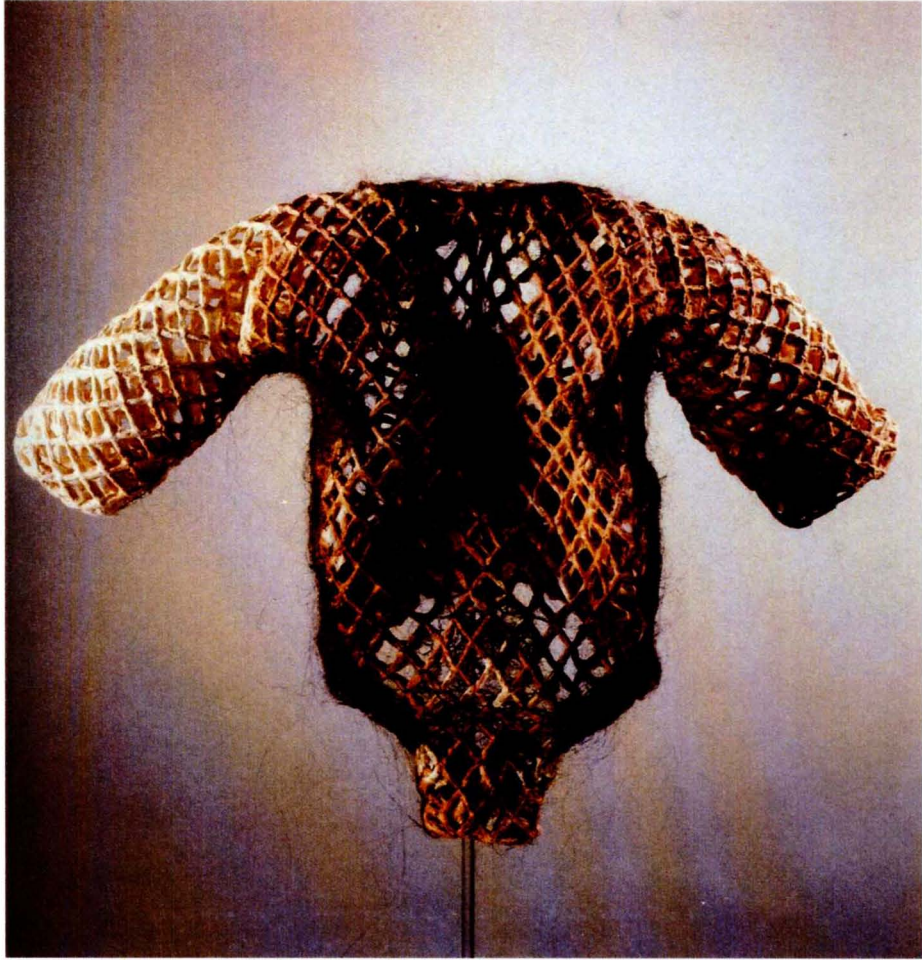


FIGURE 19. Paula Santiago, *BOM*, 1999



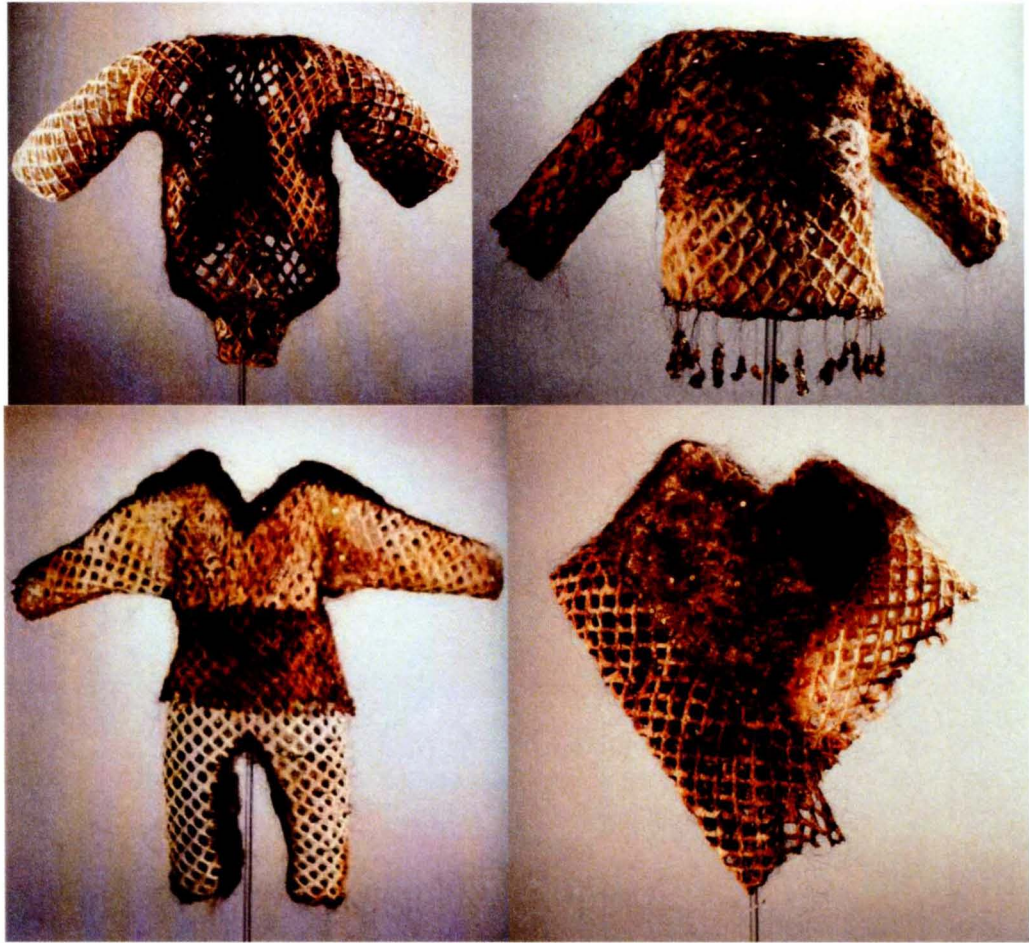


FIGURE 20. Paula Santiago, *To Protect Oneself From History* series, clockwise from top:  
*BOM, QUEX, QUIPE, GUE* 1999

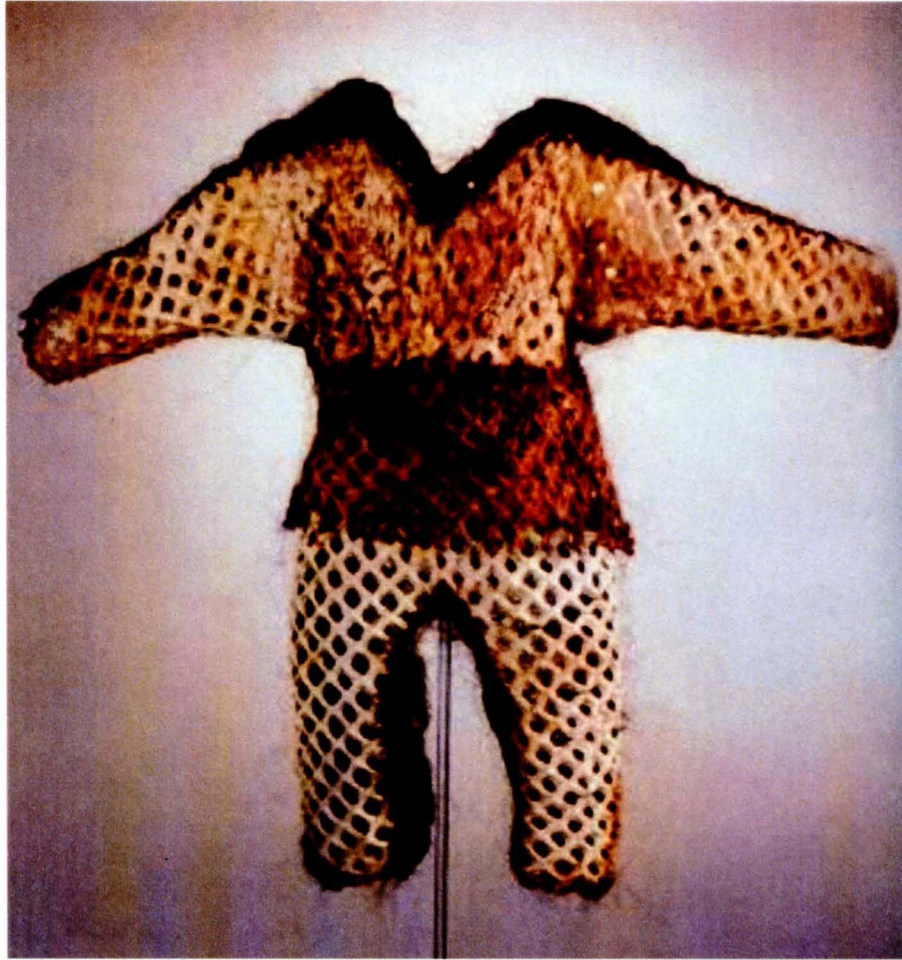


FIGURE 21. Paula Santiago, *GUE*, 1999





FIGURE 22. Monica Castillo, *Alphabet*, 1996



FIGURE 23. Monica Castillo, *Curriculum*, 1997



FIGURE 24. Monica Castillo, *Spoken Self-Portraits*, 1997



FIGURE 25. Petronilo Monroy, *Allegory of the Constitution of 1857*, 1869





FIGURE 26. Antonio Rivas Mercado and Enrique Alciati, *Monument to Mexican Independence (Angel of the Republic)*, 1910



FIGURE 27. Diego Rivera, *The Liberated Earth and the Natural Forces Controlled by Man*, 1926. National Agricultural University, Chapingo



FIGURE 28. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *New Democracy*, 1944-5. Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City



FIGURE 29. Jose Clemente Orozco, *Catharsis*, 1934. Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City



