A Research-Creation Approach to Gender-Based Violence

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ABSTRACT

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My research and creative work critically engage with gender-based violence, paying special attention to the extreme case of feminicide/femicide. Gender-based violence is an endemic problem found equally across the private and the public sphere. Feminicide/femicide is the most extreme expression of gender-based violence. It is the last link of a long chain of violence entrenched in the mindset of a patriarchal and capitalist system. In this system, the body is perceived as an exploitable and disposable commodity. This thesis reflects on the layered process that led me to the completion of two pieces emerging from a research-creation approach. This process involved an in-depth research, prototyping and iterative work, followed by exhibitions and reflections. My research is informed by concepts related to the treatment of violence and suffering through cultural expressions. During the design process, I gained insight regarding the complexities of dealing with delicate topics. In response to the many levels of complexity embedded in this subject matter, my creative practice focused on an iterative process in which a corpus of work was created. While each piece can function independently, they are tied to the same research. Through these iterations, I unfold diverse strategies that may be useful for future artists and designers working with gender-based violence.

DEDICATION

A María

y a todas las pibas que ya no tienen voz

Table of Contents

List of Figures

> "Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don't mean escaping into dreams or the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification"
>
> (Italo Calvino, Six Memos for The Next Millennium)

Chapter 1: Introduction & Research Questions

Gender-based violence is an endemic problem deeply rooted in many societies. It is equally present in the private and the public sphere. According to estimates published by the World Health Organization, around 30% of women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2002). The highest numbers of female murders can be found in countries such as El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala and Brazil. Femicide/feminicide is the most extreme expression of gender-based violence. It refers to the killing of women and girls due to their gender. In Argentina, cases of feminicide have increased in number over the last years. According to the Registro Nacional de Feminicidios de MuMaLá (Mujeres de la Matria Latinoamericana) there was one feminicide every 30 hours in Argentina in 2017 (MuMaLá, 2017). Feminicide is the last expression of a complex structure made of hate, disdain and violence. This structure is entrenched in the mindset of a patriarchal and capitalist system that exploits and desecrates the body as a disposable commodity.

By applying a research-creation approach and merging art, design and academic research, my work acts as an interdisciplinary bridge-medium that explores alternative and innovative strategies to deal with gender-based violence. I examined the methods that can be useful to deal with complex subjects such as feminicide. The interdisciplinary nature and flexible methodology of a research-creation approach provided me with a rich environment and boundless opportunities to explore and innovate in my creative practice.

My work is guided by two main research questions. The first research question explores what strategies can be applied to work with gender-based violence. While looking at what these

strategies look like, this thesis examines the implications and ethical considerations emerging from my creative work. The second research question that shapes my work is how social institutions can contribute to the perpetuation of a continuum of gender-based violence rooted in many societies. I explore how everyday actions and cultural expressions may contribute to the maintenance of a structure that naturalizes and trivializes gender-based violence.

Throughout the following chapters, I will present my methodology and the theoretical background that supports my research-creation project. I will reflect on the complexities of working with delicate subjects and the potential benefits of designing uncomfortable interactions. Moreover, I will introduce my experiences and inspiration sources as well as the rich array of overlapping concepts that contributed to my work.

In the last chapters, I will focus on the creative process behind my body of artwork, which includes a variety of prototypes, instances of exploration with diverse media, and finally the production of my research-creation pieces: SOLA and Don Federico. SOLA is a video game that embodies the climate of tension, discomfort and fear that can be experienced while walking alone at night in cities where gender-based violence is embedded in everyday life. This piece is complemented by Don Federico, which is an experimental video that, in a simple but troubling way, reveals how the naturalization of violence can be transmitted by cultural expressions. This thesis will conclude with reflections emerging from several instances of exhibitions.

Chapter 2: Background

Context

Violence Against Women

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization as: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (WHO, 2002). Violence against women is considered a major public health issue and one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations (WHO, 2002). In 1993, the United Nations defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations, 1993).

