

Allegories of Through: *Abisal* and *Tejedora*

By

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Declaration of Committee

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Abstract

Allegories of through: *Abisal* and *Tejedora*, is a dual, side by side installation based on the analysis of two frames for thinking identity, the Abyssal frame and the Nahua's frame. The first installation, *Abisal*, pulls inspiration from sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santo's concept of the abyssal line, which operates within the Modern/Colonial world to artificially divide the human from the subhuman. The piece uses found material objects (glass door and mirror) and projections to create an immersive apparatus of light and movement that functions as a potential choreographic device. The second installation, *Tejedora*, is inspired by the Nahua's concept of *teotl*, which is the dynamic principle of an eternally self – generating and self regenerating sacred power, energy or force. The installation encompasses movement, spatial design and video projection. The video loops an action involving the unrolling of sheets of paper, creating multiple lines of paper and a body in movement.

Keywords: Side by side installation; Abyssal line; *Teotl*; Movement; Choreographic device

Dedication

**With all my love to my husband Amaury, my parents
Hilda y Luis and my sister Hilda.**

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Defence Statement

Allegories of through: *Abisal* and *Tejedora*

Background: Situating my artistic practice

The art world has captivated me since I was a child; mainly Dance, but I was also interested in other artistic disciplines that, despite having a delimited field, were naturally integrated within Dance. Specifically, Architecture (in scenography), Design (in the spatial composition, costumes, and lights), the Music that has been associated with Dance since its inception, and the Theater that is integrated into the interpretation and execution of gesture and movement. Therefore, when I finished my formal training as a dancer, which included Classical, Contemporary, Modern and Folklore Dance; I went on to get a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Design, a Bachelor's Degree in Contemporary Choreography and a diploma in Musical Theater.

My work between 2010 – 2015 was generally oriented towards dance. Most of my choreographic work was born from the need to explore a personal topic or concern, turning it into a concept or premise of work and from there, investigating to find the adequate language of movement and means of production. According to the methodology and specific objectives, the exploration of movement and gesture for each piece led to different results, from narrative (as in *Hay que ser*¹ -Fig.1- where my main goal was to be clear at a dramatic level, playing with the limits of Dance and Theatre), to abstract language (as in *Travesía*² -Fig.2- where I explored with a structure based on polyphony). Through these works I began to have a nascent interest in critical discourse.

¹ *Hay que ser* - Premiere at the Raúl Flores Canelo Theatre CENART, Mexico (December 2012) Choreography: Karla Desentis. Music: Diego Carmona and Erick Tovar. Costumes: Raymundo Balderas, Lighting: Marco Huicochea, Interpreters: Sol Mora, Daniel Ramírez, Pharis Ramos, Rocío Silva, Abril Mejía, Mariano Bucio and Alberto Ramos.

² *Travesía* - Premiere at the Mexico City Zócalo (April 2012) Choreography: Karla Desentis. Music: Sonata para cello y piano de Claude A. Debussy. Musicians: Dúo Cadena de la Sierra Interpreters: Felisa Monroy, Iván Osorio, David Reyes and Julio Ruiz.



Fig. 1 – Hay que ser.
Photo by Carlos Figueroa, 2014.
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Fig. 2 – Travesía.
Photo by Amaury Villegas, 2012.
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My choreographic practice has been strongly influenced by my design background as in the play *Jenga*³ (Fig.3) where the interpreters used cardboard boxes and other materials, there, the set and space played a fundamental role in the dramatic construction. Similarly, in *Resilientes*⁴ (Fig.4) and *Ecdysis*⁵ (Fig.5), the costumes were a substantial part of the work; along with the dance, they became part of the speech. In *Resonancia*⁶ (Fig.6) I was interested in continuing to explore the use of objects on stage, but it was complex and expensive to have so much scenery, therefore I decided to use mapping in combination with objects as set design. At this time I was already working in an interdisciplinary manner, however, I was accustomed to setting my work in places such as classic and black box theatres.

³ *Jenga* - Premiere at the Black box CENART (June 2013) Choreography: Karla Desentis. Music: Sergio Valencia. Scenography and Costumes: Rodrigo Muñoz and Dafne Nava Rodríguez. Interpreters: Kesia Herrera, Sol Mora, Daniel Ramírez, Pharis Ramos and Rocío Silva.

⁴ *Resilientes* - Premiere at the Raúl Flores Canelo Theatre CENART (June 2011) Choreography: Karla Desentis. Musical asesory: Joaquín López Chapman. Lighting: Jorge Larrazolo. Interpreters: Elsy Jimenez, Ximena Marváni, Yazmín Rodríguez and Julio Cesar. Costume: Karla Desentis.

⁵ *Ecdysis* - Director: Karla Desentis, Interdisciplinary team: Students from the Faculty of Arts and Design at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (May 2019). Performers: Andrea Aguilar, Renata Rodríguez, Jessica Rivera Martínez, Amanda Tirado, Lights design: Karla Desentis.

⁶ *Resonancia*- Premiere at the Raúl Flores Canelo Theatre CENART (January 2014) Choreography: Karla Desentis. Music: Diego Carmona and Erick Tovar. Mapping animation: Francisco Fraga and Karla Desentis. Scenography: Karla Desentis and Ugo Henríque. Lighting: Ximena Marván Interpreters: Sol Mora, Julio Cesar Romero, Alberto Palestina, Pharis Ramos and Alberto Sáenz.



Fig. 3 – Jenga.
Photo by Luis Raudón, 2013
Reproduced with permission



Fig. 4 - Resilientes.
Photo by Jorge Larrazolo, 2011
Reproduced with permission



Fig. 5 – Ecdysis.
Photo by Renata Rodríguez, 2019
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Fig. 6 - Resonancia.
Photo by Carlos Figueroa, 2014
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By 2015, I was interested in moving outside the theatre as an architectural space and presented the piece *Porset*⁷ (Fig.7) at the cloister of the Franz Mayer Museum. But it was until finishing the project *Manifiesto Puma 16.1* (Fig. 8) that there was an important shift in my practice.

⁷ *Porset* - Performance at the Franz Mayer Museum (April 2015). Choreography: Karla Desentis Rodríguez. Music: Erick Tovar. Lighting and Costume: Lila Méndez Pap. Interpreters: Itzi Cortés, Ileri Mugica, Brianda Estrada, Itzel Gomez.



Fig. 7 – Porset.

Photo by Luis Raudón, 2015
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Fig. 8 – *Manifiesto Puma 16.1*

Photo by Carlos Figueroa, 2015
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*Manifiesto Puma 16.1*⁸ was an itinerant piece; it was designed in such a way that it could be presented in different spaces, namely auditoriums, public squares, and theatres. The play was presented in approximately 30 different locations, having 41 presentations in less than a month. The conclusion of this project led me into a pause in the creative practice to focus on a period of reflection about contemporary political and social issues.

The context around me (in Mexico) had shifted to one of general indignation since one of the United States presidential candidates, who was later elected, was running a campaign of hostility towards Mexican people, fomenting hate, and racism. I remember being outraged, and as that was a general sensation in my country it was a common theme in the media. I remember hearing on the radio there was a workshop directed to visual artists so that they could reflect on the creation of art with the aim of countering the damage towards Mexican people rather than making free publicity to this person and increasing his popularity. Immediately after hearing that, I knew that was what I wanted to do, and it became the premise for my next work.

I was intrigued by how Mexicans are perceived in other parts of the world, as well as how we perceive ourselves. It called my attention to the phenomenon of *Malichismo*, a term used in Mexico to describe a feeling of self-degradation of one who likes the foreign and

⁸ *Manifiesto Puma 16.1*- Premiere at the Carlos Lazo Theatre UNAM (August 2015). Choreography and Direction: Karla Desentis Rodríguez. Music: Diego Carmona, Federico Luna, Vinicio Marquina and Erick Tovar. Scenography: Amaury Villegas. Costume: Lila Méndez Pap. 2D animation: Eduardo Herrera. Mapping: Rebeca Sánchez Lighting: Brenda Gutiérrez and Karla Desentis. Interpreters: Leonardo Amézquita, Carmen Cruz, Melina Gaitán, Brenda Gutiérrez, Daniel Ramírez, Rocío Silva and Miguel Z. Solórzano.

depreciates their own. From my perspective, it was important to get closer to Mexico's indigenous roots and recognize its wealth. Therefore, I started investigating Nahuas philosophy and art expressions (the name given to Mesoamerican Nahuatl-speakers which includes the Mexicas "Aztecs", Texcocans, Chalcans, and Tlaxcaltecs among others). As part of that research, in 2016, I studied the Mesoamerican technique of Waist Weaving⁹ a technique still in use (see Fig.9), which I consider to be one of the most significant cultural wealths of my country, and that it could be the object of metaphors to explore in my art practice. That idea led me to the Indigenous Dance Residency at Banff Centre for the Arts, in the same year, and later on, to start the *Memoria Mexica Movimiento* (Mexica Memory Movement)¹⁰ project in Mexico (2018). Paradoxically, the same project brought me back to Canada to study the MFA as I was looking for the best preparation to continue this research.



Fig.9 - María Barcelona (teacher)

Photo by Lorena Gallardo, 2016
Reproduced with permission.



Fig.10 - Telar de Raíz, Memoria Mexica Movimiento

Photo by Carlos Segui, 2018
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María Barcelona Nicolás Lorenzo, artisan teacher from San Juan Cotzocón Mixe, Oaxaca. Class by YOLOPAQUI México and the National Autonomous University of Mexico at the Industrial Design Studies Centre. Student Karla Desentis Rodríguez.

