

Feminizing Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" and Vasconcelos' *Raza Cósmica*: The Videos of Sonia Andrade and Pola Weiss

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The term *mestizaje* has been broadly used to denote the hybrid nature of Latin American cultures. Two of the most notable engagements with hybridity came from the Mexican José Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cósmica* (1925) and the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" (1928). Both of these modernist intellectuals developed a strategy to resist western colonial domination and to embrace a unique culture that blended multiple histories, ethnicities, cosmologies, and practices. This paper addresses how, in the 1970s, Brazilian video artist Sonia Andrade (b. 1935) and Mexican video artist Pola Weiss (b. 1947-1990) cannibalized and embodied Andrade and Vasconcelos' manifestos from a feminized perspective.

Following the work of the Chilean critic Nelly Richard, feminization is understood as a process that breaks down the barriers of biological determinism and fixed symbolic roles, thus becoming a practice of continued contestation. This is not only relevant to those who define themselves as women, but also to a multitude of experiences that contest normative and fixed definitions of sex, race, or ethnicity. [1] From this perspective, we also position Andrade and Weiss' work as part of a meaningful dialogue with those Chicana scholars who feminized the concept of *mestizaje* during the second half of the twentieth century.

Most famously, by the mid-1980s, Chicana scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval re-engaged with the concept of *mestizaje* to theorize their experiences as mixed-queer-third-world feminists of color in the United States. [2] In particular, Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* consciousness, which stressed the potential of crossbred, queer, and indigenous peoples to propose a new angle of vision—namely, a critical way of challenging the binary structures imposed by western patriarchy—became foundational to the development of Chicana scholarship. [3] Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* consciousness went beyond biological definitions of *mestizaje*: she defined a holistic epistemology as "a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes." [4] Building on Anzaldúa's work, Sandoval proposed an oppositional consciousness as a way to explore "affinities inside of difference." [5] Sandoval's oppositional methodology describes a set of strategies that seek to build bridges and trace affinities between the work of what she calls "postcolonial US third-world feminist criticism" and canonical western postmodern cultural theorists in order to put an end to "academic apartheid." [6] Indeed, Sandoval's work is central to Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg

Manifesto" (1985), the foundational text of cyborg feminism. [7] For Haraway, the cyborg is a hybrid between organism and machine: "a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century." [8] Significantly, one of the central objectives of Haraway's "Manifesto" is a broader political project aimed at transgressing boundaries and undoing the dualisms and essentialisms of dominant intellectual and cultural traditions that dictate the construction of hierarchies of difference.

However, it is noteworthy that in the chicana-feminist-queer-cyborg-third-world re-engagement with the concept of *mestizaje/cyborg*, the voices and experiences of Latin American women from the South are excluded. Consequently, this paper seeks to address this omission by discussing two emblematic videos, *Sem título* (1975) by Sonia Andrade and *Somos Mujeres* (1978) by Pola Weiss, while situating the artists and their works in geo-historical and socio-political-cultural contexts. In doing so, we collaboratively map diverse re-engagements with the concept of *mestizaje* (including hybrids of self and technology) developed by Latin American women as a critique of dominant social structures. And, in the spirit of Chela Sandoval's search for commonalities of strength and affinity, this paper seeks to find those commonalities of strength and affinity among women in the Americas who feminized the concept of *mestizaje* during the second half of the twentieth century. [9]

Só a ANTROPOFAGIA nos une. Socialmente. Económicamente. Filosoficamente.
— Oswald de Andrade [10]

The table is set with a dish of black beans; bread, beer, and coffee complete the image of typical Brazilian food and domesticity in Sonia Andrade's video, *Sem título*. [11] We see a woman seated on an apartment balcony, a television in the background. The woman sits with her back to the television screen, facing the camera, dishing out a meal of *feijão* (black beans). The television and its soundtrack create an audiovisual disturbance in this otherwise wholesome, albeit banal, moment of repose—a woman sitting down to a meal in her home. In Andrade's video, a television station is showing a black and white Tarzan film, an American production dubbed in Portuguese, portraying the South as barbaric, primitive, and exotic.

About three quarters of the way into the video, after many long minutes of consuming her beans, Andrade suddenly abandons her spoon and starts rubbing beans on her face and neck. The banality of the ritual of eating a meal suddenly disintegrates into a new ritual, a discordant image of woman, television, and home. The woman smears black beans all over her head, face, and body, until her face is blackened. She then starts throwing beans at the camera lens in what may be considered an attack against this invasive lens, which signals a moment of voyeurism in this domestic scene, thus breaking the fourth wall. We hear the smack of beans hit the camera lens until all we see are abstracted images of the beans dripping down the lens, the dominant soundtrack of the television still ringing in our ears.