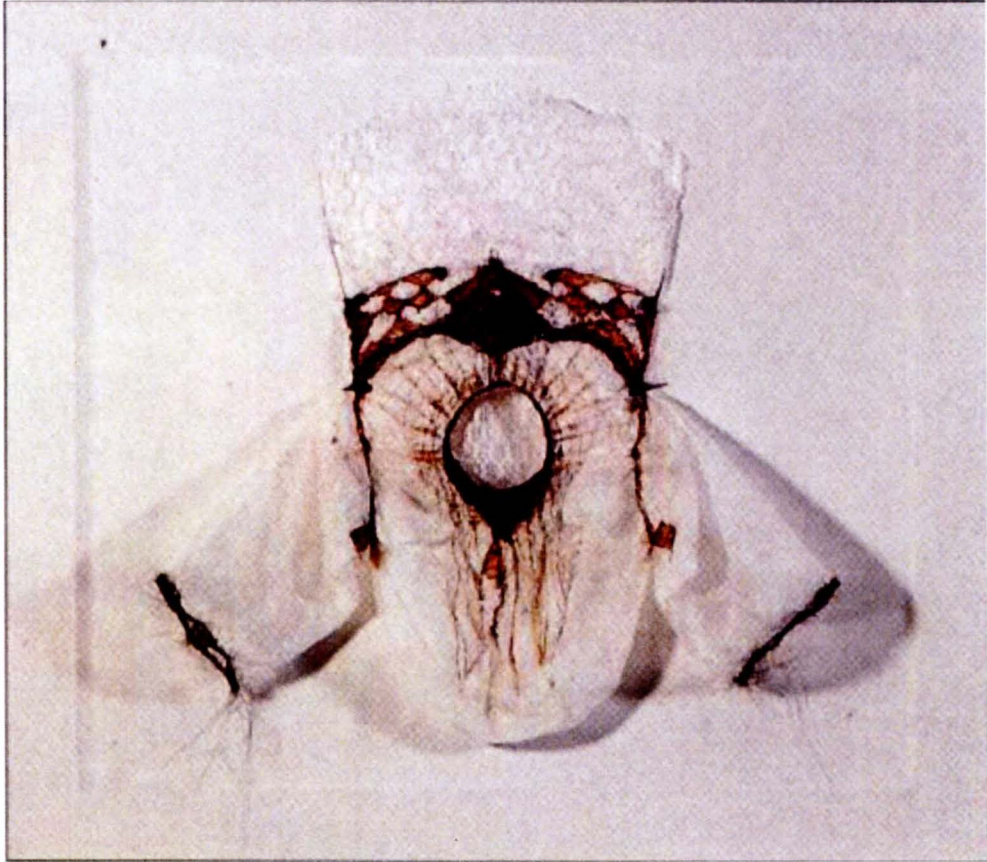


FIGURE 30. Paula Santiago, *Cefal*, 1999

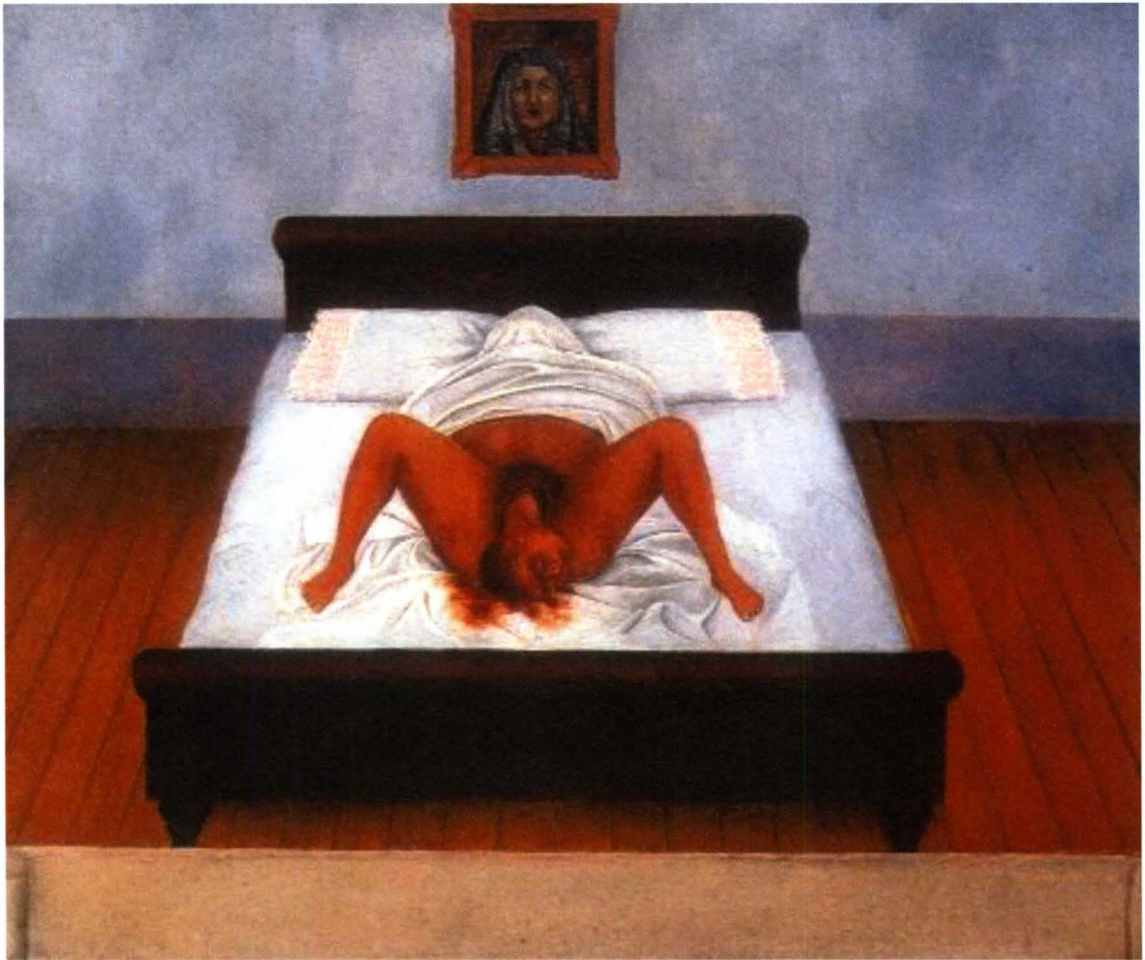


FIGURE 31. Frida Kahlo, *My Birth*, 1932



FIGURE 32. Nahum B. Zenil, *Motherland*, 1986





FIGURE 33. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia*, performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 34. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (Guillermo Ochoa), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 35. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (Maris Bustamante), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 36. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (Bustamante and Mayer), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



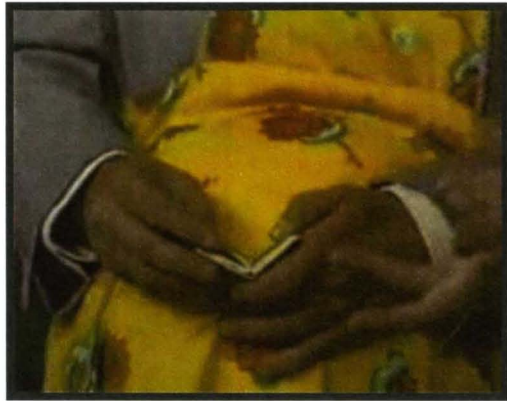


FIGURE 37. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (apron belly), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 38. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (crown), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987





FIGURES 39-42. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (maternity kit), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 43. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (Bad Mother), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987

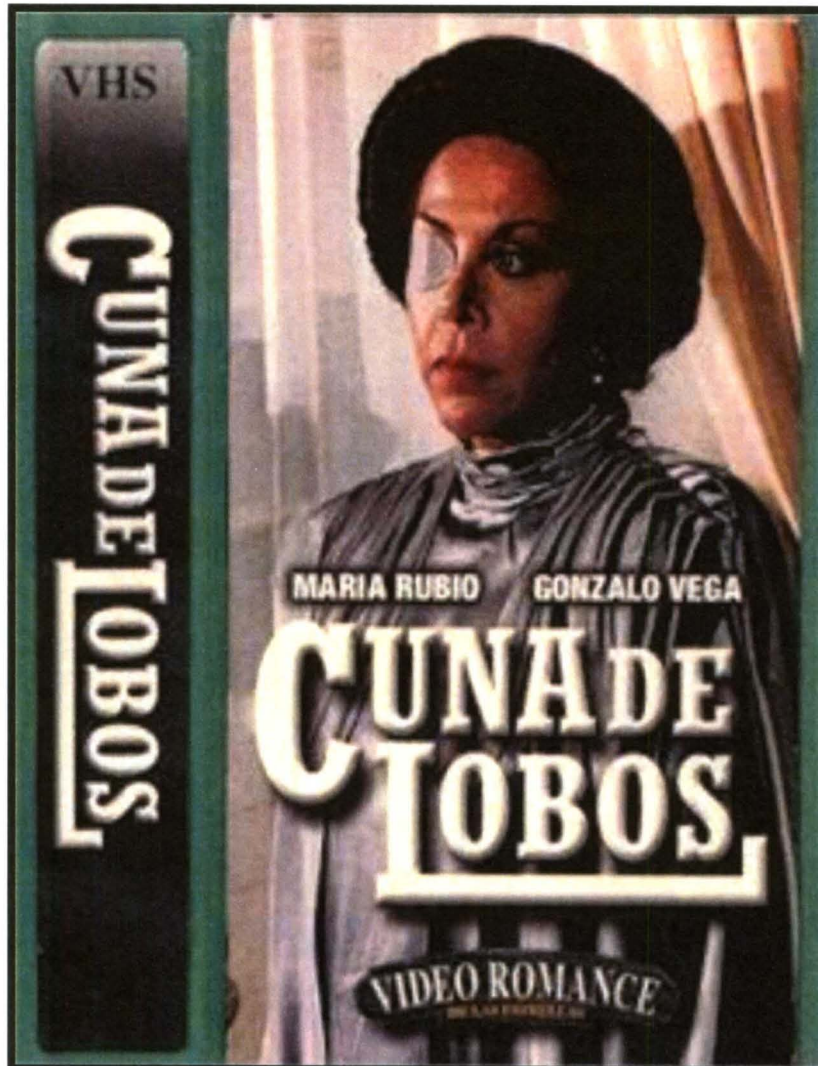


FIGURE 44. VHS cover, *Cuna de Lobos*, 1987



FIGURE 45. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia*, performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



noviembre

RECETA DEL GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA PARA HACERLE EL MAL DE OJO A LOS VIOLADORES, O EL RESPETO AL DERECHO DEL CUERPO AJENO ES LA PAZ

Acción plástica-política para el hemicidio a Juárez dentro de la marcha feminista contra la violación del 7 de octubre de 1983.  
Duración: 20 minutos ante 1000 espectadores.

Ingredientes:

- 2 docenas de ojos y corazones de mujer que se acepte como tal.
- 20 kg. de rayos y centellas de mujer que se enoja cuando la agreden.
- 1 tonelada de músculos de acero de mujer que exige respeto a su cuerpo.
- 3 lenguas de mujer que no se somete aún cuando fué violada.
- 1 sobre de grenetina de mujer, sabor espinaca, que comprende y apoya a una mujer que fué violada.
- 30 grs. de polvo de voces que desmitificuen la violación.
- 7 gotas de hombres que apoyen la lucha contra la violación.
- 1 pizca de legisladores interesados en los cambios sociales que demandamos las mujeres.
- Unas cuantas cucharadas de familias y escuelas que no promuevan los roles tradicionales.
- 3 docenas de mensajes de comunicadores responsables que dejen de producir imágenes que promueven la violación.
- 1 pelos de superfeminista.
- 2 colmillos de militante de partido de oposición.
- ½ oreja de espontáneo y curioso.

Siguiendo cuidadosamente las instrucciones sobre el modo de preparación lograremos tener como resultado final nuestra explosiva mezcla con la cual ud. podrá sorprender a los violadores que habitan su misma casa o la de la vecina, los tímidos y los agresivos, los pasivos y los activos, y los que la acechan en el trabajo o en el camión y finalmente a los que se esconden en la noche que hoy venimos a tomar.

GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA  
(Fundado el 21 de junio de 1983.)  
Maris Bustamante  
Herminia Dosal  
Mónica Mayer



FIGURE 46. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Recipe for Black Hen Dust*, 1983



FIGURE 47. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002





FIGURE 48. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Itatí Cantoral 1), 1998-2002



FIGURE 49. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002





FIGURE 50. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



FIGURE 52. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



FIGURE 53. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002





FIGURE 53. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (harem scene 1), 1998-2002



FIGURE 54. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (harem scene 2), 1998-2002





FIGURE 55. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Itatí Cantoral 2), 1998-2002



FIGURE 56. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



FIGURE 57. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



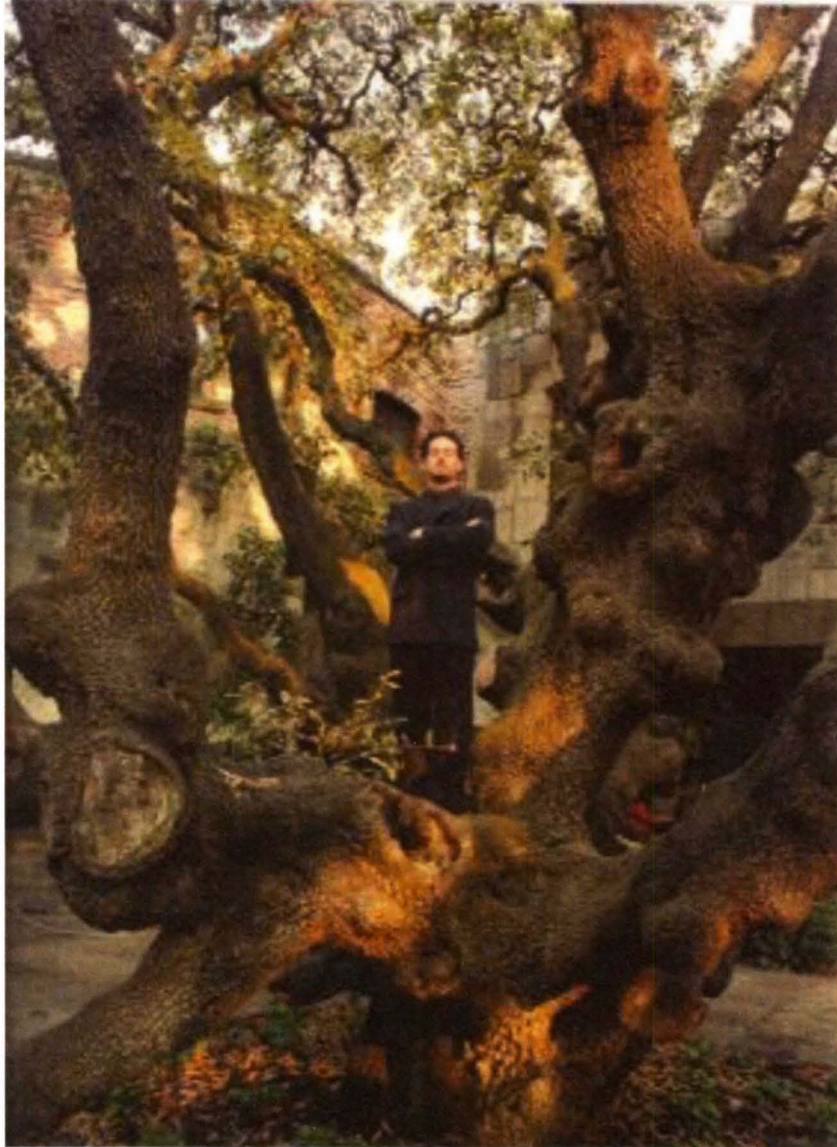


FIGURE 58. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Emiliano Salinas 1), 1998-2002

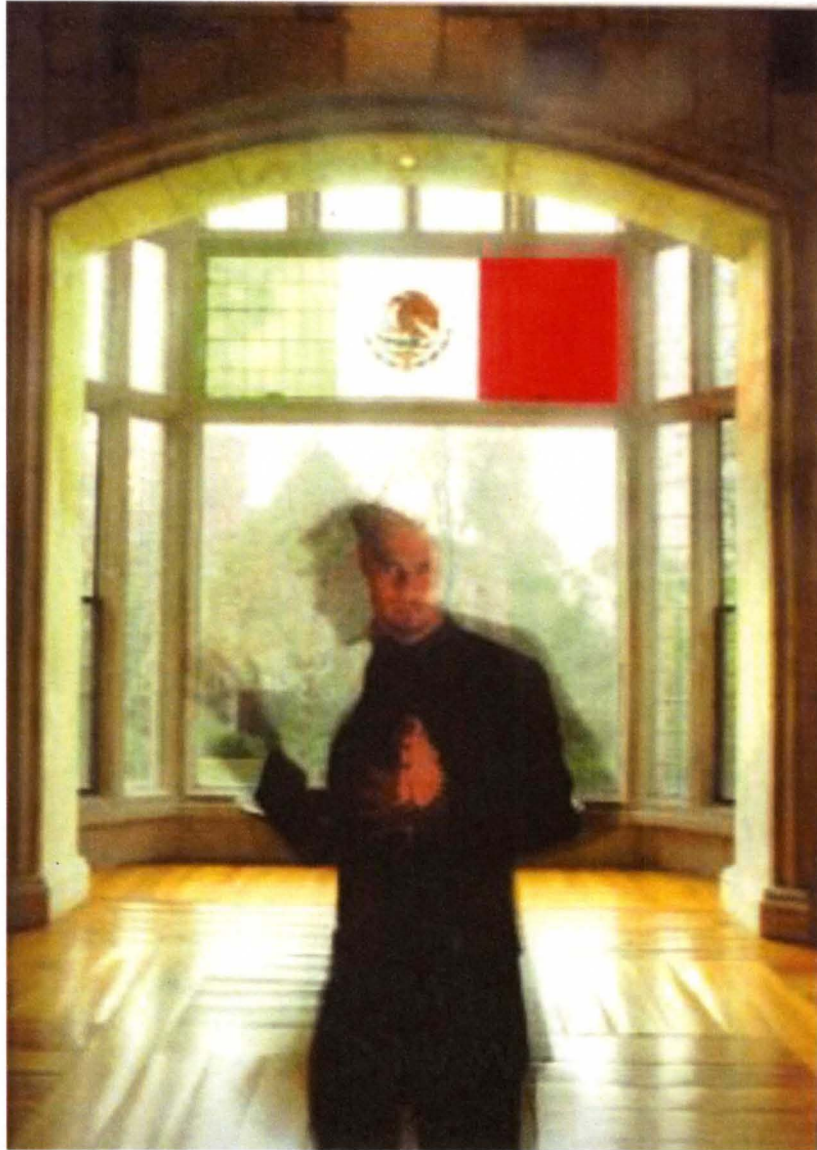


FIGURE 59. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosos* (Emiliano Salinas 2), 1998-2002



FIGURE 60. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Alinur Velidedeoglu), 1998-2002



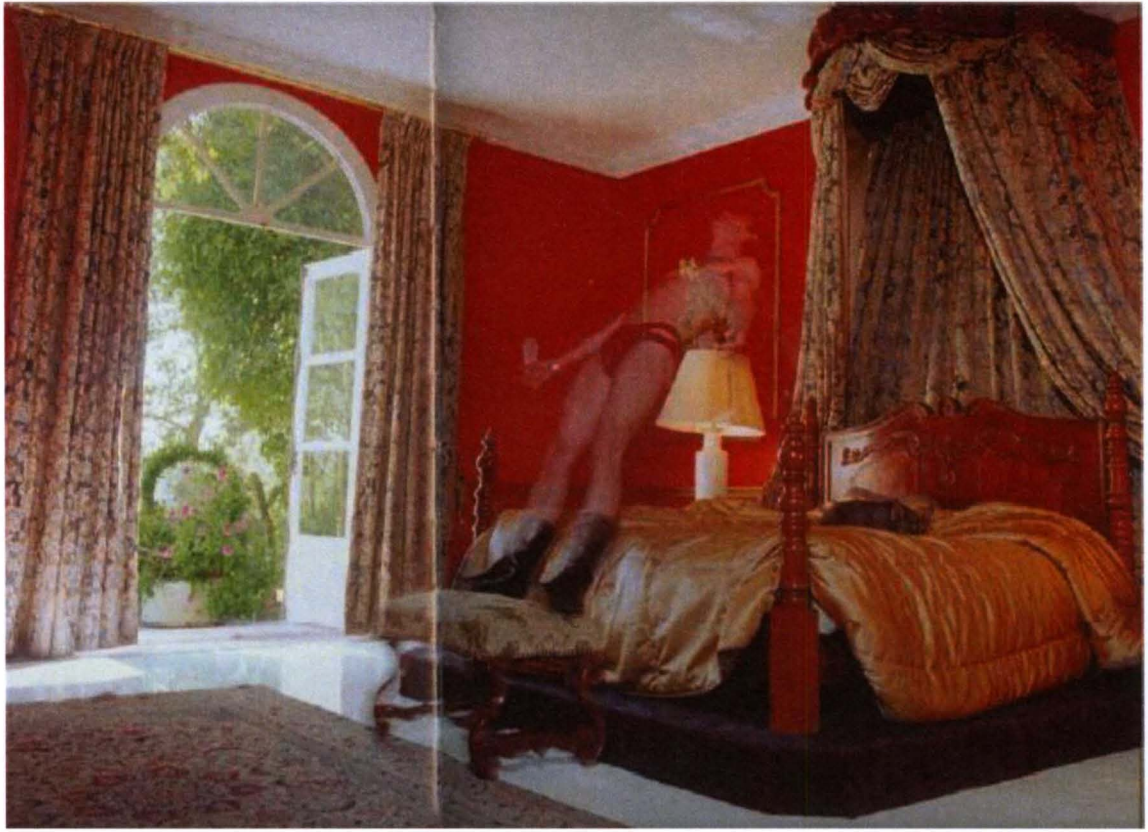


FIGURE 61. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



FIGURE 62. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002



FIGURE 63. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *¡Madres!*, appearance on the television program *Marta de la Lama*, 1987





FIGURE 64. Mayer and Bustamante, protest rally, Mexico City, 1991



FIGURE 65. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *¡Madres!*, performance at the Museo de Carillo Gil, Mexico City, 1987





FIGURE 66. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *¡Madres!*, performance in the Colonia Narvarte, street art festival, 1987



FIGURES 67-69. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (Ochoa), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987



FIGURE 70. Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un Dia* (diploma), performance on *Nuestro Mundo*, August 28, 1987





FIGURE 71. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Paulina Díaz Ordaz), 1998-2002



FIGURE 72. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (Paulina Banuet Rovirosa), 1998-2002