⁹ The textile activity, has a technological and artistic tradition that comes from the pre-Hispanic era. We can find evidence of it in different codex such as Nutall, Borgia, Fajérvary-Mayer and Mendocino where they represented some of the instruments used to thread as the terracotta malacates (Desentis, Karla. 2018. "Memoria Mexica Memory." pp 16)

¹⁰ Mexica Memory Movement is an interdisciplinary and multi representative project, that seeks to approach the subject of *malinchismo* from a point of view that highlights Mexico's richness through a contemporary aesthetics. (Desentis, Karla. 2018. "Memoria Mexica Memory." pp 6)
Choreography: Karla Desentis. Music: Carlos Segui. Interdisciplinary team: Lorena Gallardo, Amaury Villegas, Jorge Hernández, Carlos Segui and Karla Desentis. Interpreter: Eunice Zenteno.

When entering the MFA program, I was interested in deepening my theoretical and artistic research with the purpose of widening my view. As the program allows students to delve into multiple spaces, such as visual art studios, dance classrooms, black boxes or even outside the building; I had the freedom to explore beyond a specific space or artistic discipline. Therefore, I allowed myself to play with my artistic research, which produced a shift in my practice, where I could begin to think through the pieces beyond a specific genre. This openness was ideal to focus on the different questions I had and to interrogate the world through this emerging practice. This is how most of the pieces that I have worked on at SFU have been circulating approaches to identity and perception from different angles, some in relation to sexism and racism. (See Appendix A)

Contemporary context in relation to the field

It is clear to me that art could be a form of critical thinking that requires a constant attitude of reflection, observation and exploration of the multiple ways to approach urgent social themes through the artwork. Thus, my artistic interests are not linked anymore to a specific artistic discipline but to a disposition towards creation that could be related to different contemporary art practices and fields. This position is, of course, shared with many other artists and thinkers who address the problems of the contemporary world. Nowadays, not only artists but art institutions like the Tate and Whitney museums are concerned with the ways in which art can engage with social ideals and historical realities, possibly compensating for past failures to include representation from the Global South.

“Though some artists associated modernism with a utopian vision, art has also provided a mirror to contemporary society, sometimes raising awareness about urgent issues or arguing for change. Whether through traditional media or moving images, abstraction or figuration, militancy or detached observation, all the artworks in this wing highlight aspects of the social reality in which they were made, and try to generate a reaction and convey a more or less explicit message to their publics.” (TATE Museum of Art, 2020) ¹¹

¹¹ Tate Modern. n.d. “Artist and Society.” Accessed 2020.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/display/artist-and-society>

Theoretical frameworks

Following my interest in stereotypical views about identity and how these may have become normalized, generating a system of exclusion where some populations become invisible, silenced, and marginalized, I have investigated Boaventura de Sousa Santos's theories, where he describes this phenomenon as a "system of naturalizing differences." To explain how it operates, Santos proposes the concept of the "Abyssal Line" (this is a line that divides the metropolitan world and the colonial world) and he metaphorically names the "Global South" to the oppressed populations resulting from this division. As a counter solution, Santos proposes an epistemological transformation to reinvert social emancipation through plural forms including non-Western views of the world called "Ecology of knowledge" where he includes the "Epistemologies of the South".

It is an ecology, because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges (one of them being modern science) and on the sustained and dynamic interconnections between them without compromising their autonomy. The ecology of knowledges is founded on the idea that knowledge is inter-knowledge. (Santos 2007)¹²

Inspired by Santos' ideas, in the research paper that precedes this Project Defence Statement, I have analyzed two frames for thinking identity: The Abyssal frame and the Nahuas¹³ frame.

The first one, the Abyssal frame, is based on Santos's concept of the *abyssal line* which is a mechanism that produces an apparently inescapable division in binaries forming an unbalanced relationship between two social positions as natural oppositions. Santos uses the term *abyssal* precisely to emphasize the visible and invisible distinctions established through radical lines that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of "this side of the line" and the realm of "the other side of the line".

The division is such that "the other side of the line" vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. (Santos 2007)¹⁴

¹² (Santos, Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges 2007, 27)

¹³ (Nahuas is the name given to Mesoamerican Nahuatl-speakers which includes the Mexicas (internationally known as "Aztecs") Texcocans, Chalcanas, and Tlaxcaltecs among others).

¹⁴ (Santos, Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges 2007, 1)

In the paper, I argue that the abyssal line is impermeable from one side but permeable from the other, therefore, it produces three different effects and perceptions of identity (essentialized, dialectic and hybridized) which relate through irregular and intermittent dynamics in a non-symmetrical vertical structure, making relevant what is on one side, but not on the other, thus, essentializing bodies. (For more information, please refer to Appendix B.)

The second frame is the Nahua's frame, which I based on the concept of *teotl*, and James Maffie's analysis of it what he calls dialectical polar monism, as the ceaseless, cyclical oscillation of polar yet complementary opposites that involves the perpetual process of "becoming". In the paper, I argue that this frame to think identity is processive, transformational and non-hierarchical (with an internal instead of external division). Thus, it is a regular, constantly dynamic, horizontal structure of thinking identity.

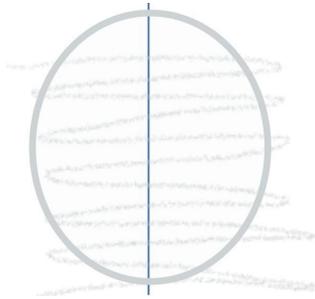


Fig. 11- Nahua's frame for thinking identity

Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

The approach to these frames is not done merely as a demonstration of its differences, but rather with the purpose of broadening the possibilities for thinking about identity. There is an intrinsic connection between the way we think and the way we act. Therefore, an ecological analysis of how we think about identity offers an opportunity to challenge Modern/Colonial structures that result in multiple forms of domination and opens the possibility to see other alternatives. Nevertheless, the theoretical understanding of this view is not the only way to approach it. As far as I am concerned, art is another medium, which through an ecological approach, might confront the modern monoculture and open other ways to think and perceive.

The work

Allegories of Through is a dual project consisting of two installations¹⁵ that are inspired in the Abyssal frame (*Abisal*) and the Nahuas frame (*Tejedora*) to think about identity.

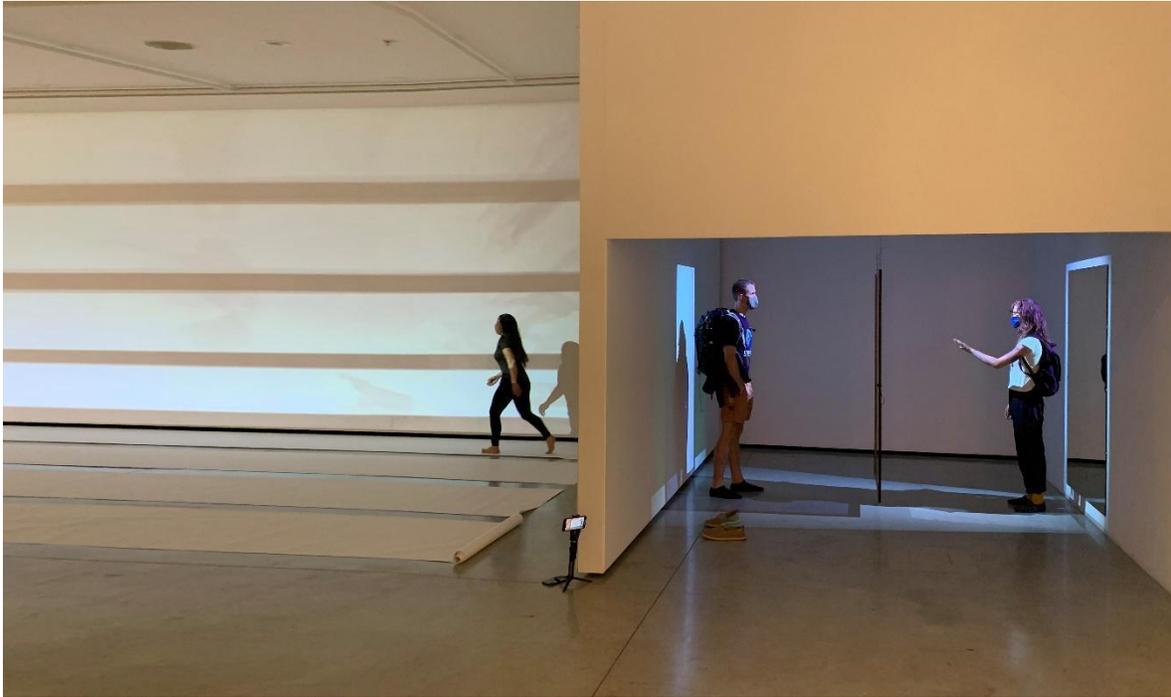


Fig. 12 - Allegories of Thought. (Left: *Tejedora*, right: *Abisal*)

Photo by Robert Kitsos, 2021
Reproduced with permission

Although these pieces are part of a single project, each of them has a particular development. Therefore, I will explain them individually, and then how they constitute the project by being side by side.

¹⁵ *Abisal* and *Tejedora* were presented as part of the MFA Graduating Exhibition 2021: Trajectories of unlooking at the Audain Gallery. Photo by Robert Kitsos 2021

Abisal¹⁶

Abisal, is an installation that uses found material objects: glass door and mirror along with projections to create an immersive apparatus of light and movement that is contained in a small semi-dark room of 10.41 ft x 12 ft at the Audain Gallery.