According to Susana T. Fried, violence or the verbal threat of violence "terrorizes many women and keeps them from freely and wholly contributing to the social, economic, and political development of their communities" (Fried, 2003, p. 91). Most signs of violence happen within the domestic environment. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 3 women that have been in an intimate relationship have reported experiencing some form of verbal, physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime (Park, 2013). Intimate partner violence comprehends any behaviour that may cause physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours (WHO, 2002).

What is Femicide/Feminicide?

> "From the burning of witches in the past, to the more recent widespread custom of female infanticide in many societies, to the killing of women for so-called honour, we realize that femicide has been going on a long time"
> (Diana Russell, 2011)

Femicide/feminicide is the most extreme form of violence. It is crucial to examine the origin of the term *femicide* and the differences between *femicide* and *feminicide*. Untangling the difference in their contexts is helpful to better grasp this phenomenon. The terms *femicide* and *feminicide* are commonly used interchangeably, however, they emerged under different contexts. The feminist writer and activist Diana Russell explains:

> "Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of the sexist terrorization of women and girls. Rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, incestuous and extra familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, and serious cases of sexual harassment are also in this continuum. Whenever these forms of sexist terrorism result in death, they become femicides" (Russell, 2001, p. 4).

The word *femicide* was firstly coined by Carol Orlock (Russell, 2011). The current use of the word emerged within femnist movements in 1970s. It is a tool to fight gender inequality and raise consciousness about gender-based oppression. Diana Russell was one of the pioneers in the use of this term. Russell first used the term *femicide* in public in 1976 in the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels (Russell, 2011).

In 1990, the Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde borrowed this concept. When she translated this term to Spanish it metamorphosed from *femicide* to *feminicidio (feminicide* in English). Not only did the word change, but its definition shifted too and took an approach more suitable to describe the case of Ciudad de Juarez in Mexico. The term *feminicide* not only refers to the murder of women by men due to gender motives, as claimed by Russell, it also calls attention to the impunity, silence and omission of unresolved crimes that target female bodies. Lagarde proposes a definition that points directly to the responsibility of the state and other institutions that contribute to the continuation and propagation of *feminicide* (Lagarde, 2014, 2015, 2018). The adoption of the term motivated feminist groups to create anti-feminicide organizations to fight

misogynist crimes (Russell, 2011). The term *feminicide* was spread and recognized in Spanish speaking countries, however, Russell disagreed with the definition proposed by Lagarde. Russell claims that including the notions of state responsibility and impunity for unresolved crimes means that other cases where the perpetrators are arrested and imprisoned would no longer be considered as feminicides (Russell, 2011). Russell argues that it is preferable to keep a definition that can be used globally (Russell, 2011).

Lagarde firstly used the term to describe the systematic killing of women in Ciudad de Juarez in Mexico. The term *feminicide* points directly to the state responsibility, therefore, one can agree this problematic exists only when there is a state that does not protect our bodies and does not prevent the proliferation of these crimes. Lagarde argues that these structures respond to what she calls *the politics of gender extermination*, which is linked to gender, class and ethnicity (Fregoso, 2007, p. 367). In these regards, Professor Rosa Linda Fregoso explains that "Feminicide is the local expression of the global proliferation of violence on the powerless, the borderland's form of social cleansing" (Fregoso, 2007, p. 367). Fregoso explores the advances made in Latina feminist studies in relation to the theories of globalism and postcolonialism. She examines the magnitude in which global forces such as neoliberalism, migrations, the war on terrorism and the proliferation of mass violence are shaping gender-based violence in the modern world. *Feminicide* acts as a form of gender, class and ethnic cleansing that is linked to the intersection of multiple forces: racism, capitalism and patriarchy (Fregoso, 2007).

