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Overlapping Textualities:
From Literary Machine to Binary-born Texts

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Christine Wilks' Women, Politics and Poetics

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ABSTRACT – In this paper we present a close reading of the electronic literature works *Sitting Pretty* (2004), *IntraVenus* (2005), *Fitting the Pattern* (2008) and *Underbelly* (2010) by Christine Wilks with the aim of reflecting on how the body of the “Woman” is represented in these works, through which mechanisms the gender is constructed in them and how these bodies of women are registered in a feminine and feminist genealogy. There is, without a doubt, in Wilks’s work a unitary discursive thread about gender identity that evolves and transforms as the narrative mechanisms of the author and, consequently, our reading process, change; the power of the word over the body in *Sitting Pretty* and the strength of the naked body in *IntraVenus* are the initial drawing of a particular and personal discourse about the genre that will become more complex and profound in *Fitting the Pattern* and *Underbelly*. In *Fitting the Pattern* we have to cut, sew and weave to know the thoughts of the daughter, the addressee of the pattern that is made. Reading, as an act of creative craftsmanship, coupled with the memory of women who rework, stitch after stitch, maternal relationships, in a textual fabric that makes the identity of a young woman and the memory of a long female genealogy. Genealogy which, on the other hand, is omnipresent in *Underbelly*, an immersive reading experience that introduces mining women in the 19th century England along with the thoughts of a sculptress about her process as an artist who is wondering about the possibility of being a mother. The texts that narrate *Sitting Pretty*, *IntraVenus*, *Fitting the Pattern* and *Underbelly* appear in the most diverse and heterogeneous forms, however the images in these works are representations of the body of the woman from different points of view: the physical body, the body of desire, the body covered, the inner body. These works, in addition, due to their specific and special characteristics, experience a process of poetization with peculiar rhetorical mechanisms that are configured in digital poetic narratives: orality, metaphors, alliterations, metonymies, rhythm, analogies, polysemy... Reading these four works is an interactive experience of the body, an intellectual dialogue about the meaning of the word and power, the body and the image, reading and memory, women and the creation through times and spaces and practicing, with reading, the exercise of a poetic and political view.

KEYWORDS – electronic literature; poetics; politics; women’s bodies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bodies of women who lie, bodies of women offered, bodies of women who must remain static, bodies of women that can only be bodies, bodies of women that cannot be just bodies... Christine Wilks releases the memory of bodies and she works on it, as if it were the raw material, to turn it into thought and gaze. A gaze that becomes action.

What's more: here action is nothing but gaze. Both in *Sitting Pretty* (2004) and in *IntraVenus* (2005) the mechanisms that transmute are pointed out, as if from an alchemical process, the word turns into gaze. In *Fitting the Pattern* (2008) and *Underbelly* (2010), however, the gaze is definitely action: a "doing" sewn with a discursive thread, resistant and unitary, about identity; a "doing" that evolves in creating, exploring, discovering the body, discovering other bodies. That body that is first expelled from the word, opaque to the eye is, in truth, a living body that changes (and changes us) as the author's discursive mechanisms and, consequently, our reading process, are transformed.

2. *SITTING PRETTY*, THE BODY OFFERED

In *Sitting Pretty*, a short unilinear hypertext that combines word and image, the word takes control over the body. A word masked behind the salutary advice that puts us in the context of something that makes us good:

Before we begin
I want you to take a moment to think about your body
Think about
Your spine against the back of your chair
Your buttocks and the backs of your thighs
The soles of your feet on the floor

Are your feet planted firmly on the floor
They should be

The text tells us to look at our body, how we sit, where we have the spine or knees while the animated image of a woman in the correct posture and sitting in an office chair accompanies this first reading, reinforcing the sense of the advice about our health. However, soon we will realize that there is something else:

Are you sitting comfortably?
Perhaps you would like to lie down
Please, lie down. I'm concerned about you
You're hunching over.
Lie down!

They suggest, first, then they order us to lie down because it seems that we are maintaining a bad posture. We have no choice but to comply with the order and, with this, we discover the image of *The Dressed Maja* by Goya which, by touching it, becomes *The Naked Maja* of the great Aragonese painter, showing us both in an alternative way. The two Majas totally resignify the initial text and give it a meaning that leads us to the antipodes of the kind advice and even the title, *Sitting Pretty*, acquires a nuance not exempt of violence, reinforced by the order ("Lie down!") an order that shows us the true hidden face of that written voice.