The room is divided in two, by the glass door which is partially reflective and partially transparent as it has a one-way mirror film attached to it, hence, when one side of the room is brightly lit and the other dark, it allows viewing from the darkened side but not vice versa. As the door is hung from the ceiling exactly in the middle of the room (just a couple of inches above the ground), it creates an apparent symmetrical space. However, the space is not exactly symmetric as there is a mirror attached to one of the walls, thus, making the space asymmetrical (See Fig.13).

These materials, along with the changing projections of white light directed from the top to each side of the installation, create a device that can be inhabited, danced, or observed: from within, from without, and/or across. In this way, the piece also functions as a potential choreographic device inspired by Santos's concept of the Abyssal line.



Fig 13 - *Abisal*. (Space apparently symmetrical, but asymmetrical)

Abisal at the Audain Gallery. Photo by Karla Desentis Rodríguez, 2021

¹⁶ *Abisal* and *Tejedora* are written in Spanish. Their translation to English are *Abyssal* and *Weaver* respectively.

Although *Abisal* pulls inspiration from theory, the piece does not seek to illustrate either the theory or my analysis of it. Instead, it seeks to bring the question of how we experience our identity being immersed in a dichotomic apparatus. The space of this installation was designed with the primary intention of being inhabited by two individuals, one on each side of the glass. However, as my decision was not to give didactical instructions to the visitors, but rather, provide a few hints through the space design, the abstract with the legend *Abisal, Duet for Two. Static or Not Installation*, and the brochure image (See Fig. 14); it was assumed that some might observe the piece from a distance, therefore, it could be said that the piece can be experienced from without and within.



Fig. 14 - Exploring the piece

Robert Kitsos and Karla Desentis, exploring the *Abisal* piece.
Photo derived from a video by Karla Desentis Rodríguez, 2021

From without, the spectator could observe a working apparatus of light, reflections, and shadows, caused by six video projections in a loop, that display simple white forms as a big white rectangle, a vertical line, a horizontal line, multiple lines, squares, and barred. The shapes from the videos are moderately shifting in time affecting the perception of the space regarding its dimension and rhythm. For the observer, it is also possible to see other participants inside the installation and their behaviour.



Fig.15 - Light and shadow
(no participants in the installation)
Photo by Robert Kitsos, 2021
Reproduced with permission.



Fig. 16 - Lights, shapes and shadows
(seeing participants from the exterior)
Photo by Robert Kitsos, 2021
Reproduced with permission.

From within, the materials produce a different experience than from without. Thanks to the quality of the one-way mirror film that I attached to the glass door, the light in the installation acts like the lens that holds our sight, bringing the questions of, what can we see and what remains hidden? Therefore, when the videos of these simple forms change, the experience of what can be seen changes depending on the light on each side of the door. The shift of the lights produces a shift in the form and materials as well as a shift of the seen/unseen relation offering multiple aesthetics, logics, reactions, choices and referents. (For more information about how the light operated and its visual effects inside *Abisal*, please refer to: Appendix C)

What also may be experienced is a relationship across the “fields”, I mean the moments you can see through the glass, not only as a visual fact, but as a possible encounter with another human being and the phenomenon of being face to face. To experience the possible somatic response of seeing yourself in another person’s face, or seeing how the other observes you, or emerges from you or simply feeling the encounter with another person and with whatever that encounter has to reveal.

Choreographic Device

One hope of the piece was to provoke movement: to see the other; to merge with the other; to play with the other; to compose with the other... to be ethical with the other.

For me, this piece brings the question of how we position our bodies in the light, and how we position ourselves in front of each other. How the somatic sensations can guide us to physical reactions, in other words, how our choices when encountering the other might be seen through movement or actions (from gestural, behavioural, pedestrian to the more elaborated).



Fig. 17 - Bodies that moved to merge with each other

Photos by Karla Desentis Rodríguez (top left), Robert Kitsos (top right) and Zartaj Habibi (bottom left and right), 2021. Reproduced with permission.

Tejedora

Tejedora is an interdisciplinary installation that encompasses movement, spatial design, and video projection. The video displays different iterations of bodily actions that include the unrolling of sheets of paper, walking, running, and other motifs done in a vertical and horizontal pattern. The layering of those iterations creates multiple lines of paper and a body in movement. Together, these lines interweave in time and space with a durational performance based on the repetition of the same patterns, choreographing the unceasing process of “becoming” inspired by the Nahuatl’s concept of *teotl*, which is the dynamic principle of an eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred power, energy or force.



Fig. 18 - *Tejedora*. Performance at the Audain Gallery, 2021.

Photo by Amury Villegas, 2021. Reproduced with permission

Tejedora 2021, was created using the materials from three different days, two different recording spaces, and several iterations. (For more information about each iteration and its process please see Appendix D)

The language of movement I used for the recorded iterations was based on the function of the thread in the actual process of weaving, where the vertical thread or warp stays plain, and the horizontal thread or weft either disappears in between the warp or produces forms by making a brocade. However, I noticed I was having a conflict between the formal and the philosophical concept and wanted to incorporate the concept of “becoming” into the process itself. (See Appendix D).

This is how I decided to include layers of the video from past iterations at Alexander Studios. In this way, I could play with the actual iterations and simultaneously see multiple moments of my explorations bringing forward notions of time, duration, repetition, difference, coincidence and chance.

In addition to the video layers, the performance worked as an extra layer to be juxtaposed. However, the principle of time was used differently, since it was focused on live actions. Thus, I decided to expand the performance duration from 20 minutes to two hours as it better reflected the unceasing character of *teotl*. Based on the same characteristic, I determined I wanted to start my actions before the audience entered the gallery, and I wanted to finish after they left the gallery. Therefore, the piece was not having a beginning or an end, which followed the idea of being in an everlasting, continuous process.

Each iteration informed my body and the piece, but the last two rehearsals of an hour gave me the closest look to how the actual performance was going to look. The generative aspect of these rehearsals was in function of analyzing the evolution of the actions over time. Hence, practicing for an extended period would best inform my decisions. After rehearsing the actions I previously did for the recordings, I noticed some of them were embodied as a result of a premeditated iteration, but not precisely from an evolution of the live practice. Therefore, it felt disconnected from the unrolling paper and walking section. This is how I noticed I had to be in the reality of time and not performing a representation of time, thus, I would only present those forms in the performance that were coming from an honest progression, variation, and construction in time. The performance was an improvisation based on a structure of four actions (see Appendix D) and their duration which was until completion, tiredness or exhaustion.

The effect of this score upon my body in real time was going to be a discovery, even after rehearsing, as it is important to acknowledge the life in it. In other words, the practice of rehearsing does not necessarily inform the actual performance, because it is a different moment and state of the body. That is why I found this different from a traditional concert practice, where premeditated and established forms guide the work. Here, my body on September 9, 2021, at 7:00 pm was going to be the guide. If I was deciding to accept the duration of some section based on bodily sensations, then I had to stay connected with my body. When performing, I knew there were going to be moments of coincidence between my movement and the movements displayed on the wall. Also, there was going to be opposition or contrast, and that was part of the intention, to let those iterations interweave creating different visual patterns and their multiple readings.

After performing that day I consider some refining process of relation could be applied in the durational aspect of the whole piece. Maybe instead of being two hours long it could be six, eight or ten hours, then I would have more time to continue developing the movement and I would get more tired, therefore, the progression and evolution could be more noticeable according to the new duration and to the state of my body on another day. Still, I consider it would be unpredictable, as it would again be in relation to my body and materials in real time and with the discoveries they have to reveal when intersecting.

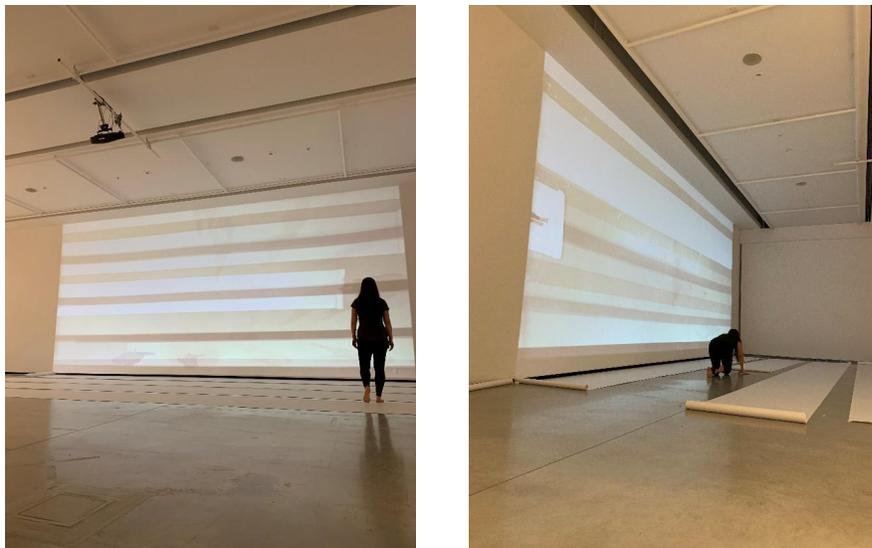


Fig. 19 - Moments of *Tejedora* Performance.
Photos by Amaury Villegas, 2021. Reproduced with permission.