It is nearly impossible to study this subject matter without examining Mexico as a case study. The case of Ciudad de Juarez in Mexico is a clear example of the inactivity of a corrupt system. As above mentioned, the term *feminicide* was firstly used by Lagarde to name the systematic killing of women in this city. Sergio González Rodríguez refers to Ciudad de Juarez as a *femicide machine*: "an apparatus that didn't just create the conditions for the murders of dozens of women and girls, but developed the institutions that guaranteed impunity for those crimes and even legalized them" (González Rodríguez, 2012, p. 7). As González Rodríguez explains, this city is a "vector of oil fields, natural gas, solar and wind-energy exploitations, and first-class military bases and installations" (González Rodríguez, 2012, p. 7) and it represents "the kind of human settlement that results from the destabilizing tensions of geopolitical interest" (González Rodríguez, 2012, p. 7).

Fregoso claims that the extreme cases of feminicide that the city of Ciudad de Juarez have suffered are the result of a necropolitical order that uses feminicide as a "form for making its dominion hyper-visible" (Fregoso, 2006, p.114). The extermination of female bodies represents a new language that emerges from a necropolitical order. Through this language, this order "communicates its total domination over the region" (Fregoso, 2006, p.114). In Ciudad de Juarez, the lives of unknown and marginalized women, mestizas or indigenous poor women are perceived as a disposable commodity. Not because of what they have done or thought, but "because of what they unchangeably were born into, the wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class, and in this case, the wrong kind of gender" (Arendt as cited in Fregoso, 2006, p. 114). Fregoso explains that feminicide targets "individual women who are murdered and disappeared because of their intersectional identities, as members of a particular gender, class and often, ethnicity" (Fregoso, 2009, p. 18).

Overall, in response to the differentiation between *femicide* and *feminicide*, one can claim that when moving from one context to another, it is logical to reshape and adapt the term. The same phenomenon may have different causes and consequences according to social, economic and political characteristics of each country. Acknowledging the need of slightly different definitions means acknowledging that gender-based violence is a complex social issue that may require multiple and alternative approaches to untangle its roots.

To conclude on its definition, *femicide/feminicide* refers to gender-related killing of women and girls, which can go from domestic violence to the "so-called 'honour' femicides, sex selection before birth, dowry marriage femicides and a host of other manifestations of extreme violence culminating in the death of a woman" (Weil, 2016, p. 7). From now on, I will use the understanding upheld by Lagarde and used by the majority of my consulted sources. My leaning towards the use of *feminicide* instead of *femicide*, is mainly due to my focus on the injustice and impunity of these crimes.

The Value of Naming

In *Femicide in Global Perspective*, Russell claims: "I have chosen the term *femicide*—the killing of female by males because they are female—in the hope that naming these crimes will facilitate its recognition" (Russell, 2001, p. 3). Russell illustrates the value of naming *femicide* and explains: "Our more ambitious aspiration is that the term femicide will soon be incorporated into the language of all wo/men working in the area of violence against women and that it will subsequently become part of every wo/man's vocabulary" (Russell, 2001, p. 4). Russell gives the example of the widespread sexual abuse that was perpetuated by Serbian soldiers against Croatian women in the Bosnia-Herzegovina civil war, who used rape as a war weapon. The incorporation of the term *femicide* to the feminist vocabulary made it possible to recognize the large numbers of cases of misogynist murders committed on the female bodies as a "deliberate and systematic part of the Serb's war strategy" (Russell, 2001, p. 9).

My research is strongly influenced by the work of the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Laura Segato. In *Notas para un Debate Emergente. ¿Qué es Feminicidio?,* Segato examines the meaning of the term *feminicide* and, as Russell, she highlights the importance of using a specific term to describe this phenomenon. She argues that to eradicate feminicide, the first step is to name it, to recognize it and give people the language to denounce it. Calling this phenomenon by its name makes it visible and leads to international awareness (Segato, 2006). In the article *Las mariposas q´eqchis de Sepur Zarco. Crímenes de género y luchas por la justicia, la memoria y la verdad en Guatemala*, Karina Bidaseca studies the case of the aboriginal women of Sepur Zarco. Similar to the case of the Bosnia-Herzegovina civil war, the Guatemalan case illustrates how the army made use of rape as a weapon of war. Rape is used as a strategy to diminish the enemy and to express the conquest of territory. The female body has been used as a metaphor or allegory for territory since ancient times (Bidaseca, 2016). In fact, the Sepur Zarco case was the first historic trial against war crimes, "This is the first generation of Mayan women who faced the colonialism of power and gender in Guatemala" (Bidaseca, 2016, p. 1). These are clear examples that contribute to illustrating the relevance of integrating the term *femicide/feminicide* in our vocabulary.