It seems that there are great differences between advice and order: advice always implies freedom, desire for good and order, nevertheless, it refers us to obedience, to the exercise of power. However, written words stripped of voice, tone and force become polysemic because of the power of the image, now dressed, now naked, of the body of the woman who accompanies them. Indeed, the line separating advice from order is finer than we might think: a somewhat sarcastic tone, an elevation of the voice, a pronouncement between teeth which, said in other words, would be kind...

"The soles of your feet on the floor, they should be"; educating the gaze to awaken reality, to be someone with feet on the ground, someone aware of the power exercised over the body of the woman. A body, that of the *Maja*, that of many *majas*, expelled from the word and converted into a static image, dressed or naked according to the desire of the man to whom the picture belongs¹.

How far away is the boring office, the busy office! The powerful image of the body of a woman painted by Goya obliges us, with surprise, to open our eyes and questions us in an uncomfortable way taking us, without doubt,

¹ "The temporary primacy of the nude maja, a commissioned work painted before 1800, in a period that would be between 1790 and 1800, date of the first documented reference of this work indicates that at the moment of being painted, the painting was not thought to form a couple. He then formed a couple with La maja dressed, dated between 1800 and 1808, probably at the request of Manuel Godoy, as it is said that they were part of a cabinet in his house. It is not known for sure who is the one portrayed. However, since the first owner was Godoy, it has been considered more likely that the model directly portrayed was the then lover and later wife of Godoy himself, Pepita Tudó" (D'Ors Führer and Morales Marín 1993).

of our comfort zone. If in Western culture until Goya and centuries ago there were almost always subterfuges to represent the naked woman (for example mythical themes), in the *Majas* we have a real woman. A real woman who posed to be exposed, as a precious object, a belonging, a trophy.

The impact of the work in *Sitting Pretty* happens when the word expels the woman from the pragmatic space in which we had settled at the beginning of reading: a neutral space, modern, functional, hygienic, salutary, even. This imagined space disappears with the order that turns the woman into a body that is offered, in static gaze, a skin, limbs, a face... without words. Our look of surprise meets the direct and sustained look of that real woman that seconds before someone has ordered to lie down. In this exchange of gazes, in that cross between the image and silence, our silence, is the meaning of the work. Our gaze is already another gaze, a close gaze at action, a scrutinizing, expectant, political gaze. We now have to answer the question that can potentially transform the artistic gaze into political action to go from obeying to deciding, from observing to saying, from staying comfortably to acting by assuming our own discomfort:

“Are you lying comfortably?”. Wilks again puts us at the crossroads of having to choose a categorical answer: we must say yes or not. But, in addition, behind this question hides a double meaning, the “lying” of resting, being indifferent or staying in our comfort zone or “lying” meaning self-deception, a kind of rejection of commitment.

However, only consciousness is allowed. Only if we say not to self-deception, to the lack of commitment, we can continue reading this performed ironic but also empowering dialogue about women’s body that *Sitting Pretty* narrates.

From here three paths intertwine and communicate each other, three complementary views on the treatment of women’s bodies in art, testimonies of women’s life, confronted with the healthy and wellcared body of postural hygiene. In the workplace, metonymy of laboral capitalism, a physiological body image appears used as the main narrative thread, where everything is measured and apparently neutral and egalitarian. In our secular patriarchal culture, metonymy of the art pieces coming next, the powerful visual message of the passive bodies of women, acts as a discourse in the background much more powerful than the previous one.

At a certain time in the reading, the body of the *Venus of Urbino*, which is offered expectantly and innocent, is the canvas where patriarchal capitalism puts women to work from an alleged productive equity disconnected from the female body and from its treatment as object.

3. INTRAVENUS

IntraVenus is a work that combines image, photography and voice. The naked body of the *Venus of Urbino* by Titian (popularly known as the “Venus of the dog”) serves as a canvas on which is painted what seems a dialogue, a relationship, between two bodies of women.