Allegories of through: *Abisal* and *Tejedora* side by side

The idea of having the two pieces together was to use them as devices to think about identity in different ways. By being side by side I was hoping to let the audience oscillate between the ideas and experiences derived from them. Certainly, I can not evaluate if they did, as those experiences belong to them. I rather focus on the fact that I did oscillate between the pieces, their processes and their theoretical frameworks, finding invaluable lessons about many things in art, but mostly, about life.

I am very grateful for the lessons that *Tejedora and Abisal* have taught me and I feel deeply touched by them.

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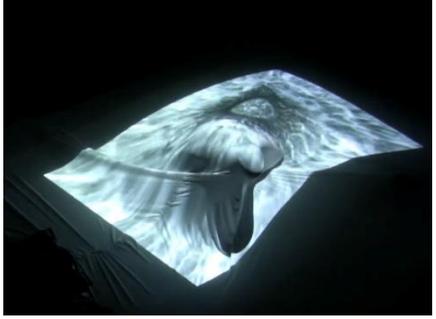
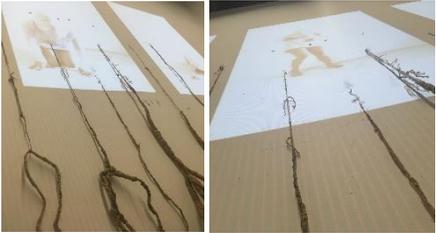
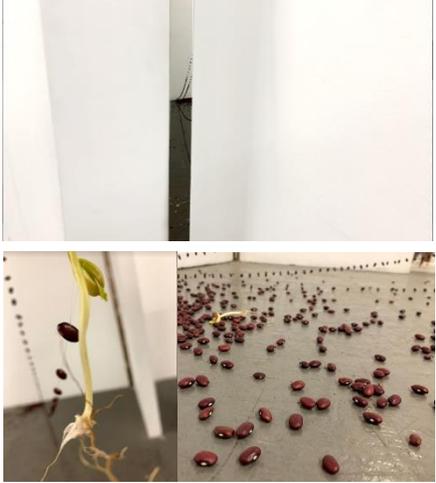
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Appendix A: Synthesis of Previous MFA Work

<p>TANGENT - Installation. Work in collaboration with Aakansha Gosh and Somayeh Khakshoor (SFU, 2019).</p> <p>This work investigates the subjective aspect of an individual's perception while interacting with their environment. It explores how bodily actions influence their context and their perception of it. In the installation, the audience is invited to interact with water, to find the reflection of the 'self' and explore how each individual's bodily actions influence their contextual reality.</p>	
<p>ECHO – Performance and video projection. Work in collaboration with Somayeh Khakshoor, Jean Brazeau and Rahul Bader (SFU, 2019)</p> <p>The piece results from an investigation into inherited experience coming from the evolution of unique genetic identifiers, also known as epigenetics. In this performance two forms emerge out of a flat plane, eventually revealing themselves as bodies. Simultaneously, digitally rendered iris' are projected onto the modulating surface, engulfing the figures as they come to be.</p>	
<p>NELTILIZTLI - Video installation (SFU, 2019)</p> <p>This piece takes its name from the Nahuas concept of <i>Neltiliztli</i>, which means <i>root as the truth and foundation of our existence</i>. The work explores notions of identity and ancestry through a video that displays different sequences of a body in movement, projected over lines of kraft paper that resembled roots.</p>	
<p>THE PRESENT - Installation (SFU, 2020)</p> <p>The piece attempts to show how different one's perception can be depending on the visual angle and the time spent observing. This installation was made with beans and a thread to form a 3D representation of the pointed lines usually drawn for illustrating a perspective vanishing point. In between the beans, on the ground, there were some germinated ones, showing the initial growth phase of them to become a plant. The audience was asked to see the piece from three different points of view. They would only be able to fully understand the pieces when seeing them closer and noticing the germinated beans. The aim of the piece is to invite people to reflect on stereotypical visions, and to consider a deeper look at differences.</p>	

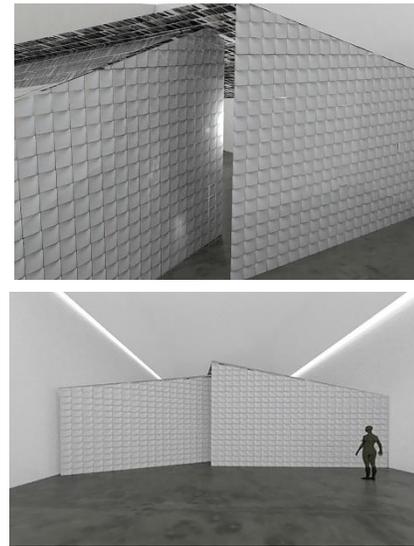
LATENTE – Video (SFU, 2020)

This piece is a six-minute video collage in landscape format, depicting twenty close-up frames of women's hands writing without ink onto a white piece of paper, leaving behind invisible marks. Each frame portrays an individual story as unique hand movements, drawings, tools, and sounds produced by the pencils, pens and other drawing instruments, creates a crescendo of a sonic texture's chorus. The intention of having diverse video frames as well as the selected materials and actions is to invite the audience to reflect on all forms of feminine violence (including the normalized ones) and its impact.



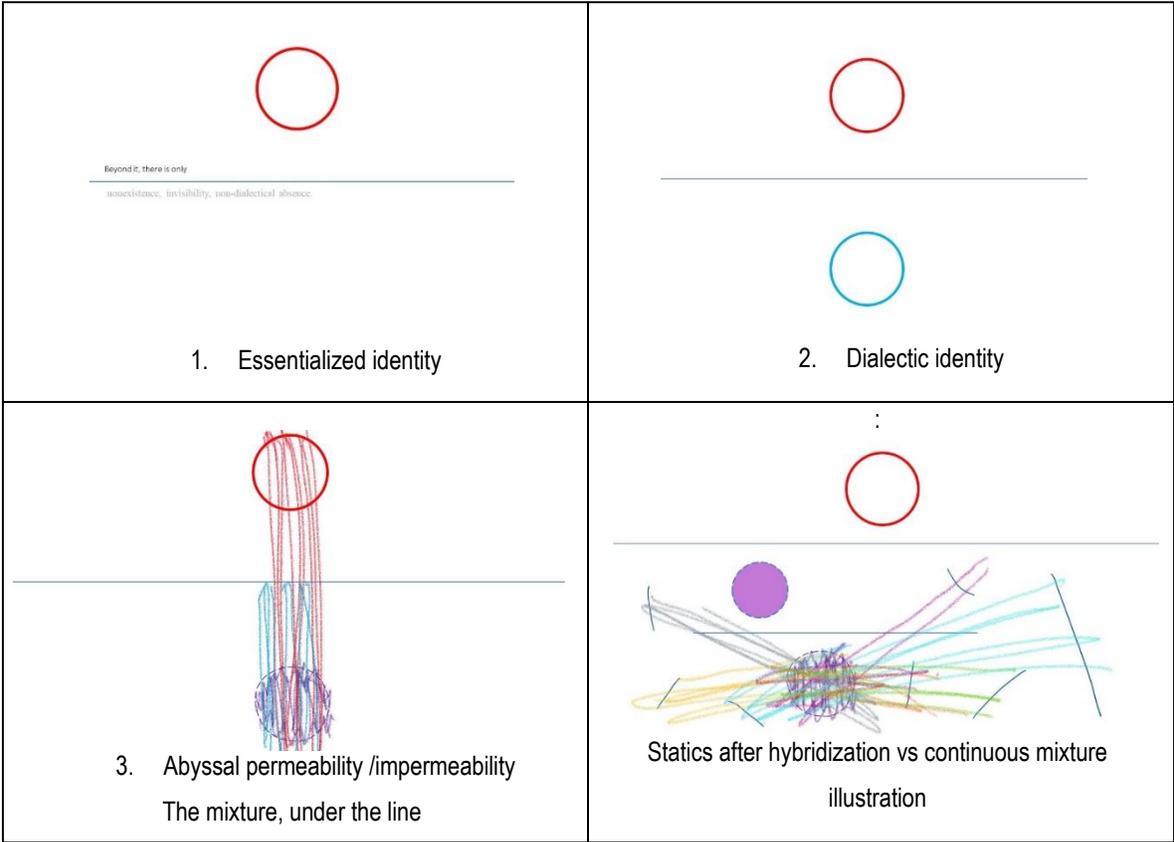
LATENTE- 3d virtual installation (SFU, 2020)

This is a preview of an architectural installation composed of hand-coloured drawings done by women on their view of the many forms of female violence. The collection of papers builds walls that form an immersive environment. While walking through the installation, spatial constraints force bodies to physically interact with the piece, where the interior walls and ceiling play with the normalized orthogonality of vertical and horizontal, as the hegemonic perceptual norms of space, forming a disruptive environment with twisted rooms and tiny corridors. Thus, provoking people to shift their physicality and probably their sensations/perceptions which ideally would be imitating the disorienting properties of the symbolic space.



Photographs by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

Appendix B: Effects and perceptions of identity produced by Santo's *Abyssal Line*.



Karla Desentis Rodríguez interpretation of the effects and perceptions of identity produced by Boaventura de Sousa Santo's *Abyssal Line*.