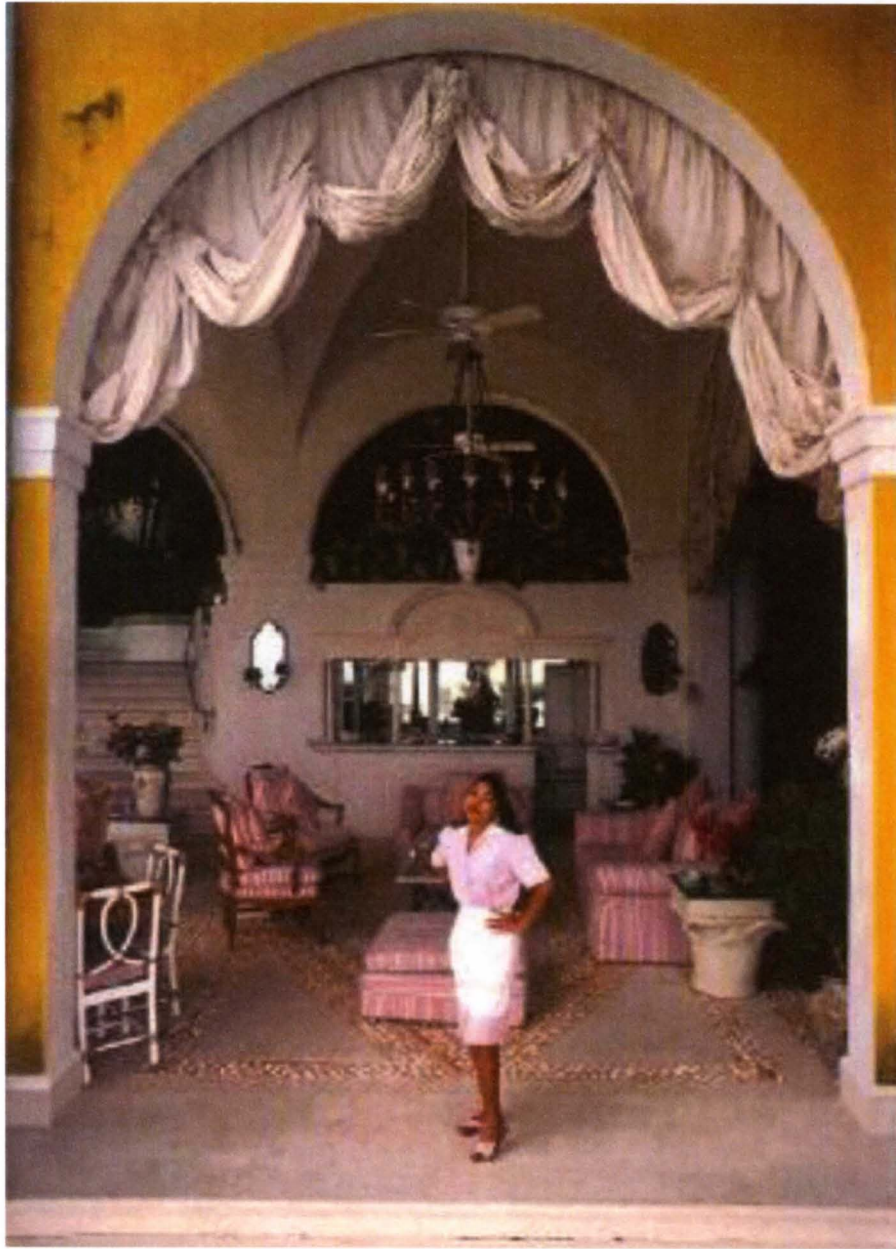


FIGURE 73. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (welcome), 1998-2002





FIGURE 74. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas*, 1998-2002, exhibited



FIGURE 75. Daniela Rossell, *Ricas y famosas* (staff), 1998-2002





FIGURE 76. Poster, *Awake is Aware*, MTA New York City Transit, and Minerva Cuevas, *Safety Pills*, 1997