Feminicide in Argentina

My research was informed by the activist and feminist collective NiUnaMenos (Not one woman less). The movement was started in 2015 by a group of Argentine female artists, journalists and academics and defines itself as a "collective cry against machista violence" (Ni una menos, n.d.). Subjects such as gender roles, sexual harassment and sexual objectification are explored within this group of activists. The movement became recognized with the use of the hashtag #NiUnaMenos on social media. The book *NiUnaMenos, Vivxs nos queremos* (NotOneLess, Alive we want us) is a recollection of work from artists that emerged after the first protest against feminicide organized by NiUnaMenos in Argentina, which took place in 2016. This collective work explores tools and strategies to fight against gender-based violence. It highlights the importance of developing a collective work and a new language to work through this social problematic. The collective Fuerza Artística de Choque Comunicativo (Artistic Force of Communicative Shock) is a group of artists that use their bodies to protest against social issues. In June 2017, a group of 100 female artists gathered and undressed in front of the Congress and the Palace of Courts in Buenos Aires. This performance happened under the slogan "Feminicide is genocide". With this intervention, they aimed to raise awareness about gender-based violence and feminicide in Argentina.

Figure 1 Fuerza Artística de Choque Comunicativo

https://vocesfeministas.com/2017/05/31/argentina-protesta-mujeres-contra-violencia-machista-feminicidio-genocidio/

Feminicide has increased in number over the last years in Argentina. In 2017 women were victims of feminicide once every 30 hours (MuMaLá, 2017). The Argentinian journalist, Luciana Peker, refers to recent cases of feminicide as "*crimes with a mark*: carried out with rage and impunity" (Fregoso, 2009, p. 109). Peker highlights the similarities emerging from countries such as Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador and Ciudad de Juárez. These crimes are carried out with: "sadism, rage, and absolute impunity" (Fregoso, 2009, p. 110). In 2016, Lucía Perez, a 16-yearold girl, was abducted, raped, tortured by the method of impalement and brutally murdered in Argentina. In response to this horrifying and unspeakable event, women from all over South America took the streets and marched in protest of femicide under a new slogan #VivasNosQueremos (#WeWantUsAlive). People in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico, among others, marched, yelled and worked collectively to denounce this social problematic.

Thanks to the efforts of many people, the large protests and manifestations carried out by feminist groups over the past years in Argentina, feminicide is currently seen as an endemic social issue that calls for everyone's attention. By moving away from the notion of rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, as isolated, personal, and frequently hidden events, we are moving into a visible, powerful and collective fight against a shared concern. As claimed by the New York Radical Feminists in their Manifesto: "When more than two people have suffered the same oppression the problem is no longer personal but political–and rape is a political matter" (New York Radical Feminists Manifesto of Shared Rape, 1971). Gender-based violence and femincide must not be considered as an individual misfortune, but on the contrary, as a collective experience shared among all women, as the powerful protest chant says: *"Matan a una, nos matan a todas"* (They kill one of us, they kill all of us).