The *Venus of Urbino* by Titian is a female nude who, although shown legally through the representation of a mythological theme (the preparation of Venus’ betrothal to Hephaestus), is not represented by the image of the goddess lost in thought, asleep or in apparent ecstasy. As we have seen in *Sitting Pretty*, we again have the nude of a woman who looks, who looks at us. However, this body is now not shown but serves as the stage for another body that represents, as if it were a play, the dialogue that someone seems to remember, the voice of memory (Mnemosyne) in *IntraVenus*². The image of a naked woman body is mixed with the body of the Venus to represent a role that develops according to the oral narration that accompanies the work. A story made of memories, fragments, questions, whispers, a sensual voice, that asks, that even begs:

My muse, she whispered to me,
My muse, said,
Come, lie with me,
Come lie
Do not paint
Do not dance
Do not sculpt,
Do not sing,
Do not write,
Do not tell stories,
no,
Do not remember
She said, she said,

² “The biggest difference with the typical Venus is that the young woman is obviously conscious and proud of her beauty and her nakedness; there is no element that causes the sensation of a ‘divine’ distancing. The flowers in the right hand highlight the aura of eroticism already reinforced by the almost golden light that illuminates the body. The light and warm color of the body produces an impression of sensual indolence, enhanced in contrast to the dark background and mattress; in effect, the dark color of the canvas on the wall causes a caesura in the gaze that is then centered on the woman’s body” (López Mato 2008).

Come lie
What kind of muse are you? I asked,
She said, be quiet, be still,
Come, lie with me,
Still the beating of your heart,
Be still

The Memory, mother of the Muses, is addressed to another woman whom she calls her Muse... Is she addressed to Venus? Is it to the poet Sappho, considered by Plato the tenth Muse?

I forget how long I lay
Stagnant
Remember I said
Forget she said
But I remember
Memory is mine, she said

The sensual voice recites a seemingly loving dialogue that is revealed as a monologue of incomprehension... and blindness: one woman requires the loving presence of another but in this requirement do not flow the desires nor the glances since one of the two women is treated as an object that requires immobility, inaction, forgetfulness. A woman who is immobile but alive, with a heart that beats and will continue to beat, although on some occasion it seems that the desire of the object (or the object of desire) is death.

The photographs of a naked woman superimposed on the body of the Venus accompany the dialogue recited as if this overlap showed a sexual relationship between both. Also in the relationship represented by the images exists this ambivalence marked by the subject and the object, the love and the violence and, even, the life and the death. A body that draws and writes on the body of the *Venus of Urbino* a chronicle of love or perhaps of pain; a dialogue of bodies but not of words, questions without listening, without response, words which are responded with silences, repetitions, orders to remain still but alive, as if painting a new Olympia³ were possible.

³ Olympia is a painting by Édouard Manet in 1863 inspired by the *Venus of Urbino*, by Tiziano the central character of which turns out to be a Parisian prostitute. In place of the naughty doggy found on the *Venus of Urbino*, at the feet of Olympia we find an awake black cat that often symbolizes ambiguity and restlessness, being involved in promiscuous or veiled erotic relationships or situations (see Floyd [2004] 2012).

The polysemy in this work is complex, because it is a polysemy of the image and the word. The title already gives us an account of this set of superpositions that always cover the body of the woman; the phonetic game between “*IntraVenus*” and “intravenous”, the game between lie (rest) and lie (not tell the truth), or the game between beat (strike) and beat (throb), in the text:

And still beating your heart, and still, and still beating my heart, and still beating, beating, beating, (some voices whispering, repeatedly: “Do not bother, you know it’s not worth even trying” ...), and still beating my art, beat on, beat on, beat on [...].

This polysemy is, however, very specific because it is based on the ambivalence between the dark and the clear, as in the picture of the *Venus of Urbino* where it stands out the enlightened body of the woman: the subject and the object, the immobile but alive, sex or violence, heartbeat and death... And in this ambivalence or chiaroscuro the suicide of Sappho from Lesbos flies over the fragmented bodies, the faces that come together, the hands that caress... or that strangle. The great woman poet, a woman surrounded by women, a body and a memory, an art, a creative subject, far from the still body of Venus always object to the designs of Zeus, an inert body, drugged or sick, perhaps, “intravenous”...

