

## Diffraction the North



# Diffracting the North

**Contemporary Latinx Canadian Experiences and  
Practices in Film, New Media, and Visual Arts**

EDITED BY GABRIELA ACEVES SEPÚLVEDA,  
ANALAYS ÁLVAREZ HERNÁNDEZ, AND ZAIRA ZARZA

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# Contents

Toward the Study of the Understudied: A Candid Preface <i>Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, Analays Álvarez Hernández, and Zaira Zarza</i>	xi
Introduction: Surveying Latinx Canadian Interventions in Film, New Media, and Visual Arts <i>Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, Analays Álvarez Hernández, and Zaira Zarza</i>	3
Part One: Constructions	43
1 <i>refugee reconnaissance</i> : Diasporic Subject Formation, Critical Thinking, and Performance Art on the Path to Citizenship <i>Francisco-Fernando Granados</i>	53
2 <i>Xeno Walk</i> : Approaching Feminism as Social Engagement in Montreal's Public Space <i>Amanda Gutiérrez</i>	81

3	<i>Sur les toits Havane: Performing Latinxité at/from Home in Cuba-Québec Film Productions</i> <i>Darien Sánchez Nicolás</i>	103
4	Exploring the “Mex-Can” Identity: Film, Belongings, and Migrant Experiences in “El Norte” <i>Argelia González Hurtado in conversation with Adonay Guerrero Cortés</i>	129
5	“I Never Really Felt Like a Latin American Artist”: Identity as a Spiritual Journey <i>Interview with Manuel Piña-Baldoquín by Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda and Zaira Zarza</i>	151
6	The SBC Gallery’s Shift Toward Latin American and Latinx Canadian Art as a Statement <i>Interview with Nuria Carton de Grammont by Analays Álvarez Hernández and Zaira Zarza</i>	169
	Part Two: Communities	185
7	<i>Episodios</i> from Southwestern Ontario: Latin American and Latinx Canadian Visual Arts in London <i>Anahí González and Alena Robin</i>	195
8	<i>Recordando</i> Movement and Navigating Diaspora <i>Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn</i>	223
9	Defying Borders Through Artist Publishing and Other Aesthetic Actions <i>Lois Klassen in conversation with Daisy Quezada Ureña</i>	255



10	Cinema as Pluriversal Consciousness: Decolonial Praxes of Film Pedagogy <i>Sarah Shamash</i>	275
11	The Body as a Combative Tool in the Art of Claudia Bernal, Helena Martín Franco, and María Ezcurra <i>Tamara Toledo</i>	301
12	CUERPO Collective Body: In Search of Expansive Pedagogies <i>Interview with Guadalupe Martínez by Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda and Analays Álvarez Hernández</i>	333
	Contributors	349
	List of Images	357
	Index	361



## Toward the Study of the Understudied: A Candid Preface

*Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, Analays Álvarez  
Hernández, and Zaira Zarza*

This book tells the story of our own people. It mirrors our engagements, experiences, and personal connections as art historians, curators, film programmers, artists, and educators in the Latin American diaspora. We have been living in Canada for over three decades, during which time we have witnessed significant transformations in how the members of this diaspora portray themselves. We understand that the Latinx Canadian cultural landscape is growing at a rapid pace as a result of changing global migration patterns and geopolitics. This volume is a snapshot of this landscape, tracing our personal connections with our communities in the fields of visual arts, new media, and film from the 1990s to the 2020s. It offers one approach to addressing the incredible necessity of giving more visibility to Latinx Canadians. Significantly, it builds on past efforts that have laid the foundations for charting the contributions of Latin American communities in Canada from the 1970s onward.

In 2020, two of this book's editors, Analays and Zaira, invited Gabriela to join them in exploring the emerging Latinx Canadian production of media, visual arts, and cinema from a pan-Canadian point of view. All three have experience in hispanophone, anglophone, and francophone universities, share interests in diaspora studies and in Latin American

and Latinx studies, and have previously contributed to these fields. Our endeavour to edit a book on Latinx Canadian production and practitioners in film, new media, and visual arts began with invitations extended to numerous scholars, artists, and filmmakers identifying with or connected to the Latinx Canadian experience. This interdisciplinary framework reflects our connections and, more often than not, the roundabout journeys that Latinx Canadian people need to take in order to develop and secure careers as academics, artists, curators, and film programmers in this country. Since 2022, we have workshopped and presented advances of this volume at annual conferences, including the Universities Art Association of Canada (Toronto, 2022), the Latin American Studies Association (San Francisco, 2022), the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (Denver, 2023), the International Institute of Ibero-American Literature (Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Athens, 2023), and the first Latin American Arts Symposium (Toronto, 2023).

Authors rarely discuss the process of bringing their books to publication, and the challenges of compiling an edited volume are thus seldom explored. However, we have chosen to delve into this aspect because the obstacles we encountered had a significant impact on this book's structure and content. More importantly, these hurdles reflect the changing environment in which contemporary Latinx Canadians are developing their work and careers. Delving into identity-related subjects and finding one's voice demands substantial time and is particularly challenging for those newly accessing or trying to access academia. These obstacles are amplified in the Canadian academic landscape, where the scarcity of tenure-track Latinx Canadian professors specializing in our fields is blatant and where the interest in Latin American art is lacking in comparison to its presence in Canadian art collections.

In 2019, Alena Robin, an art historian and professor at Western University and one of our contributors, conducted a study to map the presence of Latin American art in museums and universities in Canada.<sup>1</sup> One of her article's key findings was that, although the presence of Latin American art in Canadian museums is relatively abundant, it is nonethe-

less understudied. Another significant issue that her study brought to light is precisely the lack of tenure-track positions held in this country by scholars of Latin American descent in Latin American art history. Institutional efforts have addressed this situation over the years. We think, for instance, of the hiring of Mexican art historian Rita Eder at the University of British Columbia in 2003 and Brazilian scholar Camila Maroja at McGill University in 2018. Maroja's and Eder's positions were short-lived for personal reasons and due to the overall paucity of institutional and community support. Furthermore, the majority of Latin Americanists trained in Canada often need to search for faculty positions outside of Canada. For example, film scholar Argelia González Hurtado, one of our contributors, had to do so. Although this may be partly due to the scarcity of faculty positions worldwide, it also reflects a specific pattern of disregard within Canadian academia and society.

Moreover, Robin's article did not address Latinx Canadian cultural production as a field because back then it was not yet part, at least officially, of any curriculum in art history or in media or cinema studies. In 2019, Analays and Zaira—originally from Cuba, where both graduated with a bachelor's degree in art history from the University of Havana in the mid-2000s—were hired by the Université de Montréal's Department of Art History, Cinema, and Audiovisual Media to teach courses focused on contemporary issues, namely global art history and economies of film and media respectively. Although their tenure-track positions did not explicitly imply teaching and researching Latin American or Latinx Canadian topics, both scholars included them in their curricula—and there were expectations from their colleagues that they would do so. On the West Coast, Mexican-born interdisciplinary artist and cultural historian Gabriela was hired in 2015 to teach interactive media arts at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University. Like Analays and Zaira, she works to pursue a research agenda that is focused on Latin American media arts while fulfilling her teaching mandate to focus on media and interactive arts. To teach contemporary Latin American and Latinx Canadian visual art and film, we had to build and reflect on our

personal experiences in the same way Robin did for her 2019 article in light of the insufficient scholarly work on the presence of Latin America in Canada and on Latinx Canadian production.

If Robin's article feels exceptionally timely, as though it were written in the past few months, that is because we still face some of the same difficulties she faced in 2019. That said, this book is a testament not only to the progress, albeit slow, that has been made in the fields of Latin American art in Canada and Latinx Canadian art, new media, and cinema but also to the need for interdisciplinary collaborations. One of its significant strengths is its treatment of personal experiences as valuable and legitimate sources of knowledge. Therefore, this volume focuses mainly on the experiences of visual and media artists, filmmakers, and art and film curators, including accounts of who they are, their journeys, what they do, what they dream of, their networks, and their struggles and successes. This approach allows us to build knowledge from the ground up and to offer accounts of these experiences as valuable sources for future studies.

The lack of institutional interest in Latinx Canadian art and film production can be seen in the limited presence of these artists in museum collections, the nearly nonexistent tenure-track positions for Latin American and Latinx Canadian art history and film, and the scarcity of spaces for Latinx Canadian cultural producers to thrive. These issues can be traced back to lingering colonial perspectives that still affect the present day. The legacy of colonialism has impacted this community's varying levels of subordination to the extent that Latinx Canadians have suffered even from the commodification of Latin America as a former peripheral region. Although there are demographic differences between Latin American groups in the United States and Canada, Arlene Dávila's book *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, and Politics* (2020) provides valuable insights for examining the Canadian context.<sup>2</sup> Dávila argues that the conflation of "Latinx art(tists)" and "Latin American art(ists)" in the United States renders the former invisible. We suspect that in Canada a similar situation stands out; that is, the perception of Latin American art and artists

as “fantastic” or “authentic” reinforces the subalternity already attached to Latinx Canadian artists and filmmakers. In this sense, practitioners of Latinx Canadian heritage not only face issues of racism or categorizations of inferiority rooted in old colonial hierarchies but also deal with contemporary market-oriented hierarchies that are equally attached to colonialism.

We began work on our edited volume by inviting contributions from Latin American and Latinx Canadian artists, filmmakers, and scholars. We also invited contributions from those who do not identify as Latinx Canadian or Latin American by birth but who have created opportunities for Latinx Canadians through their research, positions in institutions, personal experiences with immigration, family relationships, ancestry, or independent art projects, including those individuals who have also established cross-cultural networks through their work. These invitations were a crucial way to acknowledge the support we have received throughout our careers and to trace the processes that laid the ground for the edition of a book that focuses on the practices and experiences of contemporary Latinx Canadians. Equally important, the contributions also reflect our interest in scrutinizing the multidimensions of identity constructions, their strategic potential to build cross-cultural, cross-border, and hemispheric forms of solidarity and allyship, as well as the exclusionary mechanisms that a focus on identity produces.

Regrettably, but perhaps not surprisingly, various authors who expressed interest in the early stages of this project declined to contribute chapters, citing the extensive effort required versus the perceived reward. Many held positions as part-time faculty or sessional instructors at the time, necessitating employment outside of academia. Since contributors to academic volumes are rarely provided with compensation, several withdrew at different stages due to their overwhelming workload. Additionally, some contributors faced language barriers, which we endeavoured to accommodate by providing editing assistance, even though English is not our first language. Others perhaps were not compelled by this volume’s

focus on the experiences and practices of Latinx Canadians, a complex identity category that the chapters both connect with and contest.

This journey was also marked by many joys, such as the fact that most of the invited visual and new media artists persevered until the project's completion. Rather than artificially balancing practitioners' and scholars' contributions, we opted to showcase the reality of our current moment: the paucity of academic/institutional interest in Latinx Canadian cultural production and the incredible number of Latinx Canadian artists, filmmakers, and curators leaving a mark on this cultural landscape. Therefore, this compilation gathers contributions from artists that reflect on their work, including interviews with curators that emphasize this deficit. In the absence of extensive scholarship in this area, it was necessary to go to the practitioners themselves in order to learn about their experiences in Canada and necessary to frame the volume as a collection by primary, active, and self-reflective creators. Thus, this book also reflects the multiple roles its contributors and editors play in the effort to claim a space for Latinx Canadian productions in diverse institutional and cultural environments—an effort that requires the constant negotiation of languages, economies, and power structures. As editors, we acknowledge that lived experiences are theory and, by extension, that art and creative practices are theoretical expressions in and of themselves. We take this stance to challenge instances of epistemic violence in Canadian academia—which has historically centred Western modes of knowledge production and delegitimized others—by engaging in unlearning practices and by exploring alternative methods of sharing research. At the crossroads of multiple colonial histories, Latin America meanders between distinct affiliations with and dismissals of the notions of both modernity and the West.<sup>3</sup>

In developing this volume, we encountered many hurdles that reveal the systemic gaps and challenges faced by Latinx Canadian practitioners, as well as by many others who belong to different racialized groups, in academia, the arts scene, and the film industry. We also built new alliances and planted seeds for future collaborations and contributions to this understudied field. It has been a tremendous learning experience.



Our goal is to contribute to a broader and more honest dialogue about the understudied realm of Latinx Canadian cultural productions and about their significance and meaningful contributions to the landscapes of Canadian film, new media, and visual arts.

#### NOTES

- 1 Alena Robin, “Mapping the Presence of Latin American Art in Canadian Museums and Universities,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2019): 33–57.
- 2 Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art, Artists, Markets, and Politics* (Duke University Press, 2020).
- 3 Despite the imposition of Western perspectives, Latin America never fully transformed into a Western centre. Latin America is “the continent of the ‘semi,’ i.e. semi-modern, semi-developed, semi-European, semi-indigenous.” Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Beyond ‘the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in US Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (MIT Press, 1995), 231. This reflection captures the complex, hybrid nature of Latin America’s identity, which remains only partially aligned with Western ideals.



## Diffraction the North



## INTRODUCTION

# Surveying Latinx Canadian Interventions in Film, New Media, and Visual Arts

Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, Analays Álvarez  
Hernández, and Zaira Zarza

*Diffracting the North: Contemporary Latinx Canadian Experiences and Practices in Film, New Media, and Visual Arts* is the first scholarly book to provide a cross-cultural exploration of creative productions and labour dynamics in the visual arts, film, and new media sectors in the twenty-first century across the land currently known as Canada.<sup>1</sup> It makes visible Latin American diasporas' contemporary contributions over the past two decades within Canadian artistic and academic spheres through a lens that brings together the fields of art history, cinema, and media studies. This volume addresses the construct of Latinx Canadianness; the emergence, in the past thirty years, of what could be referred to as a Latinx Canadian cinema and art; and the research/teaching of Latin American and Latinx Canadian topics in higher education institutions. It also showcases contributions by scholars, artists, filmmakers, and curators who engage in revindicating multiple and entangled belongings to Chile, Cambodia, Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Cuba, Mexico, France, the United States, and Canada, among other countries.

In using the term “diffracting” in reference to “the North,” we seek to symbolically weaken and to actively denounce the dominant hold of the United States over that geographical position, which has left its mark

on research and historical narratives concerned with migration, trade, and cultural exchanges across the Americas. Paradoxically, for many Latin Americans, the North—symbolically and geographically—represents both the hope for a new life and the seat of an empire. In *Diffraction the North*, we join many artists and critics, most notably the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García, who famously inverted the geographical coordinates of South America in his ink drawing *América invertida* (1943), a depiction prefigured in his art manifesto *The School of the South* (1935). In positioning the South in the North, Torres-García aimed to foster an art movement that reclaimed the South as a position of power, knowledge, and culture, claiming opposition to and autonomy from US imperialism and European colonization. In contrast, within Canada, the North represents Indigenous territories, and the South is the seat of power, whiteness, and European settler colonialism. In this book, we use “diffracting” to acknowledge the complicated ways that the North can be understood in relation to US imperialism on the American continent and in relation to the legacies of European colonization and settler colonialism in Canada and Latin America. Therefore, this volume offers a prismatic vision of the North, a pluri-perspective that accounts for the intertwined, cross-hemispheric histories of Canada and Latin America through the lens and creative contributions of the Latin American diaspora in “the north of the North”—seen from a Latin American perspective, not a Canadian one.

This volume engages in an ongoing dialogue that acknowledges how categories of identity and cultural belongings are entangled in a complex web of colonial pasts and presents that have shaped and obscured the recognition and visibility of individuals with a Latin American background in Canada. Even though identity categories are double-edged swords, we argue, like Judith Butler, that they are simultaneously “stumbling blocks” and “sites of necessary trouble.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we propose the term “Latinx Canadian” to claim and bring forward the perceived otherness (e.g., racialized and/or gendered and/or class constructions and their convergence) of individuals from the region known as Latin America.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, we suggest Latinx Canadianness as a starting point to open a conversation

about practices, experiences, and identity issues attached to the groups these terms attempt to name. How do artists and filmmakers position themselves, if at all, in the Latinx Canadian discourse? What does it mean to self-identify as Latinx Canadian in a settler-colonial context? Are such identity constructs complicit in reinforcing dominant structures, and if so, how? These are some of the questions authors tackle in their contributions to this book.

At a time when institutions and academia seem to embrace a decolonial stance, Latinx Canadians, like many other individuals, continue to encounter, experience, and resist new and persisting forms of colonialism in their everyday lives. Beyond the interrogation of the constitutive elements of Latinx Canadianness, our authors also investigate the links between current political and ideological shifts related to systemic racism and institutional oppression(s). How does the current development of Latinx Canadian art and film scenes partake in ongoing (epistemic) decolonial processes? Does the emergence of a Latinx Canadian identity contribute to dismantling “internal colonialism,”<sup>4</sup> or does it perpetuate current regimes of “coloniality of power and knowledge”<sup>5</sup>? Does this emerging identity redress historical injustices and omissions? How do Latinx Canadians build allyship and solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and other marginalized communities?

Building networks of collaboration and support across cultures through research, practice, friendship, and mentorship draws from historical forms of solidarity across nations and social movements that are not foreign to Latin Americans. A case in point is the support networks established in Canada for Chileans fleeing Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, discussed in the following section. These hemispheric networks of artists, activists, and scholars, which were established in the decades preceding the focus of this book’s timeframe, gave rise to many cultural initiatives, including film and video festivals held at artist-run centres across Canada. These initiatives laid the foundations for cross-cultural, racial, and ethnic collaborations, providing important critiques of Canadian multiculturalism during the 1980s and 1990s.

Furthermore, this book explores whether and how Latinx Canadian artists contribute to questioning and reimagining the multiculturalist agenda of the Canadian nation-state, including the challenges that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–15) posed to this agenda. Multiculturalism must be interrogated today in light of its complicity with systemic racism. In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, the year 2020 was a critical turning point for the arts and for the film and media industries in Canada; as we know, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for the multiple socioeconomic and representation issues disproportionately affecting communities whose members are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour. Massive public dialogue calling for inclusion and accountability led institutions to confront their racist biases and to recognize the deeply rooted discrimination that has characterized decision-making processes in the financing, production, distribution, and display of Canadian content.<sup>6</sup> For instance, film policies have been at the centre of cultural legislation in Canada for decades. Much of the academic literature on the topic has examined Canadian film and media policies in relation to their counterparts in the United States and to the centralized hegemonic power of Hollywood.<sup>7</sup> These comparisons have often focused on distancing the work of Canadian public funding agencies from financial strategies in the United States—which are developed mainly within the private sector—and on studying quotas of national content to both fight American cultural imperialism and support the Canadian agenda of multiculturalism. However, the principles stated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) have served to disguise white privilege and supremacy, as well as to continuously marginalize filmmakers and artists who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour.<sup>8</sup> Similar critiques have been levelled at the adoption of racial equity policies as an embrace of multiculturalism by the Canada Council for the Arts starting in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

Canadian multiculturalism is also seen as an exemplary model of immigrant integration.<sup>10</sup> However, its implementation has also taken some clear missteps, engaging in what Black scholar Rinaldo Walcott has named “the multicultural lie.”<sup>11</sup> While expanding the previous notions of



“paradoxical multiculturalism,”<sup>12</sup> as well as “post-multiculturalism” and “multiversalism,”<sup>13</sup> Walcott has radicalized the approach, claiming the need to go beyond discourses of “diversity” by moving toward what he calls the “end of diversity” and into anti-racist politics and equity activism.<sup>14</sup> Several contributions in this volume explore the failure of multiculturalism, the recentring of whiteness it conveys, and its role in historical and current Latinx Canadian realities. Therefore, we seek to enrich scholarship and debates on Canadian multiculturalism by including Latinx Canadian communities more meaningfully in this problematic agenda.

By exploring these interrelated themes of diaspora, migration, multiculturalism, and belonging, this volume signals our determination to understand the diversity of approaches, media, and roles with which our contributors engage to claim a stake and navigate the systemic exclusions and hurdles posed by the Canadian cultural landscape. In this sense, we foreground how most of the contributors in this volume engage in various approaches to research-creation. The latter has been a burgeoning field in the country since its institutionalization as a funding category, first at the provincial level in Quebec in the 1980s and then at the federal level through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in the early 2000s. As many have noted, this institutionalization—a response to the neoliberalization of Canadian academia—has given artists and other cultural producers access to funding. More importantly, it has validated creative practices as legitimate forms of knowledge production.<sup>15</sup> That is why we demand greater recognition of our contributors’ film productions, curatorial events, exhibitions, and artist-run initiatives, both outside and within the margins of academic circles, as grounded and valid knowledge-generating activities.

In echoing our intentions and the heterogeneity of the voices and lived experiences with which our contributors engage to produce creative works and to navigate Canadian cultural milieus, this book displays multiple types of writing, including academic essays, accounts of practices, interviews, and conversations by academics, artists, filmmakers, programmers, and curators. This approach signals our commitment to

understanding the slippages between academic and practice-based forms of knowledge production. It reflects the multiple hats that this volume's contributors, as well as its editors, must wear to exist in diverse institutional and cultural environments, which requires the constant negotiation of languages, economies, and power structures. As Cherríe Moraga, Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Anzaldúa, and other feminist scholars have emphatically argued, we claim that lived experiences are theory.<sup>16</sup> Following this framework, we consider art and creative practices to be theoretical expressions in and of themselves. This assumed position demonstrates our interest in historicizing and theorizing the formation of diasporic identities through the inter- and transdisciplinary approaches of this varied group of individuals and shows how their work breaks with academic and disciplinary silos. It is also a way to counter the epistemic violence embedded in academia as we engage in practices of unlearning and envision alternative forms of disseminating research, including the affective tone in some of our writing. By the same token, our research is profoundly engaged with multiple issues and lived experiences impacting Latinx Canadians. This positionality does not reduce the critical and analytical approach of our scholarship.

Lastly, we posit that lived experiences must be understood from a transnational and transcultural perspective rather than from a unidirectional viewpoint if scholarship is to reflect Latinx Canadians' migration and relocation experiences. The migration paths of these individuals are not unidirectional journeys from a place of origin to the host country; instead, these experiences are characterized by constant and multidirectional crossings, typically between multiple borders. Therefore, our contributors examine how multidirectional journeys have influenced both their lives and their work. They address how these complex border-crossing dynamics shape transnational ties and new social imaginaries while multiplying feelings of belonging and citizenship, creating multi-layered identities. Born in North, Central, or South America or in the Hispanic Caribbean and living and working in Canada, Latinx Canadian

artists, curators, scholars, and filmmakers engage in creative practices that reflect the plurality of their identities in specific cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered terms.

## Histories of Latin American Migrations to Canada

In October 2024, Statistics Canada released an online infographic highlighting demographic trends related to the Latin American diaspora in Canada. A key finding revealed that the Canada-based Latin American population had tripled from 176,970 in 1996 to 580,235 in 2021, covering the twenty-five-year span that aligns with the focus of this book.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that, in this infographic, the term “Latin American” specifically refers to individuals who identified solely as Latin American. Those who identified as both Latin American and another ethnic group (e.g., Black) were excluded from this count. This categorization reflects the challenges in studying Latin American migration in Canada and elsewhere that are posed by its heterogeneous nature and complicated histories.

As a concept, Latin America is a construction that points to a group of modern Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking nations with a shared colonial history located in North, Central, and South America as well as in some parts of the Caribbean. This definition ignores, for instance, the many Indigenous and Creole languages spoken in this region and its geopolitical heterogeneity, including autonomous territories that do not follow modern or colonial demarcations. Another challenge emerges once individuals arrive in Canada and are identified as Latin Americans since most prefer other national, regional, or ethnic/cultural designations, such as Brazilian, Palenquero, and Mayan.

Because migration from the Latin American region increased in the twentieth-first century, several advocacy groups have pushed Statistics Canada to include other factors when identifying members of these communities. Some of these factors are country of birth, ethnic identity,

languages spoken, and economic class.<sup>18</sup> In the summer of 2024, Statistics Canada launched an online survey “to engage with different groups and stakeholders to allow for their input to lend to a meaningful and relevant statistical report on the diversity of the Latin American population in Canada.”<sup>19</sup> This initiative, developed by Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy and the Disaggregated Data Action Plan, is overseen by Statistics Canada’s Diversity and Sociocultural Statistics Division. It aims to produce a series of portrait reports on six racialized population groups: Black, South Asian, Filipino, Chinese, Latin American, and Arab.<sup>20</sup>

Latin American migration was not statistically significant in Canada until the mid-twentieth century. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the United States still remained the preferred destination for immigrants from the South who wanted to relocate in North America, whereas Canada was “an important secondary destination.”<sup>21</sup> This preference was due in part to the geographical proximity of the United States, its larger labour market, and its greater number of historical territorial ties with Latin America, mainly with Mexico.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, many Latin American immigrants could not afford to travel by air. Unlike the potential for land migration into the United States, the reliance on air travel limited migration to Canada either to those who were granted refugee or asylum status or to those who entered as part of professional or temporary worker programs.

Indeed, the Latin American diasporas in Canada and the United States present distinct characteristics shaped by their unique migration histories, sociopolitical contexts, and processes of cultural integration. For the Montreal-based Argentinian sociologist and professor Victor Armony, who has written extensively on this comparison,<sup>23</sup> the Latin American population in Canada is significantly smaller, more recent, and more diverse regarding countries of origin.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, it is less influenced by aggressive rhetoric surrounding “illegal” immigration,<sup>25</sup> as well as by the idea of the border as a defining factor of collective identity. In Canada, the reasons for embracing or distancing oneself from Latin American

identities—such as the region’s prominence in mainstream society or a desire for greater acceptance—are not as politically loaded as in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Armony also points out that the Canadian case is often overlooked due to its proximity to the United States. Consequently, when discussing migration flows from Latin America to the former, researchers tend to rely on the frameworks and concepts typically used to analyze the latter. He also states that all of these comparisons are of course ultimately debatable and should be interpreted with caution. Not only are the national contexts obviously very different, but the methods for quantifying populations’ characteristics on either side of the border stem from distinct approaches and unique social realities. Ultimately, the Latin American diaspora in Canada is shaped by Canadian society while evolving under the influence of a complex North American Hispanic identity.<sup>27</sup>

As Canada began to craft an image as a humanitarian country, constant flows of Latin American migrants escaping military dictatorships and civil war arrived in the country. Most notably, Chileans escaping Pinochet’s military coup began to relocate there in the 1970s through what is known as the Special Chilean Movement,<sup>28</sup> whereas Salvadoreans arrived in the 1980s, fleeing civil war.<sup>29</sup> These flows inspired the conceptualization of successive waves of migration developed by social demographer Fernando B. Mata in 1985, which has been the dominant framework for studying Latin American migration to Canada.<sup>30</sup> The five major waves are known as Lead, Andean, Coup, Central American, and Professional, each with different historical and geographical roots. Jorge Ginieniewicz writes, “While the Lead and Professional waves were labour related, aided by favourable conditions in Canada, the other three were due to a greater extent to political reasons.”<sup>31</sup> The waves metaphor uses “push and pull” factors to explain the reasons why individuals leave their home countries in search of a better quality of life.<sup>32</sup> These reasons include, among others, higher standards of living in the host society—in this case, Canada—and therefore improvement of the quality of life, as well as an increased sense of security.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1960s, Canada ended its exclusionary politics against non-European settlers and adopted a point system favouring economic migrants, attracting Latin Americans from diverse countries of origin. In contrast, Mexicans continued to immigrate in large numbers to the United States due to this country's policy focused on family reunification. Nonetheless, the change in Canadian policy gave rise to the first, or Lead, wave of migrants, which consisted of a small group of professionals who arrived from Latin America but who were often born in Europe.<sup>34</sup> Whiteness was at the heart of this first wave's immigration policies. In response to a demand for both skilled and unskilled labour, a second wave of immigrants from the region arrived toward the end of the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> This second flow was named the Andean due to the origin of its immigrants, who were mainly from Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. These first two waves remained relatively small.

In the early 1970s, a third wave of Latin American immigration to Canada brought South Americans from countries like Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. Many of these immigrants included visual artists, musicians, and writers.<sup>36</sup> This Coup wave, composed mainly of refugees from military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, was followed by a Central American one in the 1980s, composed mostly of individuals escaping military repression and US-sponsored conflicts. As Hugh Hazelton observes, by the late 1970s, military regimes dominated much of South America, a trend that extended to Central America in the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> The decision to settle in Canada or another country often hinged on the embassies processing refugee applications at the time. As US president Ronald Reagan refused to recognize refugees fleeing the US-backed military regimes in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, Canada took a more open approach by gradually increasing its Latin American refugee quotas. The number went from 1,000 in 1981 to 2,500 in 1984; by 1986, it had been increased to 3,200. Between 1982 and 1987, the country received 15,877 immigrants from Central America, with Salvadoreans occupying the majority at 11,251—replacing Chileans, the largest community group in Canada until then.<sup>38</sup>

These migration waves attracted artists, activists, intellectuals, and cultural workers who developed exchange networks across Canada and the Americas. A case in point was the diverse international chains of solidarity supporting Chileans, who have left an essential mark on the cultural landscape of Canada<sup>39</sup>—whether through the production of *arpilleras*,<sup>40</sup> a form of Chilean textile art that gained prominence during the dictatorship of Pinochet; editorial initiatives such as *Aquelarre Magazine*, to which we return below; or the organization of feminist video art exhibitions.<sup>41</sup> These exchanges promoted the establishment of Canadian cultural initiatives that began to give voice to, imagine, and question what Latin American identity from/within Canada could look and sound like. Although these waves led to the growth of the Latin American population in Canada, the numbers of Latinx Canadians remained relatively small compared to other immigrant communities.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1990s, global pressures imposed by neoliberal economics at the end of the Cold War and the diversification of Canadian immigration programs attracted more Latin American migrants to Canada, many of whom used the educational sector as a bridge to establish themselves as professionals. According to Mata, the arrival of these professionals was “part of the ‘technological’ fifth immigrant wave described by scholars mostly comprising highly educated manpower drawn from the technology, service and industrial sectors of the Latin American region.”<sup>43</sup> At this time, Bernardo Berdichewsky identified a wave of Mexican immigrants entering Canada under economic and family migration classes.<sup>44</sup> The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program also incentivized an economic-led and often temporary labour migration from Mexico to Canada after both nations signed onto the program in 1974.<sup>45</sup>

Christina Gabriel and Laura MacDonald posit that the first two decades of the twenty-first century were characterized by a decline in refugee claims and permanent residents, an increase in migrants in the economic category, and a rise in the number of temporary migrants.<sup>46</sup> The decline in refugee claims is a response to the Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the United States, signed in 2002 and enacted in 2004.

This agreement is part of the Smart Border Accord, signed by the Canadian government in the context of the Al-Qaeda attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. The agreement applies to both countries and limits refugee admissions in Canada since claimants are more likely to make the United States their first entry point. Moreover, Alejandro Hernández Ramírez has added two more waves to the framework conceptualized by Mata.<sup>47</sup> He identifies the sixth and seventh waves of immigrants from Colombia and Mexico, who arrived from 2000 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2016, respectively. This increase in highly skilled professionals from Mexico and Colombia, and to a lesser extent from Argentina, stood in contrast to the previous moment when Central American refugees had arrived from more vulnerable communities.

Current scholarship on contemporary migration is moving away from the waves metaphor because its reliance on the dominant “push and pull” model means that it cannot account for the complexity of the neoliberal geopolitical landscape and the shifting political and economic dynamics of a transnational, hemispheric space. As Gabriel and MacDonald argue, a new framework must account for multiple forms of mobility enabled by transnational trade agreements and by new pathways for temporary mobility (e.g., seasonal agricultural programs, temporary foreign workers, and international mobility programs) and for bordering practices (e.g., safe third country agreements and shifting visa requirements).<sup>48</sup> Their study, for example, focuses exclusively on Mexico given its economic and historical ties as part of North America. They do not account for the fact that Statistics Canada’s data includes individuals arriving in Canada from other parts of the region, such as Cuba and Venezuela. Furthermore, the most recent statistics published by the Canadian government indicate that, by 2021, approximately one-third of Latin American immigrants in Canada were born in Colombia and Mexico. The top ten source countries for Latin American immigrants are Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Cuba. Many immigrants from Cuba and Ecuador arrive under the family reunification



category, whereas Brazil contributes the most significant number of immigrants in the economic category. Additionally, Salvadorians and Guatemalans account for the highest number of refugees.<sup>49</sup> These data-based approaches emphasize a quantitative focus that will always leave behind the dynamic ways that people emigrate, immigrate, integrate, and influence arts and culture in the diaspora. Our book seeks to help cover some of these obvious gaps by highlighting Latinx Canadians' sociocultural contribution to Canada beyond the numbers.

## The Emergence and Consolidation of a Latinx Canadian Cultural Scene

As accounted for in the previous section, the increase in migration flows from Latin America, as well as the diversification of Canada's immigration policies and programs, led to the consolidation of a diaspora that actively participates in this country's political, economic, social, and artistic life. By the halfway point of the twentieth century, international exhibitions in Canadian art museums,<sup>50</sup> as well as the personal interests of private donors and collectors, pioneered the presence in Canada of art and material culture from Latin America. Institutional and personal efforts continued over the next decades to attract and acquire what has been labelled by the market since the late 1970s as "Latin American art."<sup>51</sup> For instance, over the past twenty-five years, art and film institutions have expanded and consolidated their Latin American art, media, and cinema collections, exhibitions, and programming. Notably, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts<sup>52</sup> and the Art Gallery of Ontario<sup>53</sup> have enriched their collections of Latin American art, and the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) regularly presents Latin American productions. Nonetheless, it is essential to distinguish between the historical, current, and future presence of Latin American art and cinema in Canada and art and cinema produced by Latinx Canadians. It should be noted that the latter do not benefit from the same treatment and attention as the former in light of, for example,

a market-oriented logic entangled with the principles of authenticity and exoticism embedded in modernity.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to focus on the creative work of individuals of Latin American descent in Canada who are today part of an ever-expanding global art field and who live and work across borders, cultures, languages, institutions, disciplines, ideologies, and media.

During the 1990s, the imperatives of globalization and the expansion of “global art”<sup>55</sup> drove a series of exchanges, such as between Canadian-based curators and Cuban curators and artists. Some of them immigrated permanently to Canada. In 1994, Montreal’s Galerie de l’UQAM hosted a group exhibition by Cuban contemporary artists. Curated by Quebecer Diane Bertazzo and Cuban Luisa Marisy Martínez and titled *Arte cubano actual/Art cubain actuel*, the exhibition brought together artists such as Belkis Ayón Manso, Lázaro Saavedra, Antonio Eligio Fernández (Tonel), and Osvaldo Yero Montero. Today, the latter two live and work in Vancouver and Toronto respectively. Three years later, in 1997, the exhibition *New Art from Cuba: Utopian Territories*, which showcased the work of twenty-three Cuban artists, was installed simultaneously at seven venues in Vancouver. This exhibition initiated a series of exchanges that increased the interest in Cuban art in this city. In the early 2000s, Cuban conceptual photographer Manuel Piña-Baldoquín became a faculty member in the Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory at the University of British Columbia. Back then, Piña-Baldoquín filled an important gap in terms of representation, joining some short-lived efforts at the university to increase the presence of Latin American art scholars. In the same department, the Mexican art historian, critic, and curator Rita Eder held a prestigious Canada Research Chair in modern and contemporary Latin American visual art history between 2002 and 2003. To date, this chair is the only position of its kind awarded in this country to a specialist in the field.<sup>56</sup>

Latinx Canadian cinema would not exist without the impetus of filmmakers engaged in academic programs across Canada. Malena Szlam,

Katherine Jerkovic, and Diego Briceño each finished a master of fine arts degree in film production at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concordia University and went on to have their films exhibited at TIFF and elsewhere. Lina Rodríguez, Tamara Segura, Francisca Durán, Cecilia Araneda, and Nicolás Pereda all graduated from York University's Department of Cinema and Media Arts. Student projects allowed these filmmakers to experiment with media while countering historical and current epistemic violence in academia. Today, in many of their multilingual, multisited works, these filmmakers highlight and recentre stories, knowledge, and experiences from Latin America and its diasporas. This emphasis has occurred despite the limited number of Latinx Canadian film scholars working at Canadian universities and the scarce number of programs—primarily in modern languages and cultures or in ethnic studies—that include Latin American and Latinx Canadian cinema-related courses in their curricula. If they exist at all in film departments, these courses are often elective and are taught by adjunct professors or teaching fellows without permanent positions. The field of Latin American art across Canada has experienced a similar instability, with momentary initiatives or one-time courses mostly taught by sessional hires.<sup>57</sup> The situation has not improved despite the recent surge in Latin American immigration to Canada and the key roles played by the creative industries and academic sectors in attracting immigrants to the country.<sup>58</sup>

Responding to these systemic exclusions, *Diffraction the North* opens up a conversation to situate how Latinx Canadian individuals have historically inserted themselves and found their places and voices within academic contexts and cultural scenes in Canada. What strategies and initiatives have they adopted and launched, and how have these eventually played a role in the emergence and effervescence of contemporary Latinx Canadian scenes? Facing multiple barriers, some have sometimes created their own institutions and programs or diverted existing ones instead of waiting to be “included” in established and legitimate ones. For instance, the rise of alternative community arts organizations over the past three

decades speaks volumes about the need to create spaces with a symbolic survival role—not only spaces in which to resist or *aguantar* (endure)<sup>59</sup> but also spaces of “re-existence.”<sup>60</sup>

The bilingual (Spanish-English) feminist magazine *Aquelarre: Latin American Women* was published by a collective of Chilean women based in Vancouver between 1989 and 1996. *Aquelarre* became a forum for Latin American women across Canada, and it also dedicated issues to Indigenous women across the Americas (Winter–Spring 1992) or to multiculturalism as experienced by Latin American, Indian, Asian, and South Asian women in British Columbia (Fall 1992). Therefore, it brought together Latin American and Canadian women of all ancestries to produce a high-quality publication that showcased the cultural and literary work of Latin American women in Latin America, Canada, and the diaspora while also offering a platform for in-depth analyses of social issues affecting all women.<sup>61</sup> Among the longest-running organizations working to celebrate Latin American culture and heritage is Montreal’s LatinArte, both a festival and a foundation.<sup>62</sup> Since 2009, LatinArte has sought to bring together—through a broad spectrum of cultural activities—people of Latin American descent with others of diverse origins. Under the continuing responsibility of Mexican Canadian artist and curator Mariza Rosales Argonza until 2022, a yearly collective exhibition reunites different cohorts of Latinx Canadian artists, mostly based in Quebec. This annual exhibition has become one of LatinArte’s signature events and has shed light on artistic productions located, for the most part, at the margins of established art circuits in the province.

Toronto’s counterpart to Montreal’s LatinArte is Latin American–Canadian Art Projects (LACAP). The latter figures among recent initiatives orchestrated by Latinx Canadian individuals and focuses on Latin American and Latinx Canadian art, with a promising interest in cross-cultural dialogues, especially those established with Indigenous artists of Turtle Island. LACAP is a nonprofit arts organization founded in 2005. Since then, it has implemented artistic projects aimed at promoting Latin American art in Canada, with an emphasis on critically engaged artistic

practices and hemispheric exchange networks.<sup>63</sup> Among the best-known LACAP projects are the Latin American Speakers Series and Sur Gallery. The former seeks to articulate and discuss issues of identity and intercultural dynamics in contemporary Latin American art. Internationally renowned speakers are paired with local artists and curators at public conferences. Spearheading this initiative is Chilean Canadian curator, scholar, and artist Tamara Toledo, who is also the director and principal curator of Sur Gallery and one of the founders of LACAP. Created in 2015 through the implementation of Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act (1990),<sup>64</sup> Sur Gallery is located on the first floor of an apartment building in downtown Toronto. It is the first art venue in this city to exclusively promote Latin American and Latinx Canadian artists. The gallery has organized almost thirty exhibitions since its establishment and has initiated a dialogue in the past few years with local Indigenous artists.<sup>65</sup> In addition to exhibitions, it has also organized other events, such as the 2022 virtual four-day symposium *Positionality*. This symposium brought together Latin American scholars and artists from across the Americas, dedicating a special place to those of Latin American descent living and working in Canada. The gathering sparked many discussions on the existence of Latinx Canadian art scenes and their significance.

In recent years, Sur Gallery appears to have explored new paths and forged new alliances, delving into projects of a pan-American nature, examining issues impacting Indigenous communities throughout the Americas, and collaborating with Indigenous, Latin American, and Latin American diaspora artists around the world. A case in point is the group show *Power in Resistance* (2019), featuring Canadian and Plains Cree artist Meryl McMaster; Chilean and Mapuche artist Seba Cafulqueo; Maya-Kaqchikel artist Marilyn Boror; Peruvian artist Lucia Cuba, a professor at Parsons School of Design in New York; Colombian artist Iván Argote, based in Paris; and Mexican artist Carlos Colín, based in Vancouver. The group exhibition showcased the voices of resistance and resilience flourishing across the Americas in response to centuries of racism, poverty, and the widespread economic and social exclusion of the region's

Indigenous peoples. The artists featured in *Power in Resistance* highlighted the impact of colonization, including forced sterilization, the risk of language extinction, residential schools, and violence, spanning from the Mapuche in the southern hemisphere to the northern Cree communities.

Montreal's SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art has also recently emerged as a prominent art venue that showcases Latin American and Latinx Canadian art and artists in Canada. In 2021, this gallery transformed its mandate by dedicating its programming almost entirely to highlighting the works of Latinx Canadian artists.<sup>66</sup> Since then, it has maintained this approach through exhibits and residences that have explored, for instance, the historical place of Afro-descendants in Peru (*Resistencia. Perú, 1970-1975* by Montreal-based Peruvian photographer and filmmaker Carlos Ferrand Zavala), Indigenous land claims and initiatives (*Vende tela, compra terra*, a collective exhibition by Movimento dos Artistas Huni Kuin [MAHKU], the Huni Kuin being an Indigenous people who live across Brazil and Peru), and the practice of Brazilian dissident art (*TransWEB*, a virtual residency coordinated by Montreal-based Brazilian artist and curator Rodrigo D'Alcântara).

This new direction is partly the outcome of structural changes made by SBC's governance. In 2020, Mexican Canadian artist, lecturer, and scholar Nuria Carton de Grammont was appointed general and artistic director. This hiring has had a tremendous impact on the centre's functioning and on the thematic scope of its exhibitions and events, something Analays Álvarez Hernández and Zaira Zarza discuss with Nuria in chapter 6. Still, artists and curators remain somewhat confined to artist-run centres and organizations with precarious conditions and limited media presence. Besides her position at SBC, Carton de Grammont has taught Latin American art at Concordia University since 2006, first as a doctoral student and later as a part-time faculty member.

If we travel to the west side of the country, we will not find any galleries or exhibition venues specializing in Latin American art. However, Vancouver's well-known artist-run centres have employed curators, hosted residencies, and established exchange programs with Latin American art-

ists sporadically. An initiative that has brought some attention to the work of the AKA Collective and to Vancouver-based artists Josema Zamorano, Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, and Antonio Eligio Fernández (Tonel) is Mónica Reyes's Back Gallery Projects, established in 2013, which became Mónica Reyes Gallery in 2019. Chilean-born Reyes has publicly voiced the fact that there is a lack of institutional support for Latin American art in Vancouver. Responding to this lack of support and publicly announcing her gallery's name change, she posed a provocative question: "What is in a name? Can a Latina have a space in the Canadian landscape of art galleries?"<sup>67</sup> More than a marketing plot from Reyes, her provocation signalled how gender, race, and ethnicity are mobilized in the Canadian art market to render specific communities more or less visible than others. In an interview with Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda and Zaira Zarza presented in chapter 5, Cuban artist Manuel Piña-Baldoquín discusses, among other topics, the significant role of Reyes's efforts and of the AKA Collective in his practice.

All of these projects—LatinArte (Ángela Sierra and Mariza Rosales Argonza), *Aquelarre Magazine* (an all-women editorial collective), Sur Gallery (Tamara Toledo), the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art (Nuria Carton de Grammont), and Mónica Reyes Gallery—were initiated and mostly led by women. This fact clearly indicates the significant role women have played and continue to play in raising the profile of Latinx Canadian artists and filmmakers, as this book showcases.

Like other diasporic subjects, Latinx Canadian filmmakers and artists encounter multiple barriers that complicate their access to and integration into local job markets, especially that of the film industry. Thus diasporic filmmakers navigate a myriad of institutional spaces, local events, community organizations, and arts council financing before they can submit their projects to major funding agencies such as Telefilm Canada, the Canada Media Fund, the Société de Développement Économique des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC) in the case of Quebec, and others that require incorporation and robust production skills. Addressing systemic racism in Canada's film and media sectors after a major backlash

following criticism of unequal opportunities specifically for filmmakers who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour, the Canada Media Fund created the Pilot Program for Racialized Producers in 2021. The capacity of film-funding institutions across the country to hire inclusively has yet to be assessed, and audiences find themselves at the greatest disadvantage for not having these cross-cultural stories represented on screen.<sup>68</sup> The National Film Board of Canada has supported filmmakers such as Chilean exile Marilú Mallet (*Journal inachevé*, 1982; *Au pays de la muraille enneigée*, 2016), Tamara Segura (*Song for Cuba*, 2014; *Becoming Labrador*, 2019), and Rosana Matecki (*Saturday Night*, 2021), although with a scattered, insufficient presence. Since the 1970s, the National Film Board has also fostered transnational co-productions with the Mexican Film Institute.<sup>69</sup> A recent collaboration between both film institutes fostered creative cooperation between young Canadian and Mexican animators.

The dynamics of the film sector are no different from the ones in the arts mentioned earlier. Both filmmakers and artists have created their own social and cultural institutions and affiliations to give visibility to Latin American diasporic communities in Canada and to claim recognition as cultural producers. Film festivals are distinctive and have remarkably contributed to the recreation of diverse imaginaries of Latin American and Latinx Canadian cultures in so-called Hollywood North. The Vancouver Latin American Film Festival and Toronto's aluCine Latin Film and Media Arts Festival have been among the most influential.<sup>70</sup> The latter, perhaps the most grassroots initiative of all, was launched by the Southern Currents Film and Video Collective, whose members founded the First International Festival of Latin American Short Film and Video—an event that eventually became aluCine.<sup>71</sup> Some founders were filmmaker and visual artist Jorge Lozano, editor Ricardo Acosta, and aluCine's current director, Sinara Perdomo. Filmmaker and programmer Ramiro Puerta was also a founding member of the Southern Currents Film and Video Collective. He introduced the first selection of Latin American films at TIFF in the early 1990s. Following Puerta's untimely death, Diana Sánchez spent nearly twenty years programming films from the region in this



top-tier event. However, just a handful of Latinx Canadian films had entered Canada's selection at TIFF before 2020. One of them was *Roads in February* by Uruguayan-Croatian Canadian filmmaker Katherine Jerkovic, awarded best Canadian feature in 2018. Although Telefilm Canada has co-production agreements with multiple countries across Latin America, very few projects, still understudied, come to fruition through sustained alliances between these nations.<sup>72</sup>

With twenty percent of the Canadian population being foreign-born, Canada is a rich terrain for explorations of diasporic cinema and media arts. The E-fagia Collective, Aluna Theatre, and Casa Maíz are other initiatives in the Toronto area that have promoted cultural encounters with and within the Latin American communities in Canada. Other more comprehensive organizations, such as the Hispanic Canadian Arts and Culture Association<sup>73</sup> and the Latino Canadian Cultural Association, have also received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Department of Canadian Heritage to support a network that connects contemporary Latin American artists to the greater Canadian community "through its programming of contemporary visual arts exhibitions and multidisciplinary cultural events."<sup>74</sup> In the Western region of Canada, the Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre was established in 2012 as a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "contribute to the education and cultural legacy of all Canadians by exploring and sharing a deeper understanding of Latin American arts and cultures."<sup>75</sup> The organization receives funding from all sectors, including the Mexican and Brazilian consulates. With a broad mandate to promote all forms of Latin American culture, it has hosted studio visits with Latin American artists based in Vancouver, such as Osvaldo Ramírez, Carlos Colín, Josema Zamorano, Michelle Brouget Morales, Luiz Aquila, and Teo Monsalve. It regularly organizes a series of talks on Latin American art and Latin American artists in the diaspora hosted by Colombian-born art historian Jairo Salazar, and it supports initiatives that bring visibility to the historical and contemporary practices of Latin American individuals in the region.

This panorama of initiatives and challenges faced by Latinx Canadians in the past three decades is by no means exhaustive. With this volume, we seek to foreground the impact that the members of this heterogeneous community have made and continue to make within the Canadian cultural and creative sectors. We also seek to emphasize the urgent need both to meaningfully historicize, theorize, and include their contributions at all levels and to tackle the systemic exclusions to which they have been subjected. However, we cannot disregard how these exclusions are also at play within Latinx Canadian communities. Despite the linguistic, economic, and social barriers briefly portrayed above, not every Latinx Canadian receives equal treatment nor encounters the same hurdles. Latinx Canadians are racialized differently depending on their country or region of origin, background, education level, migration status, skin colour, or accent. To this reality, we must add how gender disparities and Western binary ways of historically shaping gender—also enmeshed with colonial legacies—have limited Latinx Canadian individuals' access to institutions, grants, and markets and thus to Canada's public life.

## The Current State of the Latinx Canadian Field

The intertwined histories of migration and cultural diplomacy between Canada and Latin America from the mid-twentieth century onward spurred a wealth of multidirectional artistic and cultural exchanges that have significantly contributed to the Canadian cultural milieu. However, most scholarship in these areas has been primarily framed through the lens of the dominant position that the United States occupies in the Americas.<sup>76</sup> A short-lived exception to this trend was marked by initiatives published in the context of the signing of two transnational trade agreements in the early 1990s, the North American Free Trade Agreement and Mercosur, which together imagined a reordering of culture in the face of a more globalized economy across the Americas.<sup>77</sup> In the past few decades, Latin American communities in Canada have recorded

an impressive surge, as the most recent numbers by Statistics Canada show.<sup>78</sup> Despite this increase, explained in detail above, studies on Latinx Canadian communities are scarce compared to the wealth of research dedicated to other immigrant communities in the country. Therefore, scholarship devoted to the study of the contributions of Latin American immigration to the fields of art, art history, cinema, and media studies in Canada is still in its nascent stages. Similarly, most published volumes on the creative practices of Latin American diasporic communities centre on experiences of migration or displacement in the United States, Europe, or globally. Most of this scholarship has a strong focus on early- to mid-twentieth-century artistic networks and exchanges, with some focus on recent approaches to Latinx art production in the United States.<sup>79</sup> Although there are studies of Latinx Canadian literature, performing arts, and film, Latinx Canadian visual arts are an emergent field.<sup>80</sup>

In a 2022 issue of the journal *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, Analays Álvarez Hernández and Alena Robin brought together six essays that reflected on the state of Latin American art and on the emergence of a Latinx Canadian art scene from a national perspective.<sup>81</sup> The essays explore, among other topics, understudied collections, marginalized exhibitions, ongoing and future research projects, and pedagogical experiences. The main goal of the edited section was to assert the presence of Latin American art north of the United States.<sup>82</sup> Authors explored points of contact/dialogue, shared realities across the Americas, such as Indigenous femicides, and highlighted the urgency of paying attention to the work of artists and curators with a Latin American background whose practices no longer seem to fit into the category of Latin American art. Despite the best intentions to cover geographically as wide a spectrum as possible, the focus remained on the three main cities in Canada: Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Moreover, it was published in the United States, even though the main objective was to affirm the Latinx Canadian reality as an aspect of the Canadian cultural scene that is different from the Latinx reality. With *Diffraction the North*, we attempt

to address this topic from a more cross-disciplinary perspective, to expand the geographical focus, and to root our endeavour in these lands where we stand as uninvited guests.

Similarly, local publishing efforts have recently been carried out in Montreal in relation to the long-standing work realized by LatinArte. In collaboration with Éditions du Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne, Caribéenne et Afro-canadienne, LatinArte published a volume under the direction of Mariza Rosales Argonza, who has been based in Montreal for over a decade. Addressing scholars and the general public, the book aimed to offer a panoramic view of cultural production and even introduced the term “Latino-Québécois.” *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise* (2018) provides an initial and necessary look at this emerging production, although its thematic framework goes beyond the visual arts to include other disciplines, such as literature, dance, film, and music.<sup>83</sup> Adding to the nascent literature on Latin America and Latinx Canadian art and artists, the publication of the edited volume *Latin America Made in Canada* (2022), edited by María del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin, confirms the ever-increasing expansion of the field.<sup>84</sup> Fairly similar in tone and thematic scope to *Vues transversales* but with a pan-Canadian perspective, the volume unites fourteen essays that explore an extensive range of topics, from journalism to music, literature, and visual arts. It is important to highlight that both books have been produced by nonacademic, small, or relatively new publishing houses. The emergence of these alternate publishing houses can be perceived as a response to the difficulties Latinx Canadian individuals face in publishing. For example, the publishing house Lugar Común Editorial, dedicated to promoting Hispanic literature, was founded in Ottawa in 2009. It focuses on Hispanic literary creation within migratory and minority contexts. Given this panorama, we can posit that no book published by a university press in Canada focuses entirely or in part on Latinx Canadian visual and media arts.

The situation looks identical when we turn to the film sector. Although several studies on Latin American film and its diasporas have

been published,<sup>85</sup> we are unaware of a book that delves into films made by Latinx Canadian filmmakers. That said, scholarship on Latinx Canadian cinemas includes the research of independent scholar Elena Feder, based on the West Coast, who has analyzed the filmography of 1980s émigré filmmakers, especially Vancouver-based Claudia Morgado and Montreal-based Marilú Mallet.<sup>86</sup> In 2009, Zaida Márquez wrote a master's thesis while studying at the University of Ottawa titled "Articulating a Diasporic Identity: The Case of Latin American Filmmakers in Quebec."<sup>87</sup> She contributes valuable ethnographic methods that help us to question Latin American identity as an articulation with which to examine films by Carlos Ferrand Zavala, Diego Briceño, and Patricio Henríquez. Her work is especially relevant in the absence of doctoral dissertations addressing this community's film and media productions in Canada. The only tenured professor currently conducting systematic research on Latinx Canadian cinemas that we know of works at Universidad del Zulia in Venezuela. Emperatriz Arreaza Camero, who is also president of the Venezuelan Network of Canadian Studies, has published work on Latinx Canadian cinemas in Spanish-language peer-reviewed journals in South America.<sup>88</sup> Centres, associations, and other networks of Canadian studies exist in various Latin American universities. However, to date, their focus has not been on Latinx Canadian producers and their work but mainly on Canada and the representation of Latin Americans in Canadian cultural productions.<sup>89</sup>

Expanding away from the hegemonic Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver axis, Chilean Canadian filmmaker and curator Cecilia Araneda is leading the multiyear curatorial research project *Notes on Latin Canadian Cinema* from Winnipeg. Araneda tracks the work of several fellow Latinx Canadian filmmakers, provides curator research notes based on interviews that she conducts with them, and includes bio-filmographies and other information about their work. Her project explores the following questions: "Is there a Latin Canadian cinema? Is there one or a handful of core influences or aesthetics that bind a diasporic Latin Canadian film and video movement?"<sup>90</sup> While searching for answers, she hopes to find

programming options through one-person retrospectives of Latinx Canadian film and video makers or even aesthetic interests that work as organizing rationales for collective programs featuring audiovisual artists from these communities. She is also a founding member of *Mujer Artista*,<sup>91</sup> an all-women collective formed in 2014 that engages in multiple collaborations with Mentoring Artists for Women's Art and the WNDX Festival of Moving Image. These Winnipeg-based initiatives by Araneda confirm the presence of emergent Latinx Canadian artistic scenes outside of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, demonstrating the determination and efforts of these communities to seek recognition within the cultural milieu across the country. Also led by Araneda, a National Gathering of Latinx Canadian Filmmakers was held in Montreal in May 2023,<sup>92</sup> featuring six panels by filmmakers, curators, and programmers as well as two programs of short films curated by Zaira Zarza. This event marked the first time in thirty years that Latinx Canadian film and video makers had convened at a national level since the initial Toronto encounter in the 1990s. The gathering sought to highlight the work of Latin American diasporic filmmakers in Canada through a chronological map that allowed the community to historicize and question film production, distribution, and exhibition and to establish meaningful connections within and beyond the community's broad heterogeneity and shared histories of border crossing, displacement, adaptation, and integration.

Although the publications and initiatives noted above have opened multiple doors and contributed to the study of the Latinx Canadian art and film scenes,<sup>93</sup> there remains a need for the specific interdisciplinary approach of our volume and for a broad yet in-depth focus on Latinx Canadian experiences.

## Structure of the Book

To reflect and make sense of these multilayered experiences, *Diffraction the North* is organized into two sections, each corresponding to a keyword: constructions or communities. Rather than supporting a traditional focus

on a specific media or practice, we use these two categories of analysis to highlight the variety and richness of expressions and engagements with the concept of Latinx Canadianness, which is the focal point of this volume. Taking Raymond Williams's understanding of keywords—that is, words that are difficult to define because they involve ideas and values that depend on local contexts and interconnections<sup>94</sup>—we invited scholars, filmmakers, curators, and artists to reflect on their creative work and research through these categories in light of the Latinx Canadianness construct.

The two thematic sections that structure this volume provide coherence to the intellectual contributions of our authors and to the different tones of their writing styles. Each section comprises a corpus of academic chapters and essays through which scholars, artists, and filmmakers frame their work within our key themes. The first section gathers chapters under the umbrella of *construction*—understood both as a noun indicating something built or made up and as a verb pointing to a process of creating. Francisco-Fernando Granados, Amanda Gutiérrez, Darien Sánchez Nicolás, Argelia González Hurtado, Adonay Guerrero Cortés, Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, and Nuria Carton de Grammont responded to the invitation by addressing the complexities of constructing identity in a diasporic situation. While acknowledging the difficulties of representing themselves and others through cultural markers, they explore, contest, and reshape articulations of Latinx Canadianness in their artistic, academic, and curatorial activities.

The second section brings together contributions that dwell on the formation of Latinx Canadian nodes that shape, inform, and modify Canadian landscapes and imaginaries. *Communities* are networks of people, interests, and complicities connected by visible and invisible threads. Anahí González and Alena Robin, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, Lois Klassen and Daisy Quezada Ureña, Sarah Shamash, Tamara Toledo, and Guadalupe Martínez share and connect through their contributions and lived experiences and through affects that reveal and build imagined and real networks in cross-border dynamics.

Although we have divided the book into two sections, focused on constructions and communities, both feature how distinct cross-cultural, cross-national, and intergenerational alliances, friendships, and mentorships have been integral to our contributors' experiences and practices. Latin American migrants have formed networks of support with other marginalized communities, including Indigenous ones, within a racial and gender-based framework. Our contributors present examples of allyship and solidarity with these communities and suggest strategies that can be seen as decolonial, aiming to address academic discrimination against marginalized communities in Canada. Whether reflecting on how the teachings of Indigenous artists have been crucial to their subject formation as artists living in Canada, building cross-hemispheric solidarity networks among migrant communities and feminist collectives, or intervening in dominant academic and curatorial practices through collaborations and by giving visibility to Latinx Canadian and Latin American art and film productions, all of the contributions in this book present novel understandings of Latinx Canadian cultural productions.

The chapters' interdisciplinary approaches and invaluable focus on cross-cultural collaborations offer unique testimonies by film, visual, and new media art professionals of Latin American descent. By giving visibility to these contributions, this book traces overlooked cultural histories in the country while fostering alliances and collaborations between Latinx Canadian communities. In doing so, this publication fills a significant gap in scholarship focused on Latin American diasporas and their relevance in Canadian cultural milieus.



## NOTES

- 1 The title of this book draws on *Diffractions of the Local*, a series of activities by a group of artists with varied cultural and artistic traditions based in Vancouver. The title was coined by Cuban artist and professor Manuel Piña-Baldoquín and was used in two collective exhibitions in November 2013 and March 2014 at Back Gallery Projects, which became Mónica Reyes Gallery in 2019. See Mónica Reyes Gallery, “AKA Collective,” <https://www.monicareyesgallery.com/aka-collective--diffractions-of-the-local.html>; <https://perma.cc/T74Q-DXFW>.  
In the interest of preserving web-based sources and preventing link rot, we have used Perma.cc, a service developed at Harvard University’s Law Library to capture online materials. We have done so when DOIs or other permalinks are not already available. We have included the original URL for the source as well as the Perma.cc link as a safeguard or backup, as recommended by the *Chicago Manual of Style*, eighteenth edition. The Perma.cc links that we have created are for critical digital resources for this text. We have not archived every link, only those that we consider to be critical digital resources for this text and when the source seems potentially at risk of erasure.
- 2 Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *The Lesbian and the Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (Routledge, 1993), 308.
- 3 Creating a new term helps us to differentiate ourselves from established identities and to highlight the unique characteristics of our realities north of the border with the United States. However, we propose using the category of Latinx Canadian in conversation with the experiences of other communities with a Latin American background as well as categories like Latino/a and Latinx, which are deeply embedded in the context of the United States. On the origin, conceptualization, and usages of the terms “Latino/a” and “Latinx,” see Laura E. Gómez, *Inventing Latinos: A New Story of American Racism* (New Press, 2020); and Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art, Artists, Markets, and Politics* (Duke University Press, 2020).
- 4 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012): 95–109.
- 5 Edgardo Lander, *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales: perspectivas latinoamericanas* (Clacso, 2000); Aníbal Quijano, “‘Race’ et colonialité du pouvoir,” *Mouvements*, no. 51 (2007): 111–18; Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, eds., *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Duke University Press, 2018).

- 6 Recent changes in Canada's film policy and practice include Telefilm's new Equity and Representation Action Plan and the commitment of a coalition of independent Canadian media producers to counter systemic racism within their industry by adhering to the Producer Pledge.
- 7 David H. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning, eds., *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (University of Toronto Press, 1998); Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (University of Toronto Press, 2008).
- 8 Government of Canada, *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, 1988, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html>; <https://perma.cc/TQL8-74L4>.
- 9 Andrea Monike Fatona, "'Where Outreach Meets Outrage': Racial Equity at the Canada Council for the Arts (1989–1999)" (PhD diss., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2011), <https://www.primary-colours.ca/projects/89-where-outreach-meets-outrage-racial-equity-at-the-canada-council-for-the-arts-1989-1999>; <https://perma.cc/SXL6-4Z6E>.
- 10 See Friederike Alm, "The Reluctant Multiculturalist: Investigating Possibilities for Applying Canadian Multiculturalism in Germany," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 84–100; and Miu Chung Yan and Andrew Kim, "Civic and Judicial Multiculturalism of Canada: A Critical Assessment of the Canadian Model of Diversity for South Korea," *Korea Observer* 44, no. 1 (2013): 87–112.
- 11 Rinaldo Walcott, "The End of Diversity," *Public Culture* 31, no. 2 (2019): 393–408.
- 12 Himani Bannerji, "The Paradox of Diversity: The Construction of a Multicultural Canada and 'Women of Color,'" *Women's Studies International Forum* 23, no. 5 (2000): 537–60.
- 13 Augie Fleras, "Multicultural Media in a Post-multicultural Canada? Rethinking Integration," *Global Media Journal* 8, no. 2 (2015): 25–47.
- 14 Walcott, "End of Diversity."
- 15 Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Duke University Press, 2019); Owen B. Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 5–26.
- 16 Cherrie Moraga, "Women's Subordination Through the Lens of Sex/Gender, Sexuality, Class, and Race: Multicultural Feminism," in *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men*, third edition, ed.

- Alison M. Jaggard and Paula S. Rothenberg, 203–12 (McGraw-Hill, 1993); Cherríe Moraga, “A Long Line of Vendidas,” in *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*, 90–144 (South End, 1983); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2009).
- 17 Statistics Canada, “Latin American Immigration to Canada,” 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2024042-eng.pdf?st=J2jkCFIE>; <https://perma.cc/95VQ-D8VB>.
  - 18 Christina Gabriel and Laura MacDonald, “Latin American Migration to Canada: New and Complex Patterns of Mobility,” in *Canada’s Past and Future in Latin America*, ed. Pablo Heidrich and Laura Macdonald, 133–59 (University of Toronto Press, 2022).
  - 19 The editors of this volume received an invitation via email from Statistics Canada to participate in this initiative on August 29, 2024.
  - 20 Statistics Canada, email to volume editors, August 29, 2024.
  - 21 Alan B. Simmons, “Latin American Migration to Canada: New Linkages in the Hemispheric Migration and Refugee Flow System,” *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (1993): 289.
  - 22 Gabriel and MacDonald, “Latin American Migration,” 139.
  - 23 See Victor Armony, “Latin American Communities in Canada: Trends in Diversity and Integration,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 7–34; Victor Armony, “The Interplay Between Social, Economic, and Subjective Integration Factors Among Immigrants in Canada: The Case of Quebec’s Latin Americans,” *Canadian Diversity* 15, no. 2 (2018): 63–66; Victor Armony, “Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, and the Effects of a Weak Ethnos,” *Canadian Diversity* 9, no. 2 (2012): 82–84; and Victor Armony, “Les paradoxes d’une affinité culturelle: la construction de la diaspora latino-américaine au Québec,” in *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise*, ed. Mariza Rosales Argonza, 21–39 (Fondation LatinArte/Éditions du CIDIHCA, 2018).
  - 24 Armony, “Latin American Communities.”
  - 25 Armony, “Les paradoxes d’une affinité culturelle”; Armony, “Latin American Communities.”
  - 26 Armony, “Les paradoxes d’une affinité culturelle.”
  - 27 Armony, “Les paradoxes d’une affinité culturelle.”
  - 28 Other special programs for Latin American immigrants to Canada include Oppressed Minority Chili Returnees, Latin American Designated Class, Argentine

- Political Prisoners, Cuban Movement, Mexican Labour Mobility Pilot, and Latin America Technical Assistance Program. See others at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-585-x/2018001/tbl/sec9c-tbl4-eng.htm>.
- 29 Simmons, "Latin American Immigration."
  - 30 Fernando B. Mata, "Latin American Immigration to Canada: Some Reflections on the Statistics," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 10, no. 20 (1985): 27–42.
  - 31 Jorge Ginieniewicz, "Latin American Canadians Rethink Their Political Spaces: Grass-Roots or Electoral Participation?," *Political Studies* 58, no. 3 (2010): 497–515, 501.
  - 32 The "push and pull" model explains how various factors "push" individuals out of their home countries and "pull" them toward destination countries.
  - 33 Fernando B. Mata, "Push Factors of Latin American Immigration to Canada: Explorations Using Macro-social Indicators," July 2022, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362311876\\_Push\\_Factors\\_of\\_Latin\\_American\\_Immigration\\_to\\_Canada\\_Explorations\\_Using\\_Macro-Social\\_Indicators](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362311876_Push_Factors_of_Latin_American_Immigration_to_Canada_Explorations_Using_Macro-Social_Indicators).
  - 34 Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration," 139.
  - 35 Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration," 139.
  - 36 Hugh Hazelton, "La nouvelle latinité de Montréal: les relations entre le français et l'espagnol dans une ville trilingue," in *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise*, ed. Mariza Rosales Argonza, 41–66 (Fondation LatinArte/Éditions du CIDIHCA, 2018).
  - 37 Hazelton, "La nouvelle latinité de Montréal."
  - 38 Maria Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (University of California Press, 2006), cited in Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration," 142.
  - 39 Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "Encounters with 'Latin American Art' in Canada: From Toronto to Vancouver, 1999–2021," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2022): 122–36; Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "La Portapak en Latino América: The Gendering of Early Video Technology by Women Artists in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico," in *Encounters in Video Art in Latin America*, ed. Elena Shtromberg and Glenn Phillips, 110–33 (Getty Publications, J. Paul Getty Trust, 2023); Sarah Shamash and Sonia Medel, dirs., *From Chile to Canada: Media Herstories*, documentary, 16:16 mins. (2022).

- 40 Rachel Adams, "The Northern Borderlands and Latino Canadian Diaspora," in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, 313–27 (Rutgers University Press, 2009).
- 41 In Vancouver, these undertakings included the exhibition *Mujer, arte y periferia* (Women, Art, and Periphery; Floating Curatorial Gallery, 1987) and the film program *In Visible Colours: An International Women of Colour and Third World Women Film/Video Festival and Symposium* (1989).
- 42 Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration."
- 43 Fernando B. Mata, "Exploring the Ethnic Immigrant Inflows from Latin America to Canada: 1981–2016," 7, paper presented at the CISAN-UNAM conference, Mexico City, June 15, 2021, <https://osf.io/a8e2z/download/?format=pdf>, archived April 16, 2025, at <https://perma.cc/8Z57-2GK8>.
- 44 Bernardo Berdichewsky, *Latin American's Integration into Canadian Society in B.C.* (Canadian Hispanic Congress, 2007), cited in Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration," 139.
- 45 The North American Free Trade Agreement has resulted in a dramatic increase of trade between Canada and Mexico since 1994. Visa restrictions for Mexicans were lifted and then eventually reinstated by the Conservative government in 2009, before being lifted again under Justin Trudeau's Liberal government. Canada is now Mexico's second-largest trading partner and its second-leading emigration destination after the United States. For more information, see Ian Van Haren and Claudia Masferrer, "Visitor Visa Policy Changes and Mexico-Canada Migration," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 22, no. 1 (2024): 22–36.
- 46 Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration."
- 47 Alejandro Hernández-Ramírez, "Mexican Youth in Canada: A Political Economy Analysis of Motivations for Immigration, Labour Market Integration, and Transnational Practices" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2019).
- 48 Gabriel and MacDonald, "Latin American Migration to Canada," 144.
- 49 Statistics Canada, "Latin American Immigration."
- 50 We can think of three exhibitions that took place as early as 1943 in two Canadian museums: *Chilean Contemporary Art* and *Mexican Art Today* (National Gallery of Canada) and *Art of Latin America* (Art Gallery of Ontario). For a global account of Latin American art's presence in Canada from the 1940s to today, see Alena Robin, "Mapping the Presence of Latin American Art in Canadian Museums and Universities," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2019): 33–57.

- 51 Although international auction houses, such as Sotheby's and Christie's, did not begin to promote "Latin American art" until the end of the 1970s, art historians and critics in Latin America had debated the existence of this art category since the first decades of the twentieth century. We can think of Latin American intellectuals Ángel Guido, Marta Traba, Damián Bayón, and Juan Acha, to name but a few. For a detailed overview of these discussions and efforts, see Rita Eder, "Art and Identity in Latin America," in *Being América: Essays on Art, Literature and Identity from Latin America*, ed. Rachel Weiss, 28–38 (White Pine, 1991); and Joaquín Barriendos, "Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geoaesthetic Region," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, 98–114 (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009). On the evolution of the Latin American art category in the international art market, see Sotheby's, "Sotheby's Integrates Contemporary Latin American Art into Its New York Contemporary Art Sales," <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/sothebys-integrates-contemporary-latin-american-art-into-its-new-york-contemporary-art-sales>; <https://perma.cc/L6YP-JUR7>.
- 52 The Art Gallery of Ontario's Latin American art collection has benefited from multiple donations, especially from enterprises such as Brascan Limited and Sherritt International Corporation. See Art Gallery of Ontario, "As If Sand Were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection, May 20–August 7, 2017," <https://ago.ca/exhibitions/if-sand-were-stone-contemporary-latin-american-art-ago-collection>; <https://perma.cc/H545-L2TP>.
- 53 For a detailed account of how the Latin American art collection was put together at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, see Erell Hubert, "Arts from Latin America at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts: Over a Century of History," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2022): 93–100.
- 54 Ramírez, "Beyond the 'Fantastic'"; Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," in *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, ed. Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell, 65–77 (Institute of International Visual Art, 2003).
- 55 Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, 38–73 (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009).
- 56 On Rita Eder's Canada Research Chair in Latin American visual art history, see "UBC Gains Global Brains with Latest Federal Research Funding," *UBC News*, June 25, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180413163054/https://news.ubc.ca/2002/06/25/archive-media-releases-2002-mr-02-57/>. For a more detailed ac-

- count of the presence of Latin American scholars and artists at the University of British Columbia, see Aceves Sepúlveda, “Encounters with ‘Latin American Art.’”
- 57 Robin, “Mapping the Presence.”
- 58 A key element worth noting is that all of the examples mentioned here and many of the case studies that we discuss in this volume include government-sanctioned border crossings. Notwithstanding the surge in Lead and Professional waves of immigrants who have increasingly found jobs in the creative industries, including the academic and artistic sectors, individuals in the current escalated flows of unsanctioned illegal immigration have also found the means to craft an identity and livelihood in the creative sector. As Paloma E. Villegas explains in her recent book on illegal Mexican immigration to the province of Ontario, these immigrants’ involvement in the creative sector provides them with the means to *aguantar* (endure) the gruelling process of legalization and, ultimately, to make claims to citizenship. Paloma E. Villegas, *North of El Norte: Illegalized Mexican Migrants in Canada* (UBC Press, 2020).
- 59 Villegas, *North of El Norte*.
- 60 Adolfo Albán Achinte, “Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad? Colonialidades circulantes y prácticas de re-existencia,” in *Diversidad, interculturalidad y construcción de ciudad*, ed. Wilmer Villa and Arturo Grueso, 64–96 (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional/Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2008); Adolfo Albán Achinte, “Pedagogías de la re-existencia: artistas indígenas y afrocolombianos,” in *Pedagogías decoloniales: prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, vol. 1, ed. Catherine Walsh, 443–68 (Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2003).
- 61 Carmen Rodríguez, “A Conversation with Carmen Rodríguez,” *Manifesting Resistance: Conversations about Intergenerational Memory across “the Americas,”* symposium video, 10:23 mins. (2018), <https://vimeo.com/288244954>.
- 62 See Festival LatinArte 2024, <https://latinarte.ca/>.
- 63 See Latin American–Canadian Art Projects, <https://lacap.ca/home/>.
- 64 Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act (1990), often used in Toronto, allows developers to build at greater heights and densities—such as taller buildings or increased housing capacity—than normally permitted under zoning regulations. In exchange, developers provide cash or in-kind contributions toward community or social benefits. These benefits may include the commissioning of public art, the creation of affordable housing, the development of parks, or the construction of community centres or exhibition spaces, such as Sur Gallery.
- 65 See Sur Gallery, <https://www.surgalleryvirtual.ca/>.

- 66 For several years prior to 2021, a Canadian Indigenous focus had characterized SBC's programming. The new approach kept this focus as well, but SBC enlarged its scope to include Indigenous concerns and artists from Latin America. For more on these and other changes at this gallery, see chapter 6.
- 67 Here, Reyes uses "Latina" to indicate gendered self-identification as part of the Latin American diaspora in Canada. Also, "Latino/a" is regularly used in the spoken language as an abbreviation of *latinoamericano/a*, both in Latin America and abroad. Mónica Reyes, phone conversation with Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, February 8, 2020. For more on the AKA Collective, see Josema Zamorano, "AKA collective," video, 10:11 mins. (2012), <https://timelines.cagvancouver.org/responses/aka-collective>.
- 68 See, Cameron Bailey, Valerie Creighton, Christa Dickenson, Beth Janson, Claude Jolie-Coeur, Randy Lennox, Catherine Tait, and Jesse Wente, "Industry Perspectives: Addressing Systemic Racism in Canada's Media Sector|TIFF Industry," TIFF Originals, streaming live on 23 July 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNCM8a7iPik>.
- 69 As early as 1976, Mexican filmmaker Paul Leduc was working with the National Film Board on the feature documentary *Ethnocide: Notes on El Mezquital* (1977).
- 70 Founded in 1935 in Ottawa, the Canadian Film Institute also organizes the annual Latin American Film Festival as part of its public programming, which also includes the European Union Film Festival and the African Film Festival. For more information on this nongovernmental organization, see <https://www.cfi-icf.ca/>.
- 71 Guillermina Buzio and Arlan Londoño, "Integración y resistencia: una mirada a las organizaciones y movimientos artísticos latinos en Canadá/Intégration et résistance: un regard vers les organisations et les mouvements artistiques latinos au Canada," *Inter: art actuel*, no. 102 (2009): 78–85; Maria Alejandrina Coates, "A People's Story of the aluCine Latin Film and Media Arts Festival," in *Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada*, online version, ed. Deanna Bowen (Media Arts Network of Ontario, 2019), <https://web.archive.org/web/20240916060533/https://www.otherplaces.mano-ramo.ca/maria-alejandrina-coates-a-peoples-story-of-the-alucine-latin-film-and-media-arts-festival/>.
- 72 Zaira Zarza, "Contemporary Latinx-Canadian and Latinx-Québécois Cinemas: A Diasporic Gaze," *Canadian Journal of Film and Media Studies* 34, no. 1 (2025): 123–47.
- 73 See Hispanic Canadian Arts and Culture Association, <https://hispaniccanadianarts.weebly.com/>.



- 74 See Latino Canadian Cultural Association, "Welcome to Latino Canadian Cultural Association," <https://www.lcca-toronto.com/english/welcomeLCCA.html>; <https://perma.cc/YM73-WSDS>.
- 75 Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre, "About Us," <https://vlacc.ca/about/>; <https://perma.cc/J3JH-LL48>.
- 76 Claire Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, "Cold War Pan-American Operations: Oil, Coffee, and '3,500 Years of Colombian Art,'" *Hispanic Research Journal* 12, no. 5 (2011): 438–66; Michael Gordon Wellen, "Pan-American Dreams: Art, Politics, and Museum-Making at the OAS, 1948–1976" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2012).
- 77 See, for example, Alvina Ruprecht and Cecilia Taiana, eds., *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada in the Hood* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).
- 78 Statistics Canada, "Latin American Immigration."
- 79 For studies on mid-twentieth-century artists, see Michel Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris Between the Wars* (Yale University Press, 2018); and Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher, eds., *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture* (New Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 2004). On Latinx approaches, see Dávila, *Latinx Art*.
- 80 For a literary focus, see Hugh Hazelton, *Latinocanadá: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). For studies in performing arts, see Rachel Adams, "The Northern Borderlands and Latino Canadian Diaspora," in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, 313–27 (Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Natalie Álvarez, *Latino/a Canadian Theatre and Performance: New Essays on Canadian Theatre* (Playwrights Canada, 2013). For studies in film, see Elena Feder, "Beyond the Homeland: A Comparative Introduction to Latino Film in Canada and the US," *CineAction*, no. 61 (2003): 40–51.
- 81 Analays Álvarez Hernández and Alena Robin, eds., "Latin American Art(ists) from/in Canada: Expanding Narratives, Territories, and Perspectives," section of *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2022): 75–143.
- 82 Even though Álvarez Hernández and Robin's collection of essays emerged from a session sponsored by the American Society of Hispanic Art Historical Studies at the annual conference of the College Art Association in Chicago in February 2020, they have for years discussed these matters at the annual conference of the Universities Art Association of Canada.