Related Work

Difficult Knowledge

> "We are witnesses as these images and objects, emerging from hateful contexts, are transformed into the visible, material touchstone of new experiences and narratives"
> (Lehrer et al., 2011, 17)

"What kinds of knowledge are difficult? Or rather, what is it that is difficult about *difficult knowledge*?" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 7). The term *difficult knowledge* was originally coined by the educational theorist Deborah Britzman. In the context of my work, the term *difficult knowledge* refers to those subjects that are commonly delicate or painful to unfold: "violent, tragic, gruesome, horrific, and painful topics" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 7). These are related to "experiences of war, genocide, and human rights violations" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 7). This approach to *difficult knowledge* unfolds the goals and challenges of curating complex and delicate subjects, explores how to represent absent people and how to connect difficult histories with the public. This notion provides me with a frame to understand how to engage with images of human suffering from a curatorial and practice-based approach. Working with difficult knowledge contributes to the creation of "social space[s] for shared experience of looking, listening, and talking, creating alternative relationships and publics, for constructive meaning making and action taking" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 4). Britzman distinguishes the notion of *difficult knowledge* from *lovely knowledge* (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 4). "'*Lovely knowledge'* is easily assimilable" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 8), it is a knowledge that gives us the information we are expecting to receive. Therefore, it reinforces the story that we already know by not complicating or contradicting it. The category of *difficult knowledge* is used to describe knowledge that does not fit, or that proves to be painful to fit into the story that we know. For instance, this is the story of how our nations were built, the story of the conquests and appropriation of land, the story of genocide, suffering and violence (Lehrer et al., 2011). These stories involve complex and delicate knowledge about our contexts, ourselves and our relationship with others. As Lehrer et al. explain, "Such knowledge points to the more challenging, nuanced aspects of history and identity, potentially leading us to reconceive our relationships with those traditionally defined as "other" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 8).

Working with difficult knowledge involves the curation of delicate pasts or presents and the recollection and preservation of memory. The word "curate" is linked to "caring for". As explained by Lehrer et al., "to 'care for' the past is to make something of it, to place and order it in a meaningful way in the present rather than abandon it" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 4). My creative work unfolds alternative strategies to create with and curate difficult subjects. This notion allowed me to reflect on how do we, activist artists, designers and researchers, engage with knowledge about violence and human suffering? And as Lehrer et al. claim: "who should look, at what, how, and to what end?" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 1), furthermore, what are the design decisions involved in the process of working with difficult knowledge? To quote Lehrer et al., "How do we—as scholars, curators, artists, activists, survivors, descendants, and other stakeholders—attempt to bear witness, to give space and shape to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violence conflict without perpetuating its logic" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 4). The creation of new knowledge based on delicate subjects such as gender-based violence, comes with great ethical responsibilities. What meaning are we bringing to the world? What narratives are we designing? Whose knowledge should we privilege? A crucial question to be asked and to be reflected on is where do we stand as designers in the task of working with delicate and difficult subjects. Who "is inquiring, deciding, acting - and on whose behalf" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 4).

Violence & the Image

> "What happens when the invisible is made visible, when knowledge relegated to society's margins or swept under its carpet is suddenly inserted into the public domain?"
> (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 1)

I reflected on our habituated response to violence in order to unpack alternative strategies to critically engage with painful images and produce artwork that can create lasting experiences in the viewer. How do we consume images of violence? Does portraying images of violence and human suffering contribute to raising awareness and provoke action? Is it an effective strategy?

Still images are effective means to acquire knowledge, "a photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture" (Sontag, 1977, p. 5). We witness images of human suffering daily while sitting comfortably in front of our screens. The images invite us to reflect on those horrifying acts, we feel that "what we have seen is horrible and should not have happened" (Chan, 2010, p. 379). We are disturbed by the violence depicted on screen and our response to these images triggers a feeling of being part of a "consensus of revulsion" (Chan, 2010, p. 379). However, this response does not necessarily indicate a course of action, usually "we leave the art gallery, turn off the television, have a drink, and get on with life" (Chan, 2010, p. 379). When witnessing footage of human suffering on screen, "the gaze strays into remoteness and distraction, as image leaks into the next image and all leaks into transitoriness, and pain is distanced by the safety of the medium and the comfort of the viewer" (Chan, 2010, p. 378). The overpopulation of these images become a means of desensitization, "the horror depicted is not real any more. It is just a photograph that can be passed over, looked beyond." (Chan, 2010, p. 377). Chan explains that Susan Sontag argues "that the image can be powerful, but works as an effective device to stir lasting intervention in its viewers only when the viewer recalls from his or her own and direct memory things directly witnessed and experienced" (Chan, 2010, p. 378). Sontag explains:

> "A good rule before one goes marching or signing anything: Whatever your tug of sympathy, you have no right to a public opinion unless you've been there, experienced first-hand and on the ground and for some considerable time the country, war, injustice, whatever, you are talking about. In the absence of such firsthand knowledge and experience: silence" (Sontag as cited in Chan, 2010, p. 379)

Sontag's reflection points to the idea of experience as a source of knowledge: "only from an experiential foundation can imagery evoke an imagination that means something and can lead to something" (Chan, 2010, p. 378). This notion constitutes one of the main pillars that support my creative practice. My work focuses on representing an experience rather than depicting explicit violence on screen. We are witnesses of human suffering every day, we consume the pain of others daily by turning on our TVs, by listening to the news or by scrolling on our social media platforms. I wonder, what happens to our response to violence when it is offered to us daily? It would not be surprising if we have become immune to it.

I reflected on the reproduction of gender-based violence produced by the media. These reproductions may influence the way gender-based violence is perceived, by using a certain language, stereotyping gender constructions or depicting the female body as a disposable commodity. In some cases, the media portrays the victims of feminicide in certain ways that guide the discussion towards a re-victimiczation of the victims by analyzing their background instead of asking questions about the motives and background of the perpetuator (Arduino, 2017).

The article *La Mala Victima* (The Bad Victim) written by Ileana Arduino explains how gender-based violence has taken perverse new forms and entered new spaces in Argentina (Arduino, 2017). This informed my understanding about the way in which the media writes a specific narrative to describe the victims. Arduino claims that mass communication media approached feminicide cases by categorizing the victims' according to their social conditions. For instance, they highlight facts such as if the victim used to be a "good" responsible student or if she used to go out a lot. They make remarks about what clothes she was wearing at the time of the attack, they make comments about how provocatively her clothes were and/or if she had been seen flirting with one or several men (Arduino, 2017). On the contrary, the coverage of a feminicide case of an upper-middle-class victim may be approached from a different perspective than the case of a victim coming from a working-class environment (Arduino, 2017).

In the article *We Want Them Alive*, Fregoso studies the case of the documentary *Señorita Extraviada* (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portrillo. Fregoso's analysis informed my examination on how media portrays cases of feminicide. Using this documentary as an example, the author explains how the framing of feminicide in a moral discourse can highlight the links to religious iconography such as the 'suffering mother' and the 'virgin-daughter-victim' (Fregoso, 2007, p. 125). By doing this, there is a risk of reaffirming gender power relations strongly soaked in the patriarchal script. The act of coding the victim/women as 'virgins' (Fregoso, 2007, p. 126) feeds a victim blaming system that finds its roots in society shaped by "Catholic prohibitions on premarital sex and patriarchal valorization of the purity (read 'virginity') of a woman" (Fregoso, 2007, p. 126).

Segato explains that the media is one of the main contributors to the proliferation of genderbased violence. When it comes to cases of sexual assault or feminicide, they tend to portray

the aggressor as an individual with a powerful male identity (Segato, 2017). Segato explains that, by doing this, the media is writing a very specific narrative, in which the imagery of the powerful *macho*, owner of the female body, is strengthened. Due to this storytelling/narrative, the *machismo* culture finds reaffirmation and empowerment (Segato, 2017). Segato adds another consequence that may emerge from the media coverage. Frequently, the media describes the profile of the aggressor as a solitary and mentally unstable man, who acts alone. The author argues that, the risk behind portraying the aggressor as a sort of scapegoat is that we fail to see that this individual is just a product of a broken system, a system that is responsible for naturalizing a culture of violence. By doing this, the media isolates those individuals and those events, as if they were not part of our society (Segato, 2017).