Illustrations by Karla Desentis Rodríguez, 2020

Appendix C: Visual effects that might be experienced from inside *Abisal*

Videos and shapes Side a: with mirror. Side b: without mirror	Visual effect from inside
Video. Side a) Full light to zero Side b) Zero to Full	a) Sees itself with an infinite effect and can not see b) b) Sees a) and its infinite effect and can not see itself
Video. Side a) 50% Side b) 50%	a) Sees itself with a medium intensity light/reflection and sees b) at the same time. b) Sees itself with a medium intensity light/reflection and sees a) at the same time.
Video. Side a) Zero to Full Side b) Full light to zero	a) Can not see itself in the door, but sees b), and can see itself in the mirror behind. b) Sees itself and its shadow, and can not see a)
Video. Side a) Fragment 100%. ie: square or barre Side b) Fragment 100%. ie: square or barre	a) Sees a fraction of itself and a fraction of b) b) Sees a fraction of itself and a fraction of a)
Video. Side a) Fragment complementary of b) ie: half and half, lines interlaced Side b) Fragment complementary of a) ie: half and half, lines interlaced	Both sides see a fraction of themselves and a complementary fraction from the other side.



Fraction of a) and fraction of b)
Amaury Villegas and Karla Desentis Rodríguez
Photo by Karla Desentis Rodríguez



Complementary fractions of a) and b)
Lief Liu and Karla Desentis Rodríguez
Photo by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

Appendix D: *Tejedora* Process

Tejedora 2021, was created using the materials from three different days, two different recording spaces, and several iterations:

1. The first exploration of this piece was performed at Alexander studios in March of 2020. At that moment I was interested in exploring the form of the piece inspired by the Waist Weaver, a Mesoamerican technique that I learned in 2016 and that impressed me by the difficulty and by the enormous amount of time that it takes to build the fabric. That experience, without a doubt, made me appreciate the work of those artisans who weave complex fabrics. As the artisan, María Barcelona Nicolás Lorenzo, who has expert skills, can take up to 15 days of continuous work to weave a Huipil. Inspired by that labour, I explored the piece *Tejedora*, using my body in movement as the thread to build the fabric. In addition, I used a top view video projection with iterations of my body tracing shapes in a horizontal pattern. The forms of my body were digitally edited to repeat themselves several times and then vanishing, thus, mirroring the invisibility of time and work spent to weave this craft.

The language of movement I used for that iteration, was based on the function of the thread in the actual process of weaving, where the vertical thread or warp stays plain, and the horizontal thread or weft either disappears in between the warp or produce forms by making a brocade.

This iteration was successful and worked as a draft for my graduation proposal.

2. The second recording taken for the production of *Tejedora* was done in April 2021 with the objective of having the same video material but at the new location for the piece: The Audain Gallery. Therefore, the patterns and movements were pretty similar to the first time, but having several variations, as they weren't rehearsed phrases but improvised based on the shapes of the body been seeing from the top. That day I recorded myself from a top view, exploring with the patterns and doing approximately seven repetitions iterations.

In between these iterations, I narrowed my research to the two frames for thinking identity and decided to use the concept of *teotl* as a philosophical concept for *Tejedora*. I considered that it was going to add depth and meaning to the piece, being the labour of the *Tejedora* (weaver) a perfect metaphor for the processual aspect of *teotl*, as well as the action of walking on papers for the path seeking aspect of *teotl*. At that time, I didn't understand I needed to rethink many aspects of the piece and continued the second recording using the

same ideas as the first time. This decision was going to cause confusion later on in the creative process.

The moment for start editing the videos was getting closer, and there were important technical aspects to decide prior to the edition, as if I was going to use one or two projectors and how I was going to achieve the necessary brightness to see the projection in the gallery, even when the blinds up. Here, is where the materials started to speak, and when I started paying more attention to all of them as well as to accept the conditions of the space as a collaborator. I started exploring with Isadora Software to project the videos, and I noticed I could duplicate the video, projecting it “twice” as two layers that allowed to increase the intensity. That is how I knew that was an interesting formal and conceptual possibility to keep exploring as I could have layers of two iterations playing at the same time. Instead of artificially making the layers by a command given to After Effects, I could play with the actual iterations and simultaneously see multiple moments of my explorations bringing notions of time, duration, repetition, difference, coincidence, chance.

I decided to try to use that method, as much as possible, to have various iterations. Then, I played with the position of each layer, and how by placing it differently it could form another design with more lines that would resemble the Waist Weaver even better.

Still, I was not convinced of the result, and it was a Eureka moment where I knew I had to bring the concept of *the process of becoming* to the process of my own piece. That was how I decided to include layers of the video from the first iteration at Alexander Studios. When testing that, I was amazed by the aesthetic result as it added contrast because of the colours of the floor at Alexander, it also added depth given by the difference of scales from the two places. It was as if the piece would have been asking for that. The overlapping of iterations was giving form to a moment that I didn't anticipate of extreme saturation and intensity, which started as a visual error of overexposed light, but that I decided to accept and to take to the maximum consequences, which would be increasing the elements to achieve a moment of total saturation and brightness that will look like a completely white background.

The last formal decision towards the termination of the video was based on the same principle of intensity, saturation, and accumulation, which I decided to have by increasing the tempo. After testing this, I noticed it worked to create a summary moment, where you can rapidly review actions done in a long duration of time. It reminded me of the sensation of seeing a time-lapse and it helped to clearly trace the trajectories of the bodies.

The sequence of videos was almost done, and, as I only had a couple of weeks before the performance it was imperative to review the actions that I was going to do along with the video projection. I had already decided that the performance was going to last two hours as it better reflected the unceasing character of *teotl*. Based on the same characteristic, I decided I wanted to start my actions before the audience entered the gallery, and I wanted to finish after they left the gallery. Therefore, the piece was not having a beginning or an end, which followed the idea of being in an everlasting, continuous process. Also, that decision would help to avoid reproducing the behaviours of the typical audience inside the theatre, and it would allow the audience to behave according to the architectural space and their needs. I didn't want to feel the performance was a show, it didn't make sense to me to have applause at the end and do a bow. I guess I was already feeling that my actions were going to be of a different nature from the traditional dance or theatre performance.

It was already established that I was improvising with actions as unrolling the paper and moving horizontally and vertically, but the structure of my improvisation was not completely clear as I had the conflict of deciding if I was exclusively walking, or what patterns I was going to include and if I was repeating the shapes from the video, (which corresponded to the first stage of *Tejedora* when exploring with the formal concept). The problem of repeating those bodily forms during the performance was that I felt a contradiction, that I couldn't completely comprehend. I was not against presenting those forms in the video since I wanted to acknowledge the process itself of producing *Tejedora*. But still, when thinking about performing those forms, there was something that didn't click. The opening of the exhibition was getting closer, and I was still without taking a decision because I couldn't understand the contradiction, which now I understand, it was coming from having a formal concept and a philosophical concept that did not born together.

Finally, I noticed that I was not completely following the principle of time of both, the weaving and *teotl*, and I needed to be congruent with the time and duration that they require. Not performing the representation of time but being in the reality of time. Hence, I decided that I would only present those forms in the performance that were coming from an honest progression, variation, and construction in time. I decided my main principle was going to be honest while listening to my body and the materials and decided the next structure:

Action	Duration
1.- Rolling/Unrolling of paper	Until completion
2.- Vertical zig-zag “warp”	Until tiredness
3.- Horizontal zig-zag “weft” (forms only if coming from natural evolution)	Until completing side to side
4.-Vertical walking going forward and backwards on a single line gradually increasing speed and dimension	Until exhaustion

The day of the performance was interesting because somehow its preparation guided me to reflect on the concept of *teotl*, as the process of becoming, applied to my own life. A few years have passed since the last time I performed, and every time it feels more distance in between these events.

Certainty, performing has been an important aspect in my life, since the first time I did it I was thrilled. Preparing to perform has a ritual characteristic to me, therefore, when I started preparing a few things I was doing reminded me of my path in the dance, as putting on my makeup, preparing the mask and paint the white cords with makeup, as I used to do for ballet costumes, check everything I was wearing was comfortable to move. I remembered other “rituals” I have. Then I decided to take a walk, and feel my body walking in the street, from there I started connecting with my body but the interesting aspect was that my mind was in a constant reflection.

When performing, I started a few minutes before the gallery opened. I had an extra roll of paper at the installations, that I was planning to remove, but as people were already watching from outside the gallery, I didn't want to take that paper to the office. Therefore, I decided to start with an extra roll that was going to stay close to the wall. The materials at the space were already shifting my actions. Somehow, there was a previous iteration from the opening already speaking.

I was planning that the performance didn't have a beginning to the audience, but I didn't notice it also didn't have a beginning to me as the papers were there already.

The previous arrangements of the papers, from the opening, forced me to shift my actions from what I planned and to stay aware of the present, of the space and the materials.

For the rest of the performance, I tried to remember my premise of being honest, of staying communicating with the materials (including my body as one of them), giving time for the development of each section and to embrace the durational aspect of the piece.

It was interesting to observe my thoughts during the development of the actions, and how it continued to be the concept of *teotl*, as the process of becoming, applied to my own life. During the performance, I stayed very connected with those thoughts, but I also stayed very connected with the materials, listening to the paper, to my steps on it, to the sound of the paper against the wall; as well as feeling the projection and respect both of our timings, knowing that the connection between us was already there and that I didn't need to follow the video, instead, I was paying attention to the time each section of the improvisation needed for its development.

I knew there were going to be moments of coincidence between my movement and the movements displayed on the wall. Also, there was going to be opposition or contrast, and that was part of the intention, to let those iterations interweave.

Unexpected things happen during the performance, as the paper breaking, or wrinkling. But I considered there was a beauty, and truth in those moments of apparent error. I meditated about that before, and I thought it was important to let those moments of imperfection from past iterations happen on the video. Therefore, I was mentally prepared to embrace errors and to accept they happen. Also, to let myself react to them. That was very interesting since traditionally in performing arts we are trained to do the opposite, the audience, shouldn't notice the error. But here the premise was to be honest and to stay with awareness of cohabiting the space with the materials, acknowledging them instead of denying them and to let them affect me as I affect them.