- 83 Marisa Rosales Argonza, ed., *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise* (Fondation LatinArte/Éditions du CIDIHCA, 2018).
- 84 María del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin, eds., *Latin America Made in Canada* (Lugar Común Editorial, 2022).
- 85 Chon Noriega and Ana López, eds., *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Clara E. Rodríguez, ed., *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in U.S. Media* (Westview, 1997); Henry Puentes, *The Promotion and Distribution of U.S. Latino Films* (Peter Lang, 2011); Frederick Luis Aldama, ed., *Latinx Ciné in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Arizona Press, 2019).
- 86 See Elena Feder, “Beyond the Homeland: Latinø-Canadian Film and the Work of Marilú Mallet and Claudia Morgado,” in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul, 347–69 (UBC Press, 2003).
- 87 Zaida Márquez, “Articulating a Diasporic Identity: The Case of Latin American Filmmakers in Quebec” (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 2009).
- 88 Emperatriz Arreaza Camero, “El cine latino-canadiense: una aproximación,” *situ-arte* 9, no. 16 (2014): 38–46, <https://produccioncientificaluz.org/index.php/situarte/article/view/18776>; Emperatriz Arreaza Camero, “Migración, memoria e identidades latinas en el cine canadiense contemporáneo,” *Dos puntas*, no. 19 (2019): 107–22.
- 89 The Mexican Association for Canadian Studies at Universidad del Valle de Atemajac in Zapopan as well as the Seminario Interuniversitario de Estudios Canadienses en América Latina are but two examples of these specific research interests. See Benjamin Bryce, “Ben Bryce Report on Latin American Conference 2012,” *Canadian Studies Network*, 2012, <https://www.csn-rec.ca/student-zone/student-reports/232-ben-bryce-report-on-latin-american-conference-2012>; <https://perma.cc/4XSR-UHK6>. In addition, Graciela Martínez-Zalce, senior researcher and director at the Centre for Research on North America at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, has also written extensively about the representation of Mexicans in Canadian cinema and about the potential audiences for Canadian film productions in Mexico. See Graciela Martínez-Zalce, “La difusión de los cines anglocanadiense y quebequense y la posible formación de un público mexicano,” in *Por casualidad y otras razones: traducción y difusión de la literatura, la dramaturgia y el cine de Canadá en Latinoamérica*, ed. Marc Charron, Luise von Flotow, and Claudia Lucotti, 23–41 (Bonilla Artigas Editores/Consejo Internacional de Estudios Canadienses, 2018); and Graciela Martínez-Zalce, “Los inmigrantes mexicanos según el National Film Board de Canadá: una isla de

- hombres solos,” in *Cruzando la frontera: narrativas de la migración: el cine*, ed. Graciela Martínez-Zalce and Aarón Díaz Mendiburo, 129–46 (Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019), <https://repositorio.unam.mx/contenidos/5050413>.
- 90 Cecilia Araneda, “Latin Canadian Cinema,” October 4, 2020, <https://www.ceciliaaraneda.ca/latin-canadian-cinema/>; <https://perma.cc/PAC7-7E6U>.
- 91 See Cecilia Araneda, “Mujer Artista,” August 7, 2015, <https://www.ceciliaaraneda.ca/mujer-artista/>.
- 92 See Cecilia Araneda, “National Gathering of Latin Canadian Filmmakers,” April 20, 2023, <https://www.ceciliaaraneda.ca/national-gathering/>; <https://perma.cc/U6WV-2QCL>.
- 93 Although small, somewhat sporadic, and not necessarily a permanent physical space, SpanicArts is a presence in Calgary and functions as a hub for Latinx Canadian artists east of the Rocky Mountains and west of Winnipeg. This non-profit organization supports “artists and allies by fostering connections, providing resources, and offering a platform for creative expression, contributing to the artistic growth of the city and their communities.” See SpanicArts, “Who Are We?,” <https://perma.cc/M77H-3GCT>.
- 94 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, 1983).



## PART ONE

# Constructions

Framed by the keyword “constructions,” the six chapters in this section serve as a catalyst for probing, reflecting on, and contributing to the intricate processes of identity formation. The section shows how artists, curators, and filmmakers from the Latin American diaspora use ever-changing and diverse identity constructions to navigate Canadian society. Through performative scores, decolonial soundwalking and listening, filmmaking and photography, essays, and conversations, the authors offer detailed accounts of the dynamic processes involved in the building and rebuilding of their identities. Our contributors address the diverse regional and national borders and the internal and external boundaries between different kinds of bodies and communities. They also deal with often-inconspicuous but no less insidious instances of systemic racism in Canada encountered throughout this border crossing process. These encounters are experienced as overt or subtle forms of violence, as well as moments of strength from which conflicting and, at times, strategic affiliations with the category Latinx Canadian emerge. This term allows some authors to disconnect their identities from national boundaries, racial classifications, and gender binaries. Others prefer not to identify with this construct and propose alternative categorizations instead. In this sense,

the term “constructions” serves as a reference for the ongoing process of edification and for the dismantling of identity fixations, showing once again identity’s fluidity and variations.

The term “Latinx Canadian” is a social construct that represents an identity category. It is an attempt to shape a self-concept by including certain aspects while excluding others. Identities are constructed through performed narratives that we carefully piece together to create a sense of self. These narratives are not just acts of self-fashioning but crucial constructs that enable us to navigate cultural, political, and institutional processes, as well as individual gender, racial, and ethnic identifications and feelings of belonging in different contexts. The external perception of our identity and our own self-perception are in constant flux and inform one another. Whether as refugees, international students, or temporary workers, Latin Americans, like other immigrants entering Canada, must craft a story that portrays them as recognizable and qualified by institutions to obtain a status that, hopefully, will lead to them becoming citizens and settlers.

As artist and writer Francisco-Fernando Granados explains, what immigrants and refugees decide to tell or not to tell may significantly influence the sorting, classifying, and certification encountered at the border. The burden of proof placed on refugees by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada is the first encounter with Canadian systemic racism. This encounter depends to a great degree on immigrants’ perceived racial and cultural identity and on their capacity to create an appealing narrative. Racial classification and systems of ethnic and cultural sorting have historically underpinned the projects of European colonization and Western modernity—from the *casta* systems in colonial Spanish America and apartheid in South Africa to contemporary systems that include racial, ethnic, and gender classification as part of the data collection for government censuses, immigration and refugee policies, or medical care programs. These systems are used to control populations and to conjure political and social rights, including voting and immigration status, social

security, freedom of movement and settlement, property rights, taxation, education, and the right to choose one's work.<sup>1</sup>

In "*refugee reconnaissance: Diasporic Subject Formation, Critical Thinking, and Performance Art on the Path to Citizenship*," Granados narrates his family's journey to Canada as refugees fleeing Guatemala in 2000. Marked by the violent encounter with the processes of sorting and classification at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Granados uses "Latinx" as an act of disobedience against gender binarism and colonial borders in order to reinscribe, appropriate, and queer the term "Latin American"; it is important to note that, in this context, the term "Latinx" is not related to its usage in the United States. Granados's use of the term invokes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "affirmative sabotage."<sup>2</sup> Over a decade and through a network of intergenerational friends, mentors, and lovers, Granados crafted a sense of belonging from connections to refugee, queer, and artistic communities across Coast Salish and Dish with One Spoon territories rather than nation-states. This process of subject formation provides another register for Granados's Latinx identification, allowing the possibility of crafting solidarities across histories and geographies through art. Granados's journey from refugee to citizen accounts for the influence of Latin American feminist and conceptual artists, from Frida Kahlo and Mónica Mayer to Regina José Galindo and Luis Camnitzer, and for the influence of Canadian-based performance artists, from Margaret Dragu and Japanese Canadian Cindy Mochizuki to Indigenous artists Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabekwe), T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss (Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lō, Kānaka Maoli, Irish-Métis, and Swiss), and documentary filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki). In this chapter, Granados offers a selection of performative scores from the series *refugee reconnaissance* (2005–15) that provide evidence of the slow unfolding of his queer Latinx identity in the context of increasingly militarized borders and conservative migrant politics across the Americas. To further reflect on his process of assimilation and subject formation as Latinx within the Canadian neoliberal, settler, multiculturalist milieu,

he invites us to “draw infinite hatch marks on your feet” as part of his action score *riddle* (*how many feet have pressed onto the land without having learned its language down to the root*). In fact, this action, perhaps inadvertently, calls to mind the work of Brazilian video artist Leticia Parente, who famously stitched the words “Made in Brasil” on the sole of her bare foot in front of a video camera for her work *Marca registrada* (Trademark, 1975) at the height of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Unlike Parente’s national framework to question political violence and Brazil’s capitalist export economy, Granados’s action-riddle forces us to question our roles and responsibilities as settlers in Indigenous lands, a process of self-reflection integral to the ethics of crafting migrant identities in settler-colonial territories.

As with Granados, the Latinx category allows Amanda Gutiérrez to construct hemispheric networks and affiliations that permit her to bypass national and gendered identifications. Gutiérrez’s understanding of the term “Latinx” invokes a direct connection with the Latina/x populations in the United States. She uses “Latinx” to claim a queer and hybrid identity informed by her immigration journey from Mexico City, via Chicago and Brooklyn, to Montreal. In all of these places, she developed strong community, artistic, and family ties, making her question narratives of a “single origin.” Gutiérrez also uses the term “Latinx” to position herself as a political agent in relation to the predominantly francophone and white feminist collectives in Montreal, whose members she collaborates with in the main project discussed in her chapter. In “*Xeno Walk: Approaching Feminism as Social Engagement in Montreal’s Public Space*,” Gutiérrez shares a methodology of decolonial soundwalking and listening that is integral to her collaborative research-creation practice and her interests in highlighting how modern urban infrastructures exclude various minorities. In describing her collaborations and involvement with *Collages Féministes Montréal*, *Collages Féminicides Montréal*, and *Collages Féminicides Paris*, Gutiérrez comes to terms with how her racialized body, culture, and migratory status have prevented her involvement on “the



front line” during the arrest of members of Collages Féministes Montréal for their defacing of the urban environment.

Building on Clare Hemming’s term “affective solidarity,” Gutiérrez describes the engagements and allyship that members of Collages Féministes Montréal construct with Indigenous movements, sex workers’ centres, local grassroots organizations, feminist filmmakers, and LGBTQ2+ communities, among others, by pasting up slogans of their demands as part of their activities. These experiences inform Gutiérrez’s intersectional, feminist, decolonial soundwalking practice and shed light on the construction process of her Latinx identity as she passes the mic to Latinx and Latina immigrants in order to amplify their voices and to learn about their experiences as migrant, gendered bodies walking the streets of Montreal at night. Gutiérrez engages with the communal and embodied practice of listening to and walking with Others. This engagement allows her to build connections with diasporic communities and feminist activists who denounce violence against queer, Indigenous, and migrant bodies within the context of the #NiUnaMás, #8M, and #MeToo movements. In doing so, she continually reinvents her Latinx identity as part of the learning and unlearning that these processes involve.

In “*Sur les toits Havane: Performing Latinxité at/from Home in Cuba*—Québec Film Productions,” Darien Sánchez Nicolás builds a case for the term *latinxité*, or “a specific and context-based configuration of the more traditional notion of Hispanic *latinidad* (latinhood).” Through an analysis of Québec-based Venezuelan filmmaker and photographer Pedro Ruiz’s documentary *Sur les toits Havane* (2019)—titled *Havana, from on High* and *Arriba Habana* in its English and Spanish commercial releases—Sánchez Nicolás describes the intimate and precarious networks that sustained the film’s production and circulation and how, through them, a construction of *latinxité* emerges both in the stories told in the film and in its production journey. Building on Juana María Rodríguez’s idea of “queer *latinidad*,” Edouard Glissant’s “créolisation,” and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s “meta-archipelagos,” Sánchez Nicolás’s *latinxité* is a multifaceted category

composed of a unique blend of Afro-Caribbean, queer, and transnational characteristics. The chapter accentuates the queer nature of diasporic filmmaking as a counter-normative practice—including financing, production, and exhibition dynamics—the lived experience of characters in the film, and the distinct ethnocultural, linguistic, and context specificities of Cuba-Quebec historical and current relationships.

Sánchez Nicolás focuses on how domestic hospitality and informal businesses in Cuba have created ideal settings for developing film productions between Quebec and the Caribbean country. His chapter demonstrates that co-production agreements between Canada and Latin America are often hindered by the large financing gaps between the northern nation and its southern counterparts, which struggle to match Canadian funds. In prioritizing notions such as “minor transnationalism” or “transnationalism from below” as a critique of dominant views on transnationalism, he interrogates the limits of national borders and state policies that embrace neoliberal economies in the context of late capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, through this analysis, Sánchez Nicolás demonstrates how affective networks, solidarity, collaborative relations, and engaged labour sustain and make possible film production across such dissimilar economies.

In contrast to Granados, Gutiérrez, and Sánchez Nicolás, whose nation-detached and queer claims to the term “Latinx” frame their identities, filmmakers and scholars Argelia González Hurtado and Adonay Guerrero Cortés and artist Manuel Piña-Baldoquín structure their realms of belonging and conflicted attachment to Latin American cultural identities through national and transnational frameworks. In “Exploring the ‘Mex-Can’ Identity: Film, Belongings, and Migrant Experiences in ‘El Norte,’” González Hurtado and Guerrero Cortés recount the ways their migration journeys within Mexico and to “El Norte”—first to Canada and then to the United States—shaped their cultural identity and intimate relationship as a couple. In considering their identity formation as a transborder experience, they use the term “Mex-Can” to describe the constant crossing of the US and Canadian borders. This border crossing defines their lives as a commuting couple at the intersection of three national

boundaries and highlights the ongoing reinvention of their regional, national, ethnic, and racial identities that these journeys entail. Their contribution underlines the unique path between regional peripheries and centres they have traversed while moving back and forth from Mexico to Canada and from Canada (the North of the North) to the United States (the North).

Through their conversation, González Hurtado and Guerrero Cortés offer insights into their and their families' migration histories within Mexico and into the shifting identity constructs that have allowed them to thrive as professionals while crossing different cultural, ethnic, and economic boundaries. These experiences informed their understanding of identity reinventions as they travelled to Edmonton, and the same is true as they currently move back and forth between Kingston and Maryland. These displacements demand a constant negotiation of their identities regardless of their dual citizen status as Mexicans and Canadians. They reflect upon the difference between Mexican identities in the United States and Canada due to multiple social, economic, and historical issues. In Canada, they were confronted with microaggressions prompted by the colour of their skin, which quickly identified them as people of colour. Like other immigrants in Canada, Latin Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are confronted with an array of identity groupings reflecting Canadian multicultural society. They are thus forced to reckon with deep colonial histories of racial and cultural mixing that prevent a straightforward and unethical identification as Indigenous due to how the Canadian nation-state defines Indigenous identities. In contrast to Guerrero Cortés, González Hurtado entered the country on an international student visa to pursue doctoral studies and consequently found a sense of belonging within the Latin American student body, which reinforced her identity as Mexican and Latin American.

Conversely, Cuban artist Manuel Piña-Baldoquín rejects any affiliation with the Latin American label or with any identity category. In “‘I Never Really Felt Like a Latin American Artist’: Identity as a Spiritual Journey,” a conversation with Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda and Zaira Zarza,

Piña-Baldoquín reflects on his migration journey and on his ensuing efforts in Vancouver to (re)build career networks that were destined for never-ending reconfigurations. His contribution stands at the intersection of Black and Indigenous solidarities as he navigates academic and artistic contexts in the diaspora. Experiences and memories serve to frame his take on identity as an ongoing process of construction and deconstruction inspired by his African heritage and interest in Indigenous arts and artists. Piña-Baldoquín describes his journey to becoming a photographer in Havana during the financial crisis of the so-called Special Period in the 1990s. He explains how the oppositional ethos of the Havana Biennial aimed to redefine what Latin American contemporary art could look like and brought a sense of pride to being a Cuban photographer. As with Guerrero Cortés, Piña-Baldoquín was in Canada when he encountered what he calls “the oppression caused by the social norms,” which made him aware of what it meant to be a Black Cuban photographer. As he recalls, many of his urban mannerisms were frowned upon, a realization that inspired new works.

Similar to Amanda Gutiérrez’s concern with the systems of oppression concealed in urban environments, Piña-Baldoquín’s experience of cultural adaptation and reckoning with his own Blackness is mediated by how migrant bodies experience the urban environment. Yet his experience has also been much like that of González Hurtado, who developed research on representations of Indigeneity in Mexican cinema and transnational networks of Indigenous media producers across the Americas before securing a faculty position at St. Mary’s College in Maryland. In Piña-Baldoquín’s case, his friendship with Kwakwaka’wakw Northwest Coast artist and chief Beau Dick, whom he met at the University of British Columbia, instilled in him a sense of community building and belonging beyond any borders, whether geographic, human, or nonhuman. As Piña-Baldoquín explains, Dick made him understand his place in the world beyond identity constructs, Western modernity’s ideals, or the whims of the identity-driven focus of the global art market. He concludes that “identity is this journey on which we all must embark to find the

richness in each of us, our true potentials, to heal the trauma of eons of separation, and to encounter at the end, very, very deep within, what you would probably call love.”

This section ends with a passionate yet strategic claim for the Latinx Canadian category. Nuria Carton de Grammont’s contribution details the emergence of Latinx Canadian art in the past decade. She plays a key role in this emergence, specifically in the city of Montreal. In “The SBC Gallery’s Shift toward Latin American and Latinx Canadian Art as a Statement,” an interview with Analays Álvarez Hernández and Zaira Zarza, she discusses the recent shift of the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal toward Latin American and Latinx Canadian artists. Combining her independent practice as a curator and part-time faculty member at Concordia University, Carton de Grammont has been the gallery’s director since 2020. Reflecting on her personal and professional experience as a Franco-Mexican immigrant in Quebec, she contextualizes this shift within this province’s cultural context while establishing historical and contextual differences between the categories Latinx and Latinx Canadian through the similarities and differences between the experiences that Latin American immigrants face in the United States and Canada.

Under her mandate, the SBC Gallery has presented the work of Venezuelan Canadian interdisciplinary artist Livia Daza-Paris and of Latina and Caribeña curator Claudia Mattos, whose exhibition *Here Comes the Sun* (2023) traced the origins of tourism’s extractivist practices in the Caribbean. Along with other Latinx, Latinx Canadian, Latin American, and Indigenous artists, Vir-Andrés Hera, Romeo Gongora, Geronimo Inutiq, Maria Paula Lonegro, Carla Rangel, Martín Rodríguez, and Carton de Grammont herself collaborated to put together the exhibition *Third-ear Transmissions* in 2023.<sup>4</sup> Like Guerrero Cortés, Carton de Grammont was confronted with the class- and status-centred nature of identity determinations in Mexico.

Finally, echoing Sánchez Nicolás, Carton de Grammont relates the affective dimension of economic, financial, and material integration in the context of Montreal through her contributions to visibilize the work and

life of Latinx Canadian artists. She advises on the risks associated with the diversity quotas imposed by public provincial and federal policies if these quotas are not accompanied by the long-lasting changes needed in institutional governance. Through these initiatives, Carton de Grammont has witnessed how contemporary artists of Latin American descent are currently embracing Latinx Canadian as an identity positionality. She thus offers a wider perspective on its evolution and strategic appropriation within contemporary artistic communities of Latin American origin in Canada and beyond. Regardless of the obstacles that the Latin American artistic community has faced in Canada, she remains hopeful and patient. She sees the strategic embrace of the Latinx Canadian category in the arts as signalling an intergenerational change in mentality and enormous potential for further constructions.

#### NOTES

- 1 Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (MIT Press, 2000), 197.
- 2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 114.
- 3 See *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Duke University Press, 2005); and Sarah J. Mahler, “Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism,” in *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, 64–101 (Transaction, 1998).
- 4 About this project, artist Amanda Gutiérrez explains, “*Third-ear Transmissions* is an ongoing encounter between sound artists, the interdisciplinary research group *LabARD* (Arts Research Laboratory in Decoloniality), and the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art’s team. The group exhibition ... [aims] to broaden our diverse listening perspectives. We each contributed by bringing our own ‘instruments’: music methodologies, personal experiences, and sound reflections.” Amanda Gutiérrez, “Third-ear Transmissions,” <https://amandagutierrez.net/eng/portfolio/third-ear-transmissions/>; <https://perma.cc/9B3C-NEME>.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *refugee reconnaissance: Diasporic Subject Formation, Critical Thinking, and Performance Art on the Path to Citizenship*

*Francisco-Fernando Granados*

Positioning my practice in the context of Latinx Canadian cultural discourse requires that I trace four sets of subjective conditions that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century: the political construction of the refugee in the aftermath of September 11, 2001; the formation of communities-in-solidarity across newcomer groups from different cultural communities; the possibility of education for refugees on the path toward citizenship through the preservation of a precarious public sphere; and engagement with experimental, noncommercial spaces of artmaking through artist-run culture. This chapter and its suite of performance scores attempt to give a relational account of my formation in these contexts and how they created conditions of possibility for the emergence of my work as a singular example of Latinx Canadian cultural practice. This practice aims to use the agency of citizenship critically, both to build feminist and queer alliances and to counter the logic of settler colonialism and interventionist impulses.

I am shaped by two radical geographical movements, the first from Guatemala to British Columbia in 2001, where I resided in Coast Salish Territories in a place now called New Westminster, and the second eastward across the latitude of the land to Toronto in Dish with One Spoon territory in 2010. The first time, I left Guatemala with my family to seek

refugee status in Canada; the second time, I moved on my own to begin a master's degree in visual studies at the University of Toronto, only a year after being granted Canadian citizenship. Learning and practising through these migrations instilled in me an evolving set of convictions about art and its role in social and political relations. I believe that art is an interplay between form, content, and context. I also believe that artists are workers who create specific material and social relationships through their work and that culture should remain connected to an accessible public sphere. This chapter attempts to trace how the histories and cultural practices of the colonized regions still broadly called Canada and Latin America have provided key lessons and shaped intuitions that have led to this belief. My training is primarily in visual art—drawing, painting, and printmaking—although I consider myself a cultural omnivore who observes and tries to learn from dance, theatre, film, theory, and popular culture. My influences range from *neoperreo* to Fluxus and from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to *The Real Housewives*. I understand my performance work, which emerged in the context of visual art, to be continuous with the broad range of cultural practices included in the scope of this book.

Since I began working in artist-run spaces in 2005, parallel to my formal education in fine arts, my practice has evolved away from an interest in performance-based strategies of duration, repetition, and endurance and toward site-specific drawing installations enacting the possibility of abstraction as an embodied, context-responsive practice. Degrees of abstraction have always been present in my work, but this chapter focuses on processes of diasporic subject formation. Please read between the lines to sense how the work has continuously moved toward an exploration of abstraction as a means to articulate affects that defy translation. In terms of strategies, I took cues from Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer's notion that "[c]onceptualism (as a separate term from 'Conceptual Art') challenges ... the attitude toward the role of art" in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> Conceptualism is an ever-present dimension in my approach, alongside aesthetic and contextual dimensions. As I attempted to bring these dimensions together,



my youthful impulse toward making performance art intersected with my training in drawing to produce a body of work exploring processes of observation, composition, and mark making through bodily processes like touching and tracing. These performances, spanning from 2005 to 2015, are collected here under the title *refugee reconnaissance*. The last section of my contribution to this volume presents a selection of action scores from this body of work.<sup>2</sup> These performances unfolded in the context of my coming into being as queer; they capture intuitive responses to experiences of overwhelming desire and unspeakable trauma. In this respect, I learned from the work of Latin American women artists like Frida Kahlo, Mónica Mayer, Graciela Carnevale, and Regina José Galindo—who, as argued by Argentinian art historian and curator Andrea Guinta, offered a “new conception of the body” as “[d]enaturalized and stripped of social morality,” thus “usher[ing] in knowledge that unleashed sensibilities not previously expressed in images.”<sup>3</sup> The strategies crafted through *refugee reconnaissance* grappled with the increasingly conservative and militarized climate of North America in the early 2000s in ways that sought to challenge the assimilation of migrant bodies into decorative multiculturalisms and neoliberal settler colonialisms. Shaping my intuitions through a range of anti-narrative approaches that drew from both Latin American and North American twentieth-century queer and feminist aesthetics, I sought to explore what it means to be allowed to settle into a new nation after being uprooted.

The question of Latinx identity in my work is bound up with the complexities of the category Latin American as it emerges through the violence and stratification of colonial social relations. The term “Latinx” is useful as an “affirmative sabotage”<sup>4</sup> that appropriates and reinscribes Latin American, queering a way out of the heavily binary, gendered structures of the Spanish language. Claiming the term “Latinx” as a conceptual move provides me with a category of cultural belonging that is capable of disobedience toward both gender binarism and colonial borders. I was born in 1985 in Guatemala City only a couple of years after the most gruesome genocidal violence recorded during the Guatemalan Civil

War. I grew up shielded by the privilege of my family's mestizo, urban, middle-class position, yet I can now see that my early upbringing was haunted by the presence of a war that had exiled and disappeared family members, killed hundreds of thousands of people (primarily Mayan and leftist), and created a sublime fear that silenced everyone around me. The armed conflict was not officially declared over until I was eleven years old, but the conditions of systematized violence that militarized Guatemalan civil society did not fundamentally change after treaties were signed. Feminist Guatemalan poet Luz Méndez de la Vega describes the war as "a storm of blood and terror, from which nobody escaped without suffering the loss of a family member or friend, or without living through the torture of harassment and fear." She speaks of "the pain of so many who still weep while not yet finding the remains of their dead, and the indifference of so many who ask that their memory be erased."<sup>5</sup> These conditions eventually forced our family to leave when I was sixteen. The details of that departure are ours to keep. I feel no nostalgia or longing toward Guatemala as a national colonial construct. Only sadness and overwhelming fear. I feel no sense of belonging to that body politic either, even as I love and continue to be in contact with family members on my mother's side who remain there.

The war was never mentioned during my education in Guatemala. I was eighteen years old, a refugee claimant, and a volunteer of the Ecumenical Task Force for Justice in the Americas in Vancouver before I began to understand how the historical conditions of the war had led to my family's displacement. The Task Force had a small library of books, including a copy of Rigoberta Menchú's memoir. Menchú is a K'iche' activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who published an account of her life based on testimonies written by Venezuelan anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray.<sup>6</sup> The book's title has a philosophical resonance: *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así nació mi conciencia* (My name is Rigoberta Menchú, and this is how my consciousness was born). Marta Gloria de la Vega—a Guatemalan labour lawyer, founder of the Task Force, and the person I worked with translating and mailing out notices about human

rights abuses in Latin America—lent me the book. Menchú's narrative distills the historical contours and consequences of hundreds of years of colonization in Guatemala and bears witness to the horrors of the civil war. That is how my political consciousness was born. It was my earliest awareness of the social relations set up by settler colonialism and my implication within them.

We arrived in Canada on April 12, 2001. The Tuesday of my second week at New Westminster Secondary School was September 11. In spite of the terrifying things that we heard on the news first thing in the morning, I showered, dressed, and went to class. After school, I walked to the Edmonds branch of the Burnaby Public Library to read and check my email on the computers there. As I walked past a hardware store only blocks away from the library, a man in a baseball cap shouted at me through the rolled-down window of a pickup truck, calling me a terrorist. I ran away. This man sensed something of my perceived otherness, although even in his racist assumption about the events of that day, he misread my body. I was untranslatable to his gaze. By the time I got home and turned on the television, the text on the news ticker had shifted from descriptions of the tragic events in New York to "America's New War." By December of that year, Canada had deployed soldiers to Afghanistan as part of its obligations as a NATO member.<sup>7</sup> About a year later, Canada and the United States signed the Safe Third Country Agreement,<sup>8</sup> which required people seeking asylum in the United States to make their claim on "American" soil under the assumption that the United States was a "safe country." There are no routes to Canada from Guatemala that do not first cross through the United States. Since then, the possibility of others in my position claiming refuge in the way that my family did has been foreclosed; the path has become extremely dangerous.<sup>9</sup>

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada places the burden of proof on claimants, compelling us to narrate our journeys with legibility. That is how some refugees, those of us allowed to stay, become citizens and settlers. Processes of sorting and certification create what feminist theorist and philosopher Judith Butler calls an "uneven distribution of

dispossession,”<sup>10</sup> making some lives admissible while brutally expelling others. The border between those who are admitted and those who are deported hinges on protocols that turn refugee protection into a calculation. These protocols are experienced as a form of violence by those of us who have fled, even as they enable forms of subjective recognition and civil protection that have preserved some of our lives. I feel no nationalist longing toward Canada either. My life has been such that nations as categories of belonging do not make sense. My sense of belonging comes from a connection to refugee, queer, and artistic communities both in the unceded Coast Salish lands where I first settled and where my mother still lives and in the Dish with One Spoon territory where I now live with my partner.

The first place that I found a feeling of understanding was in a volunteer training program for immigrant and refugee teenagers. MY (Multicultural Youth) Circle, an organization facilitating peer support, was run by a nonprofit settlement agency in downtown Vancouver; I participated in its first training program in the fall of 2002. The curriculum for MY Circle’s program was adapted for youth from a peer-support model for newcomer women by Chilean-born program manager Carmen Muñoz. It was designed to train us in listening, asking questions, empathizing, and organizing as a collective. I now see that this pedagogical model had significant similarities to feminist consciousness-raising methods. Even though the work happened under the institutional framework of settlement services and used the flawed language of multiculturalism, Carmen’s translation of a community pedagogy that was infused with feminist intuitions planted a seed for critical thinking. It was a rare space where the feeling of connection came from shared, if widely diverging, experiences of migration rather than from a common cultural tradition.

There, I met Colombian-born activist and scholar Nathalie Lozano-Neira. We became collaborators and shared a path in community work for years, eventually co-working as program coordinators for MY Circle after it shifted into the suburbs when most newcomers could not afford to live in Vancouver by the end of the 2000s. Our continued engagement

prompted a group of MY Circle facilitators to start an advocacy collective for young newcomers called the Action Team. The work of the Action Team garnered some local media attention. Some of us began to be asked to share our stories with a range of mainstream outlets in the context of discussions around multiculturalism and settlement in the aftermath of September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>11</sup> A critique of multiculturalism and its media representations had been articulated as far back as the 1990s by artists like Richard Fung, who noted how this policy “shifts the focus away from the political and social questions of race such as housing, employment, education, access to power, into a political marketing of personal identity.”<sup>12</sup> The kind of attention some of us got and the ways that our stories were edited and reframed made evident the dire need for a public voice for migrants as well as the limitations of mainstream frameworks for cultural visibility. Reflecting on these experiences, I wrote,

Talking to the Vancouver Sun, Global News and documentary crews became increasingly frustrating as it became obvious that their interest in our stories had less to do with creating some kind of discussion around our work in the community and more to do with repeating an idealized version of Canadian multiculturalism ... The frameworks for representation these outlets provided were too rigid, too predetermined, too small. Refugees are meant to be grateful, and talking about the struggles of institutionalized discrimination or the brutalizing refugee certification process would not fit into these frames ... The need to speak out is still pressing, but the frameworks for representation need to be transformed in order to go beyond the problematic of this one-directional way of looking.<sup>13</sup>

One of the Action Team’s projects in response to the need to shift the frameworks of representation was a collaboration with filmmaker Joah Lui on a series of short films collected under the title *Redefining*

*Canadian* (2004). In this “participatory filmmaking, action research project with immigrant and refugee youth,”<sup>14</sup> Joah facilitated a space for us to experience making short videos by bringing us into the VIVO Media Arts Centre, an artist-run video production facility, and arranging for a series of media artists to mentor us in both the technical and artistic aspects of the medium. This project was my first encounter with Canadian artist-run culture. Here, I met artists like Cindy Mochizuki, Lois Klassen, and T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss. One of the most memorable experiences of this process was the opportunity to hold a boom microphone while our group recorded an interview with Abenaki documentary filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin. This transformative experience of becoming makers rather than simply consumers and subjects in media unfolded near the end of my family's refugee hearing process and provided the conditions of possibility for thinking of myself as a cultural producer.

On March 17, 2004, as soon as we got home from the hearing where my family was granted Convention Refugee status, I looked up the fine arts programs at local colleges and decided to apply. Up until then, as a refugee claimant, I had no affordable access to post-secondary education. When I knew that my family and I would not be deported, I decided to become an artist. Consciously or unconsciously, it was then that I felt an ability to reorient my life—to define it not just in terms of the search for basic civil protections but also through the pursuit of desires that had been brewing all along. I began the fine arts diploma program at Langara College (now also called *snəwəyəl leləŋ*) the following September.

I continued to work my nonprofit part-time jobs in community development to pay for tuition while I lived at home with my family, shuttling back and forth between Vancouver and New Westminster. The daily SkyTrain commutes were also journeys between my lives as a queer art student in the city and the eldest child of a Guatemalan household in the suburbs. I voraciously absorbed lessons on drawing, painting, and print-making techniques from artists teaching at Langara, including Lesley Finlayson and Gordon Trick. They taught these historical approaches to visual art not merely as techniques but also as processes of embodied

observation where mark making and composition could come together in order to make an image. I studied alongside a vibrant cohort of peers that included Sandeep Johal, Charlene Heilman, and Vidalia Garcia.

In the summer of 2005, I was going to meet a guy I was in love with when an image on the cover of a magazine in a store window stopped me and drew me right to it. It was a photograph of Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore, a barely recognizable figure layered with a blood-red splash that abstracted the silhouette. This image was a still from Belmore's video installation *Fountain*, which represented Canada at the Venice Biennial that year. I bought the magazine and took it along on my date, reading it next to the young man I was seeing as we both sat under a tree for shelter from the summer sun. I was amazed by the documentation of Rebecca's work.<sup>15</sup> The related article in the magazine was an essay on the broader context of performance art in Canada reviewing the LIVE Biennial of Performance Art in Vancouver and the 7a\*11d International Performance Art Festival in Toronto, both artist-run initiatives whose exhibitions have featured national and international work. Randy Gledhill blew my mind with his descriptions of performances by feminist, anti-fascist Spanish artist Esther Ferrer and by Guatemalan-born Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, then based in Vancouver.<sup>16</sup> That was also the year that I learned about Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo when she won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale. Performance art sounded like a radical way of making images using whatever was at hand. It sounded like a medium driven by desire. I fell in love with performance art.

Soon afterward, I learned that the Vancouver Art Gallery was presenting a work by Ramírez-Figueroa and decided to go see performance art, presented live, for the first time. The work was a response to an installation by German artist Franz West, with gestures that included marking the body with x's and holding flowers below the arms and between the legs. That September, I had a chance to meet Ramírez-Figueroa when Vidalia Garcia introduced us at an exhibition opening. A couple of weeks later, Ramírez-Figueroa called to invite me to a performance art workshop for youth hosted alongside artist Irene Loughlin and held at

Gallery Gachet in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of Vancouver. I said yes. I was twenty years old when I did my first action, titled *Exile 1* (2005). I gave myself hickeys and covered them with makeup as an allegory for the experience of going through the refugee hearing process.<sup>17</sup> That is how I began my work as an artist. As a fully embodied medium, performance allowed me to present my body as an extended site of subjective transition shaped by refugee and queer experiences. Artist Margaret Dragu has written about performance art as a playground for refugees from traditional disciplines, a medium that is more democratic and harder to commodify than painting or theatre but still rife with issues from society at large, issues that nothing except performance can lay bare and make visible.<sup>18</sup> In Paul Couillard's words, performance uses "time, space, the performer's body, and the relationship to the audience" as its primary elements.<sup>19</sup> Performance is, as Johanna Householder articulates in dialogue with Margaret, "art in which the artist is physically present when the art is being made."<sup>20</sup> This directness of performance allowed me to move away from the limitations of representation and toward a *means of presentation* for the untranslatable affects that I was working through on my path to citizenship.

In 2007, when I transferred to Emily Carr University to finish my bachelor's degree in fine arts, I met artist and curator Ikbal Singh through Sandeep Johal. Singh was organizing a performance exhibition at the university's Concourse Gallery and seeking project submissions. I wrote instructions for *Exile 2*, a new iteration, creating my first action score, and proposed it for the show. Singh decided to include it. Watching other performances in the exhibition, I was struck by conceptualist approaches that challenged Euro-American histories and artistic hierarchies from racialized and queer perspectives. Singh's contribution to the show consisted of the durational action of plucking individual hairs from her legs that would later be carefully glued to a reproduction of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*. Mexican-born artist Manolo Lugo performed *Laundry Folds*, a work in which he carefully folded his and his partner's clothes into an



elegant, soft grid. Soon after, at Singh's invitation, I participated in the LIVE Biennial of Performance Art's emerging artist program. By then, I was fully immersed in the performance community.

I learned by watching. Margaret Dragu made *VERB WOMAN: a dance of forgetting* by superimposing video recordings of choreographic gestures performed with Paul Couillard.<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Belmore created a sculpture by nailing military combat jackets to a wooden plank while lit by a truck's high beams in *Making Always War*.<sup>22</sup> Skeena Reece dressed as Emily Carr and ran around the halls of the university singing a version of the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen."<sup>23</sup> Johanna Householder carefully traced the words of an Alain Badiou lecture for a conceptual drag lip sync in *On the Subject of Art*.<sup>24</sup> Tanya Mars created a monumental action with a long table and what seemed like hundreds of cakes for *In Pursuit of Happiness*.<sup>25</sup> Esther Ferrer gave a lecture on the history of live art in an incomprehensible language that managed to be both minimalist and maximalist in *Performance Art: Theory and Practice*.<sup>26</sup> Parallel to this community involvement, I took classes at Emily Carr with Randy Lee Cutler, Kristina Lee Podesva, Abbas Akhavan, Susan Stewart, Sam Shem, and Liz Magor. I also attended conferences organized by curators like Alissa Firth-Eagland to round out my studies.<sup>27</sup> This aesthetic education was, in feminist and comparative literature scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's terms, "a training of the imagination for epistemological performance."<sup>28</sup>

Over the years, I developed my own practice one action at a time. I pressed myself against corners for extended periods of time, traced the length of institutional spaces with my tongue, hips, and profile, and embodied the movements of a police strip search as a way to exhibit a ready-made. These durational, task-based actions sought to test the endurance of my body. I became a Canadian citizen on October 9, 2009, and wanted to know how much a refugee can take. How much can a citizen take? I turned my back to the audience often. I did not want to face anyone. This intense body of work hoped to challenge audience expectations of narrative and legible identity in performance. I wanted to go against the grain

of the aesthetic expectations, perhaps stereotypes, that I had encountered in the highly stratified Vancouver contemporary art world outside of the performance community.

By 2010, the Winter Olympics had changed the cultural fabric of Metro Vancouver. In an essay that was written for a student publication and censored by the president of Emily Carr University, I proposed that in the post-Olympic landscape, emerging artists had “the challenge of maintaining a diversity of practices that not only analyzes, questions and accounts for our circumstances but also imagines the possibilities of a future” where we could engage in “ephemeral, experimental, critical, communal and other kinds of non-commercial practice.”<sup>29</sup> Processes of gentrification in the broader context and the censorship of the essay made it feel impossible for me to sustain an experimental, noncommercial practice in Vancouver. I ran away, accepting an offer to come to Toronto to do a master’s degree. In an incredibly kind gesture that eventually helped me to heal from the anger of feeling that I had to leave the city, artist and curator Vanessa Kwan invited me to come back to do a set of performances at the Vancouver Art Gallery as part of the 2010 exhibition *Everything Everyday*.

My graduate studies at the University of Toronto from 2010 to 2012 gave me an opportunity to work under the mentorship of Tanya Mars and Lisa Steele, feminist performance artists teaching in the city. My goal was to make a performance installation of a larger institutional scale. The resulting work, titled *apostrophe*, sought to stage an impossible correspondence between myself and Omar Khadr, the Egyptian Canadian child soldier who was extrajudicially imprisoned by the US military at Guantanamo Bay after being captured in Afghanistan. In developing that performance while Khadr was still captive, I decided not to use his image or name in the work. Only allusions to his condition as a means to craft actions that I enacted over the course of a twenty-four-hour performance. I now understand this impulse as an attempt at an ethics of distance that not only hopes to make connections through the imagination without guarantee but also seeks to bypass the social and political regimes that

compel legibility. The performance was dedicated to anybody who had ever been interrogated: my parents during two rounds of refugee hearings, many friends at border crossings and in the streets, and in an extremely cruel instance, Khadr himself.

On the opening night of the thesis show, I graffitied the walls of the University of Toronto Art Museum with 3,436 marks counting the days of Khadr's imprisonment up until that point. The task failed: no attempt at empathy could reach him then. There was no cultural construction, no artwork, that could overcome or redeem the violence inflicted upon him. The performance presented the impossibility of representing him. But this failure did allow me to enter the space that I now understand as *the incalculable*. It showed me the limits of representation, and even presence, and the need to decentre my body within my own work.

The focus then shifted toward thinking of performance in terms of action scores that could accommodate more than just my body, opening up to others. The selection of pieces from *refugee reconnaissance* in this chapter ends with *riddle (how many feet have pressed onto the land without having learned its language down to the root)*. The action, initially performed through my body, is open to be enacted by any settler in Canada as a meditation on our responsibility to engage in a nation-to-nation dialogue with Indigenous people. As this body of work reached its final stage on the other side of citizenship with a reflection on settler accountability, my efforts at critical thinking eventually found two new streams of enactment: my most recent body of work dealing directly with abstraction; and my pedagogical work in the post-secondary classroom. From 2012 to 2021, I taught theory, drawing, and conceptual development to undergraduate students while working limited-term contracts at both Ontario College of Art and Design University and the University of Toronto Scarborough.

As my contribution to this volume reaches its final movement with the following action scores, I beg the reader to remember that the categories of refugee and citizen are not universal. The journey presented here is grounded through my subject formation as a descendant of the Guatemalan Civil War. As a diasporic subject in Canada, I appropriate the

category of Latinx, for it allows for the possibility of solidarities across histories and geographies. Writing on the formation of a “Latina/o[x]” performance culture in Canada, performance studies scholar Natalie Álvarez proposes that “the self-designation and appropriation of ‘Latina/o[x]’ [as a category] might allow us to identify points of contact among ... artists who are reshaping national identity while establishing hemispheric networks beyond our national borders.”<sup>30</sup> It is my best hope that the presentation of this singular trajectory can contribute to that effort.

#### Exile 1

Deciding to give up the amorous condition, the subject sadly discovers  
himself exiled from his Image-repertoire.

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977)

draw up blood  
to the surface of the skin  
using your own mouth  
in a passionate kiss—  
like motion

purple marks result

layer red wine-stained shirt  
with projection of Interim Federal Health document  
inscribed by border agent:  
“authorized to attend school for a year”

cover marks with make-up

*Performed at Gallery Gachet, November 4, 2005, as part of “out uv th storm,” a workshop series involving local youth mentored by artists Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa and Irene Laughlin.*

## Exile 2

cut clothes into long lines. put on winter accessories while semi-nude:  
gloves, scarf, toque over eyes. suck upper arms until they are marked.

cover marks with make-up

*Performed at the Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University, April 2007, as part of  
“body,” curated by Ikbal Singh.*

## Impossible Desire

consume a bridal bouquet wearing a tuxedo in a popular destination  
where (mostly heterosexual) couples get their wedding pictures taken

*After Gayatri Gopinath. Performed at Harbour Green Park as part of “Public  
Displays of Affection” for the 2007 LIVE Biennial of Performance Art in Vancouver,  
curated by Ikbal Singh.*

## purifagia 1

fellate a bar of soap until your mouth is full of foam. wash hands  
with foam.

“six times, three times each  
and wear [the] whitest cloth [...]  
in moonshine instead of sun”

*After U\_\_\_\_\_ A\_\_\_\_\_’s “drink from my hands, I will cup them,” received in an  
email in the summer of 2005. Performed at vivo Media Arts Centre, March 2008,  
as part of “Pressure to Perform.”*

## The Dedication

... it seems crucial to recognize, not only that the anguish and opacity of the 'I' is witnessed by the other, but that the other can become the name for one's anguish and opacity.

—Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005)

A non-narrative recitation collapses the public and the intimate, translating an impossible desire. What if the name of the other, which has come to stand for anguish and opacity, was to become the name of love?

os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os  
ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama,  
no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os  
ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama, os ama, no os ama ...

*Performed for the camera, July 2008, 4:03 mins.*

the window under the table

write

by

nuzzling

on a gold-leafed surface approximately the size of a tombstone:

“the rain hits my windowpane  
wish we could watch it together  
and maybe  
wet our noses”

*After an email from U\_\_\_\_\_ A\_\_\_\_\_ received in the summer of 2005. Performed at the Brow Gallery, Emily Carr University, January 28, 2009, as part of “my mother worked in a factory,” curated by Geneviève Cloutier.*

contact study – kiss 1

kiss your future

lover

for the surveillance

cameras

*Idea by Amy Zion. Performed as a public intervention for the camera at the Kitsilano BMO ATM, February 2009, with A\_\_\_\_\_ G\_\_\_\_\_ ; lost footage.*

dream act

a young Latino man sleeps on a gilded pillow for one night

*After Antonio Ruiz, “El sueño de la Malinche” (1939). Performed as a private intervention at home, March 2009, by Javier Granados Samayoa.*

with glowing hearts

spray paint a gold medal on your chest

creating a toxic cloud

*Performed as a public intervention during a visit to Toronto at the corner of College Street and Ossington Avenue, September 2009.*

seeded

oculis > au-cul-lys > lilies up the ass

An embodied detail from Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510)

*Performed at the Hastings Steam and Sauna, October 15, 2009, as part of “Body Plural” for the **LIVE** Biennial of Performance Art in Vancouver, curated by Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa.*

contact study – water and ink

draw two circles that touch at a single  
point with a pencil on a sheet of paper  
fill one circle with water  
fill one circle with ink  
ink touches water  
neither circle will be the same

*Infinitely repeatable action performed in-studio since January 2010. First iteration used brown shellac ink on Goldline Watercolour Studio paper sized 9.5 × 12.5 inches.*

contact study – matches

light match in a dark room  
hold  
carefully approximate the unlit match  
to the barely burning stick  
miniature toxic clouds follow  
a little firework parade

*Performed for the camera, January 2010.*

contact study – kiss 2

paint a lipstick beard at a party. ask a series of friends/lovers/strangers if  
you may kiss them. watch for lipstick marks on people you did not kiss.

*Performed at Gallery Gachet, February 2010, as part of Prance, a queer dance party organized by Heidi Nagtegaal.*



encounter

>

in: faggot

in: are you a terrorist?

out: what do you think?

in: u look like one

out: maybe I am

out: a faggot terrorist

in: yeah I rekkon

out: what would that make you?

*Randomized conversation with a stranger on the video chat website Chatroulette,  
April 2010; captured through screenshots.*

spatial profiling ...

*face*

*touches*

*wall*

*repeatedly*

*outline*

*profile*

*movement*

*through*

*space*

*results*

*abstract*

*pattern*

*Initially performed as “contact study (after Margaret Dragu’s ‘Eine Kleine Nacht  
Radio’)” during final undergraduate critiques at Emily Carr University, April 2010,*

*and soon afterward as part of a performance event at Chapel Arts in Vancouver curated by Zarah Ackerman.*

#### movement study – lip sync

llenarse la	sock
boca con	stuff
un calcetín	your mouth
al ritmo	to the beat
de	of

#### Juana La Cubana

*After Fito Olivares. Performed as part of a performance event at Chapel Arts in Vancouver, April 2010, curated by Zarah Ackerman.*

#### restauration

set up a janitorial cart in the area under the stairs. restore the janitorial cart by applying gold leaf to its surface. while the restoration is performed, listen to a compilation of songs selected by people in your life who do or have done janitorial work. when people speak to you, understand English, but only respond in Spanish.

once the action is over, the cart remains under the stairs.

*Performed as a site-specific installation at Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University, April 30 to May 1, 2010, as part of the Grad Show; winner of the John C. Kerr Chancellor's Award.*

contact study – Vancouver Art Gallery

the contours of the face press  
against the contours of the architecture  
for an hour. rock en español marks time;  
vaseline marks the shape of contact;  
gold leaf marks the trace.

*Performed as a series of live architectural interventions at the Vancouver Art Gallery, October 2010, as part of “Everything Everyday,” curated by Bruce Grenville and Vanessa Kwan.*

stillness study – Vancouver Art Gallery

stand at the Hornby Street entrance, close enough to the door so that people must negotiate their relationship to you as they enter or exit the space, but not so close that you block anybody’s movement. people choose how to respond to your body. choose how to respond to them. open the door for people with mobility devices.

*Performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery, October 2010, as part of “Everything Everyday,” curated by Bruce Grenville and Vanessa Kwan. Performance interrupted when a gallery patron became aggressive and suggested that the artist would get shot if he did this action in the United States. Performance postponed when tables and chairs needed to be carried into the gallery for a wedding rental. Action completed after a new site was found at the entrance of the exhibition spaces by the ticket desk.*

I have only ever been a lover in English  
press tongue against the wall  
salivate  
move slowly across the space  
tongue draws a line

*Performed for 90 minutes during the Performance as Encounter workshop organized by FADO Performance Art Centre with Agnes Nedregård, October 22, 2010, Toronto Free Gallery, as part of the 7a\*11d International Performance Art Festival. Performed for 30 minutes as part of Revisiting Ephemera, January 10, 2011, Artlab Gallery, Western University.*

movement study – bomba

trace the contours of an architecture by dancing in contact with and alongside the edges of the space. sway, sway, sway. you may dance to your own tune or use found sound in the room.

*Performed as a site-specific intervention at 1 Spadina Crescent, Toronto, April 2011, during First-Year Critiques, Master of Visual Studies, University of Toronto, and soon afterward as part of **SWEATY BONES**, a queer dance party organized by Heidi Nagtegaal.*

crown

A queen is a relationship between a head and a crown.  
What if the feet become the site of coronation?

*Performed as a public intervention at Queen Elizabeth Plaza on September 19, 2011, as part of “crown,” a solo exhibition at Queen Elizabeth Theatre curated by Connie Sabo and Angela Gooliaff.*

apostrophe

drag the chair under the spotlight. sit on the chair and read the book. erase Romeo's name every time it appears in the text. listen to a description of his image.

sit and write a letter to him. stage the impossible address. think. remember. note. compose. correct. rest. drink if thirsty. keep writing. store written pages in the space under the desktop. acknowledge members of the audience if they communicate directly. be polite, but don't invite conversation. do not say his name. go silent. go back to work.

hold hand up and draw one hatch mark for every day he has been in Guantanamo. at the time of the opening, it will have been 3,438 days. the drawing of the hatch mark produces the sound that resembles the form of the apostrophe. allow for silence. allow for exhaustion. squat down on the floor if legs are tired. rub wrists if necessary. no talking.

*Performed as part of "prose. apostrophe. prior," University of Toronto Art Centre, April 2012.*

movement study – sway, sway, sway

touch the ground with bare feet

lift the other leg

hold

notice a destabilizing force

sway  
sway  
sway

*Performed as part of "Social Choreography," Gallery TPW, Toronto, May 2012,  
curated by Julia Paoli.*

movement study – standard North American strip search procedure  
empty pockets  
remove accessories  
place the contents out of reach

take off clothing  
article by article  
shake out each piece  
place clothing out of reach

tilt head down  
run fingers through the top of the head  
pull right ear forward  
pull left ear forward

tilt head back  
open mouth. wide  
stick tongue out. up  
pull down lower lip  
lift upper lip

stick hands forward. fingers wide  
turn hands over. hands up

spread legs. wide

lift penis. retract foreskin  
lift testicles

turn around  
lift right leg up. wiggle toes  
lift left leg up. wiggle toes

bend forward  
spread buttocks  
squat  
cough

*Everyday readymade. Performed at Defibrillator Gallery as part of the Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival, Chicago, June 2012. Performed as part of "Social Choreography," Gallery TPW, July 2012, curated by Julia Paoli. Performed at Darling Foundry, Montreal, August 2012, curated by Michelle Lacombe.*

pointillism

stick your tongue  
out in a  
snow storm

*Written on February 13, 2013, not yet performed.*

riddle (how many feet have pressed onto the land without having  
learned its language down to the root)  
draw infinite hatch marks on your feet

*Guest-programmed by the Ombaasin Collective as part of "AGO First Thursdays: Land Rights Now," Art Gallery of Ontario, July 2, 2015.*

## NOTES

- 1 Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (University of Texas Press, 2007), 15.
- 2 The scores appearing in this chapter were presented in 2021 as a text-based, bilingual installation at the artist-run Centre d'Artistes AXENÉO7 in Gatineau, Quebec. That suite of performances, simply called *refugee reconnaissance*, spanned 2005–13 and was translated into French by artist, curator, and editor M.A. Marleau.
- 3 Andrea Giunta, “The Iconographic Turn: The Denormalization of Bodies and Sensibilities in the Work of Latin American Women Artists,” in *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, ed. Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta (Presstel, 2017), 29, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/essays/the-iconographic-turn>; <https://perma.cc/V36F-UMKL>.
- 4 The notion of “affirmative sabotage” has been crafted by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a means to argue for the careful deconstruction of intellectual tools crafted by the European Enlightenment. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 114.
- 5 Luz Méndez de la Vega, *Toque de queda: poesía bajo el terror, 1969–1999* (Artemis Edinter, 1999), 2.
- 6 Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1985).
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## CHAPTER TWO

### *Xeno Walk*: Approaching Feminism as Social Engagement in Montreal's Public Space

Amanda Gutiérrez

*Xeno Walk: A Soundwalk on Collective Feminism* is a research-creation project developed with augmented reality (AR) sound technology, inspired by the practice of urban paper collaging as a tool of political resistance and enunciation.<sup>1</sup> Developed in 2021 in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke as part of my involvement with the feminist collective Collages Féministes Montréal, *Xeno Walk* consists of a series of immersive urban soundwalks designed to explore what makes a city safe and accessible for its inhabitants. The project draws inspiration from French philosopher and filmmaker Guy Debord's situationist urbanism practices, such as walking, psychogeography, and *dérive* (drifting), and it features interviews with British sound artist Viv Corringham and activist members of the collectives Collages Féministes Montréal, Collages Féminicides Paris, Collages Féminicides Montréal, and #VIVAS, an Argentinian sound collective.

The wheat-paste technique used in paper collaging is an artistic practice that engages with the ephemerality of the urban space as writing palimpsest, layering the previous wall traces and allowing the decay of time to be part of the nonpermanent graffiti. The collage as a technique can be an appropriate allegory of feminist methodologies, open to be combined and deconstructed through collective processes. *Xeno Walk* offers a sonic palimpsest of storytelling narratives that connect to soundtracks produced by #VIVAS and to Viv Corringham's "Shadow-walks" in Mexico City.<sup>2</sup>

Using AR helps participants to navigate public spaces sonically and to find connections between the interview's content and the landmarks' locations. The AR tracking system in the user's mobile phone activates the audio walk. Using a phone's geolocation system, this technology allows sound to interact with movement.

My artistic residence at the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal in 2021 informed the first iteration of *Xeno Walk*. Working with members of Collages Féministes Montréal, I created a walking path that considered our personal experiences with gender and accessibility in the Mile End neighbourhood of Montreal. Our memories of the area's sounds and physical sensations informed our planning process. *Xeno Walk's* interview locations include the Rosemont Boulevard pedestrian walkway, the nearby rail tracks, the bike path, the Van Horn Skatepark, and the underpass of Saint Laurent Boulevard. These sites embrace some of Montreal's countercultures of graffiti, skateboarding, street concerts, and independent music and media festivals. Wheat-paste collages were created and placed for the *Xeno Walk* performance series in response to interviews that discussed gender, public space, and political agency. The project resulted from collective decisions made while walking and listening together as we selected the route and the collage locations in relation to the phrases that resonated with the group.

In this chapter, I discuss the challenges that I faced while developing *Xeno Walk* in Montreal as an immigrant from Mexico, an artist-researcher, and a member of Collages Féministes Montréal. To provide context for this project, I outline my individual and collective soundwalk practice as a Latinx currently living in Canada, a position that frames my approach to this work from a specific social and political viewpoint. I use "Latinx" as an inclusive term that allows for a nonbinary gender expression. I identify myself as Latinx since I experience a queer identity that has been culturally influenced by being born in Mexico City and spending a large part of my adulthood in Chicago and Brooklyn in the United States. This hybridity has made me reconsider my identity, which has no single origin but has been rendered by my experience of multiplicity.

As closing remarks, I reflect on the expression “decolonial soundwalking” not only to offer an approach that can encompass agencies outside of the hegemonic parameters that characterize soundwalking as a method but also to foreground Indigenous subjectivities and practices or experiences that are situated in the Global South.

## Soundwalking Departures

My experience as a long-time resident of South Chicago, Illinois, stimulated my interest in questioning how we can hear the process of displacement and segregation in a city. I first experienced a soundwalk at the Pullman Museum in Illinois in 2011. The soundwalk, created by sound artist Eric Leonardson, occurred near an old railroad station and opened a new dimension in my artistic research on the concept of *dérive* (drifting). My previous approximation of walking was influenced by the work of the avant-garde group Situationist International, led by Guy Debord. This movement enacted psychogeography and *dérive* as methods of inquiry and critical exploration of how the urban environment shapes our behaviour.<sup>3</sup> The psychogeography and *dérive* were meaningful tools for my practice regarding the spatial connections of our subjectivity as individuals inhabiting the city. This relational dimension was always in connection with my own experience as a Mexican immigrant in Chicago. I sensed that Situationist International’s *dérive* did not include an analysis of the sonic dimension of the language, music, and everyday aural cues that exist in the urban culture of immigrant neighbourhoods. Therefore, the soundwalk prompted me to explore the potential of *dérive* as a tool of analytical embodiment in combination with the aural study of the ongoing gentrification changes in the Mexican immigrant neighbourhoods of Pilsen and Little Village in South Chicago. As a sound artist interested in sensory experiments in ethnography, the soundwalk allowed me to prioritize the sense of hearing and to connect with spatial concerns uniquely.

In various artistic projects conducted with the local communities of Pilsen and Little Village, we explored questions about the connection

between ethnicity, race, and urban segregation. These projects addressed issues such as gentrification, marginalization, and gang violence. I walked alone and with others while using a microphone to record observations multiple times and in different locations. I also used digital cartography and storytelling to contextualize these observations. Through this approach, I gained a deeper understanding of the struggles and realities that Latino neighbourhoods face in this city. As I am an immigrant, my connection with these communities intimately linked me with the Mexican diaspora, making the situated auditory component of my research even more vital.

In addition, the field of acoustic ecology, as I elaborate in the next section, provided the framework to explore the diverse ways that sound interacts with culture in the Latino and Latinx diaspora in Chicago. Currently, as I am a Latinx immigrant living in Montreal, my projects continue to explore the interactions between sound and culture in public spaces. My research is centred on how feminist collectives use gender politics as a tool to express their agency. Specifically, *Xeno Walk* combines acoustic ecology and gender studies through collective soundwalking, understood as a performative action.

## Acoustic Ecology and Soundwalking as Tools of Engagement

Acoustic ecology is an interdisciplinary area of study developed by composer and sound scholar R. Murray Schafer, who led the World Soundscape Project (WSP) research cohort at Simon Fraser University in the 1970s. The WSP group of scholars—Barry Truax, Peter Hose, Bruce Davis, Howard Broomfield, and Hildegard Westerkamp—produced a series of aural research projects primarily focused on studying and recording different human and nonhuman sound ecologies. In his seminal study *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*,<sup>4</sup> Schafer adopted the term “soundscape”—the main concept of his early approach to acoustic ecology—to describe all of the combinations of sounds present in our environment.<sup>5</sup> The WSP team published a series of articles that

discussed its methodological tools for recording and listening to soundscapes.<sup>6</sup> The soundwalk was a tool proposed for acute aural observations and a grounding method to connect with space. Westerkamp's *A Vancouver Soundwalk* (1973) was one of the first documented and published soundwalks undertaken by the WSP. Including maps, points of reference, and two playing records, *A Vancouver Soundwalk* also featured a series of questions and aural prompts that helped the walkers' ears to develop an aural relationship with the space.<sup>7</sup> In a 2012 article, "Soundwalk Practice: An Agent for Change?"<sup>8</sup> Westerkamp highlights the importance of location and context for the situated experience of soundwalking as an analytical tool of aural and social interactions. According to Westerkamp, soundwalking can be approached as a methodology that informs and builds the analysis of local soundscapes. The guiding questions of *A Vancouver Soundwalk* aimed to link the listener's relationship to his or her cultural context, highlighting the intersubjectivity of the individuals and their location. Based on this approximation, she was commissioned by the WSP to develop a series of soundwalks for the all-day Noise Workshop at Simon Fraser University in 1973, which opened an opportunity to reflect on noise pollution and bylaws enacted in Vancouver at that time. The walks invited architects, lawyers, and most importantly, city residents to join these walking aural reflections on noise pollution and the city's legislation. This series of soundwalks was the opening point to reflect on the relationship of political agency through an active exercise of collective listening that involved engaging with localities while strolling. Westerkamp's soundwalk techniques, including her innovative sound recording edited for radio broadcast, influenced my approach to soundscape composition. Hildegard Westerkamp's connection of acoustic ecology and self-reflexivity is rooted in her exercise of soundwalking with a structured methodology, one that departs from the positionality of a listener and sound editor of the soundscape.

Another important method in my work is that of listening to what composer Andra McCartney has termed "spatial ecotones."<sup>9</sup> For McCartney, ecotones amplify spatial codes through the sounds of social and

biological interactions between multiple ecologies. While planning, developing, and geolocating *Xeno Walk*, I adopted the ecotone method to detect the overlapping spatial and social dynamics that existed in terms of gender and pedestrian accessibility. How gendered relationships exist in space can be heard more clearly when we listen to ecotones. I noticed the aural landscape of the skateboards, mainly performed by male skaters using the Van Horne Skatepark at the intersection of Rosemont and Saint Laurent Boulevards. The skateboard soundscape acoustically surrounded the audio walk and overlapped with interviews of female, nonbinary, and queer activists working with tactical urbanism in the public space. They shared strategies that used sound production and street art as tools of political agency. The amplification was possible through several wireless speakers linked to the mobile phone AR app Echoes.<sup>10</sup> The four soundwalks that constitute *Xeno Walk* were presented as part of the festival Pop Montreal 2021 and produced by Undefined Radio, a sound collective that commissions local artists to develop sonic-based artworks as part of its series *Calling Planet Earth!*<sup>11</sup>

### Walking Collectively as a Form of Activism

On 19 and 20 June 2021, I walked for the first time with six participants to determine the route for this iteration of *Xeno Walk* (fig. 2.1). Three members of Collages Féministes Montréal and the same number of other eager friends gathered at the Van Horne Skatepark for the experiment. All participants felt overwhelmed and stressed due to the noise and male-dominated presence at the meeting point. The loud sounds of cars, trains, and elevated highways added to their discomfort. Therefore, we agreed that amplifying feminist activists' voices in the area could provide an aural contrast to the male-dominated soundscape present in the skateboard park.

We carried out our initial test for the AR walking experience using a single Bluetooth speaker. The soundtracks' contents comprised interviews with Viv Corringham and with members of Collages Féministes Montréal, Collages Féminicides Paris, and the sound collective #VIVAS,





2.1 Postcard for *Xeno Walk*, 2021, with instructions to activate the augmented reality walk and the geolocation of the walks.

and the soundtracks were geolocated in the space. The interviews focused on feminist methodologies of activism, collective production, and public space from an artistic and political perspective. In total, the project consisted of ninety-four AR sounds, each featuring a different mix of the interviews and of music soundtracks by the collective #VIVAS and by Viv Corringham.

Unfortunately, the AR sound mixes were drowned out by the noise of heavy traffic and the skateboarders on Saint Laurent Boulevard. To make the AR sound mixes more audible, we decided to use several speakers and to hold the walk at night in order to revive and embrace the nighttime as a woman's right. The audio walk considered the sound amplification as an emancipatory gesture to claim our freedom. Many feminist groups

have organized night walks in the past, such as the Claiming the Night movement, which started in London and New York City in the late 1970s. In the interview for *Xeno Walk*, Viv Corringham spoke about her experience of participating in this pioneer feminist movement.<sup>12</sup> Thus the audio walk created a multigenerational approach that included contemporary and past experiences. This multi-intergenerational framework situates the political urban interventions by Collages Féministes Montréal and by Collages Féminicides Montréal are part of the legacy of collective and emancipatory nighttime militancy.<sup>13</sup>

Although the project attempted to steer clear of a gender binary perspective in urban interventions, the feedback and observations from those who participated in the walk highlighted a disputed realm within the subcultures of street art. Most taggers, muralists, and graffiti artists in Montreal are white and male. Street artists who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour are not sufficiently represented in the city, leading to the sidelining of political artworks produced by minority groups. Still, there are some female, nonbinary, and queer graffiti and wheat-paste crews in the location that we chose for *Xeno Walk*. The messages that they convey through street art are powerful, impactful, and focused on decolonization and anti-racism.<sup>14</sup> I revisit this argument later in this chapter, considering my personal experience. *Xeno Walk* was intentionally situated in an area where a gendered presence was noticeable and where pedestrian accessibility was compromised. Its purpose was to highlight how city planning affects social interactions and spatial limitations. By exploring different landscapes and soundscapes, the project highlighted how marginalized identities assert themselves in public spaces. It aimed to challenge the soundscape of the male-dominated skateboard park, an intersection with heavy traffic, a lack of accessible and lighted pedestrian sidewalks, and an abundance of graffiti and taggers' signatures. My main objective was to juxtapose the narratives of the wheat-paste activists of Collages Féministes Montréal, Collages Féminicides Montréal, and Collages Féminicides Paris to challenge and highlight how modern urban infrastructures exclude gender, class, and able-bodied minorities.

To emphasize the dialogue between the aural content and the street as a scenography in *Xeno Walk*, both Collages Féministes Montréal and Collages Féminicides Montréal walk together at night to find the perfect spot to glue their wheat-paste collages on walls. They use walking to sense and choose the most suitable location based on visibility, symbolic relevance, and safety for the group while putting up the collages. Walking and talking about our personal experiences as women, queer, and nonbinary inhabitants in Montreal has helped me to understand the city's urban infrastructure and street surveillance system. Talking, sharing, and communal care are thus vital exercises during the execution of wheat-paste collages. *Xeno Walk* puts forward the relational knowledge of collective walking and the situated experiences of activists taking to the streets as a form of protest.<sup>15</sup>

We kept these methodologies in mind when selecting the walking routes, which included the Van Horne Skatepark, the Rosemont Boulevard pedestrian walkway, and Champs des Possibles, a community-led green space that lacks public illumination at night. These places are inhabited mostly by men, tainting the space as masculine and thus threatening those who do not identify as such (fig. 2.2). Each walk had a different sound design associated with the surrounding soundscape, the spatial relation with gender in space, and the interview's narrative. During the soundwalks, members of the public could share their thoughts and engage in dialogue at specific stops along the way. This approach allowed for open discussion regarding the topics presented in the narratives. The topics were linked to freedom of expression, forms of collectivity, and political agency in the streets. These moments of reflection allow us to hear a diverse range of experiences that tackle the concept of gender violence and its connection to walking and enacting political demonstrations.

In this regard, Judith Butler's essay "Gender Politics and the Right to Appear" (2015) was an important source for this research-creation project, especially when I delved into the meaning of collective walking as a political alliance. Butler describes the concept of "we" as a collective body that voices, in a spatial manner, the challenges of exclusion experienced



2.2 *Xeno Walk* at Champs des Possibles, Montreal, 2021, with a wheat-paste collage created for the augmented reality walk.

under oppression. Butler defines the performative actions of talking and walking in the public space as acts of resistance and solidarity:

Each “I” brings the “we” along as he or she enters or exits that door, finding oneself in an unprotected enclosure or exposed out there on the street. We might say that there is a group, if not an alliance, walking there, too, whether or not they are anywhere to be seen. It is, of course, a singular person who walks there, who takes the risk of walking there, but it is also the social category that traverses that particular gait and walk, that singular movement in

the world; and if there is an attack, it targets the individual and the social category at once.<sup>16</sup>

As Butler points out, walking has the potential of emancipation through political enunciation while embodying a common experience in collectivity. Through my experience of walking and planning the *Xeno Walk* project with Collages Féministes Montréal, I gained a better understanding of the complexities of a soundwalk's organization. Specifically, I learned about the challenges of dealing with differences in race, ethnicity, cultural background, and social class while enacting emancipatory practices of street art and tactical urbanism. The main question raised during the walk pertained to the fact that some individuals are more susceptible to being racially targeted by the police, resulting in their voices being less visible and audible.

### Insider-Outsider, Feminist Initiatives and the Conflict of Difference

As someone who identifies as Latinx, I found the subaltern culture in Montreal to be complex and unfamiliar. I was unaware of either the intricate layers involved in the settler relationship with Indigenous nations in Canada or the colonial conflict between France and the United Kingdom in Tiohtià:ke, located in unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory. Facts and experiences learned through my participation in the political actions of Collages Féministes Montréal influenced the production of *Xeno Walk*.

*Xeno Walk's* first iteration was developed during an artist residency at the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal as part of the exhibition *Ruido de papel/Paper Noise/Bruit de papier* in 2021.<sup>17</sup> I proposed to transform the gallery into an open studio and meeting point for members of Collages Féministes Montréal and Collages Féminicides Montréal. The space was used to craft letters for the wheat-paste actions and to discuss the collaged actions. We also created a communal map to locate the collages that we pasted in Montreal. The gallery was adapted as a

studio for creating and showcasing animations and videos that encouraged discussions on intersectional feminism. These conversations involved reflections on our experiences of race, ethnicity, and gender discrimination in patriarchal societies.<sup>18</sup> Throughout this process, the SBC Gallery was adapted and transformed weekly by the interaction with members of these collectives.

Actively collaborating with *Collages Féministes Montréal* helped me to understand the additional challenges of making art, addressing political demands, and communicating in foreign languages.<sup>19</sup> Most of the members of both this collective and its sister collective *Collages Féminicides Montréal* are immigrants from France. French was the main language for organizational and political statements in both collectives. During my two years collaborating with them, I was the only member from South America. Therefore, Spanish and other languages were not considered in the internal organization—even though there were actions that placed Spanish collages in solidarity with the feminist slogan #NiUnaMenos as well as a few other initiatives from Latin America. Both collectives in Montreal make decisions in a democratic way through online platforms, such as a cloud-based instant-messaging app. They use virtual voting to decide on the design, date, time, and location of their collages. They also use text messages to prepare for the action, such as discussing the painting of the letters and the purpose of the action. However, this virtual communication misses the opportunity to build personal connections with new and existing members or to engage in broader political discussions about issues that affect the many communities in the city whose members are not fluent in the two official languages, English and French, or whose members do not have access to these digital platforms. This reliance on digital technology and dominant languages excludes existing and potential members from a meaningful discussion of the actions organized.

Moreover, since the *Collages Féministes Montréal*'s wheat-paste collages heavily rely on linguistic codes, the act of visualizing gender violence framed from a Western perspective narrows and excludes other feminisms and experiences of oppression. Therefore, it is critical to reflect on how

anti-colonial and anti-racist activism can be achieved in a way that departs from the subjectivity of a homogenous group whose members share a similar culture, age, ethnicity, race, able-bodied status, and class. It is also essential to consider whom these messages target. Most of these collages are in middle-class francophone and anglophone neighbourhoods. This fact was evident while creating the communal map of collages at the SBC Gallery. During the map installation process, members of the collective and I realized that most wheat-paste collages were located in Montreal's central and northeast metro areas. The messages turned into insular actions, narrowing their message to women and LGBTQ2+ audiences living or working in these locations. Nevertheless, the collages in connection with activist rallies had an intentional placement, considering their proximity to street marches, as well as their intervention in the facade of an organization or institution in response to a historical or political event.

Also, Collages Féministes Montréal's membership is mainly comprised of Canadian citizens or persons from European countries who hold a regular migratory status. Therefore, being in the front line comes from the solidarity and alliance that members exercise when they absorb the risk of placing these statements on the walls, which according to some members, as one confided to me, requires that "they enact their privilege and invisibility to pass as a white woman." While exercising this activity as a racialized immigrant, I asked myself whether it was worth taking this risk and being deported or even having a criminal record that would affect my student visa. At that time, I did not understand the magnitude of the implications until I witnessed members being violently arrested and fined by the police, which happened when I was part of both collectives. Montreal police arrested a few members of Collages Féminicides Montréal, giving them a fine of up to \$1,200 per individual. The combined total was so high that the collective had to do a public campaign to pay the fines of all arrested members.<sup>20</sup> These high-risk factors prevent communities whose members are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour from participation in these actions due to the extreme legal sanctions for migrant,

Indigenous, and Black populations that experience police violence and racial targeting in Montreal.

Regarding international solidarity with the Global South's gender violence and political initiatives, the activist actions of *Collages Féministes Montréal* are mostly, but not exclusively, based on information taken from mainstream media reporting on the political campaigns of feminist activist movements. At the local level, the collective engages and allies with feminist filmmakers and with activists from Indigenous movements, sex workers centres, local grassroots organizations, and LGBTQ2+ communities, among others. Most sentences for the collages are created from group discussions that crystalize personal opinions on the political subject (fig. 2.3). Nevertheless, in some instances, phrases and slogans from these allied groups are shared and sent directly to the group to be placed on the walls. Sometimes, these actions are organized through workshops and in-person gatherings with these organizations, artists, and activist movements. On these occasions, I witnessed and participated in meaningful dialogues among participants and members of the collective, generating solidarity while discussing and learning about their political reasoning in connection with the locations where these collages would be placed.

In her essay "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation" (2012), scholar Clare Hemmings elaborates on the concept of "affective solidarity" as an act of engagement to advocate for "affective dissonance."<sup>21</sup> This action goes beyond identity politics based on cultural and gender similarities to embrace differences in opinions, culture, and ideologies that are implicit in class, race, and ethnicity. Hemming's "affective dissonance" challenges the simple act of empathy as a privileged way of connecting through the complexity of diversity, which distinguishes "womanhood" from "feminism." Regarding this distinction, in the early 1980s, bell hooks began to question how "sorority" and "womanhood" were used as elements of gender-based solidarity to fight the systemic problems of white supremacy and patriarchy, understood as monolithic forms of oppression. According to hooks, a sorority based on women's everyday oppressions and victimization by patriarchy is a dam-





2.3 Collage intervention by Collages Féministes Montréal for the march against gender violence in Montreal, 2021.

aging concept for the feminist movement. First, as women, we do not have the same experiences of oppression since our class, ethnicity, race, and citizenship status differ, so our struggles are unequal. hooks then proposed constructing a sisterhood based on dialogue, one that embraced the conflict and dissonances that come with speaking and learning from each other through critical pedagogies.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it was essential for me, as a militant in these collectives, to discuss the necessity of decentring self-experience and talking to others as part of the intersectional process of listening while enacting activism.

As part of the *Xeno Walk* interview with two members of the Argentinian sound-based collective #VIVAS, it became clear that they use critical pedagogies to promote feminism. They shared their insights on collaboration strategies that involve sonic production and learning processes. Their approach is based on an affective relationship that is formed while producing performance and sound workshops, with a focus on reflecting on gender violence. These activities opened a dialogue through their

embodied activism in the 8M movement in Latin America. Consolidating sound field recordings and a communal database is the main source of their music production. Sound editing involves several phases of exchange among collective members to concretize the music tracks and the dissemination of their artwork. As part of the *Xeno Walk*, their words and music were geolocated at Entrepôt 77, a multi-user music venue where many music festivals and self-organized cultural events happen throughout the year in Montreal. The selection of spaces in relation to the sound interviews was based on the topics approached and on the themes that collectives and artists spoke about. For example, Viv Corringham's interview about the issues of inaccessibility in urban spaces was situated on the narrow and only sidewalk of the Rosemont overpass, thus embodying her comments on urban space and gender.

### Soundwalking While Being a Latinx in Tiohtià:ke

In my experience of living in Montreal as an immigrant Latinx, I learned that acoustic ecology is still framed by the theoretical and practical legacy of Schafer's World Soundscape Project. Still fundamental and influential are the works of composers Hildegard Westerkamp and Andra McCartney, including their practical and theoretical approaches to sound, music, and walking, which incorporate methodologies from "deep listening," a term coined by musician and composer Pauline Oliveros.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, I am aware that amplifying these perspectives creates singularity in these topics and methodologies. It reproduces a very specific aural regime of sonic practices and themes.<sup>24</sup> Even with the wide range of emerging sound AR platforms, soundwalks continue to have similar formats and are oriented toward exploring "natural" soundscapes and the "cultural legacy" of the city. The artists invited and commissioned to develop these types of soundwalks in Montreal are primarily white francophones and anglophones. Their themes reflect a single dimension of aesthetics and methodologies of listening and sounding, offered by cultural and artistic institutions producing and funding soundwalks as an exercise of passive and

contemplative entertainment. The fact that these artistic practices are offered and located mostly in the downtown area of Montreal geographically restricts the attendance and participation of immigrant and Indigenous populations who live in peripheral neighbourhoods. Most artistic walking practices lack engagement with critical race theory and, along these lines, with the immigrant and Indigenous experience in this region. In this regard, the soundwalking practices that I attended rarely reflected on the political dimension of conflict and segregation in the city's public space and Canada's colonial settlement. This marginalization also speaks volumes about the deficient cultural and public infrastructure of the systemic segregation that racial and class minorities experience.

In 2023, responding to this absence and building from my soundwalking practices concerned with framing diasporic experiences in the Global North, I produced the radio-based soundwalk *Resilience, midnight steps and the moon as guide from A to Z*, in collaboration with the self-organized group Brujas and Colectiva Tribu. Both clusters are constituted of first- and second-generation immigrant Latinas and Latinx living in Montreal.<sup>25</sup> The nocturnal soundwalk was streamed live through Radio Insomnia, direct from Lachine Canal from 12:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m.<sup>26</sup> The main goal of the soundwalk was to approach an embodied listening practice, making audible the situated experiences carried by Latina and Latinx immigrants at nighttime in Montreal's public space.

The instructions for the night soundwalk were compiled through an online form that asked participants to contribute performative sound prompts as well as ideas for the walk title. I also asked them to bring an acoustic object that signified connections with their homeland and their current immigrant identity. This soundwalk was not open to the public since the main goal was to sonically amplify the underrepresented experiences through oral histories and acoustic performances—to hear Latinx and Latinas as they guided the microphones toward their “feminist ears,” as defined by writer and scholar Sarah Ahmed,<sup>27</sup> and intervened in a radio frequency as their own space. Their narratives were mainly in Spanish and Portuguese. However, the soundwalk allowed participants to speak

in a language that made them feel more comfortable and connected. This walking relational practice, based on feminist listening methodologies, invites us to reflect on the axes of gender violence in patriarchal societies. From that context, we approached their migratory experiences to discuss the paradigms of existing between Global Souths and Global Norths—both of which are expressions also understood, beyond their geopolitical connotations, as referring to networks that overlap.<sup>28</sup> I pay particular attention to who listens to these stories, who receives the message, and what participants gain from the walking experience. These conceptual and ethical relationships are fundamental in developing sound and decolonial walking practices conceived against the grain of aural regimes and aesthetic models established by Western canons.

I came to understand my soundwalkings as decolonial. A “decolonial soundwalking”<sup>29</sup> concretizes its models and agencies of autonomy outside of hegemonic parameters, imagining and understanding the experiences of walking from the perspective of the situated realities in the Global South and from the perspective of Indigenous subjectivities and practices. These practices model strategies in dialogue with their region by establishing figures of emancipation and protest and by claiming their social movements and gender expressions. Seeking plurality in the “ways of doing” these walking events and diversifying the public who attend are essential. Therefore, creating alliances and political solidarities ensures collaborations outside of the frameworks of academia and the culture industry by considering walking activism as an essential extension of my artwork. Walking in a group allows relational knowledge to open embodied dialogues and seeks communal ways to embrace the public space in order to achieve political enunciation.