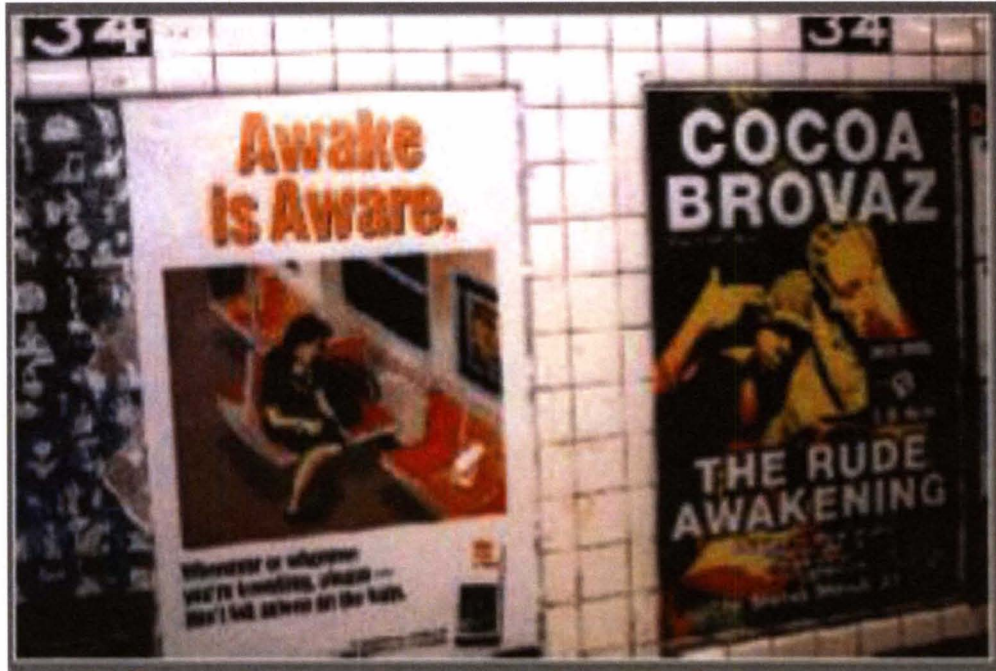


FIGURE 77. Minerva Cuevas, *Safety Pills*, NYC, 1997

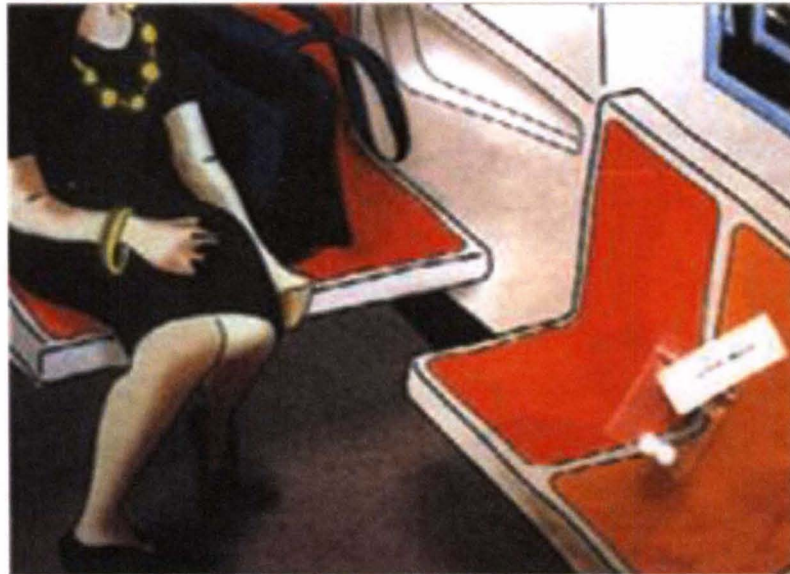


FIGURE 78. Minerva Cuevas, *Safety Pills* (detail), NYC, 1997

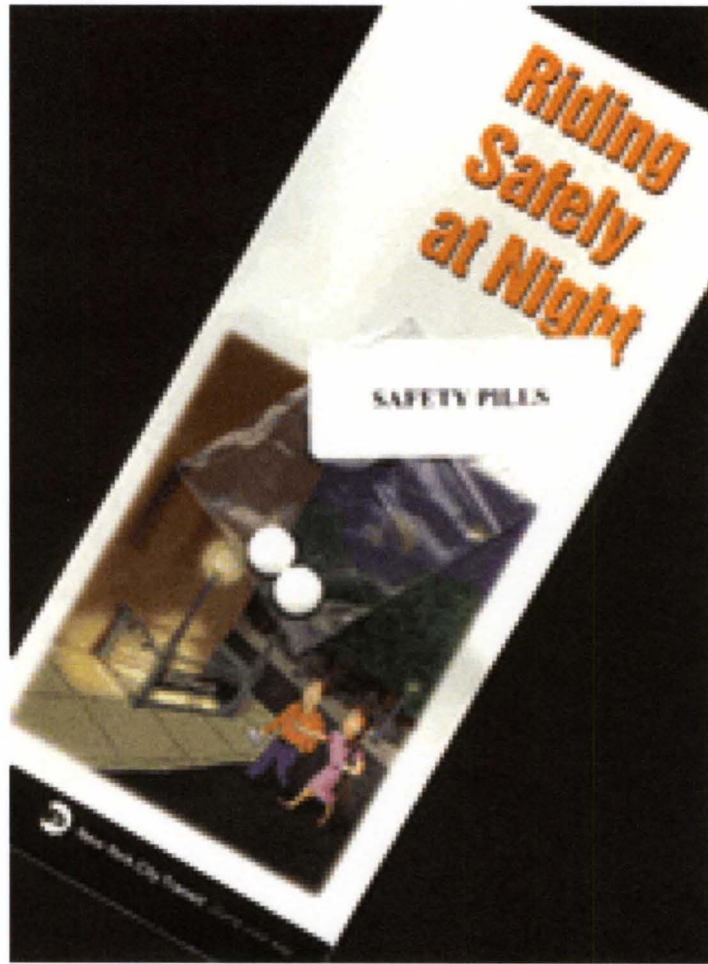


FIGURE 79. Minerva Cuevas, *Safety Pills* and brochure, NYC 1997

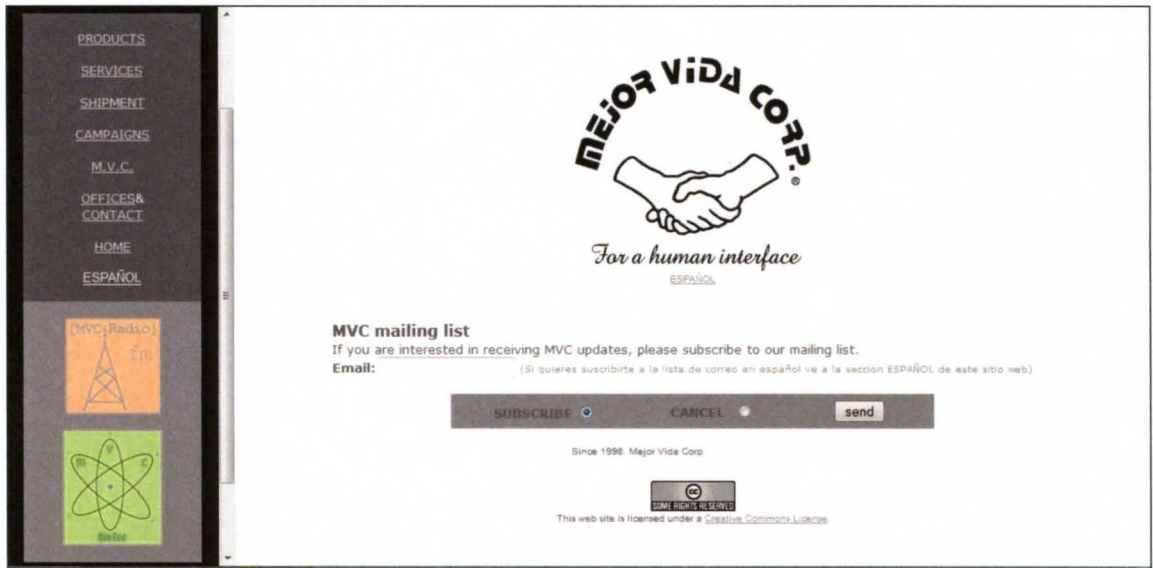


FIGURE 80. Mejor Vida Corp., website, 1998





FIGURE 81. Mejor Vida Corp., logo (Spanish and English), 1998

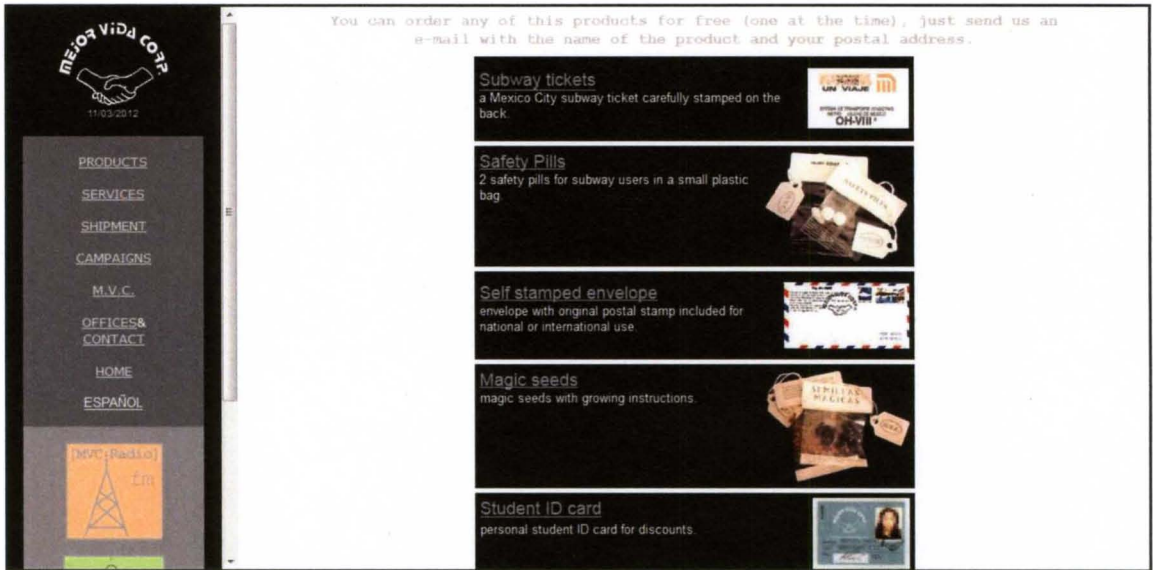


FIGURE 82. Mejor Vida Corp., website, Products page, 1998



FIGURE 83. Mejor Vida Corp., corporate offices, Torre Latinoamericana, Mexico City, 1998-2003



FIGURE 84. Mejor Vida Corp., corporate offices, view of downtown Mexico City, 1998-2003



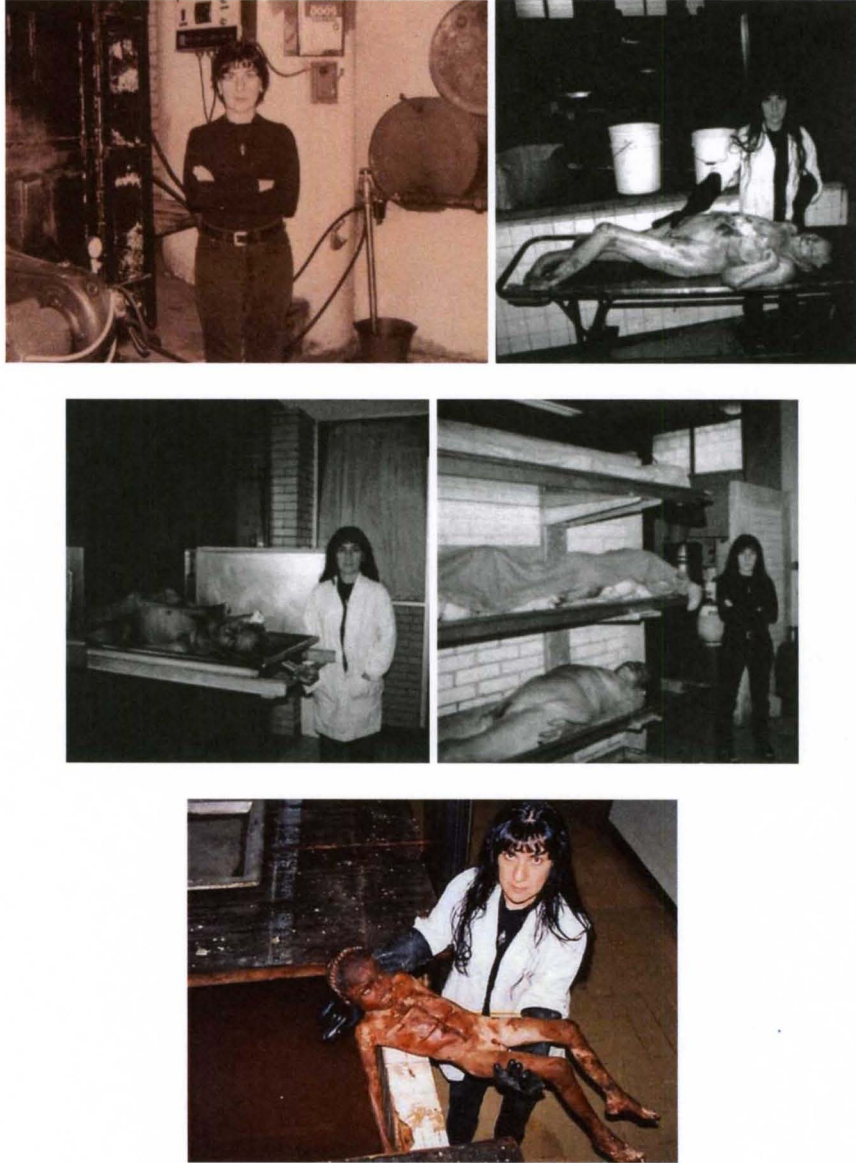


FIGURE 85. Teresa Margolles, *Autorretratos en la morgue (Self-Portraits in the Morgue)* series, 1998

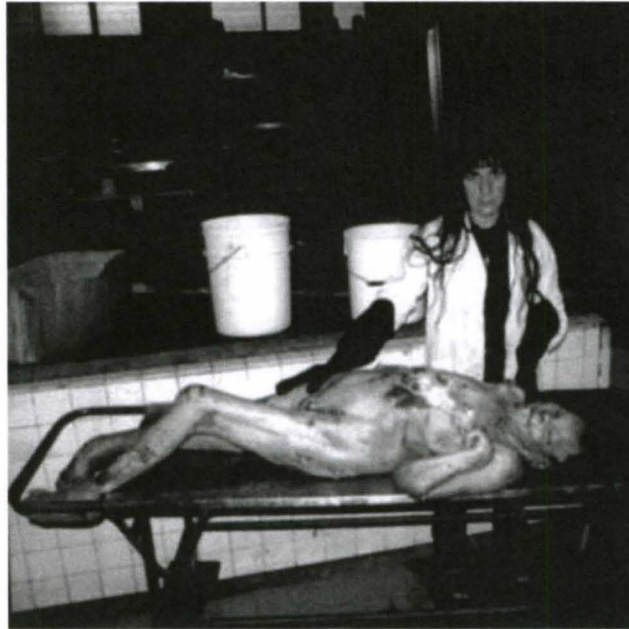


FIGURE 86. Teresa Margolles, *Autorretratos en la morgue No. 2*, 1998



FIGURE 87. Teresa Margolles, *Autorretratos en la morgue No. 3*, 1998



FIGURE 88. Teresa Margolles, *Autorretratos en la morgue No. 5*, 1998

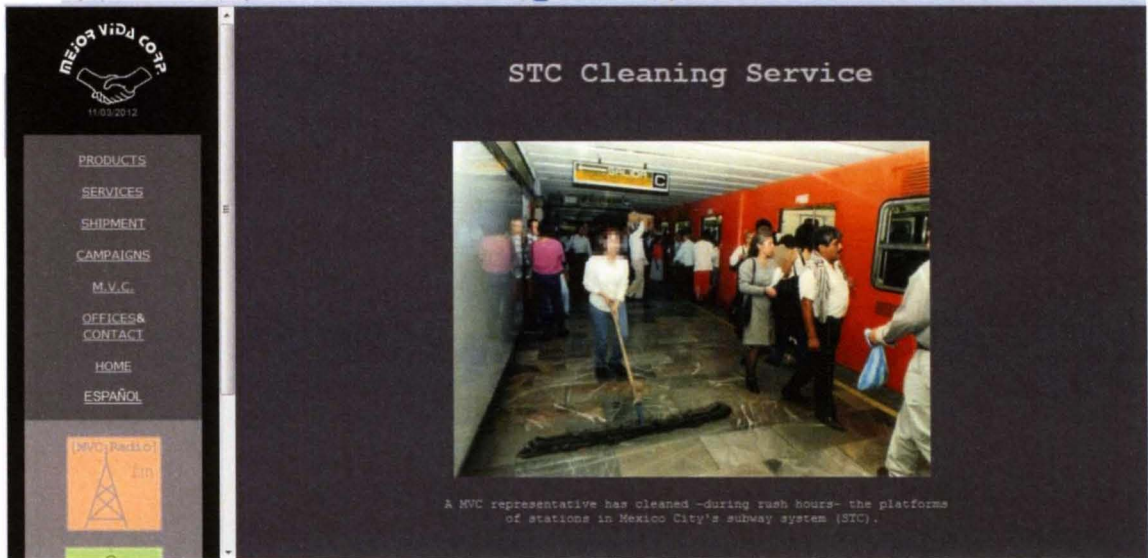


FIGURE 89. Mejor Vida Corp., website, *Servicio de limpieza STC (STC Cleaning Service)*, 1998





FIGURE 90. Mejor Vida Corp., *Servicio de limpieza STC (STC Cleaning Service)*, 1998



FIGURE 91. Photograph of the Mexico City Metro,  
[http://www.outreachworld.org/article\\_print.asp?articleid=61](http://www.outreachworld.org/article_print.asp?articleid=61)



FIGURE 92. Photograph of the Mexico City Metro,  
<http://www.coderanch.com/t/518997/md/Travel-problems>



FIGURE 93. Meior Vida Corp., website, Products page showing *Subway Tickets*, 1998