As a result, this performance was incredibly intense to me. I could feel the effort in my muscles, I could feel my heart beating, I could listen to the space and listen to my mind, and I connected deeply. I felt the audience as witnesses of the process, and I felt a warm and private sensation.

A few hours after performing, when finally relaxing at home I found myself crying feeling deeply moved by the piece and by the path it has taken.



Tejedora Performance.
Photo by Amaury Villegas, 2021
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Appendix E: Research paper

CA 812 Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar II

Approximation to post abyssal thinking of identity through ecological art to challenge modern/colonial systems of exclusion.

The topic of this paper was born from the need to reflect on how we frame our identity being immersed in the Modern/Colonial world where stereotypical visions generated by capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, globalization, and patriarchy affect individual's perceptions of themselves and others, favouring hierarchies that lead to many forms of domination and oppression. Some of these forms, including sexism and racism, have been naturalized over the years, generating a system of exclusion where some populations become invisible, silenced, and marginalized.

This "system of exclusion" has been identified, analyzed, and challenged by many authors. However, I would like to address Boaventura de Sousa Santos's view, who describes it as a "system of naturalizing differences." To explain how it operates, Santos proposes the concept of the "Abyssal Line" (this is a line that divides the metropolitan world and the colonial world) and he metaphorically names the "Global South" to the oppressed populations resulting from this division. As a counter solution, Santos proposes an epistemological transformation to reinvert social emancipation through plural forms including non-Western views of the world called "Ecology of knowledge" where he includes the "Epistemologies of the South".

It is an ecology, because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges (one of them being modern science) and on the sustained and dynamic interconnections between them without compromising their autonomy. The ecology of knowledges is founded on the idea that knowledge is inter-knowledge. (Santos 2007) ¹

Following Santo's theories, this paper will analyze two frames for thinking identity. The first one, the Abyssal² frame, arguing that the abyssal line produces three different

¹ (Santos, Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges 2007, 27)

² From the sixteenth century onwards, cartographic lines, the so-called amity lines — the first one of which may have emerged as a result of the 1559 Cateau-Cambresis Treaty between Spain and France — dropped the idea of a common global order and established an abyssal duality between the territories on this side of the line and the territories on the other side of the line. On this side of

effects and perceptions of identity (essentialized, dialectic and the mixture) which relate through irregular and intermittent dynamics in a non-symmetrical vertical structure. For the second one, I will propose the Nahua's³ frame (which could be considered an epistemology of the South) based on James Maffie's analysis of Nahua's dialectical polar monism. I will argue it is a regular, constantly dynamic, horizontal structure of thinking identity. Then, by comparing and understanding both frames, I will suggest that this is an ecological approach to identity probing how Santos's "Ecology of knowledge" could be applied to think identity confronting the monoculture of modern and recognizing alternatives from plurality and heterogeneity.

With this in mind, the goal that guided this work is to analyze art's role towards a post-abysal and thus ecological identity. I will argue that this should be approached from the process of creating art. Furthermore, from my reflections and experience derived from this research, I will propose a series of premises that could work as an artistic manifesto of what I consider would be ecological art.

To reach this ecological approach, it will be important to evaluate how we think and perceive ourselves and the other. Thus, I am presenting two frames from where we could think identity, the Abyssal and Nahua frames. In order to compare them, it is important to know their precise context and analyze them individually.

Abyssal frame

The Modern/Colonial world is operated by mechanisms that produce an apparently inescapable division forming binaries as it could be day and night, dark and light, man and woman, black and white, civilized and barbarian, among others. Some of these pairs have been associated as natural oppositions, like the day and night organic relation. However, this normalization is just a strategy of manipulation since they function as hierarchies in the Modern/Colonial world. Therefore, Santos has described Colonialism as a system of exclusions that work by naturalizing differences.

the line, truce, peace and friendship apply; on the other side of the line, the law of the strongest, violence and plunder. Whatever occurs on the other side of the line is not subject to the same ethical or juridical principles applying on this side of the line. (Santos, *Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges* 2007, 6)

³ Nahuatl-speakers included among others the Mexicas (known to us but not to themselves as "Aztecs"), Texcocans, Chalchans, and Tlaxcaltecs. Due to their common language and culture, scholars standardly refer to Nahuatl-speakers as "Nahuas. (Maffie 2005)

Colonialism is a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so on are considered the product of the inferiority of certain peoples and not the cause of their so-called inferiority. Their inferiority is 'natural', and because it is natural, they 'have' to be treated accordingly; that is, they have to be dominated. (Santos, 2016)

The relationship between binaries is no longer a relationship between two balanced entities (see Fig.1) but rather an unbalanced relationship between two social positions (see Fig.2). An alternative way of addressing this asymmetrical relation could be abyssal duality⁴ instead of binaries, since the term "binary" itself is approached with such naturalty that it stabilizes hierarchies, holding the mentioned system of exclusion together. Santos uses the term abyssal precisely to emphasize the visible and invisible distinctions established through radical lines (abyssal lines) that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of "this side of the line" and the realm of "the other side of the line". The division is such that "the other side of the line" vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent.⁵ (Santos 2007)



Fig. 1: Binary as two balanced entities Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez
Fig. 2: Binary as two unbalanced positions Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

The abyssal line, is not an abstract idea but a concept derived from reality where some populations are excluded, silenced and marginalised, such as migrants, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia and racism among others. To refer

⁴ From the sixteenth century onwards, cartographic lines, the so-called amity lines — the first one of which may have emerged as a result of the 1559 Cateau-Cambresis Treaty between Spain and France — dropped the idea of a common global order and established an abyssal duality between the territories on this side of the line and the territories on the other side of the line. On this side of the line, truce, peace and friendship apply; on the other side of the line, the law of the strongest, violence and plunder. Whatever occurs on the other side of the line is not subject to the same ethical or juridical principles applying on this side of the line. (Santos, Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges 2007, 6)

⁵ (Santos, Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges 2007, 1)

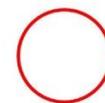
to this populations, some have used the term “South”, which from my understanding, is accurate since it illustrates a vertical position regarding power.

The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering. (Santos 2007)

All things considered, I argue there are two main characteristics of the abyssal line: The first one is that the line is horizontal, thus producing vertical (hierarchical) relations. The second one is that the line is opaque and impermeable from one side but transparent and permeable from the other, which makes invisible the Global South populations. Considering these characteristics as an abyssal frame to think identity, I argue that the Abyssal line produces different effects and perceptions of identity. Similar to Guido Fernández on his interpretation of Fanon’s “Africans and Antilleans”⁶, I propose that the abyssal line divides identity perceptions in three: 1- essentialized, 2- dialectic and 3- the mixture. To explain them, I will draw on the following illustrations.

The first one is the essentialized. It happens when seeing from the upper side of the line. If the top does not see the bottom, it can not be affected by it. Thus, it stays like an essence, which is static, fix and stable. (Illustrated with a neat perimeter, see Fig.3)

This production of identity affirms the notion of singularity, is non-dialectical since there is no one else to dialogue. It can be thought of as a Platonic or Nietzschean style, but not because of that it means it is not present nowadays in our way of thinking. As an example, there are nationalisms. Also, I would say it is the kind of thinking we use for introducing ourselves.



Beyond it, there is only

nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence.

Fig. 3: Essentialized identity.

Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

⁶ “In this article, Fanon analyzes the different positions that the Antillean passed through concerning their identity and difference, taking as a starting point the black-white opposition. Fernandez summarizes it as: before the Second World War, the Antillean said he was happy and thought of himself as white, as having no differences with the white. After the war, and as a result of the crumbling of European racism, the Antillean recognized himself as non-white, and therefore as black. However, this affirmation of their blackness was not accepted by the Africans, who did not forget their airs of superiority before the war. The case presents us with three possible places for identity production (with the possibility of a fourth): 1- by assimilation (“Europeanization”), 2 - by separation (the “blackness”), 3- by hybridization (the “mixture”) “ (Fernández 2008)

The second one is the dialectic. This occurs by opposition or by recognition when encountering the other. It could be assumed that it happens when seeing from the bottom of the line, or if there was any fraction of visibility from the top (although it would be a reduced one). Here, the dialectic binary separates identities, the definition of the self comes from a comparison with the other. (Illustrated with two neat perimeters, see Fig.4). It could be thought as a Hegel or Frankfurt School thinkers' style. As an example, we can think of nationalism but this time in relation to the other, this is used by some politicians to divide populations by highlighting differences among people.