Producing *Xeno Walk* through a collaborative model helped me to reframe the meaning of feminist soundwalks. The aim was to create dialogues that considered intersectionality in order to acknowledge the different dimensions of critical listening positionality implicit in our sexuality, gender, class, ethnicity, race, and age. My reframing builds from the multiple and diverse ranges of feminist approaches coming from #VIVAS,

Viv Corringham, *Collages Féministes Montréal*, *Collages Féminicides Montréal*, and *Collages Féminicides Paris*. In conclusion, the main objective of producing the *Xeno Walk* was to provide an immersive experience that involved listening, embodying sounds, sharing stories, and exploring site-specific relationships in and with space. In each collective walk that I have developed since *Xeno Walk*, I have contemplated and explored methods that embody a decolonial and politically aware stance in the context of feminist activism.

## Acknowledgments

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## NOTES

- 1 This project is part of my doctoral research in the interdisciplinary Humanities PhD Program at Concordia University.
- 2 Viv Corringham, "Shadow-Walks," <https://vivcorringham.org/shadow-walks.html>; <https://perma.cc/G37L-Z5AM>.
- 3 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," trans. Ken Knabb, *Les lèvres nues*, no. 9 (1956), <https://www.sionline.recherche-editions.cddc.vt.edu/si/theory.html>; <https://perma.cc/Q84K-V3KF>.
- 4 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Destiny Books, 1977).
- 5 The term "soundscape" was coined by urban scholar Michael Southworth, "The Sonic Environment of Cities," *Environment and Behavior* 1, no. 1 (1969): 49–70.
- 6 Schafer, *Soundscape*.
- 7 Hildegard Westerkamp, "A Vancouver Soundwalk," in *The Vancouver Soundscape*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (World Soundscape Project, 1973), 71.
- 8 Hildegard Westerkamp, "Soundwalk Practice: An Agent for Change?" in *Proceedings of the Global Composition Conference on Sound, Media, and the Environment*

- (Hochschule Darmstadt, 2012), [https://hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writings-by/?post\\_id=68&title=soundwalk-practice:-an-agent-for-change;https://perma.cc/6Z2J-UPR4](https://hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writings-by/?post_id=68&title=soundwalk-practice:-an-agent-for-change;https://perma.cc/6Z2J-UPR4).
- 9 Andra McCartney, "Ethical Questions About Working with Soundscapes," *Organised Sound* 21, no. 2 (2016): 160–65.
  - 10 To listen to the interviews, download the Echoes app at <https://explore.echoes.xyz/collections/uXyzohUPuK3jEdqJ>; <https://perma.cc/XS7V-A8BC>.
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  - 12 Viv Corringham, "XenoWalk Day1," video, 3:55 mins, *Vimeo*, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/656324340>.
  - 13 Corringham, "XenoWalk Day1."
  - 14 On decolonial graffiti, see Mark Ambrose Harris, "'Listen to the Walls': These Indigenous Street Artists Are Converging to Decolonialize Montreal," *CBC Arts*, August 14, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/listen-to-the-walls-these-indigenous-street-artists-are-converging-to-decolonialize-montreal-1.4246376>; <https://perma.cc/PC25-8XC2>.
  - 15 I was able to document the process of placing the collages. This collaboration was one of my first with Collages Féministes Montréal. To learn more about the first iteration of this project, see Amanda Gutiérrez, "Paper Noise (Video)," <http://www.amandagutierrez.net/eng/portfolio/paper-noise-2/>; <https://perma.cc/MQ3S-W6M4>.
  - 16 Judith Butler, "Gender Politics and the Right to Appear," in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 51–52.
  - 17 On this exhibition, see SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, "Ruido de papel/Paper Noise/Bruit de papier," <https://www.sbcgallery.ca/paper-noise-performance?lang=en>; <https://perma.cc/7VRN-6LE3>.
  - 18 On this creative process, see Lola Baraldi, "Collage, Self and City: The Wandering Steps of Paper Noise/Bruit du papier/Ruido de papel," SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, <https://www.sbcgallery.ca/artiste-en-r%C3%A9sidence-amanda?lang=en>; <https://perma.cc/LD59-UGDJ>.
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- 26 This walk was presented as part of the group exhibition *Sociability of Sleep* (2023), presented at Agora du Coeur des Sciences, Université du Québec à Montréal.
- 27 “Feminist ears” is a term coined by Ahmed to encourage forms of feminist listening that go together with the call to complain in order to amplify the collective demands against patriarchal oppressions. Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Duke University Press, 2021).

- 28 On different readings of the expression “Global South,” see Sinah Theres Kloß, “The Global South as Subversive Practice: Challenges and Potentials of a Heuristic Concept,” *The Global South* 11, no. 2 (2017): 1–17.
- 29 Amanda Gutiérrez, “Aural Border Thinking as a Decolonial Soundwalking Methodology,” in *Soundwalking: Through Time, Space, and Technologies*, ed. Jacek Smolicki, 96–115 (Focal, 2023).



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Sur les toits Havane: Performing Latinxité at/from Home in Cuba-Québec Film Productions*

*Darien Sánchez Nicolás*

To explore Québécois-Cuban relationships, one must simultaneously delve into the historical ties between Canada and Cuba. The inclusion of Canada in this seemingly bilateral portrait comes from the acknowledgment that it is always already susceptible to the influence of external players, both state and non-state-related and acting at varying levels, who have a say in the sovereign decisions of Cuba and Québec. By extension, this chapter's cinematic associations and the ensemble of mutual interfaces between Cuba and Québec are localized and predominantly private in scope, negotiated inside and outside of national borders, affected by economic policies, and characterized by diplomatic and cultural aspects that are globally imagined. These links are often also dependent on the political stance of each Canadian administration. Historically, they have swayed from Liberal leaders' attitudes of "constructive engagement" to the "benign neglect" of Conservative leaders and their alignment or lack thereof with Washington's muscled foreign policies toward Cuba.<sup>1</sup>

In economic terms, Cuba constitutes Canada's second-largest trading partner and market among nations in the Caribbean and Central America. According to the Government of Canada, the total trade amounts to over a billion dollars annually, mainly in rubrics like agriculture, mining, and food industries.<sup>2</sup> Under the shadows of official figures, there were more discreet economic investments in the real estate sector and hospitality

enterprises.<sup>3</sup> These entrepreneurial ventures were and are routinely portrayed by Radio-Canada as examples of Cuba's raw potential for untapped resources and infinite investment possibilities. Although federal and provincial governments are aware of these cases, neither offers these enterprises legal assistance or incentives. These nonstate actors become paralegal agents in Cuba, employing local workforces and implementing grassroots alliances with other private enterprises in their environments. For example, Jean Fugère, a francophone journalist turned hostel owner in Havana, confirmed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, he kept subsidizing his employees' salaries in Havana despite not having clients due to closed borders.

As for the specific presence of Québec in Cuba, since the inauguration of the Bureau du Québec à La Havane in 2017, cultural collaboration has become a leading indicator of soft power diplomacy. Treaties like the Déclaration Commune de Coopération Québec-Cuba ensure bilateral support in areas such as "research, innovation and science, sustainable development, culture, education and instruction."<sup>4</sup> These treaties have magnified Québec's presence in the cultural scene in Cuba, challenging France's place on the island as a historical promoter of francophone culture. A few examples are the establishment of the Muestra de Cine de Québec en Cuba (Québec Film Festival in Cuba) and the fact that Québec and Canada were guests of honour at the 2017 Feria Internacional del Libro de La Habana (Havana's International Book Fair) and at the 2020 Festival Internacional de Documentales Santiago Álvarez in Memoriam.

In light of the recent history of collaboration between Cuba and Québec, particularly in the cultural field, I analyze Québec-based Venezuelan filmmaker and photographer Pedro Ruiz's documentary *Sur les toits Havane* (2019)—titled *Havana, from on High* and *Arriba Habana* in its English and Spanish commercial releases.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, I consider the film's singular use of the domestic environment as an overarching infrastructure, both soft and hard, to further efforts at translocal cultural cooperation. I also discuss its inherent potential as an effective form of cultural diplomacy run by Cuban and Canadian nonstate actors. Through

this analysis, I make a case for the ways that what I call *latinxité* not only takes shape in the stories told in the film but also emerges in its production journey. I argue that *latinxité* is a specific and context-based configuration of the more traditional notion of Hispanic *latinidad* (lat-inhood). More specifically, in this documentary, *latinxité* is represented and negotiated between the individuals featured and the transnational institutions and personal networks involved in its production and circulation. It is a deterritorialized notion that builds on Juana María Rodríguez's idea of "queer *latinidad*," Édouard Glissant's "créolisation," and Antonio Benítez-Rojo's "meta-archipelagos." In Ruiz's film, through the lenses of alternative domesticities, *latinxité* manifests as a complex and multifaceted spectrum with unique Afro-Caribbean, queer, and transnational characteristics.

### Depicting Havana from Above and Below

*Sur les toits Havane* is Pedro Ruiz's fourth feature-length documentary and arguably the one that feels most authentically Cuban due to its theme, the people it follows, and the overall directorial vision (fig. 3.1). It conveys a "Cuban feel"—as vague as this expression might sound. Locals feature prominently, the language used is Cuban Spanish even when foreigners speak, and Cuban issues and debates are the focus. The music used in the documentary also contributes to this insular spirit.

*Sur les toits Havane* was produced by Faits Divers Média,<sup>6</sup> with the support of the Société de Développement Économique des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC), the Canadian Cultural Association, the Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Québec, the Government of Canada, and Post-Moderne, a Montréal post-production and equipment rental company. *Sur les toits Havane* remains to date the most acclaimed film in Faits Divers Média's portfolio. Before its official premiere on May 3, 2019, this independent documentary became an object of interest, celebrated at festivals like Hot Docs (Toronto), Rendez-vous Québec Cinéma (Montréal and Québec City), the Festival Internacional de Cine en Guadalajara



3.1 Film still from Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana, from on High*, 2019.

(Guadalajara, México), the Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena de Indias (Cartagena, Colombia), and the American Documentary and Animation Film Festival (Palm Springs, California), among many others.

After its release in Canadian theatres, *Sur les toits Havane* travelled the film festival circuit worldwide, from Santorini and Rotterdam to Montréal and Mumbai, to name a few. It was awarded Best Cinematography at the American Documentary Film Festival in 2019 and at the Canadian Screen Awards in 2020. In the documentary, tiptoeing around Havana's rooftops, we encounter individuals such as Lala, a sex worker who supports herself and her born-again Christian husband, Roberto, through the illicit sex trade with tourists. There is also Juan, a *babalawo*—high priest of the religion Regla de Osha-Ifá, or Santería—who, from his vantage point on a Cuban *azotea* (rooftop or terrace), has seen the pope, the Castros, and Barack Obama passing by down below, almost at his feet (fig. 3.2).



3.2 Film still from Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana*, from on High, 2019.

Another subject is José, an HIV-positive queer man who has made a shelter of an abandoned freight elevator for his erotic encounters. Throughout the film, these moments of heartwarming sincerity are interwoven with views of a crumbling Havana.

The Cuban capital is shown as a space detached from our habitual horizons and dislodged from geographical references dear to the mainstream foreign gaze. The documentary features the continuity between intimacy and the public, the production of home, and the outward projection of personal skills and sustenance activities as constitutive parts of domestic life. An excellent example of these elements is vividly featured in the documentary through Québec-born Jean Fugère, who owns a hostel called *La Puerta Rosa* (The pink door), an obvious allusion to his queer identity. Jean and his romantic partner, Renier, an Afro-Cuban man, manage their shared household with the same calculations that

go into any touristic venue. They ready their car to transport tourists when the latter need it and intermittently work with the cooperation of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana (Office of the Historian of the City of Havana) to provide their guests with historical tours through the same neighbourhoods from which they extract their resources and hire personnel. As hosts, they also instruct their clients in the ways and flavours of “Cuban life,” as Jean has repeatedly explained in his interviews with Radio-Canada.<sup>7</sup> These neighbourhoods’ seemingly invisible houses utilize homemaking, domesticity, and their most intimate identities as features that link them to local, national, and international entities beyond the humble confines of their derelict windows and doors. In this sense, they develop transnational networks deployed in opposition to dominant or mainstream forms of transnationalism.

*Sur les toits Havane* zeroes in on housework and maintenance as a communal epic of human resilience and quasi-utopian worldmaking from the margins. Most of the homes that we see in the documentary are familial units reliant on nontraditional forms of management, where economic enterprising, affective and sexual relations, and domestic activities are juxtaposed with one another (fig. 3.3). We attend to minute details of everyday life in today’s Havana through interviews and observational scenes. The documentary also displays a twofold relationship with domesticity. On the one hand, it revolves around the struggles of the film’s interlocutors to secure and maintain living spaces.

On the other hand, the documentary relies heavily on homemaking for its transnational production. The film’s original idea indicates the cooperative links between Ruiz’s documentary and Fugère’s hospitality business La Puerta Rosa. The documentary results from a multisided dialogue between individuals about Cuban livelihood and domesticity. Their ideas about insular homemaking found expression in the documentary as conceived by Ruiz and its producer, Arantza Maldonado. As Ruiz told Caroline Montpetit in *Le Devoir* in April 2019, it was while working on his film *Philémon chante Habana* (2012) that he discovered the “canopy” of “terraces suspended above urban life” in the city.<sup>8</sup>



3.3 Film still from Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana*, from *on High*, 2019.

Fugère's interest in the sprawling world of Havana's rooftops came from the cultural work associated with his hostel and with his unfinished literary project about the island, a novel-memoir that he has been writing for many years in Cuba. In this memoir, a chapter is devoted entirely to Fugère's infatuation with life at the highest points of the city's buildings. Through his description of these spaces, one perceives further the conflicted attitudes and feelings of locals and foreigners toward the surrounding azoteas. One of the passages reads, "During my first stay in Havana, in the early 2000s, I lived on a terrace on the 6th floor, and when I told Havana's inhabitants where I lived, people's faces got longer. The terrace did not have the best reputation ... Today, we fight to have access to it, but at the time, nobody would have lifted a finger to have one."<sup>9</sup>

Since its inauguration in 2016, La Puerta Rosa has welcomed Ruiz as a tourist, friend, and casual visitor on several occasions. Looking out from

the magnificent terrace atop the house, Fugère showed Ruiz and his team the richness of the built and human landscapes included in the guided tours that he offered his clients. He also generously shared unpublished manuscripts about Cuba with the filmmaker and the human networks that he had built around his *casa de alquiler* (rental house). From then on, director Ruiz and producer Maldonado tasked themselves with expanding the contacts and spaces in the documentary, enriched by the friends and acquaintances they had amassed.

From Caracas to Montréal to Havana, *Sur les toits Havane* was born out of transnational and transcultural intellectual and artistic cooperation, not exempt from power-relation dynamics, and catalyzed by successive individual processes of displacement and migration within and around these three cities. Next to the original nucleus of Maldonado, Ruiz, and Fugère, the Venezuelan Canadian sound director René Portillo and the Venezuelan assistant director Gustavo Marcano complemented the professional team coming to Cuba from abroad. On the other side, a massive accomplishment of the film was its development of job opportunities for neighbours of the spaces within the documentary and for the employees of La Puerta Rosa in different capacities. Víctor Linen, a local musician and resident of the former Hotel Bristol, served as field producer or fixer. Also credited as caterers were the hostel's chambermaid/cook, Asilady Díaz Ibáñez, and its general manager, Reynaldo Pérez Sueiro.

In the documentary, domesticity catalyzes a transcultural artistic conversation that extends from households to the local and the transnational, as I argue in the following sections. These intimate and public intersections are generated through the complex interactions of everyone featured and involved in the film. Out of the convergence of creative dialogues around domestic practices and microhistories of the production of home, an instance of "minor transnationalism"<sup>10</sup> or "transnationalism from below"<sup>11</sup> also emerges as a site for the production and performance of *latinxité*. However, before I can explain what I understand by *latinxité*, I briefly unravel the relations between minor transnationalism and



transnationalism from below and the place for domesticity that remains unexplored in this strand of cultural criticism.

### Sites of Transnationalism from Below: Invisible Houses, Domesticity, and Home

Early instances of transnational cultural critique and studies on globalization focused on large centres of economic power and sociocultural production. Examples can be found in Michael Peter Smith's attention to ethnicity as a transnational urban space of sociality,<sup>12</sup> in Arjun Appadurai's -scapes, including ethnoscapescapes, mediascapes, and technoscapes,<sup>13</sup> in Homi Bhabha's positing of global selves that perform "counternarratives of the nation,"<sup>14</sup> and in Saskia Sassen's examinations of global cities and their distinctions as "third world" sites of production and "first world" spaces of social reproduction.<sup>15</sup> Sassen, nonetheless, already hints at a new line of thinking when she affirms that the "household [is] a key analytic category to understanding global economic processes and ... new forms of cross-border solidarity, experiences of membership and identity formation."<sup>16</sup> I believe that the domestic space starts to receive systematic attention as an essential site of the production and reproduction of transnational flows with authors who focus on the interstitial aspects of transnationalism, like Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo,<sup>17</sup> Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein,<sup>18</sup> and Alan Smart and Josephine Smart. As the latter warn, "The global and the local intersect within households, within daily life, within neighbourhoods, and coping with the complex texture and trajectories of these interactions is a challenge which ethnographic perspectives have great 'competitive advantages' in addressing."<sup>19</sup>

In contemporary Québécois film and media, analyses of transnationalism have been particularly prolific in underscoring the tensions, if not clashes, between global factors and nationalist ideations given Québec's particular stance concerning nation building and identity. As Mercédès Baillargeon and Karine Bertrand posit, "In the contemporary Quebec

context, transnationalism then becomes a concept to question how the national framework retains its relevance as a tool to represent ‘imaginary communities,’ to use the expression of Benedict Anderson, formed through the prism of nationalism.”<sup>20</sup> The dichotomy between transnationality and the ebbs and flows of Québec’s nationalism is thus a common thread that persistently finds its place, one way or another, in different accounts of this Canadian province’s film and media transnationalism. In discussions of different media events, productions, and policies, the tension between the national and the transnational in Québec becomes an epistemological determinant. For instance, consider the extensive scholarship on the Hollywood exploits of Québécois filmmakers like Jean-Marc Vallée<sup>21</sup> and Denis Villeneuve,<sup>22</sup> the digitization of televisual formats and platforms,<sup>23</sup> and the “peripheral” criticism of the imperialist centrality of North American anglophone hegemony and French continental universalism in Denys Arcand’s poetics.<sup>24</sup> These Hollywood-oriented, more corporate or mainstream forms of transnationalism contrast with the transnationalism from below at the centre of Ruiz’s filmmaking, which instead prioritizes everyday life, domesticity, informal economies, and affective relations.

Drawing from the scholarship on domestic spaces as sites of production and transnational flows mentioned before, I understand *Sur les toits Havane* as an instance of transnationalism from below, propelled forward by converging creative dialogues around domestic practices and localized histories of the production of home. This documentary seems ideally positioned as an example to investigate the varied nature of what we know as minor transnationalism or transnationalism from below in cultural, economic, and political criticism. This conceptual choice is not only a matter of size and scale or a reference to the secondary relevance that dealings between Québec and Cuba might have. Instead, it is informed by an attention to transnationality as a global phenomenon of personal and local implications despite the traditional intellectual concentration on larger centres of economic power, financial accumulation, and ethnocultural production in analyses of the “transnational.”

Moreover, in contrast to the traditional ideation of the domestic as merely the space of the private, I link together accounts of households and domesticity as spaces of transnational production and reproduction—discursive, material, and even social—to propose a vision of domesticity as equally linked to the public realm. That is why my sociohistorical portrait of Cuban-Québécois bilateral relations moves constantly between macro-historical matters, like economic deals and diplomacy, and microhistories of the personal, domestic bridges between the two. Finally, with the extended space devoted to the dynamics of cultural diplomacy between Havana and Québec, this chapter highlights, among other films, *Sur les toits Havane*, an unofficial initiative of cultural diplomacy that I consider a pioneer in engaging transnational cultural production between Québec and the domestic and private sectors of Cuba.

### *Latinxité*: Strategies of Latinx Québécois Film Production

I have decided to use the term *latinxité* to name both the *mixité* (mix) operating in Ruiz's film, which combines, among other "ingredients," Latin American, Cuban, and Québec linguistic politics, histories, and cultures as well as gender neutrality. This francized portmanteau, juxtaposing terms such as Latinx, *mixité*, and *latinidad*, is indebted first to Juana María Rodríguez's queering of the latter concept. For Rodríguez, *latinidad* is an essentially queer category, or at least a concept susceptible to queering. It is a cultural identity beyond national belongings that stresses "'and' over 'is'"<sup>25</sup>—that is, plurality over singularity—as the means to think through "differences." In the cinematic accounts of the babalawo Juan, the Rastafarian Leonardo, the spoken-word poet Omar, and the hostel owner Jean, as well as in the words of the director Ruiz, the producer Maldonado, and other subjects in this inquiry, we can perceive the many layers that comprise an extended elaboration of *latinidad*—which I contend is at once deterritorialized, ramified, queered, and centred on the Afro-Caribbean and Québec in this film's realm. This identity on the move becomes *latinxité*, which is possible through historical and

current minor and mainstream transnational networks between Québec and other countries and regions in Latin America. The *x* encompasses the intersection of multiple identities facing each other as they come together in and around Ruiz's film.

*Sur les toits Havane* portrays *latinxité* through the material aspects of marginalized Cuban domesticities, emphasizing Cuba's Antillean, Afro-Caribbean, and queer facets while also conveying Québécois points of view and Québec's essence. As a concept, *latinxité* relies on the historical dependence on the strategic interests that Canada, Québec, and Latin American nations have perceived in their mutual relationships. Historians such as Maurice Demers, Geneviève Dorais, Michel Nareau, and Cynthia Wright, to name a few, have amply analyzed the tactical links established with Latin American countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and México. They have also demonstrated how these bridges have been built around shifting societal values, from Catholic conservatism<sup>26</sup> to leftist proletarian solidarity,<sup>27</sup> while passing through material cultural and literary commonalities.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, they illustrate how these formative moments call for an all-encompassing idea of *latinidad* that is always already negotiated through the punctual engagements of regional ethnicities and countries, of which *latinxité* is a specific configuration whenever francophone Québec is involved.

As Rodríguez writes, "*Latinidad* serves to define a particular geopolitical experience, but it also contains with it the complexities of immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, colour, legal status, class, nation, language, and the *politics of location*."<sup>29</sup> Navigating said politics of location, which is how our lived experience determines the ways that we behave, act, or create, is a constant practice for filmmakers and producers in Québec's Latin American diaspora, as both Ruiz and Maldonado exemplify. Performing *latinxité* sometimes becomes a survival tool for creators from Latin America living in Québec to gain attention and recognition for their work.

Maldonado came to Montréal as a Spanish national of Uruguayan descent. Her introduction to official institutions and local production

houses came about through the unofficial tutelage that she received from the Montréal-based French producer Brigitte Germaine—known for her productions of François Truffaut and Jean Gruault's *Belle époque*, directed by Gavin Millar in 1995, and Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral*, directed by Mouawad in 2004, among others. Despite years of living in the country, her Hispanic migrant identity was remediated in similar pan-American arrangements through triangular leverage by association. In Ruiz's case, the politics of location are amplified by his roots in Venezuela, a country related to the Caribbean's cultural and political history. Ruiz's recurrent cinematic returns to his origins operate as a tangential turn toward the Caribbean region—as exemplified by his documentaries *Animal Tropical à Montréal* (2007), about the Cuban writer and enfant terrible Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, and *La dérive douce d'un enfant de Petit-Goâve* (2009), about Haitian writer Dany Laferrière. These returns were further developed in *Philémon chante Habana* (2012), where Ruiz narrated the insular adventures of singer, composer, and songwriter Philémon Bergeron-Langlois (a.k.a. Philémon Cimon) while he recorded his second album, *Les sessions cubaines* (EGREM, 2010) in Cuba. The chaotic nature of these configurations—what Ruiz refers to as “una especie de magia o de casualidad” (a kind of magic or chance)—has led all of his projects to Cuban shores. However, as he details, his choice of words “magic” and “chance” are metaphors that attempt to conceal the incommensurable enterprise—“una locura ... casi que un acto fantástico” (a crazy ... almost fantastic act)<sup>30</sup>—that it becomes for a “latinoamericano” to finish a feature film in Canada. Despite these circuitous processes, or maybe because of them, both Maldonado and Ruiz insist on these cinematic returns to what Maldonado calls the broadly conceived “mundo latino” that their filmography performs.<sup>31</sup> Ruiz and Maldonado have repeatedly crafted projects that focus on the Latin Caribbean and, more particularly, on Cuba.

The politics of location play out, too, in the funding and circulation strategies of projects like this documentary, or rather in the struggles to secure them. The rhetoric behind the refusal of funding organisms like SODEC bears witness to these politics. For SODEC, a predominantly Latin

American or Latin American diasporic crew working on a documentary that refused to perpetuate the glossy images from Cuba that local and global audiences demand did not seem to align with its international agenda. It instead suggested focusing on President Barack Obama's visit to Cuba. Maldonado recalls,

SODEC turned us down twice. The first time we were turned down, we were told by some comments that Obama had just gone and that we were not talking about Obama's visit. And we just said, "Well, but it is not a film about Obama's visit. It is a film about Cuba, so it has nothing to do with it. It is good that Obama went, but that is not the movie." And [we received] comments like, "Oh, no. Not that film! A film about Cuba is not going to go around the world. It is not going to go to festivals!"<sup>32</sup>

This event emphasizes how much the cultural and political links between Québec and Cuba are mediated by the latter's status and its standing in relationship to the United States or other geopolitical entities. SODEC needed to tie its name to "bigger players" such as Obama and its North American neighbour. As producer Maldonado further comments, provincial and federal arts councils seem to follow different guidelines. After some time working out of their pockets, the filmmakers were sponsored by the Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Québec and later by the Conseil des Arts du Canada. Maldonado clarifies that councils have a more artistic-driven approach to supporting transnational projects. Seemingly, fewer economic calculations and revenue expectations are taken into consideration than with public financing institutions like SODEC and Telefilm Canada. As a case in point, cultural initiatives linking Québec and Canada's Latin American diasporas with Latin America often find support in these local councils at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

Confronted with an initial lack of resources, Maldonado and Ruiz turned to Víctor Linen and Jean Fugère for help as in-the-field "fixers," a term that Maldonado dislikes to some extent because she considers them

first and foremost friends. They served as proxies in the film's preproduction when the filmmakers could not afford the costs of going back and forth between Québec and Cuba. Later, when funding started to flow into the project, the on-the-ground friends acquired other technical labels—fixer, field producer, and musician in the case of Víctor and researcher in the case of Jean—that justified the payments that they would receive for the services already rendered out of affective connections.

Regarding the circulation of the finished documentary, it was up to Maldonado and Ruiz to find pathways in the film festival circuits for a Latinx Québécois documentary about Cuba's hidden sides. Latinx<sup>33</sup> and Latin American film festivals were the first logical venues for *Sur les toits Havane*. Among the festivals that welcomed the documentary and cemented its recognition were the aforementioned Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena de Indias and Festival Internacional de Cine en Guadalajara as well as the Festival Internacional del Cine Pobre de Gibara (Gibara, Cuba), the Chicago Latino Film Festival, the AFI Latin American Film Festival (Silver Spring, Maryland), and CinéLatino (Toulouse, France). Québécois foreign cultural diplomacy has also instrumentalized the latinxité of the documentary. For instance, the documentary was scheduled as part of a special screening in February 2020 during Québecine, the yearly showcase of Québec cinema in México, co-organized by the Cineteca Nacional in the Distrito Federal and by the Delegación General de Québec en México.<sup>34</sup> Amid growing concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of the subject matter of the film, organizers scheduled two open-air, free-of-charge presentations of the film in the gardens of the Cineteca Nacional, an institution located in the quaint historical borough of Coyoacán, which is characterized by an architectural environment not unlike the urban landscape shown in *Sur les toits Havane*. There is some acid irony implied in organizing a free screening in a Latin American country of a documentary by Latinx Québécois filmmakers who struggled to secure funding from Québec's institutions.

To summarize, Latinx Canadian and Latinx Québécois cultural workers' ability to complete their projects relies on the spatial considerations

of their creative labour. This attention to specific geopolitical contexts mainly includes the connections that filmmakers develop with locals in the multiple places where they shoot their films. Success depends in equal parts on the ability to appeal to several territorial imaginations, the successful navigation of muddy cultural policies, and the power to command deterritorialized forces, influences, and affective links.

### Alternative Domesticities and Afro-Caribbeanness at Play in *Sur les toits Havane*

Domesticity is a site critical to understanding the expansive notion and the contested character of what I have called here *latinixité*. The critically queer character of *latinidad* brought forth by Juana María Rodríguez is potentiated by the identities that inhabit the canopy of alternative domesticities present in the documentary. That said, this *latinidad* or *latinixité* is one with a more Afro-Caribbean and Antillean profile than what the Latino/a canon has traditionally allowed for itself. The visual aspects of many of the alternative domestic spaces in the documentary speak to this expanded *latinidad*, which also unravels the epistemologies and ontologies of *cubanía*. Pictures of Ernesto (“Che”) Guevara, Fidel Castro, and José Martí coexist with images of Latin American cultural icons such as Argentine football player Diego Maradona, the Virgin of Guadalupe, reproductions of works by Chilean painter Roberto Matta, Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, who is the patroness of Cuba, and memorabilia of the revolutionary process experienced on the island since the 1950s.

Individuals such as Rastafarian Leonardo and the *babalawo* Juan contribute further to this heterogeneous mosaic of Afro-Caribbean and Antillean accents that reconfigure the physical, linguistic, and cultural borders of the historical entity traditionally designated as Latin America. Leonardo speaks about his adoption and practice of the Rastafarian faith and culture. With anglophone imports, his speech and musical creations speak simultaneously to the ethnocultural vastness of the Antillean and Caribbean space and to the increasing globalization of anglophone popu-



lar culture in Cuba and Latin America. Similarly, Juan closes his testimony with a *moyugba*, a Yoruba prayer in the Regla de Osha-Ifá religion, in front of an altar where his orishas dwell with Catholic icons. He offers cigar smoke and rum to these deities while praying to attract their favour. This activity is punctuated by discussions of the historical manoeuvres of subjugation and forced normalization of Afro-Cuban bodies to conform with the socialist project under construction. “You couldn’t have long hair because it was illegal. You couldn’t have an *espendrun* [Cuban neologism for an afro updo] because it was ... illegal. The police would catch you, and it was ra ra ra to see what you had there.” While speaking these words, he mimics being forcefully pinned before the camera and the hieratic, lifeless gaze of his orishas as though someone has aggressively put fingers into his imaginary afro, searching for illegal substances or contraband.

The allusions to Rastafarian culture should be taken as an indication of how African descendants in Cuba across ideological allegiances construct and perform their identities materially at the crossroads between marginalized ideations of *cubanía* and Blackness and what are Caribbean, Antillean, and Latin American cultural icons. In contrast, Juan’s memories of the violent policing and othering of Black Cuban bodies convey a virtual reckoning with the island’s unresolved racial issues and an acknowledgment of the neglect and effacement of Afro-descendant legacies in the global making of Latinx identities. Furthermore, these memories must globally be regarded as belonging to those that echo “tropisms, in series” and to those “movements in approximate directions” that constitute at once the unity and the diversity proper to the Antilles and the Caribbean as “meta-archipelagos” that can materialize anywhere in the world.<sup>35</sup> Juan’s memories speak directly to the need for the decentredness that Leonardo embodies with his anglophone inflections, which Juan expresses through his religious syncretism and his screen performativity of past and present racial violence. In some allegorical sense, this decentredness is also represented by the image of Jean Fugère, with his undeniable francophone accent in Spanish, showing proudly his Santería paraphernalia for the screen. As Antonio Benítez-Rojo writes,

[T]he Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago ... [I]t has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance, and its *ultima Thule* may be found on the outskirts of Bombay, near the low and murmuring shores of Gambia, in a Cantonese tavern of circa 1850, at a Balinese temple, in an old Bristol pub, in a commercial warehouse in Bordeaux at the time of Colbert, in a windmill beside the *Zuider Zee*, at a café in a barrio of Manhattan, in the existential *saudade* of an old Portuguese lyric.<sup>36</sup>

Benítez-Rojos's idea is closer to the notion of "créolisation" crafted by Martinique poet, writer, and philosopher Édouard Glissant, who explains that the world is becoming creolized without any hierarchical authority but in an archipelagic mode.<sup>37</sup> More than ever, individuals and cultures are witnessing an unprecedented, sustained, and accelerated contact process. *Créolisation* allows us to escape the idea of identity as a closed entity<sup>38</sup> by conceiving of it as something constantly in the making: a perpetual, context-dependent becoming entangled in multidirectional *voyages* and time.

Ruiz's circuitous physical and cinematic paths have been actual "voyages in pursuit of the furtive *locus* of Caribbeanness" and, by extension, of *latinxité*, as I have suggested.<sup>39</sup> These voyages have carried him back and forth between his native Venezuela, Montréal as it floats at the heart of the Hochelaga Archipelago, and the galaxy of islands or meta-archipelagos of the Caribbean that have been at the core of his career as a filmmaker.<sup>40</sup> Ruiz's work materializes the global condition hailed by James Clifford in the late 1980s when he audaciously affirmed that "we [were] all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagos."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, *Sur les toits Havane* performs a geopolitical and hemispheric reconfiguration of *latinidad* that stretches from the northernmost areas of the continent to the South, avoiding the Central American isthmus, as it is artificially fractured by the ravages of US imperialism and neocolonialism and streams through

the Caribbean Sea, with its “repeating islands,” its particular histories of violation, colonization, and decolonization, and its “awesome process of creolisation or indigenisation.”<sup>42</sup>

Fugère offers a final example of the adoption and performance of latinixité in the film but from a white Québécois-Latinx point of view. He displays distinctively queer, Afro-Caribbean worldviews that undergird, refashion, and surpass the revolutionary, nation-based goals of Québec’s independence and anti-anglophone cultural imperialism. He discusses his infatuation with *la luz* (the light) that inundates his life in his azotea, the significance that *la luz* has for Afro-Cuban religions as a sign of the truth revealed, and the manifestation in his life of the beauty of the after-life and the strength of ancestors: “Light is the most important thing in life ... When there is something that happens in heaven, with the gods, or when a dead person enters this realm, they say: ‘Light! The light has arrived!’” We then learn that his decision to settle in Cuba came after he was attacked by a couple of street thugs during one of his many travels to the island and the fortuitous discovery when he visited the emergency ward that he had a life-threatening cancer. Walking home one night from a bar in Old Havana, he was beaten in the head and left unconscious on the street after being robbed by his assailants. Locals who came to his aid scared the robbers away, managed to save some of his belongings, and took him to the emergency ward of a hospital in Havana. It was during a routine check there that he learned he had a form of cancer that needed treatment and that in some twisted way, the assault had helped him to detect the tumour in time. This alternation between violence and salvation, of otherworldly revelation and embracing human suffering, is felt in Fugère’s reasons for adopting *cubanía* as one of the multiple location-specific configurations of *latinidad*. He candidly explains how, in Cuba, he had the enormous privilege—the privilege that come with being a white foreigner—of living his homosexuality and his spirituality as the same thing. His freedom and spiritual awakening are intimately linked to the radical sense of liberty and humanistic values that he perceives

in Cubans, with the personal and collective violence that this freedom implies. In his unpublished memoirs, these ideas lay at the core of his independentist hopes as a Québécois:

My homosexuality is no longer in the way; it is now part of me, as is independence for Cubans and as I would like independence for Québécois ... When one becomes independent as an individual or a people, one must have the strength of the blow of a rod. One must “do violence to oneself,” as they say, or “kick oneself in the butt,” as they say. Breton wrote at the end of *Nadja*: “Beauty will be convulsive or will not be.”<sup>43</sup>

For Fugère, queering his identity in Cuba meant also imagining a queer, independentist utopia for his native Québec through the adoption of latinxité, more specifically, of cubanía.<sup>44</sup> In Ylce Irrizarry’s words, this is a “narrative of new memory,”<sup>45</sup> one that is both non-heteronormative and Afro-centric and, therefore, more apt for *la lucha* (the struggle) of coming out into la luz. Like his experiences in Cuba and his challenged love on/for the island, independence in Québec and the decided embrace of its latinxité should accommodate the subaltern, the neglected, and the othered and should dispel the fears of loss and self-inflicted brutality.

### *Sur le toits Havane: Building Latinxité at/from Home*

In this chapter, I have examined how Pedro Ruiz’s documentary *Sur les toits Havane* engages with domesticity as a foundational element of the film’s production in Cuba. I have also explored how it makes homemaking on the island—more specifically, marginal homemaking—its main thematic concern. In my analysis of the documentary, I have brought together the marginal nature of alternative domesticities in Havana and their role in practising transnationalism from below. As demonstrated, Latinx Québécois filmmakers might need to seek out informal networks and simultaneously rely on latinidad as a strategy to finance their projects.

This initial Latinx Québécois documentary project was at first an object of marginal interest for the Québécois funding structures. However, due to the unique latinxité aspect of the project, it became an attractive building block for the Québec government's foreign cultural diplomacy efforts aimed at southern neighbours such as México and Cuba.

Furthermore, by analyzing the visual and textual cues present in the film, I have shown how *Sur les toits Havane* elaborates a new articulation of latinidad—namely latinxité—one that, in my understanding, is based mainly on historical and current relationships between Cuba and Québec, on their ethnocultural, linguistic, and context specificities, and on informal networks anchored in alternative domesticities.

## NOTES

French and Hispanic orthography and diacritics have been respected throughout the text as a style choice. Unless otherwise noted, French and Spanish translations to English are by the author.

- 1 Robert Wright, “Northern Ice’: Jean Chrétien and the Failure of Constructive Engagement in Cuba,” in *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era*, ed. Robert Wright and Lana Wylie, 195–223 (University of Toronto Press, 2009).
- 2 Government of Canada, “Canada-Cuba Fact Sheet,” September 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220917020911/https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/fact\\_sheet-fiche\\_documentaire/cuba.aspx?lang=eng](https://web.archive.org/web/20220917020911/https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/fact_sheet-fiche_documentaire/cuba.aspx?lang=eng).
- 3 Some of these ventures are the *casas particulares* of Daniel Soucy (Passion Adventures), Jérôme Hudon (La Habana Vida), and Jean Fugère (La Puerta Rosa).
- 4 Québec, Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec, *Déclaration commune entre le Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec et le Ministère du Commerce Extérieur et de l’Investissement Étranger de la République de Cuba*, September 13, 2016, 2, <https://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/Document/Engagements/2016-A03.pdf>; <https://perma.cc/56E5-RDCV>.

- 5 Besides the film discussed in this chapter, the many films and moving-image-based projects of recent years have included television series like *Au volant d'une belle cubaine* (Driving a Beautiful Cuban) (Eric Blouin, 2019) and the films *Angle mort* (Blind Spot) (Dominic James, 2011), *Playa coloniale* (Colonial Beach) (Martin Bureau and Luc Renaud, 2012), *All You Can Eat Buddha* (Ian Lagarde, 2017), *Cuba Merci Gracias* (Alex B. Martin, 2018), *Maffia inc.* (Podz, 2020), *The Fence* (Viveka Melkis, 2020), and *Sin La Habana* (Kaveh Nabatian, 2020). Films in the realm of co-productions have included the Canadian American features *Papa: Hemingway in Cuba* (Bob Yari, 2015) and the documentary *Queens of the Revolution* (Rebecca Heidenberg and Kristen Brown, 2020). For more on the subject of Québécois film produced in Cuba, see Darien Sánchez Nicolás, "Cinematic Voyages: Québécois Transnational Filmmaking and Cuban Domesticity" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2022).
- 6 With a reduced but solid portfolio of avant-garde and social documentaries, Faits Divers Média is a small enterprise created in 2009 by Ruiz and producer Arantza Maldonado of Spain that focuses on documentary production.
- 7 Marie-Louise Arsenault, "Jean Fugère: se libérer du carcan," *Radio-Canada OHdio*, April 28, 2017, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/premiere/emissions/les-grands-entretiens/segments/entrevue/21730/jean-fugere-liste-lecture-quebec-cuba>.
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- 9 Jean Fugère, "39-Las Azoteas," unpublished manuscript, digital typescript.
- 10 Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Duke University Press, 2005).
- 11 Sarah J. Mahler, "Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, 64–101 (Transaction, 1998).
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- 14 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004).
- 15 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton University Press, 1991); Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New Press, 1998).
- 16 Sassen, *Globalization*, 84–5.

- 17 Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (Transaction, 1998).
- 18 Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World-Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6–7.
- 19 Alan Smart and Josephine Smart, “Transnational Social Networks and Negotiated Identities in Interactions Between Hong Kong and China,” in *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (Transaction, 1998), 105.
- 20 Mercédès Baillargeon and Karine Bertrand, “Introduction: le transnationalisme du cinéma et des (nouveaux) médias: le contexte Québécois,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 44, nos. 2–3 (2019): 137.
- 21 Karine Bertrand, “De Gilles Groulx à Jean-Marc Vallée: transnationalisme, américanité et territoire dans le cinéma québécois,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2019): 70–84.
- 22 Camilla Eyre and Joanna McIntyre, “Traversing National Borders, Transcending Cinematic Borders: The Sojourner Cinema of Denis Villeneuve,” *Trespassing Borders*, no. 7 (2018): 33–48.
- 23 Marta Boni, “Les séries québécoises: modularité, circulation et transnationalism,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 44, nos. 2–3 (2019): 241–56.
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- 25 Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity, Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York University Press, 2003), 10.
- 26 Maurice Demers, “De l’exotisme à l’effet miroir: la représentation de l’histoire latino-américaine au Canada français,” *Mens: revue d’histoire intellectuelle et culturelle* 13, no. 1 (2012): 19–54. See also Maurice Demers, *Connected Struggles: Catholics, Nationalists, and Transnational Relations Between Mexico and Quebec, 1917–1945* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).
- 27 Lana Wylie, Luis René Fernández Tabío, and Cynthia Wright, “Introduction—Diplomacies: Constructing Canada and Cuba,” in *Other Diplomacies, Other Ties*, ed. Lana Wylie, Luis René Fernández Tabío, and Cynthia Wright, 3–36 (University of Toronto Press, 2018); Geneviève Dorais, “La révolution cubaine en Amérique latine: essai historiographique sur l’importance d’un symbole régional,” *Chronique des Amériques* 18, no. 3 (2018): 2–9.
- 28 Michel Nareau, *Double jeu: baseball et littératures américaines* (Le Quartanier, 2012).

- 29 Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 10, emphasis added.
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- 32 Arantza Maldonado, interview with author, September 8, 2021.
- 33 Latinx stands for all of the hyphenated identities of populations of Latin America descent living outside of this cultural region—such as Latinx Canadian, Latinx French, and so on.
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- 37 Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1995).
- 38 Jean-François Blanchard, “Alain Menil, *Les voies de la créolisation. Essai sur Edouard Glissant*,” book review, February 25, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.10951>.
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- 41 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 173.
- 42 Rex M. Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica, an Essay in Cultural Dynamics* (International Development Research Centre, 1979), 21.
- 43 Fugère, “39-Las Azoteas,” 12–13, referring to André Breton’s 1928 novel *Nadja*.



- 44 Here, I borrow the ideation of *cubanía* (i.e., the ontologies and epistemologies of being Cuban) offered by Ylce Irrizarry, who details a queered *cubanía* that includes the multiple and contradictory narratives of Cuban exiles and non-heteronormative identities. Ylce Irrizarry, “Encarnaciones Cubanas: Elías Miguel Muñoz and Queering of the Latina/o Canon,” in *Latinidad at the Crossroads: Insights into Latinx Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Amanda Ellen Gerke and Luisa María González Rodríguez, 108–34 (Brill, 2021).
- 45 Irrizarry, “Encarnaciones Cubanas,” 126.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Exploring the “Mex-Can” Identity: Film, Belongings, and Migrant Experiences in “El Norte”

*Argelia González Hurtado in conversation  
with Adonay Guerrero Cortés*

In this conversation, my husband, filmmaker Adonay Guerrero Cortés, and I reflect on the meaning of living, working, and creating in diverse environments and how this meaning shapes our cultural identity. We consider the process of being part of the Mexican and Latin American diasporic experience in “El Norte,” which started for us in Canada. Born in Mexico, we migrated to Canada to pursue our postgraduate studies. Despite facing the common two-body problem of commuter couples—I accepted a tenure-track position in the United States, whereas Adonay remains in Kingston, Ontario—we continue to collaborate on media projects that entail our experiences in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

#### On Our Lived Experiences and Other Theoretical Concerns

When we first met in Guadalajara in 2008, Adonay was working on his student film *El hijo del Santo/The Son of Santo* (2008), a story based on his mother’s belief that her father was the renowned *luchador* (wrestler) Santo. This project involved multiple locations, extras, and even the biological son of the legendary wrestler in a prominent role. With the help

of his classmates and a network of industry acquaintances, Adonay successfully managed all aspects of the production.

Adonay was born in San Luis Potosí, a city in central Mexico, but he moved to Guadalajara to pursue his studies in audiovisual arts at the Universidad de Guadalajara. Before moving to Guadalajara, I lived in two cities in northern Mexico, Torreón in Coahuila and Monterrey in Nuevo León. These previous relocations within Mexico, like those abroad, profoundly impacted our academic and creative practice.

Our experiences in Guadalajara significantly impacted our professional lives and migration history. I taught communication studies at the Guadalajara campus of the Tecnológico de Monterrey (TEC). I also acted as the coordinator for a student-run television program on the state's local channel. We had plans to work on various projects individually and together within the city's media landscape. However, I decided to relocate to Edmonton, Alberta, in Canada to pursue my doctoral degree, and Adonay joined me soon afterward. This move presented several challenges for both of us. Adonay faced the challenge of leaving behind an established professional network and starting anew in an unknown place. I had to adjust to an academic environment where my ethnicity became a prominent aspect of my identity. Together, we faced various dimensions of immigration in the twenty-first century.

As Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Néstor García Canclini, and others have argued, migration is a phenomenon that allows for creating “new discourses” because individuals who migrate are constantly building and rebuilding their identities.<sup>1</sup> As migrants, we exist in a space that is neither our place of origin nor where we have settled down. This space is known as the in-between in Bhabha's conceptualization. In this space, we constantly negotiate and construct different narratives to help us navigate a new environment. In our case, we built and rebuilt our cultural identity at the intersection of three national spaces.

That said, Mexico and Canada are the two predominant national spaces that we have experienced the most. I often travel from the United

States to Kingston, where Adonay lives and works as an independent filmmaker and media instructor at Queen's University. This commuter experience defines my life in the United States as strictly professional, as our life as a couple takes place in Canada. Through this process, we have reinvented ourselves as "Mex-Cans" to conjure—and sometimes explain—our official place of origin and our official place of settlement. Of course, this identifier conveys only a general idea of our dual citizenship. It contains a broad sense of Mexicanness and Canadianness without providing a deep understanding of the formal, informal, and alternative discourses behind what these categories mean.

We also understand our migration process and cultural identity formation through Lynn Stephen's conceptualization of the migration of Mexican Indigenous people to the United States as a "transborder" experience.<sup>2</sup> She argues that Indigenous migrants cross a national border and various frontiers—ethnic, gender, generational, regional—that shape their experience. Stephen's transborder concept has helped us to realize that living in a diasporic context means a constant reinvention/renewal of our regional, national, international, ethnic, and gender identities, and depending on the place where we stand, these categories have different symbolic meanings. For example, being Mexican in the United States differs from being Mexican in Canada due to complex historical, social, and economic issues. Our identities are mediated and constructed by categories imposed by national and regional discourses, including Western-based understandings about what is considered Indigenous, mestizo, Mexican, local, foreign, or Other. And most significantly, they are mediated and constructed by what Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls "coloniality of power."<sup>3</sup>

The notion of coloniality of power identifies and describes the legacy of colonialism in contemporary Latin American societies and beyond, where discriminatory racial hierarchies, among others, continue to exert influence.<sup>4</sup> For example, the conceptions and politics of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) are linked to ideas of racial superiority that have been present

in the region currently known as Latin America since colonization. Although Quijano's analysis focuses on this cultural region, the legacies of European colonization have similar effects in the United States and Canada. Here, Indigenous peoples or those of African descent have historically been disenfranchised due to their ethnicity or their skin colour. Adonay and I are dark-skinned Mexicans, which sometimes affects our relationships with others in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. We know that the labels imposed on us or those that we freely adopt in Mexico, Canada, or the United States—such as *chilanga* (a woman native to Mexico City), *potosino* (a native of San Luis Potosí), *mexicana/o*, *mes-tiza/o*, *indígena*, Hispanic, Latinx Canadian, or Mex-Can—are arbitrary designations with diverse political, historical, and symbolic meanings. Our voluntary or involuntary use of these terms allows us to negotiate our sense of selves in Mexican, Canadian, and American societies and to navigate the academic and media landscapes in which we varyingly find ourselves. Our notion of identity is based on acts of constant reinvention/renewal and self-definition and is an active and continuous process of choice and positioning shaped by migration experiences.

In the following conversation, we consider these dynamics further. Reflecting on our migration journey to Canada, Adonay shares what it means to be a Latin American filmmaker with Mexican roots working within the Canadian film industry and university system. As a Latin American film and media scholar living and working between Canada and the United States, I offer reflections on how this moving between three national contexts has shaped my identity and how I position myself within these environments. In addition, I discuss how I have expanded my research on Indigenous media to include diasporic filmmakers.

## The Conversation

ARGELIA GONZÁLEZ HURTADO (AGH): Adonay, could you describe your early filmmaking career as a student in Mexico? How did you position yourself as a filmmaker and individual?

ADONAY GUERRERO CORTÉS (AGC): In Mexico, I considered myself an emerging and independent filmmaker. As an individual, the most critical part of my identity was to be a potosinoí. My early creative work was rooted in my local culture and hometown stories, such as family tales—some related to my great-grandparents' Indigenous and peasant roots—and in issues related to my city and state.

I moved to Guadalajara because San Luis Potosí lacks a film school and an industry. Still, the country's film industry is concentrated in Mexico City, where leading studios, companies, and film institutions, such as the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, are based—even today. There were no film schools or training centres almost anywhere in Mexico during the 1990s. The only options for studying film were the two primary film schools, namely the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC), which was part of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC), an exclusive film school supported by the Secretariat of Culture. When I tried to apply to the CUEC, a massive student strike paralyzed the UNAM, so there were no academic activities that year, and I could not apply to the film program. Luckily, the Universidad de Guadalajara's School of Cinema opened up then. Established and championed by renowned filmmakers such as Jaime Humberto Hermosillo and Guillermo del Toro, the Department of Image and Sound (DIS) at the Universidad de Guadalajara is noteworthy for providing training in filmmaking techniques to emerging filmmakers from diverse backgrounds, even those not based in Mexico City. This location opened the door to a more diverse set of stories not based on the country's capital.

As provincial cities, both Guadalajara and San Luis Potosí are more traditional and conservative than Mexico City. On a personal level, they both influence me differently as a filmmaker. San Luis Potosí is my home, where I spent my childhood, and a city that I have always loved and carried under my skin, full of personal and family stories. In contrast, Guadalajara is a city that is more active culturally and artistically. Guadalajara has a rich contemporary art history, from visual artists (Gerardo Murillo

Coronado and Juan Soriano) to writers (Juan José Arreola and Vicente Leñero) to filmmakers (Guillermo del Toro). The DIS also firmly understood the filmmakers' social responsibility. It prioritized social documentaries, primarily because of the influence of the program director at that time, Russian filmmaker Boris Goldenblanc, which allowed me to expand my artistic personality, reflecting more on social issues in my work.

The social perspective that I acquired at the DIS led me to produce the documentary *Cuando las piedras gritan/When the Stones Scream* (2003), a film about the struggle between the local communities of Cerro de San Pedro and Minera San Xavier, a subsidiary of the Canadian mining company New Gold Inc. The Canadian company wanted to extract gold, silver, and other minerals from the old town mines using the open-pit mining method, which involves explosives and chemical processes. Because Cerro de San Pedro is the foundational town of San Luis Potosí, there was strong resistance and a desire to protect its surroundings. I made the documentary to support the protests against exploiting the hill near the town. But in the end, even though there was intense activism against this company, the Canadian company started working, extracting the gold, and with this work, the hill disappeared. Although the town remains, its geography was significantly impacted. My documentary serves as a testament to the town's resilience against extractivism. This experience highlights how my identity as a potosino influences my filmmaking. At that time, I recognized the importance of documenting the impact of Canadian mining companies in Mexico. Now, as a dual citizen, I feel a strong moral obligation to continue this work.

While studying in Guadalajara, I wanted to explore stories of marginalized people in Mexican society. I used to call it "cine de ojo de perro" (dog's-eye cinema) because it would be a film that, like a dog, sees everything at the ground level. For instance, *El blues del buen samaritano/The Good Samaritan Blues* (2003) tells a fictional short story about two gang members on the street who witness a hit-and-run, which leaves a drunken man severely hurt, and instead of helping him, they try to rob him. The situation creates a conflict when one of the gang members decides to help



the dying man. I shot this film in 16 millimetres on a dangerous street in Guadalajara to capture the city's rough and violent side. The neighbourhood where we filmed was so dangerous that, during the shooting of the short, we witnessed a moment in the street nearby when some men violently attacked other men and then fled in a truck. My third film, *Duda mata/Doubt Kills* (2007), was made in collaboration with several classmates. I focused on a story that shows the prejudices and underlying violence in a strident and paranoid Mexican society. It tells a fictional story set on a bus about how passengers react to an unconventional-looking man with tattoos whom they think is a murderer. I made this film about appearance and prejudice because of my dark-brown skin and long hair. When I walked home at night, the police often stopped me and checked my backpack. For them, perhaps, I looked like I was part of a gang. Nevertheless, this assumption was only an excuse, which showed me how corrupt and abusive certain police officers were.



AGC: What about you, Argelia? How did you position yourself as a professional and individual in Mexico?

AGH: In Guadalajara, I described myself as a *chilanga-torreónense-regia* and *comunicóloga* (mass media communicator) from the TEC. I was born in Mexico City, also known as the Distrito Federal. My father's family has lived there for several generations. They were working-class and lived close to a popular city area near the famous La Lagunilla market and the Tepito neighbourhood. This city area has deep historical roots dating back to pre-Columbian times. Some pre-Colombian traditions, like in other parts of Mexico, are still practised by my family. For example, every Sunday morning, I visited an open-air market—known by its Nahuatl name, *tianguis*—such as La Lagunilla. Although tianguis exist in other parts of Mexico, this Sunday ritual with my family was unique because of the enormous variety of products at our tianguis and especially because of my grandmother's and other relatives' relationships with the vendors.

Moreover, some of my aunts and uncles lived in Tlatelolco, a housing complex infamous for the massacre of students in 1968 and also the site of a pre-Columbian city. So I grew up in iconic places in Mexico that had historical weight in the country's cultural imagination and were popularized in films.

In Mexico, I was a *chilanga* or *defeña*, two labels for natives of Mexico City. As a *chilanga*, I have a distinct intonation, which I was aware of every time I visited my mother's side of the family in the country's northern city of Torreón, where I lived in junior high. Although I proudly say that I am a *chilanga*, this term has negative connotations outside of Mexico City because Mexicans from the capital are often seen as arrogant, deceitful, and opportunistic. Also, our accents can be perceived as annoying or funny. So I did not use that term to identify myself when in Torreón, whose inhabitants call themselves *torreonenses*. It was a way for the locals to point out that I was not from that place and did not share their experiences. Even though my mother is from Torreón, I had to learn about the city's traditions. There were few historical places or museums, no colourful *mercados* (markets), or tianguis. With time, I started speaking like a local.

I loved living close to my relatives in Torreón. For various reasons, such as early death, my mother's family follows a matriarchal system. My grandmother raised five daughters and a son without their father. My aunts grew up as strong, independent women, unlike my family in Mexico City, where the family's firm patriarchal structure mirrored traditional values. Living in Torreón with my mother's family taught me the value of being a woman in Mexico's patriarchal society.

I moved north to Monterrey in Nuevo León to obtain my bachelor's degree in communication sciences. Monterrey is Mexico's second-largest city and stands out for its industry; its people are hard-working and direct, which is sometimes confused with being rude. I studied at Tecnológico de Monterrey, a secular private university with thirty-five campuses nationwide. The TEC is recognized as one of Mexico and Latin America's most prestigious and expensive universities. To attend this university, one

must have excellent academic performance, come from a wealthy family, or obtain a scholarship—the latter was my case. During my undergraduate studies, I worked as a camerawoman and later as a production assistant for classes broadcast live via satellite to different campuses. I volunteered in the film laboratory as part of the crew that helped during the film production class. Although I do not agree with much of the TEC's philosophy due to its lack of attention to the humanities and social issues, it shaped my professional personality. I was in the TEC system from high school until the end of work on my master's degree, and I spent almost nine years in Monterrey, living among *regios*, or *regiomontanos*—that is, locals in Monterrey, so called because they are surrounded by *montañas regias* (magnificent mountains).

Mexico City, Torreón, and Monterrey marked my personality, ways of speaking, relations with others, and professional practices. I became a chilanga-torreonense-regia. After obtaining a master's degree and working for two years in an advertising agency in charge of corporate communication for clients and political campaigns, I applied for a full-time professor position at the TEC campus in Guadalajara, which at the time offered a bachelor of arts in communications. This job was the equivalent of a permanent teaching-stream position in the Canadian academic system. After five years and feeling stagnant, I decided to pursue a doctorate in media with a critical and humanistic approach instead of the corporate one that I had experienced at the TEC. That is why I went to study at the University of Alberta, and then you decided to follow me.



AGH: When we first moved to Edmonton, we struggled to find our place in Canada. Tell me about your experience transitioning professionally to Canada and about how its film culture compared to Mexico's.

AGC: Edmonton was the place that welcomed us to Canada and was our first home abroad. When you arrive in a new country, the place that shelters you is crucial in a migrant's experience. Difficult circumstances

did not prompt our move to Canada. We were not being persecuted and did not move to claim refugee status. That said, Edmonton was not the best place to start a professional career as a filmmaker, as there is no film industry in the city or nearby. There is, however, enthusiasm for watching films, noticeable in the well-organized Edmonton International Film Festival and a circuit of small movie theatres devoted to showing Canadian and international films. The community invests in bringing exciting films to be watched and discussed in these movie theatres, at universities, and via other forums, such as the Film and Video Arts Society of Alberta, a small, nonprofit, local organization dedicated to promoting film production and film culture.

I knew of these circuits because of your connections with the University of Alberta and the scholarly community. I even attended some lectures that were addressed mostly to the academic community, such as the visit of Robert Stam. However, there is a strong contrast between Edmonton's film culture and what I experienced in Guadalajara. For example, the Festival Internacional de Cine en Guadalajara is among Latin America's most recognized. This reputation gives you an idea of the dimension of this Mexican city's film community.

Due to my visa restrictions, I could not work for my first two years in Edmonton. However, during that time, I kept myself occupied by completing editing work on my film *El hijo del Santo/The Son of Santo* (2008), which I submitted to various film festivals (fig. 4.1). Luckily, the film was selected for the 2008 Edmonton International Film Festival and for the 2009 San Diego Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival. In addition, I also began to work on a short animation project called *La semilla/The Seed* (2008). Our first creative collaboration in Canada was *La semilla*. I handled stop-motion and classical 2D animation while you assisted with the process. A grant from the Consejo de las Artes de San Luis Potosí funded this project.

In Edmonton, my first job as a media professional was at a small video production, advertising, and web design company. I was responsible for



4.1 Film still from Adonay Guerrero Cortés, dir., *El hijo del Santo/The Son of Santo*, 2008.

various video production and editing tasks, from assembling interviews of Canadian punk and rock musicians to editing travel shows and producing advertising content. Later, the company developed documentary projects focused on the Canadian Army and its veterans and subsequently expanded to producing television shows for local channels. Although this company was not established in Canada's more expansive film and television industry, I gained professional experience in documentary, video, and television production in this context while learning about specific topics that brought me closer to Canadian culture, stories, and people. However, working in this commercial setting affected my creative work. Writing and preparing a new film project takes time, and working full-time for this company took time away from my projects.

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AGC: Did being in a doctoral program hinder your ability to work as a media maker?

AGH: Definitely. During my doctoral degree, I could not work on developing any media production and put that part of my practice on hold. My only work as a producer and editor was when I helped you with your experimental and animation projects. But moving to Canada allowed me to immerse myself in research and theory, something that I could not do at the TEC. When I was a student there, I was interested in the media practices related to *comunicación para el desarrollo* (communication for development) and some ideas pioneered by the Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán about democratizing the media through access, participation, and dialogue to improve the conditions of marginalized communities.<sup>5</sup> I studied how some communities in Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico used the radio to develop their communities. While a TEC professor, I helped to develop projects such as an internet radio station and a television show. While conducting research on community radio stations in Mexico, I discovered that Indigenous communicators were developing projects to preserve and revitalize their culture, including their language and their traditional practices, like songs, dances, and oral histories. With the rise of video technology, many Indigenous communicators began to use this medium, which prompted me to study their work.

My interest in the videography and filmography practices of Indigenous communities in Mexico grew when I learned that the first film workshop for Indigenous communities was conducted with a community of female weavers in Oaxaca. I also discovered that Indigenous cinema was promoted in Canada thanks mainly to the work of female documentary makers. Therefore, I was fascinated by the audiovisual works of Indigenous communities in Mexico and Canada, particularly those that promote their cultural and political independence and the role of women in media. I knew about Alanis Obomsawin's work and that some Indigenous communities in Chiapas and Oaxaca also produced video projects.

While searching for graduate programs, I became interested in researching Indigenous media practices and comparing video practices of Indigenous communities in Canada and Mexico. Ultimately, my doctoral research focused on how Indigenous media producers in Mexico

confronted and contested the long history of representations of Indigeneity within the national Mexican mediascape. I am currently developing a comparative and transnational framework to analyze the work of Indigenous media producers across the Americas. These media creators have built institutions, events, and programs beyond national boundaries to promote Indigenous media practices, fostering cooperation, production, distribution, and exhibition. These transnational networks create a sense of community and solidarity based on their experiences as Indigenous media makers. For instance, *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas* unites Indigenous media makers to defend the right of communication of Indigenous peoples in Latin America.



AGH: Apart from the professional adjustments and difficulties that you faced as a migrant, how did your first experience of living abroad affect you personally or shape your self-awareness?

AGC: Living in a different country reinforced my Mexicanness because I looked different and missed aspects of my culture, such as food, music, and how people interact. It was, however, educational to see the variety of people and cultures—South Americans, Eastern Asians, Africans, or Europeans—coexisting in Canada. Having contact with people of diverse cultural backgrounds was enriching. It also revealed how different I was in this context concerning the colour of my skin, hair, and other physical features.

In this way, the perception of myself changed. In Canada, you and I were seen as people of colour and migrants; we became the Other. We had to learn to navigate these labels that were put on us here because of the ethnic and racial structures that exist in this country. I have always been conscious of my skin tone. My dark complexion was frequently pointed out in Mexico at school and home. This experience speaks of a society that favours light over dark skin, concepts imposed by colonization

and that we continue to reproduce. However, after arriving in Canada, I gained more awareness about the strong racialization practices in Canada. My skin colour became part of my identity, as this society distinguishes between white and nonwhite people. For example, I never thought of myself as a person of colour until one of your classmates from Nigeria told me that “for us, people of colour, it is challenging to find a job.” Having trouble obtaining a job because of my ethnicity is one way of showing how racialized Canadian society is and how people of colour are aware of daily inequalities.



AGC: Did you go through a similar process when you came to Canada? How did this experience affect your sense of identity?

AGH: I had to situate myself in Canada through relationships at the university. I was in a bubble in the university environment and in a program where cultural diversity is valued and desired (at least in theory). However, I experienced microaggressions in the classroom when my white professors asked me whether I knew how to use a computer. Only students from Latin America and Africa, not my (white) Canadian and European classmates, were asked these questions. Even so, academic contexts, where we critically study the dynamics of power and racialization, do not escape reproducing colonized thought structures. We still need to work toward decolonizing practices. I became aware that due to my place of origin and physical appearance, I was perceived as less capable or lacking the resources to perform well academically. Along with my Latin American and African colleagues, I was different from the norm. In this sense, I found that Mexican coloniality and structures of racial domination were not much different from Canadian racial and economic hierarchies imposed by settler English and French colonial structures. In reaction to this awareness, I started to cherish some of my Mexican heritage, like setting up an altar for the Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, at the entrance of the Art and Convocation Hall Building every year during my



time in the program. I became more conscious of my cultural heritage and expressed pride in my diverse background.

In addition to underlining my Mexican identity, our Latin American belonging also became significant. For instance, the university became a meeting place for people from Latin America, both newcomers to Canada and first- and second-generation migrants. Because of its academic nature, the Modern Languages and Cultures program was a hub for Latin Americans (and people from other cultures). Although different, Latin Americans share some cultural aspects. We know popular culture references such as artists, singers, and movies. Historically, we share a history of colonization, a period of independence from the European colonial authority (predominantly Spanish and Portuguese), and a process of nationhood. Of course, even for people of the same country, there are several differences and experiences related to ethnic background, social status, and gender. Many of my peers in the doctoral program taught Spanish in a school created by Latin Americans to teach Spanish. Thanks to this school, we expanded our support network and, at the same time, our *latinidad*. Historically, Mexico's foreign policy was one of solidarity with its neighbours to the south and with the Caribbean, transmitted to the population through the educational system or the media. I remember that one of the history textbooks bragged that Mexico was one of only two American countries that maintained diplomatic ties with Cuba throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis and that Mexico played a mediating role in the Chapultepec Peace Accords between the Government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. This affinity with Latin America is also reflected in other areas. When there is an international sports competition, it is common for Mexicans to support other Latin American countries once their team has been eliminated.

Ultimately, I reinforced my identity as a Mexican and Latin American. When people wanted to know more about my Mexicanness, I explained my chilanga-torreonense-regia dimension. None of my group used the terms "Latino" or "Latina" or the term "Latinx Canadian," and the first- or second-generation immigrants from Chile used identifiers

such as “Chilean Canadian,” “Canadian with Chilean heritage,” or “Chilean born in Canada.”



AGH: Tell me about your academic journey in Canada and why you pursued a master's degree in film production. How did this education contribute to your vision as a filmmaker and impact your career?

AGC: In the last year of your doctorate, we realized that we needed to find another way to access the Canadian media industry on a more professional level. We agreed that the best way to do that was through a master's degree at a Canadian university. Luckily, I was accepted to York University for a master's degree in film production. I learned other cinematic techniques and approaches from filmmakers such as Phil Hoffman, John Greyson, and Ali Kazimi. The master's degree was a space that helped me to reflect deeply on my artistic direction, my experience of immigration, the themes that I brought from Mexico, my cultural heritage, and particularly aspects of my Indigenous ancestry.

Your research on Indigenous media has informed and influenced me as a filmmaker. I read some of the books you brought home for your research, including those by authors such as Anita Brenner, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Miguel León-Portilla, and Serge Gruzinski. These materials prompted me to reflect on my roots and to start rediscovering my identity as a person and filmmaker, and they informed my thesis film, *Dioses ocultos/Hidden Gods* (2014). Using an experimental aesthetic, I explored my perception of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and how Indigenous peoples maintain their beliefs despite colonization. I was inspired by observing how we continue to practise Indigenous cultural traditions in Mexico (fig 4.2). My great-grandmother used to tell stories where she referred to the *petob*, a typical headdress of the Tenek community. Although she did not wear a *petob*, the constant retelling of the story kept the tradition alive for us living in an urban setting. Also, while living in the city, my great-grandmother tried to maintain a plot of



4.2 Film still from Adonay Guerrero Cortés, dir., *Dioses ocultos/Hidden Gods*, 2014.

land in her garden where she planted vegetables for her consumption—a practice related to the *milpa*, an Indigenous traditional system of growing regional vegetables.

AGH: It is great to hear that my research has been helpful or inspiring for your projects. During my study of Indigenous diasporic filmmakers, I observed that some of them create autoethnographic pieces that convey their cultural knowledge through the visual medium.<sup>6</sup> I situated their practice within what Hamid Naficy has called “accented cinema”—or the cinematic practices of filmmakers living in exile, migration, or diaspora—and how their work addresses these experiences.<sup>7</sup> Since your master’s degree, you have incorporated a translated part of your culture into an audiovisual medium to show Canadian and Mexican audiences what it is to live in the diaspora.

AGC: Living outside of Mexico ignited a desire to recover part of my hidden or forgotten family history. At the same time, my condition as

a migrant shaped my films' themes. In the reflexive documentary *I Live Here: Windows* (2011), I contemplated my diasporic experience by re-viewing my memories and my work as a filmmaker. Similarly, I reflected on my and others' migration experiences. That is also the case in *Making Sones and Memories* (2012), where I focus on Mexican Canadian graphic artist Alec Dempster and Mexican immigrant writer-singer Kali Niño. This short documentary explores the emotions and personal struggles faced by Kali and Alec, who left their home in Veracruz, Mexico, and adapted to their new residence by creating music and visual art. You are right. I produce autoethnographic work on my migratory situation.

I also created a short film, *Distant Altars* (2019), showcasing a traditional Mexican custom of the Día de los Muertos. The movie portrays the story of some *fieles difuntos* (ghosts of loved ones) who return to visit the altar of a young man in Canada. He is experiencing a crisis of faith about his cultural identity. Developing these short films helped me to build a network of artists and media makers with Latin American heritage, which in turn helped me to feel less alone. I started to perform my *latinidad* by interacting with other Latin American and Latinx Canadian artists.

Earning a professional degree from a Canadian institution carries enormous weight. It is a professional validation for me as a media maker. Having a degree from a Mexican school is hardly taken seriously in Canada. Obtaining a degree from York University positively impacted my projects, including my successful application for funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. Furthermore, it opened the doors to teaching opportunities at the university level. As a disclosure, now that I have studied and taught media in Canada, I can attest that the quality of education is equal to that of Mexican film schools.



AGC: Now that you are a Mex-Can who works in the United States, how have your research and sense of identity changed?

AGH: While working on my doctoral dissertation, I noticed two main topics on the agendas of Indigenous media makers, which have become the main focus of my research now as a tenure-track research professor. Documenting the experience of Indigenous communities migrating to the United States and the transformative role of women in these communities are two essential aspects of my research agenda on diasporic Indigenous filmmakers from Mexico based in the United States.

When examining the ways that Indigenous filmmakers represent the migratory experience, I observed that their films were connected to cultural and political activism that focused on claiming their rights as migrants and Indigenous people both in Mexico and in the United States. In contrast, Indigenous creators working from the United States embark on social, political, and cultural quests to visibly represent aspects of Indigenous identity and culture, such as traditions, languages, belief systems, and knowledge. Their work renders a more nuanced depiction of realities in a US society that tends to erase people from different communities by placing them in one of the identity supra-categories, such as Latinx and Hispanic. Indigenous media makers also question what it means to be Indigenous in Mexico and the United States, reimagining their sense of identity in a diasporic context.

Like other diasporic communities, Indigenous communities build bridges between their communities of origin and their new communities in the United States. When seeking to connect with their communities of origin, diasporic Indigenous filmmakers use media to extend cultural networks while telling current stories about their experiences. Some of these filmmakers use their media practices to provide transnational support for deeper political and cultural issues that their communities face by engaging in activism. Also remarkable is the fact that Indigenous media makers build networks worldwide to show and support the work of other Indigenous creators. Some Latinx Canadians are also trying to develop networks within Canada and their places of origin. For example, Alec Dempster, a Latinx Canadian, organized an exhibition in Mexico in 2019

that showed the work of graphic artists from Latin America representing extractivist practices by industries, including Canadian companies, in Latin America.

Looking back on my migration history, I have incorporated identity categories as my reality has changed. In the United States, I am considered Mexican, Hispanic, Latina, or Latinx; in Canada, I am mainly a migrant of colour; and in Mexico, depending on the place, I may be labelled as *chilanga*, *torreonense*, or *norteña* (northerner). Identities are fluid, and many borders are crossed in a space delineated by migration. In the United States, I use Mexican and Latin American, and when I am in Mexico, I like to use *chilanga-torreonense-regia*. When asked about my identity, I prefer the self-explanatory term “Mex-Can.”

We have found stability and situated ourselves in our respective fields. However, due to a lack of positions in my field in Canada, I had to emigrate to the United States. This circumstance shows the Canadian academy’s need for more attention to Latin America and Latinx Canadian culture. You have achieved stability and established yourself in the Canadian film industry through your position as an adjunct professor and your work as an independent filmmaker. Yet both transitions have led us to re-examine where we fit in these new professional and social contexts.

AGC: Before I migrated to Canada, I thought that it was a culturally diverse country that provided opportunities for individuals of various cultural backgrounds. However, I discovered that Latin American media professionals still require assistance obtaining professional and artistic spaces within the Canadian media industry. In my case, I had to find other ways to insert myself into the milieu. Working as an instructor has allowed me to teach about media production and Latin American cinema in a department lacking courses in this field. At the university, Latin American cinema was taught only in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. Excluding this subject and the work of Latinx Canadian filmmakers from a film and media department’s curriculum in Canada seemed outrageous.

Therefore, my courses also incorporate films by Nicolás Pereda and Karina García Casanova, among others.

My position as an instructor has given me a sense of personal and creative stability. I have found support to produce my independent projects, opportunities for collaboration, and strategies to balance my productions with my teaching duties.

I have embraced my immigrant identity and Canadian citizenship with a mix of nostalgia for Mexico and my hometown. For example, I now talk about myself as a potosino Canadian.

The challenge for newcomers and immigrants in Canada is getting to know the options and being attentive to opportunities that can open social and professional environments to establish ties and networks. Latinx Canadian and diasporic filmmakers must stay in creative dialogue with each other and with broader migrant communities to expand the media industry and to create more inclusive cultural spaces in Canada. A strong presence of Latinx Canadian artists and audiovisual technicians could open doors and expand the perception of Latinx Canadian professionals in cultural institutions nationwide.

## NOTES

- 1 See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 392–401 (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994); and Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
- 2 Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Duke University Press, 2007).
- 3 See Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.
- 4 See Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."
- 5 See Luis Ramiro Beltrán, "La radio popular y educativa en América Latina," *Chasqui: revista latinoamericana de comunicación*, no. 53 (1996): 8–11; and Luis

Ramiro Beltrán, "Comunicadores y derechos humanos: ¿de malos amigos a ángeles guardianes?," *Chasqui: revista latinoamericana de comunicación*, no. 64 (1998): 24–28.

- 6 See Argelia González Hurtado, "Shaping the Taraspanglish Diaspora," in *Adjusting the Lens: Community and Collaborative Video in Mexico*, ed. Freya Schiwy and Byrt Wammack Weber, 90–118 (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).
- 7 See Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Cinema* (Princeton University Press, 2001).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### "I Never Really Felt Like a Latin American Artist": Identity as a Spiritual Journey

*Interview with Manuel Piña-Baldoquín by Gabriela  
Aceves Sepúlveda and Zaira Zarza<sup>1</sup>*

ZAIRA ZARZA (ZZ): Hi Manuel, thank you for agreeing to chat with us. How about we start from the beginning? Tell us about how you came to photography, why you chose this medium, and how your initial approach to art has evolved. How do you understand photography? We want to discuss your trajectory as an artist, your photographic practice, and especially your theoretical approach to digital moving images and how your stance regarding technology informs your work.

MANUEL PIÑA-BALDOQUÍN (MPB): I discovered photography in Russia during my university years. Back in Cuba, like all amateurs, I started taking photos during my free time. In the 1990s, when the Special Period in Times of Peace began,<sup>2</sup> I lost my engineering teaching job and started to explore photography in more depth.

In terms of age, I belong to the generation of the 1980s, but in terms of art practice, I belong to the group of the 1990s. The artists of the 1980s generation greatly inspired me because they became visible during the Special Period. They took art to the streets. These artists were saying things that nobody could say, and that got me very excited. One day, in 1989, I saw an exhibition by Arturo Cuenca, a Cuban conceptual artist and theorist, at the Castillo de la Fuerza. I realized that I understood

these works from within. Then I began to study art more seriously. Because the economic crisis started in those years, there was little work. So I often escaped from my workplace and went to study art in the library.

zz: Did these generations and the exhibitions at Castillo de la Fuerza inspire you to become a photographer?

MPB: I learned photography by shooting the streets and sharing ideas and findings with René Peña (Pupi), Juan Carlos Alom, and a small group of mostly beginners. We all had our own informal teachers. Mine was Guillermo Fernando López Junqué (Chinolope), who deeply influenced me, although I didn't realize it at the time. We even learned to produce our own chemicals because there was no access to professional products.

Pupi introduced me to a circle of art history students that included Juan Antonio Molina, Tayana Pimentel, Eugenio Valdés, Dannys Montes de Oca, and Eduardo Muñoz Ordoqui, who organized my first two-person solo show with Pupi. They all inspired me and introduced me to the contemporary art world. As is well known, they all developed impressive international careers as curators and critics.

All of these experiences and friendships resulted in a great education.

zz: The emergence of these generations of artists you mention also coincides with the beginning of a massive migration, which is something that your series *Aguas baldías/Water Wastelands* (1992–94) beautifully portrays. How did you see yourself within that generation when you were in Cuba? And now from the diaspora, how do you feel your relationship with it and with Cuba?

MPB: I first encountered my generation at the Wifredo Lam Centre during a preparatory meeting in 1994 for the 5th Havana Biennial. Most established artists of the 1980s generation had emigrated, and the centre had been left to a group of mainly young students from the Instituto Superior de Arte. But it was harder with photographers because we didn't



5.1 Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, untitled black and white photo in the series *Aguas baldías* (Water Wastelands), 1992–94.

have much visibility. Although some of us had actually participated in Photofest, I don't think that many curators knew that. It was Molina who put my name forth.

Many have pointed out that our works in the exhibition were premonitory of the migration tragedy that occurred a few months later, but it is less acknowledged that it was Llilian Llanes and her team who had the vision to choose migration as a theme (fig. 5.1).

The 5th Havana Biennial was a powerful event, capturing the drama of migration in many beautiful and powerful voices, a poignant collective cry. We became an instant generation, and our careers skyrocketed. Mine certainly did. There, I met artists and curators who became dear friends and supporters, some of them to this day.

zz: Tell us about your first encounters with Latin American art. Do you consider yourself a Latin American artist? How did you define

yourself during your first decades in the artistic profession before coming to Canada?

MPB: If I were to mark an encounter, it would be Julio Le Parc's work at the 1st Havana Biennial in 1984. But, of course, my generation grew up immersed in Latin American cinema, music, and literature.

At the time, it felt to me that being a Latin American artist meant mostly to be acknowledged as such by some North American or European art institution. The Havana Biennial was an attempt to claim the right to define Latin American art from outside the dominant establishment. But other than that, there were only a few exchanges among creators and just a couple of magazines coming from the area. So we knew of other Latin American artists through US-based publications. We were all, as far I could tell, trying to find a voice in the "global" art scene and actively resisted the label. I think it was Pupi who used to say that his CV made it appear as though he had participated in only one very long exhibition titled *Contemporary Art from Cuba*. Being a Latin American artist started to make sense much later, and my practice became both a result and an affirmation of that condition.

ZZ: How did you arrive in Canada, and why Vancouver?

MPB: Coming to Vancouver was a direct consequence of the 5th Havana Biennial. Scott Watson and Keith Wallace (two life-long friends) saw my work, and Scott managed to bring me to the University of British Columbia (UBC) as a fellow artist in residence in the Faculty of Arts. It was them who introduced me to Stan Douglas, Jan Wade, Mina Totino, Hank Bull, Ian Wallace, and so many others. I met Ken Lum and attended his class. (He also introduced me to Japanese food!) Rodney Graham took me once for coffee and offered me a show in his studio on the spot. I have endless good memories of that time. Most importantly, the Vancouver School of Photography was then a very vital movement at the peak of its

fame. Every conversation that I had was very enriching, and the whole experience defined me as an artist. Being part of this community became my dream. I had found a home.