It isn't until we witness Andrade's seemingly barbaric yet calculated and ritualized behavior with the beans that our attention shifts from the television to the foregrounded woman. With a banal, minimal, and domestic *mise en scène* of food, television, woman, and body, Andrade re-conceptualizes the complex inter-relationships of the above in the context of an urgent political and social condition.

The historical moment in which Andrade made this 1975 video was one of Brazil's most politically fraught periods, characterized by a highly repressive military dictatorship and extreme censorship laws. After the 1964 military coup in Brazil, the cultural landscape shifted as artists adapted to the newly repressive environment by broadening the relations between art and spectatorship, while challenging accepted norms of art through the use of existing technologies and modified production materials, such as in Andrade's video experiments. Significantly, in 1968—a critical year in Brazil, Mexico, and internationally, marked by abuses of human rights, mass demonstrations, political upheaval, and demands

for social justice—a new law known as the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) was passed. [12] Under this new law, a complex system of censorship regulations was put in place, restricting any form of public commentary and entertainment, including journalism, music, film, theatre, and art. However, Andrade, and her pioneering video art contemporaries often managed to pass under the radar of this restrictive law with videos that critiqued the dictatorship, as video art was not seen as a threat in its early days. [13]

Also of note, in that same year *Tropicália*, one of Brazil's most influential cultural movements, was launched in response to the increasingly strict laws and the generally repressive climate for artists, activists, journalists, and intellectuals, who were being tortured and forced into exile. [14] As Elena Shtromberg explains, "Art is an open system ... a matrix of social exchange." [15] *Tropicália* was characterized by a fusion and hybridization of forms and influences that combined traditional Brazilian culture with foreign influences, the popular with the avant-garde, in order to create something new and unique.

Tupí, or not Tupí: that is the question.
— Oswald de Andrade [16]

The dominant doctrine of *Tropicália* was *antropofagia* (cannibalism), which took the original concept from the poet Oswald de Andrade's famous 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago." Of historical interest is that the first television channel in Brazil was called "TV Tupí"; it was also the first commercial television broadcast in South America, in September of 1950 by Assis Chateaubriand, a co-founder of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) in 1947. [17] In 1975, Sonia Andrade made her video *Sem título* at a time when almost no one was using video, after an invitation by the then-director of the MASP. Her 1970s series of videos, all titled *Untitled*, comprise a vitriolic critique: they drew attention to the bodily pain of torture employed by the regime, the patriarchal view of women, and the use of television as a predatory tool in the hands of the dictatorship.

Looking back at Brazil's television history, the Ministry of Communications was created in 1967, the same year that the famous Brazilian artist, Hélio Oiticica, exhibited his installation *Tropicália* (the name subsequently taken up for the cultural movement) at Rio's Museum of Modern Art as part of the *New Brazilian Objectivity* show. [18] Also in 1967, the newly created Ministry of Communications allied itself with the Brazilian government's agenda to increase control of the Amazon basin by means of the Trans-Amazon Highway.

In effect, television became the means to aggressively promote the government's ideological agenda, both in Brazil's urban hubs as well as in its hinterlands. Just as the state was investing in telecommunications technology, Andrade used the same technology as a tool to express and engage with ideas through the visual, corporal, non-verbal, and gestural. The political dimension of Andrade's work in her 1970s video series is as pervasive as the booming television in her frame. As articulated by Marshall McLuhan, "TV will not work as background. It engages you. You have to be with it." [19] In this way, the television in Andrade's work becomes a constant reminder of the invasive presence of the repressive authoritarian regime, while Andrade enacts, through corporal gesture, new ritualized relationships with food, television, and body within the confines of the frame.

Andrade drew attention to the political and social body by turning the camera on herself in her single take, fixed-camera, monochrome videos that meditate on bodily gestures. Andrade's work, which engaged her body and the medium of video, provided alternatives to television's dominant and unrealistic projections of Latin American women and their lifestyles, along with the rest of the televisual norms dictating gender, family, religion, politics, and social behavior. Feminist and cultural critic Nelly Richard discusses how the body is a site for exposing tensions in repressive societies. Richard asserts that "under circumstances where censorship is applied to vast areas of meaning in language, any superfluous discourse or unspoken pressure which escapes or undermines the syntax of the

permitted can only surface as bodily gestures.” [20] Certainly, Richard’s arguments, made in reference to Chile’s dictatorship, are apt in Brazil’s political climate during the 1970s.