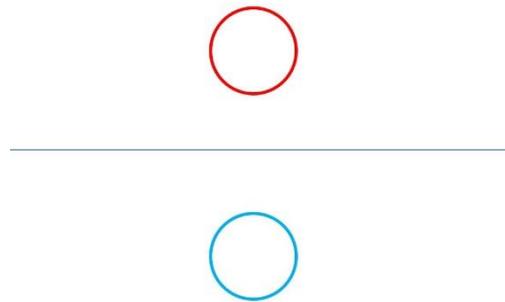


Fig. 4: Dialectic identity. Under and both sides of line
Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

The third one is the mixture. If my premise that the abyssal line is impermeable⁷ from one side but permeable from the other, is accepted then it could be said that the abyssal line blocks the entrance of “the other” to the top, remaining as an essence. However, at the bottom, “the other” enters producing a mixture. This hybridization could be considered an intermediate position related to postcolonialism and migration. This notion of identity is more dynamic and doesn't have regular borders (see Fig.5). However, it has the risk of becoming static. As an example, I would suggest that Mexican identity has been formulated as a mixture between the Spanish and the native Mesoamericans. Nevertheless, it has the risk of staying like that and not continue mixing with others. (See Fig. 6 & 7)

⁷ English word impermeable comes from Latin permeabilis (Passable. Permeable.) Capable of being permeated: PENETRABLE

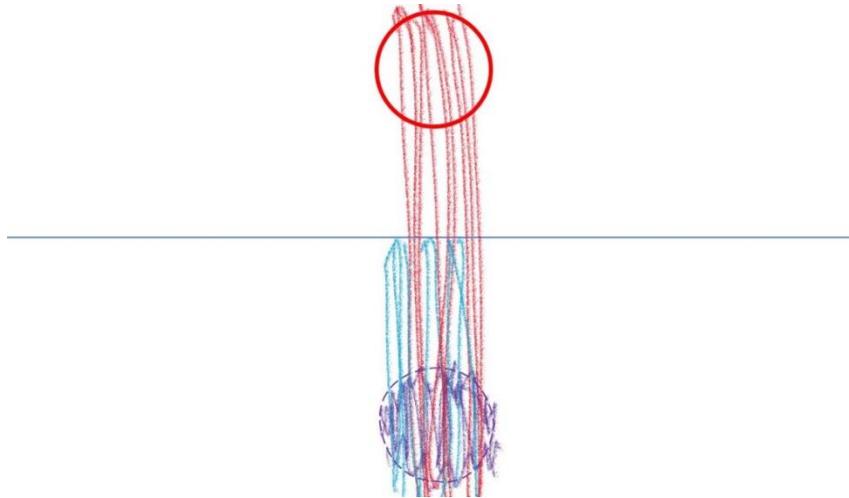


Fig. 5: Abyssal permeability & impermeability
 Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

By analyzing the image, it can be seen the difference between one side and the other. Thus, it could be argued that the line produces an asymmetrical relation, and that it works in static/dynamic or intermittent dynamics patterns.

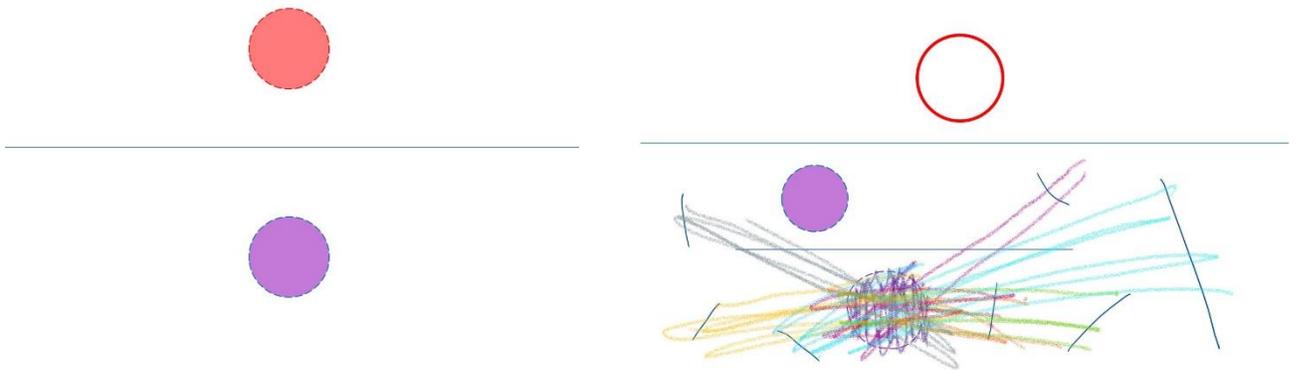


Fig.6 Statics after hybridization

Fig. 7 Statics vs continuous mixture

Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

Santos understands that this is not a singular line that divides the world in two, but that there are multiple lines, working in different depths and scales, (drawing cartographies) and that we, as individuals, are divided by those lines as well as the world. However, we don't always recognize it, we don't understand our heterogeneity, because of mainstream

education and media, which is linked with power and hegemony of the mainstream discourses. According to Santos, this condition has been resilient since the three modes of domination (colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy) work together (see Fig. 8). Some counter-hegemonic movements fight against just one, but not the other. He says forms of domination never act as pure forms but rather in a constellation of oppressions.⁸ If we see that and our heterogeneity, we can see the abyssal line. And move towards a post-abyssal thinking.

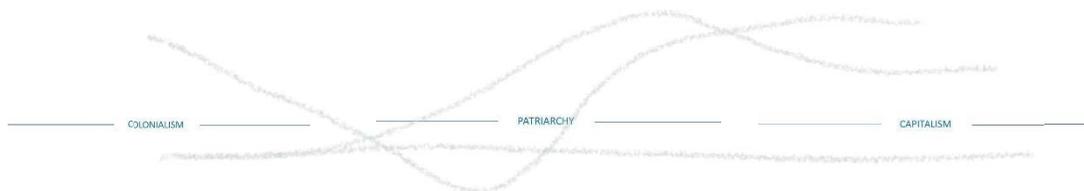


Fig. 8: Three abyssal lines corresponding to three modes of domination.
Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

The abyssal frame to think identity is founded on the abyssal line and its effects. However, understanding that there is no just one abyssal line could be helpful to examine our positions regarding the multiple abyssal lines and to evaluate if we stand from one side, or the other, even if we navigate crossing these lines. Thus, the abyssal frame is analyzed dividing perceptions of identity in three, nevertheless it should be clarified, that it does not mean that we think just as one of them.

It is possible that the three effects of the abyssal line sound familiar to the reader, since they are coming from the mechanism that operates the Modern/Colonial world. However, it could be interesting to compare it with a frame that is not operating the contemporary world, and that constitute an Epistemology of the South⁹.

⁸ (Santos, Epistemologies of the south: building public spaces upon absences and emergences 2016)

⁹ Santos calls Epistemologies of the South to the knowledge of bodies in struggle (migrants, slaves, indigenous and others) arguing that their way of knowing is a key factor for emancipation from colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. However, these forms of knowledge have been ignored by many since they are under the Abyssal line.

Nahua's frame

Nahuas is the name given to Mesoamerican Nahuatl-speakers which includes the Mexicas (internationally known as "Aztecs") Texcocans, Chalcans, and Tlaxcaltecs among others. Many scholars have studied their thought; however, I am focusing on James Maffie's vision, who has investigated Nahua's philosophy through sources such as native pictorial histories, ritual almanacs, tribute records, maps, Codex Mendoza, Codex Borgia, Codex Borbonicus and reports of the Spanish conquerors and missionaries (part of them compiled and analysed by Miguel León-Portilla¹⁰), among other sources. In his work Maffie explains that at "the heart of Nahua philosophy stands the thesis that there exists a single, dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred power, energy or force: what the Nahuas called *teotl*." (Maffie 2005)¹¹

Thus, *teotl* is fundamental for Nahuas philosophy and is fundamental for this conceptualization of the Nahua's frame from which to think identity.

According to Maffie, *teotl* is properly understood as ever-flowing and ever-changing energy-in-motion and not as an isolated, static entity. Thus, he proposes to treat the word "teotl" as a verb denoting process and movement (instead of as static noun) since it better reflects its dynamic and processual nature. "So construed, "teotl" refers to the eternal, universal process of teotlizing." (Maffie 2005)¹² This can be understood as "becoming" which is interpreted from the ceaseless becoming of the cosmos characterized by an overarching balance, rhythm, and regularity. *Teotl*'s and hence the cosmos' ceaseless becoming is characterized by what Maffre calls "dialectical polar monism".

Dialectical polar monism holds that: (1) the cosmos and its contents are substantively and formally identical with *teotl*; and (2) *teotl* presents itself primarily as the ceaseless, cyclical oscillation of polar yet complementary opposites. *Teotl*'s process presents itself in multiple aspects, preeminent among which is duality. This duality takes the form of the endless opposition of contrary yet mutually interdependent and mutually complementary polarities which divide, alternately dominate, and explain the diversity, movement, and momentary arrangement of the universe.

¹⁰ Miguel León-Portilla (22 February 1926 – 1 October 2019) was a Mexican anthropologist and historian. He was one of the most reputable and commonly cited authorities on Aztec culture and literature in the pre-Columbian and colonial eras among Mexican academia. Many of his works have been translated to English and are widely read. In 2013, the Library of Congress of the United States bestowed on him the Living Legend Award. (Wikipedia, 2020)

¹¹ (Maffie 2005) pp4

¹² *ibidem*, pp 4

These include: being and not-being, order and disorder, life and death, light and darkness, masculine and feminine, dry and wet, hot and cold, and active and passive. Life and death, for example, are mutually arising, interdependent, and complementary aspects of one and the same process. (Maffie 2005)¹³

An example of this “dialectical polar monism” thought is the “half-fleshed, half-skeletal mask”, also known as “life and death mask” which represents a unified duality (see Fig.9). It is neither alive or dead, but both, alive and death at the same time. The mask shows that life emerges from death and death emerges from life and that you can't have life without death or death without life.