GABRIELA ACEVES SEPÚLVEDA (GAS): This is an excellent introduction to discussing how your work changed when you arrived in Canada, how it continues to do so, and your identification as a Latin American artist during various stages here in Canada. I am thinking first of when you arrived at UBC as a professor and experienced a kind of culture shock, like all of us.

MPB: Settling in Canada in 2004 began a difficult experience for me in both personal and professional terms. I was shocked to see the oppression caused by the social norms in this place. Looking at people on the streets was frowned upon, the way that I walked and moved was different, and soon I noticed how my street behaviour and my whole body started to transform to fit the new norms. My first Canadian work was a response to these experiences. It was a series called *On Discipline* (2005–2007). I was struck by the locals' obsession with pruning trees and shaping them into geometric forms. To me, this resembled my own experience of control and oppression in Canadian society, to which I had to, unfortunately, adapt.

Being a professor was also a huge struggle. I had no formal training, and the cultural gaps in my experience quickly became evident. My limitations with the language made me feel that I could not sustain a conversation with any of my friends, so I retreated from social life and hardly ever went to openings. Adding to the pain was the tension that I perceived around my hiring. I would go to shows, and people would say, "Oh, I know who you are!" But it didn't feel too cheerful. Someone told me that since the position was created after Jeff Wall left the department, in some people's minds, it belonged to the community.

The job was extremely demanding, and I felt constantly overwhelmed and struggled to be a father to my children. It was a devastating experience.

I felt hollow inside. At some point, Wendy Watriss, co-director and curator of Photofest, invited me for the second time, and then I realized that I had nothing to offer. Something had literally died in me. It was scary.

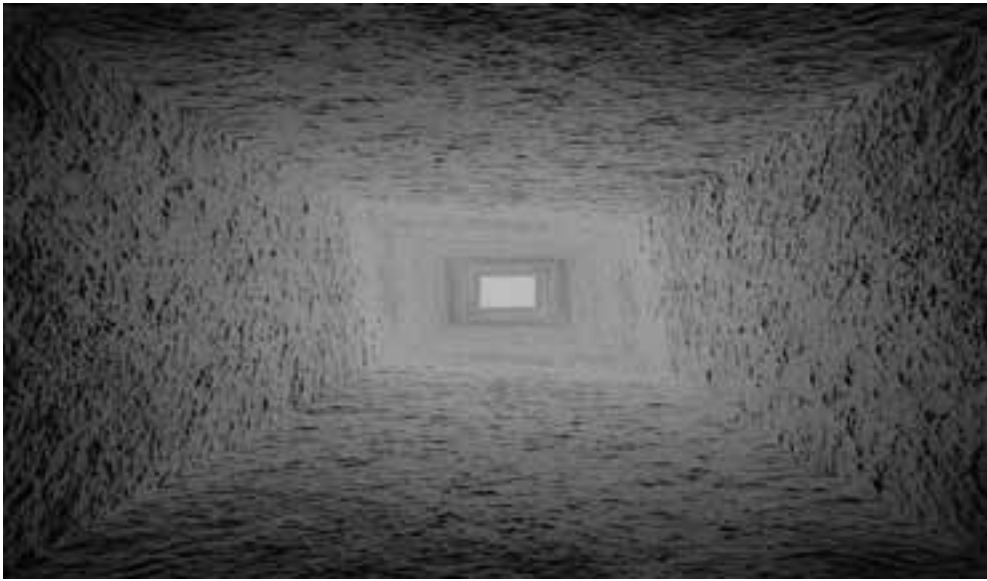
Yet I certainly have a position in the institution—Beau Dick, with brilliant sarcasm, used to say that we were “institutionalized.” Just like before I came to UBC, the global art world had “positioned” me. Integrating is a matter of survival. Those first years were devastating, but Beau made me see that it was a necessary process of death and rebirth.

GAS: It is interesting to observe how your artistic journey has been shaped by friendships. What is the place of your encounter with Kwakwaka'wakw artist and hereditary chief Beau Dick in this journey?

MPB: Beau led me to fully embrace the spiritual nature of art, and I seek to deepen that awareness in my “art+teaching” practice. His work is both beautiful and haunting, and we most cherish the mystery behind the creative process, the richness of that encounter. Witnessing Beau carving was quite a thrill. He was the ultimate master carver, and I felt like I was witnessing an act of possession, through which he became one with his tools and the cedar, at once deeply listening and present.

Without me realizing it, my work became “sculptural” too—not only in the sense of installation but also in terms of the materiality of the image. Until then, my videos had been rooted in the tradition of abstract geometric painting. Now, I have become much more aware of the materiality of video, the distinct plasticity with which different software rendered the image. I started to twist the images and distort them. It was a new relationship (fig. 5.2).

Of course, Beau was also a teacher in the spiritual sense. His studio was a place of learning and transformation, and he was constantly giving talks all over campus. I attended the only class he formally taught, and we planned to do a class together that never happened because he left too



5.2 Video still from Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufragios* (Shipwrecks), 2015.

soon. It would have been a communal space, open to anyone on campus, free of attendance and grading requirements, and a meeting place of technology and spirituality. It has remained a model for me.

GAS: With regard to Latin American art and identity categories, did you still consider yourself a Latin American artist in this context of cultural adjustment? In this book, we engage with Latin/x identities, and we define them broadly and as diverse identity categories. In this sense, we are interested in hearing your position concerning this identity construct. We want to know whether this category speaks to you or whether you are affiliated with it. In particular, we seek to understand and trace the positionality of Latin American and Afro-Latin American artists in these territories that we currently know as Canada.

MPB: I never really felt like a Latin American artist, although I was starting to become one through my inclusion in international Latin American art exhibitions and publications. But let's talk first about identity. For example, growing up, I hated being Black. I was born in appalling poverty and had the misfortune of being aware of my condition. All I wanted was to escape that situation and everything related to it. I wished I wasn't Black, or Cuban, or Latin American, for that matter. I just strived to become a modernist "universal man." This colonial notion at the core of the Cuban Revolution was fed to us in every instance of cultural or political discourse.

Those marks remained with me for the longest time. And I wasn't alone. I recall having numerous discussions with my artist colleagues about how to define ourselves, including a conversation that we had during an exhibition in Vienna called *La Mirada* (2010). We engaged in several talks with the Kunsthalle Wien's director, Gerhard Matt, and with curator Eugenio Valdés, as we were hesitant to label our work as contemporary Cuban art. Our dream was not to be labelled as Cuban artists but to be acknowledged solely as artists.

GAS: How did the AKA Collective, which you established several years later in Vancouver, relate to this position?

MPB: At one point, a number of Latin American artists joined the Master of Fine Arts program here at UBC: Argentinian Guadalupe (Lupe) Martínez and Mexicans Carlos Colín, Nelly César Marín, and Emilio Rojas. All of them are truly brilliant. Despite our different backgrounds, we felt a deep connection. It was Lupe who introduced me to Mónica Reyes, with whom I immediately started to dream of an exhibition. Those were the seeds leading to the formation of the AKA Collective and our first show in 2013. It was not our identities, but a shared sensibility, that brought us together. The premise, the initial question that led to the AKA, was precisely whether there is such a thing as a Latin American artist. What would that mean?



That was very explicit in the foundation statement for our first exhibition in Mónica's Back Gallery Projects (now Mónica Reyes Gallery). That vision made the collective very open. It was about "other" sensibilities and about the ways that they transformed in this cultural context. It was about much more than a defined identity, and it appealed to artists and creators of many other backgrounds.

ZZ: In relation to identity, I am interested in taking up again what you mentioned about hating being Black because it made me think about your relationship with Pupi and Juan Carlos, two critical photographers who are also Black men and your best friends. How was being a Black artist in Havana different from being a Black artist in Vancouver? Did you feel more or less isolated as a Black person in Canada or perhaps as the only Black artist and scholar in your faculty or at UBC?

MPB: With Pupi, Juan Carlos, and Molina, we often talked a lot about *negritud* (Blackness) and all that. We had different positions based on our own experiences. It was not a question of whether we were *negros* (Black) and artists, but we all had our own angle. I was not exactly *un artista negro*. I was rather a *mulato* artist, a strongly racist notion, which in Cuba demarcates a distinct cultural (and racial!) lineage of outstanding mixed-race artists and cultural production.

In Vancouver, I did not know many Black curators or scholars at the time. The Black population in the city is relatively small and dispersed. At first, I couldn't read the local racial codes. I attributed my discomfort and the absence of Black people to class issues. Class and power are very pronounced in the academic environment. However, class differences were subtly mobilized, and being in British Columbia, it was challenging to understand whether people treated me differently because of my race or because of my socioeconomic status or whether it was just how people treated each other in this place.

I hardly ever experienced explicit racism, but of course, I hardly ever interacted socially. I was very secluded in my studio, working ten or twelve

hours a day, going home to actually continue working. My world became tiny, and in that world, Blackness wasn't a thing.

Yet, for whatever reason, I have hardly had a solo show in Vancouver to this day.

zz: And did that change over time? Because integration takes time and, of course, has its costs.

MPB: It hasn't really changed. Except for a solo exhibition curated by Keith Wallace for Atsui Gallery and the shows at Back Gallery Projects and Mónica Reyes Gallery—three galleries that, strangely enough, occupy the same location!—I have never had a show in Vancouver. Rarely, have I been included in group shows in the city.

zz: Still, today, artists are often expected to self-promote and to commercialize their work. Having an online presence is very important. Do you think this dynamic also influenced how exhibitions worked for you at the local and global levels?

MPB: Totally. You do have a point. My problem is that in Cuba, everyone who went to Havana came looking for me because there weren't many photographers. And I never had to promote myself. When I got here, I realized that I had to look for the curators and the art dealers. But I had neither the time nor the energy to do it, nor did I know how. I went from home and my children to work. And that, too, of course, had a tremendous influence. When people stopped seeing me, they forgot about me.

zz: Did it also have to do with entering academia? The university became your main space because it was your permanent job. Although you continued making art, you were now a full-time professor.

MPB: That would not be a reason because here in Vancouver, there is a long tradition of being an academic and an artist. Everyone in my department

is an academic-artist. They make art often destined for art historians. And so that is the tradition in my department, and it still exists.

GAS: Regardless of your inability to promote yourself, I think what you confronted here has to do with how racism intersects with other forms of oppression and white male privilege in particular. The milieu around photo-conceptualism was and still is elitist, extremely misogynistic, and except for Stan Douglas and Ken Lum, very white. It is a group with a lot of power in the entire cultural sphere of this city. The fact that you were symbolically chosen as the successor to Jeff Wall disrupted the power structures and expectations of many.

MPB: Yes, many things came together, and yes, the art world was and continues to be very toxic, and there probably was a bit of resentment. I am not trying to downplay any of those realities.

But to me, it was all a process of learning and growth. I gave up on my career and embraced my practice, much as a poet whose poems end up in a drawer. That liberated me from exactly those conditions you are mentioning and gave me the freedom and focus to embrace my spiritual journey and to change the way I engaged in the creative process. Thus, in the end, it was a gift I am deeply grateful for.

ZZ: Can you tell us about your friendship with Beau Dick and how your company with him related to your production that followed?

MPB: I already mentioned the immediate change in my artmaking, but it would be impossible to apprehend the whole of his influence.

I finally took my first sabbatical leave after ten years of teaching. When I returned to school, it was clear that something had changed; it felt as though Beau had taken over the program. He was just a huge presence, an exceptional human being, very generous, full of charisma and brilliance, but also very cool. He was already a living legend, a true rock star. We instantly became brothers. He knew the art and stories of the

Northwest Coast like no one else and would constantly teach them. So I spent many hours in his studio, sharing medicines and learning about the cultures and the marks of colonialism. I travelled to potlatches and visited Indigenous communities. He gave me friends who are today my teachers and brothers.

He made me understand myself better, and instilled in me the drive for community building and the importance of art as a vehicle for change.

Around the same time, my wife encountered Flavio Santi, an Ecuadorian spiritual and community leader, who has been healing people around the world for the past twenty-five years while struggling to collect funds to recover his family's ancestral lands. It was through Flavio that I encountered Ayahuasca. In our first ceremony, I brought him an invitation from Beau to join our group and participate in documenta 14 in Greece. Beau's vision was to hold ceremonies in the Parthenon in order to break the spell at the cradle of Western civilization.

This trip to Greece never happened, as Beau passed away shortly before the event. But he had already set me on my path.

I have been a friend and collaborator with Flavio for a long time now, but I have also met other teachers, and my path has led me to Africa.

Beau was still in the hospital when I encountered the book *Of Water and Spirits: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman* (1994) by Dagara elder Malidoma Patrice Some. I immediately mentioned it to Beau, and we wrote to Malidoma to join us in Greece too.

A year later, Malidoma came to Vancouver, and that was a brief but extraordinary encounter. We did not spend much time together afterward, but when he recently passed away, I felt a deep loss.

Throughout these years, I have been blessed with many extraordinary teachers. I should mention my deep personal ties with Kwakwaka'wakw hereditary chief and artist Willie Hawkins; with Hunor Labor Gatorwobuna Avi, who initiated me into Vodun spirituality; with Tenzin Tsepa, a Tibetan monk who introduced me to Buddhism; and with Midao Kago Kumordzi, a high priest and Ewe philosopher, whose work and vision for an Ewe University I am committed to supporting.



5.3 Video still from Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufragios (Shipwrecks)*, 2015.

GAS: From around this time, I also remember a series of videos or images that were pure colour compositions, can you tell us about their relation to these moments?

MPB: Yes, I made a lot of videos at that time (fig. 5.3). But everything keeps changing. I also began to look at how to make the students *feel* an image so that they could get out of the conceptual mindset. In my early years of teaching, I struggled to talk about images. I turned to Western philosophy, notably to Martin Heidegger, who I was introduced to by my then student and long-time friend Josema Zamorano. The question “What is an image today?” has been with me all of this time, especially in light of the digital explosion. The answers have led me on a very long journey.

Photography has lost its narrative power, its formerly intrinsic ties to reality, its ability to tell the world. With that, the trust that we had

in images is also gone. Digital still images are not photographs. So what exactly defines an image today? What has taken the role of photography? What is the dominant image of the present? Is it video, stills, or GIFs? All of these visual artifacts are central to our culture, but none are dominant.

This inquiry has led me to understand the role of the digital interface in contemporary culture—a complex array of textual, sound, and visual images arranged in hyperspatial distributions. This uber-image has come to dominate contemporary culture and, furthermore, contemporary existence.

GAS: In relation to this idea, how do you define your new project on interface art? And how does it inform how you express yourself as an artist?

MPB: The digital interface (DI), as the dominant image of our image-dominated world, is also our new universal language—a highly sophisticated means of communication that is uniquely capable of shaping and conveying the vast complexity of today's realities. No linear language can claim that much.

But we find ourselves in the paradoxical situation of generalized illiteracy: we can't express ourselves in this language. Surely, you can post a video or write a blog, but you are basically *adding* to the interface. We are literally filling forms, framing our images in a grid. Our message is already predetermined. Marshall McLuhan taught us long ago that the medium is the message.

The keys to this language are in the hands of technocrats. Through them, a technocratic imagination has penetrated culture. Their main goal of interface design today is that of control and manipulation.

The question is whether this language is intrinsically toxic. What is its potential for free expression? For poetic creation?

I am now in a quest to examine these conditions by exploring the morphology of this language in order to challenge the dominant norms of DI creation and to investigate its potentials for communication and for the imagination of the future.

I have encountered a fascinating medium, a highly dense system of communication and exploration of our realities, and a rich soil for poetic subversions.

The DI is a space-based language. We have these complex collages, but perhaps more importantly, we have the hyperlinks. As we navigate from site to site, from video games to shops, from news outlets to virtual worlds, we embark on this never-ending transdimensional journey—*un naufragio infinito* (an endless shipwreck). The spaces that we delineate through our navigations are fundamental to our experience.

So I am very invested in creating such spatial experiences. One can think of them as hyper(linked) sculptures, hieroglyphs, unconcrete poems, and the like. I call them MAGINES.

ZZ: Can you tell us more about all of these terms and how they are related to your interest in the Hotglue platform? How do all of these elements shape your vision of the technical, the technological, and technology?

MPB: Hotglue is the tool that has allowed all of these investigations. (I don't know how to code!) This is an incredibly simple, yet powerful, tool designed by the Critical Engineering Working Group. As a former engineer, I fully appreciate the group's manifesto, which partly states, "The Critical Engineer expands 'machine' to describe interrelationships encompassing devices, bodies, agents, forces and networks."<sup>3</sup> MAGINES share this vision, although I also invoke a spiritual dimension of this intrarelation.<sup>4</sup>

Dominant approaches to DI design generate addictive and toxic effects on users. MAGINES are other interfaces—a pharmacological approach to interface design of the kind articulated by philosopher Bernard Stiegler—through which we seek to create healing experiences.

MAGINES = machines+imago+magic

I believe that there is an essential spiritual dimension to technology: on the one hand, it transcends humanity (technology is ever present in

nature); and on the other hand, it is impossible to conceive of humanity without musical *instruments*, without writing *systems*.

Our own body is but a system of systems. Technology is some sort of logic or drive that underlies reality. There are a million views on this question, which is of course central to our moment.

MAGINES attempt to invoke this spiritual dimension of cyberspace. This dimension is something that I am exploring together with a group of programmers, artists, and spiritual activists. Our dream is to forge a liberatory language, a unique means both for the preservation and dissemination of ancestral cultures and for the imagination of “other” communities and futures.

GAS: To finalize, can we return to the question of identity? This book maps the experiences of artists, curators, filmmakers, and creatives of Latin American descent or origin in Canada. Given your experience as a teacher and an artist based in Vancouver, do you have anything to share about this moment of heightened identity politics?

MPB: I carry many names with a lot of pride: Manuel, Yutsu (Quichua), Tsukanka (Chuar), Hator (Ewe). What is my identity?

I am connected to many lands, and in all of them, I am part of many families I deeply love. I have also found many children among my students in Canada. There are profound differences between us in terms of our individual and collective histories, personal experiences, cultures, races, and genders. For example, I was deeply touched when a young female student of mine called to tell me that she had just kissed a girl for the first time. I was also devastated by the loss of my son in my village of Dzogadze in Ghana.

I have found this identity in my journeys without ever attempting to. So this is my experience: identity is a journey of self-discovery to find the many identities in each of us. At the end of that journey, we will find the oneness that binds us.



It seems as though identity is this bottomless pit, and the deeper we look, the richer we become.

I have been captive to the modernist notion of “universality” and have known, deeply within, the force of its oppression. But modernity and the whole of Western ontologies and epistemologies are exhausted. The resistance from the dominant centres of knowledge can’t repress emerging versions of history and can’t offer any alternative to the potential of marginalized epistemologies to address our generalized crisis. Beyond colonial “universality,” these histories and ontologies convene at one point to unveil the truth behind what elders and wisdom keepers reveal as our ultimate identity: we are all one.

Yet identity is this journey on which we all must embark to find the richness in each of us, our true potentials, to heal the trauma of eons of separation, and to encounter at the end, very, very deep within, what you would probably call love.

#### NOTES

- 1 This conversation was conducted in Spanish on May 4, 2023 and subsequently translated into English.
- 2 In early 1990, after the Eastern Bloc dissolved, Cuban president Fidel Castro announced a series of economic restrictions and shortages of electricity and food.
- 3 Critical Engineering Working Group, “Critical Engineering Manifesto,” <https://criticalengineering.org/>; <https://perma.cc/23W2-TKPB>.
- 4 Karen Barad, “Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism without Contradiction,” in *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson, 161–94 (Springer Netherlands, 1996).



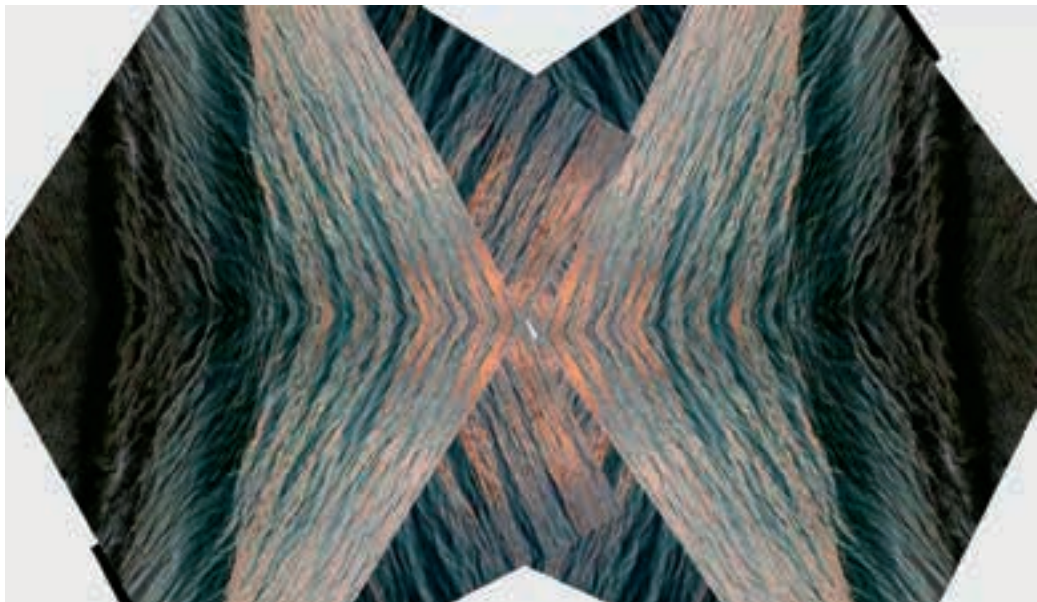


3.2 Film still from Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana*, from *On High*, 2019.



4.2 Film still from Adonay Guerrero Cortés, dir., *Dioses ocultos/Hidden Gods*, 2014.

5.3 Video still from Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufragios* (Shipwrecks), 2015.



7.1 Anahí González, photo documentation of billboard installation in the series *Allá más al Norte* (Further North), 2022, London, Ontario.





8.8 Postcard and background for virtual events, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mên, *Passing Through the Heart*, 2019–23.



11.1 Claudia Bernal, *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood), 2008. Caught by a red fishing net, the artist slowly moves and releases from their captivity while an audience witnesses the performance at A Space gallery, Toronto.



11.5 María Ezcurra, *Invisible*, 2005–16. In the 2016 installation at Sur Gallery, multiple nylons stitched together stretch from the gallery floor to the ceiling, taking over the space.





12.1 View of performance, CUERPO Collective Body, 2022.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The SBC Gallery's Shift Toward Latin American and Latinx Canadian Art as a Statement

*Interview with Nuria Carton de Grammont by  
Analays Álvarez Hernández and Zaira Zarza*

ZAIRA ZARZA (ZZ): Hello, Nuria. It is a delight to have this conversation with you. We would like to begin with a straightforward query: can you share some information about your educational and cultural background and professional trajectory? Essentially, we would like to learn more about you and your career in order to introduce you to our readers.

NURIA CARTON DE GRAMMONT (NCG): Of course! I am Franco-Mexican. My father is from France, and my mother is from Mexico, where I grew up. If I had to define my bicultural identity, my cultural *ancrage*<sup>1</sup> (anchoring) is in Latin America, where I studied history in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. In 2004, I decided to move to Montreal to pursue a master's degree in *études des arts* (art studies) at the Université du Québec à Montréal because I speak French as a second language and had previously worked as a translator for French-speaking performing art companies from Quebec. After completing my doctorate at Concordia University in 2012, I completed two post-doctorate degrees at the Université de Montréal. Although I come from an academic background, I have also worked in other sectors and have always thought of returning to Mexico. In other words, my partner and I did not plan to make Montreal our home, but over time, we grew

attached to the city and ultimately decided to stay. It was a natural progression that came with living our lives as a family. So I am an art historian, a critic, a curator, a mother, and a mestiza woman based in Montreal.

ZZ: Can you please explain how you transitioned from your academic background to become the director of the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art? Could you also provide more information about the gallery, such as its type of ownership, year of creation, and operational structure?

NCG: I joined SBC in 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a great challenge. The origin of the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art dates back to 1967, when it was founded as the Saidye Bronfman Centre. Since 2007, SBC has been located in the Belgo Building in downtown Montreal, where it operates under a new institutional structure. Today, SBC is a nonprofit exhibition centre and public gallery in Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyaang/Montreal dedicated to providing a forum for artists, curators, and cultural practitioners whose projects critically engage diverse publics with current issues in art, culture, and society. As an exhibition centre, it has secured ongoing and recurrent financial support from all three levels of government and has maintained its status as a museum without a permanent collection. In its eighteen years of existence as an independent organization, SBC has been able to leave a mark on the pan-Canadian art scene with a critical and collaborative vision based on a distinctive program composed of exhibitions, public events and workshops, research residencies, and publications. As a space that supports personal and collective agency, SBC relies on a curatorial approach that has historically engaged with challenging artworks and diverse communities. With my arrival, SBC adopted a more hemispheric perspective, considering both the North and the South, and thus took a cross-cultural approach (fig. 6.1).

ZZ: Institutions are people too. Can you tell me more about the work team and its operations?



6.1 View of Livia Daza-Paris's solo exhibition, *L'arbre blessé/The Wounded Tree*, 2023, curated by Nuria Carton de Grammont, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal.

NCG: Our team consists of three individuals working full-time, one as the head of exhibitions, communications, and the residency, one as the head of public programs and institutional development, and myself as the director. Additionally, we have a part-time employee who serves as the administrative manager and a *stagiaire* (intern). As a team, we aim to create a sense of belonging with a sustainable vision to build community. It is a place that functions on a human scale, making every person count. It is also a space for inclusive curatorial experimentation and decolonial research practices in collaboration with universities, museums, and other cultural and community-based institutions locally and internationally. Another unique aspect of SBC is that we conduct research-based exhibitions and explore art from a perspective guided by our interests as a team. Therefore, our exhibitions are curated internally or in collaboration with a curatorial committee and through our curatorial orientations, including



6.2 View of performance, Pilar Escobar, *Canto, río, río, lloro* (I Sing, I Laugh, I Laugh, I Cry), 2022.

critical historiographies, oralities and active listening, institutional critique, sovereignties, ecologies and cosmovisions, climate change and non-human semiosis, neurodiversity and extended corporealities, epistemic decolonization and collective knowledge, and radical politics and border thinking. We are a growing community actively included in the shaping of the institution through its curatorial and artistic research-focused programming (fig. 6.2).

ANALAYS ÁLVAREZ HERNÁNDEZ (AAH): What prompted you to implement changes to the gallery's activities and approach? Additionally, are there any plans to explore new directions in the future? This question takes us back to what you mentioned previously about SBC offering, since its

inception, a space for vulnerable communities and the fact that the current shift does not necessarily align with its mission.

NCG: It was intuitive and evolved from a particular social context in Montreal and Quebec more broadly. I am referring to a public debate about the space of visible minorities in the province. This was a debate that, I would say, gained more emphasis after the death of George Floyd in the United States in 2020. It was an interesting experience that pushed me to position myself as part of it and made me need to situate myself in the South of this North. In other words, during this time, we witnessed how different minorities emerged and situated themselves within this debate and negotiated spaces for themselves. I do not know whether it is something shared, but I felt disoriented because this public debate gives little space to the Latin American artistic community even though it is one of the most rapidly growing populations in Canada. I believe that Latinx Canadian art has not yet emerged because there is a struggle for representation and positioning within the art world. Certain narratives are given more value over others, which can lead to feelings of exclusion and abandonment. Despite seeing progress, it was disheartening to feel that Latin American voices and perspectives were underrepresented in the art world. This general absence can be attributed to various factors, but for me, this experience made me realize the importance of positioning myself both individually and as part of the Latin American diaspora in Canada. Understanding and highlighting our history, culture, and experiences are crucial.

AAH: I wonder how these changes have been received by the media, the artists, and the public. Your organization is positioning itself as a Latin American or Latinx Canadian space with a dynamic and evolving approach. Can you share any feedback that you have received so far?

NCG: Yes! I think it was a shift that I needed, that I could say was maybe, how can I say—I don't have the word in any of the three languages I

speak [Spanish, French, and English]—very rapturous, if you will, but I also understand the context and mission of the gallery. My principal objective is to maintain a dialogue between the Global North and the Global South. I do not want to limit SBC's curatorial approach to one direction but want to focus on the overall look and feel. This objective may change in the future, but it was important for me to make a statement at this particular moment. This statement reflects my reality, and I need to find my place in this cultural landscape. Overall, there is an opening for the public, our colleagues and peers, the media, and even the university. This opening was necessary, don't you think? It provided a space for different working methods at the intersection of contemporary art and civic life that amplifies the pluralization of voices and augments art's role as a place for collective learning, an incubator and convener for social justice. So it is not just about what we present in the gallery but also about the refreshing change in our approach to work and in our commitment to give visibility to Latin American artists and other cultural and artistic communities.

When we discuss institutions, there is often a heated debate. That is particularly true within universities, where we may feel pressured to respond to diversity quotas imposed by public provincial and federal policies. This pressure is different and, compared to other institutions, may be delayed. Ultimately, these policies influence and permeate all institutions, forcing them to adapt. I strongly believe that the recent changes have brought about positive outcomes by making voices, perspectives, and artists visible, even those overlooked for years. However, we must also acknowledge the potential risks of these changes. We cannot simply open Pandora's box without considering the changes that need to be made in governance and institutions. It is not just about representation and visibility but also about respecting the knowledge, temporalities, and ecologies of our different communities, particularly the vulnerable ones whose knowledge and traditions are marginally positioned. We must rethink alternative models of art outreach, exhibition making, and institution building that are attuned to issues of social ecology and transformative



justice. We must create new working methods and adapt to different epistemologies and know-how in order to embrace these diverse perspectives.

zz: This book's main discussions, reflected in the authors' contributions and in our own work as editors, focus on understanding the idea of Latinx Canadianness through an inclusive and evolving lens. Building on this foundation, we explore the definition of Latinx Québécois. Do you believe that there is such a thing as Latinx Canadian or Latinx Québécois art and artists? Essentially, where do you stand on this topic? What makes these artists unique? What do you think is the significance of circulating these categories? Although categorizations can be complex, they are crucial, even if they require dismantling. Related to the previous questions, do you believe that it is important to approach this topic from a personal perspective? Can you share how you identify as a member of the Latin American diasporic community in Montreal and where you place yourself in national, regional, and local identities? Do you see yourself as Latinx Canadian, Mexican Canadian, Québécoise, Latina Québécoise? There are multiple levels of inquiry, so feel free to start with the personal level before moving on to the theoretical and the professional or to proceed in whichever order you prefer. Artists and curators often say, "Do not put us in a box," but these categories still hold significance, even if it derives from tearing them down.

NCG: Yes, they do, especially when we seek to retransform them, right? I believe that there is a Latinx Canadian art that exists. However, the perception of Latinx Canadian art may come from those outside the Latinx Canadian community. The specificity of Latinx Canadian art is the negotiation between North and South perspectives, as we have a cultural context from the South but live in the North. This perspective is rich and hemispheric, crossing borders and always multisituated. It is important to note that we have been able to speak in terms of Latinx Canadian art since 2000, but the Latin Canadian diaspora has been present since the 1970s, with Chilean refugees being among the first. The artists from the earlier

generation are often unknown, making them the lost generation. I think of José Szlam and Domingo Cisneros, but there are/were many other names that we do not know. Despite their presence, we have practically lost sight of this generation of artists whose members are now around eighty years old. However, if we look at when the category of Latinx Canadian art emerged publicly, it could be argued that it was around the early 2000s or even the 2010s. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, a community of neoconceptual artists emerged, including Giorgia Volpe, Helena Martín Franco, Claudia Bernal, Constanza Camelo-Suarez, and Livia Daza-Paris, among others.

Interestingly, these artists did not situate themselves as Latina/o/x when they arrived. In the early stages of their careers, when asked about their origins, they would avoid the question and refuse to be categorized as artists from the South. That was because they struggled to integrate into the system, and being labelled as Latin American artists would make them appear folkloric rather than contemporary. Latinx Canadian art is a relatively new category that has existed only for the past decade with the emergence of this pluralization of the artistic scene. Before that, there were no clear definitions of Latinx Canadian art. It is fascinating to observe how these categories have evolved over time.

But it is also important to note that our diasporic reality differs from that of Chicano or Latinx art in the United States, which emerged from a well-defined Mexican American movement of political and social cohesion that began to push for a new identification during the 1960s. The Latin American diaspora in Canada is made up of waves of people from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, which has made it challenging for the community to cohere. There is no cohesion because you can find a person who fled from Sendero Luminoso in Peru, and you can find a person who participated in leftist guerrilla movements of liberation, and both are political refugees, right? Additionally, there are those of us who are not political refugees but part of a middle-class diaspora, as we had certain privileges that allowed us to come to Canada. Yes, so we have,

really, a very fragmented and more recent diaspora. We produce work that is different from the Chicano or Latinx art in the United States because of our very different cultural and historical realities.

zz: Could you provide further insight for those of us who are physically closer to the United States, as well as for Latinx individuals residing in Europe and other global regions? It is evident that Latino/a/x culture is stronger in the United States, so how would you approach this topic? We are currently exploring and will continue to explore this matter in relation to Latino/a and Latinx individuals in the United States.

NCG: The diasporic stories of Latinx Canadians are unique due to the double border that they navigate as they cross from the United States into Canada. It is important to understand this concept in order to comprehend the Latinx Canadian diaspora fully. The US border with Mexico became permeable and moved, but it was once part of Mexican territory. Culturally, a Mexican community already living there had been displaced but still inhabited the territory. This relationship between the United States, Mexico, and the rest of Latin America has existed for many years, dating back to the nineteenth century. These diasporic relations involve labour mobility and work that is always in motion. For Latinx Canadians, these aspects define the borderlands—a double border, with all its unique qualities, that separates us from the United States. These qualities define us as we navigate these crossings. The images of migrants crossing the border illegally that we see in Canada today are not new to those who have lived near the Mexican border, where this is a constant reality. However, they are undoubtedly striking when viewed from this double-border perspective.

Moreover, the presence of the Latin American community in Canadian media is relatively new, and it has only recently started to receive recognition. Despite having a presence in Canada since the 1970s and before, it was not until the murder of Fredy Villanueva in 2008 in Montreal that

the media in Quebec “discovered,” in a way, our community. To truly grasp the essence of our diaspora, it is crucial to comprehend how we have positioned ourselves. This “discovery” brought to light the existence of our Latin American community and made us visible through the lens of police violence. It was through this gesture of violence that the media began to recognize our presence in Canada. Significant events like this one have defined our history and should not be overlooked. The debate initiated by the Parti Québécois under Premier Pauline Marois through the Charter of Quebec Values in 2011–13 has also played a significant role in shaping our identity and position in Quebec as a diasporic community, as well as what we say about the current anti-immigrant and anti-minority discourse of Coalition Avenir Québec, the party led by Quebec premier François Legault!

AAH: I appreciate your distinction between Latinx and Latinx Canadian identities, as it can help us to escape our cultural and historical ties to the United States. This reliance is due not just to our diaspora but also to Canada’s perception of its neighbour. Regarding Zaira’s question, I want to know how you identify within these categories and whether you consider yourself Latinx Canadian.

NCG: That is a difficult question to answer. While I think about it, I want to continue expanding on the difference between Latinx and Latinx Canadian. In addition to the historical relationship, which is much older, I would like to point out the existence of Chicano art and the sense of community collectivity that arose from a specific political and social movement in the 1960s in the United States. The Chicano movement was a movement of workers, specifically agricultural workers. This collective political struggle allowed for a definition of what it means to be a Latino in the United States. In contrast, in our community—comprised of seasonal agricultural workers, peasants, and Indigenous people from Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala—we have not had such a collective struggle to help

define our identity. These communities of seasonal workers are constantly made invisible in the political and social landscape in Canada. Until recently, the idea of a collective identity did not exist in our community. Only recently have these categories been imposed on us, requiring that we follow cultural policies, such as when we are asked to define ourselves when filling out government forms. To return to your question, I consider myself a Montréalaise. In the context of the Coalition Avenir Québec's policies, I do not feel represented as a Québécoise, despite being a French speaker and having moved here for the Francophonie. It has been a debate of self-definition and deciding who I am. But this self-definition is fluid and will evolve over time, along with the new forms of inclusion that this society is collectively capable of building.

AAH: It seems that these categories are temporary and context-dependent, constantly changing. Therefore, in a few years, we might feel differently about them. Concerning the relationship between Latinx and Latinx Canadians, we have another important question: can artists of Latin American origin living and working in Canada be considered Latin American, or is their art Latin American? We are interested in the definition of Latin Americans and what distinguishes Latinx Canadian art from Latin American art. Can you provide us with more concrete examples related to SBC? This question raises others. There is a difference in perception between artists who currently live and work in Latin America, even if they travel frequently, and artists who have been working in Canada for over twenty-five years since immigrating, for example, from Colombia in the case of Claudia Bernal and Helena Martín Franco. I wonder what sets them apart and how these definitions affect the reception of their art.

NCG: Specifically, I think that the idea of diaspora characterizes this movement. It is a historical and cultural reality that migrations from the South to the North have vindicated over time. This idea of a scattered and fragmented diaspora gave rise to Latinx Canadian art. It is difficult

to condense a uniqueness from this perspective, and we have discussed this topic extensively. Essentially, we all agree that the categories do not necessarily fit together.

In my opinion, it is also crucial to acknowledge the presence of non-Latin American artists who have contributed to the North-South cultural exchange within the realm of Latin Canadian art. These artists played a pivotal role in building a bridge between these two regions even before the emergence of the Latinx Canadian art movement. It is important to recognize and to celebrate the specific individuals who have made significant contributions to this exchange. I am thinking of Christine Brault, Patrick Dionne, Miki Gingras, and Catherine Bodmer, among others. These artists have established their careers through a North-South cross-border dialogue, yet they are facing significant difficulties, which is the paradox of the Pandora's box that has been opened. Although the current debate on cultural pluralism is essential, it also exhibits certain contradictions.

zz: We would like to know more about the challenges faced by artists and curators from the Latin American diaspora as they try to integrate into Montreal's art scene. Can you share your thoughts about some of the obstacles that you have encountered in your career? What can be done to overcome these challenges and bring about change? We are specifically interested in the financial and media contexts of galleries and the Latinx Canadian art community, as well as in the film industry. We understand that Montreal has a unique context and history, and we would appreciate your insights on how this uniqueness affects artists' and curators' experiences in the city. Although we are interested in Montreal, we welcome comparisons to other parts of Canada where you may have lived.

nccg: When I arrived here, Quebecers were called the "Latinos of the North." But, at the same time, in 2021 the Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission exposed systemic racism in the province and highlighted a significant problem of assimilation of visible minorities, including Latino/as and Latinx. This commission's findings situated us amid

the historical events that have defined the artistic movement. It is essential to understand that systemic racism exists and that the plans for shaping Quebec as intercultural, plural, and inclusive have not worked as envisioned.

Once in Montreal, I became aware of my racial identity as a mestiza, although I am a privileged and middle-class person. It contrasted with being called *güerita* (white woman) in Mexico, which has more to do with social status than skin colour. I have had to reconstruct my identity and situate myself politically since becoming a visible minority in Canada. The obstacles that we face include invisibility, folklorization, and discrimination. However, I want to end on a positive note. Although the current context is sensitive, I see a lot of change in academic, cultural, and artistic institutions. The biggest challenge ahead is finding common ground for meaningful exchanges. It seems that we are caught between the urgency of current events, such as the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and the aftermath of past incidents, like the controversy surrounding director Robert Lepage's production of *SLAV* (2018). Both are significant moments in our collective history. We are currently experiencing a shift in mindset that requires a long-term process. As we navigate this period of accidental history accelerated by social media, I am sure that younger generations will demonstrate the patience necessary for us to effect meaningful change.

AAH: I partially agree with you—and believe that having different opinions enables us to keep the conversation going. I agree that we should be patient and that things can improve. Many of the measures that we take, such as positive discrimination, are temporary and meant to reach a point where they are no longer needed. However, experience has shown that institutions may have good intentions but are not always successful in implementing change. That is my issue with institutions that claim to include more when, in reality, the focus should be on questioning the structures, methods, and frameworks in place. We should be willing to challenge both the content and container and not be afraid to include

temporalities that may contradict the normative one. However, this type of interrogation can be painful and often requires sacrifice. I do not see a willingness to sacrifice in our privileged society, which is a problem.

Although the changes that we are making are extremely necessary, the issue is not the goodwill behind them but the current structures and systems, which need to be questioned and changed. It is important to maintain a continuous dialogue rather than sporadically addressing issues. We should embrace constant questioning—instead of seeking only certainty—which can lead to change. The past few years have highlighted the need for the latter, despite the potential for excesses within movements. This emphasis has personally made me aware, for instance, of my privilege, both in my current context and in my upbringing in Cuba, where systemic racism exists despite government denial. I faced economic challenges growing up, but I realize today that my status as a white woman in Cuba—I now identify as a white *mestiza*—gave me access to many things and that I received a certain level of societal treatment that I took for granted. It was not until later that I realized the extent of my privilege and the potential harm that I could cause to others. Maintaining an open dialogue about these issues is perhaps the key to finding a solution.

NCG: I agree entirely with you. The context is incredibly complex, and I believe that your idea of maintaining a continuous dialogue is crucial. When I say that we need patience, I mean that changing mentalities takes time. This kind of change cannot be achieved in the blink of an eye. It is a process that could take many years if we are to do it right. We are essentially dismantling a colonial paradigm that has been in place for hundreds of years, and this paradigm cannot be undone overnight. So the ups and downs that we experience along the way are to be expected. It is important to note that although there are calls for more representation in public policies, the management level within institutions often remains stagnant. This circumstance makes it difficult to implement real changes and to shift dynamics. We need more flexibility in the administration of these institutions to create eco-socially operational practices consistent



with the institutions' ethical guidelines. I have been asked numerous times whether I have been instrumentalized. I have given this question a lot of thought, as it is a topic that is often discussed. For me, the important thing is to use the spaces that we have fought for in order to position ourselves politically and to change things.

#### NOTE

- I To highlight the linguistic contamination experienced by diasporic subjects, we have kept French words used during the interview, which was conducted in Spanish.



## PART TWO

# Communities

Community building relies on cultural, religious, and ethnic ties but also on common interests, struggles, and collective aspirations that lead to the formation of a social body. These shared elements give rise to diverse communities and, more often than not, to unexpected networks and alliances that may collectively confront challenges like systemic racism—as social theorist Patricia Hill Collins has pointed out when discussing the importance of collective struggles in dismantling the latter and as illustrated by various examples in this book’s chapters and in this section.<sup>1</sup>

Community building is essential for those individuals who exist in diasporic contexts. Members of diasporic communities connect through shared memories, language, and cultural, religious, sociopolitical, and economic ties, as explored by sociologist Avery Gordon and writer and feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa in their respective works on memory, haunting, and borderlands.<sup>2</sup> These bonds express themselves materially through territorial markers and expansion. Diasporic communities function therefore as networks of social and emotional support, assisting immigrants in navigating the challenges of integration and adaptation in new environments. They also play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and needs of their members, often bridging the gap between their

homeland and their new country,<sup>3</sup> as well as fostering cross-cultural understanding.<sup>4</sup>

Latin American diasporas, as discussed in this book, are transnational diasporic communities whose formation is determined by a variety of economic and political factors, including the desire for improved living conditions due to increased guerrilla warfare, civil wars, and military and dictatorial regimes in their places of origin, as well as the impact of neo-liberal policies across this cultural region. In Canada, the Latin American diaspora interacts with a myriad of other groups, either diasporic, settler, or Indigenous. When these groups overlap, new networks of affinities emerge. Through solidarity and shared experiences, these communities empower individuals, strengthen their collective voice, and enhance their ability to effect positive change both locally and globally.<sup>5</sup> These overlapping create communities of interest that implement survival or resilience strategies, highlighting the importance of solidarity in addressing shared challenges.

This volume's second and final section comprises six chapters that delve into the concept of allyship through the creation of temporary or enduring communities that frequently extend beyond the confines of ethnic groups. By presenting artists' essays, dialogues, and narratives of practices, the contributors offer various models of collaboration, involvement in multidirectional or cross-border identity journeys, and experiences to explore the potential of these models.

Anahí González and Alena Robin survey the Latinx Canadian art scene in London, Ontario, in this section's opening chapter, "*Episodios from Southwestern Ontario: Latin American and Latinx Canadian Visual Arts in London.*" They engage in conversations with a series of local actors and institutions to highlight how different webs of relationships, efforts, and interests have come together to nurture this emergent Latinx Canadian scene outside of the Vancouver-Toronto-Montreal axis. One of their main goals is precisely to shed light on Latinx Canadian communities that exist and thrive elsewhere in Canada but have received less attention than those located in the most populated urban centres. After a brief overview

of the initiatives connecting London and Latin America since the 1950s, González and Robin put aside a chronological account to enter a more organic and multidirectional narrative strategy. The fragmented story of the cultural and artistic ties between London, Latin America, and the Latinx Canadian communities is narrated through various *episodios* (episodes), such as Canadian painter Greg Curnoe's imaginary and natural relations with Mexico and Cuba; González's exchanges with Canadian artist and gardener Ron Benner about London, Cuba, and the Art Gallery of Ontario's contemporary collection of Latin American art; and Robin's first experience with London's Latinx Canadian scene through the annual exhibition *Colores de Latinoamérica*. The narrated story does not prioritize or rank the characters but aims to demonstrate that there are several protagonists and that the authors themselves are among them. The chapter's structure adds to the narrative, as it demonstrates that the Latin American and Latinx Canadian story in London has been the collective effort of many individuals, institutions, projects, agents, contextual dynamics, and desires throughout the years. A community is not a unified entity but something that builds over time, engaging in continual processes of making and unmaking. It offers a platform to which people can turn and to which they can simultaneously contribute. Ultimately, it is important to highlight the intergenerational, intercultural, and professor-student collaboration between Robin and González. Robin's work has significantly contributed to Latin American studies in Canada, and she continues by passing on the task and by empowering and supporting Latinx Canadian students to explore and reflect on their own realities.

The following two chapters propel the reader into even more audacious cross-cultural dialogues than Latinx Canadian experiences already entail. In "*Recordando* Movement and Navigating Diaspora," Toronto-based media artists, educators, and long-time collaborators Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn build bridges between Latinx Canadian and Khmer Canadian diasporic experiences to understand their trajectories through overlapping and networking logics. They focus on collaborative media-based projects through which it is possible to experience multiple worlds.

Their artistic collaboration explores the intricacies of Paul Gilroy's "diaspora-consciousness" through the affective bodily memories—gestures, movements, and postures—involved in the act of sharing food, testimonies, or fables of diasporic mythical creatures.<sup>6</sup> In Dávila and Mèn's chapter, the concept of community, specifically diasporic community, escapes its macrodefinition to operate at a microlevel; that is, family and friends also form communities. The processes of transmission operate strongly at this level, often focusing on more personal, bodily aspects such as blinking eyes, head or hand movements, smells, touch, and the sounds attached to everyday rituals, all of which are passed on within these community units while also shaping processes of memory transmission and (re)construction. Food, for instance, is understood in their account and artistic practice as something that is formed out of more than a recipe; preparing and partaking of food involve several bodies in motion that respond to one another. Dávila and Mèn's technology-based art projects help (them) to remember in a different, but no less meaningful, way and to champion the multiple possibilities of using motion recording as a generative and expressive agent of memory. They build on the shared roots of the verbs record and *recordar*, which in Spanish means "to remember."

Furthermore, their collaborative work often challenges essentialist viewpoints that rigidly define communities. Instead, it sheds light on the numerous and interconnected intersections between Asian, Latinx, and Afro-descendant communities. For example, one of the analyzed projects, *Receipts* (2021), focuses on building solidarities and alliances that transcend ethnocultural community boundaries. These connections, which Gilroy refers to as a form of "supra-national kinship,"<sup>7</sup> address instances of systemic racism, such as the discrimination faced by Asian communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, which Dávila and Mèn tackle through anonymized written testimonies in *Receipts*.

In "Defying Borders through Artist Publishing and Other Aesthetic Actions," Lois Klassen and Daisy Quezada Ureña discuss some of the artist publications they have worked on since meeting within the context of an artist residency on migration at the Santa Fe Art Institute in 2016.

Although these publications centre on the migration experience of the US-Mexico border, they mark a point of departure in their multiregional dialogue and cross-border collaboration, implicating Latinx, Latinx Canadian, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks of Turtle Island.

One of the aims of this book is to highlight the Latinx Canadian experience. That said, Klassen and Quezada Ureña's chapter specifically illustrates that our focus on Canada does not limit our exchanges of ideas and dialogues to the framework of the nation-state. The book seeks to engage with Latinx artists and cultural workers while exploring realities beyond the United States alone—"Latinx" being understood to signal the inclusion of other individuals from the Latin American diaspora in other parts of the world, such as Latinx Australians and Latinx Belgians. Borders are constantly crossed—not without hardships and deadly consequences for some—between the United States and other Latin American countries like Mexico but also between Canada and the United States. Our goal is to showcase our differences while highlighting the continuity of the Latinx phenomenon and its enmeshment with other claims, such as those of Indigenous people, placing our book within a network that extends across and beyond Canada while contributing to a global dialogue on this group's diasporic experiences.

Additionally, the Latinx experience and struggles, beginning with the Chicano movement in the 1960s, have influenced Latinx Canadians' lives and cultural productions. For instance, several of our contributors as well as the editors of this volume take inspiration and build on Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational theorizations on queer borderland identities. Anzaldúa's ideas help us to question and scrutinize the term "Latinx Canadian" as a fluid and nonstatic identity construction and as an opening for cross-cultural solidarity and community building in multicultural spaces such as Canada. Her famous notions of *conciencia de la mestiza*, describing the awareness and consciousness developed by individuals who navigate and exist between multiple cultures, as well as *la facultad*, a heightened awareness or intuitive ability that allows marginalized individuals to perceive deeper realities and to navigate different

social worlds, accentuate how the contributors to this book—particularly to this section—build intergenerational and cross-cultural communities that challenge dominant monocultural and monolingual social realities.<sup>8</sup>

The publication *bosque brotante* (2020), which is directly tied to the Rio Grande region and cultures, is the fulcrum of Klassen and Quezada Ureña's chapter. Edited by Klassen, *bosque brotante*, initially a community-based project by Quezada Ureña, brings together the latter's voice—that of a Latinx and Mexican American artist—alongside the voices of Indigenous folks. Included are the activist Beata Tsosie-Peña who is from the New Mexican towns of Santa Clara Pueblo and El Rito, as well as potters and activists Marian Naranjo of Santa Clara Pueblo and Jonathan Loretto of Cochiti and Jemez Pueblos. The publication brings forward some of the restorative initiatives led by these actors who seek to re-Indigenize the Rio Grande area. In this chapter, the occurrences of displacement and dispossession of Indigenous and other minority groups in the United States are examined in relation to a similar situation in Canada. This account includes how Canadian policies have prevented several Indigenous communities from accessing clean water, enabled by instances of environmental racism. While also hinting at the collective historical complicity of Canadians in these issues, the chapter mostly focuses on our current collective responsibility to solve them, such as through lateral solidarities and allyship. A case in point is Klassen's collaborative, intercultural artistic work and practices, through which she strives to reckon with her past on a personal level and to deal with this complex colonial past and present. This undertaking brings Gilroy's concept of "supra-national kinship,"<sup>9</sup> mobilized already in Dávila and Mèn's chapter, into focus once again.

The chapters by Vancouver-based filmmaker, curator, and scholar Sarah Shamash and curator Tamara Toledo explore the potential of decoloniality as a tool for radical change in the arts, cinema, and education. Achieving decolonization at the ontological, epistemological, political, and economic levels also requires building alliances and collaborations, as their chapters demonstrate. In "Cinema as Pluriversal Consciousness:



Decolonial Praxes of Film Pedagogy,” Shamash highlights the importance of having a theory of cinema that can better represent and articulate narratives from Latin American, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, diaspora, and other Global South and non-Western communities. She advocates for transnational and translocal community building through filmmaking, teaching, and film curation, exploring how the legacy of Third Cinema can be harnessed to decolonize film pedagogy and public initiatives in Canada. Shamash discusses film’s potential to foster critical consciousness and encourages its use in educating diverse communities. Her intercultural classrooms also resemble Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of “contact zones,”<sup>10</sup> spaces marked by asymmetrical power relations, where Shamash seeks to bridge North and South approaches to experience, practice, knowledge, and pedagogy. As a programmer of Indigenous cinemas for Cine Kurumin, an international film festival focused on Indigenous topics and filmmakers, Shamash is dedicated to creating spaces that enhance visibility for Latinx, Latinx Canadian, and Indigenous artists while advancing their professional careers.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Shamash critiques the corporate nature of universities, highlighting how they perpetuate discrimination by privileging certain forms of knowledge over others.

This perspective aligns closely with Toledo’s concerns about how museums, galleries, archives, and other colonial institutions have historically neglected the contributions of Latin American diasporas in Canada. Toledo’s chapter also expresses fear that a “cosmetic interest” has prompted the recent superficial recognition of historical and systemic discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality, among other factors. In “The Body as a Combative Tool in the Art of Claudia Bernal, Helena Martín Franco, and María Ezcurra,” Toledo discusses the lives and migratory paths of three Montreal-based Latinx Canadian artists. Bernal, Martín Franco, and Ezcurra have challenged colonial power structures in Canada and Latin America by assuming various positions of dissent and subalternity. In this chapter, Toledo asserts the body as a site of decoloniality. By embracing the dialectic of the absence and presence of their diasporic female bodies, Bernal, Martín Franco, and Ezcurra assert claims for emancipation

and decolonization to dismantle, for instance, the legacy of patriarchal and religious determinations. Fleeing conditions of violence, corruption, and military dictatorships set them up for a future of cultural translation in their creative work, more often than not underfunded, underexhibited, and underresearched. Bernal, Martín Franco, and Ezcurra's works build either on existing communities (*Hechos de la misma sangre*, 2008, performance installation by Bernal), imagined communities (*Ni una más*, 2003, installation by Ezcurra), or future, hybrid, and transforming communities (Martín Franco's three alter egos, Corazón Desfasado, Fritta Caro, and Mujer Elefante). Bernal and Martín Franco use the body (mainly their own) as their core material, whereas Ezcurra builds on the absence of the latter. Ezcurra's works reference issues such as missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, femicides in Mexico, and the *desaparecidos/as* in Argentina, bridging her native country of Argentina with her adoptive ones. Her installations incorporate the use of translucent multitoneal nylon stockings, hung or stretched, as well as shoes. *Ni una más* denotes femicides in Mexico and also draws attention to a similar situation targeting Indigenous women in Canada by featuring empty shoes hanging from stockings. Ezcurra's representation of absence is reminiscent of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's work. The latter utilizes absence as her main material and has also used shoes in pieces like *Atrabiliarios* (1992–97) to rematerialize countless bodies that have been victims of violence, especially women's bodies.

This section and the book conclude with a conversation between Guadalupe (Lupe) Martínez and two of the co-editors titled "CUERPO Collective Body: In Search of Expansive Pedagogies." Lupe is an artist and educator from Argentina who recounts her migration journey from Buenos Aires to Vancouver. She explains how her formative experiences in her native country shaped her particular current sensibilities and aesthetics in Canada. This conversation's main focus is, nonetheless, her work in the fluid collective CUERPO, an ongoing project that uses the body as a site of activism. Bringing young artists and mentors together to share knowledge, movement, and touch, CUERPO invites them to be part of a larger

organism. Their involvement is reminiscent of works by Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, as noted by Lupe herself. Pape, in particular, orchestrated a well-known public and collective performance called *Divisor* (1968) in Rio de Janeiro. During this event, participants were asked to place their heads through openings cut in a large white canvas measuring approximately 30 square metres. This symbolic act represented the unity of people's bodies, as only their heads were visible, thus eliminating social hierarchy and class distinctions and demonstrating the need for everyone's contribution to progress as a unified social body.

CUERPO also disrupts and decentres academia and institutions through collective action while opening up to the fluidity of identities and belongings. The conversation touches on themes such as transformation, motherhood, and pedagogy. It appeals to a sense of community as always in the making or in constant renewal. Lupe declares that all her projects are now infused with the spirit of community building as a method for healing and learning together while letting the collective aspect of art-making freely unfold and shape the outcomes. ¡Hagamos CUERPO!

## NOTES

- 1 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2000).
- 2 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (Aunt Lute Books, 2012).
- 3 Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Duke University Press, 1999); Linda G. Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Routledge, 2003).
- 4 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 5 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
- 6 Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora," *Paragraph* 17, no. 3 (1994): 207–12.
- 7 Gilroy, "Diaspora."

- 8 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*.
- 9 Gilroy, "Diaspora."
- 10 Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33–40.
- 11 Cine Kurumin: Festival de Cinema Indigena, <https://cinekurumin.com.br>.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Episodios* from Southwestern Ontario: Latin American and Latinx Canadian Visual Arts in London

*Anahí González and Alena Robin*

This chapter highlights the work of different local actors in the Latin American and Latinx Canadian art scene in London, a mid-size city in southwestern Ontario. From a global perspective, London is not the most active centre of Canada's Latin American and Latinx Canadian artistic scene. Instead of one specific connection to Latin America, we wish to explore multiple connections in order to provide a first assessment of the situation from a historical and personal perspective.

Regional initiatives in Canada shaped early depictions of Mexico as culturally and historically rich. Although formal diplomatic ties between Canada and Mexico were not established until 1944, informal relations between them trace back to the late nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> exemplified by the 1880 publication of H.C.R. Becher's *A Trip to Mexico*. This text follows Becher's exploration of the country, prompted by his fascination with William H. Prescott's account of Mexico's conquest, with the aim of witnessing the depicted land and people. The journey, motivated partly by a desire to escape the Canadian winter, commenced with a group led by the Reverend Dr. Henry Chauncey Riley, newly elected Protestant bishop of Mexico, which departed from western Ontario in 1878 for a five- to six-week stay. Additionally, subsequent correspondence led to the

decision to publish the journey's chronicles, the aim being to captivate Canadians seeking respite from winter climates. The book, comprising eight extensive letters detailing their experiences and discoveries, includes historical context, photographs of Mexican cities, and archaeological insights. Beyond curiosity, this nineteenth-century expedition established Mexico as a cultural magnet for southwestern Ontario residents.<sup>2</sup>

Present-day London has been well exposed to Latin American immigration, as Colombian and Mexican communities have a strong presence there. It also goes by two nicknames, Londombia and PuebLondon. This presence has left a negligible impact on the local artistic scene, but as the examples narrated here demonstrate, an artistic relation between southwestern Ontario and different countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico, has existed for some time, and some relationships are ongoing. In contrast, others have varied throughout the years. These relationships are the fruit of uneven efforts, individual interests, or small group initiatives. The outcomes of these efforts do not represent a cohesive voice, and there needs to be more visibility of Latin American and Latinx Canadian art in London, particularly from an institutional standpoint.

Through informal conversations with local actors, such as artists, curators, and scholars, we want to take the pulse of this reality. Although these examples seem disconnected, they address the enthusiasm of London's Latin American and Latinx Canadian artistic scene. These *episodios* (episodes) become a source of knowledge and help to retrace a history that has yet to be written. As for what we mean by "Latinx Canadian" artists in this chapter, we follow the malleability of the term as established by art historian and Université de Montréal professor Analays Álvarez Hernández. She uses the term "Latinx Canadian" to name:

- artists/curators who were born in Canada to parents born in Latin American countries;
- artists/curators who were born in Latin American countries, have settled in Canada, and no longer work in their country of origin;

- artists/curators who were born in Latin America, have settled in Canada, but continue to work in both Canada and their country of origin; and
- artists/curators who find themselves at the crossroads of multiple traditions (Latinx, Canadian, or Latin American) and thus can no longer be studied or understood solely under one of the prior categories.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter is a collaboration between a trained art historian and associate professor at Western University, Alena Robin, and a studio art doctoral candidate at the same institution, Anahí González. London is the city that we now call home. Here, we have found a long-standing and thriving art community, which has become the focus of our research collaborations. We agree that conversations are vital for source knowledge and documentation—in this case, about the Latinx Canadian art community in London. Therefore, our goal with this chapter is to decentre the Latinx Canadian experiences of cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. As active members of the community, we are thankful for spaces that cultivate the London artistic scene, such as Museum London, the Embassy Cultural House, Forest City Gallery, TAP Centre for Creativity, Good Sport, Satellite Project Space, the McIntosh Gallery, the Artlab Gallery, and the Department of Visual Arts at Western University. These spaces have welcomed us and have been the starting point of many connections and friendships. Drawing on historical data and our personal and professional experiences, we have traced many connections between London and Latinx Canadian projects that have begun in the city and travelled to many others. Our collaboration is just one testament to the many sites of Latin American and Latinx Canadian art that London has built throughout the years and to the importance of Latinx Canadian studies in the art scene of southwestern Ontario.

The episodes below start with our positionalities as we acknowledge how they influence our research and artistic practice. Who we are and where we come from, including our personal stories and professional

training, impact how we perceive and interact with the Latin American and Latinx Canadian artistic scenes. The chapter continues with stories that discuss the London art scene and different Latin American projects from 1950 to today. It then focuses on specific episodes involving different exhibitions, collections, and artists that somehow connect Latin America to southwestern Ontario, such as local artist Greg Curnoe's imaginary and natural relations with Mexico and Cuba; González's exchanges with Canadian artist Ron Benner about London, Cuba, and the contemporary collection of Latin American art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO); and Robin's first experience with London's Latinx Canadian scene through the annual exhibition *Colores de Latinoamérica* in 2011. Alternating between traditional methods of art historical research and lived experience, these isolated episodes reflect the evolving relationship between London and Latin America and help us to understand the actors at play.

## Alena and Anahí: On Our Lives and Professional Backgrounds

### ALENA ROBIN

Born and raised in Québec, I moved to Mexico City to pursue graduate studies in art history at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. After living in the megalopolis for nine years, I returned to Canada. Shortly afterward, I found a position as a visual culture specialist in the Spanish program in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Western University (now the Department of Languages and Cultures). I found myself in a privileged position: I was teaching what I love and had trained for, and I was communicating in Spanish—a language that I manage almost as a native speaker—to students who were learning the language and discovering the culture of the Hispanic world, a process with which I could identify. Now, in the Department of Visual Arts at the same university, I am training the next generations of visual arts professionals, displaying to them the rich cultural heritage of Latin America and interacting more closely with the artistic scene of London.



As a child, I was exposed to immigration from Latin America through my mother's volunteer work in Québec, specifically in the regions of Cap-de-la-Madeleine and Trois-Rivières. In the mid-1970s, immigrants from Latin America mostly came from Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador. My parents are from the province of Québec; there is no Hispanic blood in my genetics, as far as I know. My mother had a basis in conversational Spanish—acquired through night classes before she married. That was one reason why she oversaw families arriving from Latin America. She soon found out that her best allies to greet the arriving families were her two offspring; my brother and I would mingle with their children despite the language barrier. This was a natural icebreaker for the adults involved. I was four or five years old then, so I have only vague memories of those visits, but I assume that these occasions are when I first heard stories of Latin America. Later, my parents would travel to various parts of Latin America for different reasons, and more stories would populate my imagination. In high school, we had to choose a course option, and it was no surprise that I chose Spanish over music, Latin, or fine arts. That is how I began my path as a hispanophile, not knowing that it would become such a central part of my life.

#### ANAHÍ GONZÁLEZ

I moved to Canada to pursue my master's studies at Western University. Like many other immigrants, I chose the educational path in my migratory journey to make Canada my home. I did my early education and bachelor's degree in my hometown of Saltillo, Mexico, a city with an important automotive manufacturing industry in the region and known as an in-transit city for migrants crossing from Mexico to the United States.<sup>4</sup>

As a northern Mexican who had lived most of my life in proximity to the United States, moving to Canada changed my perspective on the impact of US-led imperialist policies on narratives of migration. As a result, my artistic practice has focused on exploring and creating visual narratives related to Mexican labour within/for Canada to decentre the



7.1 Anahí González, billboard installation in the series *Allá más al Norte* (Further North), 2022, London, Ontario.

US narrative concerning Mexican migration—one that I saw while living and growing up in northern Mexico.

My thesis exhibition in 2021 for my master's degree in fine arts provides an example of creating these narratives between Mexico and Canada. For the exhibition, I held simultaneous shows in both countries. *The Other Neighbour of El Otro Lado* was shown at the Artlab, a gallery on the Western University campus in London, and at the Nodo, a cultural space in Saltillo. To connect both regions through the lens of labour, it was essential for me to have the shows in both countries. As part of the project, I collected over two hundred cardboard boxes of Mexican products from Latin Markets in the Greater Toronto Area and in southwestern Ontario. The cardboard boxes were part of a sculptural installation and interacted with the various systems that facilitate the movement of human

labour across Canada and Mexico. Therefore, I engaged with the cardboard box's materiality and representation of temporality and mobility to critique such systems that move and classify labour. Inspired by such a gesture, artist Andreas Buchwaldt wrote and created an exhibition text in a cardboard box to accompany both exhibitions. Months later, the Embassy Cultural House,<sup>5</sup> with the support of the London Arts Council, funded the production of the boxes when multiple artists presented them in the exhibition *Intercambio/Exchange*, held at London's Support Gallery in 2021.

My goal in living and working in London as an artist and curator is to continue researching and creating art that echoes the lived experiences of Latinx Canadians by weaving together themes of human labour, migration, and my own experiences as a visual artist and as a Mexican immigrant in Canada (fig. 7.1).

### The London Art Scene: Latin American Projects, 1950–2023

In the 1950s, a few artists associated with London made the trip to Mexico: Jack Chambers (1931–1978), Robert Hedrick (1930–2021), Bernice Goodsell (née Vincent) (1934–2016), Gillian Saward (1934–1983), Don Vincent (1932–1993), and Duncan de Kergommeaux (1927–2024).<sup>6</sup> The influence most likely came through the artists Leonard Brooks and Reva Brooks, who established themselves in Mexico in 1947, stayed for more than fifty years, and helped to establish San Miguel de Allende as a world-famous art destination.<sup>7</sup> Their works were exhibited in 1949 at the London Public Library and Art Museum (now Museum London). Duncan de Kergommeaux, lured by advertisements in *Canadian Art* magazine, went to San Miguel de Allende from Ottawa in 1958 with one of the first grants from the Canada Council for the Arts. All the artists eventually returned to Canada and became practising professional artists. The attraction of Mexico for London artists continues to this day with Tony Urquhart (1934–2022), Eric Atkinson (1928–2022), Jamelie Hassan (b. 1948), Ron Benner (b. 1949), Tom Benner (1950–2022), Jean Spence

(b. 1946), Kim Moodie (b. 1951), and others who have found inspiration in the landscape of Mexico, as well as sun and warmth in place of cold, grey London winters, just as Becher did a century prior.<sup>8</sup>

In 1956, Canadian Pacific Airlines organized a nationwide exhibition of Mexican art to stimulate Canadian interest in travelling to Mexico for a holiday. While promoting its flights to Mexico, it sought to contribute to a better understanding between both countries through an art display.<sup>9</sup> The exhibition was shown at Hudson's Bay department stores across the country, but in London, it was held at the Public Library and Art Museum. It was not, however, a sustained effort. Nevertheless, several other exhibitions in London displayed Latin American art throughout the following decades. For example, the AGO curated the exhibition *10 Brazilian Artists/10 artistes brésiliens* and toured eleven Canadian cities, including the Museum London, in August 1975.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, John ("Jake") H. Moore, a critical businessman, passionate art collector, and significant supporter of Museum London, donated a collection of Brazilian art to the regional museum in 1985, which prompted exhibitions of the collection in 1986 and again in 1988.<sup>11</sup> Other Latin American artworks donated by Moore included a Fernando Botero painting that has since been deaccessioned and a Jesús Rafael Soto sculpture that the museum still owns. The impact of this small Latin American art collection in the regional museum is minimal on both the local and national artistic scene, as it largely remains in the storage room.<sup>12</sup>

A more recent initiative can be found in *TransAMERICAS: A Sign, a Situation, a Concept*, an exhibition that Cassandra Getty and Dianne Pierce curated at Museum London in the fall of 2016. This exhibit displayed work by the following Latinx Canadian and Latinx artists: Laura Barrón, Dianna Frid, Alexandra Gelis, Pablo Helguera, Manolo Lugo, Juan Ortiz-Apuy, Eugenio Salas, José Seoane, José Luis Torres, and Clarissa Tossin, as well as Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano, and Ilyana Martínez, members of the artist collective Z'otz\*.<sup>13</sup> The artists participating in *TransAMERICAS* examined the relationships formed between people and places through different artistic techniques. Dianne Pearce, co-curator

of the exhibition, is originally from southwestern Ontario but lived in Mexico for fourteen years, where she obtained her master's degree in fine arts from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, exhibited her work at different venues in the country, and taught art classes at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda." Pearce recognized that her artistic practice had undergone a transformation "that broke free of disciplines, crossing borders into new territories."<sup>14</sup> For example, she utilizes the *papel picado* (perforated tissue paper) tradition in some installations, alongside words in Spanish, vinyl tiles, plaster decorations inspired by Mexican colonial houses, and the like. It is no wonder that Pearce advocated for Museum London's promotion of Latinx Canadian artists in a city with a rapidly growing population from Latin America.

Another initiative was *Mountains & Rivers Without End*, inaugurated in mid-November 2016 at the Artlab Gallery of the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre at Western University.<sup>15</sup> The result of an interdisciplinary group project that involved artists and scholars from Canada and Ecuador, it was meant to reflect on diverse outcomes of the mining industry in southern Ecuador, addressing contemporary issues related to the abandonment of the region by American companies. The art exhibition raised issues of the global mining industry in a local context, especially questions of water and the environment. The *Mountains & Rivers Without End* project was initiated in the summer of 2015 with a residency of artists and researchers in the mining area, accompanied by local scholars and cultural promoters. The outcome of this reflection was a series of artworks and texts that were exhibited reciprocally in the Museo Municipal de Arte Moderno in Cuenca, Ecuador, in early 2016 and at Western University in the late fall of 2016.<sup>16</sup> The artists responsible for the creation of the exhibit do not share a common origin. Some are from Ecuador (Esterban Ayala, Jenny Jaramillo, Ulises Unda), others are Canadian (Patrick Mahon), and interestingly, some are Canadian residents originally from India (Gautam Garoo) and China (Gu Xiong). The resulting exhibition comprised works by these six artists in a range of media, from sonic

segments, interactive videos, and video performances to photographs, collages, and installations.

In the late summer of 2022, the McIntosh Gallery at Western University displayed an exhibition titled *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear/Me susurran al oído historias de migrantes*. It presents an installation of the photographic work of Mexican photojournalist Moysés Zuñiga, portraying the violence and injustice of undocumented migration. He travelled the migratory routes from Mexico's southern border with Guatemala to Mexico's northern frontier with the United States in order to visually record the journey. Curated by Anahí González, the exhibition was based on the research of Professor Sarah Bassnett in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of the exhibition was to address the different roles that photography can play in shaping our understanding of undocumented migration.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, photo testimony is also an essential way to connect the Latin American population with the artistic scene in London. Bruno Sinder, an international student originally from Brazil and a doctoral candidate in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University, curated *Brazil/Canadá* as part of his graduate program. The project involved family photographs of Brazilian immigrants to Canada, and the exhibition was held in August 2022 at the Artlab Gallery.<sup>19</sup> In a similar way, documentary researcher and producer Juan Bello explored the relationship between London and its Colombian community through a photo project entitled *Londombia*. The project was displayed in May 2023 at Satellite Project Space, a downtown London location shared by Fanshawe College, Western University, and Museum London.<sup>20</sup>

The above-mentioned episodes represent and narrate different relations between London and Latin America through art—relations rooted in tourism, the mining industry, and migration. First, in the 1950s, Mexico was promoted as a destination for tourism and art. Then a somehow isolated collection of Brazilian art was donated to Museum London. Decades later, the same museum exhibited artworks from Latinx Canadian artists, and the Artlab Gallery at Western University displayed a visual

reflection on the impact of the mining industry in Ecuador. A few years later, the McIntosh Gallery hosted an exhibition documenting the migration from Mexico to the United States, and other initiatives in different artistic institutions in London have alluded to the Brazilian and Colombian migration through photo testimony. These projects are evidence of the various institutions and specific individuals involved in the relationships between London and different nations in Latin America.

### Greg Curnoe: Canada, Mexico, and Cuba

An important figure in strengthening London's relationship with Mexico and Cuba was Greg Curnoe (1936–1992), who was a London-based artist working in various media, such as painting and watercolour. Curnoe grew up and lived most of his life in southwestern Ontario surrounded by the Great Lakes and near the United States border.<sup>21</sup> Developing a strong regionalist sensibility, his Canadian patriotism was sometimes seen as hostile to the United States, challenging at the same time the hegemony of international art centres. Praise of his oeuvre extends not only to his brightly coloured works but also to his activism in support of local and Canadian artists in general.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Curnoe started to dislike the increasing influence of the United States on Canada, a sentiment that he would express in his works.<sup>23</sup> He would further develop this theme in his first version of *Map of North America* (1972), an ink drawing now in the collection of the Dalhousie Art Gallery, and it was a topic to which he would return throughout his career (fig. 7.2). Curnoe's map somehow echoes Joaquín Torres-García's 1943 *América invertida*, a drawing of an upside-down map of South America that proposed an alternate imaginary geography. Instead of suggesting the southern hemisphere as a guiding horizon, Curnoe proposed a different geography that connected Canada directly to Latin America. Curnoe further explored this topic in his subsequent versions of *Map of North America*, which were done in various media: watercolour and ink on paper (1973, McIntosh Gallery), two colour



7.2 Greg Curnoe,  
*America October 21,*  
1988, 1988.

lithographs (1988, McIntosh Gallery; 1989, National Gallery of Canada), and fired clay with glaze (1990, Museum London).

His interest in maps has been credited both to his childhood and to a summer job in the City of London's Surveys Department, where he learned about various historical border disputes. The ongoing debate of nationalism versus continentalism further enhanced his concerns. In his initial map, as in subsequent ones, Curnoe completely eliminated the United States from the North American continent, connecting Canada to Mexico and identifying different Central American countries and islands.



With his commonly employed sarcasm, he made the following statement in 1970: "All Canadian atlases must show Canada's southern border to be with Mexico. Bridges & tunnels must be built between Canada and Mexico."<sup>24</sup>

The map was initially commissioned for the 1972 issue of *The Journal of Canadian Fiction*, but a reiteration of the concept was used in different environments on subsequent occasions. Curnoe's map was first used in the context of an exhibition in 1980, when it appeared in an exchange exhibit co-hosted by Forest City Gallery in London and by the Fonapas Crafts Center in Merida, Yucatan. This group exhibit featured works on paper by artists involved in Forest City Gallery at the time, followed by an exhibit of works by artists from Merida at Forest City Gallery.<sup>25</sup> Jamelie Hassan travelled to Merida with a portfolio of artworks for the installation and opening. Curnoe's map of North America, featured in this exhibit, was also used for the 1981 solo exhibit at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where it was adapted to the French-speaking context of the city, with some countries' names spelled in French: Mexique, St-Pierre et M., Iles Bahamas, Jamaïque, and Colombie.

Another important episode in Curnoe's life and map was an artistic exchange with Cuba. In 1988, a poster with Curnoe's map was created with many names of the countries spelled in Spanish for an exhibition held at Casa de las Américas in Havana, Cuba. *Cinco artistas canadienses exponen* featured different London-based artists, including Curnoe, and was organized by Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan.<sup>26</sup> The trip to Havana was Curnoe's first trip outside of Canada or Europe, and he discovered a culture and politics that seemed to "embody qualities that he had fruitfully explored throughout his life."<sup>27</sup> Curnoe even crafted a chess board with pieces illustrating major political figures of the era, such as Fidel Castro and Brian Mulroney. Several visits to different cultural organizations were organized, including artists' talks, studio visits, and informal meetings with Cuban art students and professional artists, all made possible through simultaneous translation. Relations seem to have gone very well, as "possible future participation by Canada in the [Havana] biennial was

discussed.”<sup>28</sup> Other projects envisioned were artists’ residencies, meant to accommodate “an artist from Cuba travelling to Canada to reside in a studio and to exhibit,” and a large exhibition of Cuban contemporary art, which “would give Canadians an opportunity to position the young generation of artists in Cuba with the political impact and history of the revolution.”<sup>29</sup>

Curnoe filled two big notebooks with observations throughout his stay in Cuba.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the notebooks were promptly lost. Although the full impact of the Cuba trip on Curnoe’s work will remain unknown since he abruptly died only four years after the journey, his maps of North America are still an intriguing part of a complex cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>31</sup>

### Anahí González and Ron Benner: An Exchange About London, Cuba, and the AGO’s Latin American Contemporary Collection

ANAHÍ GONZÁLEZ—The counterpart of the 1988 Cuba trip, where London artists visited the country, was the series of exhibitions in 1990 called *Siting Resistance*, where Cuban artists travelled to London.<sup>32</sup> As Jamelie Hassan underlines, the Cuba project was initiated “in London, Ontario, a regional rather than metropolitan site, by artists rather than institutions,” and received little attention in Canada, which exemplifies how Latin American and Latinx Canadian cultural events take place in the city of London, Ontario.<sup>33</sup>

As a Latinx Canadian artist living and working in London, I have been privileged to participate in and to organize cultural events involving the voices of my community. For example, I helped the Embassy Cultural House to organize the exhibition *Intercambio/Exchange* (2021), and I was the guest curator of the show *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear/Me susurran al oído historias de migrantes* (2022), held at the McIntosh Gallery. So, when I learned about the course taught at Western University by Professor Alena Robin, “Art from Latin America in Canada: From Ancient Times to Today,” I was eager to participate in any capacity.<sup>34</sup> As

part of the curriculum, the curator Adelina Vlas was invited to give a talk about her role as curator of the exhibition *As If Sand Were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection* in 2017 and curator of the AGO's Latin American contemporary collection.<sup>35</sup> I attended the talk and was immediately drawn by Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles's piece *Camelô* (1998), which is part of the AGO's collection and was shown in the exhibition.<sup>36</sup> It is a piece that engages with concepts of human labour and mobility, the same concepts with which my artistic practice engages. Moreover, as a Mexican artist and doctoral student in Canada, I wanted to know more about the impact of Latin American and Latinx Canadian artists in the region where I currently live.

Weeks after Vlas talked about her curatorial process at Western University, the AGO shared a call for proposals for their AGO × RBC Emerging Artists Exchange Program. This initiative provided three emerging artists with a four-week mentorship to pursue a research project and was the perfect opportunity to research the AGO's Latin American collection. I was selected alongside artists Wenting Li and Gwenyth Chao to be part of the 2022 program. My project explored the Latin American collection's artworks that depicted human labour, like *Camelô* by Meireles.