Ultimately, Andrade’s videos, similar to those of her Mexican contemporary Pola Weiss, used the then-new medium as a poetic and utopic hybrid extension of the female body that had the power to cannibalize and attack its political enemy.

Present world conditions favor the development of interracial sexual unions, a fact which lends unexpected support to the thesis which, for the lack of a better name, I entitled: The future cosmic race.
—José Vasconcelos [21]

In his essay *La Raza Cósmica*, José Vasconcelos foretold the coming of a new age for mankind in which racial barriers would lose their force and ongoing racial mixture would lead to the cosmic race. According to Vasconcelos, this new race would be “gifted with the power of creative fantasy over reason” and its dominance would coincide with the “Spiritual or Aesthetic Era of mankind.” [22] Vasconcelos’ essay was foundational to Mexico’s post-revolutionary nationalist project of *indigenismo*, which relied on the concept of *mestizaje* as the main element that would bring radical change to Mexican society. [23] Of particular interest is that, as secretary of education from 1921 to 1924, Vasconcelos played a crucial role in the construction of national imagery based on the promotion of “mestizo aesthetics,” encouraging the development of the Mexican School of Muralism, which, along with photography and film, helped to visualize and promote the values of *indigenismo*. [24]

In the 1970s, Pola Weiss looked back at Vasconcelos’ cosmic race to formulate the coming of a new era rooted in the emerging role of video as an artistic medium and its connection to television broadcasting. Like Sonia Andrade, Pola Weiss began to experiment with video technology at a time of social and political turmoil. In the aftermath of the 1968 massacre of students in downtown Mexico City, the Mexican state embarked on a populist program of reforms to regain popularity. Part of the package of reforms targeted the television industry—which had been in the hands of the private sector since the early 1950s—as the most effective means to influence public opinion. [25] These reforms led to the consolidation of three main institutions that vied for televisual airwaves and programming. [26] These recently established broadcasting institutions were not only open to experimenting with video technology but also eagerly opened their doors to a new generation of media professionals—including women. [27] As early as 1973, Pola Weiss began to collaborate with these three institutions in various capacities, and soon after established her own production company ArTV (1978). [28]

Weiss believed that televisual art (or ArTV as she called it) could foster large-scale transformations that would shape a new man, one she labeled, “el hombre cósmico” (the cosmic man). [29] For Weiss, the cosmic man was an embodied critical media viewer in touch with his/her feelings—a sensorial being who challenged dominant regimes of visibility and separated the act of viewing from other sensorial experiences. [30] Unlike Vasconcelos’ cosmic race, Weiss’ cosmic (wo)man would foster change not through racial mixing, but through the development of hybrids of self and technology. [31] For Weiss, the new aesthetics of *mestizaje* for this televisual era would no longer be distributed and popularized through murals, photography, or films predominately created by male artists, but through televisual images increasingly produced by women who, like her, embraced the potential of video and television broadcasting. Indeed, just like Sonia Andrade, Weiss was attracted to video because of its lack of history, which, as Midori Yoshimoto has described, afforded many 1970s female artists a clean slate, allowing them to launch their careers without the burden of an existing male tradition or established categories and genres. [32]

In Pola Weiss’ *Somos Mujeres*, the camera moves quickly between shots of busy street traffic, close ups of a church, modern buildings, and women begging on the streets with

children in their arms or strapped to their backs with a *rebozo*. [33] The soundtrack intermixes dialogues in indigenous languages with the weeping sounds of women and children. Suddenly, the camera takes the point of view of a child being carried on her mother's back. By using a tilted angle and subjective camera perspective, Weiss places the viewer in the position of the indigenous child. The viewer looks at the side of a building, and from this position—perhaps just like a child being carried on his/her mother's back—is unable to understand what she/he sees: the city becomes foreign, the space of the Other. The camera moves from a subjective position to an objective one, and at some point in the video, the women on the street become aware of Weiss' camera. They seem to throw things at Weiss and her camera. Like Sonia Andrade, Weiss was also interested in breaking the fourth wall. In *Somos Mujeres*, Weiss did so by incorporating the women's responses to her camera. Shown at the February Biennale of Modern Art in Mexico City in 1978, *Somos Mujeres* was one of the first videos by Weiss where she began to formulate the utopic potential of video: namely, the medium's capacity to develop alternate televisual realities in which the subject (the camerawoman) and the object (the indigenous woman and her child) of representation could switch positions, mix with one another, and thus subvert the power relations in the matrix of representation. [34]

Weiss conceived each of her videos as an act of giving birth, and her camera as her daughter—her *escuincla* (from the Náhuatl word for daughter). The word *escuincla*, also from the Náhuatl word *itzcuintli* (a dog without hair, or a child) is commonly used in colloquial Mexican Spanish as a pejorative term to refer to an indigenous or dark-skinned female beggar, or to refer to any nuisance. As we have argued elsewhere, by conceptualizing her camera as her daughter, Weiss challenges normative female experiences by developing an incestuous coupling of herself, her camera, and the Other. [35] By using the video camera as a hybrid extension of her body and adopting television broadcasting as a conceptual model to reach audiences outside of the art world circuits, Weiss developed a unique approach to video.