Fig. 9 Ceramic mask, half-fleshed, half-skeletal, Tlatilco
(Museo Nacional de Antropología, México).
Photo by Ugo Henrique, 2021. Reproduced with permission

The mask is an example of a philosophy applied to other aspects (besides life and death) also considered in constant alternation between being, not being. As an example, Maffie, explains that the same relates to male and female. “Everything in the world consists of both male, female components...even the male viral member has a female component... They are mutually complementary, mutually arising, mutually interdependent and mutually competitive, and then, there also alternately dominating.” (Maffie 2012)¹⁴

Taking all the above into consideration, I argue that the Nahua’s frame to think identity is processive, transformational, and non-hierarchical. Thus, it is a regular, symmetric, constantly dynamic, horizontal structure of thinking. Illustrated with a vertical line and in consequence horizontal interaction (see Fig. 10)

¹³ ibidem, pp 5

¹⁴ (Maffie, Aztec Philosophy 2012)

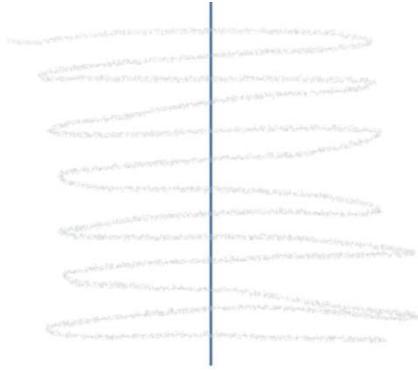


Fig. 10: Nahua's regular, symmetric, constantly dynamic, horizontal structure of thinking.

Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

Abyssal frame and Nahua's frame comparison

ABYSSAL FRAME	NAHUA'S FRAME
Horizontal division	Vertical division
Vertical relation: hierarchical	Horizontal relation: non-hierarchical
Non-symmetrical	Symmetrical
Static/Dynamic: intermittent dynamics	Constantly dynamic
Tends to stabilize into essences.	There are not stable essences, they are continuously changing, fading and re-emerging
There is no pattern	Pattern in a continuous process of becoming
Exteriorized: the division is external	Internalized: the division is internal

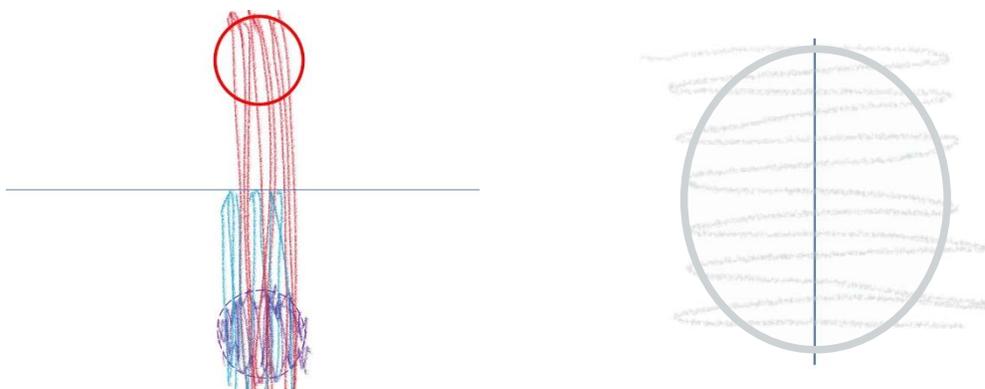


Fig.11: Abyssal frame and Nahua's frame visual comparison

Illustration by Karla Desentis Rodríguez

The comparison between these two frames is not done merely as a demonstration of their differences; rather it is done with the purpose of broader the possibilities of thinking identity. In this sense, it could be assumed that the Abyssal frame results more familiar to the reader than the Nahua's frame since the abyssal reflects how the Modern/Colonial world operates, and how mainstream education has trained people to think. Thus, reading about Nahua's philosophy could result unfamiliar. This brings an important question to be asked: if we are trained to think in a way that generates social marginalization, how we unlearned that? How we challenge the negative aspects of the current apparatus? The unfamiliar brings the possibility of awakening a critical attitude towards the negative aspects of the present. It is not that we unlearn what we know but that we can see what we have learned.

Therefore, applying the "ecology of knowledge" to the apparatus from where we perceive identity, means approaching it through different lens, allowing us to see alternative ways of thinking and defamiliarizing us from automatic and uncritical attitudes. Hence, it offers the possibility of confronting the monoculture of modern/colonial thought and recognizing alternatives from plurality and heterogeneity. An ecological approach, thus, challenges static thought and offers the opportunity of making dynamic interconnections between the diverse knowledges.

If, like the Nahuas, we accept these dynamic interconnections not only with "the other", or with the exterior, but within ourselves, and agree about being in a constant flux that it is process, movement, becoming and transmutation, then we might as well accept the premise of becoming through the creative.

The Nahuas characterize the ever-changing aspect of *teotl* in two seemingly deceptive ways that raise important issues pertaining to the possibility of knowing reality. One of these ways is through the creative, aesthetic concept of *in xochitl in cuicatl* or "flower and song." The Nahuas thus conceive the generating and regenerating activity of *teotl* as an artistic creation... *In xochitl in cuitcatl* then does not refer to our contemporary conception of art for art's sake but rather responds to the necessity of making human life meaningful... *In xochitl in cuicatl* allows the *tlamatinime*¹⁵ to perceive beyond immediate perception and thus to perceive beyond the particular guises of *teotl* as individual objects and to approximate *teotl* as *teotl*. (Montiel 2019)¹⁶

¹⁵ Nahua *tlamatinime* (philosophers). In León-Portilla's interpretation, the *tlamatinime* conception of art functions as *poiesis*, that is, as the process of aesthetic creation that gives meaning to human life.

¹⁶ (Montiel 2019, 8)

Nahuas view of art has been conceived not as a purely aesthetic tradition but it corresponded to a way of making human life meaningful. Hence, it is reflective of the world itself and has the willingness to perceive it beyond the eminent. Therefore, Nahua's art is not only the material produced but the way it is thought. It is philosophy, and consequently, is *teotl*, thus is becoming.

In the prehispanic Nahuatl world, the artist has constant conscience of people... "he pretended first of all to humanize people's heart", "make their faces wiser", help them discover their truth, which means their root on earth. (León-Portilla 2015)¹⁷

Nahuas believe that art could humanize people's hearts. This vision of art might result in something not so different from some Western views, as it could be Marcuse's, Brecht's, Ranciere's, among others who have considered that art can contribute to social transformation. With this in mind, I ask how art can help us move towards a post-abysal identity, humanizing our hearts and letting us perceive beyond?

In my view, this is a question that should remain over time. It does not have one specific answer, and I would suggest it should be an unceasing in constant movement question, as *teotl*. Nevertheless, I would like to offer some ideas of a "in-process" answer.

Ecological art

Based on this research and the thoughts that it has awakened in me, I am proposing to reach art through ecological methods, which means, with an awareness of our incompleteness and with an understanding of our limitations but with the willingness to see more alternatives and to perceive the unperceivable. I think this could be reached from the way we approach research, as Edgar Morin suggests, with an ongoing critical self-reflection, cultivating a spirit of openness to learning from other traditions and perspectives.

Ecological art "in-progress" manifesto:

- It acknowledges the existence of a plurality of knowledges
- It is flexible
- It is dynamic

¹⁷ (León-Portilla 2015, 268)

- It is creative
- It is not fixed and stable
- It thinks with the whole body
- It perceives with the whole body
- It thinks a-disciplinary
- Creates not from one discipline, but from all and non at the same time
- It is complex
- It dialogues
- It understands how affects the context and how the context affects itself
- It takes responsibility
- It tries to see the other
- It tries to be empathic
- It tries to be ethical

In conclusion, there is an intrinsic connection between the way we think and the way we act. Therefore, an ecological analysis of how we think about identity offers an opportunity to challenge Modern/Colonial structures, that results in many forms of domination and oppression, which allows us to understand the apparatus that operates the world and opens the possibility to see other alternatives. Nevertheless, the theoretical understanding of this view is not the only way to approach it. As far as I am concerned, art is another medium, which through an ecological approach, could confront the modern monoculture and show us via various methods other ways to think and perceive. If art can help us to think and perceive ecologically, it will allow us to think with the whole body and to perceive beyond. Maybe we can start seeing the unseen and hearing the unheard. Maybe we are just “becoming” ethical.

Images content

- Fig. 1: Relationship between day and night as two balanced entities illustration.
- Fig. 2: Relationship between civilized and barbarian as two unbalanced social positions illustration.
- Fig. 3: Essentialized identity. Above the abyssal line illustration
- Fig. 4: Dialectic identity. Under and both sides of line illustration
- Fig. 5: Abyssal permeability & impermeability illustration. Essentialized identity (above the line), the Mixture (under the line).
- Fig. 6: Statics after hybridization (under the line) illustration.
- Fig. 7: Statics after hybridization vs continuous mixture illustration.
- Fig. 8: Three abyssal lines corresponding to three modes of domination (colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy) and its navigation trajectories.
- Fig. 9: Ceramic mask, half-fleshed, half-skeletal, Tlatilco (Museo Nacional de Antropología, México).
- Fig. 10: Nahua's regular, symmetric, constantly dynamic, horizontal structure of thinking illustration.
- Fig. 11: Abyssal frame and Nahua's frame visual comparison.

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Appendix F. Video Documentation

Editor:

Amaury Villegas

Description:

Compilation of images and videos from the creative process.

Files Name:

Allegories of Through_Process.mp4

Editor:

Karla Desentis Rodríguez

Description:

Compilation of images and videos of the final performance and exhibition.

Files Name:

ALLEGORIES OF THOUGH Abisal and Tejedora documentation.mp4