While working on the AGO collection, it was important for me to acknowledge the land where my research was conducted. This land has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for thousands of years. Today, it is still the home to many Indigenous people across Turtle Island, and I was grateful for the opportunity to work on this land. Because my project was related to labour and given my belief that land acknowledgments should be actions, a monetary donation was made to Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training, which works with Indigenous community members in the Greater Toronto Area to support them in navigating employment and training services.<sup>37</sup>

During my time in the program, I had the opportunity to meet with several of the AGO's curators and staff members, who contributed to my research by providing me with information about the artworks in the



7.3 Exhibition poster, *Siting Resistance*, 1990.

Latin American collection. They invited me to guided tours of their exhibitions and helped me to answer the many questions that I had about their collection.<sup>38</sup> One of the documents that the AGO shared with me was the list of works and installation images of the exhibition *As If Sand Were Stone*. The document listed photographs and information about the artworks and artists, but I was also interested in gathering the names behind the artwork donations. I wanted to know the names of the people and organizations that had donated to the AGO and helped to build the Latin American collection. Ron Benner was on the list, as he had donated to the collection in 2004 four drawings made by the Cuban artist José Bedia. I instantly felt that there was an intriguing story behind such a donation and contacted Benner for a conversation. I was honoured to meet visual artists Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan in the winter of 2021.

Benner and I connected through our mutual interests in labour, food politics, and Mexico. Since then, both have been a source of inspiration to me over these past few years, and I have worked with them on various projects at the Embassy Cultural House as a contributing editor (fig. 7.3).

The research project that I commenced was focused on the depiction of labour in the AGO's Latin American collection of artworks, which resulted in an exciting conversation with Benner about how his many trips to Latin America impacted his artistic practice, about cultural projects organized by the Embassy Cultural House while hosting Latin American artists in London during the 1980s and 1990s, and about the importance of the presence of Latin American communities in the region. Benner travelled to northern Mexico in 1972 and again in 1974. During that time, he worked on the railway and held a train pass, allowing him to travel for half price on passenger trains in the United States and Canada. He would often show his railway watch and identification to freight train employees in the United States, Mexico, and South America, and they would let him travel on the caboose or engine for free. Between 1974 and 1975, he made a long trip throughout the Americas. According to Benner, "My education began at the age of 23 when I first travelled to northern Mexico."<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the years, he continued to travel and stay in various Latin American countries for a long period of time. He described his trips as life-changing, and when he travelled back to Canada from such trips, he began to question the Eurocentric perspective of the history of the Americas. This experience impacted his way of seeing and his ability to produce art. Benner has been a founder and member of many regional artistic projects, but the Embassy Cultural House remains one of his most recognized contributions in London, Ontario. The Embassy Cultural House was founded by Hassan, Benner, and jazz musician Eric Stach in 1983. The community-driven gallery hosted many interdisciplinary programs both in the restaurant portion and in hotel rooms of the Embassy Hotel, located at 732 Dundas Street in East London. Although the hotel closed its physical doors in 1990, it was re-envisioned as a virtual art space



7.4 José Bedia, untitled mural (left), 1990s, Embassy Hotel, London, Ontario.

in 2020, delivering projects such as *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2020), *Intercambio/Exchange* (2021), *Sleepwalking* (2021), *Pandemic Gardens* (2022), and many others.<sup>40</sup>

In 1990, the Embassy Cultural House received funding from the Department of External Affairs through its Visiting Foreign Artists Program, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Ontario Arts Council to present a series of exhibitions called *Siting Resistance*. The exhibiting artists included Sonia Boyce, Allan DeSouza, Shaheen Merali, Pitika Ntuli, and Keith Piper from the United Kingdom, Grace Channer from Toronto, and José Bedia and María Magdalena Campos-Pons from Havana, Cuba.<sup>41</sup> Part of the funding covered the cost of transportation for Bedia and Campos-Pons from Havana to London and Calgary, Alberta. Both artists attended an artist residency in Alberta at the Banff Centre. After

their residency, Bedia had a solo exhibition at Forest City Gallery and a mural on the front of the Embassy Hotel in London (fig 7.4). Campos-Pons had a solo exhibition at the Embassy Cultural House and did a hotel room installation in the Embassy Hotel. The mural and the installation lasted until the hotel burned down in 2009.<sup>42</sup>

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the *Siting Resistance* show featured a performance event organized by Jamelie Hassan, which included poetry readings by Lillian Allen, Jamila Ismail, and Lee Maracle as well as music by Allen and the Revolutionary Tea Party. In addition, a screening of recent Cuban films organized by David McIntosh was held at Forest City Gallery. While the series was being shown, the Kanesatake Resistance occurred, and Bedia created an installation in solidarity.<sup>43</sup> It was first presented at Forest City Gallery, then featured at an exhibition in Toronto, and later shown at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of Bedia's visit to London, he gifted Benner four drawings completed in the Banff residency. He also gifted Hassan a natural ochre pigment from the Paint Pots, a site near Banff, which she later used in her works on paper from that period. In 2004, Benner donated Bedia's drawings to the AGO because of their aesthetic and historical value. The four drawings were first and last shown in the 2017 exhibition *As If Sand Were Stone*.<sup>45</sup>

My conversation with Ron Benner and learning the history of the four drawings of José Bedia had a huge impact on my research. This history shows not only that Bedia was part of the AGO's collection thanks to Benner's donation but also that he had participated in artistic programming in the region. He had created installations and artworks that were part of London's landscape. Benner noted the impact of Bedia's and Campos-Pons's artworks in the region, explaining that "there was an audience for their work. Their artworks were appreciated."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, Campos-Pons is not part of the AGO's collection, and at this early stage of my research about her work done in Canada, I have not found documentation of the artworks that she did during her residency at the

Banff Centre. While delving into the AGO's Latin American collection to research artworks depicting labour, I found Bedia's drawings to be a critical example of the impact that Latin American artistic practices have in the community of southwest Ontario and in Canadian art institutions. Echoing Benner's comment, I argue that there is a continued, growing audience for art and cultural projects about and by Latin American artists in the region—projects that need to be highlighted, researched, and documented.

### Alena and *Colores de Latinoamérica*: Music, Art, and Food

ALENA ROBIN—On a cold night in January 2011, the London community gathered in the TAP Centre for Creativity, a downtown art gallery.<sup>47</sup> Since 2006, the gallery had held an annual exhibition of work by Latin American artists living in Canada. *Colores de Latinoamérica* (Colors of Latin America) was usually composed of artworks by professional artists who were exploring the methods of artmaking while examining their cultural roots.

A committee selected the artists according to different criteria. Beyond the artistic quality of the works, there was an aspiration to balance established and emerging artists, nationalities, ages, and genders. Artists usually came from southwestern Ontario and Québec, although the organizers always tried to have some local representation. Alfredo Caxaj was the main promoter of this annual exhibition and is a central figure in the cultural scene of the city. Caxaj came to London from Guatemala with his family in November 1985. He founded Sunfest in 1995, a summer festival held in Victoria Park that exposes visitors to musicians and performers from around the world, and he remains its executive and artistic director to date. In 2013, he was named one of the ten most influential Hispanic Canadians by the Canadian Hispanic Business Alliance for his dedication to his homeland and to the arts sector.

During the 2011 edition of *Colores de Latinoamérica*, a short talk by the organizers introduced the artists and their artworks. Free Latin



American food was served shortly afterward. After touring the exhibition, we were all invited to the adjacent room for live music and dancing by the Alfredo Caxaj Latin Jazz Ensemble. One of their compositions is called “Celebrando la diversidad” (Celebrating diversity), and this exhibition is just one expression of this diversity found in London. According to Caxaj, “We live in a country which is so culturally diverse, and I think there is no better way to educate people on culture than through the arts.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Caxaj believes that “the art exhibition is part of Sunfest’s mandate to promote multi-cultural arts, and it helps draw attention to artists ... who are trying to get established on the Canadian art scene,”<sup>49</sup> which connects with the above-mentioned description of Latinx Canadian artists by Álvarez Hernández.

The last iteration of *Colores de Latinoamérica* took place in late January 2020, when it celebrated its fourteenth anniversary. It featured works by Andrea Vela Alarcón, a Toronto-based Peruvian artist; Ana Arias, a multidisciplinary Venezuelan artist residing in Montreal; Jaquie Comrie, a Panamanian artist living in Toronto; César Morriss, a Peruvian artist; Michelle Peraza, a second-generation artist of Cuban and Costa Rican descent; and Enrique Bravo, a Venezuelan artist.

Unfortunately, *Colores de Latinoamérica* was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is uncertain whether the project will continue at the moment of writing. This local initiative, driven by one specific individual, sponsored by the Toronto-Dominion Bank, also the main supporter of Sunfest, was the longest existing and stable enterprise in London in relation to the southwestern Ontario Latin American community. It has received the attention of the local press, such as *CBC News*, *London Free Press*, and some Spanish-speaking media.<sup>50</sup>

Attendance numbers for *Colores de Latinoamérica* varied from year to year but also greatly depended on the active involvement of the artists in promoting the events, their local connections, and other events taking place at the TAP Centre for Creativity.<sup>51</sup> That being said, according to the organizers, the daily visitors to the exhibition were slightly higher than the average viewership to the gallery.

My first experience at the opening night of *Colores de Latinoamérica* in 2011 remains very special. The general ambiance, the artworks, the people, the food, the music, and the dance brought back fond memories of my time in Mexico. For a moment, I completely forgot where I was. It was only after the last echo of music stopped, when we grabbed our coats and bundled up to confront the winter storm outside, that I wondered whether this could be London, Ontario.

## Conclusion

As the previous episodes have shown, London's relationship with Latin American and Latinx Canadian art has not experienced continuous and linear growth. It has depended on different types of artistic institutions, personal initiatives, and connections, yet it has happened and reappeared despite a continued lack of institutional interest and support. Nevertheless, the idea of building community through art was present early on. Some bilateral relationships were established that led to reciprocal cultural exchange and exhibitions. The exhibitions mentioned had different backgrounds, drawing on a combination of personal initiatives and the resources of artist-run centres, regional museums, and university galleries. These isolated attempts were important agents of change, and they involved major art players across the city: Museum London, Forest City Gallery, the TAP Centre for Creativity, the Embassy Cultural House, Satellite Project Space, the McIntosh Gallery, and the Artlab in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University. It is important to note the different institutions somehow involved but also the stories of the people who initiated these artistic enterprises. They have different connections to Latin America: some were born there but chose to migrate to Canada for political reasons, whereas others came for educational purposes. Some are Canadian-born but, at some point, left for Latin America and were inspired by their experience to bring some of it back home. With the current and growing Latinx Canadian presence in London, we can hope that this trend becomes more stable and constant.

## NOTES

- 1 Sarah E.K. Smith, “Exhibiting Mexican Art in Canada: Histories of Cultural Exchange and Diplomacy in the Mid-twentieth Century,” in *Latin America Made in Canada*, ed. María del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin (Lugar Común Editorial, 2022), 70.
- 2 H.C.R. Becher, *A Trip to Mexico, Being Notes of a Journey from Lake Erie to Lake Tezcuco and Back, with an Appendix Containing and Being a Paper About the Ancient Nations and Races Who Inhabited Mexico before and at the Time of the Spanish Conquest, and the Ancient Stone and Other Structures and Ruins of Ancient Cities Found There* (Toronto: Willing and Williamson, 1880), 4–5. We thank Jason Dyck at Western Libraries for drawing our attention to this book. More research would be necessary to assess the book’s reception and impact, which are beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 3 Analays Álvarez Hernández, “An Auto-ethnographic *Entrée en Matière* and *Mise en Contexte*: Latinx Canadian Art(ists) in Montréal,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 4 (2022): 102–103. See also Mariza Rosales Argonza, “Angles morts: visions transfrontalières latino-québécoises,” in *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise*, ed. Mariza Rosales Argonza, 127–71 (Éditions du CIDIHCA, 2018); Mariza Rosales Argonza, “Representations of the Latin American Diaspora in Quebec: Latino-Québécois Visions,” in *Latin America Made in Canada*, ed. María del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin, 45–64 (Lugar Común Editorial, 2022).
- 4 The city of Saltillo and its migrant shelter, Casa del Migrante, are positioned on strategic points along the transit route that undocumented migrants use across Mexico. René Leyva-Flores, Cesar Infante, Juan Pablo Gutierrez, Frida Quintino-Perez, MariaJose Gómez-Saldivar, and Cristian Torres-Robles, “Migrants in Transit through Mexico to the US: Experiences with Violence and Related Factors, 2009–2015,” *PLoS One* 14, no. 8 (2019): 1–16, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6703673/>.
- 5 As a result of COVID-19, the Embassy Cultural House re-envisioned itself as a virtual art space to deliver online and in-person projects throughout the region. The Embassy Cultural House has more than a hundred contributors collaborating on such projects. To know more about the organization, see <http://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca>.
- 6 We are grateful to Judith M. Rodger for sharing with us some of her research on this topic. Judith M. Rodger, email conversation with authors, January 2023. For

- more on the topic, see Judith M. Rodger, “Mexico—Magnet for London Artists in the 1950s,” in *An Alternative Cultural History of London Ontario: Art and Activism*, ed. Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner, 76–95 (Embassy Cultural House, 2024).
- 7 John Virtue, *Leonard and Reva Brooks: Artists in Exile in San Miguel de Allende* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).
  - 8 The collections of Museum London and the McIntosh Gallery at Western University have works produced in Mexico by many of these artists, a topic that requires further attention. The specific relations that these artists developed with Mexico also require further contextualization. For example, Jean Spence was somehow influenced by the fieldwork of her husband, Michael Spence, an archeologist at Western University who specialized in Mesoamerica. In 1988, a solo exhibition of Jean’s work inspired by her time in Mexico, entitled *Teotihuacan: Place of the Gods*, was curated at the then London Regional Art Gallery (now Museum London). Embassy Cultural House, “Jean Spence,” <https://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca/jean-spence.html>; <https://perma.cc/7KGU-8FFS>.
  - 9 Smith, “Exhibiting Mexican Art,” 81.
  - 10 *10 Brazilian Artists/10 artistes brésiliens* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1975). On this exhibition and the Brazilian collection in Museum London, see Alena Robin, “Geopolítica institucional de dos colecciones de arte brasileño en Canadá,” in *Anais do II Encontro Geopolíticas Institucionais: conexões e redes nas artes visuais*, ed. Patrícia Corrêa, 42–53 (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro/ Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais/ Escola de Belas Artes, 2024).
  - 11 The exhibition *Brazilian Paintings from the Collection* took place from December 2 to June 17, 1986, and *Brazilian Art in the Permanent Collection* was displayed from December 2, 1987, to February 1, 1988. On the Moore donation to Museum London, see Tom Smart, *The Collection, London, Canada* (London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), esp. ch. 6. We are grateful for the research support that we received from Andrew Kear, Janette Cousins Ewan, Victoria Burnett, and Krista Hamlin at Museum London.
  - 12 Alena Robin, Rodrigo de Alcântara Barros Bueno, Lauren Puley, and Bruno Sinder are currently studying the Moore donation with the aim of reactivating interest in the Brazilian collection at Museum London. Their curatorial proposal for a November 2025 exhibition includes some artworks by Brazilianx artists residing in Canada.
  - 13 Cassandra Getty and Dianne Pearce, *TransAMERICAS: A Sign, a Situation, a Concept*, exhibition catalogue (Museum London, 2016).

- 14 Dianne Pearce, "Stammer and Rustle: Indisciplined Translations," in *Latin America Made in Canada*, ed. María del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin (Lugar Común Editorial, 2022), 283.
- 15 A reflection on these exhibitions from a teaching perspective was published in Alena Robin, "Colores de Latinoamérica: Teaching Latin American Art in London (Ontario, Canada)," *International Journal of Education and the Arts* 21, no. 16 (2020): 1–27, <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijeaz11n16>. The exhibition and its accompanying conference were co-organized through the Department of Visual Arts at Western University by doctoral candidate Ulises Unda and faculty members Andrés Villar and Patrick Mahon.
- 16 Ulises Unda, *Montañas y ríos sin fin*, exhibition catalogue (Museo Municipal de Arte Moderno, 2016).
- 17 Sarah Bassnett, "Witnessing the Trauma of Undocumented Migrants in Mexico," in *Contact Zones: Photography, Migration, and Cultural Encounters in the United States*, ed. Sigrid Lien and Justin Carville, 281–302 (Leuven University Press, 2021).
- 18 For more on the exhibition *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear/Me susurran al oído historias de migrantes*, see <https://mcintoshgallery.ca/exhibitions/past/2022.html>; <https://perma.cc/2VXH-HNMY>.
- 19 For more on the exhibition *Brazil/Canadá*, see [https://www.uwo.ca/visarts/artlab/exhibition\\_archive/20212022.html#cb](https://www.uwo.ca/visarts/artlab/exhibition_archive/20212022.html#cb); <https://perma.cc/K2A8-8FL7>. For the photographs shown in the exhibition, see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/westernuvisarts/albums/72177720301668130/>; <https://perma.cc/N2GX-MBMC>.
- 20 Juan Bello, email conversation with authors, April 25, 2023. For more on Satellite Project Space, see <https://satelliteprojectspace.com>.
- 21 Curnoe enrolled in the Art program at H.B. Beal High School in London prior to attending the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, where he never finished his degree, as he failed his last year prior to returning to London, his hometown. Curnoe's London studio was the centre of the city's intellectual activity and became recognized beyond the region after he met Pierre Théberge in 1966. Théberge, then a young assistant curator at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, would eventually become chief curator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In the early 1970s, Curnoe's paintings had been purchased by major museums in Canada, with his work exhibited in different Canadian cities and international exhibitions, including the 1969 São Paulo Biennial and the 1976 Venice Biennale. Curnoe was scheduled to attend the 1969 São Paulo Biennial but changed his mind at the last minute. See Katie Cholette, "Playing the Art World: The Rise and Fall of Greg

- Curnoe (Jouer le jeu du monde artistique: montée et chute de Greg Curnoe)," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 65.
- 22 As a cultural activist, Greg Curnoe was a leading founder of a local publication called *Region*, which promoted the works of local artists, and he participated in the founding of Forest City Gallery, Canada's first artist-run centre, and other alternative galleries. He also supported the establishment of Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens, to ensure fair compensation for artists. Judith M. Roger, *Greg Curnoe: Life and Work* (Art Canada Institute, 2016), 3–12, 44–46.
  - 23 For examples, see Roger, *Greg Curnoe*, 27–30, 33–35, 52–53.
  - 24 Greg Curnoe, "Amendments to Continental Refusal/Refus Continental," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 57.
  - 25 Jamelie Hassan, email conversation with authors, January 9, 2023.
  - 26 An exhibition catalogue, featuring texts by Christopher Dewdney, was published in Spanish by Casa de las Américas, Galería Latinoamericana, Havana, Cuba, in 1988. We are very grateful to Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner for sharing their visual material and memories of these events.
  - 27 Jamelie Hassan, "What Counts as Culture," in *Theory Rules: Art as Theory/Theory as Art*, ed. Jody Berland, Will Straw, and David Tomas (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 105. A photo of the group in Cuba is reproduced in Roger, *Greg Curnoe*, 55.
  - 28 Jamelie Hassan, "Final Report, London-Havana," 1988, personal archive.
  - 29 Hassan, "Final Report."
  - 30 David McFadden, "The Death of Greg Curnoe," poem, *This Magazine*, no. 5 (1995): 37–39; James Kings, *The Way It Is: The Life of Greg Curnoe* (Dundurn, 2017), 320–21.
  - 31 Dot Tuer, "Decolonizing the Imagination: Artists' Exchanges," *C Magazine*, March 1, 1992, 36–41.
  - 32 For more on the context of this project, see Ron Benner, "Siting Resistance Continued," in *An Alternative Cultural History of London Ontario: Art and Activism*, ed. Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner, 114–23 (Embassy Cultural House, 2024).
  - 33 Hassan, "What Counts as Culture," 105, 113n8.
  - 34 The course was part of the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities at Western University and was taught in the winter terms of 2022 and 2023 as a regular course in the Department of Visual Arts.

- 35 In 2017, the Art Gallery of Ontario presented for the first time its collection of Latin American contemporary art. The artworks represented how the artists had been influenced by the different geographical, political, social, and artistic contexts of their respective countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela. Through the juxtaposition of these artists' works, the exhibition aimed to provoke thought about place, identity, and time.
- 36 Art Gallery of Ontario, "As If Sand Were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection, May 20–August 7, 2017," <https://ago.ca/exhibitions/if-sand-were-stone-contemporary-latin-american-art-ago-collection>; <https://perma.cc/H545-L2TP>.
- 37 The donation was made through the organization's website on September 4, 2022, the day that I presented my findings to the Art Gallery of Ontario.
- 38 I want to thank AGO staff Danah Abusido and Paola Poletto for their support during my time in the AGO × RBC Emerging Artists Exchange Program.
- 39 Ron Benner, video call conversation with Anahí González, August 23, 2022.
- 40 Embassy Cultural House, "Projects" and "Exhibitions," <https://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca/about.html>. See also Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner, eds., *An Alternative Cultural History of London Ontario: Art and Activism* (Embassy Cultural House, 2024).
- 41 Ron Benner, video call conversation with Anahí González, August 23, 2022.
- 42 Christopher Régimbal, "A Fire at the Embassy Hotel," *Fuse Magazine* 33, no. 3 (2010), <https://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca/ech-news/reprint-christopher-regimbal-a-fire-at-the-embassy-hotel-fuse-magazine-vol-33-no-3-summer-2010>; <https://perma.cc/S67A-HYGB>.
- 43 The Kanesatake Resistance was a seventy-eight-day standoff between the Mohawk, the Québec police, and the Canadian Army that occurred in the community of Kanesatake, also known as the Pines. The resistance was sparked by a land development proposal on disputed land in the Pines that included a Mohawk burial ground. Alanis Obomsawin, dir., *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, documentary, 1 hr., 59 mins. (National Film Board of Canada, 1993).
- 44 Ron Benner, video call conversation with Anahí González, August 23, 2022.
- 45 Art Gallery of Ontario, "As If Sand Were Stone."
- 46 Ron Benner, video call conversation with Anahí González, August 23, 2022.
- 47 Originally called the ARTS Project, the TAP Centre for Creativity advertises itself as a nonprofit art gallery, theatre, and studio space for artists. Its mission is to bring arts and culture to the downtown core and to the wider city of London by

providing the space and the means for artists to do their work and by providing a venue for the public to see their creations. For more on the TAP Centre for Creativity, see <https://www.tapcreativity.org>.

- 48 Sofia Rodriguez, “Connecting with Heritage from Afar: Latin American Artists Showcase Work at London Exhibition,” *CBC News*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-colores-de-latinoamerica-2020-1.5436589>; <https://perma.cc/M5UW-KAE3>.
- 49 Joel Belanger, “Colores de Latinoamérica features works of six artists of Latin American heritage,” *London Free Press*, January 22, 2018, <https://lfpres.com/2018/01/22/colores-de-latinoamerica-features-works-of-six-artists-of-latin-american-heritage>; <https://perma.cc/67ST-TMYS>.
- 50 See, for example, Rodriguez, “Connecting with Heritage”; Belanger, “Colores de Latinoamérica”; José Rey Pena, “London resplandece con los colores de Latinoamérica,” *Magazine Latino!* January 20, 2014, <https://www.magazinelatino.com/london-resplandece-con-los-colores-de-latinoamerica/>; <https://perma.cc/CK6R-PF2E>; Rufo Valencia, “Se abre la exposición ‘Colores de Latinoamérica 2016’ en London, Ontario,” *Radio Canadá Internacional*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.rcinet.ca/es/2016/01/28/se-abre-la-exposicion-colores-de-latinoamerica-2016-en-london-ontario/>; <https://perma.cc/7YV7-HAB2>; and “Festival Colores de Latinoamérica 19 vuelve a London,” *Toronto Hispano*, January 8, 2019, <https://www.torontohispano.com/publicacion/vuelve-a-london-el-festival-colores-de-latinoamerica-19/>; <https://perma.cc/5T7N-TNKX>.
- 51 We are grateful to Sandra De Salvo, executive director of the TAP Centre for Creativity, to then coordinator Chris White, and to Alfredo Caxaj for their input through phone and email conversations with Alena Robin in 2017 and 2022.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Recordando* Movement and Navigating Diaspora

*Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn*

*Recordar* means “to remember,” “to bring back,” and “to make present.” The epigraph in Eduardo Galeano’s *The Book of Embraces* (1992) defines the term *recordar* as a way of passing a memory again through the heart.<sup>1</sup> In other words, we feel the memory not only as a mental process but also with our body and our senses. This idea is a starting point to think through how we use media to remember, what we record, and how we perform these memories. Particularly for those living in the diaspora, modes of remembering become a crucial technology for caring, maintaining networks, and continuing into the future.

“Diaspora” is a vague term that evokes dispersal, connection, isolation, and in-betweenness. The Greek origin of the word means “to sow” and “to scatter.”<sup>2</sup> The contemporary use of the term encompasses a wide range of descriptions of how people from specific ethnonational identities move to host lands, why they move, how they continue to conceive of themselves, and how they maintain links to their homelands.<sup>3</sup> Exploring diasporic consciousness and production that informs an identity is particularly important for us as media artists/authors because of our own lived experience as members of Chilean (Patricio) and Cambodian (Immony) diasporas.

We also acknowledge that a diasporic identity is complex, wide, and complicated. In each of our cases, it emerges from the dispersal of a people

who originate from a common homeland. Origin serves as a marker of difference when combined with destinations (e.g., a Chilean in Canada). Often these determinations of *same* and *other* are based on the identification of what a nation is or what the state recognizes as an identity. This identification can lead to essentialisms (e.g., “are you really Chilean?”) that double down on a fixed image that is, in practice, anti-diasporic. Separate from the factors that cause migration, diaspora is a valuable process that can undermine nationalist conceptions that depend on a certain homogeneity of values and language and that are reinforced through thick borders. Paul Gilroy posits that these attitudes reproduce stagnant modernist intellectual habits that betray an obsession with origin.<sup>4</sup>

If seen as a linear process, diaspora is constituted by moments in time. Homeland is a snapshot of a generation’s experience at a specified time and place. That is especially true of homelands that are colonized territories where invasion, genocide, displacement, and miscegenation have occurred or continue to occur. As change continues in the homeland, what is held as the connection to an image becomes progressively more frayed. It is constituted by relations of family and friends with similar histories and languages. There are accents, attitudes, and turns of phrases that situate you in a diasporic community. As time goes by, our relations extend and combine with others. They also perish. When parents and friends die, the territory shrinks. The daily markers of that space fade away.

Gilroy reminds us that “unnameable terrors have all figured in the constitution of diasporas and the reproduction of diaspora-consciousness, in which identity is focused less on common territory and more on memory, or, more accurately, on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter was written by a Chilean refugee (Patricio) and a Khmer/Cambodian refugee (Immony), both of whose families escaped imprisonment and probable death. It is important to note this history because diaspora works as a continually mutating process that creates relations with other diasporas through new creations such as knowledge, performances, and artworks. We each separately participate in community processes that commemorate and celebrate our survival. While working

together, we have noted many similarities in our experiences growing up and in our perspectives toward family. Our shared experiences of migration and settlement also form the common ground of our collaboration and thinking about identity. Our relation to language and traditions, including how we negotiate them in a Canadian-dominant cultural context, is shared. Growing up in English-speaking and French-speaking contexts immediately created a dichotomy between private life (e.g., Chilean or Khmer/Cambodian) and public life. In this respect, diaspora has also come to mean for us the overlapping and combination with other diasporas, which resonates with Gilroy's notion of "diaspora-consciousness."<sup>6</sup>

Patricio was born in Santiago de Chile, a year before the US-backed military coup in 1973, led by Augusto Pinochet against the government of democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende. His family left everything behind and arrived in Montreal in the winter of 1974. A common characteristic of refugee stories is the abrupt and violent nature of the displacement experienced. The refugee starts from zero and has no choice in the matter. There is often a very complicated relationship with the host country, the language, and fellow refugees. We experienced longing, betrayal, gratitude, and perpetual suspicion of the new dominant culture. It was said that many of us had a set of suitcases ready for the minute we could go back.<sup>7</sup> Connections were made with other Chileans and other Latin Americans to find support. Attempts to fit into a Canadian space were made as well as attempts to differentiate. Maintaining the integrity of one's identity through language, rituals, and food was important for Patricio's parents and grew in importance for him as he became older. It is in this context that a diaspora over several decades is negotiated at the level of the individual.

Immony was born in Chon Buri, Thailand, after his family survived the Cambodian genocide driven by the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, who was the general secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. His parents and their siblings fled to France, the United States, and Canada, whereas some family members decided to remain in Srok Khmer. His immediate family's settlement was supported by Ottawa's Project 4000, a

municipal program to assist with the sponsorship of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. They held memories of having very little to restart their lives together. Through family and community gatherings, they were able to share knowledge about second-language lessons, education, health services, and employment opportunities. They were also able to find other Khmer families with which to build their lives over multiple decades, people with whom they were able to build trust and work through social and cultural challenges while they settled together away from their homeland.

By positioning our creative practice between return and departure and as diasporic media artists, we can imagine our relations to political movements, homeland, cultural rituals, and family histories. Potentially, this artistic practice can support the visualization and communication of lived experience, allowing us to explore subject matter that is unimaginable yet familiar such as embodied experiences, cultural engagements, communal practices, and inherited archives. Our selected media artworks detailed in this text serve as investigations into how we perform this kind of remembering and cultural reproduction. Movement, gesture, storytelling, sharing, and gathering are essential for the experiences that we wish to explore and recreate. The three projects engage specifically in testimony, storytelling, and instruction respectively.

Through these investigations, we remember that food can create a space that feels familiar and that temporarily occupies the dominant space in which you find yourself. Beyond words or reason, eating and tasting help you to perceive a context made from juxtapositions of flavours and priorities of ingredients. Sharing food and its preparation also play a large part in the creation of this temporary space by providing sites for the performance of the relations on which we rely to identify with a community. As Jeanette Kong notes, food offers a reference point for affective affinities to form, a place where smell, taste, and the visual and sonic elements that surround familiar recipes invite individuals from various diasporas to find comfort.<sup>8</sup> These recipes may not have a direct cultural connection to an individual's homeland but can instead be adjacent while holding aspects

that are affectively familiar. As new generations are introduced within these diasporas, groups witness waves of expansion and contraction within their communities. There are moments when intergenerational knowledge plays a significant role in guiding cultural positioning and shaping identity within diasporas—moments when knowledge and bodies traverse various diasporas to form connections, affinities, common understandings, and networks of care. While observing, listening, negotiating, and living with each other, diasporic communities create informal structures for care and intercultural support systems out of necessity.

For Khmer families, a series of stories about survival, longing, loss, and being reunited connected communities while they worked toward healing as a nation within and away from their homeland. Memories about settlement programs, paper names, and family reunions acted as familiar reference points for these communities. Khmer families moved to Montreal to form microeconomies where informal structures for child care and labour distribution were mounted and where workplace environments became accessible, domestic, and trusting. These spaces were family basements and garment factories that held familiar sounds, smells, tastes, bodies, and aesthetics.

During the years of the dictatorship in Chile, food made the distance both greater and lesser between Toronto and Santiago, Antofagasta, Temuco, Valparaiso, or other cities. Rare ingredients smuggled into Canada by friends and relatives helped to recreate foods that evoked the memories of home, but their scarcity highlighted how far away the southern hemisphere really was. Gatherings to celebrate Chilean independence are days away from the date that marks the military coup and the country's domination by contemporary imperial powers. Over the decades, in living rooms, kitchens, and halls, there were gatherings of parents with children, socialists, militant leftists, communists, workers, teachers, and artists across Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and other large cities in Canada. These events were held to help diasporic Chileans remember our origins or to fuel political resistance against the dictatorship both back home and in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Our media arts projects also help us to think about how we recall and replay these important, yet quotidian, events in our minds as images while raising the question of whether we remember them in other ways. Preparing and partaking of food involve the body in motion in relation to others (responding or mirroring). Is there a mode of proprioceptive remembering? Proprioception is the sensing of one's own (i.e., *proprio*) body—that is, the position of one's limbs, weight, and movement. It also allows the body to form somatic markers for memories, engagements, and relations. Not only is this awareness a basis for understanding our movement, but it is also a resonant motif of how we each know where we are in relation to others as we move from one homeland to another. Our projects that deal with storytelling and testimony have focused on how we register microgestures while listening, such as by tilting the head, blinking the eyes, and following the voice of the speaker. Our collaborative work has helped us to reflect on this question. These investigations have helped us to understand how recordings of diasporic sight, voice, and movement support storytelling, remembering, protesting, and learning.

Questions begin to emerge through the engagements with our collaborators, our family, technology, and our respective homelands. What do we inherit when we learn about cultural recipes, stories, and testimonies that are connected to our identity and our homeland? Does the body gain information about communal gestures, familiar body language, and familial histories? In our collaborations with each other, creative projects have allowed us to explore various notions of recordings that act as a supplement for our bodies to remember and reimagine our connections with our homeland, cultural teachings, and memories of our loved ones.

### Three Projects Exploring Diaspora-Consciousness

Over the past few years, we have worked on three projects that deal more directly with movement, gesture, storytelling, sharing, and gathering. *Passing Through the Heart* (2019–23) is an ongoing project that looks at food preparation and gesture as a way of remembering and negotiating

diaspora. Using recipes, ingredients, cooking utensils, and movement, we explored how we can record and perform everyday gestures that are at once mundane and meaningful. *Receipts* (2021) is a project created in response to the increased anti-Asian violence that accompanied the global COVID-19 pandemic. Written testimonies were re-presented and combined with the act of listening/witnessing. *Fabulous Ones* (2022) features a collection of diasporic mythical creatures that silently wait for passersby and occasionally look in their direction. Each project makes use of movement recording to remember gestures or to react to the presence of others. These records assist us with remembering, as they are carefully assembled from our recollection of affective experiences to preserve our memories of events and people.

This series of works attempts to situate affective recordings of diasporic voices and bodies through Tess Takahashi's notion of the "murmur," which highlights the audibility and filtering of particular frequencies in minor and major voices.<sup>10</sup> For us, the audibility of the minor voice is dependent on preserving undesired and overlooked noises; this range is where intimacy and family resemblance lie. Our projects include knowledge and memories that are shared by our families, peers, and communities. We search for aesthetics, visual language, and methods like movement and gesture to remember, celebrate, and communicate with each other.

Experience, memories, and trauma are recorded in the body through the tightness of our hands when we hold each other while crossing the street, the fear of familial loss having been communicated at an early age. We speak about memories of our parents holding our hands in public spaces, recalling the tightness of our hands and the gaze of our parents. Without words, Immony has witnessed his mother's desire to prevent revisiting family loss. As children, we moved through unfamiliar public spaces, and Immony has memories of riding with his mother on the bus to work and following her through large malls with fluorescent signage and perfume samples. To him, the impression of her hand communicated a fear of loss. The tightness of fingers and palms spoke to a longing for

security and familial connection, providing a directional pull to a parented movement between unfamiliar bodies and environments. Patricio remembers the silent moments of holding his father's hand and then his mother's hand as they each passed away in their own time. He recalls the texture of their thinning skin and the delicate pressure as they clenched his own hand. The fear of imminent loss was imprinted on his hand, and he can still feel the smoothness of their fingers. These moments and others are remembered and replayed in our minds and with our bodies. The projects that we have recently completed meditate on the *recuerdos* (memories) of movement, both embodied and observed.

## Recording, Not Capturing

Motion capture (or performance capture) techniques have been in use for a long time and in a variety of areas of practice and research. In the late 1800s, French scientist Etienne Jules Marey used specialized camera equipment to record stages of a subject's locomotion (or movement through space).<sup>11</sup> Marey sought to understand the physiology of bodies through what he termed "chronophotography."<sup>12</sup> The study of locomotion and movement continued in the early 1900s with Frank Gilbreth and Lillian Gilbreth's motion studies of office work and factory work, which sought to record human knowledge through gesture—as depicted in chronocyclegraphs—and to economize human movement for safer, more efficient, and more profitable production processes (fig. 8.1).<sup>13</sup>

More recently, researchers in the fields of computer-human interaction and engineering, among many others, have studied human motion for a range of reasons, such as to help train robots, identify human behaviours and gestures, advance physiological therapies, and improve computer vision and machine-learning processes. This endeavour has recorded and collected large amounts of data, including the movements of dance, acrobatics, walking, combat, everyday actions, and even the preparation of recipes in a kitchen.<sup>14</sup> Experiments in human gait have processed recorded

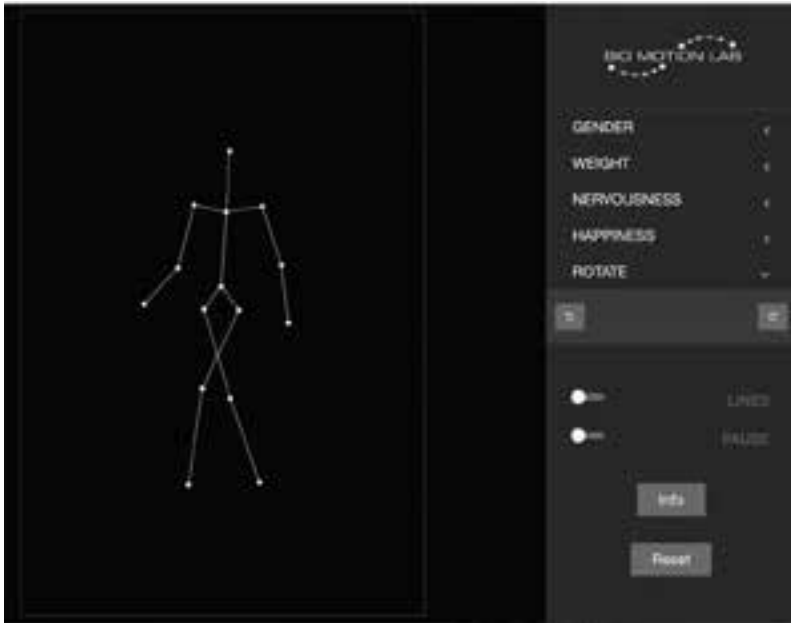




8.1 Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, chronocyclegraph of a woman staking buttons, 1917.

motion data to understand the identification of gender, affect, and body mass (fig. 8.2).<sup>15</sup>

In most of these research projects, anonymization is used to ensure compliance with research ethics and because identity is not prioritized as an objective. Perhaps inadvertently, this fact reproduces a logic of extraction that is a pervasive aspect of contemporary society. We became sensitized to this dilemma throughout the process of making these projects. In an attempt to address this problem, we have adopted the term “record” in place of the term “capture” to signal the important difference between *taking* and *remembering/processing*. A logic of capture implies taking ownership of a subject, extracting the subject from a context, and potentially denaturing it from its previous state.



8.2 Interface for the Bio Motion Lab demonstration that allows a user to generate different gaits.

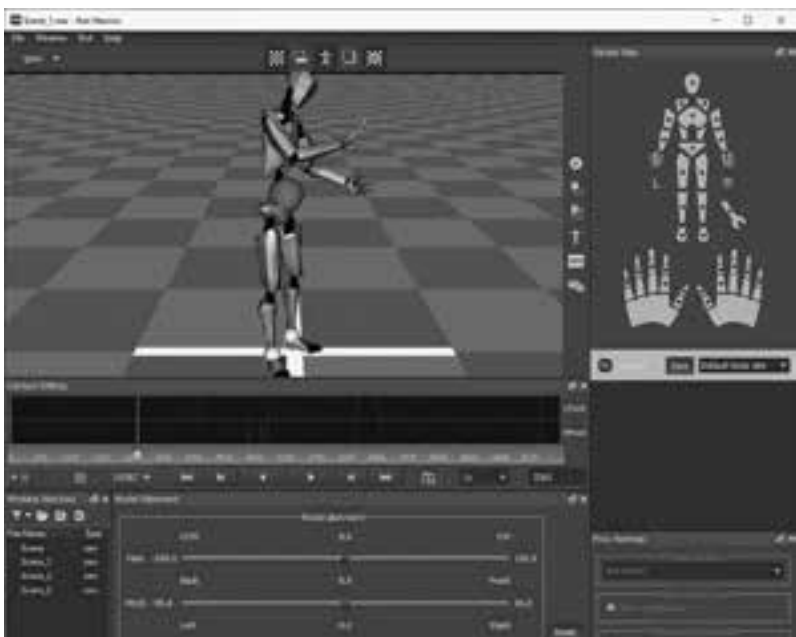
We have therefore *détourned*—subverted/hijacked to create something new<sup>16</sup>—motion-capturing technology by conceiving of it as a motion-recording process in order to reveal the generative and expressive possibilities of recording. These alternative directions are explored by thinking through how we can weave virtual presence, cultural gestures, reference material, and instructional recipes with our own memories. We take note of how Eduardo Galeano reminds us that to *recordar* (remember) is to pass again (*re-*) through the *corazon* (heart). In English, the word “record” shares the same roots as *recordar*.<sup>17</sup> To *recordar* is to pass again through our body rather than only to rationalize with our mind. *Recordando* (remembering), with this expanded definition in mind, involves embodiment and feeling with movement and gesture. The acts of recording and replaying involve a ceaseless process of passage through another medium.

Contrary to the logic of capture, which prioritizes the immobilization of a thing, recording and playing evoke an ongoing flow. Instead of consuming a finite resource, there is a performance of endless iterations. Instead of scarcity, there is plenitude.

Although these aspects may still be very much part of the technique, a prioritization of recording/remembering/processing brings to the forefront a logic of relation, reassembling, and care. Through recording, we can produce both understanding and recognition of what is visually present in the works and be attuned to the affective registers in these records, which may appear through reference memories and lived experience. What is immediately absent in motion data in the context of film, games, and television may be the physical presence of what is in the room at that moment: the producer, director, and equipment operator. In our case, it is our collaborators, our family, and our community who guide us through stories, teachings, and performances that are shared with each other. Sensory registers connected to the event that is being recorded—memories of smell, taste, sound, and touch—inform how we remember these moments that we engage with.

Producing a record of a person's movement distinct from their visual image challenges our idea of correspondence between person and image. Can you still see the person through the coordinated flow of points along the body abstracted from the person's skin, hair, and flesh? As some researchers have demonstrated, humans do seem to be able to ascertain the gender expression of biological motion.<sup>18</sup> As far as other aspects of the person are concerned, perhaps only the viewer who is familiar with and who cares about the living person can detect the relation of bones moving together and identify that person.

Immony can see the presence of his mother and her interactions with him in the negative space of the motion data while looking at a video and motion recording (figs. 8.3 and 8.4) of his mother teaching him how to make a Khmer *banh ciao* (crepe). Through repetition and instruction, she demonstrates hand gestures to distribute rice flour evenly in a pan. In this record, her stories about preparing food to sell with her aunt at the



8.3 Immony's mother teaches her son how to make *banh ciao* (crepe), 2019.

8.4 Motion data editing of Immony's crepe-making recording.

market in Phnom Penh are present. These are stories about her morning commute by bicycle and boat to the market every day to help her family work. These are gestures of care that she sends through Immony's body and beyond. There are nonvisible registers in the motion data of this record that are legible, felt, and seen through the memory of his mother that day as she taught her son—who was wearing a motion capture suit—how to make their family's favourite Khmer recipe.

Patricio plays a recording of his father's movement and recognizes the position of his shoulders, the orientation of his hands when he swings his arms, and the distance between his physicality hand and his shoulder. These details are familiar to him and in some ways mirror his own (figs. 8.5 and 8.6). But they seem all the more uncanny when he opens the recording data files to view the quality of the data. What often follows is a process of cleaning motion data, which in some cases requires automated filtering that involves the erasure of undesired frequencies and a flattening of values to generalize movement. Like in the restoration of old photographs, we try to fix gaps introduced by the medium's fragility. We apply techniques that involve manually changing aberrant positions of joints using intuition and memory, enacting gestures toward care and respect for these familial records. For instance, Patricio fixes his father's fingers, frame by frame, to preserve body language and the intimacy of the recording. In these recordings, there are intimate registers and details about body language and signature. As we work through the production techniques for these projects, we consider our role in preserving and caring for these traces that connect us with our family.

Filtering can also remove body language/signature. Smoothing motion data is a process of removing the vicissitudes of the signal so that noise from motion capture equipment in the form of spikes in the *x*, *y*, and *z* coordinates are flattened. In some cases, practitioners employ this process to generalize gestures when applying recorded movement to a virtual character because what this process removes are unique body signatures within these records. In our work with these processes, our desire is to preserve the intimate registers within these records. These lower



8.5 Patricio's father shares his experience of growing food, 2019.

8.6 Digital-human version of Patricio's father clothed in digital clothing and animated by motion capture data.

8.7 Photo documentation of gestural reference, Khmer Apsara, Angkor Wat, Cambodia, 2017.



frequencies create a direct tie to our bodies. To be found in this range are body language, family resemblance, and cultural traces.

The traceable aspect within these records helps us to explore aesthetics, gestures, and methods that allow us to engage with communal and cultural memory. Examples of these moments are evident when Immony stretches his wrists with an upward 90-degree movement of his hands, his index and middle fingers partially closed, which occurs just before he performs a gesture. He has found references to this form in video documentation of traditional Khmer dance, in sculptures (fig. 8.7), and in karaoke videos. When we are manually editing motion data, there is an



8.8 Postcard and background for virtual events, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Passing Through the Heart*, 2019–23.

effort to preserve these personal traces. We choose to care for them and to preserve them so that we can retain intimate and overlooked details that will assist us in remembering affective registers connected to events, practices, and people.

The motion data that we record is also meant to animate virtual bodies that we create. They can be bodies that attempt a similarity to the person recorded. In the case of *Passing Through the Heart*, this undertaking meant working on virtual models of family members who no longer exist as an exercise in care (fig. 8.8). Sculpting and shaping the face and body, you re-examine the physical existence and traits, which you rarely had the opportunity to do while they were alive. You find resonances between your body and that of your father. For Patricio, pulling and tugging virtual cloth over a virtual model of his father is much like dressing a doll



and playing make-believe. He is transported momentarily to an imaginary place. These avatars have a fleeting power over the one who holds their hand or pulls the shirt over the shoulder.

These virtual bodies and recording techniques have connected us with dialogues and creative projects that look at our experience as settlers, immigrants, and refugees, touching on narratives of familiarity, difference, longing, distance, arrival, and return. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked through a series of remote motion-recording processes and collective experiences to maintain our dialogues with collaborators and family members about topics that touched on diasporic identity, migration, mourning, healing, and communal practices. These technologies included photogrammetry, motion recording, videography, and audio recording, which came together to support oral testimonies, object-centred narratives, and transmedia storytelling. These techniques flesh out the motion recording done previously, literally giving voice and a face to the bare motion data.

*Passing Through the Heart* looks at how knowledge is shared through gestures and feelings by friends and family members. This work consists of a series of workshops conducted via Zoom video conferencing, motion capture performances, interviews, and video installation. It is based on the collection of recipes from immigrants and refugees in Canada, each of which represents the formation of transnational identities within North America. We explored multidirectional approaches to cultural food practices, the bodies that preserve them, and various techniques for recording conversations, events, and teachings. We did live performances of motion recording for remote audiences, which included demonstrations from guests who shared their own recipes.

Knowledge of practice and feeling is carried across borders. The histories that are shared between parent and child, aunts, sisters, brothers, and chosen family are guided by multigenerational narratives that consist of bodies, memories, events, and environments. The work highlighted commonalities and affinities in transnational experiences while expanding on a specific type of intergenerational knowledge sharing—one that not



8.9 ISEA2020 online conference, October 13–16, 2020. Participants around the world shared recipes and cooked while recording motion for this conference, held during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

only preserves approaches, information, and traditions but also creates feeling for processes, smells, and tastes while transforming, hybridizing, and responding to contexts around food as a cultural practice.

In developing and producing this project, we faced travel restrictions and physical-distancing requirements imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic (fig. 8.9), which led to the use of video conferencing to hold workshops and to perform demonstrations. We realized that remote audiovisual communication was an aspect that we had to use and address. We started to think about our own memories of long-distance phone calls with family members. Using calling cards bought at local convenience stores and pharmacies, we were each able to hear the voices of distant loved ones. The sounds of our family members travelled across long distances through oceans over copper wires. We remember having the receiver pressed against our ears searching for the small, low, and fragile

sounds of familiar voices among other hums and the hiss of the phone line. These memories of longing to hear our family are what fed our interest in amplifying and augmenting familiar affective registers within storytelling practices—registers that are sensorial experiences—and aesthetics that are felt with our body (e.g., sonic, visual, haptic, and olfactory). Through these moments of storytelling and sharing, we wanted to extend virtual presence and remembering by observing body gestures and facial expressions alongside the audiovisual recordings with which we were working.

## The Visibility of Diasporas

During the most intense period of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–22), a “shadow pandemic” emerged that greatly affected us and many in our shared communities.<sup>19</sup> A shadow pandemic describes the secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including forms of violence and oppression that became worse. For instance, violence against women, the elderly, children, and members of racialized communities worsened due to pre-existing factors such as isolation, misinformation, xenophobia, misogyny, or racism. In addition to the direct health impacts of COVID-19, we experienced parallel shadow pandemics of racial discrimination and violence, housing precarity and homelessness, and negatively impactful isolation. These occurrences disproportionately affected our vulnerable communities. For example, Asian diasporic communities saw troubling intensifications of racism that negatively affected perceptions of personal safety.

In the summer of 2020, in response to growing anti-Asian violence in North America, members of the Groupe d’Entraide Contre le Racisme Envers les Asiatiques au Québec shared their experiences on social media of increased vulnerability and visibility at familiar locations such as Costco, Korean markets, and metro stations.<sup>20</sup> In the group’s comments section, strategies were shared, and condolences were offered. Participants threaded records to support identifying the actions of offenders.



8.10 Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Receipts*, 2021, Bentway Conservancy, Toronto.

Being in this space inspired us to develop a way to safely record and share testimonies and sentiments. We created a space to listen and to understand how gestures, bodily fluids (i.e., spit), and rhetoric were weaponized. This space became a place to connect with all those who had to think twice about how they moved as their bodies became increasingly more vulnerable during this time. In 2021, we created the installation *Receipts* for a project commissioned by the Bentway Conservancy in Toronto. Originally focused on the idea of safety in public space, we responded by highlighting this crisis (fig. 8.10).

To complete *Receipts*, we created a space for collective healing and social awareness by working closely with networks of generous collaborators (including Lillian Leung), allies, and community partners on a creative tool that would form anonymized records of accounts provided by individuals who had experienced or witnessed racism in public spaces. Rooted in shared experiences, these diasporic networks were utilized and activated through “supra-national kinship,” which works beyond identities based on nation-states.<sup>21</sup> Our sense of solidarity between diasporas is fuelled, in part, by a shared experience within Canada’s predominantly white-settler cultural context. Also at play is the “chaotic” model, which produces “new understandings of self, sameness, and community.”<sup>22</sup> Strict definitions of one community fall apart when diasporas reproduce non-linearly and through other diasporas. Hyphenated identities of Asian Canadian, Latinx Canadian, Latinx-Asian Canadian, Asian Caribbean, and Afro-Canadian multiply and produce intersections between Asian, Latinx, and Afro-descendant communities.

To orient our work on *Receipts*, we asked ourselves a series of questions about the techniques used in this context: How can anonymizing testimonies of racist aggression create structures of accountability, solidarity, healing, and community? How can data collection be mobilized as an activist tool to counter the regimes of surveillance in which it typically operates? The project addressed these questions by receiving, translating, anonymizing, aestheticizing, recording, voicing, and archiving written testimonies from participants who were willing to share their experiences. These anonymized records were collected, translated from English into Chinese (traditional and simplified), Tagalog, and Vietnamese and displayed online during and after the installation. This repository acted as evidence of and resistance against anti-Asian racism (fig. 8.11).

Assembling stories from individuals who had experienced anti-Asian racism, these written testimonies scrolled across the screen as an artificial voice generated by an AI-driven text-to-speech process. The testimonies attested that these sentiments and actions had occurred in public spaces, in our neighbourhoods, to our loved ones, and to people we did

Target / Victims	Location	Date	Context	Description (English)	Description (Traditional Chinese)
Target	Twitter world	2020		As the lead researcher on the 2004 report on racialization of SARS and impacts on Chinese and SE Asian communities in Toronto, I re-posted the report in January 2020 to warn of what to expect as COVID-19 cases started to appear in Canada and the US. Consequent to that posting, I was inundated with racist hate mail and threats. I also witnessed the much circulated image of an East Asian looking woman eating hot soup. Trump called the "Wuhan flu," the "Chinese flu," and this way and continues to echo, scapegoating Chinese and Chinese appearing folks.	因為2004年關於SARS「台灣」的調查報告指出，東南亞社區在COVID-19流行期間已受到針對性傳播病的威脅。我的2020年1月再刊發了該報告，為了在COVID-19（新冠肺炎）期間警告加拿大民眾。此後，我收到許多充滿仇恨的電子郵件和威脅。此外，網絡上還流傳了有關一名東亞裔女性吃熱湯的圖片。特朗普將武漢肺炎稱為「中國肺炎」，這種方式不斷重複，並將矛頭指向中國和中國裔人士，為其打壓。
Target	PR, Toronto	2020		Also in March, before the lockdown, I posted a tweet and as video as I sat down, a white woman pulled her face 180cm up from their chair and closed down the bus away from me.	在3月封鎖之前，我發了一條推文，並錄下我坐下時，一名白人女性將臉從椅子上抬起180度，並關閉了公共汽車，使我無法靠近。
Target	Brimley Street West, Toronto	2020		Walking down on Brimley Street West, towards the local grocery store, it happened to me that two individuals stopped as I walked towards them. They turned away so their backs were to me all present.	在前往位於Brimley Street West的當地超市時，我碰巧遇到兩個人停在我走向他們時。他們轉過身去，使他們背對着我。
Target	Toronto	2020		My 12-year-old child was walking by himself and a man pointed to him yelling, "Liar!" gesturing to his mouth.	我的12歲兒子在街上獨自行走，一名男子指著他大喊「騙子！」並指著他的嘴巴。
Target	Hwy404/Fidley School, North York, Ontario	2020/2020		On Saturday July 25th at around 2:40 p.m., I was in the Bayview and Sheppard/Hwy404 area sitting in a park reading my book when a woman – who claimed to be a teacher – accused me and threatened to call the police on me for trespassing. She then went on to hurl racial insults at me, telling me that I can't read or speak English, that I should "go back home to China," and that "all Chinese people should go to jail." She then pointed me, going back and forth from across the fence, when I refused to leave the park. I recorded a video of myself to capture my story while it was still fresh in my head and immediately managed to capture the woman's face and a snippet of her racist speech. The next day I decided to post the video on my social media channels and speak up about my experience. It has become a full but necessary reflex to record my own traumas and share it widely to hold people to account these days. And even then, justice is never guaranteed. As a community builder and founder of Living Righteous, a community that explores the experiences of those living in between cultures as part of a diaspora, I feel I had a responsibility to speak up and take action. No one teaches you what you should do when you've been racially harassed. He and tells you what you are supposed to do to ensure your safety. At least no one ever told me. But today when I decided to do, I knew that moment was pivotal to tell me that she is a teacher. I filed a formal complaint with the Ontario College of Teachers, has person in a position of power to whom young minds should never be standing in front of a classroom harbouring such aggressive and xenophobic beliefs. I remain fully in the conviction that she must be held accountable for her actions. I posted this incident on my social media channels to tell my story and to harness the power of the internet to help identify this woman. I reached out to the Toronto Board of School Board to notify them that this incident happened on their school grounds and is tied out if this woman was employed by their school board (she is not). I reached out to local media to bring attention to this issue. My story has since been covered by CTV News, Global News, City News, BlogTO, Starline Toronto, the Daily News Toronto, and SouthShore. I filed a report for harassment via AntiDiscrimination.ca and openbust.com to capture this act of anti-Asian racism for historical and archival purposes. With a goal of shaping the incident, we managed to identify the woman and confirm that she is, in fact, a registered teacher with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). I have since filed a formal complaint with the OCT and an investigation is now underway to determine disciplinary actions.	7月25日星期六下午2:40左右，我在Bayview和Sheppard/Hwy404地區坐在公園裡讀書時，一名婦女（聲稱是老師）指控我並威脅要報警，指責我擅闖。她接著對我進行種族侮辱，告訴我我不能閱讀或說英語，讓我「回中國去」，並說「所有中國人都應該進監獄」。她來回指著我，當我拒絕離開公園時。我錄製了一段自己的視頻，以記錄我的經歷。第二天，我決定將這段視頻上傳到我的社交媒體頻道，並就我的經歷發表看法。這成為了一個必要的反應，以記錄我自己的創傷，並廣泛分享，以追究這些人的責任。即使如此，正義也並非總是保證的。作為社區建設者和「Living Righteous」社區的創始人，該社區探索作為 diaspora 一部分的人的生活經歷，我感覺我有責任站出來並採取行動。沒有人會教給你當你受到種族騷擾時應該做什麼，也沒有人會告訴你應該做什麼來確保你的安全。至少沒有人告訴我。但今天當我決定站出來時，我知道那個時刻是關鍵，要告訴她她是一名老師。我正式向安大略省教師學院（OCT）提出投訴，因為她處於一個對年輕人的思想應該永遠不要站在教室後面懷有如此強烈的侵略性和排外信念的位置。我深信她必須為她的行為負責。我在我的社交媒體渠道上發布了這一事件，以利用互聯網的力量來幫助識別這名婦女。我聯繫了多倫多教育局（Toronto Board of School Board）通知他們這一事件發生在他們的學校範圍內，並詢問如果這名婦女是他們的員工，他們是否知道。她不是。我聯繫了當地媒體，以引起對這一問題的關注。我的故事隨後被CTV News、Global News、City News、BlogTO、Starline Toronto、Daily News Toronto 和 SouthShore 報導。我通過 AntiDiscrimination.ca 和 openbust.com 提交了一份關於反亞裔種族主義的報告，以記錄這一行為，為歷史和檔案目的。我們的目標是塑造這一事件，我們成功地識別了這名婦女，並確認她確實是一名註冊教師（OCT）。我隨後向 OCT 提出正式投訴，目前正在進行調查，以確定紀律行動。

8.11 Online records detailing various incidents of anti-Asian violence and racism during COVID-19.





8.12 Immony records motion for installation, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Receipts*, 2021.

not know yet. The hypervisibility of faces and the racialization of the pandemic became palpable, and an anonymized voice asked viewers to feel the weight of their words. We concealed the visual identity of individuals to ensure that the sharing of their experience would not have any additional repercussions, such as retaliation, legal discrimination, and emotional trauma. Additionally, these records were assembled using a



consent-focused protocol that requested permission from the owners of these experiences. The terms of their presentation were determined by the contributors to avoid a potentially extractive process.

We attempted to bring back the body of listening in order to counteract the distancing created by anonymization of both image and voice. Immony performed the act of listening to the testimonies, recording the movement of his eyes and the tilt of his head as he bore witness to the stories of violence and discrimination (fig. 8.12). These movements were subtle, but the viewer could still detect the feeling that drove them. Motion recordings were made while replaying each testimony. We recorded Immony's reactions to listening and visualizing the events described—including his sadness, anger, and fear. The act of witnessing was, in the end, one of most important physical gestures and ethical responses to this crisis. Through solidarity and allyship, we engendered being present in the face of these testimonies.

## Fictions and Diasporic Imaginations

Stories contain actors, places, and actions that we recall as memories—as though they could really have taken place. They can contain symbols that evoke a web of feelings and thoughts. In diasporic communities, stories of homeland and migration create images that we repeat to create a temporary space in the diaspora that feels more familiar. Although the veracity of the stories is often important if we are to understand the facts about origins, equally important is the feeling and subtle meaning of the stories, which can by turns become hard to believe or be perceived as hearsay or superstition. What remains important in these more fantastical tales is how they still reflect a bit about us. In 2022, we created our project *Fabulous Ones* to help us remember homelands through imagined beings of diasporic fantasy and autobiographical fiction. These stories situated us, soothed us, or warned us.

We began with constructed creatures inspired by Jorge Luis Borges—specifically his fictional bestiary *The Book of Imaginary Beings*<sup>23</sup> and his

short story “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins,”<sup>24</sup> in which a catalogue divides all animals into one of fourteen fantastical categories, including “fabulous ones” and “those that have just broken a flower vase.”<sup>25</sup> In typical Borges style, his story incorporates myth, information systems, and ancient kinds of knowledge to invite readers to interrogate their own basis of knowledge. His story prompted us to ask what things are the same and what things are other. As Michel Foucault reminds us, classification is contingent on site and moment.<sup>26</sup> We wondered what creatures would be included in our project’s category. How might it contain a wide range of creatures translated from diasporic people around the world?

Our response was to collaborate with friends of diasporic communities to create beings that would belong to the category of fabulous ones. Our collaborators included Dave Colangelo, Nehal El-Hadi, and Patricia Pasten. Three-dimensional digital masks based on these descriptions were displayed in a triptych of large LED screens in custom-made, free-standing structures situated within a cluster of trees across from the Archives of Ontario at York University (fig. 8.13). The masks, made to appear both fantastical and bored, looked back at the viewers, tracking them as they moved in front of the displays. From speakers located in the structures, the story of each creature was told, including land of origin and, in some cases, the creature’s connection to the land on which it was currently situated.

In this project, five creatures represented five stories of diasporic translation from origin to destination. “Kuan khla” tells the story of a panther-like beast from Cambodia that travels with the mist along the Mekong River with its kin. “El doppio” is about a monstrous owl-like creature from Italy with two mouths that bicker with each other. “El alicanto” tells of a gold- and silver-eating bird from Chile that cannot fly after it has eaten. “Kuthbani” describes a mischievous sand spirit from the Sahara that shifts form and predicts the future. “El perro negro” tells of a black dog with red eyes seen by miners in northern Chile. This last story, which shares many traits with the Cerberus in Borges’s book,<sup>27</sup> was originally told to collaborator Patricia Pasten during her childhood in



8.13 Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Fabulous Ones*, 2022, Nuit Blanche, York University.

Scarborough, Ontario. It evokes an image of a desert populated with spirits and omens. Patricia holds this story as an emblem of the place from which her family originates. Each retelling recreates a space and time that reconnects to her in a diasporic present.

### *El perro negro*

In the north, in the driest desert in the world, where it hasn't rained for 500 years, there was once a lucrative saltpeter mine. In this arid land of the "white gold," a giant black dog is seen roaming the hills. It has red eyes that glow in the moonlight and wears a serpent made of pure gold around its neck. It is told that if you are fortunate enough to witness this terrifying creature digging you must mark the spot with a dagger deeply plunged into the earth. It is believed that the black dog is the guardian of the richest vein

of gold in existence. The night my father was born my grandfather began the long solitary journey on foot to the birth registry office in the neighbouring town. As my grandfather made his way by moonlight he knew that he was alone in this desolate stretch of terrain where nothing moves—he stopped suddenly as he felt an eerie unseen presence. And then he saw it, the huge red eyes watching him, the giant black form. Following him for three days and nights, the black dog stayed close behind until at last, he disappeared. My grandfather, a learned man, an atheist, believed that the figure that shadowed him was not of this earth, but somehow an omen. This legend from the salitreras, still told today by the miners of the north, warns of the giant black dog with red eyes—the devil's guardian.<sup>28</sup>

The luminous eyes of these fictional characters attracted visitors while their stories of diasporic fantasy were told, touching on themes of migration, survival, adaptation, kinship, and loss. The narration of each story registered a distinct presence conveyed by a different voice, each having a unique quality, accent, and pronunciation that added a dimension relevant to the story. Moreover, in order for the eyes of each creature to follow visitors, their subtle head movements were recorded and played back during the exhibition in a way that blended and modified the sequence (fig. 8.14). Rather than faithfully replaying only a single motion recording that preserved and highlighted the presence of the original subject, several different recordings were seamlessly blended in an assemblage of movements. This technique resulted in another kind of perceived presence—that of the fantastical creature as conscious and capable of perception—as registered through its uncanny movement and lifelike response to the viewer. We utilized the spectacle of computer animation, interaction, and large visual displays to attract and disarm the viewer. We attempted to make a connection between story, creature, and listener by bringing to life stories often retold only within diasporic families. We hoped that when standing in front of creatures that followed

8.14 The creature  
Alicanto, in Patricio  
Dávila and Immony Mèn,  
*Fabulous Ones*, 2022.



their movements, viewers would be reminded that they, too, were present in the process of storytelling.

Witnessing extends past the viewing experience of records and recordings because it is connected to gestures that impact or change our relationships, experiences, and perspectives. The notion of recording for us depends on careful reconstruction and assemblage for our future visit

to our memories of the past. It is a generous gesture that preserves the affective registers within records that, in some cases, may be hidden, tender, and traumatic, making them difficult to access, but they guide us as we reimagine our identity, positioning, relationships, histories, and futures.

The stories of food and gathering in *Passing Through the Heart*, the testimonies of violence in *Receipts*, and the fables of imaginary creatures in *Fabulous Ones* all depend on a localization in a broader Canadian context. Whether through Canada's official multicultural policy over the past few decades or because of a particular latitude afforded in the Canadian national identity, there is a possibility in this country both to maintain a hyphenated identity and to create alliances with immigrants and refugees. At once, there is a shared history of displacement, of difference from a dominant Canadian culture, and of a distinction based on one's country of origin.

We have collected and shared stories from distant territories and have put them in conversation with each other. We have facilitated the sharing of food, aesthetics, desire, and history through gatherings that purposely invite a wide variety of Indigenous, settler, and immigrant attendees. These gestures are aimed at continuing the work of creating bonds and understanding between different people. We have been particularly invested through our own collaboration in the possibility of developing a diaspora-consciousness that evinces essentialisms in favour of common struggle.

Working with bodies in motion alongside the narratives that were voiced in our projects, we could not ignore the physical dimension of presence and being situated in a place. We were constantly reminded of the negotiation of difference between a diasporic identity and a space of reception. Distinguishing between the notions of *recording* and *record-and*o for us became a way to connect media techniques with the act of remembering, which ultimately led to gestures of care. We used records to supplement details from past events, to reimagine histories, and to respond to some of our present-day desires related to family, community, and futures.

Through the three projects discussed above, we developed a more intuitive understanding while moving through various dimensions of diaspora. We connected across different diasporas by using our bodies and senses to recognize and understand familiar gestures and intimate registers that are stored, assembled, and shared through our creative projects. Our curiosity led to questions that connected motion-recording technology, interaction, and computer graphics to gesture, memory, and storytelling. Modes of remembering became crucial to understanding how we place diasporic voices within a diaspora-consciousness where our bodies not only form intimate markers for the events that we experience but also carry narratives of settlement, refuge, and loss.

#### NOTES

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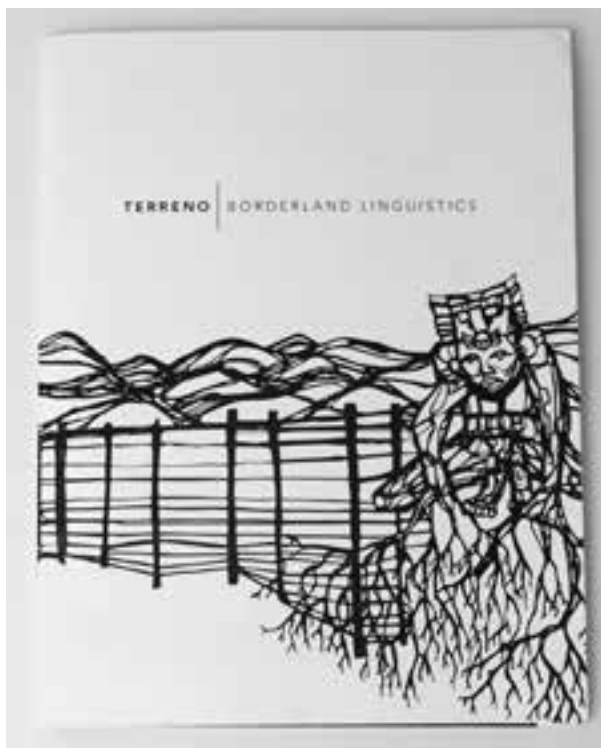


## CHAPTER NINE

### Defying Borders Through Artist Publishing and Other Aesthetic Actions

*Lois Klassen in conversation  
with Daisy Quezada Ureña*

I treasure the shared determination and common inspiration that have characterized my conversations with ceramics artist and educator Daisy Quezada Ureña, who is based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In this one, Daisy and I review the artist-publishing work that we have shared since 2016 and the flurry of collaborations with Canadian (and international) Latinx artists that have followed our work. Based in Vancouver, I am not at all Latinx Canadian and, in fact, have barely learned beginner Spanish, and Daisy has never been to Canada. Yet we have found ourselves inside of Latinx Canadian cultural production while defying its national definitions. In effect, the inclusion of our conversation in this book could be seen as an aesthetic action of refusing national borders and identities, particularly the economic, cultural, and political borders that delineate the Global South from the Global North. Although voices from Mexico and Latin America are correctly centred and unfettered from categories of difference in this book's focus on Latinx Canadian production, it is through the fellowship that the US Latinx Art Forum awarded to Daisy in 2023 that our conversation explores relations that defy national borders. We imagine instead how our work follows Turtle Island's north-south migratory corridors along the continent's cordillera and waterways.



9.1 (left) Sylvia Arthur, Lois Klassen, and Daisy Quezada, eds., *Terreno: Borderland Linguistics* (Light Factory Publications, 2017), with image by Israel F. Haros Lopez.

9.2 (below) Present Cartographers collective, Santa Fe Art Institute, 2017. *Left to right:* Sylvia Arthur, Daisy Quezada Ureña, and Lois Klassen.



In 2016, my academic research on artists' response to the ethical demand of migration detention took me to Santa Fe. An outcome of that research-creation work was the production of the book *Terreno: Borderland Linguistics* (2017) with Daisy Quezada Ureña and Sylvia Arthur, who had come from London (figs. 9.1 and 9.2).<sup>1</sup> The three of us met through our involvement with an immigration/emigration-themed residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute. Our publication gathered work from other artists who were similarly caught in the web of relations resulting from the institute's year-long theme.<sup>2</sup> A year after the residency, we launched *Terreno* under the imprint Present Cartographers at Light Factory Publications (LFP).<sup>3</sup> Inside *Terreno*, we declared that the aim of the book and of future work by Present Cartographers was to "seek out cultural geographies which reflect resistance to dominant political frameworks and oppressions."<sup>4</sup> Along that theme, another geography-responsive document, *bosque brotante* (sprouting forest), followed three years later in 2020 (figs. 9.3 and 9.4).<sup>5</sup> Daisy Quezada Ureña created *bosque brotante* to document a practice-based artwork grounded in the Rio Grande region and cultures. I edited it and added an afterword linking the issues that it covered with the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia. Using English and Spanish, *bosque brotante* records three land-based conversations that took place as a component of Daisy's artwork for the 2019 exhibition *Species in Peril along the Rio Grande*, shown at 516 Arts in Albuquerque. They feature the following voices:

- Beata Tsosie-Peña, a community development leader and a member of Tewa Women United, in conversation with Marian Naranjo, a founder of Honor Our Pueblo Existence (HOPE), both members of Santa Clara Pueblo;
- Jonathan Loretto, a potter and member of the Cochiti Pueblo and Jemez Pueblo, in conversation with Roxanne Swentzell, a sculptor, food activist, and member of the Santa Clara people; and
- the late professor Manuel Robles Flores (known as *profesor Robles*), founder of El Museo Regional del Valle de Juárez, in



9.3 Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), with image by Daisy Quezada Ureña and embossed title text.

conversation with Susana Landeros Moreno and Oralia Prieto Gomez, staff of El Museo in San Agustín, Chihuahua, México.

In this participatory component of the artwork, the conversationalists each shared a textile of personal significance, which was transformed by Daisy into a ceramic seed pod. These objects were seen in the exhibition and later returned to be buried in land near where the conversations had taken place. Another material return was the distribution of *bosque brotante* to the conversationalists' community libraries, where it now contributes to cultural records. As a grounded publication, I like to

9.4 Brandon Armijo of Jemez Pueblo and Santo Domingo Pueblo setting up *bosque brotante* cover pages for embossing on a laser-etched plate, IAIA Printmaking Studio, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2021.



imagine that it also serves as a link to British Columbia's Lower Mainland through references to the region in my afterword, as well as through Daisy's subsequent online presentations about the work in Canada.

Aside from *bosque brotante*, our work together has fed a web of Latinx art production materialized in artist books through LFP's Reading the Migration Library (RML) project. Two bilingual (Spanish-English) artist books in the project are Gabriela Galíndez's *Notas sobre un recorrido: el Centro de Procesamiento de El Paso/Notes on a Tour: The El Paso Processing Center* (2021), about an immigrant detention centre in her home city of El Paso–Juárez (fig. 9.5), and Carlos Colín's *Tierra y Libertad/*

9.5 (top) Gabriela Galíndez, *Notas sobre un recorrido: El Centro de Procesamiento de El Paso/Notes on a Tour: The El Paso Processing Center* (Reading the Migration Library, 2021). Photo by Clare Yow.





9.6 (opposite, bottom) Carlos Colín, *Tierra y Libertad/Little México* (Reading the Migration Library, 2020); 9.7 (this page, top) Francisco-Fernando Granados, *Waves* (Reading the Migration Library, 2017); 9.8 (this page, bottom) Kattia Samayoa, *Paisanos* (Reading the Migration Library, 2017).

*Little México* (2020), about a mobile Spanish-language library that he set up for Mexican temporary foreign workers in British Columbia's Fraser Valley (fig. 9.6). The RML publications that resulted from a community workshop in New Westminster, British Columbia, include Francisco-Fernando Granados's *Waves* (2017), a poetic reflection on his teen years as a newcomer (fig. 9.7), and Kattia Samayoa's *Paisanos* (2017), a folded collage piece by Granados's mother about perilous asylum travels from Guatemala (fig. 9.8). In another publication, Crista Dahl's *The Migrants* (2020), there is a commissioned essay by the Columbian art historian Jairo Salazar, who is also based in New Westminster. In promoting Latinx artists' publishing in Canada, these works nurture connections across the continent while offering a critical approach to political geographies. As we discuss here, Daisy and I imagine these works as aesthetic actions across zones of human migration and shared ecologies.

## The Conversation

LOIS KLASSEN (LK): Before we discuss the publication projects that we have done together, can you tell me how you respond to the term "Latinx" these days and how it has been circulating in your world? The US Latinx Art Forum awarded you a 2023 Latinx Artist Fellowship.<sup>6</sup> What does that award mean for you as an artist?

DAISY QUEZADA UREÑA (DQU): Considering the trajectory and development of social and racial categories dating back to contact, the term's use is complicated and also deeply personal. Since infancy, it was communicated to me by some family members that I was not Latina, even if I was immersed in Latina/o culture, as I was. Reflecting on that now, I see a mirroring of what the Spanish authority did in pursuit of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) as an elite trait, with any mixture seen as less. Although I do not identify as Latinx and find more relation to Mexican American identity, the roots and culture embedded within my identity are from Latin America, and in turn the recent national recognition through



the fellowship has brought a profound sense of belonging for both me and my community. Being seen and recognized, I hope, carries through to all whom I have worked alongside.

LK: I can hear your unease with the term and its colonial associations. Despite its problematics, I congratulate you, especially, but also your community, for the recognition of your impact on and contributions to US culture. I very much look forward to seeing what you and the other US Latinx Art Forum fellows work on throughout the year.

In reflecting on our work together, let's talk about *bosque brotante* as an artwork. How does it fit into your multimedia and socially engaged ceramics practice?

DQU: I see my practice as holding space and coming into existence through the inspiration of my surroundings—the spaces across southwest Mexico—and their peoples. It connects both to my personal upbringing in Jalisco, Mexico, and to the United States, where I now live, highlighting the way that the social sphere often builds walls of confinement.

At a point of origin for *bosque brotante*, I created ceramic works from a deep space of feeling displaced and isolated. By experiencing those states of being that resided at the divide between countries or walls and the surrounding regions, I was able to better identify where I needed to be. It informed who I am as an artist and educator in the present.

When I was invited to contribute to the exhibition *Species in Peril along the Rio Grande* (2019), curated by Josie Lopez and Subhankar Bannerjee at 516 Arts in Albuquerque, what was most needed, I felt, was a gathering of stories from the people residing in the spaces that the exhibition addressed.<sup>7</sup> In your afterword for *bosque brotante*, you mention Josie's observation that issues are presented to us as scientific studies and her understanding that until these studies become stories, they won't engage the larger public in a way that is empowering. It felt to me that this focus on stories was what was needed. I needed to bring forward the stories of community leaders. Since my practice was primarily object-based, the

work first became the ceramic seed pods for Beata, Jonathan, and profesor Robles, but it soon needed to become more. It would be better to talk about their contribution to how *bosque brotante*, both in its print and in its media forms, came to be. I needed to make sure that their stories were accessible to both communities, including those who might not have had reliable access to the internet, and I also wanted to reach others whose stories mirror those that are shared in *bosque brotante*. Locally, the publication is now a part of libraries like the Española Public Library and the library at the Institute of American Indian Arts, in addition to being the focus of a 2020 article in SeedBroadcast's *agri-Culture Journal*.<sup>8</sup>

The project has also had a life outside of the region. After the 516 Arts exhibition closed, *bosque brotante* travelled to the Korean International Ceramics Biennale at the Gyeonggi Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art in Icheon, where it received an honorable mention. The ceramic work has been returned, but the museum kept a copy of our artist book for its permanent collection. Having both the work and stories reach such a great distance was not something that I ever envisioned but something for which all involved were deeply grateful, especially because of the respect and recognition that it brought to the issues and cultures of the Rio Grande region.

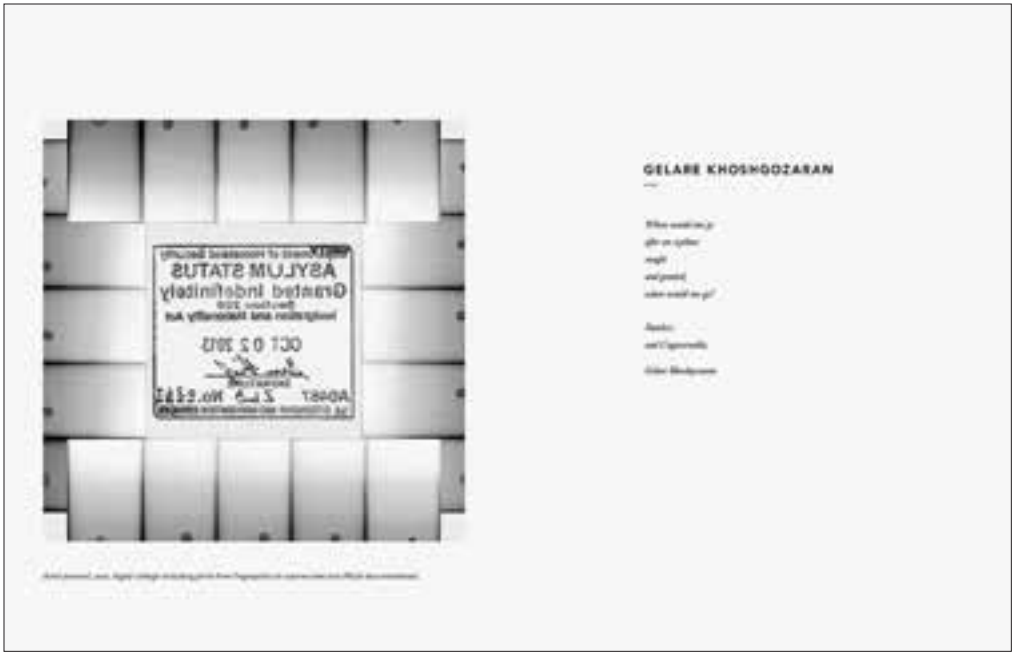
LK: This discussion brings to my mind the concept of “aesthetic action,” a term that Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin use to explore the embodied and political impact of the cultural events produced alongside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in the years 2010 to 2014. With some ambivalence, Robinson and Keavy and their book's contributors appropriate the European concept of “aesthetics” to consider art and cultural production in the midst of public testimony from Indian residential school survivors.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the TRC offered a stage for public witnessing aimed at a national resolution of Canada's genocidal histories and policies, artworks and music refused easy resolutions. Some creative strategies seen alongside TRC events included “refusing to be a Native informant,” as Métis artist David Garneau put it,<sup>10</sup> or reclaiming protocols

to serve as “structures of witnessing,” as Tahlitan Nation performance artist Peter Morin recounted.<sup>8</sup> Artists’ refusals and performances of witness are aesthetic actions that demand the responsible engagement of viewers, learners, readers, and audiences.