Weiss, like Andrade, combined the predominant articulation of video art as a medium of self-knowledge with a concern for exploring video's relation to television broadcasting and the medium's aesthetic and technical qualities. [36] Through this approach, Weiss sought to undermine the separation between real experience and the reality structured by the medium of video. In naming her camera "escuincla" and allowing it to act as a prosthetic to extend the vision of her white, middle-class, female body, while also allowing the Other to see through it (via the use of subjective camera or feedback), Weiss gendered the process of mestizaje as female.

Weiss' approach was not free from contradictions. Her fusions of self, Other, and machine were at times patronizing and idealistic experiments. [37] Nonetheless, like Andrade's approach, Weiss' use of video did offer an alternative to dominant expressions of Latin American utopian impulses during the second half of the twentieth century. By blurring the division between the subject and object of representation, Weiss developed contradictory fusions of self and Other, and in so doing, Weiss feminized *indigenista* visual traditions by breaking down the barriers of biological determinism and fixed symbolic roles that once connected man to technology and woman to nature. [38] In much the same way as Andrade, Weiss provided alternative visions for Latin American women through the expansion of utopian televisual realities where the boundaries of race, class, gender, and ethnicity could be experienced and performed differently.

Among the affinities between Sonia Andrade and Pola Weiss and the parallel worlds they inhabited, this paper has discussed how both artists used video and the site of their bodies in hybridized, feminized, cannibalist experiments to subvert the masculine and authoritarian language of televisual images. These efforts speak to a common interest in undoing longstanding colonial, racial, gender, and class hierarchies present in Latin American societies.

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3. Chela Sandoval, "Mestizaje as Method," 354–355. See note 2.
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8. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 291. See note 7.
9. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 2-4.
10. "Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically." Oswald de Andrade as quoted by Leslie Bary, "Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalist Manifesto," *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (July-December 1991): 38.
11. Sonia Andrade, *Sem título*, 1975. Video, 8 min.
12. The law was proposed by the army general Artur da Costa e Silva, then president of Brazil. Elena Shtromberg, *Art Systems: Brazil and the 1970s* (United States: University of Texas Press, 2016), 44.
13. Sonia Andrade in conversation with the curator at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, April 2, 2012. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xrnb3p_cinema-et-videos-sonia-andrade_creation.
14. Tropicália is largely associated with music (Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Os Mutantes, Tom Zé, Gal Costa) but also encompasses cinema, theatre, poetry, and art. The movement gained strength in 1968 with the release of the album *Tropicália: ou Panis et Circencis* serving as a musical manifesto.
15. Shtromberg, *Art Systems*, 9. See note 12.
16. English translation of the Portuguese "Manifesto Antropófago," by Oswald de Andrade. Tupí is the popular generic name for one of Brazil's largest Indigenous peoples, also known for their cannibalistic rituals. Leslie Bary, "Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalist Manifesto," 38. See note 10.
17. Shtromberg, *Art Systems*, 94. See note 12.
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19. McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Massachusetts, MIT Press edition 1994), 312.
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21. José Vasconcelos, "The Cosmic Race: The Mission of the Iberoamerican Race," in *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* trans. Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3.
22. José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, x. See note 21.
23. Indigenismo is defined as a set of reforms and practices that attempted to integrate indigenous cultures in the development of a national narrative in order to construct a modern national identity. It was a process of internal colonization and expropriation, whereby the image of the Indian emerged as the source of mythical originality and the basis of a new mestizo national identity. Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "Imagining the

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 25. Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 48. See note 23.
 26. These institutions included the state through the purchase of the television channel, Canal 13 (1972); Televisa (1973); and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) through TV UNAM, a closed network television production station that began to broadcast on an open network in association with Televisa in 1976. See Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 48. See note 23.
 27. Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 48–49. See note 23.
 28. For more details on Weiss' conception of arTV see Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 53.
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 32. Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 187.
 33. Pola Weiss, *Somos Mujeres*. 1977. Video, 7 minutes 15 seconds.
 34. Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 46–60. See note 23.
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 38. Sepúlveda, "Imagining the Cyborg in Náhuatl," 57. See note 23.

Bios

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