There is a message which is not clear in the game of ambivalence about the naked bodies of women that *IntraVenus* plays. And, the confusion of the message, is related in some way to the myth. Barthes states that myth today is a speech, myth constitutes a system of communication, a message (Barthes 1980), a speech chosen by history, an object that has passed from “a closed and mute existence to an oral state, open to the appropriation of society” (Barthes 1980, 7). The myth of Venus, the body of the female emblem of sensuality, is found in this digital work at the base of the superposition of two other messages and codes (textual and visual) that exercise on it the strength of the artistic, the poetic:

While the myth points to an ultrasignification, to the amplification of a first system, poetry, on the other hand, seeks to rediscover an infrasignification, a presemiological state of language; in short, he endeavors to retransform the sign into the sense: his ideal – tendential – would be to arrive not at the meaning of words, but at the very meaning of things. That is why poetry disturbs the language, increases as much as it can the abstraction of the concept and the arbitrary of the sign, and extends as far as possible the relation of the signifier and the meaning. Poetry occupies the inverse position of the myth: myth is a semiological system that pretends to overflow in factual system; poetry is a semiological system that seeks to retract into an essential system. (Barthes 1980, 18)

This statement of Barthes on poetic language may well have in common with artistic language the will to reach the “sense of things”. And that sense in *IntraVenus*, wants to show the historical-erotic body of the woman as a scenario where both desire and violence can be possible.

4. *FITTING THE PATTERN*, THE BODY DRESSED

Fitting the Pattern is a work in which the gaze has become active, occupied, caught up in the details and the meticulous and precise actions demanded by the pattern we make, cut, sew, weave... This pattern makes a body visible, a body that has to adapt to a symbolic pattern, a pattern that we adjust, a pattern that ends up conforming a woman.

The pattern, as a reading guide, “generates” the movement of the work. Movement over the body and movement that girds the body, which becomes a letter of presentation of the body. A body that, however, is not the woman but what is expected of her:

The picture of the pattern I am supposed to be that shape?
She often told us when she married she had a 20 inch waist
I always felt I should fit the clothes rather than the clothes should fit me

The action of elaborating the pattern, far from being situated in the present, strongly mobilizes memories of childhood and adolescence that are evoked as we, the readers, elaborate the dress. A pattern that represents being a woman and that, however, more than covering a body discovers a daughter. Memories not without pain, many of them held with pins, which hidden behind a hem can surprise us with some puncture:

She preferred to assume we were size 10...
She could have taken our measurements
To ensure a correct fit
But for some reason never did
Dress sizes crept up... 12... 14...
But not until for years
We'd endured too tight wistbands
Hooks and eyes popping buttons
Bulges accentuated

If in *Sitting Pretty* and *IntraVenus* the bodies were expelled or annihilated by the words, in *Fitting the Pattern*, on the contrary, the body, which materializes through that which envelops it, is the catalyst of memory that becomes discourse, a word that reveals and that destroys:

Home made clothes do not come with washing instructions
My adult life is littered with laundry disasters
Garments made with loving care
And such attention to detail
Ruined by my negligence
With every loss I felt
I let her down

But in *Fitting the Pattern* the pattern fits, in a way, both the mother dress-maker and the artist daughter: we move in a single space, that of the mother, crossed by a single speech-memory, that of the daughter. In the gaze that sews, cuts, weaves, unstitches and holds with needles we discover the mother dress-maker, artisan, who is a model that reproduces conventions, and the daughter, artist, who behaves like a bad model and is creative from rebellion. Both are united by a woman's body, a covered body, of which we see nothing except the fragments of cloth we manipulate. Is this union something hybrid or perhaps we are faced with a full and dual opposition? Destroy to build (oneself):

A cut above for a teenager in a working class
It made me stick out
Target
Let's bray'er!
I had to learn how to though it out

The memory in *Fitting the Pattern* that presents itself as fragmentation and even as an exercise of the destruction of facts and experiences contributes, nevertheless, to the construction of the daughter's identity, and to an approach and a certain understanding towards the mother; the gaze, again, is directed to herself to recognize where she comes from:

I did not want to follow in my mother's footsteps
After art college I took up film-making
And one night I dreamed I was threading
A sewing machine with unexposed 16mm film
In broad daylight
In the dream it took me some time to realize

That by doing this I was exposing the film
Rendering it useless
blank
No, I did not follow in her footsteps
But somehow our footsteps were superimposed
Strange
Odd notions...
The twiddly bits and bobs
That made the garment work
Buttons, zippers, hooks and eyes
Notions
The user interface of the garment
The equivalent of the graphical user interface
I create here digitally
My buttons, zippers, hooks and eyes
Mother dressmaker
Daughter filmmaker
Dressfilmmaker
Filmdressmaker
Filmdaughtermaker
Dressmothermaker
Dressdaughtermaker
Filmmothermaker...

Fitting the Pattern is a narration of the self, of the construction of one's own feminine identity through (despite) that of the mother, the elaboration of one's own genealogy which, at the same time, is that of women. The genealogy of women is built not without some destruction of the previous because the generations of women, in addition to being united by a long common thread are superimposed to the previous by the need for self-affirmation against the patriarchal model, and draws as a conclusion the urgency of building a genealogy and, with an image that tries to overcome the old and painful natura-culture split, word and body, considers the need to "give birth" to literary mothers, symbolic mothers of whom to consider themselves daughters and with whom to build a tradition. As Marçal writes, "despite the myth of Athena, without a mother the woman cannot be, as such, placed in the world of culture and thought" (see Antolín 2004, 217).

The identity construction of this female genealogy contributes in *Fitting the Pattern* to the process of personal creation of the identity of a woman, an exercise of self-affirmation raised as part of a creative process.

5. UNDERBELLY, THE OPEN BODY

In *Underbelly* the maternal body is that which goes through the life of women through centuries and history. The tunnel map in which we immerse opens the door to a mediatextual experience, a hybrid between documentary and anthropological study, which, however, under a first appearance of detachment shelters the intimate and sensual experiences of a woman sculptor and the women who once worked in the mine where now the sculptor must intervene artistically. The testimonies of mining women crawling through the tunnels of the mine contrast, in principle, with the words of the successful, confident, conscious sculptress, a woman of the 21st century.

This completely immersive reading experience, which is oral and visual, leads us through the dark to discover submissive and exploited lives that took place in the very space where the sculptress now works the stone. Voices that speak in the same place since ancient times, that intermingle with the sure and coherent discourse of the sculptress on her creative process which, as we deepen in the tunnels and nooks of the mine, melts in moans, words, complaints and doubts that are presented to the artist before the possibility of being a mother: pleasure, pain and fear.

One of the patriarchal frontiers most strongly established and internalized in our society is that of motherhood and spirituality, as concepts related to each other and, at the same time, confronted. Motherhood as a “duty” is linked to the sense of transcending, of giving something to society, of bringing a benefit to humanity. Motherhood, in this sense, has the label imposed of “spirituality” even if it is a fundamentally physiological phenomenon. Both the maternal and the sacred thus find themselves in the damp, viscous ground of depth, of the occult, of the mysterious, of the inexplicably contradictory, of desire and pain.

And the women in all this? The freedoms we have acquired through contraception and artificial fertilization do not prevent the desire for motherhood from being the guiding line of the female experience. [This] is not a pure and simple biological process: I speak about the meaning of life, of a life that has a meaning. We are here in the “zero degree” of sense, taking up the expression of Barthes, of whom I do not forget his irony or loving thought. What if what we call the “sacred” is the celebration of that mystery which is the appearance of meaning? [...] What if the ancestral division between those who “give life” and those who “give meaning” is disappearing? How about? It would be a radical change, the never seen. Something that would precisely announce the new era of the sacred,

which could well be the surprise of this third millennium. [...] would women not be able to give another coloring to that sacred last that is the miracle of human life: not life itself, but the life bearer of meaning, for the formulation of which women are called to contribute their desire and their word? (Clément and Kristeva 2000, 79)

The work, therefore, shows us the possibility of exercising freedom regarding conscious motherhood that meets the limits of the social and the physiological and is therefore, an apparent freedom. Once the decision has been made, the roulette wheel can bring another kind of luck to us: the sculptress will decide to go ahead with the pregnancy and lose it, or go ahead with it and lose her artistic career, or she will decide to give up motherhood and she won't have a successful career either, she will give up motherhood and will succeed, although she will always regret not having been a mother ... The list goes on because, although the decision is free and conscious, it is sculpted inside a living body in society. And neither the body nor the society, the first constrained by the second, evidently respond in fullness with lofty perspective to the result chosen from the rational, from the thought and desire of the free woman of the 21 century.