In a time of pervasive and ever-expanding border enforcement, *Terreno: Borderlands Linguistics* and *bosque brotante* aim to offer aesthetic encounters that disavow border imperialism. The artists’ works in *Terreno* refuse to put the burden of public testimony on those who have endured migration trauma. Instead, these artists, who themselves have experienced the border region’s failures, change the language and the ways of representing forced or failed migrations. The works of Israel Haros Lopez, Alice Briggs, and Julian Cardona, most directly, represent the emergent vocabularies that are necessary to describe violence associated with the border regime and corrupt policing in the region.<sup>11</sup> I am also thinking of how the artwork that Gelare Khoshgozaran contributed inverts the language of asylum paperwork to demonstrate a perpetual state of being “Stateless / and Ungovernable” (fig. 9.9).<sup>12</sup>

Another way to look at aesthetics is by considering how the active aspects of Latinx art (through its engagement with other arts) carry potential ways of “decolonizing citizenship,” to borrow a concept from Andrea Dyrness and Enrique Sepúlveda III.<sup>13</sup> By conducting research with youth in the United States from Latin America and the Caribbean, Dyrness and Sepúlveda have identified a “diasporic citizenship,” or cultural practices, that they think could enable us to “decouple citizenship from the nation-state and its attendant colonial cultural constructs, and to recognize young people’s in-between location as a source of insight, critique, and radical possibilities.”<sup>14</sup> I want to pay attention to work that effectively enacts civic agency or that offers a representation of citizenship or accountability to place and lands, despite existing legal definitions of citizenship.

The larger *bosque brotante* project employs multiple actions and media, including intimate and local conversations in your own region as well as links to Canada and, even farther away, to your residency and exhibition in South Korea. Does this work, by its nature, need multiple and



together as the “Four R’s”<sup>16</sup>—may contribute to the persistence of colonial systems and mindsets. The work is then no longer centred among Indigenous values or the community. Making art and working in a way that honours the Four R’s should be done according the needs of those involved. Art should not be propelled by patriarchal notions of being that seek to profit and disband.

Thinking about the concept of place, especially as we are talking about southwest Mexico and the direct tie that it has to me, my family, culture, and community, could you share what brought you to this *estado fronterizo* (border state). How does this land in the American Southwest connect back to your home?

UK: My specific experience with migration is through my grandparents and my in-laws, who all immigrated to the Prairies of Canada from the Crimea region in the early and mid-twentieth century. Just as the settlement of European ancestors may have already displaced people in Ukraine, my ancestors’ settlement was also part of the displacement of Indigenous people in Canada. In Canada these days, practising Mennonites—that is my family’s heritage—seem to find belonging in their brand of often fundamentalist Christianity. My interest in a Mennonite heritage is instead focused on how this ethnic identity has been dominated by a lack of belonging, perpetual displacement, and its displacement of others. When I was growing up, migration narratives were circulated with fervour and without any critical perspectives on colonization. The RML publications have been for me an opportunity to expand and materially circulate critical migration perspectives.

I am also thinking about how an invisibilizing of Latinx culture here in Canada has been a deliberate result of the US-Canada Safe Third Country Agreement, implemented in 2004. This agreement prevents asylum claimants originating south of the US border from making a claim for asylum in Canada since the United States is still deemed a “safe country” for claimants.<sup>17</sup> The invisibilizing of Latinx culture has also resulted from Canada’s long-standing Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which

relies heavily on the short-term, rural, and unseen labour of Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean workers to ensure Canadian food security. I think that our collaborations and the other Spanish-language works in the RML project have attempted to defy and reveal these disappearing acts.

DQU: Absolutely! I also see *bosque brotante* as an action and a documentation of history that is currently being lived as a form of resistance that seeks to re-Indigenize. It supports creative initiatives of restoration that support the sustaining of Indigenous rights, lands, and ways of life. It brings forward voices and engagement that call for awareness and identifies the progress made. It contributes to a movement that reminds all of us that national relations and policies are, more frequently than not, fuelled by capitalistic policies where pure profit perpetuates classism and racism as opposed to a cosmovision. These policies repress the very groups of people whom profesor Robles and his staff described as “uninformed, poor, and academically unprepared” (fig. 9.10).<sup>18</sup> Also in the book, Marian Naranjo shares how the organization HOPE found a map that in 1970 had described the geological fault lines threatening the safety of nuclear testing and disposal at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Documents like these ones were removed and erased from the record when Congress heard appeals to fund the plutonium factory. In the next conversation in *bosque brotante*, Jonathan Loretto mentions that, to his knowledge, profits gained from Cochiti Dam and from the Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument are not returned to Cochiti Pueblo (fig. 9.11).<sup>19</sup> We also included photographs by Richardo Boreno that show a Mexican community coming together to protest the landfill in Sierra Blanca, New Mexico, by blocking the Zaragoza port of entry to Mexico, among others.<sup>20</sup>

When we published *bosque brotante* in 2020, first digitally and then in print, the world seemed to enter a lull because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The decrease in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions within just a few weeks was telling of how economic sectors that



9.10 Professor Manuel Robles Flores (*centre*), with Oralia Prieto Gomez (*left*), Susana Landeros Moreno (*back right*), and Ana Jazmin Rodriguez (*front right*), in Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), 32.

are regulated by discriminatory government policies have a direct tie to the land where we reside. Since then, an accelerator seems to have been pressed, metaphorically speaking. Lois, what relation do you see between environmental issues in Canada and the United States, and how does this relation come through in your book projects with Light Factory Publications?

LK: Environmentalism has not been a focus of LFP, but my research-creation in forced migration studies has brought this content forward for



Cochiti Dam outlet to the Rio Grande

9.11 Cochiti Dam outlet to the Rio Grande, in Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), 21.

me, as has *bosque brotante*. The conversations in the book touch on what Harsha Walia refers to as “social relations of dominance,” which are interconnected and self-perpetuating in a globalized governance system controlling human migration.<sup>21</sup> Categories for the containment, detention, and criminalization of racialized people are materialized through imperial



border regimes that are not limited to singular nations or to the stretch of land along national borders. Border regimes also generate the social relations of dominance needed to enable environmentally hazardous industries to displace or dispossess Indigenous and nondominant populations, as the conversations in *bosque brotante* reveal. I am thinking of the *racismo ambiental* (environmental racism) that the contributors to *bosque brotante* describe as a context for living as Indigenous and Mexican residents in the Rio Grande region. This racism resonates strongly with the policies that have prevented First Nations in Canada—even the Semiahmoo First Nation, which is adjacent to the Canada-US border—from accessing clean drinking water. The three conversations that you hosted reveal how racism characterizes the gravest of threats, from the disasters of nuclear research and testing at Los Alamos and other nearby military sites to the US nuclear waste sites in Mexico.

When you initiated the conversations with people of the Rio Grande region, I was surprised to read about the dire state of that ecology, and I was also sobered to recognize how consistent their experience is with that of Indigenous people in Canada. I hope that the publication reveals this link. Unfortunately, profesor Robles is no longer with us, so the book also serves to bring to Canadian readers documentation of his activist and community development work in northern Mexico.

DQU: I am grateful to profesor Robles, Susana Landeros Moreno, Oralía Prieto Gomez, and his student León de la Rosa Carrillo for welcoming me as a guest to hear their story in San Agustín, Chihuahua, Mexico. It was not included in *bosque brotante*, but during the visit, I was invited to the home of *el profesor*, where numerous recognitions and awards filled the entryway from floor to ceiling, commending his stewardship of the land and peoples on both sides of the Mexico-US border. For me, his actions bring to mind activists like Berta Cáceres, numerous journalists across Latin America, and the protests of Indigenous people in Peru fighting for civil rights. Similarly, through the language revitalization and utilization undertaken across programs like the Native Language Immersion

Initiative and through film works like *Hadaya* (2023) by recent Institute of American Indian Arts graduate Alica Mteuzi,<sup>22</sup> language as an action directly impacts the tribal nations, communities, and spaces to which it belongs.

Thinking of *bosque brotante* and all who contributed, I hope that it provides what the community needs and that our conversation continues to keep their stories with care. Lois, being in conversation with you is always a pleasure, and I am grateful for our time together across borders. *Te mando un abrazo, amiga.*

LK: Working with you has helped me to negotiate the complexities of cultural production using categories like Latinx as well as Mexican American, all of which intersect in our projects with immigration themes (*Terreno*) and with Indigenous and environmental issues (*bosque brotante*). Our collaborations have laid a path for other Latinx and Mexican artists to be a part of subsequent publications in the Reading the Migration Library project. It is as though our work and friendship are part of a map of relations and interrelations that persist despite colonial borders as we seek to recognize the imprints of Latinx and Mexican culture in our local ecologies. *Gracias, Daisy.*

## NOTES

- 1 Sylvia Arthur is a writer, editor, and founder of the Library of Africa and the African Diaspora in Accra, Ghana.
- 2 The artists who appear in *Terreno: Borderland Linguistics* (2017) are Alice Leora Briggs, Tings Chak, Israel F. Haros Lopez, Gelare Khoshgozaran, Carolina Rubio MacWright, Julian Cardona, Kemely Gómez, Sheena Hoszko, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, and Tara Evonne Trudell. Sylvia Arthur, Lois Klassen, and Daisy Quezada, eds., *Terreno: Borderlands Linguistics* (Light Factory Publications, 2017), <https://lightfactorypublications.ca/title/terreno-borderlands-linguistics/>; <https://perma.cc/ADA5-QYMZ>.
- 3 Since the 1990s, the moniker Light Factory Publications has been used to label the publications and artists' editions (or multiples) that have resulted from my

socially oriented art practice. Today, its web portal includes both the Present Cartographers series and the Reading the Migration Library project. See <https://lightfactorypublications.ca/>. *Terreno* was published by LFP with the support of the Santa Fe Art Institute and the Fulcrum Fund, which was administered by 516 Arts in Albuquerque in collaboration with the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

- 4 Arthur, Klassen, and Quezada, eds., *Terreno*, 22.
- 5 Daisy Quezada Ureña, with Susana Landeros Moreno, Jonathan Loretto, Marian Naranjo, Oralia Prieto Gomez, Manuel Robles Flores, Roxanne Swentzell, and Beata Tsosie-Peña, *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), <https://lightfactorypublications.ca/title/series-present-cartographers/bosque-brotante-book/>; <https://perma.cc/GJP3-ZN53>.
- 6 US Latinx Art Forum, "US Latinx Art Forum Announces New Latinx Artist Fellows," Mellon Foundation, May 31, 2023, <https://www.mellon.org/news/us-latinx-art-forum-announces-new-latinx-artist-fellows>; <https://perma.cc/8KC9-F7ZK>.
- 7 516 Arts, "Species in Peril along the Rio Grande," <https://www.516arts.org/exhibitions/species-in-peril-along-the-rio-grande/>; <https://perma.cc/4QT4-4QZ6>.
- 8 Daisy Quezada Ureña and Lois Klassen, "Bosque Brotante," in *SeedBroadcast, agri-Culture Journal*, no. 15 (Fall 2020): 4–11.
- 9 Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, "Introduction: 'The Body Is a Resonant Chamber,'" in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 8–11.
- 10 David Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing," in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 23.
- 11 Israel F. Haros Lopez, "la hielera monologue," in Arthur, Klassen, and Quezada, eds., *Terreno*, 10; Julián Cardona and Alice Leora Briggs, "cinta canela" and "encobijado, da | encobijar," in Arthur, Klassen, and Quezada, eds., *Terreno*, 13–14.
- 12 Gelare Khoshgozaran, untitled poem, in Arthur, Klassen, and Quezada, eds., *Terreno*, 18.
- 13 Andrea Dyrness and Enrique Sepúlveda III, *Border Thinking: Latinx Youth Decolonizing Citizenship* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
- 14 Dyrness and Sepúlveda III, *Border Thinking*, 25.

- 15 Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (University of Texas Press, 2007).
- 16 Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, "First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility," *Journal of American Indian Education* 30, no. 3 (1991): 1–15. Kirkness and Barnhardt offer the handy "Four R s" acronym to guide North American universities in hosting and integrating Indigenous students and research.
- 17 With increasing violations of the legal and human rights of asylum seekers in the United States, at the time of writing I note urgent pleas to repeal the US-Canada Safe Third Country Agreement, including a Supreme Court of Canada order for it to be reviewed by the Federal Court. Canadian Council for Refugees, "CCR Renews Call for Canada to Withdraw from STCA in Joint Statement," February 4, 2025, <https://ccrweb.ca/en/ccr-joint-statement-canadas-need-withdraw-stca>; <https://perma.cc/3VWX-GTFZ>.
- 18 "Comparte Profesor Manuel Robles Flores con Susana Landeros Moreno y Oralia Prieto Gomez," September 17, 2019, in Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Klassen, 34, my translation.
- 19 "Jonathan Loretto and Roxanne Swentzell in Conversation," September 19, 2019, in Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Klassen, 20.
- 20 "Comparte Profesor Manuel Robles Flores," 40.
- 21 Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Fernwood, 2021), 6.
- 22 Alica Sheyhshe Mteuzi, "Hadaya," <https://alikahteuzi.com/projects/hadaya>; <https://perma.cc/7HZ9-P7S3>.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Cinema as Pluriversal Consciousness: Decolonial Praxes of Film Pedagogy

*Sarah Shamash*

Writing from a position of mixed heritage with family in Brazil and Canada, I reflect on a praxis of public pedagogy through teaching, filmmaking, and curation. In this chapter, I focus on how my teaching and making have been informed by my experiences as a diasporic person in film education and consider how these experiences have informed my scholarship and pedagogy. My positionality is shaped by the fact that I have an ethnically Middle Eastern father who grew up in a large family in Brazil and a European mother who grew up between the United States and France. I was born in Vancouver—on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations—in a household where I heard and learned Portuguese, French, and English. Through my father and our large Middle Eastern immigrant Brazilian family, I grew up with one foot in Brazil and one in Canada. I forged bonds with and relationships in Brazil through my family growing up, and I continue to do so as an adult through creative, curatorial, and academic collaborations and through my study of Brazilian film and media cultures. Language and translation have played a formative role in my navigation of the world; my approach to filmmaking and film studies has been informed by an intercultural lens. As a practising media artist with practical knowledge of film and media production, I also bring an

experiential perspective, whether through public film programs, curated exhibitions, or teaching film studies in university settings.

In this account of practices, I reflect on the decolonial possibilities of film teaching and making as part of a pedagogical praxis that allows for consciousness raising and for a curricular focus on non-Western films, movements, and philosophies. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Wang's critical text "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (2012) reminds us how problematic the term "decolonization" is in the university context,<sup>1</sup> and I acknowledge the limitations of the university itself as a colonial institution. I consider my work and approach to be aligned with a general movement to make visible and to dismantle the colonial structures, knowledge, and perspectives that have shaped higher education. Through course design and film curation that recognize the way that the evolution of film history and distribution circuits have privileged and been encoded in Euro-Western centrism and supremacy, part of my pedagogical project is to investigate what it means to decolonize film and media studies. Aiming to include other knowledges and approaches to filmmaking and film studies that are often marginalized from film pedagogy, I ask several questions through this praxis: How can cinema be used to teach critical consciousness to diverse learning communities? In what ways can cinema, as an ontological art, be used to decolonize minds? And how can a theory of cinema be developed to better serve and articulate Latin American, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, Palestinian, diaspora, and other Global South and non-Western narratives within film studies?

In this chapter, I draw from over two decades of experience as an independent filmmaker and close to a decade as a university instructor; I reflect on the above questions as they relate to Latin American and diaspora-centric pedagogies. Combining intersectional feminisms and drawing from decolonial thought and action to combat and resist structural systems of domination, I discuss some theoretical threads that inform my pedagogical praxis. I use an intersectional feminist and pluriversal approach that critically engages films from the Global South as part of

reframing cinema studies. My intellectual framework has been informed by Latin American and Global South scholars, Indigenous thinkers, and philosophers from Abya Yala and Turtle Island.<sup>2</sup> I use the term “pluriversal” as theorized by Latin American decolonial thinkers (e.g., Arturo Escobar), as much of my teaching centres on cinemas of the Global South, with a focus on América Latina, Abya Yala, and Afro-América Latina. I intentionally put the northern and southern hemispheres into dialogue in my teaching, curation, and scholarship. This transhemispheric approach invites an examination of relations between Turtle Island and Abya Yala and between Indigenous and diasporic peoples, including their respective struggles and ways of making stories and culture visible through representational practices. This transhemispheric approach further makes evident how Indigenous film and media transcend national borders and thus often exceed a transnational analysis. Whereas the significance of the revolutionary cinemas of Latin America in the 1960s, or Third Cinema, can be understood in terms of their national focus, Fourth Cinema’s project requires theoretical frames beyond national or transnational discourses.

## Film Education and Third Cinema

My film education and teaching have been hugely influenced by my encounter with Third Cinema in Latin America during my bachelor’s degree in film in the late 1990s at the University of British Columbia. The course was taught by a sessional faculty member who was a woman of colour, and it is only in hindsight that I appreciate the magnitude of what it meant for me to learn about this decolonial movement at that time in my film education. It is also retrospectively that I understand the power dynamics affecting this precariously employed faculty member who would never have been hired in a tenured position by a department of white men who exclusively taught Eurocentric film studies.<sup>3</sup> My film-viewing experience in her class fundamentally informed my learning, scholarship, making,

and teaching. When I first saw the Cuban film *De cierta manera* (1977) by Sara Gómez, her distinctive Black, female, Global South perspective opened a window into the people, history, and reality of Cuba in the 1960s. I did not realize how hungry I was then to learn about film from a non-Western perspective; being introduced to a couple of films from Cuba opened the door to a whole continent of cinema that had been otherwise completely ignored in my formal film education. Beyond its geographical parameters, I use the term “non-Western” to designate ideological frameworks that provide non-Eurocentric perspectives that break with binaries between the West and the rest—that is, to designate what Stuart Hall calls “a decentered, diasporic or ‘global’ rewriting of earlier, nation-centered imperial grand narratives.”<sup>4</sup> This classroom screening of Gómez’s film catalyzed me to do my research by reading related books and by watching as many films from this era and movement as possible.

I learned how the rise of US neocolonialism—which permeated the Latin American economy, labour conditions, politics, and culture, including through the dominant presence of Hollywood film as part of this hegemony and imperial ideology—ultimately incited a generation of Latin American filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s to create a revolutionary cinema. This cinema became famously known as Tercer Cine, or Third Cinema. Although Third Cinema was a tricontinental revolution that included Asia and Africa, it was often referred to as Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, or New Latin American Cinema, and was accompanied and defined by a series of core texts.<sup>5</sup> The films and texts defined a style of representation that shared a refusal of imposed imperialist cinematic conventions.

These filmmaking theorists transformed a common scarcity of resources, along with volatile political and production conditions, into aesthetic and political assets. They understood the camera’s power as a radical weapon of resistance and revolution. For film scholar Robert Stam, “envisioning a wide spectrum of alternative practices”<sup>6</sup> included recuperating and resignifying scarcity and waste materials as part of an artistic strategy called an “aesthetics of garbage.”<sup>7</sup> A limitation of resources thus called for



a hybridized bricolage of sound and image as part of a leitmotif that gave currency to imperfect, hungry Third Cinema aesthetics.

Moreover, the intellectual project behind Third Cinema was a form of public pedagogy that called for new revolutionary ways of thinking and doing. These films were shown clandestinely to avoid censorship and repression, often being smuggled out of their countries of origin to be edited and shown in exile. The films and filmmakers also travelled to rural, peasant Latin American communities. These distribution models provided alternate modes of access to diverse audiences; the idea was for these films to incite political discussion, organizing, and action.

Certainly, the Third Cinema filmmakers' aesthetics, politics, and ethos were avant-garde; their conception of the filmmaking process reimagined the hierarchal Hollywood structure still dominant today. Marta Rodríguez (and her partner Jorge Silva, 1941–1987), along with Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau Group, carried out all aspects of production, from preproduction to distribution and exhibition, which included organizing screenings of their works in rural communities. This comprehensive approach to the filmmaking process, which operates both inside and outside of the capitalist film distribution system and market, is also evidenced in the Fourth Cinema ethos. Fourth Cinema across the hemispheres elaborates the notion of the pluriverse, comprising multidimensional ontologies communicated through a representational lexicon of knowledge systems, cosmologies, and geopolitical processes specific to each context of production. Although the term Fourth World initially referred to Indigenous peoples in the northwestern hemisphere, it applies to Indigenous knowledge systems and geopolitical processes affecting Indigenous people in the Global South. Indeed, Stuart Murray views New Zealand filmmaker and writer Barry Barclay's idea of Fourth Cinema as inclusive of a "global Indigenous presence."<sup>8</sup>

Bringing political and noncommercial films to less accessible communities is a practice seen in Soviet-era cinema, Third Cinema, and Fourth Cinema as well as in more contemporary practices in North America. As part of a legacy of Fourth Cinema, Wapikoni Mobile, founded in 2004 in

Montreal, Quebec, has been working to raise awareness and to educate a wider public about Indigenous cultures. The project focuses on youth and has conducted workshops in over twenty-nine Indigenous communities in Canada and abroad, producing numerous short films.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that many of the Latin American, Third Cinema filmmakers were lighter-skinned men from an educated class, with the exception of a few women. As a result, Third Cinema has been critiqued as a male-dominated movement, with only a few notable exceptions (e.g., Sara Gómez and Marta Rodríguez), that lacked a feminist agenda as part of its decolonial project. Notwithstanding such glaring omissions, Third Cinema's influence on world cinemas and its success in advancing a decolonial agenda have ultimately transformed the discipline of film studies. My Latin American-centric and Third Cinema cinephilia, which included Palestinian, Asian, and African films of the period, was an education in world history. When French film philosopher Alain Badiou says, "Cinema has played an essential role in my existence and my apprenticeship of ideas,"<sup>10</sup> I similarly recognize how cinema has been one of my greatest teachers. I see as mentors some of the filmmakers, like Sara Gómez, who have so hugely influenced my ideas about the world.

When bell hooks tells us that the classroom is the most radical space in academia,<sup>11</sup> I am reminded that watching Sara Gómez's film was life-altering. The possibility of completely shifting one's worldview through film is a lesson I will never forget. I was affected by how experimental in form and content *De cierta manera* is, given that it provides a testament to the Cuban Revolution (1953–59) from the perspective of a Black Cuban woman. And it is not part of the experimental cinema defined and canonized by white North American males (e.g., Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Micheal Snow) or part of the more male-centric films of the Third Cinema canon (e.g., *Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968). Although these latter films and filmmakers were also important to my film education, as a woman of mixed ancestry and a diasporic background, I rarely saw films that included, even peripherally, cinematic languages related to my situatedness in the world.

## Modernity, *Modernidad*, *Modernismo*, *lo Moderno*

Consequently, a core component of my film teaching involves challenging representational systems of dominance through the filmic and scholarly works of visionaries with radical imaginations such as Sara Gómez. When I show *De cierta manera*, I also work to decolonize the notion of modernity as a uniquely Western invention that is technologically supreme. We know that European artists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, considered to be at the forefront of the modernist artistic movement, found artistic renewal in the “primitive” arts of Africa, specifically in masks displayed in anthropological and ethnographic collections in museums in Europe as a direct result of colonization.<sup>12</sup> The European artists were inspired by the cultures and art of colonized worlds, which had their own intellectual and artistic movements. In Latin America, modernism left enduring legacies as these movements exploded in Spanish-speaking Latin America (1880–1920) and in Brazil (1922–45), generating cultural production in art, architecture, literature, thought, and music.

Walter D. Mignolo’s discussion of an epistemic delinking from the Western idea of modernity, or the “darker side” of modernity, that is coloniality—understood as the encroachment of Western institutions and philosophies upon “non-Western cultures and civilizations since 1500”<sup>13</sup>—is relevant to unpacking non-Western modernisms. Indeed, as articulated by Catherine E. Walsh and Mignolo, modernity, coloniality, and decoloniality are indeed entangled, and the critical contributions of non-Western thought provide alternative notions of modernity as a force capable of delinking us “from the colonial matrix in order to open up decolonial options—a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions.”<sup>14</sup> Non-Western modernities, exemplified in Global South filmmakers’ films, allow us to imagine and build futures in which human beings and the natural world can be free and can coexist outside of an exploitative paradigm of wealth accumulation. I use the term “Global South” to signify epistemological and ontological locations and perspectives that exceed geospatial borders.

Just as the Global South is an onto-epistemological location, the empire reaches far beyond Global North borders.

The Global South is part of a recognition of a shared experience of the negative impacts of the ongoing production of coloniality and globalization. Global South scholars recognize, as Last Moyo explains, that the Global South invokes “a new cartography of epistemic and cultural resistance against global capitalism, [and] Western media monopolies.”<sup>15</sup> This cartography extends to our position as scholars from the Global South—or in my case, between hemispheres—who work in Canadian universities. As someone born on unsundered Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, I have a responsibility to include Indigenous filmmakers, scholars, and artists of so-called Canada in my curriculum design. To wit, I most recently taught an art history course called “Hemispheric Dialogues,” where I focused on Indigenous film and art of Canada and Brazil. I paired films and artists from the Global North and South who were in dialogue with overlapping territorial rights issues, colonial legacies, Indigenous sovereignty, women’s bodies, and Indigenous solidarity. As part of my own cinematic decolonization and a (re)valuing of my Latin American connection and intellectual inheritance, I also learned to recognize how notions of modernity are not exclusive to the West.

In José F. Aranda Jr.’s definition, “modernity cannot be easily divorced from its companion Latin American versions like *modernidad*, *lo moderno*, *modernismo*, and so on.”<sup>16</sup> According to Amy Oliver’s discussion in Latin American literature, “Modernism was the first literary movement to focus deliberately and self-consciously on the New World. From its beginnings, it was usually anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist, and announced itself through significant ruptures with conventional forms.”<sup>17</sup> Oliver notes that there was a concern over the ambitions of the colossal North after the Mexican-American War (1846–48) and the annexation of Texas. He goes on to explain that modernism sought “to create a distinct literary style that showcased Latin American realities,”<sup>18</sup> the desire being to rebuild the continent and its sovereignty.

In Brazil, poet Oswald de Andrade's concept of cultural cannibalism in his essay "Manifesto antropófago" (1928) effectively illustrates the interconnections of modernism in literature, the visual arts, and by extension, film and media cultures.<sup>19</sup> The trope of the pagan cannibal or noble savage fed the Western colonial imagination of what Latin America represents. A direct result of the Semana de Arte Moderna, held in São Paulo in 1922, Andrade's manifesto is often cited "as a paradigm for the creation of a modern and cosmopolitan, but still authentically national culture."<sup>20</sup> Andrade radicalizes ideas about how Brazil, as a colonial subject, will metaphorically cannibalize all of its imposed and independent cultural influences into "an autonomous and original (as opposed to dependent, derivative) national identity."<sup>21</sup> By breaking down binaries between civilized and barbaric, modern and primitive, and original and derivative, Andrade's essay confronts colonial violence with revolution and resistance that are adapted to a uniquely Brazilian reality. Arguably, Andrade's poetic reference to the "bárbaro tecnizado" (technified barbarian) foreshadows the use of film and video technologies by Indigenous filmmakers in Latin America.<sup>22</sup>

Although often tied to colonial histories, Latin America's plurivocal film cultures are a testament to Latin America's modernidad; Indigenous cinemas of Abya Yala have been a means to reverse anthropological European gazes while eliminating the imposed framework of non-Indigenous observers. I understand "modernity" as a malleable, fluid, and expansive term; modernity through a decolonized lens can be reclaimed to better understand Indigenous and Black philosophies and expressive cultures. Ailton Krenak, an Indigenous Brazilian scholar, reminds us of how Indigenous histories are "interlaced with the history of the world."<sup>23</sup> Latin American, Black, and Indigenous modernities are interlaced with Western modernities and have much to teach us about the world. I view film not only as ontological art and critical pedagogy but also as a conduit to better understand some of these teachings, which allow us to critically unpack Western conceptions of technology and modernity.

## Video in the Villages, Indigenous Media, and Fourth Cinema

Focused on Brazil, my doctoral project was founded on a desire to understand how film history was altered by the critical contribution of Third Cinema—the largest non-Western decolonial film movement. When the militant cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s, loosely framed within New Latin American Cinema, were at a point of crisis or transition in the 1980s, the ongoing political, cultural, technological, and ideological shifts happening during the evolution of video technologies allowed for “an array of community-based and activist media projects”<sup>24</sup> across Latin America. The organization that I studied is connected to histories of community-based media activism; I also made a case for these audiovisual productions, circulating in film festival circuits, to be evaluated as critical contributions to media and cinema studies.<sup>25</sup>

My dissertation worked to counter the epistemic racism of pedagogy and scholarship in film and media studies, which often excluded Indigenous productions from the discourse by relegating them to the field of ethnography. I was interested in examining how these audiovisual productions rendered Indigenous modernities through audiovisual media and non-Western cinematic strategies. In the 1960s, Third Cinema was a key reference point for decolonial cinema theories and studies, reflecting the internationalist anti-colonial movements of the Global South. However, my dissertation project sought to look beyond the historical and ideological struggles of Third Cinema’s geo-historical-political context to better grasp the realities and struggles of the global capitalist system in the digital age.

Drawing from Indigenous thought in the films that I studied, which propose philosophies of being and a politics of coexistence with and within the cosmos through a filmed repertoire of daily practices, I understood how these audiovisual modes of storytelling present ontological universes. Krenak explains that “for the Yanomami, everything that exists in this world also exists in another place,” whereas for the Guarani, “this planet is a mirror, an imperfect world.”<sup>26</sup> When the Zapatistas affirm that

we live in “un mundo donde quepan todos los mundos” (a world where many worlds can fit), we understand how the pluriverse is a world of many worlds centred on “the relationship between territory, autonomy, dignity, and the defense of life.”<sup>27</sup> My theoretical framework was also influenced by Michele H. Raheja’s discussion of visual sovereignty and what she calls “the virtual reservation,” which sees “twentieth-century mass-mediated images of Native Americans” as an imagined place where “Indigenous people can creatively reterritorialize physical and imagined sites that have been lost, that are in the process of renegotiation, or that have been retained.”<sup>28</sup> In the context of the organization and archive that I studied—*Vídeo nas Aldeias* (Video in the villages)—the archive as a virtual village encompassed the archive’s collective multivocal, multinatural, multicultural, multiethnic, and pluriversal space as a decolonial site of Indigenous knowledge production. I understand this film archive as a body of knowledge that performs many functions as a political body of resistance: bearing witness to oppressive histories, reimagining Indigenous futures, and decolonizing and shifting the national imaginary. I have created several courses around (and incorporated teaching materials from) my study of Brazilian Indigenous cinemas, Latin American cinemas, and Fourth cinema.

Significantly, the broader political context of international movements began to include Fourth World theory as part of a framework to better understand a common Indigenous experience. George Manuel and Michael Posluns, in their foundational text *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974), argued that Indigenous peoples “were not just nations within states, but also nations within larger geopolitical processes.”<sup>29</sup> A study of non-Western, Global South, Black, and Indigenous films opens up spaces for a plurivocal and pluriversal understanding of film cultures that invite other knowledges, not only as legitimate but also as critical to the future of film studies education.

Many of the films I study, curate, and teach present alternative ways of being, (co)existing, and surviving on the planet. A pluriversal approach recognizes these modernisms as affording us our best chance of planetary

survival and coexistence; these films present decolonial, non-Western philosophies led by Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples. This strong case for “autonomous interexistence,” in opposition to the “current global capitalist One-World order,”<sup>30</sup> reminds us of the critical Indigenous knowledge that “land is our first teacher.”<sup>31</sup> If we understand global modernity through a decentred, decolonial framework, in opposition to capitalist, consumerist notions of modernity, we can consider the study of Indigenous cinemas to be a form of agency for non-Western modernisms that teach us about coexistence with the planet.

The Global South may suffer greater economic inequalities that forgo Western standards of production value. I teach students how to value other forms of storytelling that may not have the largest production budgets or the fanciest technological tools. Many independent Global South filmmakers working with a scarcity of resources simply cannot and do not follow conventional production processes to make their films while nevertheless using the cinematic medium for political, social, and cultural consciousness. In this context, Girish Shambu discusses how, for the modern world, “a new cinephilia” is an ideology that does not preclude aesthetic pleasure but has a deeper, more critical engagement with the world, one that is “powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will to social and planetary change.”<sup>32</sup> I am interested not only in how filmmakers translate ontological universes and radical visions for the future of our planet but also in how film can construct sociopolitical realities.

## Latina and Women of Colour Feminisms and Pedagogies

The teachings from these films, from Indigenous philosophies, from Third and Fourth World theorists, and from women of colour feminisms (and their lineages) in contemporary pedagogies continue to shape how I imagine the space of the classroom as a radical space for self-discovery, for shifting paradigms, for pleasure in learning, for community building, and for *convivencia* and *conscientização*.



The term *convivencia*, or in English “conviviality,” is used not here in the usual English sense of being jovial, hearty, and festive but rather to mean coexisting, sharing, and living together in harmony, a translation of the verb “convivir” (to live together) in Portuguese and Spanish. Rooted in Chicana feminist thought and action, *convivencia*, as articulated by Trinidad Galván, is about coexisting with community to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences in an informal and social space that deconstructs the power dynamics in traditional teacher-student, researcher-subject dichotomies. Although my familial history is distinct from that of the Chicana feminists theorizing their transborder experiences, my own intercultural realities of visiting and connecting with family in Brazil hold some similarities.

Galván develops the notion of *convivencia* as emerging from women’s dialogues and from their community organizing and activism. *Convivencia* is a pedagogical means to learn from each other and (in the case of my teaching) to develop critical literacies in Latin American and Latinx film and media cultures. *Convivencia* is part of community building and knowledge sharing in the classroom, where each student has an active role in collectively producing knowledge. Creating a space of *convivencia* in the classroom promotes the joyful aspect of learning that recognizes reciprocity in knowledge sharing and community building.

These Latina and women of colour feminist theories and pedagogies were developed through lived experiences within social movements. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s project was to create a bridge of relations between “Third World feminisms” as a progressive resistance movement that rendered multiple histories and intersectional identities visible as part of a coalition against the multiple oppressions faced by many in the overpoliced, patriarchal, white-supremacist state. In her foreword to the third edition of the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (2001), Anzaldúa tells us “that *Bridge* has multicultural roots and that it is not ‘owned’ solely by mujeres de color, even by women. Like knowledge, *Bridge* cannot be possessed by

a single person or group. It's public, it's communal."<sup>33</sup> This understanding of knowledge production informed by identity politics is importantly articulated as communal and for the public good; thus real transformation through the decolonization of knowledge hierarchies is possible only through collective effort and struggle.<sup>34</sup> These feminist histories have inspired me to show films by Sylvia Morales (*Chicana*, 1979; *A Crushing Love*, 2009) and Lourdes Portillo (*After the Earthquake*, 1979; *La Ofrenda*, 1989; *Señorita extraviada*, 2001), as well as Peter Bratt's documentary on labour activist Dolores Huerta (*Dolores*, 2018).

I have argued elsewhere that teaching non-Western cinemas is a means to develop a critical consciousness of the present<sup>35</sup> in order "to better understand the modern world as an interrelated knowledge system."<sup>36</sup> As articulated by hooks, "Working with a critical pedagogy based on my understanding of Freire's teaching, I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build 'community' in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor."<sup>37</sup> The teachings of Paulo Freire, hooks, Latina feminists, and Indigenous land-based pedagogies affirm the importance of taking time to build community with the human and nonhuman world as part of decolonizing approaches to education. Freire's articulation of *conscientização* (consciousness raising or critical consciousness) is part of a pedagogical project to liberate both oppressor and oppressed from systems of oppression through a form of *conscientização* where the individual goes from a state of naïveté to social critical consciousness as part of a liberatory process.<sup>38</sup>

When teaching Third or Fourth Cinemas—Latin American, feminist, Chicana, Indigenous, Palestinian, Black, and Brazilian cinemas that develop radical consciousness through film languages—I work to teach these cinemas of liberation through a liberatory method that moves us toward *conscientização*. The use of personal narratives as part of a liberatory process is informed by the practice of *testimonio* (testimony), which has given us "a legacy of reflexive narratives of liberation used by people throughout the world."<sup>39</sup> An intentional and political way to give voice to accounts of oppression, this practice is rooted in Latin American

liberation struggles from the 1970s and has been used by women of colour feminists in North America as a narrative format and political methodology for consciousness raising. I have used reflexive writing exercises that permit students to articulate their own experience of learning and working through the course content: they are invited to make connections with their own positions and realities. I consider this form of writing a conduit for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, as well as for feedback on the content being taught.

In response to the course “Border Aesthetics in Contemporary Art—The Border Crossed Us,” which I taught at an art university, a student who identifies as Chicana wrote: “To be able to learn about my own culture and history in an art university in Canada of all places was not only a pleasant surprise, but also vital to my work as a Chicana artist.” Although students in the Latin American diaspora appear to connect more readily with a Latin American and Latinx-centric curriculum, many students in other diasporas have shared their testimony about the course content as important to their feminist perspectives and understanding of border identities and politics. For instance, another student wrote, “I want to also say that initially the topic felt intimidating to me because it felt so foreign ... As a Chinese person in Canada, I think I also live on these boundaries. I both belong and do not belong, and I think recognizing that this is a legitimate way to make sense of my identity has given me new confidence to draw, paint, write and just express myself.” I see the intersection between this reflexive writing practice and identity politics as related to practices of testimonio.

## Media Praxes: Film Curating and Filmmaking

My commitment to subalternized knowledge systems also manifests through collective curatorial practices that underscore Indigenous cinematic worlds. I have been involved with Cine Kurumin: Festival de Cinema Indigena since 2017, first as a filmmaker and most recently as an invited curator for the seventh and ninth editions of the festival, held

in 2020 and 2024 respectively. I have written elsewhere about the sixth edition of the festival, held in 2017, as a site of immersive cosmopolitical technologies through Indigenous knowledge production.<sup>40</sup> Here, I reflect on the 2024 edition of the festival through collective curation in a (post)pandemic world and during the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island to Abya Yala to Palestine.

As a co-curator of the feature-length film program, I was immersed in the worldmaking of Indigenous films from all over Brazil, a select number from Latin America, and even one from Palestine. The documentary *Sekbedese* (2024), directed by Graciela Guarana, starts with a voice-over narration accompanied by the image of a fire at night. The narrator states, “We have an imagination from this side of South America from Indigenous people,” reflecting on her subject position as an Indigenous woman born into an Indigenous village who is now part of a collective movement struggling to survive in a capitalist world. The image of the fire at night as a site of storytelling in this opening sequence shifts to a wide shot of a burning fire that destroys. The Rainforest Foundation US has stated that 2024 was the worst year for Amazon fires in two decades.<sup>41</sup> We know that Indigenous peoples have been on the frontlines of climate catastrophe, activism, and justice, as expressed in the many films I watched for the festival. The voice-over in Guarana’s film states, “Our wealth is the land. If you take the land away from us, we die. Our strength is in the land. The land is everything. For Indigenous people, the land is everything.”<sup>42</sup> This powerful statement on relationships to land and survival was echoed in all of the feature-length film submissions that we watched and ultimately functioned as a curatorial thread in our programming discussions and decisions.

As for my practice as a filmmaker, I am currently carrying out a short, experimental documentary film project that uses testimonio as a method to witness the housing crisis through the voices of women. I am working with people who are experiencing or who have experienced housing insecurity to show how access to safe, affordable housing on stolen Indigenous land is gendered and racialized. I use a sound recorder to

record the testimonios of women who are choosing different ways to bear witness to their experiences of housing insecurity. I also use Super 8 film and stills to do some simple animations that employ a city symphony aesthetic or counter-aesthetic in order to challenge some of the aspects of capitalist development.<sup>43</sup>

I situate this research-creation practice within a community of practitioners, scholars, activists, artists, filmmakers, and pedagogues who collectively shift the discussion on knowledge production toward decolonizing and pluralizing knowledge systems. The work of Latinx Canadian visual and media initiatives is part of this greater discussion, which seeks to challenge hegemonic power structures by rethinking “interculturalism as a complex set of negotiations across multiple sites of difference.”<sup>44</sup> In the context of women of colour feminists living transborder and intercultural realities, Mariana Ortega explains that these experiences are constructive of multiplicitous selves “as both being-between-worlds and being-in-worlds.”<sup>45</sup> She distinguishes between Anzaldúa’s account of ontology and that of Martin Heidegger, which lacks “attention to the lived experience of those who are oppressed and at the margins.”<sup>46</sup> Here, identity politics highlight ontological differences and existential pluralism. When Anzaldúa says, “I seek new images of identity,”<sup>47</sup> she articulates that identity is as diversified as the pluriverse, illustrating how the pluriverse is interrelated with multiplicitous identities and ontologies. Teaching humanities, film, and art from a pluriversal perspective can thus be a tool with which to understand the ontic worlds of our many selves, or what Ortega calls “being-in-worlds.”

“Being-in-worlds,” I experienced a sociopolitical context in Brazil for the emergence of an aesthetic that expressed a consciousness of a political and economic Third World, or what was meant by the term “underdeveloped country.” However, it was not until later that I learned about Glauber Rocha’s manifesto “The Aesthetics of Hunger” (1965) and about Cinema da Boca do Lixo’s “aesthetics of garbage,” which is associated with cinema’s marginality in São Paulo in the 1970s. I also learned about Letícia Parente’s, Sonia Andrade’s, and Ana Bella Geiger’s videos

critiquing a macho, patriarchal society; these early video pioneers denounced the repression, violence, torture, and “disappeared” of the US-backed military dictatorship (1964–85) in Brazil throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These artists used video as a medium of political expression and various conceptual strategies to avoid the extreme censorship of the time. First, as a child and as an adult in Brazil, I witnessed poverty, machismo, and unstable economies, and I learned about some of the realities and histories of US-backed dictatorships in Latin America. In 2019, Casey Wei, then the distribution manager of the VIVO Media Arts Centre in Vancouver, first contacted me about an archive of Chilean videos made during a period of creativity similar to that experienced by feminist video artists in Brazil; I immediately connected with the material. These archives speak to revolutionary times, radical actions, and feminist struggles in Augusto Pinochet’s Chile. This research in the archives began what became a documentary film project, *From Chile to Canada: Media Herstories* (2022) (fig. 10.1), which I directed with Sonia Medel. Some of the works in the archive document the feminist movement and protests against the Pinochet dictatorship as well as the performative actions that these artists took as part of that revolt. Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda has done extensive research and scholarship on these particular videos; interviewed in *From Chile to Canada*, she helps to analyze and contextualize the works while making connections to what was happening in Latin America, in Canada, and globally.

Part of Vancouver’s burgeoning feminist of colour movement in the 1970s and 1980s was the groundbreaking In Visible Colours film festival in 1989, co-founded by Zainub Verjee and Lorraine Chang during their tenure at the Women in Focus Society. I bring up this particular history of In Visible Colours, a festival by and for women of colour, because the exhibition *Mujer, arte y periferia* (Women, art, and periphery) was shown in 1987 at the Floating Curatorial Gallery at Women in Focus, which was how this feminist, Chilean art-video archive ended up in Vancouver. Moreover, according to Verjee, the exhibition “rais[ed] complex questions



10.1 Poster for Sarah Shamash and Sonia Medel, dirs., *From Chile to Canada: Media Herstories*, 2022.

about the gestures of Chilean women under dictatorship as well as the ‘placement’ of women’s art.”<sup>48</sup> In *Visible Colours* took place a couple of years after *Mujer, arte y periferia*, part of a growing discourse in media art around women of colour praxes. Another direct legacy of this exhibition was that Chilean women who were political refugees in Canada, such as Carmen Rodríguez, along with other women in the feminist and Latin American community, came together and began a magazine called *Aquelarre*, which translates as an “illegal gathering of witches.” In the late 1980s and 1990s, this Spanish-English magazine, became a creative and political forum for Latin American women everywhere. *From Chile to Canada: Media Herstories* highlights some of these overlapping histories and concerns of women of colour feminisms, together with Chilean and Latin American diaspora activism in Vancouver.

## Conclusion

Studying, teaching, and curating non-Western cinematic languages as a form of political ontology is part of understanding cinema as a pluriversal consciousness that teaches us about other models of living, being, thinking, and doing; it teaches us about our multiplicitous selves “being-in-worlds.” These non-Western cinemas interrupt the globalizing project of a one-world order that applies Euro-universalizing paradigms of film theory and criticism. In brief, I frame pluriversal consciousness as a construct that helps us to theorize non-Western cinematic worlds. Understanding pluriversality is part of the critical consciousness of diverse cinematic practices. I use film pedagogies and filmic representation strategies to build on the collective labour of my peers and spiritual mentors and in collaboration with a movement away from hegemonic systems of thought and toward another possible world where fluid, borderless, interconnected beings are free. In the classroom, teaching Global South, non-Western, Indigenous, Black, and feminist cinemas, I work to develop theoretical tool kits, concepts, and vocabulary with and for students in order to better



critically engage with the works that I study and teach. I labour with colleagues and students to develop critical strategies of resistance to the one-world order—to predatory, racial capital and to settler colonialism.

In a world of continual flux and in an era of rising fascism, corporate-owned media, big tech, systemic racism, climate destruction, and disaster capitalism, teaching histories of ongoing resistance struggles through film and art is a means to examine ever-mutating patterns of the neoliberal, settler-colonial state and the interplay of race, power, gender, and sexuality. The worlds and worldings proposed by revolutionary filmmakers, artists, and writers from the 1960s to the present teach resistance and imagine other possible worlds. The classroom is a place where we discuss the meaning of living on stolen Indigenous lands and our role(s) in this occupation and liberation. It is a space where we have uncomfortable confrontations with our privileges and implications in the capitalist system. Cinema is a pluriverse, and the classroom is a space where we examine the pluriverse through film and art. The classroom is thus a space of community building and connection, political consciousness, and resistance, as well as a portal to imagining other possible worlds.

## NOTES

- 1 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
- 2 Abya Yala is a decolonial name that originally referred to the Americas before European contact. It comes from the Kuna people’s word for “land in its full maturity.” In the context of film and film festivals, Indigenous film movements in Latin America have adopted the designation Abya Yala to refer to the southern hemisphere of the Americas. Conversely, the name Turtle Island is often used to represent the northern hemisphere of the Americas from an Indigenous perspective.
- 3 This same department hired its first women of colour faculty member in 2019.
- 4 Stuart Hall, “When Was ‘the Post-colonial’? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (Routledge, 1996), 247.

- 5 Starting with Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal in the mid-1960s in Brazil, a series of core texts articulated Third Cinema's theories, ideologies, and praxis: the Brazilian Glauber Rocha's celebrated essay "The Aesthetics of Hunger" (1965), the Argentinians Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's "Toward a Third Cinema" (1969), the Cuban Julio García Espinosa's "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1969), and the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés's "Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema" (1976).
- 6 Robert Stam, "Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity," *Rethinking Third Cinema*, ed. Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (Routledge, 2003), 31.
- 7 Formulated by a group of independent filmmakers, the "aesthetics of garbage" came out of a cinematic movement that originated in São Paulo's downtown neighbourhood Boca do Lixo (Mouth of garbage) and is associated with Cinema Marginal. For a deeper discussion of the aesthetics of garbage, see Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Stam, "Beyond Third Cinema."
- 8 Stuart Murray, *Images of Dignity: Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema* (Huia, 2008), 11.
- 9 According to a *Wikipedia* entry, Wapikoni Mobile has produced over 1,000 short films and 600 music recordings. "Wapikoni Mobile," *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wapikoni\\_Mobile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wapikoni_Mobile).
- 10 Alain Badiou, *Cinema* (Polity, 2013), 1.
- 11 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994), 12.
- 12 Large-scale exhibitions such as *L'exposition coloniale internationale* (1931), held in Paris, worked to put on display France's colonial supremacy and civilizational modernity in its territories with a focus on three themes, one being "primitive arts." Lacking any critical discourse and faced with utter silence on the violences of colonization, the exhibition worked as a display of colonialism. In New York, at the Museum of Modern Art, the show "*Primitivism*" in 20th Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984–85) was also critiqued as a colonial modernist essentialization and aesthetization of Native cultures. The show's premise was to display tribal works that influenced modern artists. In Paris, at the Centre Georges Pompidou, the show *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) attempted to address these fraught debates and historical representations of modernity and primitivism in visual art histories. Although the show was critiqued for being a continuation of colonialism and for exotifying the other, the curatorial team worked to decentre

- Europe as an art epicentre by ensuring that fifty percent of the work was done by non-Western artists. For more on *Magiciens de la terre*, see Hanru Hou, "In Defense of Difference: Notes on *Magiciens de la terre*, Twenty-Five Years Later," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 13, no. 3 (2014): 7–18.
- 13 Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, "The Conceptual Triad: Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality," in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Duke University Press, 2018), 138.
  - 14 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), 9.
  - 15 Last Moyo, *The Decolonial Turn in Media Studies in Africa and the Global South* (Springer International, 2020), 9.
  - 16 José F. Aranda, "Modernity," in *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, ed. Deborah R. Vargas, Nancy Raquel Mirabal, and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (New York University Press, 2017), 140.
  - 17 Amy Oliver, "Modernism in Latin America," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/overview/modernist-intellectual-currents-in-latin-america>.
  - 18 Oliver, "Modernism."
  - 19 Oswald de Andrade, "Manifesto antropófago—edição crítica e comentada," *Periferia* 3, no. 1 (2011): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.12957/periferia.2011.3407>.
  - 20 Leslie Bary, "Oswald de Andrade's 'Cannibalist Manifesto,'" *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991): 35.
  - 21 Bary, "Oswald," 35.
  - 22 Andrade, "Manifesto antropófago," 2.
  - 23 Ailton Krenak and Maurício Meirelles, "Our Worlds Are at War," in *Amazonia: Anthology as Cosmology*, ed. Kateryna Botanova and Quinn Latimer (Sternberg, 2022), 25.
  - 24 Freya Schiwy, Amalia Córdova, David Wood, and Horacio Legrás, "New Frameworks: Collaborative and Indigenous Media Activism," in *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema*, ed. Marvin D'Lugo, Ana M. López, and Laura Podalsky (Routledge, 2018), 211.
  - 25 My dissertation was a case study of the archive, production, and distribution organization Video nas Aldeias (Video in the villages), founded in Brazil in 1986 by Vincent Carelli.
  - 26 Krenak and Meirelles, "Our Worlds," 25.
  - 27 Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Duke University Press, 2020), 131.

- 28 Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 248.
- 29 Rudolph Carl Ryser, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, and Heidi G. Bruce, "Fourth World Theory and Methods of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Research on Theoretical Perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Developing Countries*, ed. Patrick Ngulube (IGI Global, 2017), 53.
- 30 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2017), 215.
- 31 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, "Introduction," in *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View*, ed. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang (Routledge, 2019), 1.
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  - 43 City symphony films emerged in early cinema of the 1920s and 1930s primarily in Europe and the United States, reflecting the modernity of the city between wars through an often experimental form. Following the course of a day in the life of a city, one of the most renowned examples is Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927).
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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Body as a Combative Tool in the Art of Claudia Bernal, Helena Martín Franco, and María Ezcurra

Tamara Toledo

This chapter examines how three women artists of the Latin American diaspora in Canada use their bodies and art as sites of contestation and decoloniality. To decolonize their subaltern presence as diasporic subjects, these artists question and challenge Eurocentric, Western epistemologies and aesthetics by dismantling preconceived notions of subjectivity and by offering alternative identification sites. Claudia Bernal's, Helena Martín Franco's, and María Ezcurra's positionality, upbringing, geopolitical contexts, and personal experiences inform their understanding of *coloniality of power*, *coloniality of being*, and *coloniality of gender* as elaborated respectively by Aníbal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and María Lugones. These artists navigate their erasure by developing methodologies and aesthetics of resistance, proposing strategies of radicality, and using their in-between diasporic state to facilitate a relationship of solidarity and allyship with Indigenous peoples in the Global South and in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Patriarchal systems of power and the politics of representation provide contextual material as they negotiate within a system that perpetuates marginality and exclusion. This chapter discusses the lives and migratory trajectories of these artists, who codify forms of subaltern agency, question heteropatriarchal, Western epistemologies, and leverage the body by adopting and engaging with its presence and absence. This

female diasporic body is presented as a site of strength, resistance, agency, and contestation that defies the rhetoric of fragility, vulnerability, and precarity.

## Absence in the Canadian Context

Latin American art has been part of cultural institution imaginaries across Canada since the early twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> but as Dr. Alena Robin<sup>3</sup> has brought to our attention in her research documenting its presence within Canadian museums and universities, this interest has not resulted in further representation of Latin American diasporic artists within the field. Their invisibility within prominent art institutions is gravely noticed, and those who offer challenging forms of social contestation are often left at the margins within subaltern grassroots spaces of discourse.<sup>4</sup> In response, various diasporic artists from Latin America adopt strategies of resistance to counter their invisibility. They encode messages of dissent, question assertions of multiculturalism, defy hierarchical structures of power, transform absence into representation, and challenge oppressive systems to dismantle preconceived constructions of identification. Canadian art critics, writers, and art historians have consistently ignored these artists, yet they deserve long-awaited research and scholarship.

Various artists of the Latin American diaspora in Canada often reclaim strategies employed by conceptual artists of the Cold War era in Latin America. Oriented toward social change, these artists emerged from violence and trauma, but their work alludes to a space of contemporary resilience and resistance, communicating personal and collective experiences that speak to their positionality with and in diaspora. Such is the case for Claudia Bernal, María Ezcurra, and Helena Martín Franco, who for the past twenty years have all developed distinct aesthetic vocabularies that address their position as racialized diasporic women. They touch on themes that pertain not only to the life that they left behind when they departed their places of birth but also to their present state as settlers in Canada. Specifically, by manifesting the body as a site of resistance, they



conjure ideas about the presence and absence of racialized women's bodies to disrupt canonical Canadian art constructions that neglect their existence as diasporic subjects.

Canada, as a systemically white-supremacist state, has privileged white artists, scholars, and practitioners and has not been receptive to the types of concerns that question and challenge the status quo within institutions until quite recently. In fact, Canada has a genocidal history of relations with Indigenous peoples, evident in a colonial intention to eradicate their existence. Systems and structures have erased Indigenous people, and this ideological framework has also affected racialized people of various diasporas who have settled in the nation-state of Canada. This lack of interest and visibility and the representational shortfall are partially due to Canada's systemically racist institutional history and structure. However, today, Canadian art spaces, art institutions, and museums are attempting to move beyond their exclusionary practices by offering spaces to underrepresented artists. This shift in mandates flourished with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), Idle No More (2012), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's "Calls to Action" (2015), and the racial reckoning prompted by George Floyd's (2020) murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter insurgency. Art institutions found themselves accountable for systemic racism within their spaces, and many adopted cultural difference and decolonization as terms of reference to change decades of privileged systems of exclusion. Black and Indigenous artists who were once ignored by museums and art institutions are today being exhibited, discussed, and recognized as important contributors to Canadian art. Yet there is still a long way to go for artists in the Latin American diaspora who have not yet entered this space of visibility and recognition.

Art of the Latin American diaspora is still underexplored within academia, museums, and art institutions in Canada. This is the case not only because of the country's racist systemic structures but also due to the demographics of its Latin American diaspora,<sup>5</sup> which in comparison to its neighbour in the United States is noticeably smaller and invisible.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, diverse ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, histories, migratory experiences, social classes, and ideological perspectives inhibit the manifestation of a unified diaspora, resulting in its increased invisibility. For Latin American subjects, this invisibility can be a choice if they are of white European background, have been raised in the North, and share either a francophone or anglophone accent, or it can result from their attributes as racialized individuals. With their stories neither represented, learned, nor acknowledged, they become invisible to a predominantly white-privileged demographic that erases those who are not in power.

Art historian, curator, and art critic Gerardo Mosquera describes cultural difference as a commodification that has been homogenized and tolerated under globalization through the imposition of paternalistic political correctness.<sup>7</sup> Art critic and curator Carolina Ponce de León takes it a step further and describes the global art world as “a colonizer captivated by the strategies of decolonization.”<sup>8</sup> The “language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences.”<sup>9</sup> As Ponce de León reminds us, the art world adopts the term “decolonization” to navigate safely within a changing social landscape. However, this tokenized approach to cultural difference does not change systems and cycles of erasure and exclusion but, in fact, hinders the process of decolonization within the North American terrain of political correctness, where making mistakes may result in being cancelled.

In their essay “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” (2012), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang urge us to consider the true meaning of decolonization and how to move beyond symbolic representation in order to achieve tangible and substantial change. Their essay also questions white innocence as a settler-colonial strategy that benefits and preserves oppressive colonial systems. Tuck and Yang state that “when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it settles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future.”<sup>10</sup> Under this premise, the efforts that art institutions have initiated toward Black and Indigenous representation are yet to ignite substantial, significant, and remedial change, and deeply troublesome is

the lack of further revision toward racialized diasporas, especially those from the Global South. Unfortunately, it remains to be seen whether these attempts will have long-lasting effects or whether we will go back to how things have always been run in the nation-state of Canada.

The neoliberal model of temporality privileges the site of decolonization as a metaphor, as it offers a space to perpetuate colonial frameworks. *Feminismo comunitario* (communitarian feminism) counterposes the futile and counterproductive interpretation of decolonization as a metaphor.<sup>11</sup> It understands neoliberalism to be a tactic of economic and political domination that benefits patriarchal and colonial systems of power, recognizing that all three systems work in tandem.<sup>12</sup> Economic systems and patriarchal legacies dominate in today's neoliberal society. Museums and art institutions are not interested in ascribing an epistemological, ontological, and cosmological meaning to decolonization, as doing so would alter the status quo and uproot its primary capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal modernist intention. Thus the cosmetic interest in expanding audiences and representation within art institutions and museums in Canada has not systemically benefited or privileged Black and Indigenous artists. Nor has it provided spaces for other racialized artists in Canada. The current inequity is perfectly demonstrated in the discrepancies delineated in data from the 2016 census.<sup>13</sup> It is evident that the resurgent interest in decolonization has not translated into factual opportunities for subaltern artists, and we continue to witness inequitable standards for racialized and Indigenous artists in this country.

Despite this barrier, Bernal, Martín Franco, and Ezcurra, among many other artists, resist manifestations of exclusion and find ways to combat this invisibility with their own bodies. An exemplary manifestation of this desire to change absence into presence was witnessed during an intervention at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal in 2019. In a guerilla performance entitled "It's Happening Now," the women artists Claudia Bernal, Marilou Craft, My-Vam Dam, Jannick Deslauriers, Nuria Carton de Grammont, and Julie-Isabelle Laurin, along with the organizer Stanley Février, "dragged 50 years of the MAC's annual reports

shackled to their ankles, before shredding them and launching a collective call for a new chapter in Québec art history.” Their intention was to challenge “museums to recognize ‘invisible’ Québécois artists that have been long ignored by the art establishment.”<sup>14</sup> Black, brown, and female bodies questioned patriarchal and colonial systems of power, proposing new ways of thinking and doing while counterattacking with the strength of their artistic practices. They had nothing to lose and were not afraid to burn bridges that did not even exist. Nothing could stop their desire to make a bold statement at a time when very few had done so. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres states, decoloniality “is not so much about obtaining recognition from the normative subjects and structures, but about challenging the terms in which humanity is defined and recognition takes place. This necessitates the formation of new practices and ways of thinking.”<sup>15</sup> The legacy of these artists reinstates the possibility of change by questioning historical agendas. These artists do not seek recognition or necessarily to be accepted in the house of a colonial institution that has historically marginalized them. Rather, as Walter D. Mignolo explains, it is a “delinking” choice—a decolonial option—to enter the debate and work in the “entanglement and differential of power.”<sup>16</sup> Beyond disrupting the museum space, they announce their intentions by disrupting colonial public spaces and operations, dismantling the past to build alternative futures.

### Creatively Oppositional Possibilities

As expressed by the sociologist Aníbal Quijano, influential in the fields of decolonial studies and critical theory, artists from the Global South work in a state of *coloniality*.<sup>17</sup> These artists work within a matrix of power that is geopolitical, ideological, and epistemological.<sup>18</sup> It is important to foreground that Quijano introduced the concept of coloniality within the Latin American experience of the early 1990s—during the shift of Cold War geopolitics to neoliberalism—offering *decoloniality* as a space to delink from this matrix of power. Furthermore, it must also be recognized

that decoloniality is a concept that stems from liberation struggles of the South and is not a concept born of western European histories or sensibilities. Artists who contest Eurocentric, Western, violent legacies offer decoloniality and an aesthetic of resistance that defies homogenous views of neoliberal temporality and coloniality. This idea of resistance follows sociologist, feminist philosopher, and activist María Lugones's ideas of "creatively oppositional" intention and agency, understood not as the "end or goal of political struggle, but rather as its beginning, its possibility."<sup>19</sup> The artists under discussion work from a locus of enunciation,<sup>20</sup> creating and articulating knowledge from a specific subaltern location and space. Quijano explains that "coloniality of power" was entrenched by the rise of modernity, creating a world system of racialized capitalist exploitation, and Lugones embraces this idea, yet she reminds us that not only class and race but also gender are in question. Thus she coins the term "coloniality of gender."<sup>21</sup> Lugones also adopts Nelson Maldonado-Torres's concept of "coloniality of being" as she delineates "the process of dehumanization" that characterizes "the modern, colonial, gender system."<sup>22</sup> She emphasizes that "the coloniality of gender is still with us; it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system."<sup>23</sup>

The artists in this chapter understand the concept of decoloniality as a process and possibility of resistance and opposition to forms of coloniality of being and of gender. They adopt feminism as a possibility and as a practice through the absence and presence of their diasporic female bodies. They have developed an aesthetic of resistance that emanates from understanding *coloniality of power*, *coloniality of being*, and *coloniality of gender* as they navigate patriarchal, racist, and classist spaces of exclusion in Canada. Mignolo helps us to understand that artists who adopt the decolonial option do not necessarily want to create beautiful objects but want to create in order to decolonize sensibilities.<sup>24</sup> Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martín Franco work within this framework, using the language of aesthetics, through and with the female body, to mark the presence of a colonial wound,<sup>25</sup> which for them is imperial, racial, and patriarchal.<sup>26</sup> They

work and live in Canada within a patriarchal, systemically racist society that continuously reopens colonial wounds, making them difficult to heal. Their ability to create counterproposals demonstrates a strength and resilience that supersedes obliteration. By using their own bodies and their absence, they offer a site to oppose institutional erasure. Their position as racialized women artists from the Global South not only challenges dominant narratives but also defies co-opted, tokenized interpretations of cultural difference and decolonization within a neoliberal, patriarchal art system. Their autonomy, agency, and efficacy become radically powerful. As a result, these diasporic, subaltern women artists, who work within the confines of global economies and within diaspora, remain locally grounded as they decolonize systems of subaltern barriers and offer sites of solidarity and allyship.

By following Chicana queer and feminist cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, it is possible not only to claim that the artistic practices of Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martín Franco have the potential to transform contemporary Canadian art but also to point out the inequities that persist within Canadian borders. Anzaldúa, a Chicana poet and writer, proclaimed the transformative “power and medicine of art.” She claimed that “this country’s real battle is with its shadow—its racism, propensity for violence, rapacity for consuming, neglect of its responsibility to global communities and the environment, and unjust treatment of dissenters and the disenfranchised, especially people of colour.”<sup>27</sup> Even though Anzaldúa speaks of and is situated in the United States, it is possible to argue that the truth of this statement extends to the Canadian context. Canada’s complicity in Latin American global affairs perpetuates imperialist and interventionist positions based on economic interest.<sup>28</sup> Canada has ignored its own genocidal practices for over a century.<sup>29</sup> Its extractivist industry in Latin America has not only destroyed the environment but also terrorized Indigenous communities in various locations throughout the region.<sup>30</sup> Canada has benefited from an international reputation for welcoming and offering opportunities to immigrants and refugees, promoting its multicultural haven to the world. This reputation is, of course, a myth,<sup>31</sup> one masked

by the country's multicultural propagandistic agenda, which has disenfranchised and systemically undermined racialized and Indigenous people both within its borders and on a global scale. Richard J.F. Day claims that "the problem of Canadian diversity *has always been public*, it has always involved state-sponsored attempts to define, know, and structure the actions of a field of problematic Others (Savages, Québécois, Half-breeds, Immigrants) who have been distinguished from unproblematic Selves (French, British-Canadian, European) through a variety of means (civilization, humanity, race, culture, ethnicity, ethnocultural origin)."<sup>32</sup> Within this multicultural myth, diasporic stories are not shared, learned, recorded, theorized, or archived. This contradiction has resulted in an ongoing, systemically driven disempowerment.

The artists under discussion have all settled in Canada and consider it their home. They build their lives within accentuated legacies of colonial genocide, they live within coloniality, and they develop their practices surrounded by the myth of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Their practices have been vastly ignored by academia,<sup>33</sup> as well as by museums both nationally and internationally,<sup>34</sup> despite their relevance and contributions to discourses within contemporary art. These artists began their work in the late 1990s at a time when very few were ready to listen. Today, geopolitical and sociocultural manifestations as well as racial movements offer the possibility to change absence into presence as we re-evaluate and question art history and the exclusionary project of modernity.

## In-Between States of Violence

Place is relevant to practice because it grounds artists. As a result, it is important to understand the violence inflicted upon people and land. Outlining the geopolitical context from which these artists come, the conflict that they endured, and their relationship to Canada helps us to understand interrelationships and how they manifest within diaspora. Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martín Franco have witnessed violence in their home countries due to government corruption and imperialist intervention. For

over fifty years, an undeclared civil war between drug traffickers, soldiers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries left Colombia in a state of turmoil and uncertainty, and many people fled its violence in search of stability. Both Bernal and Martín Franco arrived in the 1990s during Colombia's conflict and stayed in Canada, developing their artistic practices in their adopted homeland. Ezcurra's family escaped a military dictatorship in Argentina during the 1970s and fled to Mexico, where she spent her childhood and formative years before coming to Canada in 2010 to pursue graduate studies. She also left Mexico due to the ongoing violence of government corruption and the war on drugs instigated by the United States. Bernal spent her formative years in Colombia but travelled to Manitoba during a 1988 World Youth exchange program, which inspired her to return to Canada. Martín Franco arrived in Canada in 1998 at the age of thirty as a result of her marriage to a Canadian artist of Lebanese origin whom she had met in Cartagena.

These artists come from places of conflict; they have adopted Canada as their home but do not necessarily find it to be a haven. Although they have received attention in the past few years—Ezcurra, for example, exhibited in group exhibitions at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec in 2023 and at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal in 2024—it is important to acknowledge that this recent change favours a neoliberal, temporal institutional framework of diversity and inclusion mandates, adopted after the Black Lives Matter movement challenged institutions across Canada. However, the vast majority of them remain on the sidelines, invisible, and ignored, particularly racialized women. Bernal and Martín Franco and to a certain extent Ezcurra experience this country as a liminal space, one that erases their presence and prolongs their experience of violence and coloniality. Underneath superficial cosmetic changes, systemic racism prevails in Canada, and its colonial institutional history is difficult to ignore. In this sense, their work connects again with Anzaldúa's scholarship, as she introduces and adopts the concept of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word that refers to a psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future. For Anzaldúa, *nepantla*



is the in-between state; it is “that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another; when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another; when travelling from the present identity into a new identity.”<sup>35</sup> They find themselves between two borders that prolong systems of violence, and they are aware of the country’s implications in geopolitical global affairs and its genocidal history with Indigenous peoples. They live in perpetual states of *nepantla*—neither forgetting nor erasing where they come from, including the land and the people they left behind, despite its distance and evolving changes—while sharing their artistic language and commitment to resist fixed identities.

### Forming Allyships through Common Threads

In 2008, the interdisciplinary performance artist Claudia Bernal shared with Toronto audiences *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood). This video-performance installation was part of a curated group exhibition entitled *Pilgrimage of Wanderers*.<sup>36</sup> Her interdisciplinary approach encompasses her theatre and dance background, casting a deep understanding of the craft both visually and performatively. Various elements, such as water, human hair, a chair, and a fishing net, surround the gallery space, converting the white cube into a place of memory, entrapment, and acknowledgment while tracing a violent history. Inspired by Colombia’s forced displacement due to armed conflict and extractivism, the artwork is eerily familiar to the land on which it is performed, Toronto.<sup>37</sup> Extractivism and displacement are familiar themes for Canada, with its genocidal practices related to Indigenous communities, making evident the interconnection between the South and the North. Bernal not only exposes the truth in Colombia but also offers a bridge to denounce it in Canada. The images, elements, and performance shared resonate as a transnational Indigenous experience, transcending borders, with the in-between state becoming a “locus of resistance”<sup>38</sup> that overrides any dislocation or disassociation. The traumatic aftermath of forced displacement is dramatically emphasized as the artist travels from object to object

during the performance—hugging the audience, swaying inconsolably in a rocking chair, searching for drips of water, trembling under a large red fisherman's net, and pointing blame into the far distance. Sixty-two long black-haired braids cover a wall from top to bottom. An empty wicker rocking chair with a ball of red wool placed on its seat stands beside a long white rope hanging from the ceiling with the tips branching out into a ball of curly black hair. All of these elements surround the fisherman's net, which hangs from the ceiling. The net envelops the artist, who lies flat on the floor. Her body moves slowly as she realizes her entrapment. After frantically but graciously finding a way out as the net slowly ascends to the ceiling, she dives into the performance to interact with an attentive gallery audience.

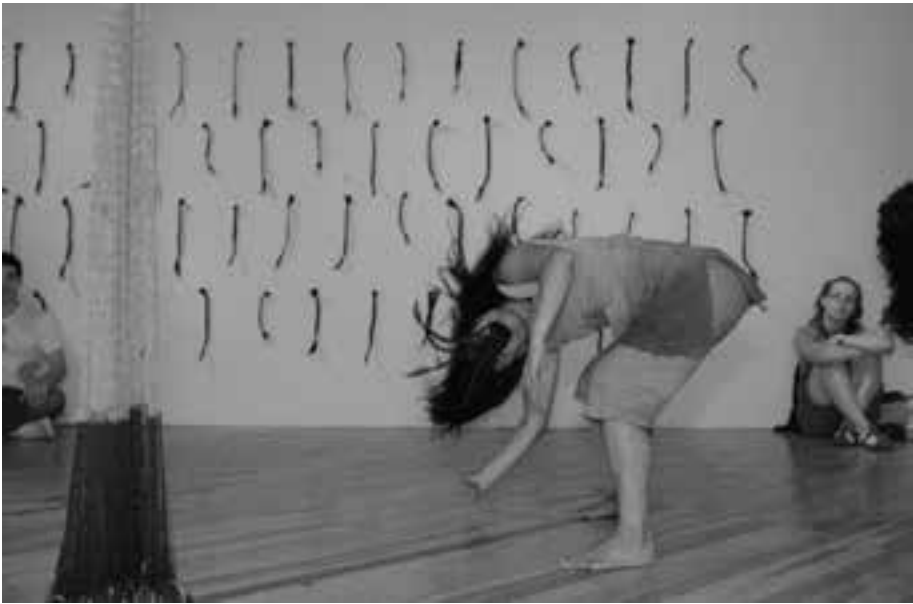
When the performance ends, a large screen projects a twenty-five-minute documentary-style video of three women sharing their testimonies of how they have survived incredible hardship, death, and violence. Three generations of women are depicted: a fourteen-year-old girl who has survived an attack by paramilitaries, a trade unionist who shares the experience of the murder of her brother, and an Indigenous elder who fights to reclaim land taken by armed forces. These are brown women who embody the resiliency of generations of people who have survived colonial legacies and imperial extractivism, all the while reminding us of the capacity to transform this violence into resistance and art. We acknowledge their pain and their strength in finding a space for resistance and decoloniality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres claims that since "aesthetics is so closely connected to embodied subjectivity and this subjectivity is at the crux of the colonality of knowledge, power, and being, decolonial aesthetics very directly challenges, not only each basic coordinate of modernity/coloniality, but its most visceral foundations."<sup>39</sup> Claudia Bernal's work reaches this capability as the body, the mind, and all the senses respond viscerally and ontologically, impacting the terrain of colonality. The "rituals that seek to keep the body open as a continued source of questions, as a bridge to connect to others, and as prepared to act"<sup>40</sup> are employed as a methodology, a decolonial aesthetic that is both critical to



11.1 Claudia Bernal, *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood), 2008. Caught by a red fishing net, the artist moves slowly and releases from their captivity while an audience witnesses the performance at A Space Gallery, Toronto.

the aftermath of displacement yet empowering within spaces of solidarity and allyship (fig. 11.1).

Bernal spent two years investigating and returning to Colombia to develop this video-performance installation—an autoethnographic attempt to materialize the outcomes of displacement faced in the region along the Magdalena River. This river crosses Colombia from north to south and carries within it not only gold and oil but also the blood of thousands of victims of violence. Art critic and historian Hal Foster cautions that “the artist as ethnographer” faces “the danger ... of ‘ideological patronage.’”<sup>41</sup> He claims that this patronage can become a case of self-othering that easily passes into self-absorption, turning into the practice of philosophical narcissism.<sup>42</sup> However, in the case of *Hechos de la misma sangre*, the



11.2 Claudia Bernal, *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood), 2008. Bernal moves frenetically with several braided hair bundles in her mouth, navigating the various spaces of the installation.

use of anthropological elements does not invoke an outsider's perspective, nor does the process assume to represent the entire region (fig. 11.2). In fact, the artist has an entangled autochthonous history with the place depicted, the land, and its people. The artist is of "the same blood" and states this fact very clearly in the title. The story is not foreign, as she is reminded when an Indigenous elder interviewed in the video states, "We are all of the same blood." Bolivian feminist, activist, sociologist, and subaltern theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui proposes a third concept with the inclusion of the term *ch'ixi*, an Aymara word for the colour grey. This alternative to the lexicon of *mestizaje*, proposes that the colour grey is composed of a multiplicity and coexistence of colours, which may consist of white but is not white; it is both white and its opposite, black. The

artist embodies these differences as she positions her own white, black, and brown body on the land.<sup>43</sup>

Bernal's work is recoded as difficult to understand, site-specific to Colombia's reality, and foreign to Canada. As already indicated, it is not difficult to point out connections with Canada's own history and to present common threads that link the colonized histories of both the North and the South. Genocide, forced displacement, and violence against Indigenous women resonate as strongly in Colombia as they do in Canada. The Americas share a common history of colonization and a perpetual state of coloniality. Bernal's intention is not simply an artistic gesture or an anthropological study; it is rather a relationship established between her past and her present as a diasporic subject. She is explicit in stating that "art must consist of action rather than objects ... As an artist, I have a role to play in the process of social and political transformation."<sup>44</sup> Bernal actively and intentionally builds a bridge between the North and the South, a strategy of decolonization inspired by the teachings of Chicana feminist theorists and writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Chela Sandoval. Within Bernal's work, we witness the potential of decoloniality, which "refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities."<sup>45</sup> She offers us a transformative way of understanding the world with her counter-narrative and with a counter-art practice that dismantles coloniality while creating a space for new methods of interpreting land, place, women, and power.

In Claudia Bernal's decolonial proposal, her third self, the *ch'ixi* identity, is manifested through her body, her movements, the elements, the land, the water, and the people. Systems of domination and racist dogmas not only affect racialized people in Canada but are also a transnational issue that weighs heavily in the Global South. Bernal exposes this truth beyond any type of border and claims complicity and responsibility. The artist points her finger at all Canadians, those who deny violence and those who stand complicit. Through *Hechos de la misma sangre*, we are not only reminded of the resiliency of people to surpass the effects of

coloniality but also told of our connection to ancestral knowledge and being, and the artist's brown body becomes a thread that weaves Abya Yala from the North to the South and back.<sup>46</sup> As Anzaldúa poetically states, "We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that alienated us from others. When the wound forms a *cicatriz*, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart."<sup>47</sup>

### Rupturing Coloniality with a Politicized Body

The multidisciplinary artistic practice of Helena Martín Franco, who uses her own body to manifest her decolonial vision and proposal, adopts an approach that is different from Bernal's practice but one that is still within the tradition of performance and installation art. The artist's work denounces a violent history while seeking opportunities to heal scars by combating patriarchal and religious oppressive dogmas through the use of her own body. Aware of her colonized position and her repressive upbringing, Martín Franco critically denounces the abuse of oppressive idiosyncrasies and dogmas. Her critical observations explore both the concept of religion and ideas of race as human identifiers imposed by colonial systems of representation. Maldonado-Torres posits that the study of religion can contribute to the rethinking of ethics/politics and to the decolonization of the modern/colonial world.<sup>48</sup> For Martín Franco, as demonstrated within her artistic oeuvre, Christianity's effects on gender and race are quite explicit and obvious, for it has imposed constructions of inferiority, ontological positions of dehumanizing otherness, and patriarchal preservations.

Regarding gender, Maldonado-Torres explains that in modern/Western paradigms, "the male and female binary is informed and informs the division between the subject as freedom and the subject as body."<sup>49</sup> That is to say, the rational and active male body is compared to the irrational and passive female body. Furthermore, within this modern/colonial binary perspective, the colonized subject is perceived as nonhuman, and the female colonized body seems to "share more characteristics

with non-human animals than with humanity proper.”<sup>50</sup> As a result, the condition of the colonized subject and its naturalization to animality perpetuate a state of war and conquest over colonized bodies, for as Maldonado-Torres explains, they become enemies who are both threatening and suspicious.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, Martín Franco uses her own brown body as a confrontational tool to defy colonial and patriarchal impositions of fragility and animality. She embodies the personification of fictional characters to redefine aspects of religion, tradition, and colonial and institutional norms that so heavily impacted her throughout the course of her upbringing and migration to Canada. She embodies the hybridity of *mestizaje* and questions its origins, its limitations, and its nuances while exposing the hidden effects of colonial epistemic racism and sexism on individual and collective knowledge.