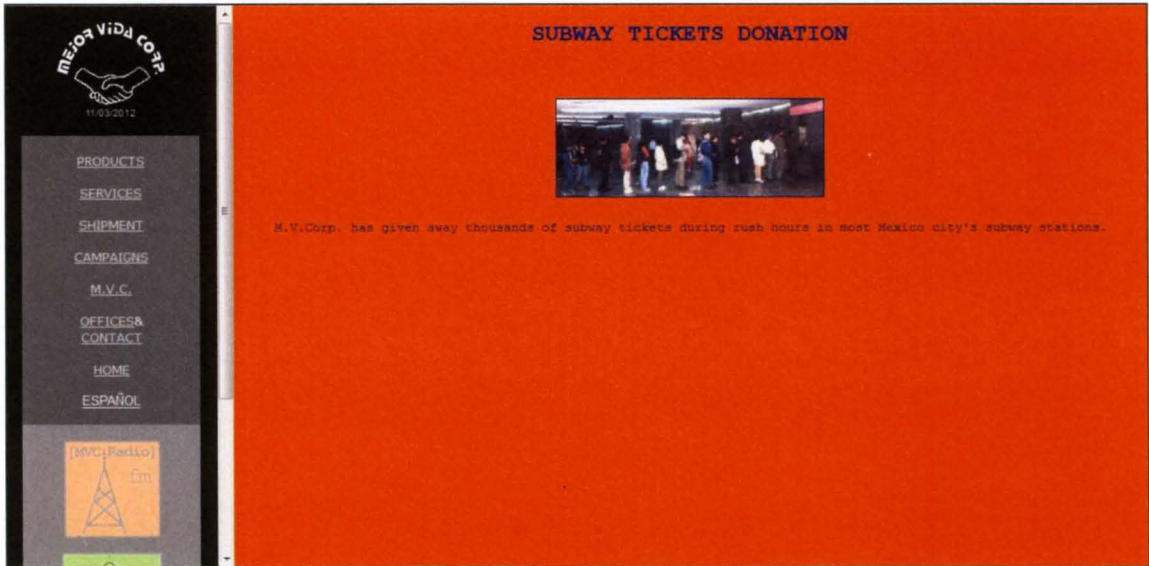


FIGURE 94. Mejor Vida Corp., website, *Subway Tickets*, 1998





FIGURE 95. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Narcomessages*, 2009

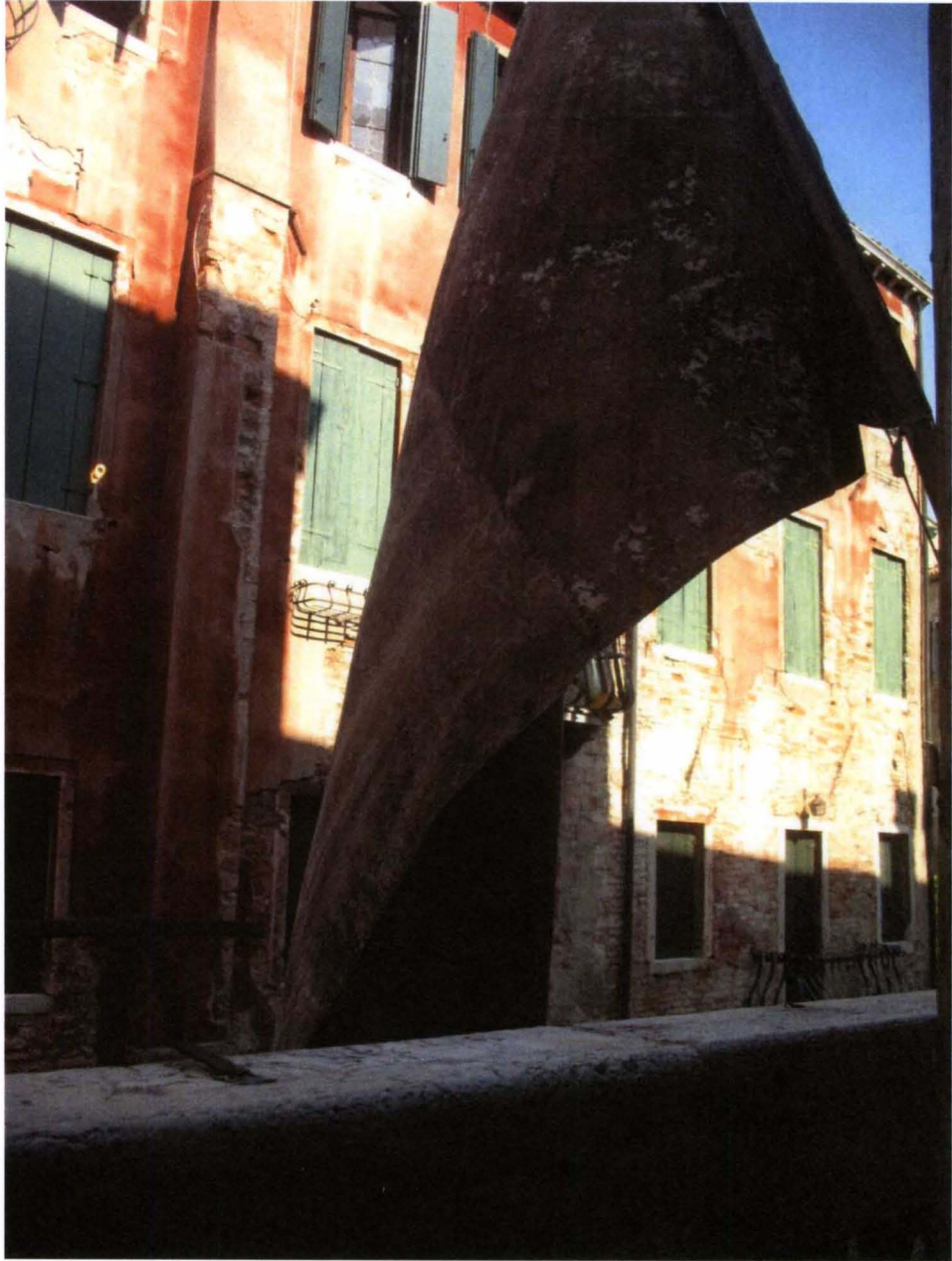


FIGURE 96. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Flag*, 2009



FIGURE 97. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Score Settling*, 2009





FIGURE 98. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Sounds of Death*, 2009



FIGURE 99. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Recovered Blood*, 2009





FIGURE 100. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Recovered Blood*, details, 2009



FIGURE 101. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning*, 2009



FIGURE 102. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About?* Extramural Activity, intervention and cleaning up in the streets of Ciudad Juárez where assassinations took place, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, April 2009





FIGURE 103. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About?* Extramural Activity, groundwork for Recovered Blood, northern Mexico, Spring-Summer 2009



FIGURE 104. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Submerged Flag*, public action in Lido Beach, Venice, done with fabric impregnated with blood collected from execution sites in Mexico, May 2009



FIGURE 105. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning*, 2009





FIGURE 106. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning*, detail of water, August 2009



FIGURE 107. Teresa Margolles, *What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning*, 2009



FIGURE 108. Mexican Pavilion sign, Venice Biennial, 2009





FIGURE 109. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Activity: Hartford Wash*,  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, 1973



FIGURES 111 AND 112. Mejor Vida Corp., *Barcode Stickers*, 1998



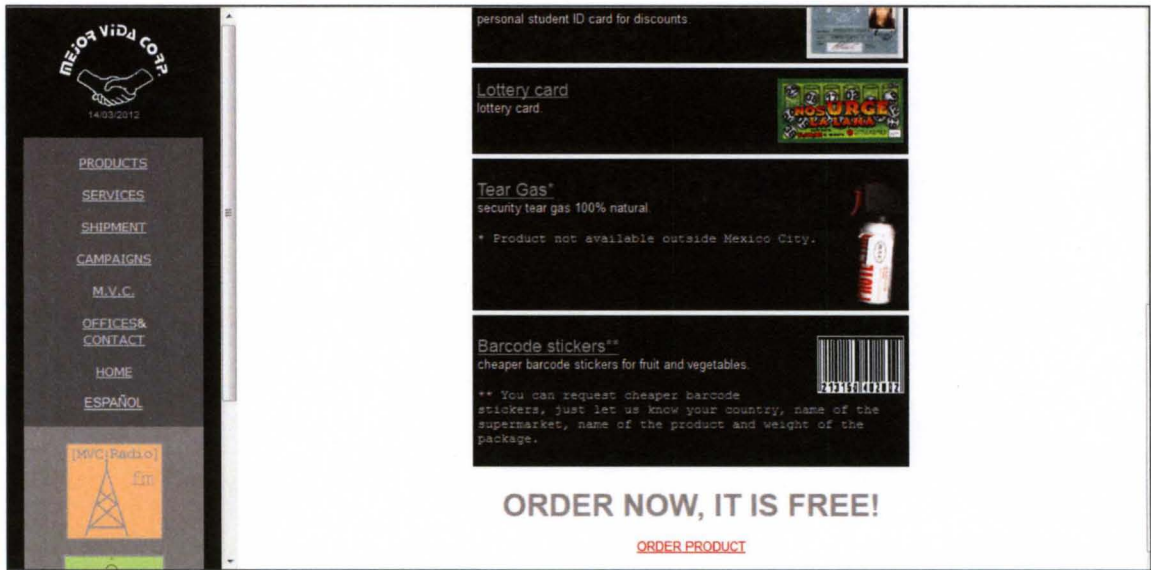


FIGURE 113. MeJOR Vida Corp., website, Products page showing *Barcode Stickers*, 1998



FIGURE 114. Mejor Vida Corp., website, Products page showing *Barcode Stickers*, 1998




FIGURE 115. Mejor Vida Corp., *Barcode Stickers*, 1998




FIGURE 116. Mejor Vida Corp., *Student ID Card*, 1998





14/03/2012


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- CAMPAIGNS
- M.V.C.
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## RECOMMENDATION LETTERS


This is a service available in collaboration with certain institutions. Anyone can request a recommendation letter issued by MVC or institutions collaborating with us.

**From August 30th to October 29th 2006 you can request letters from HMKV in Germany:**



**From July 13th to September 9th 2000**

The **Lisson Gallery** (London, UK) collaborated with Mejor Vida Corp. and provided recommendation letters to anyone that requested them.




Lisson Gallery  
52-54 Bell Street, London, NW1 5DA  
contact(a)lisson.co.uk  
Tel. +44(0) 207 724 2739  
http://www.lisson.co.uk

---

**From May 16th to July 29th 2000**

The **Galerie Chantal Crousel** (Paris, France) collaborated with Mejor Vida Corp. and will provide recommendation as well.