Underbelly is an open body, like a mine, through which we dug into our most intimate self, the self of a woman unfailingly linked to the possibility (or not) of being a mother. However, the revelation of what our insides hide consists of “making visible” other damaged, vulnerable bodies:

In order to preserve the memory of the vulnerability of bodies we require a kind of memorization that has to be repeated and established through space and time; could even be called a form of performativity: a performative memorization. [...] It is impossible to preserve memory without means to transmit it, but are we able to understand the body as a means of transmission? The body is a place where the story passes from one to the other [...]. Part of the receptivity of the body has to do with opening up to a story that is not yours, or that maybe belongs to you only in part, but that, however, stands in for. In this sense the subject is an embodiment of stories that has not lived, but that transmits in the name of a fight to preserve the history of the oppressed and thus to avoid that this one falls into oblivion. (Cavarero and Butler 2014, 105)

6. A FIRST APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND: ENGRAVED BODIES,
NARRATIVE MECANISMES, AND POETRY

In the four works of Christine Wilks that we present, the reading process takes the form of a concrete mechanism that relates movements, strategies and sensations with meanings and messages. This forces us, as Hayles expressed, to refocus attention on how the electronic literary work unfolds:

Central to repositioning critical inquiry, so it can attend to the specificity of the medium, is a more robust notion of materiality. Materiality is reconceptualized as the interplay between physical text characteristics and its signifying strategies, a move that entwines instantiation and signification at the outset. This definition opens the possibility of considering texts as embodied entities while still maintaining a central focus on interpretation. It makes materiality an emergent property, so that it can not be specified in advance, as if it were a pre-given entity. Rather, materiality is open to debate and interpretation, ensuring that discussions about the text's "meaning" will also take into account its physical specificity as well. (Hayles 2004, 25)

Walter Benjamin in *The Author as a Producer* mentions the social implication of an artistic or literary work as its "tendency" and wonders to what extent a work of "tendency" is literarily good or not and, to find this out, he focuses on the process of elaboration of the work, in the "technique":

With the word 'technique', I introduce the concept that allows the submission of literary products to a direct and therefore materialistic social analysis. At the same time, the concept of 'technique' provides the dialectical starting point that allows us to overcome the barren opposition between 'form' and 'content'. Moreover, this concept also allows us to correctly determine the above-mentioned relationship between 'tendency' and 'quality'. Thus, if we were able to affirm that the correct political tendency of a work implies its literary quality because it includes its literary tendency, we can now specify the statement by pointing out that this literary tendency may consist of a progress or a regression of literary technique. (Benjamin 1934, 3)

Hayles and Benjamin, therefore, agree on the point of granting to the process of discovery or reading one, and of elaboration the other (aspects that are strongly imbricated in the digital work) a fundamental weight in the meaning and transcendence of the Work, understanding as transcendence the effect that this produces in the reader, undoubtedly potentially capable of transferring from the personal to the social, of bringing about change:

Only taking into account the technical realities of the current situation, we can understand the forms of expression that give way to the literary energies of our time. Novels have not always been written in the past, and nothing indicates that they will continue to be written. There were not always tragedies, no big epics. The forms of commentary, translation and even plagiarism were not always marginal variants of literature, but came to have a specific weight not only in the philosophical literature but also in the poetics of Arabia or China. The rhetoric was not always a minor form: it left its trace in great provinces of literature in the Antiquity. I mention all this to familiarize you with the idea that we are in the midst of an immense process of fusion of literary forms; a process of fusion in which many of the oppositions with which we are used to thinking could end up losing their vigor. (Benjamin 1934, 3)

Visionary Benjamin, conceives “technique” as the ability of the author, the artist, to reflect on his/her own place of creation: “Perhaps you have noticed that these considerations, which are coming to an end, impose a single requirement on the writer: that of reflecting, of wondering about their position in the production process” (Benjamin 1934, 10).