The fictional characters that Martín Franco has embodied, *Corazón Desfasado*,<sup>52</sup> *Fritta Caro*,<sup>53</sup> and *Mujer Elefante*,<sup>54</sup> adopt identity codes that refer to her position as a Colombian woman from the Caribbean navigating spaces of erasure and invisibility. Lugones defends embodied, impure, diversified, and fragmented multiple selves, all of which resist the institutional structures that are used to control them.<sup>55</sup> *Mujer Elefante*, for example, is one of those threatening impure selves that defy any form of unified homogenous persona. Through performance, the diasporic woman artist adopts the elephant’s trunk as an animal metaphor for transmission and transformation. Using a construction tube to imitate its animal characteristic, the artist uses its long phallic shape to manipulate its structure and to elongate its potential to her own liking. Thus Helena Martín Franco is a feminist artist who defaces herself with the tube, her body attached to the structure, but who refuses to be the victim. There is an undeniable struggle, but she is not dominated; she constantly wrestles to detach herself from the conformities of gender and patriarchy. The artist resists fragility, normativity, and identity politics, remaining in complete control of her actions and position as half elephant and half woman. Sonia Pelletier understands Martín Franco’s autofictitious persona of *Mujer Elefante* as a protean character that hides a state of pain

and sadness. She states that the artist “reappropriates the expression by transforming it into a mechanism of self-mockery that figures her own suffering in the dimensions of an elephant.”<sup>56</sup> It seems to me that *Mujer Elefante*, rather than assuming this submissive position, is the animal personification that resists normativity, fights passiveness, confronts pain, and struggles against the perpetual war imposed on the colonized woman subject. In fact, the elephant is a highly resilient animal, intelligent, nurturing, and strong. It is the creature that best exemplifies her connection to life in resistance, which requires a constant confrontational dialogue to defy otherness, fragility, and precarity.

The character of Fritta Caro also becomes an outlet for the artist to activate resistance. Fritta Caro is “active in autofictions that aim to point out certain inconsistencies in government discourse and policies on the integration of immigrants, particularly with regard to the issues of identity and difference.”<sup>57</sup> Despite appropriating identity classifications—a diasporic-Canadian personification of Frida Kahlo—the artist redefines her own production and semiotic translation within a Canadian systemically racist landscape and adopts a transformed vision of what a racialized artist is and can be. Maldonado-Torres explains that decolonial aesthetics emerged in discussions of the modernity/(de)coloniality network—introduced by the Colombian artist, activist, and scholar Adolfo Albán Achinte—and explains that “decolonial visual art directly impacts the terrain of the coloniality of place and space... Decolonial aesthetic creation[s], including decolonial performances of self and subjectivity[,] are, among other things, rituals that seek to keep the body open as a continued source of questions, as a bridge to connect to others, and as prepared to act.”<sup>58</sup> This use of the body is exemplified with *Mujer Elefante* and Fritta Caro, who become outlets to name invisibility, to rupture stereotypes of identity politics, and to re-examine colonial modes of existence. With the act of using the politicized female body, the artist places Fritta Caro in public space to make connections and to question what has become the norm (fig. 11.3).

*Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (*Altero(s)filia* or *The Weight Games of Fritta Caro*, 2018), a performance intervention in public





11.3 Helena Martín Franco, *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (Altero(s)filia or The Weight Games of Fritta Caro), 2018, Le Parc des Hommes-Forts, Montreal. The image captures the moment of the performance in which Martín Franco tapes the words "Racism," "Diversity," and "Minority" onto the concrete.

space, was presented at Le Parc des Hommes-Forts in Montreal. The location was strategic, not only because the performance was situated at the Monument of Louis Cyr, a "Quebec weightlifter said to have been, in his time, the 'strongest man in the world,'"<sup>59</sup> but also because it was placed against the backdrop of a mural hidden between abundant tree foliage that states "White Supremacy Is Killing Me," painted by the Colombian American muralist Jessica Sabogal. It is difficult to decipher the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist message of the mural, but with her public intervention, Fritta Caro embodied the sentiment for all to witness. With her petite body, she stepped into the space like a courageous athlete entering Montreal's Olympic Stadium. Wearing red and white sports attire and a red maple leaf cap, Fritta Caro swept the dirt in front of the monument and used yellow caution tape and white fragile tape to write the words



11.4 Helena Martín Franco, *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (Altero(s)filia or The Weight Games of Fritta Caro), 2018, Le Parc des Hommes-Forts, Montreal. After the artist places the tape on the floor, she jumps a rope attached to her ankle, swinging a ball of tape that grows bigger and heavier as the pieces of tape detach from the concrete.

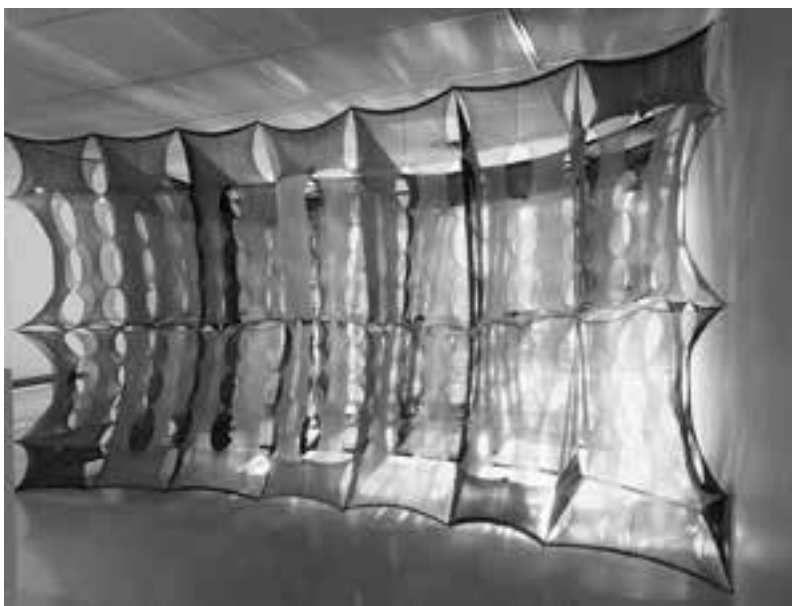
“Racism,” “Diversity,” and “Minority” on the concrete in large bold letters for a predominantly white francophone audience. Fritta Caro skipped over a rope wrapped around her ankle as she swung a ball attached to the rope, causing the tape to slowly detach from the concrete each time the ball swept past. The pieces of tape stuck to the ball, which became bigger, heavier, dirtier, and tangled, camouflaging the words in one big sphere. Those who follow a decolonial path “tend to approach ideas and change in a way that do[es] not isolate knowledge from action. They combine knowledge, practice, and creative expressions, among other areas in their efforts to change the world.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, as a result, not only did the ball of tape symbolize all that must change and disintegrate, but it also transformed into something different, a powerful weapon. It accentuated

the white fragility of those who witnessed Fritta Caro become an agent of social change when she disrupted history markers in a public space (fig. 11.4). By challenging a white spectatorship through her equation of Canadian national identity markers with racism, Helena Martín Franco embodied strength not with muscle or mass but with her performance's potential to transform history and knowledge. As a subject of difference, she posited a threatening view with her petite body. She demonstrated the potential of the fragmented self—the impure mestiza self that María Lugones speaks of—to move from a “focus on ethnicity-nation-race to a focus on gender-race-ethnicity.”<sup>61</sup>

### Resistance with and in Absent Bodies

The artist María Ezcurra follows a path similar to those of Claudia Bernal and Helena Martín Franco in her search for ways to dismantle and uncover histories and legacies of patriarchal violence. In her work, Ezcurra foregrounds centuries of Eurocentric, Western gender violence, referencing issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, femicide in Mexico, and the disappeared in Argentina through the symbolic gesture of the absence of bodies. With his name on a search list, the artist's father fled Argentina during the dictatorship. A genocidal process—in which the United States as well as the civil and ecclesiastical sectors were complicit—the right-wing coup d'état of 1976 in Argentina left over 30,000 murdered, tortured, and disappeared opponents of the military regime. *Los desaparecidos* (the disappeared) cannot be forgotten, and the members of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo remind us of the legacy of fascism.<sup>62</sup> It is women like them who defy and denounce these structures of power, and it is artists like María Ezcurra—inspired by the strength and resiliency of these women and others—who activate historical and collective memory to empower future generations through their art practice.

There has been a steady increase in femicide against girls and women in Mexico, with a more recent statistic indicating over 56,000 instances between the mid-1990s and 2019.<sup>63</sup> The reality and fear of gender violence



11.5 María Ezcurra, *Invisible*, 2005–16. In the 2016 installation at Sur Gallery, multiple nylons stitched together stretch from the gallery floor to the ceiling, taking over the space.

have weighed heavily on Ezcurra's practice since the early 2000s. Drawing on her fear and her outrage, she uses women's nylon stockings for their manoeuvrability, high-heeled shoes for their reference to gender control, and metal hangers as a symbol of restriction and submission. Unlike Bernal and Martín Franco, Ezcurra's body is absent in the sculptures of *Ni una más* (Not one more) (2003) and *Invisible* (2005–16). The commemorative installation *Invisible* consists of an assemblage of delicate, translucent, multitoneal nylon stockings carefully sewn together, stretched to their limits, and fully exposed from all points of view to be witnessed and penetrated (fig. 11.5). The spectator is easily lured by the sculpture's beauty—its pleasant shapes, translucency, shadows, crevices, and gaps—yet uncomfortably torn by its obvious resemblance to skin and exposed orifices, stretched to capacity. The painful analogy to femicide envelopes

the larger-than-life sculpture, as we witness the trauma inflicted upon bodies and minds. Yet it is also important to remind ourselves that this vulnerability and precarity can also be interpreted as strength and agency when placed within a collective community whose members are able to resist an imposed rupture and to maintain form metaphorically and physically while countering violence with their own bodies. The elasticity of the stretched nylons symbolizes the resilience of women as they endure pain, and the sculpture itself relies on the collectivity and the collaboration of all bodies sewn together to form a solid unifying structure.

According to Julieta Paredes, an Aymara Bolivian decolonial feminist and activist who has participated in the work of the *Mujeres Creando* movement,<sup>64</sup> bodies are connected to nature and form part of Pachamama. *Feminismo comunitario* is counterposed to patriarchal capitalist systems that focus on individualism. It offers a different ontological configuration that instead emphasizes the relationship of body with community—a relationship that serves as a bridge between men, women, and nature. From the Aymara perspective, Pachamama is composed of men, women, intersex, animals, vegetation, and minerals. They all complement each other, as they form part of Pachamama and share the skin of the same body, an idea related to the *ontología de la piel* (ontology of the skin).<sup>65</sup>

Ezcurra uses this analogy—expanding it to critique patriarchal systems of neocolonialism—through the artistic gestures of placing stockings as the symbol of skin and stitching them together to create a complete visualization of a community of women. Vulnerability is reconfigured as resiliency and continuity, with the strength of collectivity liberating women's bodies from all static, violent forms of structural and patriarchal confinement.

María Ezcurra employs nylon as it relates to the elasticity of the human body, much like the sculptures of the African American avant-garde artist Senga Nengudi. Nengudi's most well-known works, those in the *R.S.V.P.* series, "like many others by Nengudi, conjure humans whose bodies are no longer there."<sup>66</sup> In Nengudi's case, purchased nylon pantyhose are stuffed with sand, knotted, and elongated, stretching into

corners, onto walls, and across floors, resulting in uncanny disfigurements of shapes and sizes. The works in the series resemble limbs and genitalia, with the skin stretched to its maximum capacity, referencing the artist's experience of giving birth.

Similarly, Maria Ezcurra's nylon installations also symbolize the ability of the female body to stretch beyond its limits, its resiliency to change, and its capacity to endure trauma. The installation *Ni una más* consists of seventy-five stockings with high-heeled shoes that weigh heavily inside of stretched nylon as they all hang suspended within a circular shape that denounces systemic femicide in Mexico (fig. 11.6). The absence of bodies, of those who once wore these shoes, declares the relationship between violence and indifference. Ezcurra allows space for the memory of forgotten subjects and exposes the violent truth of patriarchal, imperial, and colonial systems that choose to dismiss and render these bodies invisible.

The same indifference to violence can be seen in the case of the missing and murdered Indigenous women of Canada, a femicide that has cast a deep wound for its ongoing legacy of colonization.<sup>67</sup> "Reconciliation' has been extensively critiqued by Indigenous scholars and allies who have dismissed the term as a romantic attempt to smooth over Indigenous-settler relationships while leaving the status quo untouched."<sup>68</sup> Through the lexicon of equality, inclusivity, diversity, and *reconciliation*, it is a challenge to do the work of "unsettling the settler within"<sup>69</sup> by questioning roles and privileges. White Canadians are beneficiaries of injustices committed and perpetuated against Indigenous bodies who are rendered invisible in an attempt to erase a violent, colonial, heteropatriarchal history.

Instead of *reconciliation*, Ezcurra's work speaks to the resiliency within those absent bodies, the multiplicity of voices, the truth behind absence, and the strength that lies within collectivity and community. As scholar and playwright Jennifer Joan Thompson argues, "any artistic act of resistance is inflected and shaped by that which it seeks to resist, just as it inflects and shapes that which it resists."<sup>70</sup> Ezcurra accentuates this violence and resistance, crossing borders between Argentina, Mexico,

11.6 María Ezcurra, *Ni una más* (Not One More), 2003. Multiple women's shoes hang inside nylon stockings, which are attached to hangers placed on a circular metal structure.



and Canada, a violence that has formed her journey through life, land, and people. The installation *Reflections* (2016), commissioned for her solo exhibition at Sur Gallery in Toronto, speaks to the relationship of complicity and to the need for *truth* rather than *reconciliation*. The labyrinth shape composed of emergency blankets hanging from the ceiling outlines a journey that Canadians must face as they find their way, see themselves reflected, and recognize their own implication and complicity in a history of genocide rather than continuing to profess the ongoing myth of Canada as the saviour.

## Conclusion

Bernal, Martín Franco, and Ezcurra have each embarked on a path of decentring, altering, reconfiguring, and constructing counter-hegemonic narratives that defy traditional canons with their decolonial methodologies and frameworks. They resist the classifications of identity politics and redefine their own production with an autosemiotic and personal translation. Most importantly, they suggest that perceived diasporic fragile bodies instead project agency and currency and find strength from community. They share knowledge based on experience, collaboration, community engagement, activism, and a combative spirit that accompanies the practices of each. Their work suggests sites of resistance to the status quo, and their counter-perspectives provide a voice for diasporic female peripheral identities through the use of the racialized body.

Positioned as diasporic settler women within a predominantly white art scene, they occupy a subaltern space that feeds their proposal. They defy heteropatriarchal structures of power by denouncing acts of genocide and violence in both the Global South and the Global North. They inspire an understanding of the power of decoloniality and use their bodies and their absence to decolonize existing patterns of erasure and exclusion. The transformation and regeneration enacted by their artistic practices—as influenced by their place of origin and life experiences—transcend local identities and offer a space of connection within the territory that they inhabit. They use their position as women to personify empowerment through their own bodies and manifest them with power, agency, and dignity. The politicized present and absent body becomes a powerful tool, an outlet to form structures of allyship, and a position to further its transformative potential.



## NOTES

- 1 The term “Global South,” as understood not only geographically but also politically, includes diasporas located in subaltern spaces in the Global North. Alfred J. López writes, “What defines the global South is the recognition by peoples across the planet that globalization’s promised bounties have not materialized, that it has failed as a global master narrative,” as well as “the mutual recognition among the world’s subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization.” Alfred J. López, “Introduction: The (Post) Global South,” *The Global South* 1, no. 1 (2007): 3.
- 2 Alena Robin, “Mapping the Presence of Latin American Art in Canadian Museums and Universities,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2019): 33–57.
- 3 Robin, “Mapping the Presence,” 35.
- 4 See Arlan Londoño, “Una mirada a las organizaciones y movimientos artísticos latinos en Canadá,” *Arte por excelencias*, July 7, 2009, <https://www.arteporexcelencias.com/es/noticias/2009-07-07/una-mirada-las-organizaciones-y-movimientos-artisticos-latinos-en-canada.html>; <https://perma.cc/87CP-USPM>.
- 5 Canada has experienced waves of migration from Latin America, starting with Chilean refugees fleeing a military dictatorship in the 1970s.
- 6 See Victor Armony, “Les paradoxes d’une affinité Culturelle: la construction de la diaspora latino-américaine au Québec,” in *Vues transversales: panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise*, ed. Mariza Rosales Argonza, 21–40 (Éditions du CIDIHCA/Fondation LatinArte, 2018).
- 7 Gerardo Mosquera, “Alien-Own/Own-Alien: Globalization and Cultural Difference,” *Boundary 2* 29, no. 3 (2002): 163–73.
- 8 Carolina Ponce de León, “Encounters and Disencounters: A Personal Journey through Many Latin American and U.S. Latino Art Worlds,” in *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 147, <https://archive.org/details/overhereinternatooooounse/mode/2up>.
- 9 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 2.
- 10 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization,” 3.
- 11 Julieta Paredes explains *feminismo comunitario* as a process initiated in 2003 by social movements of Indigenous people of the Andean region, known today as

Bolivia. *Feminismo comunitario* proposes a radical shift and understanding of feminism rooted in an Indigenous perspective and ways of being. It is seen as an organic, practical way to organize that replaces hierarchies with responsibilities, and it is considered a political struggle since it recognizes patriarchal systems as oppressive and violent. Most importantly, its struggle is locally based and opposes Euro-Western gender categorizations by emphasizing the geographic and historical particularities of the region.

- 12 Nataly Guzmán and Diana Triana, "Julieta Paredes: hilando el feminismo comunitario," *Ciencia política* 14, no. 28 (2019): 23–49.
- 13 Hill Strategies Research Inc., "Demographic Diversity of Artists in Canada in 2016," January 29, 2020, <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/demographic-diversity-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/>; <https://perma.cc/WCX2-F3HU>. This report's data from the 2016 census are focused on four demographic groups of artists: women, Indigenous people, members of racialized groups, and members of official language minority groups.
- 14 Stanley Février, "It's Happening Now," 2019, <https://www.fevrierstanley.com/itshappeningnow>; <https://perma.cc/MH4H-8NNU>.
- 15 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," Foundation Frantz Fanon, Paris, 2016, 22, [https://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres\\_Outline\\_Ten\\_Theses-10.23.16.pdf](https://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf); <https://perma.cc/MR7Y-UV93>.
- 16 Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonial Options and Artistic/Aesthetic Entanglements: An Interview with Walter D. Mignolo," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 1 (2014): 206.
- 17 Coloniality of power, a concept developed by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, identifies the legacies of European colonialism integrated into contemporary societies through hierarchical social orders and forms of knowledge. *Coloniality* refers to a classification of races that distinguishes between colonizer and colonized, naming the configuration of a system of exploitation where all control of labour revolves around the hegemony of capital and where labour is racialized. See Aníbal Quijano, "Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America," in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, ed. John Beverley, José Oviedo, and Michael Aronna, 201–16 (Duke University Press, 1995); and Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System," *International Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 134 (1992): 583–91.

- 18 Mignolo states that “a politics of location can be in itself an epistemology.” Walter D. Mignolo, “I Am Where I Think: Epistemology and the Colonial Difference,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 237.
- 19 María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 746.
- 20 The importance of positionality and location cannot be underestimated in the process of knowledge production. Mignolo writes about the collapse of identity in a philosophical way to explain that people are not only who they are but where they are located. Mignolo, “I Am Where I Think.”
- 21 Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 743–45.
- 22 Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 745, citing Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008).
- 23 Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 746.
- 24 Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonial Options,” 201.
- 25 Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonial Options,” 206.
- 26 Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonial Options,” 201.
- 27 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Duke University Press, 2015), 10.
- 28 Tyler Shipley explains that the Canadian government has been complicit in decades of imperialist economic interest, has supported countless military regimes throughout Latin America, and has prioritized the interests of both Canadian and American corporations since the early twentieth century, including when it backed Bolivia’s coup in 2019. Tyler Shipley, “Canada’s Support for Bolivian Coup Regime Part of Century Long Imperialist Bent in Latin America,” *The Canada Files*, October 23, 2020, <https://www.thecanadafilms.com/articles/dsfes>; <https://perma.cc/5GU6-23UT>.
- 29 It was not until June 2021 that members of Parliament unanimously consented to a motion calling on the federal government to recognize Canada’s residential schools as genocidal. Leah Gazan, the New Democratic Party’s member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, had brought forward a similar motion in June of the previous year but had not received unanimous consent.
- 30 Working Group on Mining and Human Rights in Latin America, *The Impact of Canadian Mining in Latin America and Canada’s Responsibility: Executive Summary of the Report Submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, May 22, 2014, [https://www.back.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report\\_canadian\\_mining\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.back.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_canadian_mining_executive_summary.pdf); <https://perma.cc/FF4F-T25S>.

- 31 As Richard J.F. Day argues, multiculturalism in Canada controls “*différance*; it is more modern than ever in its unwillingness to accept diversity in the social, political, and linguistic forms.” Richard J.F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 9, 12.
- 32 Day, *Multiculturalism*, 5, original emphasis. As Day explains, he uses “the term ‘Self’ to refer to a group constructed as possessing propriety, normality, and validity, the existence of which does not pose a public problem of diversity. The term ‘Other’ [is] used with reference to those groups constructed as ‘not-Self,’ which are seen as improper and problematic by those who identify with the Self group, and against whom various actions may be taken to change or eliminate their presumed problematic qualities” (229n2).
- 33 Robin, “Mapping the Presence,” 55.
- 34 On the invisibility of Latin American Canadian representation in the context of the international survey exhibition *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000*, held at the Museo del Barrio in New York in 2008, see Tamara Toledo, “Now (Here) Represented,” *Fuse Magazine*, December 2008, 14–20.
- 35 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 56.
- 36 Presented at A Space Gallery in Toronto in 2008, the group exhibition *Pilgrimage of Wanderers* was curated by Tamara Toledo with artists Claudia Bernal, José Mansanilla-Miranda, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, and José Luis Torres.
- 37 The name of the city of Toronto originates from the Mohawk name Tkaronto, meaning “the place in the water where the trees stand.” Tkaronto is considered the original name, and today people have been adopting it to acknowledge and honour the city’s Indigenous presence and history.
- 38 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 49.
- 39 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 27.
- 40 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 27.
- 41 Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press, 1996), 173.
- 42 Foster, “Artist as Ethnographer,” 180.
- 43 See also the views on the concept of *mestizaje* in Javier Sanjinés, *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004).
- 44 Claudia Bernal, “Performance as an Act of Survival,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 150 (2012), 22.
- 45 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 10.
- 46 The name Abya Yala has been adopted by Indigenous peoples to describe the region of the American continent. Abya Yala in the Kuna language means “land in

- its full maturity.” The Aymara leader Takir Mamani has suggested that we adopt this name and renounce colonial designations. Cited in Emilio del Valle Escalante, “Self-Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala,” *E-International Relations*, May 5, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala/>; <https://perma.cc/SBW2-JLJU>.
- 47 Gloria Anzaldúa, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—La sombra y el sueño,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Duke University Press, 2009), 313.
- 48 See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 691–711.
- 49 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 15.
- 50 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 15.
- 51 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 15.
- 52 Corazón Desfasado is difficult to translate but can be interpreted as “decentred heart.”
- 53 This character’s name is a spin on the iconic name Frida Kahlo. In Spanish, the word *fritta* also means “bad luck,” implying that one is bound to encounter difficulty, and *caro* means “expensive.”
- 54 This character’s name translates as “elephant woman.”
- 55 Ofelia Schutte, “Border Zones, In-Between Spaces, and Turns: On Lugones, the Coloniality of Gender, and the Diasporic *Peregrina*,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8, nos. 1–2 (2020): 103–104.
- 56 Sonia Pelletier, “Identité hybride, ou la mise en vie des personnages d’Helena Martin Franco,” *Spirale*, no. 261 (2017): 24, my translation.
- 57 Pelletier, “Identité hybride,” 22, my translation.
- 58 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 27.
- 59 For a full description of the monument that commemorates Louis Cyr, see Art Public Montréal, “Monument à Louis Cyr 1970,” <https://artpublicmontreal.ca/en/oeuvre/monument-a-louis-cyr/>; <https://perma.cc/JY92-HSR2>.
- 60 Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses,” 7.
- 61 Schutte, “Border Zones,” 104.
- 62 Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo is an association formed during the Argentine military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla. In a time of severe repression, mothers wearing white headscarves with the embroidered names of detained and disappeared children gathered weekly in the public square in front of the presidential palace to petition for their reappearance.

- 63 See “Más de 56 mil feminicidios en México desde 1990,” *La Cadera de Eva*, November 1, 2021, <https://lacaderadeeva.com/actualidad/mas-de-56-mil-feminicidios-en-mexico-desde-1990/2526>; <https://perma.cc/5WW8-XXJL>.
- 64 Mujeres Creando (Women creating) is an anarchist feminist movement founded in 1990 in La Paz, Bolivia, by María Galindo, Julieta Paredes, and Mónica Mendoza, who use creativity as an instrument of resistance while seeking social participation and the recuperation of public space. See <https://mujerescreando.org/>.
- 65 In contrast to relational ontology, which rests on an individual understanding of consciousness, Paredes considers skin to be an element that all living people, animals, fauna, flora, and minerals share. This unity brings to life the essence of community. Julieta Paredes, “Despatriarcalización: una respuesta categórica del feminismo comunitario (descolonizando la vida),” *Revista de estudios bolivianos* 21 (2015): 100–15.
- 66 On Senga Nengudi’s work, see Alex Greenberger, “Pulled Bodies, Fabric Spirits, and Celebration: Senga Nengudi’s Elusive Art Finds Joy in the Everyday,” *Art in America*, April 28, 2021.
- 67 The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women has been described as a Canadian national crisis and a genocide where Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately the victims of violence.
- 68 Lynne Davis, Chris Hiller, Cherylanne James, Kristen Lloyd, Tessa Nasca, and Sara Taylor, “Complicated Pathways: Settler Canadians Learning to Re/frame Themselves and Their Relationships with Indigenous Peoples,” in *Pathways of Settler Decolonization*, ed. Lynne Davis, Jeffrey S. Denis, and Raven Sinclair (Routledge, 2019), 7. For a critique of reconciliation, see Victoria Freeman, “In Defence of Reconciliation,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 27, no. 1 (2014): 213–23.
- 69 Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (UBC Press, 2010).
- 70 Jennifer Joan Thompson, “Each/Every: CADA’s Radically Democratic Dramaturgy of Dissent,” *Theatre Survey* 61, no. 1 (2020): 6.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CUERPO Collective Body: In Search of Expansive Pedagogies

*Interview with Guadalupe Martínez by Gabriela Aceves  
Sepúlveda and Analays Álvarez Hernández<sup>1</sup>*

GABRIELA ACEVES SEPÚLVEDA (GAS) and ANALAYS ÁLVAREZ HERNÁNDEZ (AAH): Thank you, Guadalupe (Lupe), for agreeing to chat with us about your art practice and how it relates to your identity as an Argentina-born artist who lives and works in Canada. Since our volume maps the presence and contributions of such artists, we would like to focus on whether you identify as a Latinx Canadian/Latin American artist in Canada and, if so, why. Specifically, we are very interested in your current project, CUERPO, which you describe as a research-based art that employs performance art and critical pedagogies to create “embodied communities” with artists and art students based in Vancouver and Buenos Aires. We want to know how CUERPO informs your sense of self as an artist in the diaspora (fig. 12.1). Additionally, we would like to understand how your passion for building embodied communities relates to notions of identity, diaspora, and migration. This conversation also opens up the scope for discussing other factors that contribute to our sense of self, such as sensory experiences, intergenerational learning, and our connections to land and nature.

GAS: Could you share your experience of studying and growing up in Buenos Aires? What inspired your passion for art, and what did your artwork look like during that time?



12.1 View of performance, CUERPO Collective Body, 2022. Photo by Luciana Freire d'Anuniação..

GUADALUPE MARTÍNEZ (GM): Thank you for this fantastic opportunity to discuss my projects. I studied fine arts at the Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte. The setting was a precariously renovated old factory in the industrial neighbourhood of La Boca in Buenos Aires. Precariousness in Argentina has historically operated as a catalyst for artists to organize and build communities that surround, trespass, and flow through public institutions such as the university. The economic and political reality demands a fluid and dynamic attitude for the art communities to thrive. Although the public university is free, a considerable part of art education happens at private studios, where much more personalized and intimate learning occurs. Free from academic restrictions, relationships between professors and students exist as mentorships and apprenticeships. They



almost always derive from friendships that last for decades and heavily mould the city's artistic landscape.

As a young artist, I studied under the guidance of Patricio Bosch and Ana Dolores Noya, printmakers who possessed one of the largest private libraries of contemporary art and an electric printing press. Their studio fostered a thriving community of artists passionate about traditional printing techniques applied to contemporary graphic art. Within this context, I delved deep into art history and explored my understanding of art. I studied with Patricio and Ana for over a decade until I left Argentina to move to Canada. While I was completing a bachelor's degree in fine arts at a public university, their studio was the hub for most of my research, studio visits, and the production of the work that I presented at the university and in public exhibitions. Ironically, it was in their studio, Grafica P/A, that I was first introduced to performance art. This environment, with its mentors, close-knit community, and freedom from academic constraints, shaped the work of many young artists, including me, during that time.

While working with Patricio and Ana, I primarily focused on mastering techniques such as printmaking, etching, and woodcut, applying them in a contemporary context, along with conceptual approaches to graphic arts. However, within their studio, there was a separate space dedicated to research that housed an extensive library of contemporary art books that were challenging to access in Argentina at the time. There, I was exposed to the work of artists like Ana Mendieta, Rebecca Horn, Bruce Nauman, and others. These artists' works deeply interested me, especially those rooted in performance art and those that explored themes related to the body and identity. My artistic focus began shifting, and I started to experiment with incorporating printmaking into sculpture, soft sculptures, and installations.

As I neared the end of my studies, I became increasingly interested in the work of Ana Mendieta. I came across a text written by Cuban art historian Gerardo Mosquera, which gave me inspiration for my graduation

paper.<sup>2</sup> The paper was a research piece that explored the connections between Mendieta's work and the themes of ritual, death, and spirituality.

I did not realize the extent to which my upbringing and these formative experiences in Argentina had shaped my particular sensibilities and aesthetics until I moved to Canada. For instance, my early performance art projects in Canada, developed between 2011 and 2015, were heavily influenced by the concept of pilgrimage and by the transformative act of walking—a journey that transcended physical barriers and fostered a profound connection to space, the landscape, and a larger communal or cultural identity. One pivotal moment in my identity formation as a young woman occurred when I was around the age of thirteen. My friends and I embarked on a walk to Luján, a city located 68 kilometres northwest of Buenos Aires, to participate in the annual pilgrimage to the basilica of Argentina's patron saint, Our Lady of Luján. This pilgrimage, attracting over a million participants, allowed young people to experience a sense of belonging to a collective identity.

A local Catholic school organized a group of students and provided a bus that transported us halfway to our destination. Instead of walking the entire route, we started our journey in a town called Moreno and covered only 40 kilometres. We departed at 7:00 p.m., led by a small truck through the crowds of pilgrims. Becoming part of such a vast collective action was an incredibly transformative experience. The kinesthetic sensation of blending into this communal endeavour transcended the physical and became spiritual; it fundamentally informed my later fascination with “embodiment” as a means of artistic exploration. It highlighted the body's capacity to connect with the collective, transcending individual identity and thought. It allowed us to inhabit both the individual and the collective simultaneously.

We walked throughout the night and stopped at noon the following day. I distinctly recall the final kilometres, with the Basilica of Luján visible in the distance and a seemingly endless stream of people connecting the gap between us and the destination. During the journey, those in the main truck prayed and sang, and everyone joined in, creating

a transcendent and meditative experience. Walking and praying became a mantra that shifted the focus from the distance between home and Luján to the present moment itself. It was no longer about the physical journey; it was about embracing the present moment. I felt like I was disappearing. Exhausted and in pain, I held onto a metal handle at the back of the truck, closed my eyes, and surrendered to the experience. My thoughts ceased, and my will dissolved. I became the act of walking, the sound, the prayers, the people around me, the sensations, the smells, the rain's wetness—everything simultaneously heightened and dissolved.

**GAS:** Given your interest in pedagogy, performance, and conceptual art, we wonder whether you are familiar with the generation of Latin American artists who became globally known in the art world in the 2000s. Did these artists inform your practice at the time, and if so, how?

**GM:** My art education in South America profoundly influenced my understanding of modern and contemporary art history. The artists who influenced my work were deeply connected to the emotions and poetics of the region. Some of these artists have recently gained popularity in North America but were not as globally recognized during the late 1990s and early 2000s when I was in art school. Artists like Lygia Clark, Victor Grippo, Alfredo Portillos, and Ana Mendieta, writers like Clarice Lispector, Julio Cortázar, Rodolfo Kusch, Jorge Luis Borges, and Alfonsina Storni, and musicians like Caetano Veloso, Pedro Aznar, and Mercedes Sosa all contributed to shaping my understanding of what art could mean and represent in South America. It's challenging to convey how different the experience of studying art in Buenos Aires felt compared to my education in Canada. In Buenos Aires, there was a more porous relationship between university life and the broader art world, a nearly seamless integration of art with life, society, politics, and the personal psycho-emotional landscape. This environment fostered a sense of freedom and permission to experiment, to push boundaries, and to engage deeply with inquiries about the self, the social, and the political. It encouraged a raw and experimental approach

to art embedded in the present moment. The proximity to these artists and their histories was instrumental. For example, a friend's parents were friends of Victor Grippo, and I had the opportunity to visit their homes, where Grippo's artworks adorned the walls. I visited these artists' studios and interviewed many of them. I belonged to the local network of art communities, a dynamic and vibrant scene comprised of artist studios in town. Many of these artists' works respond to the uncertainty prevalent in Latin American cultures and societies. Their art emphasizes grounding oneself in the body and the present moment, representing a rawness and refuge—a deep connection between art, profound self-exploration, and societal reflection. This atmosphere fostered a radical and unique educational experience for me.

AAH: Can you explain why you moved to Canada?

GM: My family immigrated to Canada in the early 2000s. Argentina had experienced significant economic and political instability during the previous decade, which prompted my family's decision to immigrate. At that time, Canada offered more opportunities for young people and families to immigrate. Some of my siblings moved first to pursue their studies, and I followed after I completed mine in 2008. I deeply cherished, and still do, Buenos Aires; therefore, leaving the city was not an easy decision. However, I wanted to explore new possibilities in Canada and remain close to my family.

I have a strong passion for teaching, and I thought that I could build more sustainable careers in both art and education here. I worked as a waitress for the first couple of years. My bachelor's degree did not provide many job prospects in the arts sector, and I had limited connections within the artistic community. In 2010, I was accepted by the Banff Centre for an eight-week residency with artist Ken Lum, whose master class profoundly influenced my artistic growth. Additionally, Banff is a magical place that reshaped my understanding of the Canadian creative landscape. It also

introduced me to the art scene and facilitated connections with the art community in Vancouver and with artists from across Canada.

AAH: Did your studies for a master's degree in fine arts at the University of British Columbia help you to connect more with the Vancouver arts scene? Could you describe the artwork that you created while pursuing your degree, as well as the professional practice that you established after graduating?

GM: During my master's program, my focus shifted toward sculpture and materiality, including their roles in exploring the relationships between place, identity, and memory. Simultaneously, I began to explore the connection between performance and pedagogy. Collaboration has always been a significant element of my work, especially in exploring the collective body and collaborative experiences of doing, performing, and being. Around that time, I collaborated extensively with colleagues like Emilio Rojas, Nelly César Marín, and Luciana Freire D'Anunciação, many of whom I continue to collaborate with. The three participated in my final performance at the Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver. This collaboration was crucial because we formed a tight-knit community, offering support and constructive discussions that significantly influenced our artistic journeys. Some projects in which they participated included performance lectures that I conducted during teaching sessions or symposiums. They animated materials as I painted my writings about embodiment and the politics of language, or they engaged with me in choreographed works that incorporated found materials and objects into the gallery, creating a performative installation. Although my work has evolved significantly since then, my collaboration with Emilio, Nelly, and Luciana remains a central contributor to my practice.

GAS: I would like to discuss CUERPO with you, but before that, I have a question. Have the working conditions of sessional labour in Vancouver

universities affected your practice? Can you please share with us how your approach to mentorship and building transnational communities through the concept of embodied communities relates to your teaching opportunities?

GM: I have been a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia for over seven years, teaching performance art and actions, as well as occasionally other courses. I have also taught at other universities in the city, such as Emily Carr University of Art and Design and Simon Fraser University. I know there are drawbacks to sessional teaching. However, I enjoy the freedom that it offers since I am not required to participate in all of the academic obligations, which allows me a lot of time to work on my independent projects. In terms of mentoring, as soon as I started teaching, I realized that the academic space, although necessary and rich, is not sufficient for the development of artists or for the development of what, in my opinion, is the potential of art education to facilitate community building, healing, and creativity. For this reason, in 2018, I created CUERPO Collective Body, which functions as a space for sharing embodied research outside of academia. This space has allowed me to foster mentoring relationships with former students without the restrictions required in an academic setting (fig. 12.2). In this space, formal art education is somewhat diluted and expanded through personal relationships between mentor and mentee. Here, there is room for emotional, embodied, and intimate interactions to occur and for participants to share other ways of knowing that are not theoretical or technical but instead ephemeral, lived, experienced, and affective. This space has also been a site to build community, nourish friendships, find support, collaborate, share moments of suffering and joy, heal, learn, and share inquiry. This space in my practice has become the soul of my work, and in a way, all my projects are now infused with this spirit of building community, healing together, learning together, and redefining or not defining at all how the creative process has to unfold and what kind of art each artist has to make. Instead, participants share a process and let that be the guiding

12.2 View of rehearsal,  
CUERPO Collective Body,  
2022. Photo by Luciana  
Freire d'Anunciação.



principle. Having worked with students in academic settings for many years, I believe that such spaces of support are much needed. I think that these spaces have always been sites of self-discovery, which is not only important for an artist but also necessary today in the face of rhetorics that enforce narratives of destruction and hopelessness. It's imperative to help young artists find meaning in their work and to foster their resilience and their sense of reliance on themselves and their friendships.

That said, I love teaching, and I also enjoy bringing this practice into academic spaces. I do so through my courses and the events that I

organize independently, even within the university. So I am always open to the possibility of teaching full-time, with the awareness that each work setup has its benefits and drawbacks. I believe that most universities need to change many of their approaches to learning and to how they teach art. Deep changes, in my opinion, are achieved not only by diversifying a syllabus but also by changing how we learn, create, and share knowledge and by changing the value that we attribute to different ways of knowing and what knowing means.

AAH: As feminists in the diaspora, we understand that our identities as artists, scholars, and/or researchers are not separate from our daily lived experience, from our families, from our friends, from our mentors, from our partners. Thinking about that, how has motherhood and/or parenting transformed your identity as an artist?

GM: Motherhood has been a transformative experience for me. It has made me more attuned to life's fragility, the significance of each moment, and the interplay between life and death. It has brought me closer to the present moment, fostering a desire for authenticity and a commitment to creating work that truly resonates with me. However, motherhood has not yet become a central theme in my art. It has influenced my life and perspectives but has not directly impacted my artistic practice. Certainly, traditions of matriarchal wisdom and the feminist practice of collective sharing have impacted my work and views of intergenerational mentoring.

AAH: Mentorship is a crucial aspect of an art pedagogy approach. Can you share how your fellowship with Catherine Soussloff influenced the development of CUERPO?

GM: In 2016, I received a grant for a mentorship with art historian and professor Catherine Soussloff, one of the former advisors on my master's thesis. The mentorship focused both on exploring the potential of men-



torship within and beyond academic settings and on utilizing performance art to develop embodied approaches to teaching and learning within the university. Soussloff, as my advisor, had previously guided me into the depths of embodiment and performance art theory. Having lived and worked in Santa Cruz, California, for many years, she had collaborated extensively with artists of the Latin American diaspora. This shared background was invaluable and created a familiarity and understanding that enriched our collaborative work. With this mentorship grant, we engaged in extensive discussions, readings, and writing. We developed syllabuses for potential courses in performance studies. Subsequently, I travelled to Argentina and established a small research program at the Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas in Buenos Aires. I invited three performance artists to lead workshops and discussions. We held four open sessions, attended by around twenty local artists, during which we shared exercises, literature, and transformative learning experiences. These encounters profoundly shaped our understanding of performance art, community, and its transformative potential. This approach to embodied research became clearer to me through these experiences.

In 2018, after teaching my first performance art and actions class at one of Vancouver's universities, several students expressed a desire to continue exploring performance art through embodied practice. I had been developing research in performance art and pedagogy for some time and was eager to create a space to develop these new methodologies. That is when I founded CUERPO Collective Body with some former students.

GAS: Could you explain what CUERPO is?

GM: The name CUERPO is derived from the Spanish word for "body." The term "collective body" is drawn from Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, who explored the sensory potential of art as a therapeutic endeavour. CUERPO, as a collective body, represents a collaborative and organized approach, functioning as a larger organism. It allows us to collectively share our sensory experiences, both individually and together.

CUERPO serves as a platform for embodied exploration inside and outside of academic institutions. It places the artist's body at the centre of the learning process, liberating the body-mind-self. CUERPO seeks to occupy spaces that often disembodiment individuals within academic and artistic institutions. It integrates and shares a gestalt of knowledge that is focused on care, listening, breath awareness, and sensory recognition. It fosters ways of knowing that prioritize the body, the sensory, intimacy, intergenerational learning, and connections to nature and the land.

CUERPO aims to promote a vision of worldmaking by co-creating a reality that thrives on attunement and lived experiences. It acknowledges the wisdom of perennial and matriarchal traditions rooted in the present. The project encourages embodied and collaborative exploration, intending to create a world that aligns with our feelings and imaginations, both individually and collectively.

The projects arising from this collective engagement focus on living and knowing, acknowledging both what we have access to and what we cannot access. They reflect a desire to understand the limits of knowledge and the necessity of experiencing life. CUERPO believes in creating worlds through sensorial visibility, allowing individuals to interact with and to shape the world that they want to live in.

Since its inception in 2018, CUERPO has presented work at various venues, including Or Gallery in Vancouver (2020), FUSE at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2018), and City of Vancouver Public Art Programs (2019 and 2022).

AAH: This project touches on many fascinating subjects and relates to how our collective and individual identities are constructed. How does one become part of CUERPO?

GM: It's usually through meeting me or the collective via a project, workshop, or class. Often people who experience my approaches to performance research express interest in continuing the embodied practice. I

usually contact participants when starting a new project, as I fund them through individual grants or sometimes through commissions or public programs. Ultimately, people get in touch with me, and it's a very organic unfolding of community building.

GAS: We noticed that you switched from using the first person to the third person when describing CUERPO. Is this a crucial aspect of its methodology? Additionally, how do you handle authorship when organizing exhibitions or events related to CUERPO, and how does that impact your identity as an artist?

GM: Yes, you've highlighted an interesting aspect of CUERPO's methodology and structure. The shift from first person to third person reflects the dual nature of CUERPO. On the one hand, it is a project that I conceive conceptually, manage, direct, and produce. It embodies my research methodologies and approaches. On the other hand, CUERPO truly comes to life through the participants and the collective experience when we create together. It's a project in the interplay between individual and collective contributions.

Regarding authorship, it's a shared endeavour. Although CUERPO's projects are often associated with my name, the authorship of what is created during these projects is collective. Whether we produce performances, pieces of writing, or other forms of artistic expression, credit is shared among all participants. Everyone involved has access to the documentation and outputs of the project. This approach aligns with CUERPO's ethos of collaborative exploration and learning.

As for how this authorship impacts my identity as an artist, it reinforces the idea that my role is not just that of an individual artist but also that of a facilitator and collaborator. It emphasizes the collective aspect of artmaking and highlights the importance of the community in shaping the outcomes. In many ways, CUERPO has expanded my understanding of authorship and artistic identity, making each a more fluid and collaborative concept.

AAH: Thanks for sharing your experiences, Lupe. To conclude our conversation, could you tell us how you define yourself? Do the categories Latinx and Latin American speak to you at all? For instance, earlier in this conversation, you used “South America” instead of “Latin America” when speaking about artists from South America who influenced your work. Did the category of Latin American art make sense when you were based in Buenos Aires? Does it make sense now? What do you think of the current academic and cultural environment in Canada, where identity politics has the potential to open up more opportunities to artists with a Latin American background?

GM: The term “Latin American” is often used to group together cultures, bodies, countries, and identities, but the reality of what is currently referred to as Latin America is much more intricate than a single term can capture. Each country in this region has a unique culture and history. It is thus inaccurate to group Argentina with Central or North American countries, even in the northern part of South America. That said, my relationship to the term changed when I arrived in Canada.

When I researched Ana Mendieta’s work and read her journals, I came across an anecdote that struck a chord with me. She mentioned that she was not considered a woman of colour in Cuba but became one when she moved to the United States. I could relate to this shift in subject position, as I had experienced a similar transformation when I moved from Argentina to Canada. I then encountered a new understanding of “Latin American.” For instance, it has connotations or implications in the United States that differ from its meaning in Canada, and its usefulness can vary depending on the context. Today, I identify as a Latin American artist in Canada, but I don’t see this as the sole defining aspect of my work and research. My interests span broad themes, philosophies, and histories encompassing Western and non-Western traditions. I believe that definitions can be helpful and valuable but have limitations. They create boundaries and borders. In my opinion, the key is to navigate the ethical and artful use of these definitions, knowing when and how to

employ them and, most importantly, what end they serve. It is possible to use definitions as tools for understanding and establishing connections rather than as rigid constraints.

#### NOTES

- 1 This conversation was conducted via email on August 21, 2023.
- 2 Gerardo Mosquera, “Arte, religión y diferencia cultural,” *Replica 21: obsesiva compulsión por lo visual*, October 4, 2000, [https://replica21.com/archivo/articulos/m\\_n/037\\_mosquera\\_mendieta.html](https://replica21.com/archivo/articulos/m_n/037_mosquera_mendieta.html); <https://perma.cc/XBS6-FWC5>.



## Contributors

GABRIELA ACEVES SEPÚLVEDA is an associate professor in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University, where she directs the research-creation space criticalMediaArtStudio (cMAS) and teaches media arts production, theory, and history. Her research centres on the histories of women and feminism(s) at the intersection of art, media, science, and technology, as well as Latin American art and archival practices. She is the author of the award-winning book *Women Made Visible: Feminist Art and Media in Post-1968 Mexico* (2019). As an interdisciplinary artist, she produces collaborative multimedia projects that investigate the body as a site of cultural, gendered, and techno-scientific inscription. Recent works have been exhibited at the Surrey Art Gallery's outdoor venue UrbanScreen (2022) and at Mónica Reyes Gallery in Vancouver (2024).

ANALAYS ÁLVAREZ HERNÁNDEZ is an associate professor in the Department of Art History, Cinema, and Audiovisual Media at Université de Montréal. Her research interests include public art, global art histories, Latinx Canadian art, and decoloniality. She is the author of *Climbing Aboard: Havana Apartment-Galleries and International Art Circuits* (2023) and has co-edited issues for the journals *RACAR* and *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*. As an independent curator, Álvarez Hernández has organized several exhibitions, including *The Recipe: Making Latin*

*American Art in Canada* (Sur Gallery, Toronto, 2018; OBORO, Montreal, 2020) and *On Americanness and Other Experiences of Belonging* (Onsite Gallery, Toronto, 2023).

NURIA CARTON DE GRAMMONT is an art historian, curator, and lecturer based in Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyaang/Montreal. She holds a doctorate in art history from Concordia University and two postdoctoral fellowships from the Centre for International Studies and Research and the Department of Geography at the Université de Montréal. She has published many articles, and she co-edited the book *Politics, Culture and Economy in Popular Practices in the Americas* (2016). As a curator, she is drawn to projects that promote pluralization and decolonial practices in the arts. Her exhibitions have been presented in Quebec and Mexico, and she is currently director of the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal.

PATRICIO DÁVILA and IMMONY MÈN are members of Public Visualization Studio (PVS), a collective of designers, artists, creative technologists, and researchers. As collaborators, they create projects to investigate political and conceptual aspects of interaction, participation, community, space, and media. They explore how specific technologies of vision, communication, and gesture support experiences and memories in participatory spaces. Dávila and Mèn have exhibited nationally and internationally. They have worked in a variety of areas, including public projection, media architecture, locative media, video installation, exhibition design, interaction, communication design, data visualization, and media scholarship. PVS works in collaboration with the Public Visualization Lab (PVL), a university-based lab in Toronto. Patricio's research/practice focuses on the politics and aesthetics of participation in information visualization, large-scale interactive public installations, and curation projects. Immony's research focuses on developing a theoretical framework for understanding Khmer/Cambodian diasporic experience through media praxis, critical race theory, and various forms of community engagement.



ANAHÍ GONZÁLEZ is a Mexican photographer based in London, Ontario, who explores visual narratives of Mexican labour within Canada. She has served as programming and fundraising chair at Forest City Gallery and has curated exhibitions at McIntosh Gallery, ArtLab, and Jeffrey Rubinoff Park. She received an award from Jóvenes Creadores in 2021–22 and participated in the AGO × RBC Emerging Artist Exchange in 2022. Her work has been shown in Mexico, Canada, the United States, Norway, Spain, and France. She is a contributing editor at the Embassy Cultural House and is a doctoral candidate at Western University.

ARGELIA GONZÁLEZ HURTADO is an associate professor of Spanish and Latin American studies at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She earned her doctorate from the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on the intersection of Latin American and Latinx studies, contemporary media, Indigenous media, and Latin American cinema. Her recent work examines the role of landscape in Latin American cinema, as well as the representation of women and violence in film. In 2024, she co-edited the book *Cinematic Landscape and Emerging Identities in Contemporary Latin American Film*.

FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS is an artist and doctoral candidate in Media and Design Innovation at Toronto Metropolitan University. Since 2005, his visual practice has traced his movement from convention refugee to critical citizen, enacting site-specific and relational abstraction to create projects that challenge the stability of practices of recognition. Some of his major exhibitions include *who claims abstraction?* (2023–24) at SFU Galleries, *foreward* (2021–23) at the MacLaren Art Centre, and *duet* at the Art Gallery of Peterborough and the Robert McLaughlin Gallery. He has also participated in international group shows on contemporary queer aesthetics at the Hessel Museum (2015) and Ramapo College (2016) in the United States and at Malmö Konstmuseum (2022) in Sweden. Since 2012, Granados has taught art and theory in various capacities at Ontario

College of Art and Design University and at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

ADONAY GUERRERO CORTÉS is a Mexican Canadian filmmaker and screenwriter teaching media production and Latin American cinema at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He earned a master's degree in film production from York University, where he developed his thesis project, *Hidden Gods* (2013). He also holds a bachelor's degree in audiovisual arts from the Universidad de Guadalajara. Guerrero's films have been featured in festivals such as San Diego Comic-Con and the Edmonton International Film Festival. His short film *Distant Altars* (2019) received funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. His work encompasses fiction and documentary projects, including *Making Sones and Memories* (2013).

AMANDA GUTIÉRREZ is a doctoral candidate at Concordia University in the Arts and Humanities program. She explores the intersection of political listening and gender studies through soundwalking practices. A graduate in stage design from the National School of Theater in Mexico City, Gutiérrez uses a range of digital media tools to investigate everyday life's aural agencies and collective identities. Approaching these questions from aural perspectives continues to be of particular interest to Gutiérrez, who completed her master of fine arts degree in Media and Performance Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

LOIS KLASSEN (she/her) is an artist, writer, and researcher who works and lives on traditional and unceded Coast Salish territory in what is known as Vancouver, Canada. Klassen's writing has appeared in *Public Journal*, *The Conversation*, *Parse*, *Fillip*, and elsewhere. Klassen has been a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at criticalMediArtStudio (cMAS), Simon Fraser University, and she was a 2020 Fulbright scholar at the Center for Inter-American Border Studies and the Ruben Center for the Visual Arts, University of Texas El Paso. Lois Klassen is the founder of Light Factory

Publications, which circulates publication-based art projects, including Reading the Migration Library and Present Cartographers.

GUADALUPE MARTÍNEZ, originally from Argentina, has worked and lived in Canada since 2008. She is an artist, educator, and mother whose practice explores performance, pedagogy, and place, with the intention of creating spaces of connection, healing, and worldmaking. Her ongoing project, CUERPO Collective Body, is a process that explores embodied research and somatic creation. Martínez holds a master of fine arts degree from the University of British Columbia, where she teaches approaches to performance art. Her work has been exhibited extensively in Argentina, the United States, Italy, Mexico, and Canada at venues such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, the SFU Art Gallery, Or Gallery, the Belkin Art Gallery, VIVA Art Action, and Latitude 53.

MANUEL PIÑA-BALDOQUÍN, born in Havana in 1958, is a Cuban Canadian artist, teacher, and spiritual activist based in Vancouver. After a few years as a mechanical engineer, he began his artistic practice in the early 1990s. Piña-Baldoquín's work is concerned with the tensions between power and individual freedom. Earlier works consisted of urban landscapes through which he interrogated the urban environment as a place and embodiment of this relationship. His current art projects and pedagogical practice investigate the ongoing impact of technology on contemporary art and vernacular approaches to image making and dissemination. His works appropriate the visual language arising from these conditions to explore its potential as a means of social emancipation. Piña-Baldoquín's work has been exhibited in the Americas and Europe at the Havana and Istanbul Biennials, Kunsthalle (Vienna), Grey Gallery (New York), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Daros Museum (Zurich), Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Projects (New York), and the Bronx Museum (New York). He is an associate professor in the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

DAISY QUEZADA UREÑA (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist and an associate professor and associate academic dean at the Institution of American Indian Arts in 'Ogap'oge, known as Santa Fe, New Mexico. Within her practice, she creates ceramic works, installations, and artists' books that thematically connect to ideas around identity and place in relation to social structures that cross imposed borders. As a national and international exhibiting artist, her work has been featured at Summerhall (Edinburg, Scotland), the New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum (New Taipei, Taiwan), the Korean Ceramic Foundation (Icheon, South Korea), and the Denver Art Museum (Colorado), as well as in *Women's Work*, an exhibition at the Lyndhurst Mansion in Tarrytown, New York. Quezada Ureña was named one of fifteen Latinx artist fellows for 2023 by the US Latinx Art Forum.

ALENA ROBIN is an associate professor and chair in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University in London, Ontario. Her research focuses on religious art from colonial Mexico and the history of collections and exhibitions of art from Latin America in Canada. She is the author of *Las capillas del Vía Crucis de la ciudad de México* (2014). She is a co-editor, with María del Carmen Suescun Pozas, of *Latin America Made in Canada* (2022) and a co-editor, with Analays Álvarez Hernández, of "Latin American Art(ists) from/in Canada: Expanding Narratives, Territories, and Perspectives," a section of the journal *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* (2022).

DARIEN SÁNCHEZ NICOLÁS is an instructor cross-appointed to the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Humanities, Philosophy, and Religion at John Abbott College in Montreal. He earned a doctorate in Film and Moving Image Studies from the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concordia University. He was a postdoctoral fellow at Queen's University's Vulnerable Media Lab. He has also worked as a

film pre-screener and programmer for the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), the LatinArte Festival, and the South Asian International Film Festival of Montreal.

SARAH SHAMASH is a practising media artist, scholar, educator, and curator. Her artworks comprise the use a wide variety of media formats, such as installation, documentary, photography, sound, performance, and video. Her works have been shown in curated exhibitions and film festivals internationally and have been awarded numerous academic and arts council grants. She currently holds a position as an assistant professor of Critical and Cultural Studies at Emily Carr University. Her doctoral research was on an archive of films in Brazil known as *Vídeo nas Aldeias (VNA)*. Her work as an artist, researcher, educator, and programmer can be understood as interconnected and whole; it all revolves around a passion for cinema as a pluriversal art. She lives on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh First Nations in what is known as Vancouver.

TAMARA TOLEDO (PhD) is the director/curator of Sur Gallery in Toronto, the only space dedicated to contemporary Latin American art in Canada. Her curatorial and scholarly research focuses on hemispheric connections, decolonial methodologies, diasporic exhibitions, and aesthetics of resistance. She has published in, among others, the *ARM Journal*, *C Magazine*, *Fuse*, *Canadian Art*, and the *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture Journal*. She has shared her research through talks, exhibition tours, lectures, panels, symposiums, and conferences in Canada, Colombia, the United States, and Mexico. Toledo is the co-founder of the nonprofit arts organization Latin American Canadian Art Projects (LACAP), and she has conceived, curated, and developed the Latin American Speakers Series, the digital archive ARCHIVO, and a symposium on Latin American and Latinx art in Canada.

ZAIRA ZARZA is an associate professor in the Department of Art History, Cinema, and Audiovisual Media at Université de Montréal/Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang. Her research interests include the cinemas of the diaspora and the economies of film and media in Latin America and the Caribbean. As a programmer, she has worked at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the Cartagena International Film Festival (FICCI). She also directed the 2019 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Film Festival in Boston. Zarza published the book *Caminos del cine brasileño contemporáneo* (Ediciones ICAIC) in 2010 and co-curated the exhibition *L'espace de plateformes* (Carrefour des Arts et de Sciences de l'Université de Montréal, 2023–24). Her academic writing has also appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, *Intermedialités*, and *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas*.

## List of Images

- 2.1 Postcard for *Xeno Walk*, 2021.
- 2.2 *Xeno Walk* at Champs des Possibles, Montreal, 2021. Photo by Alexis Bellavance.
- 2.3 Collage intervention by Collages Féministes Montréal for the march against gender violence in Montreal, 2021. Photo by Amanda Gutiérrez.
- 3.1 Film still, Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana, from on High*, 2019.
- 3.2 Film still, Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana, from on High*, 2019.
- 3.3 Film still, Pedro Ruiz, dir., *Sur les toits Havane/Havana, from on High*, 2019.
- 4.1 Film still, Adonay Guerrero Cortés, dir., *El hijo del Santo/The Son of Santo*, 2008.
- 4.2 Film still, Adonay Guerrero Cortés, dir., *Dioses ocultos/Hidden Gods*, 2014.
- 5.1 Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, untitled black and white photo in the series *Aguas baldías* (Water Wastelands), 1992–94.
- 5.2 Video still, Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufraños* (Shipwrecks), 2015, two-channel video installation, 15:38 mins.
- 5.3 Video still, Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufraños* (Shipwrecks), 2015, two-channel video installation, 15:38 mins.
- 6.1 View of Livia Daza-Paris's solo exhibition, *L'arbre blessé/The Wounded Tree*, 2023, curated by Nuria Carton de Grammont, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal. Photo © Freddy Arciniegas—Arcpixel.
- 6.2 View of performance, Pilar Escobar, *Canto, río, río, lloro* (I Sing, I Laugh, I Laugh, I Cry), 2022. Part of the exhibition *Confluences: River Rights/Rites*

- de rivière*, curated by Gwynne Fulton, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal. Photo © Freddy Arciniegas—Arcpixel.
- 7.1 Anahí González, photo documentation of billboard installation in the series *Allá más al Norte* (Further North), 2022, London, Ontario.
  - 7.2 Greg Curnoe, *America October 21, 1988*, 1988, colour lithograph, 60.8 × 45.7 cm. McIntosh Gallery Collection, Western University. Gift of Anonymous Donor, 2014.
  - 7.3 Exhibition poster, *Siting Resistance*, 1990. Image courtesy of Embassy Cultural House, London, Ontario.
  - 7.4 José Bedia, untitled mural, 1990s, Embassy Hotel, London, Ontario. Photo courtesy of Embassy Cultural House.
  - 8.1 Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, chronocyclegraph of a woman staking buttons, 1917. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
  - 8.2 Interface for the Bio Motion Lab demonstration that allows a user to generate different gaits.
  - 8.3 Photo of Immony's mother teaching her son how to make *banh ciao* (crepe), 2019.
  - 8.4 Motion data editing of Immony's crepe-making recording.
  - 8.5 Photo of Patricio's father sharing his experience of growing food, 2019.
  - 8.6 Digital-human version of Patricio's father clothed in digital clothing and animated by motion capture data.
  - 8.7 Photo documentation of gestural reference, Khmer Apsara, Angkor Wat, Cambodia, 2017.
  - 8.8 Postcard and background for virtual events, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Passing Through the Heart*, 2019–23.
  - 8.9 Screenshot of participants, ISEA2020 online conference, October 13–16, 2020.
  - 8.10 View of installation, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Receipts*, 2021, Bentway Conservancy, Toronto.
  - 8.11 Online records detailing various incidents of anti-Asian violence and racism during COVID-19.
  - 8.12 Photo of Immony recording motion for installation, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Receipts*, 2021.
  - 8.13 View of installation, Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Fabulous Ones*, 2022, Nuit Blanche, York University.



- 8.14 Photo of the creature Alicanto, in Patricio Dávila and Immony Mèn, *Fabulous Ones*, 2022.
- 9.1 Cover of Sylvia Arthur, Lois Klassen, and Daisy Quezada, eds., *Terreno: Borderland Linguistics* (Light Factory Publications, 2017), with image by Israel F. Haros Lopez, from his self-published zine, *Mexican Jazz: A Chicano Poetry Codex* (2016). Photo by Clare Yow.
- 9.2 Present Cartographers collective, Santa Fe Art Institute, 2017. Photo by Robert Gómez Hernández.
- 9.3 Cover of Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), with image by Daisy Quezada Ureña and embossed title text.
- 9.4 Brandon Armijo of Jemez Pueblo and Santo Domingo Pueblo setting up *bosque brotante* cover pages for embossing on a laser-etched plate, IAIA Printmaking Studio, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2021. Photo by Daisy Quezada Ureña.
- 9.5 Cover and interior of Gabriela Galíndez, *Notas sobre un recorrido: el Centro de Procesamiento de El Paso/Notes on a Tour: The El Paso Processing Center* (Reading the Migration Library, 2021). Photo by Clare Yow.
- 9.6 Cover of Carlos Colín, *Tierra y Libertad/Little México* (Reading the Migration Library, 2020). Photo by Clare Yow.
- 9.7 Cover of Francisco-Fernando Granados, *Waves* (Reading the Migration Library, 2017). Photo by Clare Yow.
- 9.8 Interior of Kattia Samayoa, *Paisanos* (Reading the Migration Library, 2017). Photo by Clare Yow.
- 9.9 Spread of Sylvia Arthur, Lois Klassen, and Daisy Quezada, eds., *Terreno: Borderland Linguistics* (Light Factory Publications, 2017), 18–19, with an image titled *distal-proximal* and text by Gelare Khoshgozaran.
- 9.10 Professor Manuel Robles Flores, with Oralia Prieto Gomez, Susana Landeros Moreno, and Ana Jazmin Rodriguez, in Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), 32. Photo by Daisy Quezada Ureña.
- 9.11 Cochiti Dam outlet to the Rio Grande, in Daisy Quezada Ureña et al., *bosque brotante*, ed. Lois Klassen (Light Factory Publications, 2020), 21. Photo by Daisy Quezada Ureña.
- 10.1 Poster for Sarah Shamash and Sonia Medel, dirs., *From Chile to Canada: Media Herstories*, 2022.

- 11.1 View of performance, Claudia Bernal, *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood), 2008. Photo courtesy of the artist.
- 11.2 View of performance, Claudia Bernal, *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Made of the Same Blood), 2008. Photo courtesy of the artist.
- 11.3 View of performance, Helena Martín Franco, *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (Altero(s)filia or The Weight Games of Fritta Caro), 2018, Le Parc des Hommes-Forts, Montreal. Photo courtesy of the artist.
- 11.4 View of performance, Helena Martín Franco, *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (Altero(s)filia or The Weight Games of Fritta Caro), 2018, Le Parc des Hommes-Forts, Montreal. Photo courtesy of the artist.
- 11.5 View of installation, María Ezcurra, *Invisible*, 2005–16. Image courtesy of Sur Gallery, Toronto.
- 11.6 View of installation, María Ezcurra, *Ni una más* (Not One More), 2003. Photo courtesy of the artist.
- 12.1 View of performance, CUERPO Collective Body, 2022. Photo by Luciana Freire d'Anunciação.
- 12.2 View of rehearsal, CUERPO Collective Body, 2022. Photo by Luciana Freire d'Anunciação.

# Index

(f) indicates pages with figures.

Abya Yala, 277, 295n2, 330n46. *See also* Global North and South

academia: about, xii–xvi, 15–17, 25–28, 146–49; Canada Research Chairs, 16, 36n56; community networks, 334–35, 337–43; critiques of, xv, 193, 342; decolonization, 5, 276, 304–305; epistemic violence, xvi, 8, 281–82, 284; funding, 7–8, 146; institutional change, 181–83; key questions, 5; Latinx and Latinx Canadian barriers, xv, 24, 148–49, 155–56; Latinx scholarship, 24–30; Latinx underrepresentation, xii–xiv, 25–28, 148–49, 173, 302–306; lived experience, xiv, xvi, 8–9, 141–46, 155–56, 160–61; mentorships, 342–43; positions as adjunct, part-time, and sessionals, xv, 16–17, 148–49, 277–78, 339–42; positions as tenure track, xiii–xiv, 16, 148–49; research-creation practice, 7–8, 46, 81, 257, 291, 349. *See also* film and media studies; performance art; visual arts

academia, universities and colleges, 25–26. *See also* Montreal, universities and colleges; Ontario, universities and colleges; Toronto region, universities and colleges; Vancouver, universities and colleges

Aceves Sepúlveda, Gabriela: about, xiii, 349; *From Chile to Canada* (film, 2022), 292–94, 293(f); education and career, xi–xiii, 292, 349; interview with Martínez, 333–47; interview with Piña-Baldoquín, 21, 49–50, 151–67; introduction, 3–41; preface, xi–xvii

Ackerman, Zarah, 72

Acosta, Ricardo, 22

acoustic ecology, 84–85, 96. *See also* sound; soundwalking

activism: aesthetic actions, 255, 262, 264–67; barriers to alliances, 91–94; body as site of activism, 192–93; collective walking, 47, 82, 87–91; decoloniality, 98–99, 318–21; against extractivism, 134, 148, 308, 311; Four R's, 266–67; Indigenous creators, 147; media activism, 284–86; soundwalking, 47, 82, 85, 87–94, 98–99. *See also* decolonization; resistance

aesthetic actions, 255, 262, 264–67

affective solidarity and dissonance, 47, 94

affirmative sabotage, 45, 55, 78n4

Africa: African Film Festival, 38n69; modernist art, 281; mythical creatures (*Fabulous Ones*), 248; Third Cinema, 280

African Americans, 6, 173, 181, 303, 323–24, 332n66. *See also* Black people

- Afro-Caribbean, 48, 105, 107–108, 113–14, 118, 121
- AGO. *See* Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO)
- Ahmed, Sarah, 97, 101n27
- AKA Collective, Vancouver, 21, 31n1, 38n67, 158
- Akhavan, Abbas, 63
- Albán Achinte, Adolfo, 318
- Alberta: Banff Centre, 212, 213–14, 338–39; Edmonton, 49, 130, 137–43, 352; SpanicArts, Calgary, 41n91
- Albuquerque, New Mexico, 257–58, 263–64, 272n3
- Allen, Lillian, 213
- alliances and solidarity: about, xv, 29–30; affective solidarity and dissonance, 47, 94; barriers to alliances, 91–94; communities as networks, 29–30; decolonization, 98–99, 190–91. *See also* Indigenous peoples, connections with diasporic peoples
- Alom, Juan Carlos, 152, 158–59
- alternative organizations. *See* artist-run centres
- Álvarez Hernández, Analays: about, xiii, 349–50; education and career, xiii, 349–50; interview with Carton de Grammont, 51–52, 169–83; interview with Martínez, 333–47; introduction, 3–41; *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* (2022), 25–26, 39n80; Latinx terminology, 66, 196–97; life in Cuba, xiii, 182; preface, xi–xvii
- Álvarez, Natalie, 66
- América invertida* (Torres-García, 1943), 4, 205
- Anderson, Benedict, 112
- Andrade, Oswald de, 283, 297n19
- Andrade, Sonia, 291–92
- anti-racism. *See* racism and discrimination
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, 8, 185, 189–90, 287–88, 291, 308, 310–11, 315–16
- Appadurai, Arjun, 111
- Aquelarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294
- Aquila, Luiz, 23
- Arab Canadians, 10
- Aranda, José F., Jr., 282
- Araneda, Cecilia, 17, 27–28
- Arcand, Denys, 112
- Argentina: dictatorship, 321, 331n62, 338; diffracting the North, 3–4; disappeared (*los desaparecido/as*), 192, 321; Luján, 336–37; Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 321, 331n62; migration to Canada, 12, 14, 199; performance art, 335–36, 343; pilgrimages and collective identity, 336–37; precariousness of artists, 334; #VIVAS (sound collective), 81, 86–87, 95–96, 98–99. *See also* Ezcurra, María; Martínez, Guadalupe (Lupe)
- Argote, Iván, 19
- Arias, Ana, 215
- Armony, Victor, 10–11, 33n23
- Arreaza Camero, Emperatriz, 27
- Arriba Habana* (film). *See* *Sur les toits Havane* (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019)
- AR (augmented reality) sound, 81–82, 86–87, 87(f), 90, 96
- Arte ≠ Vida* (exhibition, 2008), 329n34
- Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO): about, 15, 221nn35–36; *Camelô* (1998), 209; donations, 36n52, 210, 213; emerging artists program (AGO × RBC), 209–10, 351; Latin American collection, 36n52, 198, 202, 208–11, 213, 221nn35–36; performance art, 77; *10 Brazilian Artists/ 10 artistes brésiliens* (1975), 202, 218n10; *As If Sand Were Stone* (2017), 36n52, 209–10, 213, 221nn35–36

- Arthur, Sylvia, 256(f), 257, 266(f), 272n1
- art institutions, galleries and museums:  
about, 15–24, 304–306; decolonization,  
304–306; demographics of artists, 305,  
328n13; global art exchanges, 16, 24–25;  
global markets, 35n51; Latin Amer-  
ican art, 15–17, 35n51; Latinx Canadian  
barriers, 17, 24; university galleries, 216;  
visibility/invisibility of arts, xiv–xv, 181,  
267, 301–306, 310–11, 330n34. *See also*  
artist-run centres; Latinx and Latinx  
Canadianness
- art institutions, galleries, and museums,  
regions, 25–26, 186–87. *See also* London,  
Ontario, galleries, museums, and artist-  
run centres; Montreal, galleries, mu-  
seums, and artist-run centres; Toronto,  
galleries, museums, and artist-run  
centres; Vancouver, galleries, museums,  
and artist-run centres
- artist-run centres: about, 7, 17–21, 216,  
337–38; community connections, 334–35,  
337–38; Indigenous artists, 18–20; pre-  
cariousness as catalyst, 334, 338; women's  
influences, 21
- artist-run centres, specific: AXENÉO7, 77;  
Forest City Gallery, 197, 207, 213, 216,  
220n22, 351; Mónica Reyes Gallery, 21,  
31n1, 158–59, 349; SpanicArts, 41n91; Sur  
Gallery, 19–20, 21, 37nn64–65, 322(f),  
325, 355; TAP Centre for Creativity,  
197, 214–16, 221n47, 222n51. *See also*  
CUERPO Collective Body; Embassy  
Cultural House, London, Ontario;  
Light Factory Publications, New  
Mexico; SBC Gallery of Contemporary  
Art, Montreal
- Artlab Gallery, Western University:  
about, 197, 216; *Brazil/Canada* (2022),  
204–205, 219n19; on mining industries,  
203–205; *Mountains & Rivers Without  
End* (2016), 203–204; *The Other Neigh-  
bour of El Otro Lado* (2021), 199–201,  
217n4; performance art (2011), 74
- Asian diasporic communities: anti-Asian  
violence, 142, 229, 241, 243–47,  
244(f)–245(f). *See also* Cambodia; Mèn,  
Immony
- As If Sand Were Stone* (exhibition, 2017),  
36n52, 209–10, 213, 221nn35–36
- asylum. *See* migration, refugees
- Atsui Gallery, Vancouver, 159
- augmented reality (AR) sound, 81–82,  
86–87, 87(f), 90, 96
- aural studies. *See* sound; soundwalking
- Ayala, Esteban, 203–204
- Ayón Manso, Belkis, 16
- Back Gallery Projects. *See* Mónica Reyes  
Gallery, Vancouver
- Badiou, Alain, 280
- Baillargeon, Mercédès, 111–12
- Banerjee, Subhankar, 263
- Banff Centre, Alberta, 212, 213–14, 338–39
- Barclay, Barry, 279
- Bassnett, Sarah, 204, 219n17
- Becher, H.C.R., 195–96, 217n2
- Bedia, José, 210, 212–14, 212(f)
- Belkin Art Gallery, 339
- Bello, Juan, 204
- Belmore, Rebecca, 61, 63
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio, 47–48, 105, 119–20
- Benner, Ron: about, 198, 210–11, 213–14;  
AGO's Latin American art, 187, 198,  
210–11; artwork donations, 210, 213;  
Embassy Cultural House, 211–12; life in  
Mexico, 201–202, 211
- Benner, Tom, 201, 201–202
- Berdichewsky, Bernardo, 13
- Bergeron-Langlois, Philémon, 115

- Bernal, Claudia: about, 191–92, 301–302, 311–16, 326; body as site of decolonization, 191–92, 301–303, 307–308, 326; decoloniality, 301–309, 316–21, 326; *Hechos de la misma sangre* (2008), 311–16, 313(f), 314(f), 330n36; Indigenous connections, 301, 311–12; “It’s Happening Now” (2019), 305–306; Latinx and Latinx Canadian identity, 176, 179; life in Canada, 308–11; life in Colombia, 309–15
- Bertazzo, Diane, 16
- Bertrand, Karine, 111–12
- Bhabha, Homi, 111, 130
- Biennial of Performance Art, Vancouver (2007), 67, 69
- Black people: African Americans, 6, 173, 181, 303, 323–24, 332n66; Afro-Caribbean culture, 118–19; anti-Black racism, 119; Black Cuban identity, 50–51, 158–62; Black feminism, 298n34; coloniality of power, 131–32; Combahee River Collective, 298n34; community networks, 50–51; *negritud*, 158–59; visibility/invisibility of arts, 303. *See also* Piña-Baldoquín, Manuel
- Bodmer, Catherine, 180
- body: about, 301–302, 326; absence of bodies, 301, 321, 324, 326; communitarian feminism (*feminismo comunitario*), 305, 323, 327n11; embodiment as art exploration, 326; remembering with body and senses (*recordando*), 223, 228–30; resiliency, 301–302, 321–24; as site of decolonization, 191–92, 301–308, 316–22, 326; skin and unity of life, 323–24, 332n65; skin colour, 132, 135, 141–42, 181; virtual body animations, 238–39, 238(f). *See also* CUERPO Collective Body; performance art; sound; soundwalking
- Bolivia, 323, 327n11, 329n28, 332n64
- book publishing. *See* publishers and publications
- Borges, Jorge Luis, 247–48
- Boror, Marilyn, 19
- Bosch, Patricio, 335
- bosque brotante* (Quezada Ureña et al, 2020): about, 190, 257–58, 258(f), 259(f), 263–72; aesthetic actions, 255, 262, 264–67; ceramics, 258, 263–64; community libraries, 258, 264; contributors and editors, 257–58, 269(f), 273n5; environmental issues, 268–72, 270(f); Rio Grande region, 190, 257, 268–72, 270(f). *See also* Quezada Ureña, Daisy
- Botero, Fernando, 202
- Boyce, Sonia, 212
- Bratt, Peter, 288
- Brault, Christine, 180
- Bravo, Enrique, 215
- Brazil: *Brazil/Canadá* (exhibition, 2022), 204–205, 219n19; dictatorship, 292; diffracting the North, 3–4; *Divisor* (Pape, 1968), 193; Indigenous peoples, 20, 289–90; migration to Canada, 14–15; performance art, 46, 193; photo testimony, 204–205. *See also* Shamash, Sarah
- Brazil, film and media: cultural cannibalism, 283, 297n19; film aesthetics of garbage, 278–79, 291–92, 296n7; “Manifesto antropófago” (essay, Andrade), 283, 297n19; modernism (1922–45), 281–83; *Sekhbedese* (2024), 290; Third Cinema, 191, 277–80, 284–86, 288–89, 296n5; Video nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages), 285, 297n25, 355; videos, 46, 291–92. *See also* Shamash, Sarah
- Briceño, Diego, 17, 27
- Briggs, Alice Leora, 265, 272n2
- British Columbia: Reading the Migration Library, 259–62, 260(f), 261(f);

- temporary foreign workers, 262, 267–68. *See also* Vancouver
- Brooks, Leonard and Reva, 201
- Brouget Morales, Michelle, 23
- Brow Gallery, Emily Carr University, 68
- Brujas and Colectiva Tribu, 97
- Buchwaldt, Andreas, 201
- Bull, Hank, 154
- Burgos-Debray, Elizabeth, 56
- Butler, Judith, 4, 57–58, 68, 89–91
- Cáceres, Berta, 271
- Cafulqueo, Seba, 19
- Calgary, Alberta, 41n91
- Cambodia: diffracting the North, 3–4; gestures in Angkor Wat, 237–38, 237(f); mythical creatures (*Fabulous Ones*), 248; refugees, 225–26. *See also* Mèn, Immony
- Camelo-Suarez, Constanza, 176
- Camnitzer, Luis, 45, 54, 266
- Campos-Pons, María Magdalena, 212–13
- Canada, academia. *See* academia
- Canada, art institutions. *See* art institutions, galleries and museums
- Canada, Indigenous peoples. *See* Indigenous peoples
- Canada, Latinx Canadian. *See* Latinx and Latinx Canadianness
- Canada, migration. *See* migration; migration, refugees
- Canada Media Fund, 21–22
- Canadian Film Institute, Ottawa, 38n69
- Cardona, Julian, 265, 272n2
- Carelli, Vincent, 297n25
- Carnevale, Graciela, 55
- Carton de Grammont, Nuria: about, 20, 51–52, 169–83, 350; education and career, 20, 169–70, 350; identity, 51, 169–70, 175–79, 181–82; interview, 51–52, 169–83; “It’s Happening Now” (2019), 305–306; languages, 169, 174, 179; life in Mexico, 169, 181; life in Montreal, 51–52, 169–70, 178–79; SBC Gallery director, 20, 21, 51, 170. *See also* SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal
- Caxaj, Alfredo, 214–15, 222n51
- Centre d’artistes AXENÉ07, Quebec, 78n2
- Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC), 133
- Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas, 343
- Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC), 134
- Cerro de San Pedro, Mexico, 134
- César Marín, Nelly, 158, 339
- Chak, Tings, 272n2
- Chambers, Jack, 201
- Chang, Lorraine, 292–94
- Channer, Grace, 212
- Chao, Gwenyth, 209
- Chapel Arts, Vancouver, 72
- Chatroulette, 71
- Chicago, Illinois, 83–84, 117
- chilanga identity, 132, 135–37, 143–44, 148
- Chile: *Aquellarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294; *From Chile to Canada* (film, 2022), 292–94, 293(f); dictatorship, 5, 11, 13, 225, 292; diffracting the North, 3–4; film and media, 22, 27, 35n41, 292–94, 293(f); food connections, 227–28; identity categories, 143–44; migration waves, 5, 11–15, 143–44, 175, 199, 225, 292; mythical creatures (*Fabulous Ones*), 248–50, 251(f); solidarity, 5, 13, 227; soundwalk, Valparaíso, 101n25; textile art (*arpilleras*), 13. *See also* Dávila, Patriocio; Reyes, Mónica
- China, diaspora, 203–204
- ch’ixi, as term, 314–15
- Cine Kurumin (film festival), 191, 289–90
- cinema. *See* film and media
- Cisneros, Domingo, 176