Galerie Chantal Crousel  
40, rue Quincampoix 75004 Paris  
galerie(a)crousel.com  
Tel. +33 (0) 1 42 77 38 87  
http://www.crousel.com

FIGURES 117 AND 118. Mejor Vida Corp., website, Services page showing Recommendation Letter, 1998



FIGURES 119. Mejoy Vida Corp., website, Services page showing *Recommendation Letter* ("trust us" GIF), 1998



FIGURES 120. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra y Cerro de Cristo Negro*, 2005





FIGURES 121-123. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra y Cerro de Cristo Negro*, 2005



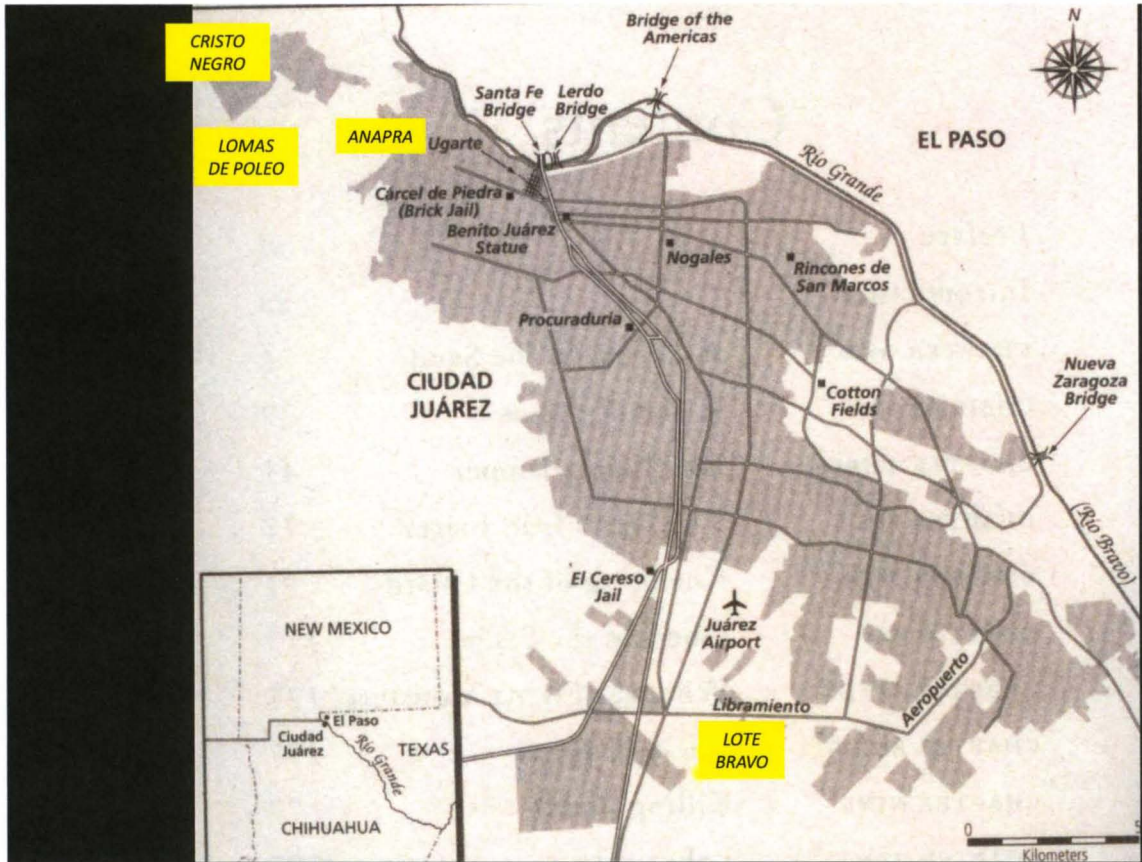


FIGURE 124. Map of Ciudad Juárez, highlighted areas indicate the spaces included in the video, *Lote Bravo*, *Lomas de Poleo*, *Anapra* y *Cerro de Cristo Negro*

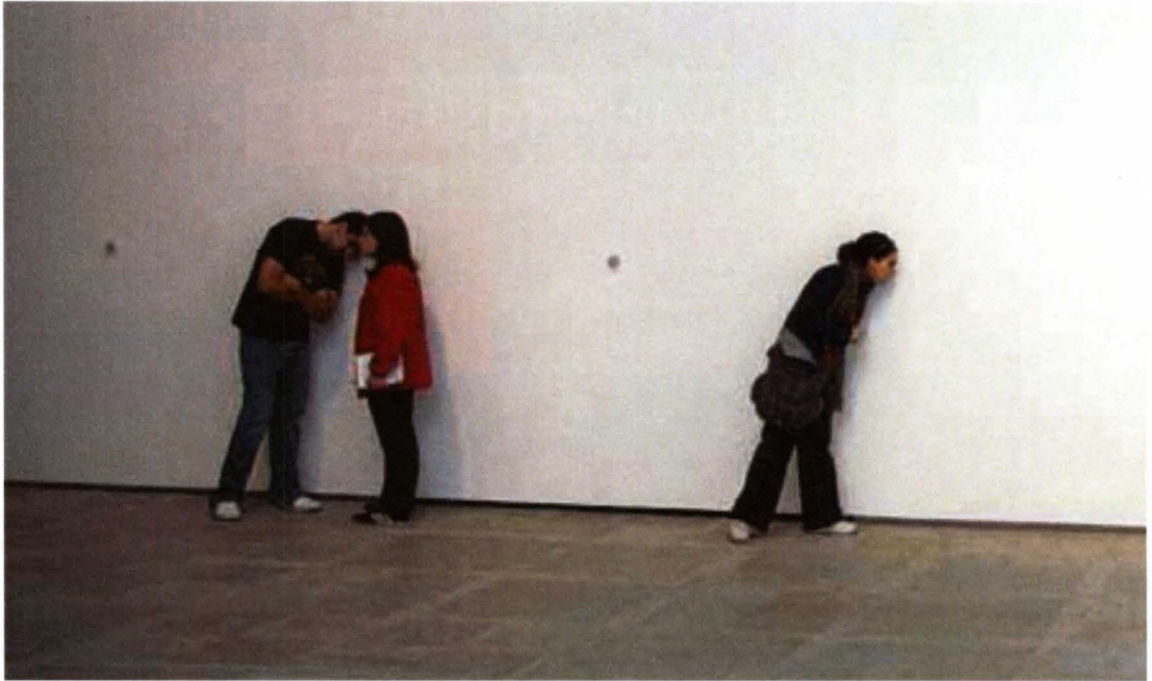


FIGURE 125. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra y Cerro de Cristo Negro* (audio projection, installation view from 2008), 2005



FIGURE 126. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo*, 2005





FIGURE 127. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo*, 2005

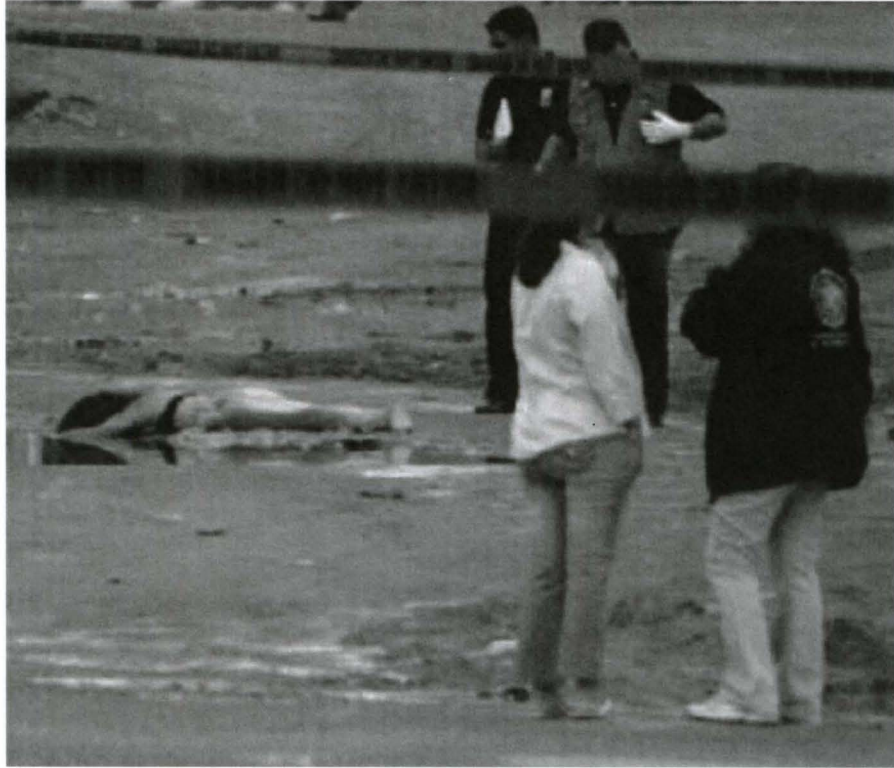


FIGURES 128 AND 129. Memorial crosses in Juárez





FIGURES 130 AND 131. Teresa Margolles, *Lote Bravo* (installation view from 2006, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), 2005

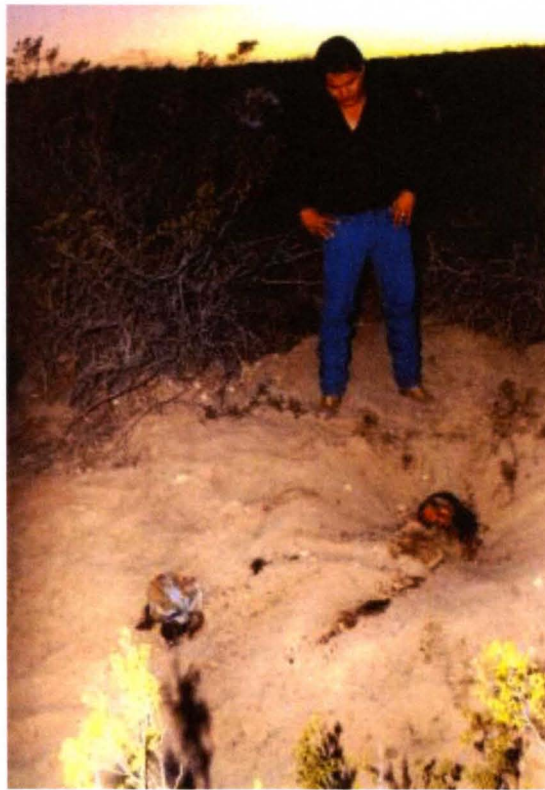


Caption: "Unidentified woman was found 2005 in a sewage ditch in Juarez."

FIGURE 132. Raymundo Ruiz; Reprinted in Diana Washington Valdez's *Harvest of Women*, 2006



Caption: "A raped and murdered woman found in Chamizal Park."