The author creates the literary work and, according to Hayles, the “materiality” of this includes how we unveil it, with what movements, with what strategies and what mechanisms we implement to fully read these works and what meaning this process has in the work itself. That is, the electronic medium does not imply a certain materiality but the possibility, by its very nature, of a process of incarnation in each work. This process also contributes to the meaning of the work: “Materiality thus can not be specified in advance; rather, it occupies a borderland, or better, performs the connective tissue-joining the physical and mental, the artifact and the user” (Benjamin 1934, 3).

The “materiality” on which Hayles reflects and the “technique” that transcends to the social are linked in the four works of Christine Wilks analyzed in the preceding pages to a sort of ambivalence of meaning that filters to the discursive that which is poetic.

7. MEMORY AND POETRY

This connection between the physical and the mental, between the artifact and the user, between the reader, in short, and the text, has as a result in Wilks’ works which are the object of this analysis, a poetic effect of social impact. In Rich’s words, the social commitment embraces the poetic:

I hope you never have idealized poetry. Poetry is not a healing lotion, an emotional massage, a kind of linguistic aromatherapy. Neither is a blueprint, nor an instruction manual, nor a billboard. There is no universal poetry. Anyway, only poetry and poetics, and the streaming intertwining histories to which they belong. There is room, indeed necessity, for both Neruda and César Vallejo, for Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alfonsina Storni, for Audre Lorde and Aime Césaire, for both Ezra Pound and Nelly Sachs. Poetics are no more pure and simple than human histories are pure and simple. Poetry, like silk or coffee or oil or human flesh, has had its trade routes. And there are colonized poetics and resilient poetics, transmissions across frontiers not easily traced. (Rich 2011, 20)

Every expression of the poetic is undoubtedly the expression of the concrete nature of human nature. However, the materiality of this expression through the poem, technique, is what is the responsibility of the poet:

If to 'aestheticize' is to glide across brutality and cruelty, treats merely the dramatic occasions for the artist rather than structures of power to be revealed and dismantled, much hangs on the words 'merely' and 'rather than'. Opportunism is not the same as committed attention. But we can also define the 'aesthetic' not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but the news of an awareness, the resistance, that totalizing systems want to quell: art reaching into us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched. (Rich 2011, 25)

However, reading poetry sometimes ignores the imbrication of the poetic in the social forgetting that reading is also reading ourselves:

Critical discourse about poetry has said little about the daily conditions of our material existence, past and present: how they imprint the life of the feelings, of involuntary human responses how we glimpse a blur of smoke in the air, look at a pair of shoes in the shop window, at a woman's sleep in her car or a group of men on a street corner, how we hear the whir of a helicopter or rain on the roof or music on the radio upstairs, how we meet or avoid the eyes of a neighbor or a stranger. That pressure bends our angle of vision whether we recognize it or not. A great many well-wrought, banal poems, like a great many essays on poetry and poetics, are written as if such pressures did not exist. But this only reveals their existence. [...] And such a line can also be drawn between ideologically obedient hack and an engaged poetics that endures the weight of the unknown, the untracked, the unrealized, along with its urgencies for and against. (Rich 2011, 31)

And is that reading ourselves only depends on our glance... Reading the bodies or reading the glances. The glance, therefore, becomes a word. The glance, rather, exists instead of the word:

It's about love, and not just anatomy or species, hormones, or genes, it's about reading.

What, then, is love? It would be a superintelligence of a desire of the other, desire for the happiness of the other capable of inventing passages, signs, languages, a superintelligence, independent of the codes of species, cultural conquests.

I say "love", a love of joy she without violence, without relationships of strength, a benevolence, a beautiful lying, a caressing made of attention, of listening, an approach, a touch, a reading with the other's eyes, with the glance that blesses. (Cixous 2009, 55)

Definitively, Chistine Wilks has a full of love and a plenty of intelligence gaze over women bodies. But Wilks loving is an insisting strength in our personal values, as women and ideas as men, for achieve a social strong commitment, a personal commitment that we can sum up in two words: do it!

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