- Clark, Lygia, 193, 337, 343
- Cloutier, Geneviève, 68
- Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico, 190, 257, 268, 270(f)
- Colangelo, Dave, 248
- Colin, Carlos, 19, 23, 158, 259–62, 260(f)
- collage: asylum travels, 261(f), 262; DI as space-based language fix, 164; exhibition, 204; feminist methodologies, 81, 89; urban resistance (*Xeno Walks*), 81–82, 89–94, 90(f), 100n15, 101n20; wheat-paste technique, 81
- Collages Féminicides Montréal, 46–47, 81, 86–89, 91–93, 99, 100n19
- Collages Féminicides Paris, 46–47, 81, 86–88, 99
- Collages Féministes Montréal, 46–47, 81–82, 86–89, 91–95, 99, 100n15, 100n19. *See also Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- colleges. *See* academia; Montreal, universities and colleges; Ontario, universities and colleges; Toronto region, universities and colleges; Vancouver, universities and colleges
- Collins, Patricia Hill, 8, 185
- Colombia: civil war, 309–10, 311; extractivism, 311; film festivals, 106, 117; *Hechos de la misma sangre* (Bernal, 2008), 311–16, 313(f), 314(f), 330n36; *Lon-dombia* (Bello, 2023), 204; migration to Canada, 12, 14–15. *See also* Bernal, Claudia; Martín Franco, Helena
- colonialism: about, 4–5, 306–309; coloniality of being, 301, 307; coloniality of gender, 301, 307, 316–17; coloniality of power, xiv–xv, 131–32, 301, 306–309, 328n17; critiques of, 323–24; epistemic violence, xvi, 8, 281–82, 284, 317; hierarchies of inferiority, xiv–xv; homelands as colonized territories, 224; institutional change, 181–83; neoliberalism, 305–307; racial superiority, 131–32; universality concept, 157, 167; white-settler colonial context, 243. *See also* decolonization; Indigenous peoples, colonialism
- communities. *See* diasporic communities; gender, LGBTQ2+ communities
- community arts centres. *See* artist-run centres
- Comrie, Jaquie, 215
- Concordia University, 17, 20, 169
- Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University, 62, 67, 72
- Corazón Desfasado, 192, 317, 331n52
- Corringham, Viv, 81, 86–88, 96, 99
- Couillard, Paul, 62, 63
- COVID–19 pandemic: anti-Asian racism, 188, 229, 244(f)–245(f); arts and culture impacts, 104, 117, 215, 217n5, 239, 268; environmental changes, 268–69; minorities, 6, 241, 246; video conferences, 239–40, 240(f)
- Craft, Marilou, 305–306
- créolisation, 47–48, 105, 120–21, 126n40
- Cuba: Black women, 280; Canada relations, 103–105, 205–14; Canadian artists in, 207–14; *Cinco artistas canadienses exponen* (exhibition, 1988), 207, 220n26; Havana, 207–208; *Map of North America* (Curnoe, 1972–1990), 205–208, 206(f); Rastafarian culture, 113, 118–19; revolution, 157, 280; *Siting Resistance* (exhibition series, 1990), 207–208, 210(f), 212–13, 220n32; Special Period, 151–52, 167n2. *See also* Havana, Cuba
- Cuba, diaspora: about, xiii, 16, 103–105; Afro-Caribbeanness, 118–19; anti-Black racism, 119; Black identity, 50–51, 158–59; diffracting the North, 3–4; London,



- Ontario, Latinx, 205–208, 212–14;  
 Mexican solidarity with, 143; migration  
 to Canada, xiii, 14–15, 16; ontologies  
 and epistemologies (cubania), 118–19,  
 121–22, 127n44; photography, 50–51,  
 152–53; trade, 103–104. *See also* Álvarez  
 Hernández, Analays; Piña-Baldoquín,  
 Manuel; Zarza, Zaira
- Cuba, diaspora, artworks and exhibitions:  
*Arte cubano actual/Art cubain actuel* (ex-  
 hibition, 1994), 16; Castillo de la Fuerza  
 exhibitions, 152; *New Art from Cuba*  
 (exhibition, 1997), 16; *Siting Resistance*  
 (exhibition series, 1990), 208, 210(f),  
 212–13, 220n32
- Cuba, film and media: *De cierta manera*  
 (1977), 278, 280–81; film festivals, 104,  
 117; film industry, 47–48, 105–106,  
 122–23, 124n6; film studies, 278, 280;  
 latinxité identity, 47–48, 105, 118–23;  
 Québec-Cuba networks, 47–48, 103–105,  
 111–13, 122–23; television series, 124n5;  
 transnationalism from below, 111–18,  
 122–23. *See also* *Sur les toits Havane*  
 (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019)
- Cuba, Lucia, 19
- Cuenca, Arturo, 151–52
- CUERPO Collective Body: about, 192–93,  
 333–34, 334(f), 339–46, 341(f); author-  
 ship, 345; embodied communities, 333,  
 340–45, 353; mentorships, 333, 340,  
 342–43; name, 343; pedagogies, 333,  
 339–45; performance art, 333, 334(f),  
 340–41, 341(f), 344
- Curnoe, Greg: education and career,  
 219n21, 220n22, 220n30; *Map of North*  
*America* (versions, 1972–1990), 205–208,  
 206(f); relations with Cuba and  
 Mexico, 187, 205–208, 206(f)
- Cutler, Randy Lee, 63
- Cyr, Louis, 319, 331n59
- Dahl, Crista, 262
- D'Alcântara, Rodrigo, 20
- Dam, My-Vam, 305–306
- Dávila, Arlene, xiv–xv, 31n3
- Dávila, Patricio: about, 187–88, 223–54,  
 350; as Chilean refugee, 224–25; col-  
 laboration with Mèn, 187–88, 226–28,  
 252–53, 350; education and career,  
 350; father's body movements, 235–39,  
 236(f), 238(f); life in Chile, 225; Public  
 Visualization Studio (PVS), Toronto,  
 350; recordando movement, 232–33,  
 252–53; virtual body animations, 238–39,  
 238(f). *See also* *Fabulous Ones* (Dávila  
 and Mèn, 2022); *Passing Through the*  
*Heart* (Dávila and Mèn, 2019–23);  
*Receipts* (Dávila and Mèn, 2021)
- Day, Richard J.F., 309, 330nn31–32
- Daza-Paris, Livia, 51, 171(f), 176
- Debord, Guy, 83
- decolonization: about, 190–92, 276,  
 301–309; in academia, 142–43, 276; body  
 as site of, 191–92, 301–303, 307–308,  
 322, 326; coloniality of being, 301,  
 307; coloniality of gender, 301, 307,  
 316–17; coloniality of power, 131–32, 301,  
 306–309, 328n17; cultural revitalization  
 in Mexico, 140; decolonial aesthetics,  
 318–21; decolonial soundwalking, 46–47,  
 83–86, 98–99; delinking options, 281,  
 306–307; language of decolonization,  
 304; metaphor in, 304–305; modernity  
 and decoloniality, 281–86; spirituality,  
 161; street art, 100n14; woman's body as  
 site, 191–92, 301–308. *See also* resistance
- Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, 77
- de Kergommeaux, Duncan, 201
- de la Rosa Carrillo, León, 271
- de la Vega, Marta Gloria, 56–57
- del Toro, Guillermo, 133, 134
- Demers, Maurice, 114

- Dempster, Alec, 146, 147–48
- Deslauriers, Jannick, 305–306
- DeSouza, Allan, 212
- Diamond, Sara, 292–94, 293(f)
- diaspora: about, 223–27; diasporic identity, 147–48, 223–24, 243; nationalist conceptions, 224; private/public dichotomy, 225; relations with other diasporas, 224–27; as term, 223
- diasporic communities: about, 29–30, 185–86, 192–93, 216, 243; academic studies on, 24–28; alliances across boundaries, 188–90, 216; barriers to alliances, 91–94; cross-cultural communities, 186, 189–90, 193, 216, 224–25, 252–53; fluidity in, 193, 227; food connections, 188, 226–28; individual collaborations, 187–88, 252–53, 350; intergenerational communities, 190, 227; Latinx and Latinx Canadian terminology, 31n3, 189–90, 196–97; narratives of violence against, 241–43; storytelling, 248–49, 252–53; as support networks, 29–30, 47–48, 122–23, 185–87, 216; supra-national kinship, 188, 190, 243; visibility/invisibility of arts, xiv–xv, 25, 181, 267, 301–306, 310–11, 330n34. *See also* identity; identity categories; Indigenous peoples, connections with diasporic peoples
- Díaz Ibáñez, Asilady, 110
- Dick, Beau, 50–51, 156–57, 161–62
- Diffractions of the Local* (Vancouver), 31n1
- Diffractioning the North*: about, xi–xvii, 3–9, 17–18, 25–30; community theme, 29–30, 185–94; constructions theme, 28–30, 43–52; contributors, 349–56; cross-disciplinary approach, 26–28; diffracting, as term, 4, 31n1; geographical focus, 25–28; Latinx and Latinx Canadian identity category, xvi, 189–90; Latinx Canadians in academia, xi–xvii, 17–18; Latinx and Latinx Canadian terminology, 31n3, 126n33, 196–97; lived experience, xiv, xvi, 8–9. *See also* Latinx and Latinx Canadianness
- digital technologies. *See* motion recordings; technologies
- Dionne, Patrick, 180
- disabilities and activism, 82, 86, 88–91
- Dish with One Spoon territory, 45, 53, 58
- Dorais, Geneviève, 114
- Douglas, Stan, 154, 160
- Dragu, Margaret, 45, 62–63, 71, 79n21
- Durán, Francisca, 17
- Dyrness, Andrea, 265
- Ecuador: Cuenca, 203; Latinx Canadian art, 203–204; migration to Canada, 12, 14–15; mining industries, 203–205; *Mountains & Rivers Without End* (2016), 203–204
- Eder, Rita, xiii, 16, 36n56
- editorial initiatives. *See* publishers and publications
- Edmonton, Alberta, 49, 130, 137–43, 352
- education, higher. *See* academia
- #8M movement, 47, 96
- El-Hadi, Nehal, 248
- Eligio Fernández (Tonel), Antonio, 16, 21
- El Museo Regional del Valle de Juárez, Mexico, 257–58
- El Paso–Juárez, Texas, 259, 260(f)
- El Rito, New Mexico, 190
- El Salvador, migration, 12–15, 199
- Embassy Cultural House, London, Ontario: about, 197, 211–13, 212(f), 216; artist collaborations, 211–12, 217n5, 221n40; González's support, 208, 211–13, 351; *Intercambio/Exchange* (exhibition, 2021), 201, 208, 212; *Siting Resistance*

- (exhibition series, 1990), 208, 210(f), 212–13, 220n32
- Embassy Hotel, London, Ontario, 211–13, 212(f), 221n42
- Emily Carr University: performance art, 62–64, 67, 68, 71, 72; scholars, 62–63, 340, 355
- environmentalism: Amazon fires, 290; border regimes, 270–71; Light Factory Publications, 268–72, 270(f); mining industries, 203–205; nuclear waste, 268, 271
- Escobar, Pilar, 172(f)
- European Union Film Festival, 38n69
- Everything Everyday* (exhibition, 2010), 64, 73
- Ezcurra, María: about, 191–92, 301–302, 321–26; allyship, 301, 326; body as site of decolonization, 191–92, 301–303, 307–308, 322, 326; decoloniality, 301–309, 326; exhibitions, 310; femicide, 25, 101n20, 192, 321–25, 325(f); Indigenous connections, 192, 321–25, 325(f); *Invisible* (2005–16), 322–23, 322(f); life in Argentina and Mexico, 310, 321, 324–25; life in Canada, 308–11, 324–25; *Ni una más* (2003), 192, 322, 324, 325(f); nylon installations, 192, 322–25, 322(f), 325(f); *Reflections* (2016), 325; resiliency, 301–302, 321–24
- Fabulous Ones* (Dávila and Mên, 2022): about, 187–88, 226, 229, 247–53; autobiographical fiction, 247–50; collaboration of Dávila and Mên, 252–53, 350; diasporic mythical creatures, 188, 247–53, 251(f), 252; digital masks and voices, 248, 250–52, 251(f); York University site, 248, 249(f). *See also* motion recordings
- Faits Divers Média, 105, 124n6
- Fanshawe College, London, Ontario, 204
- Feder, Elena, 27
- feminism: about, 94–95, 286–89, 307; coloniality of gender, 301, 307, 316–17; Combahee River Collective, 298n34; communitarian feminism (*feminismo comunitario*), 305, 323, 327n11; consciousness-raising, 58; conviviality, 287; feminist collectives, 46–47, 86–87; film and media studies, 286–89; gender-based solidarity, 94–95; identity politics, 298n34; intersectionality, 95, 98–99; lived experiences as theory, 8–9; Mujeres Creando movement, 323, 332n64; political agency, 84; *refugee reconnaissance* (Granados, 2005–15), 55; sound walks and night walks, 87–88, 97–99, 101n27. *See also* Collages Féministes Montréal
- Ferrand Zavala, Carlos, 20, 27
- Ferrer, Esther, 61, 63
- festivals: LatinArte, Montreal, 18, 21, 26, 37n62, 126n30, 355; performance art (7a\*Id), 61, 74; soundwalking, 86, 96. *See also* film festivals; LIVE Biennial of Performance Art
- Février, Stanley, 305–306
- film and media: about, 3–4, 15–17, 26–28, 191; academic studies, 16–17, 26–28; activism, 284–89; aesthetics of garbage, 278–79, 291–92, 296n7; axis of Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver, 27–28; decoloniality and modernity, 281–86; Eurocentrism, 276–77; history, Third Cinema (1960s and 1970s), 191, 277–80, 284–86, 288–89, 296n5; history, Fourth Cinema, 277, 279–80, 284–86, 288–89; intersectional feminisms, 286–89; lived experience, xiv, xvi, 8–9; New Latin

- American Cinema, 284; non-Western perspectives, 27–28, 278–80, 287–88; pluriversality, 276–77, 279–80, 284–86, 291, 294–95; rural screenings, 279–80; testimony, 288, 290–91; video technologies, 163–66, 284–86. *See also* motion recordings; recordando movement; technologies
- film and media, artists. *See* Aceves Sepúlveda, Gabriela; Dávila, Patricio; Guerrero Cortés, Adonay; Mèn, Immony; Ruiz, Pedro; Shamash, Sarah
- film and media, Caribbean. *See* Cuba, film and media; *Sur les toits Havane* (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019)
- film and media, Indigenous. *See* Indigenous peoples, film and media
- film and media, Latin America. *See* Brazil, film and media; Mexico, film and media
- film and media, Montreal. *See* Montreal, film and media
- film and media, photography. *See* González, Anahí; photography; Piña-Baldoquín, Manuel
- film and media industry: about, 21–24; awards, 106; community networks, 47–48, 59–60, 122–23; co-production agreements, 22–23; Cuba–Québec networks, 47–48, 105–106, 122–23, 124n6; funding, 6, 21–22, 116; Latinx and Latinx Canadian barriers, 21–22, 24; National Film Board, 22, 38n68, 221n43; politics of location, 114–16, 329n18; SODEC (Quebec), 21, 32n6, 105, 115–16; systemic racism, 21–22, 32n6; Telefilm Canada, 21, 23, 32n6, 116; transnationalism from below, 111–18. *See also* film and media studies; film festivals
- film and media studies: academic scholarship, xi–xvii, 16–17, 24–28, 39n78, 126n33; conferences, 28; decolonization, 190–91, 275–95; epistemic violence, xvi, 8, 17, 281–82, 284; feminisms, 286–89; Freire's critical consciousness, 288–89; key questions, 276; modernity and decoloniality, 281–86; pedagogies, 191, 282–83, 285–89, 294–95; reflexive writing, 289. *See also* academia
- film festivals: about, 22–23, 105–106; African Film Festival, 38n69; aluCine Latin festival (Toronto), 22, 38n70; documentaries, 105, 106, 117; European Union Film Festival, 38n69; Festival Internacional de Cine (Guadalajara), 105, 117, 138; Indigenous peoples, 191, 289–90; International Film Festival (Edmonton), 138, 352; In Visible Colours (Vancouver), 35n41, 292–94; Latin American Film Festival (Vancouver), 22; Latino Film Festival (Chicago), 117; networks, 5, 30; Quebec films in Cuba, 104; TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), 15, 17, 22–23, 355, 356
- Finlayson, Lesley, 60–61
- Firth-Eagland, Alissa, 63
- 516 Arts, Albuquerque, 257–58, 263–64, 272n3
- Floyd, George, 6, 173, 181, 303
- food: diasporic memories, 226–30; ingredients from homelands, 227; motion recordings, 233–35, 234(f), 235–37, 236(f). *See also* *Passing Through the Heart* (Dávila and Mèn, 2019–23)
- Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario, 197, 207, 213, 216, 220n22, 351
- Foster, Hal, 313–14
- Foucault, Michel, 248
- Fountain* (Belmore, 2005), 61
- France: diaspora in Montreal, 92; diffracting the North, 3–4; film and media, 117, 280; modernist art, 281, 296n12
- Freire, Paulo, 288

- Freire D'Anunciação, 339
- Fritta Caro (character), 317–21, 331n53. *See also* Martín Franco, Helena
- Fugère, Jean, 104, 107–10, 116–17, 119, 121–22, 123n3
- Fung, Richard, 59
- Gabriel, Christina, 13–14
- Galeano, Eduardo, 223, 232
- Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal, 16
- Galíndez, Gabriela, 259, 260(f)
- galleries. *See* art institutions, galleries, and museums
- Gallery Gachet, Vancouver, 62, 66, 70
- Gallery TPW, Toronto, 76, 77
- Galván, Trinidad, 287
- García, Vidalia, 61
- García Canclini, Néstor, 130
- García Casanova, Karina, 149
- García Espinosa, Julio, 296n5
- Garneau, David, 264–65
- Garoo, Gautam, 203–204
- Gazan, Leah, 329n29
- Geiger, Ana Bella, 291–92
- gender: coloniality of gender, 301, 307, 316–17; gendered soundscapes, 82, 86–89, 99n5; gender violence, 25, 101n20, 192, 321–25, 325(f); Latinx barriers, 24, 45; matriarchal/patriarchal systems, 136; motion-recording data, 230–31, 232(f), 233; political agency, 84. *See also* feminism; women; *Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- gender, LGBTQ2+ communities: borderland identities, 82–83, 189–90; non-binary expression, 45, 82; performance art, 55; queer activism in Montreal, 86, 93–94; queer character of latinidad, 47–48, 105, 113–14, 118, 120–23
- Germaine, Brigitte, 115
- Getino, Octavio, 296n5
- Getty, Cassandra, 202
- Gilbreth, Frank and Lillian, 230
- Gilroy, Paul, 188, 190, 224–25
- Gingras, Miki, 180
- Ginieniewicz, Jorge, 11
- Gledhill, Randy, 61
- Glissant, Édouard, 47–48, 105, 120
- Global North and South: about, 3–4, 277, 281–82, 327n1; Abya Yala, 277, 295n2, 330n46; film and media studies, 277, 281–82; modernity and decoloniality, 281–86; non-Western, as term, 278; resistance against global capitalism, 282, 307, 323; terminology, 281–82, 327n1; trade, 24–25, 35n45, 103–104; Turtle Island, 277, 295n2; visibility/invisibility of diaspora, 304–305; whiteness and power, 3–4. *See also* diaspora; diasporic communities
- Gómez, Kemely, 272n2
- Gómez, Sara, 278, 280
- Gongora, Romeo, 51
- González, Anahí: about, 199–201, 208–14, 351; education and career, 197, 199–201, 208–209, 351; Embassy Cultural House, 208, 211–13, 351; land acknowledgments, 209; Latinx Canadians in London, Ontario, 186–87, 208–14; life in Cuba, 209; life in London, Ontario, 199–201, 208–11; life in Mexico, 199–201
- González, Anahí, artworks and curated exhibitions: *Allá más al Norte* (2022), 200(f), 201; *Intercambio/Exchange* (2021), 201; *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear* (Zuñiga, 2022), 204–205, 208, 219n18; *The Other Neighbour of El Otro Lado* (2021), 199–201, 217n4
- González Hurtado, Argelia: about, 48–49, 50, 129–49, 351; chilanga-torreonense-regia identity, 132, 135–37, 143–44, 148; education and career, xiii, 129–32,

- 136–37, 139–44, 147–48, 351; Indigeneity and media, 50, 140–41, 144–45, 147; Latina, Latino, and Latinx Canadian identity, 143–44; life in Edmonton, 130, 137–43; life in Maryland, 50, 132, 146–47, 351; life in Mexico, 129–30, 135–37; life in Ontario, 131; marriage to Guerrero Cortés, 129–32, 144–45, 148; Mex-Can identity, 48–49, 50, 129–32, 142–44, 146–48; physical characteristics, 132, 142–43, 148. *See also* Guerrero Cortés, Adonay
- Goodsell (née Vincent), Bernice, 201
- Gooliaff, Angela, 74
- Gopinath, Gayatri, 67
- Gordon, Avery, 185
- Graham, Rodney, 154
- Granados, Francisco-Fernando: about, 44–46, 53–80, 351–52; conceptualism, 54–55; education and career, 53–54, 60–65, 351–52; Indigenous lands, 55, 58; Latinx identity, 55–56, 66; life in Guatemala, 53–54, 55–56, 65, 262; life in Toronto, 53–54, 64–66; life in Vancouver, 53, 56–64; performance art, 53–55, 61–77; queer aesthetics, 55, 58, 60–62, 351; refugee and citizen, 53–66; visual arts, 54–55, 60–61; *Waves* (2020), 261(f), 262. *See also* refugee recon-naissance (Granados, 2005–15)
- Granados Samayoa, Javier, 69
- Grenville, Bruce, 73
- Grippio, Victor, 337–38
- Gruault, Jean, 115
- Guadalajara, Mexico: film festival, 105–106, 117, 138; pre-Columbian traditions, 135–36; Universidad de Guadalajara, 129–30, 133–34, 352
- Guarana, Graciela, 290
- Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo, 111
- Guatemala: Civil War, 55–57, 65; diffracting the North, 3–4; Menchú's narrative, 56–57; migration to Canada, 14–15, 262. *See also* Caxaj, Alfredo; Granados, Francisco-Fernando
- Guerrero Cortés, Adonay: about, 48–49, 129–49, 352; education and career, 129–33, 137–39, 144–49, 352; Indigeneity, 144–45; latinidad, 146; life in Edmonton, 130, 137–39; life in Mexico, 129–30, 133, 144–46; life in Ontario, 131, 144–49; marriage to González Hurtado, 129–32, 144–45, 148; Mex-Can identity, 48–49, 129–32, 141–42, 147–49; physical characteristics, 132, 135, 141–42, 148; potosino identity, 133–34, 149. *See also* González Hurtado, Argelia
- Guerrero Cortés, Adonay, works: about, 138–39, 352; *Cuando las piedras gritan/When the Stones Scream* (2003), 134; *Dioses ocultos/Hidden Gods* (2014), 144–45, 145(f); *Distant Altars* (2019), 146, 352; *Duda mata/Doubt Kills* (2007), 135; *El blues del buen samaritano/The Good Samaritan Blues* (2003), 134–35; *El hijo del Santo/The Son of Santo* (2008), 129–30, 138, 139(f); *I Live Here* (2011), 146; *Making Sones and Memories* (2012), 146, 352; *La semilla/The Seed* (2008), 138
- Guinta, Andrea, 55
- Gutiérrez, Amanda: about, 46–47, 81–102, 352; decolonial soundwalking, 46–47, 83, 91, 98–99, 352; education and career, 46–47, 82, 99n1, 352; feminist collectives, 82, 93–94; Latino and Latinx identity, 46–47, 82, 84, 91, 93–94, 96; life in Mexico and US, 46, 82; life in Montreal, 46–47, 82, 84, 91, 93–94; SBC Gallery artist residency, 82, 91–93

- Gutiérrez, Amanda, artworks and exhibitions: *Resilience*, 97–98; *Ruido de papel/Paper Noise/Bruit de papier* (2021), 91, 100n15, 100n17; *Sociability of Sleep*, 97, 101n26; *Third-ear Transmissions* (2023), 51, 52n3. *See also* *Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- Gutiérrez, Petro Juan, 115
- Gu Xiong, 203–204
- Hall, Stuart, 130, 278
- Harbour Green Park, Vancouver, 67
- Haros Lopez, Israel, 265, 272n2
- Hassan, Jamelie, 201–202, 207–208, 210–11, 213, 220n26, 221n40
- Havana, Cuba: Havana Biennials, 50, 152–54, 207–208; Instituto Superior de Arte, 152–53; Wifredo Lam Centre, 152
- Havana, from on High* (film). *See* *Sur les toits Havane* (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019)
- Hawkins, Willie, 162
- Hazelton, Hugh, 12
- Hedrick, Robert, 201
- Heidegger, Martin, 291
- Heilman, Charlene, 61
- Hemmings, Clare, 47, 94
- Henríquez, Carmen, 292–94, 293(f)
- Henríquez, Patricio, 27
- Hera, Vir-Andrés, 51
- Hernández-Ramírez, Alejandro, 14
- Hispanic identity, 10–11. *See also* *latinidad* identity
- Honduras, migration, 12
- hooks, bell, 94–95, 280, 288
- Horn, Rebecca, 335
- Hoszko, Sheena, 272n2
- Householder, Johanna, 62, 63
- Huerta, Dolores, 288
- Humberto Hermosillo, Jaime, 133
- identity: about, 4–5, 43–52, 148, 166–67, 346–47; diasporic identity, 147–48, 223–24, 243; essentialism, 224; inter-sectional identities, 243; migration as in-between, 130; multiple identities, 166–67; performed narratives, 44, 57–58; pilgrimages and collective identity, 336–37; positionality and location, 328n17, 329n20, 346; self and Other, as terms, 330n32; self-discovery, 166–67, 179; shifting at borders, 48–49, 148, 177, 346–47; social construct, 29, 43–44, 130, 148; spirituality, 166–67; state recognition, 224; subject formation, 45–46; universality and colonialism, 157, 167. *See also* Mexico, identity; United States, identity
- identity categories: about, 4–5, 131, 148, 175, 196–97, 346–47; as context dependent, 120, 131, 148, 179–80, 248, 346–47; *créolisation*, 47–48, 105, 120–21, 126n40; fictional characters as disruption of, 317–21; hyphenated identities, 243; key questions, 175; Latin American as category, 196–97; Latinx as category, 4–5, 196–97; Latinx as resistance to, 45, 189–90; limitations, 346–47; meta-archipelagos, 47–48, 105, 119, 120; migration statistics, 9–10; racial, ethnic, and gender classifications, 44; self-identification, 9–10, 142, 148; skin colour, 141–42. *See also* *latinidad* identity; Latinx and Latinx Canadianness; Mexico, identity categories
- immigration. *See* migration
- India, diaspora, 203–204
- Indigenous peoples: Abya Yala, as term, 277, 295n2, 330n46; demographics, 303–305, 328n13; Fourth World theory, 279, 285–86; land, 290–91; Latinx

- terminology, 189–90; relational ontology, 332n65; spirituality, 161–62, 310–11; Turtle Island, as term, 295n2; women in media, 140. *See also* Mexico, Indigenous peoples; United States, Indigenous peoples
- Indigenous peoples, colonialism: about, 303; critiques of reconciliation, 324–25, 332n68; diffracting the North, 4; displacement and dispossession, 190; environmental issues, 190, 271–72; identity and state power, 49; Kanesatake Resistance, 213, 221n43; land acknowledgments, 209; language revitalization, 271–72; modernity and decoloniality, 281–86; noble savage, 283; residential schools, 329n29; settler responsibilities, 46; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 6, 264–65, 303; universality and identity, 157, 167; visibility/invisibility of arts, 303–304; whiteness and power, 303–304, 324. *See also* decolonization; resistance
- Indigenous peoples, connections with diasporic peoples: about, 5, 303, 315–16; *Aquelarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294; Columbia connections, 311–16, 313(f), 314(f); communities as networks, 29–30; extractivism, 311–16, 313(f); femicide, 25, 101n20, 192, 321–25, 325(f); film and media, 191, 277, 289–90; genocide, 311–16, 313(f); LACAP cross-cultural dialogues, 18; in London, Ontario, 213; racialized women, 302–303; supra-national kinship, 188, 190; Sur Gallery, 19–20; transhemispheric approach, 277; transnational networks, 140–41, 147–48; visibility/invisibility in arts, 303–304; women artists, 301–302. *See also* Light Factory Publications, New Mexico
- Indigenous peoples, film and media: about, 279–80, 284–86; Cine Kurumin film festival, 191, 289–90; Mexican film industry, 50, 140; pluriversality, 276–77, 279–80, 284–86, 291, 294–95; testimony, 290–91
- Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, 264, 272, 354
- institutions, art. *See* art institutions, galleries, and museums; artist-run centres
- Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte, 334
- Inutiq, Geronimo, 51
- Irrizarry, Ylce, 122
- Ismail, Jamila, 213
- Jaramillo, Jenny, 203–204
- Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, 190, 257, 259(f)
- Jerkovic, Katherine, 17, 23
- Johal, Sandeep, 61, 62
- John Abbott College, Montreal, 354–55
- José Galindo, Regina, 45, 55, 61
- Kahlo, Frida, 45, 55, 318, 331n53
- Kanesatake* (film, 1993), 213, 221n43
- Khadr, Omar, 64–65
- Khmer diaspora: about, 187–88, 224–27; dance, 237–38, 237(f); food, 226–28, 233–37, 234(f), 236(f); gestures, 233–35, 234(f), 237–38, 237(f). *See also* Mèn, Immony
- Khoshgozaran, Gelare, 265, 266(f), 272n2
- Kingston, Ontario, 49
- Klassen, Lois: about, 188–90, 255–72, 256(f), 352–53; conversation with Quezada Ureña, 262–72; education and career, 60, 188–90, 257, 352–53; life in Vancouver, 255, 257, 259, 352–53; positionality, 255, 267–68; Present



- Cartographers, 256(f), 257, 272n3;  
residency at Santa Fe Art Institute,  
188–90; *Terreno* editors (2017), 256(f),  
257, 265, 266(f), 272, 272nn2–3. See  
also *bosque brotante* (Quezada Ureña et  
al., 2020); Light Factory Publications,  
New Mexico
- Knights, Karen, 292–94, 293(f)
- knowledge production: coloniality of  
power, 306–309; epistemic violence,  
xvi, 8, 281–82, 284, 317; lived experience,  
xiv, xvi, 8–9; positionality and location,  
328n17, 329n20
- Kong, Jeanette, 226
- Krenak, Ailton, 283, 284
- Kwan, Vanessa, 64, 73
- LACAP (Latin American–Canadian Art  
Projects), 18–19, 37n63, 355
- Lacombe, Michelle, 77
- Laferrière, Dany, 115
- Landeros Moreno, Susana, 257–58, 269(f),  
271, 273n5, 274n18
- Langara College (snóweyæl leləni),  
Vancouver, 60
- languages: barriers in collectives, 92;  
demographics of artists, 305, 328n13;  
soundwalk participation, 97–98
- Latin American art: about, 15–16, 35n51;  
comparison with Latinx, 15–16, 179–80;  
conflation of Latin American and  
Latinx, xiv–xv, 25–26; Latin America,  
xviii; Latin American art, as term,  
15–26, 35n51, 175–78
- Latin American Film Festival (Canadian  
Film Institute), 38n69
- Latin America Made in Canada* (Suescun  
Pozas and Robin), 26
- LatinArte, Montreal, 18, 21, 26, 37n62,  
126n30, 355
- latinidad identity, 47–48, 105, 107–108,  
113–14, 118, 120–23, 143
- Latinx and Latinx Canadianness: about,  
3–5, 15–30, 31n3, 44, 52, 126n33, 143,  
173–78, 189–90, 196–97; in academia,  
xi–xvii, 16–17; academic studies of,  
24–28; as affirmative sabotage, 45, 55,  
78n4; comparison with Latin Amer-  
ican, 15–16, 179–80; conflation of Latin  
American and Latinx, xiv–xv, 25–26;  
diffracting the North, 3–4; double  
border of US/Canada, 177–78; folkloric  
vs. contemporary art, 176, 181; global  
art exchanges, 16, 24–25; history of,  
xiii–xiv, 15–24, 175–78; identity as  
context dependent, 148, 179–80, 248,  
346–47; identity category, xvi, 4–5, 31n3,  
43–52, 126n33, 148, 196–97; inclusion of  
countries and peoples, 189–90, 196–97;  
Latin American art, as term, 15, 35n51;  
Latino/a/x terminology, 31n3, 38n67;  
Latinx and Latinx Canadian as categor-  
ies, 176, 189–90, 196–97; modernity and  
decoloniality, 281–86; nonbinary gender  
expression, 45, 82; queer borderland  
identities, 189–90; terminology, 4–5, 9,  
31n3, 196–97, 346; underrepresentation,  
xiii–xiv, 25–28, 148–49, 173, 302–306;  
US dominance, 24–25, 278; visibility/  
invisibility, xiv–xv, 181, 267, 310–11,  
330n34. *See also* academia; *Diffracting the  
North*; identity; United States, identity
- latinxité: about, 47–48, 113–14; *créolisation*,  
47–48, 105, 120–21, 126n40; domesticiti-  
ties, 118–23; latinidad as queer, 47–48,  
105, 113–14, 118, 120–23; meta-archipel-  
agos, 47–48, 105, 119, 120; spirituality,  
166–67; in *Sur les toits Havane* (film),  
47–48, 105, 110–11, 113–14, 118, 121–23;  
transnationalism, 111–18

- Laughlin, Irene, 66
- Laurin, Julie-Isabelle, 305–306
- Leduc, Paul, 38n68
- Leonardson, Eric, 83
- Lepage, Robert, *SLAV* (2018), 181
- Le Parc, Julio, 154
- Leung, Lillian, 243
- LGBT2+. *See* gender, LGBTQ2+ communities
- Li, Wenting, 209
- Light Factory Publications, New Mexico: about, 257, 269–70, 272n3, 352–53; Present Cartographers, 256(f), 257, 272n3, 353; Reading the Migration Library (RML), 259–62, 260(f), 261(f), 353; *Terreno*, 256(f), 257, 265, 266(f), 272, 272nn2–3. *See also* *bosque brotante* (Quezada Ureña et al, 2020)
- Linen, Victor, 110, 116–17
- Littoral* (film, 2004), 115
- LIVE Biennial of Performance Art, Vancouver, 61, 63, 67, 69
- Llanes, Lilian, 153
- London, Ontario: Embassy Hotel, 211–13, 212(f); expedition in *A Trip to Mexico* (Becher, 1880), 195–96, 217n2; historical relationships, 195–98; *Region* (publication), 220n22. *See also* Western University, London, Ontario
- London, Ontario, galleries, museums, and artist-run centres: about, 197, 200–208; Forest City Gallery, 197, 207, 213, 216, 220n22, 351; Museum London, 197, 201–206, 216, 218n8, 218nn10–12; Satellite Project Space, 197, 204, 216, 219n20; TAP Centre for Creativity, 197, 214–16, 221n47, 222n51. *See also* Artlab Gallery, Western University; Embassy Cultural House, London, Ontario; McIntosh Gallery, Western University
- London, Ontario, Latinx Canadian: about, 186–87, 197–208; *Colores de Latinoamérica* (exhibition, 2006–20), 187, 198, 214–16, 219n15, 222n50; Cuba, 205–208, 212–14; history, 201–205; Indigenous solidarity, 213; Latinx Canadian terminology, 196–97; *Londombia* (Bello, 2023), 204; *Map of North America* (Curnoe, 1972–1990), 205–207, 206(f); Mexico, 205–208; musical performances, 214–15; nationalism vs. continentalism, 205–207; nicknames for, 196; Sunfest, 214–15; *TransAMERICAS* (exhibition, 2016), 202–203; Z'otz (collective), 202. *See also* Curnoe, Greg; González, Anahí; Robin, Alena
- London Public Library and Art Museum, 201. *See also* Museum London, Ontario
- Lonegro, Maria Paula, 51
- López, Alfred J., 327n1
- Lopez, Josie, 263
- López Junqué, Guillermo Fernando (Chinolope), 152
- Loretto, Jonathan, 190, 257, 264, 268, 273n5
- Loughlin, Irene, 61–62
- Lozano, Jorge, 22
- Lozano-Neira, Nathalie, 58
- Lugar Común Editorial, Ottawa, 26
- Lugo, Manolo, 62–63
- Lugones, María, 301, 307, 317, 321
- Lui, Joah, 59–60
- Lum, Ken, 154, 160, 338
- MacDonald, Laura, 13–14
- Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 321, 331n62
- Magor, Liz, 63
- Mahon, Patrick, 203–204, 219n15
- Maldonado, Arantza, 108, 110, 113–17, 124n6

- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson, 301, 306–307, 312, 316–18
- Mallet, Marilú, 22, 27
- Mamani, Takir, 330n46
- “Manifiesto antropófago” (essay, Andrade), 283, 297n19
- Manitoba, film and media, 27–28
- Masanilla-Miranda, José, 330n36
- Manuel, George, 285
- Map of North America* (Curnoe, 1972–1990), 205–208, 206(f)
- Maracle, Lee, 213
- Marcano, Gustavo, 110
- Marca registrada* (Parente, 1975), 46, 291–92
- Marey, Etienne Jules, 230
- Marisy Martínez, Luisa, 16
- Marleau, M.A., 78n2
- Maroja, Camila, xiii
- Márquez, Zaida, 27
- Mars, Tanya, 63, 64
- Martin, Keavy, 264
- Martínez, Guadalupe (Lupe): about, 192–93, 333–47, 353; community networks, 192–93, 334–35, 337–39; CUERPO, 193, 333, 334(f), 340–45, 341(f), 353; education and career, 158, 192, 334–42, 353; Latinx Canadian identity, 333–34, 336–37, 346–47; life in Argentina, 192, 333–38, 343, 346–47, 353; life in Vancouver, 192, 333, 336–47; pedagogies, 333, 339–45; performance art, 336–41, 344; spirituality, 336–37. *See also* CUERPO Collective Body
- Martínez-Zalce, Graciela, 40n87
- Martín Franco, Helena: about, 191–92, 301–302, 316–21, 319(f), 320(f), 326; alter egos, 192, 317–21, 331nn52–54; *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (2018), 317–21, 319(f), 320(f), 331n53; body as site of decolonization, 191–92, 301–303, 307–308, 316–21; coloniality of gender, 316–17; decoloniality, 301–309, 316–21, 326; Latinx Canadian art and identity, 176, 179; life in Canada, 308–11; life in Colombia, 309–10; mestizaje hybridity, 317, 321
- Mata, Fernando B., 11, 13–14
- Matecki, Rosana, 22
- Matt, Gerhard, 157
- Mattos, Claudia, 51
- Mayer, Mónica, 45, 55
- McCartney, Andra, 85–86, 96
- McGill University, Montreal, xiii
- McIntosh, David, 213
- McIntosh Gallery, Western University: about, 197, 205, 216, 218n8; *Map of North America* (Curnoe, 1972–1990), 205–208, 206(f); *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear* (Zuñiga, 2022), 204–205, 208, 219n18; photojournalism, 204–205
- McMaster, Meryl, 19
- Medel, Sonia, 292–94, 293(f)
- media studies. *See* film and media studies
- Meireles, Cildo, 209
- memory, 188, 223, 228–31. *See also* record-ando movement
- Mèn, Immony: about, 187–88, 223–54, 350; cultural gestures, 237–38, 237(f); education and career, 350; family, 233–37, 234(f), 236(f); as Khmer/Cambodian refugee, 224–27, 237–38; life in Montreal, 227, 233–35, 234(f); Public Visualization Studio (PVS), Toronto, 350; recordando movement, 232–35, 234(f), 252–53. *See also* Khmer diaspora; motion recordings; recordando movement
- Mèn, Immony, collaborative artworks: with Dávila, 187–88, 226–28, 250. *See*

- also *Fabulous Ones* (Dávila and Mèn, 2022); *Passing Through the Heart* (Dávila and Mèn, 2019–23); *Receipts* (Dávila and Mèn, 2021)
- Menchú, Rigoberta, 56–57
- Méndez de la Vega, Luz, 56
- Mendieta, Ana, 335–37, 346
- Merali, Shaheen, 212
- Mercosur trade agreement, 24–25
- Merida, Mexico, 207
- mestizaje, as term, 314–15, 317, 330n43
- #MeToo movement, 47
- Metropolitan University, Toronto, 351
- Mexico: Canadians in Mexico, 195–96, 201–207, 217n2; extractivism, 134, 148, 308; femicide, 25, 192, 321–25; matriarchal/patriarchal systems, 136; Merida, 207; Monterrey, 130, 135–37, 140; police violence, 135; research on Canada, 40n87; Saltillo, 199–201, 217n4; San Luis Potosí, 130, 132–33, 134, 138, 149; San Miguel de Allende, 201; Torreón, 130, 136–37; tourism, 195–96, 202, 204; trade, 35n45. *See also* Guadalajara, Mexico; Mexico City
- Mexico, diaspora: diffracting the North, 3–4; double border of US/Canada, 177–78; history of, 14–15, 35n45, 177, 201–202; illegal immigration, 37n58; labourers in Canada, 199–201, 217n4; migration to US and Canada, 12, 35n45; photojournalism, 204–205, 208; Quebec cultural diplomacy, 122–23; Québecine film festival, 117; solidarity with Latin America, 143; soundwalking, 83–84. *See also* Carton de Grammont, Nuria; González, Anahí; González Hurtado, Argelia; Guerrero Cortés, Adonay; Gutiérrez, Amanda; Quezada Ureña, Daisy
- Mexico, film and media: Canadian film productions, 22, 40n87; Festival Internacional de Cine en Guadalajara, 105, 117, 138; film schools, 133–35; in Guadalajara, 133–34, 138; Indigeneity, 50, 140; Mexican Film Institute, 22, 40n87; in Mexico City, 133
- Mexico, identity: about, 131–32, 141–44, 148; coloniality of power, 131–32; as context dependent, 148, 179–80; double border of US/Canada, 177–78; fluidity of, 148, 179; Indigenous media, 140, 144; physical features, 132, 135, 141–42, 148; self-definition, 132, 148
- Mexico, identity categories: about, 131–32, 148; chilanga or defeña (Mexico City), 132, 135–37, 143, 148; güerita, 181; indígena, 132; Latinx Canadian, 132; mestiza/o, 132, 181; Mex-Can identity, 48–49, 131–32, 141–44, 146–48; mexicana/o, 132; potosino, 132–33, 134, 149; torreónense, 135–37, 143–44, 148
- Mexico, Indigenous peoples: cultural traditions, 135–36, 142–43, 144–45; identity categories, 132; Indigeneity and media, 50, 144–45, 147–48; media producers, 140–41
- Mexico City: Canadian students in, 198; chilanga or defeña identity, 132, 135–37, 143, 148; film industry, 133; Latinx identity, 46, 82
- Mignolo, Walter D., 281, 306–307, 329n18, 329n20
- migration: about, 9–15; borders, 10–11, 14, 177–78, 270–71; double border of US/Canada, 177–78; historical waves, 5, 9–15, 37n58, 176; idealized multiculturalism, 59–60; identity categories, 9–10, 44; illegal immigration, 37n58; performed narratives, 44, 57–58; professionals, 10,

- 12–14, 37n58, 176–77; programs for immigrants, 6–7, 33n28, 58–59; push and pull model, 10–11, 14, 34n32; statistics, 9–10, 13, 14–15, 23, 33n17; systemic racism, 12, 44; temporary mobility, 13, 14, 262, 267–68; top ten source countries, 14–15; US/Canada comparison, 10–11, 176–79, 303–304. *See also* United States, migration
- migration, refugees: about, 44–45, 57–60, 225; historical waves, 10, 12–15; US Safe Third Country Agreement, 13, 57, 78n8, 267, 274n17; US Smart Border Accord, 14. *See also* Dávila, Patricio; Granados, Francisco-Fernando; Mèn, Immony; *refugee reconnaissance* (Granados, 2005–15)
- Millar, Gavin, 115
- Minera San Xavier, Mexico, 133
- mining industries, 203–205
- Mochizuki, Cindy, 60
- modernity: city symphony films, 299n43; film and media studies, 281–83; modernity and decoloniality, 281–86; pluriversity, 281–86; primitivism exhibitions, 296n12
- Molina, Juan Antonio, 152, 153, 158–59
- Mónica Reyes Gallery, Vancouver, 21, 31n1, 158–59, 349
- Monsalve, Teo, 23
- Monterrey, Mexico, 130, 135–37, 140
- Montes de Oca, Dannys, 152
- Montreal: academic studies on Latinx Canadian, 24–28; barriers to alliances, 91–94; countercultures, 82; *Entrepôt* 77, 96; film and media, 27–28; Indigenous alliances, 94; Latinx immigrants, 97–98; Latinx immigrants, 180–81, 199; Louis Cyr monument, 319, 331n59; Le Parc des Hommes-Forts, 319, 319(f), 320(f), 331n59; police violence, 93–94; Pop Montreal (2021), 86; queer activism, 86, 93–94; systemic racism, 180–81; Tiohtià:ke, as name, 91; visible minorities, 180–81
- Montreal, artworks: *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (2018), 317–21, 319(f), 320(f), 331n53; *Resilience* (sound-walk), 97–98; *Xeno Walk* locations, 82, 86, 88–90, 90(f), 93. *See also* *Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- Montreal, film and media: about, 27–28; community networks, 47–48, 122–23; Cuba–Québec relationships, 47–48, 105–106, 122–23, 124n6; funding, 21, 32n6, 48, 105, 115–16; *Kanesatake* (1993), 213, 221n43; latinxité identity, 47–48; *Rendez-vous Québec Cinéma* film festival, 105; SODEC, 21, 32n6, 105, 115–16
- Montreal, galleries, museums, and artist-run centres: Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal, 16; LatinArte, 18, 21, 26, 37n62, 126n30, 355; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 15, 36n53, 207, 219n21; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (MAC), 305–306, 310. *See also* SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal
- Montreal, universities and colleges: Concordia University, 17, 20, 169; John Abbott College, 354; McGill University, xiii; Université de Montréal (UdeM), xiii, 169, 349, 350, 356; Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), 16, 101n26, 169
- Moodie, Kim, 201–202
- Moore, John (“Jake”) H., 202, 204, 218nn11–12
- Moraga, Cherrie, 8, 287–88, 315
- Morales, Sylvia, 288

- Morgado, Claudia, 27
- Morin, Peter, 265
- Morriss, César, 215
- Mosquera, Gerardo, 304, 335–36
- motion recordings: about, 230–41; COVID–19 context, 229, 239–41; data, 230–31, 231(f), 232(f); digital clothing, 236(f); editing, 234(f), 235–38, 236(f); listening/witnessing acts, 229, 246(f), 247, 251–52; motion capture, as term, 231; recorder and recordando, as terms, 188, 223, 232–33; storytelling technologies, 239, 252–53; virtual body animations, 238–39, 238(f). *See also* Dávila, Patricio; Mèn, Immony; recordando movement; technologies
- Mouawad, Wajdi, 115
- Mountains & Rivers Without End* (2016), 203–204
- movement. *See* motion recordings; performance art; soundwalking; walking
- Moyo, Last, 282
- Mteuzi, Alica, 272
- Mujer, arte y periferia* (exhibition, 1987), 292–94
- Mujer Artista, 28, 40n89
- Mujer Elefante, 192, 317–18, 331n54
- Mujeres Creando movement, 323, 332n64
- multiculturalism, Canada: about, 6–7, 59–60, 308–309; *Aquellarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294; critiques of, 6–7, 308–309, 330nn31–32; immigrant integration, 6–7, 58–59; Indigenous identities, 49; Multiculturalism Act (1988), 6, 32n8; reputation as welcoming, 308–309
- Muñoz, Carmen, 58
- Muñoz, Soledad, 292–94, 293(f)
- Muñoz Ordoqui, Eduardo, 152
- Murray, Stuart, 279
- Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (MAC), 305–306, 310
- Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, 310
- Museum London, Ontario: about, 197, 201–202, 201–206, 216, 218n8; Moore's collection of Brazilian art, 202, 204, 218nn11–12; Dianne Pearce's influence, 202–203; Satellite Project Space, 204; *10 Brazilian Artists/10 artistes brésiliens* (exhibition, 1975), 202, 218n10; *Teotihuacan: Place of the Gods* (exhibition, 1988), 218n8; *TransAMERICAS* (exhibition, 2016), 202–203. *See also* London, Ontario, Latinx Canadian
- museums. *See* art institutions, galleries and museums
- Naficy, Hamid, 145
- NAFTA trade agreement, 24–25, 35n45
- Nagtegaal, Heidi, 70, 74
- Naranjo, Marian, 190, 257, 268, 273n5
- Nareau, Michel, 114
- narratives. *See* storytelling and characters
- National Film Board of Canada, 22, 38n68, 221n43
- National Gallery of Canada, 35n50, 206, 219n21
- Nauman, Bruce, 335
- Nengudi, Senga, 323–24, 332n66
- nepantla, as term, 310–11
- networks. *See* alliances and solidarity; diasporic communities
- new media. *See* film and media; motion recordings
- New Mexico: El Rito, 190; 516 Arts, Albuquerque, 257–58, 263–64, 272n3; Institute of American Indian Arts, 264, 272, 354; pueblos, 190, 257, 259(f), 268, 270(f); Santa Fe Art Institute, 188–90, 256(f), 257, 266(f), 272nn1–3; Sierra Blanca, 268
- New York, 296n12, 330n34

- Nicaragua, migration, 12
- Niño, Kali, 146
- #NiUnaMás movement, 47
- #NiUnaMenos movement, 92
- nonbinary. *See* gender, LGBTQ2+ communities
- non-Western, as term, 278. *See also* Global North and South
- Noya, Ana Dolores, 335
- Ntuli, Pitika, 212
- nylon stockings, 192, 322–25, 322(f), 325(f)
- Obama, Barack, 106, 116
- Obomsawin, Alanis, 60, 140, 221n43
- OCAD (Ontario College of Art and Design University), Toronto, 65, 219n21, 351–52
- Olivares, Fito, 72
- Oliver, Amy, 282
- Oliveros, Pauline, 96
- Ombaasin Collective, 77
- Ontario: arts funding, 23, 37n64; expedition in *A Trip to Mexico* (Becher, 1880), 195–96, 217n2; illegalized Mexican migrants, 37n58. *See also* Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO); London, Ontario; Latinx Canadian; Ottawa, Ontario; Toronto
- Ontario, universities and colleges: Fanshawe College, 204; Queen's University, Kingston, 131, 352, 355; University of Ottawa, 27. *See also* Toronto region, universities and colleges; Western University, London, Ontario
- Or Gallery, Vancouver, 344
- Ortega, Mariana, 291
- Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Film Institute, 38n69; Lugar Común Editorial, 26; National Gallery of Canada, 35n50, 206, 219n21; refugee project, 225–26; University of Ottawa, 27
- Paoli, Julia, 77
- Pape, Lygia, 193, 343
- paper collage. *See* collage
- Paper Noise* (Gutiérrez, 2021), 91, 100n15, 100n17
- Paredes, Julieta, 323, 327n11, 332nn64–65
- Parente, Leticia, 46, 291–92
- Passing Through the Heart* (Dávila and Mèn, 2019–23): about, 187–88, 226, 228–41, 238(f), 252–53, 350; collaboration of Dávila and Mèn, 252–53, 350; food culture, 188, 227–28, 233–35, 234(f), 235–37, 236(f), 239–40, 252; gestures, 232, 233; transnational narratives, 239–41, 240(f); virtual body animations, 238–39, 238(f). *See also* motion recordings
- Pasten, Patricia, 248–50
- Pearce, Dianne, 202–203
- pedagogies. *See* film and media studies; performance art
- Pelletier, Sonia, 317–18
- Peña, René (Pupi), 152, 154, 158–59
- Peraza, Michelle, 215
- Perdomo, Sinara, 22
- Pereda, Nicolás, 17, 149
- Pérez Sueiro, Reynaldo, 110
- performance art: about, 61–66; action scores, 65; *Altero(s)filia o los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro* (Martín Franco, 2018), 317–21, 319(f), 320(f), 331n53; Biennial of Performance Art, Vancouver (2007), 67, 69; dialogue with Indigenous people, 65; ethics of distance, 65–66; pedagogies, 333, 339–45; 7a\*IIId international festival, 61, 74; social issues, 62, 64–65; untranslatable affects, 62, 65. *See also* Bernal, Claudia; CUERPO Collective Body; Granados, Francisco-Fernando; Martínez, Guadalupe (Lupe); Martín Franco, Helena;

- refugee reconnaissance* (Granados, 2005–15)
- Peru, migration, 12, 14–15
- photography: artist-run centres, 154–55; *Brazil/Canadá* (exhibition, 2022), 204–205, 219n19; digital photography, 162–63; *Londombia* (Bello, 2023), 204–205; *Migration Stories Whispered in My Ear* (Zuñiga, 2022), 204–205, 208, 219n18; photo-conceptualism, 160; photo testimony, 204–205; pure colour compositions, 162–63; relation to motion recordings, 233, 235; scholars, 16, 154–61; on urban environments, 353. *See also* Piña-Baldoquín, Manuel
- Pimentel, Tayana, 152
- Piña-Baldoquín, Manuel: about, 16, 21, 49–51, 151–67, 353; AKA Collective, 21, 31n1, 38n67, 158; Black Cuban identity, 158–62; Black solidarities, 50–51, 157–60; colour compositions, 162–63; community networks, 50–51, 152, 161; DI (digital interface), 163–67; education and career, 16, 21, 151, 153–54, 160–61, 353; Indigenous solidarities, 50–51, 156–57, 161–62; Latin American identity, 49–51, 153–54, 157–58, 166–67; life in Cuba, 50, 151–54, 157, 158–60, 353; life in Vancouver, 16, 50–51, 154–61, 353; spirituality, 49–51, 156–57, 160–62, 165–67; UBC professor, 16, 154–61
- Piña-Baldoquín, Manuel, works: *Agua baldías/Water Wastelands* (1992–94), 152, 153(f); *Diffractions of the Local* (exhibitions, 2013–2014), 31n1; *On Discipline* (2005–2007), 155; exhibitions, 21, 31n1, 158–60, 349, 353; MAGINES, 165–66, 164(f), 165(f); *La Mirada* (2010), 158; *Naufragios* (2015), 163(f), 157(f), 165
- Pinochet, Augusto, 5, 11, 13, 225, 292
- Piper, Keith, 212
- pluriversality, 276–77, 279–80, 284–86, 291, 294–95
- Podesva, Kristina Lee, 63
- Ponce de León, Carolina, 304
- Portillo, Lourdes, 288
- Portillo, René, 110
- Portillos, Alfredo, 337
- Positionality* (symposium, 2022), 19
- Posluns, Michael, 285
- Power in Resistance* (exhibition, 2019), 20
- Pratt, Mary Louise, 191
- Prescott, William H., 195
- Present Cartographers, 256(f), 257, 272n3, 353
- Prieto Gomez, Oralia, 258, 269(f), 271, 273n5, 274n18
- Public Visualization Studio (PVS), Toronto, 350
- publishers and publications: about, 18, 25–27, 190, 255–62; *Aquelarre Magazine* (all-women editorial team), 13, 18, 21, 294; *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* (journal), 25–26; LatinArte, Montreal, 26; Reading the Migration Library, 259–62, 260(f), 261(f); *Vues transversales*, 26. *See also* bosque brotante (Quezada Ureña et al, 2020); Light Factory Publications, New Mexico
- Puerta, Ramiro, 22–23
- Pupi (René Peña), 152, 154, 158–59
- Quebec: academic studies on Latinx, 24–28; anti-Asian racism, 241–42; anti-minority sentiment, 178; Coalition Avenir Québec, 178–79; community networks, 47–48, 122–23; Kanesatake Resistance, 213, 221n43; Latino-Québécois, 26; police violence, 178; transnationalism, 111–18; visibility/invisibility of Latinx, 178, 305–306. *See also* Montreal Queen's University, Kingston, 131, 352, 355



- queer. *See* gender, LGBTQ2+ communities
- Quezada Ureña, Daisy: about, 188–90, 255–72, 256(f), 354; aesthetic actions, 255, 262, 264–67; ceramics, 258, 263–64; conversation with Klassen, 262–72; education and career, 255, 354; Latinx Art Forum fellowship, 255, 262–63, 273n6, 354; Latinx identity, 262–63; life in Mexico, 263; life in New Mexico, 263, 354; Present Cartographers, 256(f), 257, 272n3; Santa Fe Art Institute residency, 188–90; *Species in Peril along the Rio Grande* (2019), 257–58, 263, 273n7; *Terreno* (2017), 256(f), 257, 265, 266(f), 272, 272nn2–3. *See also* *bosque brotante* (Quezada Ureña et al, 2020)
- Quijano, Aníbal, 131–32, 301, 306–307, 328n17
- racism and discrimination: about, 5–7, 49, 241, 303; anti-Asian violence, 142, 229, 241, 243–47, 244(f)–245(f); anti-racist policies, 6–7; capitalist exploitation, 268, 307; coloniality of power, 131–32, 301, 306–309, 328n17; demographics, 303–305, 328n13; environmental issues, 190, 269–72, 270(f); film and media industry, 21–22, 32n6; microaggressions, 49, 142; skin colour, 132, 135, 141–42, 181; soundwalking and marginalized people, 96–97; systemic racism in Montreal, 180–81; visibility/invisibility in the arts, 301–306, 310–11; whiteness and colonization, 3–4, 141–42, 303–304. *See also* Black people; Indigenous peoples; *Receipts* (Dávila and Mèn, 2021)
- Radio Insomnia, 97
- Rafael Soto, Jesús, 202
- Raheja, Michele H., 285
- Ramírez Castillo, Osvaldo, 23, 272n2, 330n36
- Ramírez-Figueroa, Naufus, 61, 66, 69
- Ramiro Beltrán, Luis, 140
- Rangel, Carla, 51
- Reading the Migration Library, 259–62, 260(f), 261(f), 267, 353
- Receipts* (Dávila and Mèn, 2021): about, 187–88, 226, 241–47, 252–53, 350; anonymized records, 188, 243–47; anti-Asian violence, 142, 229, 243–47, 244(f)–245(f); collaboration of Dávila and Mèn, 252–53, 350; COVID-19 context, 229, 241; diasporic networks, 241–44; listening/witnessing acts, 229, 246(f), 247; motion recording, 229, 246(f), 247; testimonies of violence, 229, 241–47, 242(f), 244(f)–245(f), 252. *See also* motion recordings
- recordando movement: about, 223, 230–33, 252–53; gestures, 232, 233–35, 234(f); hands, 229–30; proprioception, as term, 228; recorder and recordando, as terms, 188, 223, 232–33; recording/remembering/processing, 232–33; remembering with body and senses, 223, 228–31; walking gaits, 232(f). *See also* Dávila, Patricio; Mèn, Immony; motion recordings
- recordings, motion. *See* motion recordings
- Redefining Canadian* (short films), 59–60
- Reece, Skeena, 63
- refugee reconnaissance* (Granados, 2005–15): about, 45–46, 55–56, 65–77, 78n2; action scores, 55, 65–77, 78n2; *apostrophe*, 64–65, 75; *Exile 1* and *2*, 62, 66–67; *riddle*, 46, 65, 77
- refugees. *See* migration, refugees
- research-creation practice, 7–8, 46, 81, 257, 291, 349. *See also* academia

*Resilience, midnight steps and the moon as guide from A to Z* (Gutiérrez, 2023), 97–98

resistance: about, 307, 324; aesthetic actions, 255, 262, 264–67; affirmative sabotage, 45, 55, 78n4; *bosque brotante*, 268–69, 269(f); decolonial aesthetics, 318–21, 324–25; film and media studies, 295–96; Latinx terminology, 45; Mujeres Creando, 332n64; paper collages (*Xeno Walk*), 81–82, 89–94, 90(f), 100n15, 101n20; *Power in Resistance* (exhibition, 2019), 19–20; visibility/invisibility of artists, 305–306. *See also* decolonization; feminism

Reyes, Mónica, 21, 31n1, 38n67, 158

Riley, Henry Chauncey, 195–96

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia, 31n4, 314–15

*Roads in February* (film), 23

Robin, Alena: about, xii–xiii, 198–99, 354; *Colores de Latinoamérica* (exhibition, 2011), 187, 198, 214–16, 219n15, 222n50; education and career, xii–xiii, 197–99, 208, 302, 354; on Latinx in London, Ontario, 186–87; publications, xii–xiv, 25, 26, 39n80, 354. *See also* London, Ontario, Latinx Canadian

Robinson, Dylan, 264

Robles Flores, Manuel, 257–58, 264, 268, 269(f), 271, 273n5, 274n18

Rocha, Glauber, 291, 296n5

Rodger, Judith M., 217n6

Rodríguez, Carmen, 292–94, 293(f)

Rodríguez, Juana María, 47–48, 105, 113–14, 118

Rodríguez, Lina, 17

Rodríguez, Marta, 279, 280

Rodríguez, Martin, 51

Rojas, Emilio, 158, 339

Rosales Argonza, Mariza, 18, 21, 26

Rubio MacWright, Carolina, 272n2

Ruiz, Antonio, 69

Ruiz, Pedro: about, 47–48, 115–16, 120–21; *Animal Tropical à Montréal* (2007), 115; *La dérive douce d'un enfant de Petit-Goâve* (film 2009), 115; Faits Divers Média, 105, 124n6; latinxité identity, 47–48, 120–23; *Philémon chante Habana* producer (2012), 108, 115; politics of location, 114–16, 329n18; *Sur les toits Havane* director, 47–48, 108–10; transnationalism from below, 111–18. *See also* *Sur les toits Havane* (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019)

Ruttmann, Walter, 299n43

Saavedra, Lázaro, 16

Sabo, Connie, 74

Sabogal, Jessica, 319

Safe Third Country Agreement, US–Canada, 13, 57, 78n8, 267, 274n17

Salazar, Jairo, 23–24, 262

Salcedo, Doris, 192

Saltillo, Mexico, 199–201, 217n4

Samayoa, Kattia, 261(f), 262

Sánchez, Diana, 22–23

Sánchez Nicolás, Darien: about, 47–48, 103–27, 354–55; Cuba–Québec networks, 47–48; education and career, 124n5, 354–55

Sanjinés, Javier, 330n43

Sanjinés, Jorge, 279, 296n5

San Luis Potosí, Mexico, 130, 132–34, 138, 149

San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, 201

Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, 190, 257

Santa Fe, Institute of American Indian Arts, 264, 272, 354

Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico, 188–90, 256(f), 257, 266(f), 272nn1–3

Santi, Flavio, 161

- Santo Domingo Pueblo, New Mexico, 259(f)
- São Paulo, Brazil, 219n21, 283, 291, 296n7
- Sassen, Saskia, 111
- Satellite Project Space, London, Ontario, 197, 204, 216, 219n20
- Saward, Gillian, 201
- SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal: about, 20–21, 51, 169–84; Carton de Grammont as director, 20, 21, 51, 170; Gutiérrez's residency, 82, 91–93; Indigenous focus, 20, 37n66; *L'arbre blessé/The Wounded Tree* (2023), 171(f); Latinx Canadian art, 20, 51, 170, 173–75; Latinx Canadian identity, 175; nonprofit exhibition centre, 170; research-based exhibitions, 171–75; *Canto, río, río, lloro* (Escobar, 2022), 172(f); sound artists, 51, 52n3; staff, 170–71; *Third-ear Transmissions*, 51, 52n3. *See also* Carton de Grammont, Nuria; *Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- Schafer, R. Murray, 84, 96
- scholarship. *See* academia
- Segura, Tamara, 17, 22
- Seminario Interuniversitario de Estudios Canadienses en América Latina, 40n87
- Sepúlveda, Enrique, 265
- 7a\*1ld International Performance Art Festival, Toronto, 61, 74
- sexuality and gender. *See* gender; gender, LGBTQ2+ communities
- SFU. *See* Simon Fraser University (SFU)
- Shamash, Sarah: about, 190–91, 275–95, 355; *From Chile to Canada* (2022), 292–94, 293(f); Cine Kurumin film festival, 191, 289–90; decolonization, 190–91, 277–78; education and career, 276–78, 280, 282, 284, 289, 291, 355; film and media, 290–94, 293(f), 355; film pedagogies, 191, 282–83, 285–89, 294–95; intersectional feminisms, 276, 286–89; life in Brazil, 275–76, 287, 290–91; life in Vancouver, 275–76, 355; pluriversality, 276–77, 279–80, 284–86, 291, 294–95; positionality, 275–76, 280, 282; transhemispheric approach, 277–78; Video nas Aldeias (video in the villages), 285, 297n25, 355
- Shambu, Girish, 286
- Shem, Sam, 63
- Shipley, Tyler, 329n28
- Sierra, Ángela, 21, 126n30
- Sierra Blanca, New Mexico, 268
- Silva, Jorge, 279
- Simon Fraser University (SFU): scholars, xiii, 340, 349, 352; World Soundscape Project (WSP), 84–85, 96, 99n5. *See also* Aceves Sepúlveda, Gabriela
- Sinder, Bruno, 204
- Singh, Ikbāl, 62–63, 67
- Situationist International, 83
- skin. *See* body
- Smart, Alan and Josephine, 111
- Smith, Joan, 111
- Smith, Michael Peter, 111
- Société de Développement Économique des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC), 21, 32n6, 105, 115–16
- Solanas, Fernando, 296n5
- solidarity. *See* alliances and solidarity; diasporic communities
- Some, Malidoma Patrice, 162
- sound: acoustic ecology, 83–86, 96, 101n24; sound collectives, 86–87; #VIVAS (sound collective), 81, 86–87, 95–96, 98–99; World Soundscape Project (WSP), 84–85, 96, 99n5
- soundwalking: about, 83–89; AR (augmented reality) technology, 81–82, 86–87, 87(f), 90, 96; collective walking as agency, 87–94; *dérive* (drifting), 81,

- 83; gendered soundscapes, 82, 86–91, 96, 99n5; intersectionality, 95, 98–99; language barriers, 97–98; as political activism, 86–91, 98–99; *Sociability of Sleep*, 97, 101n26; *Third-ear Transmissions*, 51, 52n3; *A Vancouver Soundwalk*, 85. *See also* Gutiérrez, Amanda; *Xeno Walk*, Montreal
- Soussloff, Catherine, 342–43
- South, Global. *See* Global North and South
- Southern Currents Film and Video Collective, 22
- South Korea, 32n10, 264, 265, 354
- Southworth, Michael, 99n5
- A Space Gallery, Toronto, 311–13, 313(f), 330n36
- SpanicArts, Calgary, 41n91
- Spence, Jean and Michael, 201–202, 218n8
- spirituality: communitarian feminism, 305, 323, 327n11; identity, 166–67; Indigenous artists, 161–62; Pachamama, 323; pilgrimages, 336–37; Piña-Baldoquin's experiences, 49–51, 156–57, 160–62, 165–67; *Sur les toits Havane* (film, 2019), 121–22; technologies, 165–67
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 45, 54, 63, 78n4
- Stam, Robert, 278
- Steele, Lisa, 64
- Stephen, Lynn, 131
- Stewart, Susan, 63
- Stiegler, Bernard, 165–66
- St. Mary's College, Maryland, 351
- storytelling and characters: autobiographical fiction, 247–50; characters as disruption of categories, 317–21; fantasy, 247–48; motion recordings, 247–48, 252–53; performance art (*Altero(s)filia* o *los juegos de fuerza de Fritta Caro*), 317–21, 319(f), 320(f), 331n53. *See also* *Fabulous Ones* (Dávila and Mèn, 2022)
- Suescun Pozas, Maria del, 26
- Support Gallery, London, Ontario, 201
- Sur Gallery, Toronto, 19–20, 21, 37nn64–65, 322(f), 325, 355
- Sur les toits Havane* (documentary film, Ruiz, dir., 2019): about, 47–48, 104–23; Afro-Caribbeanness, 48, 105, 107–108, 113–14, 118–19, 121; awards, 106; *créolisation*, 47–48, 105, 120–21, 126n40; cultural diplomacy, 113–18, 122–23; domesticities, 106(f), 107–14, 107(f), 109(f), 118–23; *Faits Divers Média*, 105, 124n6; film festivals, 105–106, 117; funding, 105, 124n6; languages, 104, 105; latinxité identity, 47–48, 105, 110–11, 113–14, 118, 120–23; Maldonado as producer, 105, 108, 110, 113–17, 124n6; politics of location, 114–16, 122–23; Québec-Cuba networks, 47–48, 122–23; queerness and latinidad, 47–48, 105, 107–108, 113–14, 118, 120–23; Ruiz as director, 108–10; transnationalism from below, 104–105, 107–108, 110–18, 122–23
- Swentzell, Roxanne, 257, 273n5, 274n19
- Szlam, José, 176
- Szlam, Malena, 16–17
- Takahashi, Tess, 229
- TAP Centre for Creativity, London, Ontario, 197, 214–16, 221n47, 222n51
- technologies: about, 162–67; digital cartography, 84; digital interface (DI), 163–67; *MAGINES*, 164–66, 164(f), 165(f); online presence of artists, 159–60; spirituality, 165–67. *See also* motion recordings; recordando movement; sound; soundwalking

- Tecnológico de Monterrey (TEC), 130, 135–37, 140
- Telefilm Canada, 21, 23, 32n6, 116
- terminology, Latinx. *See* Latinx and Latinx Canadianness
- Terreno* (Arthur, Klassen, and Quezada, eds., 2017), 256(f), 257, 265, 266(f), 272, 272nn2–3
- Thailand, refugees, 225–26. *See also* Mèn, Immony
- Théberge, Pierre, 219n21
- Third-ear Transmissions* (exhibition, 2023), 51, 52n3
- Thompson, Jennifer Joan, 324
- TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), 15, 17, 22–23, 355, 356
- Tiohtià:ke, 91. *See also* Montreal
- Tkaronto, 330n37. *See also* Toronto
- Toledo, Tamara: about, 19, 190–92, 301–32, 355; decoloniality, 190–92; education and career, 19, 355; LACAP co-founder, 18–19, 37n63, 355; *Pilgrimage of Wanderers* (2008), 311–13, 313(f), 330n36; Sur Gallery director/curator, 19–20, 21, 37nn64–65, 322(f), 325, 355. *See also* Bernal, Claudia; Ezcurra, María; Martín Franco, Helena
- Toronto: academic studies on Latinx, 24–28; aluCine Latin film festival, 22, 38n70; arts funding, 23, 242; film and media, 27–28; film festivals, 22–23, 38n70, 105; performance art, 54, 61, 64–65, 74–75, 311–13, 313(f), 330n36; TIFF film festival, 15, 17, 22–23, 355, 356; Tkaronto, as name, 330n37
- Toronto, galleries, museums, and artist-run centres: about, 23; Gallery TPW, 76, 77; LACAP (Latin American–Canadian Art Projects), 18–19, 37n63, 355; A Space Gallery, 311–13, 313(f), 330n36; Sur Gallery, 19–20, 21, 37nn64–65, 322(f), 325, 355
- Toronto region, universities and colleges: Metropolitan University, 351; OCAD University, 65, 219n21, 351–52; York University, 17, 144, 146, 248, 249(f). *See also* academia; University of Toronto; Western University, London, Ontario
- Torreón, Mexico, 130, 136–37
- torreonense identity, 135–37, 143–44, 148
- Torres, José Luis, 330n36
- Torres-García, Joaquín, 4, 205
- Totino, Mina, 154
- trade agreements, 24–25, 35n45
- transnationalism from below, 107–108, 110–18
- TransWEB* (virtual residency), 20
- Trick, Gordon, 60–61
- Trudell, Tara Evonne, 272n2
- Truffaut, François, 115
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), 6, 264–65, 303
- Tsosie-Peña, Beata, 190, 257, 264, 273n5
- Tuck, Eve, 276, 304
- Turtle Island, 277, 295n2. *See also* Global North and South
- UBC. *See* University of British Columbia (UBC)
- Unda, Ulises, 203–204, 219n15
- Undefined Radio (sound collective), 86
- United States: about, 25–26, 31n3, 147–48; academic studies, 24–25, 343; African Americans, 6, 173, 181, 303, 323–24, 332n66; art exhibitions on modernity, 296n12; Chicano movement, 178, 189; comparison with Canada, 10–11,

- 176–79, 303–304; diffracting the North, 3–4; film festivals, 106, 117; global art exchanges, 24–25; Latinx Art Forum fellowships, 255, 262–63, 273n6, 354; performance art, 343; *R.S.V.P.* series (Nengudi), 323–24, 332n66. *See also* New Mexico
- United States, identity: categories as context dependent, 148, 179–80, 248, 346–47; conflation of Latin American and Latinx, xiv–xv, 25–26; Hispanics, 147; Latino/a identity, 31n3; Latinx identity, 24–25, 31n3, 147, 189–90, 196–97; supra-categories, 147–48; visibility/invisibility of Latinx art, xiv–xv, 24–25
- United States, Indigenous peoples: environmental issues, 269–72, 270(f); identity, 147; languages, 271–72; Rio Grande region, 190, 257, 268–72, 270(f); supra-national kinship, 188, 190. *See also* Light Factory Publications, New Mexico; New Mexico
- United States, migration: comparison with Canada, 10–11, 176–79, 303–304; double border of US/Canada, 177–78; historical trends, 10, 12–13, 177; Safe Third Country Agreement, 14, 57, 78n8, 267, 274n17; Smart Border Accord, 14
- Universidad de Guadalajara, 129–30, 133–34, 352
- Universidad del Valle de Atemajac, Zapopan, 40n87
- Universidad del Zulia, Venezuela, 27
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), 40n87, 133, 169, 198, 203
- Université de Montréal (UdeM), xiii, 169, 349, 350, 356
- Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), 16, 101n26, 169
- universities and colleges. *See* academia; Montreal, universities and colleges; Ontario, universities and colleges; Toronto region, universities and colleges; Vancouver, universities and colleges
- University of Alberta, Edmonton, 137, 138, 141–43, 351
- University of British Columbia (UBC): about, xiii, 16, 36n56, 158; Black scholars, 158–59; Cuban Canadian artists, 16, 353; film and media studies, 154–55, 277; first woman of colour faculty, 295n3; Indigenous artists, 50–51, 156–57, 161–62; part-time and sessionals, 340–42; scholars, xiii, 16, 36n56, 154–55, 158–59, 339–42, 353; tenure-track positions, xiii, 16, 353
- University of Ottawa, 27
- University of Toronto: performance art, 54, 64–65, 74–75; scholars, 351–52
- urban environments: acoustic ecology, 84–85, 96; gender and walking, 82, 86, 88–91, 96; gentrification, 64, 83–84; noise pollution, 85; photography, 353; psychogeography, 83; situationist urbanism, 81; skateboard parks, 82, 86–89. *See also* sound; soundwalking
- Urquhart, Tony, 201–202
- Uruguay, migration, 12, 23
- Valdés, Eugenio, 152, 157
- Vallée, Jean-Marc, 112
- Vancouver: Action Team, 59–60; *Aquelarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294; Biennial of Performance Art (2007), 67, 69; Black population, 159; *From Chile to Canada* (film, 2022), 292–94, 293(f); Ecu-menical Task Force for Justice, 56–57; film and media, 27–28, 59–60, 154–55, 277; film festivals, 22, 35n41, 292–94;

- Indigeneity, 161–62; Latinx in academia, 24–28; *New Art from Cuba* (exhibition, 1997), 16; refugee peer support, 58–59; soundwalks, 85–86
- Vancouver, galleries, museums, and artist-run centres: about, 20–21, 23–24; AKA Collective, 21, 31n1, 38n67, 158; Latin American Cultural Centre, 23, 38n73; Mónica Reyes Gallery, 21, 31n1, 158–59, 349; photography, 154–55; Vancouver Art Gallery, 64, 73, 344; VIVO Media Arts Centre, 60, 67, 292. *See also* CUERPO Collective Body
- Vancouver, universities and colleges: Emily Carr University, 62–64, 67, 68, 71, 72, 340, 355; Langara College (snaweyəł leləm), 60. *See also* academia; Simon Fraser University (SFU); University of British Columbia (UBC)
- Vela Alarcón, Andrea, 215
- Venezuela, 14–15, 27. *See also* Ruiz, Pedro
- Venice Biennale, 61, 219n21
- Verjee, Zainub, 292–94
- video. *See* film and media; motion recordings; technologies
- Vietnamese refugees, 225–26
- Villar, Andrés, 219n15
- Villegas, Paloma E., 37n58
- Villeneuve, Denis, 112
- Vincent, Don, 201
- visual arts, xi–xvii, 3–4, 25–28. *See also* film and media; motion recordings; photography
- #VIVAS (sound collective), 81, 86–87, 95–96, 98–99
- VIVO Media Arts Centre, Vancouver, 60, 67, 292
- Vlas, Adelina, 209
- Volpe, Giorgia, 176
- Vues transversales* (LatinArte), 26
- Wade, Jan, 154
- Walcott, Rinaldo, 6–7
- Walia, Harsha, 270
- walking: as agency, 47, 82, 85, 87–94, 98; feminist night walks, 87–88; pilgrimages and identity, 336–37; situationist urbanism, 81; walking gaits (motion recordings), 232(f). *See also* soundwalking
- Wall, Jeff, 155, 160
- Wallace, Ian, 154
- Wallace, Keith, 154, 159
- Wallerstein, Immanuel, 111
- Walsh, Catherine E., 281
- Wang, K. Wayne, 276, 304
- Wapikoni Mobile, 279–80, 296n9
- Watriss, Wendy, 155
- Watson, Scott, 154
- Wei, Casey, 292–94, 293(f)
- West, Franz, 61
- Westerkamp, Hildegard, 84–85, 96
- Western University, London, Ontario: about, 197–200, 216; course on Latin American art in Canada, 208, 220n34; photo testimony, 204–205; Satellite Project Space, 204; scholars, xii, 197, 354. *See also* academia; Artlab Gallery, Western University; McIntosh Gallery, Western University
- whiteness. *See* racism and discrimination
- Winnipeg, Manitoba, 27–28
- women: *Aquelarre Magazine*, 13, 18, 21, 294; artist-run centres, 21, 28; body as site of decolonization, 191–92, 301–306; demographics of artists, 305, 328n13; elasticity of bodies, 323–24; femicide, 25, 101n20, 192, 321–25, 325(f); film festival (In Visible Colours), 35n41, 292–94; first woman of colour faculty at UBC, 295n3; Indigenous women, 140, 192; motherhood, 342; Mujer Artista,

- 28, 40n89; resiliency, 321–24. *See also* feminism; gender
- World Soundscape Project (WSP), 84–85, 96, 99n5
- Wright, Cynthia, 114
- Wyss, T'uy't' tanat-Cease, 60
- Xeno Walk*, Montreal: about, 46–47, 81–82, 86–99, 87(f), 90(f), 95(f); barriers to alliances, 91–94; Collages Féministes Montréal, 46–47, 81–82, 86–89, 91–95, 99, 100n15, 100n19; criminalization, 93–94, 101n20; decoloniality, 46–47, 83–86, 98–99; gender and accessibility, 82, 86, 88–91, 96; interviews, 82, 86–87, 95–96, 100n10; locations, 82, 86, 88–91, 90(f), 93, 96–97; marginalized people, 96–97; queer activism, 86, 93–94; research-creation practice, 46–47, 89; skateboard parks, 82, 86–89. *See also* Gutiérrez, Amanda
- Yero Montero, Osvaldo, 16
- York University, Toronto, 17, 144, 146, 248, 249(f)
- Zamorano, Josema, 21, 23, 163
- Zarza, Zaira: about, xiii–xiv, 356; education and career, xiii–xiv, 28, 356; interview with Carton de Grammont, 51–52, 169–83; interview with Piña-Baldoquín, 49–50, 151–67; introduction, 3–41; preface, xi–xvii
- Zion, Amy, 69
- Z'otz (artist collective), 202
- Zuñiga, Moysés, 204, 208