FIGURES 133 AND 134. Photographs printed in Charles Bowden, *Juarez: The Laboratory for our Future*, 2006

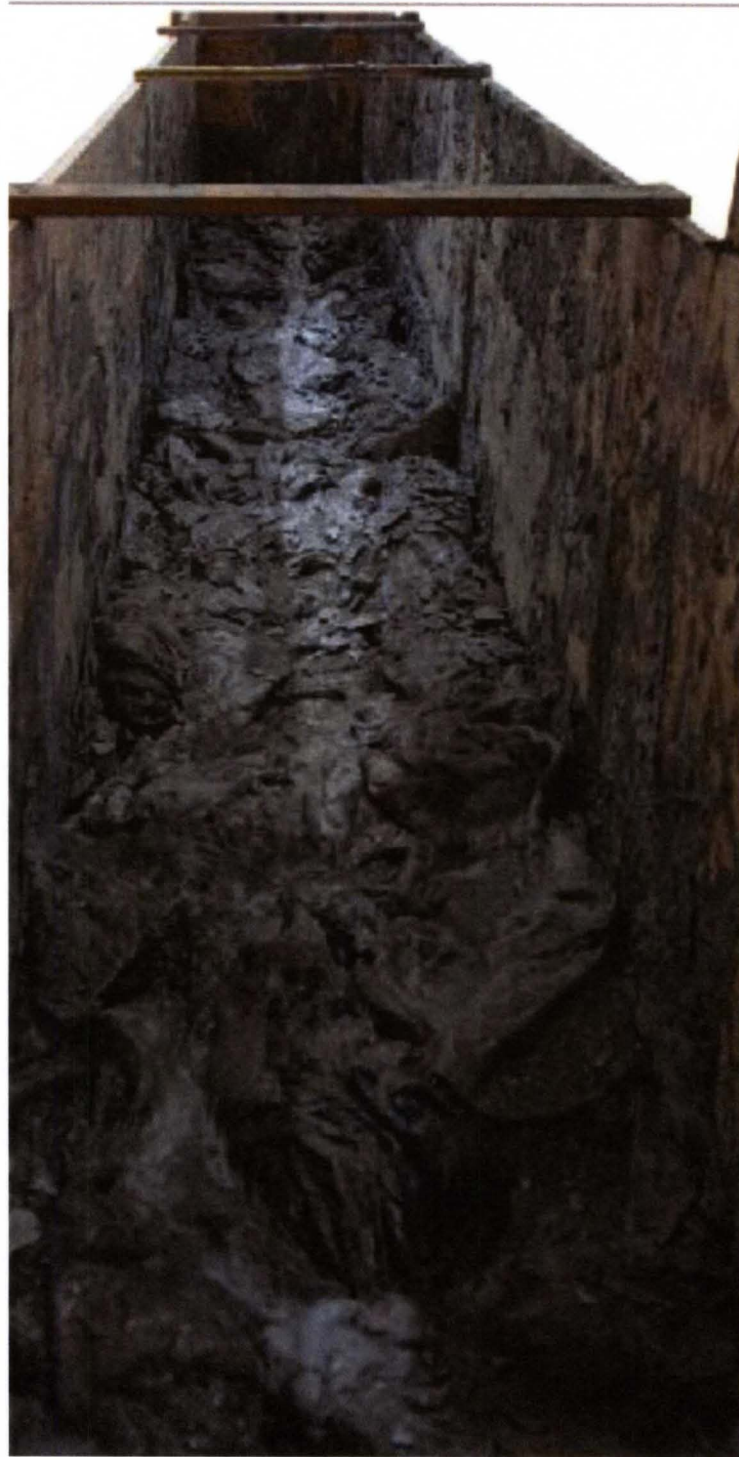




FIGURES 135. Teresa Margolles, *Cimbra Formwork*, 2006



FIGURES 136. Teresa Margolles, *Cimbra Formwork*, 2006



FIGURES 137. Teresa Margolles, *Cimbra Formwork*, 2006

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- Woods, Tryon. "Globalizing Social Violence: Race, Gender, and the Spatial Politics of Crisis." *American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2002): 127-53.
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- . "Maquiladora Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics: Revisiting Anzaldúa." *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 114-31.
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Zamudio-Taylor, Victor. "Paula Santiago: *Numen*." In *Paula Santiago: 96.4*, 1-3. San Antonio: ArtPace, 1996.

Zapata Galindo, Martha. "Feminist Movements in Mexico: From Consciousness-Raising Groups to Transnational Networks." In *Feminist Philosophy in Latin America and Spain*, edited by Maria Luisa Femenias and Amy A. Oliver, 1-20. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

Zavala, Adriana. *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010.

Zolov, Eric. *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

**JAMIE L RATLIFF**  
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### EDUCATION

- Ph.D., summa cum laude, University of Louisville** 2004-2012  
Department of Fine Arts, Art History Program  
Areas of concentration: Contemporary Art; Latin American Art  
Advanced to candidacy, April 2009  
Dissertation title: *Visualizing Female Agency: Gender and Space in Contemporary Women's Art in Mexico*  
Director: Susan Jarosi
- Graduate Certificate in Latin American and Latino Studies** 2008  
University of Louisville
- Graduate Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies** 2007  
University of Louisville
- M.A., magna cum laude, Tufts University** 2003  
Art History  
Area of concentration: Contemporary Art
- B.A., magna cum laude, Georgetown College** 2001  
Fine Arts
- Art History Curriculum Study Abroad, Oxford University 2000  
Regent's Park College

## **PUBLICATIONS**

“Border Control: The Intersection of Feminism and Abjection in the Work of Paula Santiago,” *SECAC Review*, vol. 15, n. 4, December 2009: 456-463

“The Social Mapping of Self and Other: Cross Purposes and Double Mistaken Identity in Colonial Mexico and Europe,” *Athanor*, vol. 27, February 2007: 39-48.

“Translating the Postmodern: Painting and Philosophy in the Work of Boris Zakić.” *Zakić: Translations*. Ex. cat. Novi Sad, Yugoslavia: Stojkov, 2002: 7-23.

## **FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS**

Dean’s Citation Award, Graduation Honor University of Louisville, School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies	2012
Outstanding Graduate in Fine Arts University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2012
Don Payton Award University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2012
Graduate Student Travel Grant University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	awarded annually, 2004-2012
Cressman Scholar Award University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2011 – 2012
Don Payton Award University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2010 – 2011
American Society for Hispanic Art Historical Studies Research/ Photography Grant	2010
Graduate Teaching Assistantship University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2005 – 2009
Lilialyce Akers Travel Grant for Issues of Women in the Global South University of Louisville, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies	2009

Richard and Constance Lewis Scholar University of Louisville, Department of Latin American and Latino Studies	2009
Nominated for Faculty Favorite Award, Delphi Center, University of Louisville	2008-2009
University Overseers Scholar University of Louisville, Honors Department	2008
Lilialyce Akers Travel Grant for Issues of Women in the Global South, University of Louisville, Department of Women's and Gender Studies	2008
Lilialyce Akers Travel Grant for Issues of Women in the Global South, University of Louisville, Department of Women's and Gender Studies	2006
Carol Krauss Maddox Paper Award University of Louisville, Department of Women's and Gender Studies	2005
Cressman Scholar Award University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	2004 –2005
Tuition Award Tufts University, Department of Art History	2001 – 2003
Pierce Scholarship for Artistic Achievement Georgetown College	1997 – 2001
Trustees Scholarship Georgetown College	1997 – 2001
Art Department Scholarship Georgetown College	1997 – 2001

## **PRESENTATIONS AND PAPERS**

“Visualizing Terror: Teresa Margolles’ Art on the Border,” Southeastern Conference on Latin American Studies Conference, Art and Democracy in Latin America Panel, Gainesville, FL	2012
“Art and Feminism: Representing the Female Body,”	2012

- Invited guest lecture, *Art, Thinking, and Social Change*, Graduate Seminar in Fine Arts, University of Louisville
- “Remaking the Home: Media, Myth, and Maternity in Polvo de Gallina Negra’s *Mother for a Day*,” College Art Association Annual Conference, Association of Latin American Art Emerging Scholars Panel, Los Angeles, CA 2012
- “Beyond Mexicanidad: Harold Winslow in Mexico,” Invited Public Lecture, in conjunction with the exhibit *Harold Winslow: Un Visión de Mexicanidad*, Georgetown College 2012
- “Feminist Art in Mexico: Paula Santiago and the Abject Body of the Nation,” Invited Public Lecture, Latin American and Latino Studies, University of Louisville 2011
- “The Other Side of the Border: Woman and Nation in Teresa Margolles’ *Ciudad Juárez*,” First Annual Feminist Art History Conference, American University, Washington, D.C. 2010
- “Teresa Margolles at the 2009 Venice Biennale,” University of Louisville Women’s and Gender Studies Day of Research Celebration 2009
- “Presence of Mind, Absence of Voice: Feminist Art in Mexico,” Invited Guest Lecture, *Body in Popular Media*, Graduate Seminar in Women’s and Gender Studies, University of Louisville 2009
- “*Polvo de Gallina Negra*: Feminist Art in the ‘Age of Discrepancies,’” Graduate Panel: Art and Social Movements in Mexico, in connection with the Symposium Journey to Mexico: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Travel to Mexico as Reflected in Art and Architecture of the 16th-21st Centuries, University of North Carolina at Charlotte 2009
- “*Polvo de Gallina Negra*: Feminist Art in the ‘Age of Discrepancies,’” University of Louisville Women’s and Gender Studies Day of Research Celebration 2009
- “The Un-Expectant Mother: *Polvo de Gallina Negra* and Feminist Art in Mexico,” Southeastern College Art Conference, New Orleans 2008
- “Contemporary Women Artists in Mexico,” Elizabethtown Community and Technical College, Women’s History Month Celebration 2008
- “Border Control: The Intersection of Feminism and Abjection in the work of Paula Santiago,” Southeastern College Art 2007



Conference, Charleston, WV

“Female Artists in the Mexico City Arts Scene,” University of  
Louisville Women’s and Gender Studies Day of Research Celebration 2006

“The Social Mapping of Self and Other: Cross Purposes and Double  
Mistaken Identity in Colonial Mexico and Europe,” Florida State  
University Graduate Student Symposium 2006

“The Social Mapping of Self and Other: Cross Purposes and Double  
Mistaken Identity in Colonial Mexico and Europe,” University of  
Oregon Art History Association Annual Symposium 2005

“Politics of Display: The Persistence of *Mexicanidad* in Twentieth-  
Century Mexican Art,” University of Southern California, Expanding  
the Visual Field Graduate Student Symposium 2005

“A Display of Feminism: Curatorial Challenges and the Development  
of Feminism in Mexico,” University of Louisville Department of  
Women’s and Gender Studies Carol Krauss Maddox Award Presentation 2005

## **RELATED EXPERIENCE**

Presenter 2008  
Food for Thought Brown Bag Lunch Research series  
University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts  
Topic: *Polvo de Gallina Negra*, Mexican feminist art collective

Editorial board member for *Parnassus*, the Graduate Journal of the  
University of Louisville Art History Program Spring 2008

Reviewer for forthcoming textbook, *Art Matters*, by Pamela Gordon 2007  
McGraw-Hill Publishers

Presenter 2007  
Food for Thought Brown Bag Lunch Research series  
University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts  
Topic: Paula Santiago, contemporary Mexican artist

Symposium Committee Chairperson 2006 – 2007  
University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts  
Oversee all planning and preparations for “Cross-Cultural Encounters,”

*Aegis* 1st Biennial Symposium on Art History and Visual Culture

Presenter	2006
Food for Thought Brown Bag Lunch Research series	
University of Louisville, Department of Fine Arts	
Topic: <i>Codex Mendoza</i> , colonial Mexican manuscript	
Invited guest lecturer	2005
Georgetown College, Georgetown, KY	
Course: Women in the Arts; Topic: Contemporary Mexican Women Artists	

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

College Art Association  
Southeastern College Art Conference  
The Association for Latin American Art  
American Society of Hispanic Art Historical Studies  
Western Association of Women Historians  
National Women's Studies Association  
*Aegis* (University of Louisville Association of Graduate Students, Department of Fine Arts), Founding President and Symposium Chair, Jan. 2006 – Aug. 2007; Co-President 2009-2010  
Golden Key International Honor Society