An example to better illustrate this is the case of Marc Lépine. In 1989, Montreal was the scenario of a case of mass feminicide: Marc Lépine murdered 14 women and wounded another 10 female students at the École Polytechnique. It is said that he separated men from women and started shooting only female targets. Russell explains that even though Lépine had a list with 19 female names that were premeditated to be his victims, the media denied Lépine's misogynist motivation. Russell claims that this event was not an isolated crime but a "horrifying reflection of misogyny in the Quebecian society" (Russell, 2001, p. 6). The author argues that some male commentators pushed to depoliticize this case by neutralizing the gender aspect of the event and saying that it was not a social phenomenon, but an individual action of a sick person: the *other*. The one who is not part of what we consider *us*, the sane, the decent.

I examined the notion of *othering*. It is a "process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between ‟us‟ and ‟them‟—between the more and the less powerful—and through which social distance is established and maintained" (Lister as cited in Jensen, 2009, p. 13). It is a term used to describe a racial, religious, gender group or sexual minority. This classification can become a way to justify exploitation, oppression and in some cases genocide, by denying the *other* its essential humanity and thus, its human rights (Jensen, 2009).

This *other* represents perversion and wrong, we take distance and therefore, assume a passive role. It might be easier to believe in this narrative and lock this person in prison, which only works in countries where the justice system actually works, rather than accepting that gender based violence is a social issue that needs to be engaged with and acted on by everyone. The risk

of this passive role is to overlook and silence an issue that calls for everyone's attention. To quote Russell:

> "By locating the killing of women within the arena of sexual politics, I reject the popular conception of women killing as private and/or a pathological matter. When men murder women or girls, the power dynamics of misogyny and/or sexism are almost always involved" (Russell, 2001, p. 3).

Feminist HCI & Critical Design

> "feminist approaches can integrate seamlessly and productively in all stages of the design process, including user research, prototyping, and evaluation"
> (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302)

Feminism is commonly understood within academia as a field that critically examines "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson as cited in Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302), it "integrates a collection of theories, methodologies, ethical values and political positions" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). It has evolved over time, going from a "*first-wave feminism* (1830s–1920s)" to a "*second wave of feminism* (1960s–1980s)" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). The first one "refers to the suffragette movement in the late 19th century/early 20th century in the US and UK that focuses on women's rights to vote and to participate in democratic government" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). The second one is "concerned with the emancipation of women from patriarchal structures" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). The *third wave of feminism* (1990s) "includes postmodern feminism, post-colonial feminism and eco-feminism, among others" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). The last wave of feminism "builds on the famous dictum of Simone de Beauvior's: 'One is not born a woman but becomes one'" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). Contemporary feminism questions the notion of femininity and makes visible the many ways in which gender is constructed in everyday life. Instead of considering "female" and "femininity" as given and biological facts, it "explores the construction of gender in media, institutions, embodied performances, scientific discourse, and so on" (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). My research is positioned within the spectrum of the third wave of feminist thoughts. The naturalization and perpetuation of gender-based violence runs in parallel to

the construction of gender. As noted earlier, my research aims to make visible some of the multiple ways in which gender-based violence is constructed every day.

The field of human-computer interaction (HCI) emerged in 1980s with personal computing. It consists of a multidisciplinary field of research that studies humans' interaction with technology. HCI was primarily incorporated by disciplines like computer science, cognitive science and human-factors engineering. As a design discipline, it contributes to the design of systems that involve people's interaction with technology. HCI allows interaction designers to better understand how to create technologies and design systems for the users (Interaction Design Foundation). According to Bill Gaver, technology reflects every aspect of our humanity and motivations, our emotions and our social and spiritual lives (Gaver et al., 2002, p. 2). Therefore, he argues, insights from psychology and sociology, politics, arts, philosophy and religion must be incorporated in the design of technology (Gaver et al., 2002, p. 2). Moreover, Gaver points out that interaction designers who have a background in traditional arts and design contexts may be able to articulate analytic approaches with more subjective techniques. These articulations can lead to a better understanding of people's experiences with technology and to the exploration of design spaces.

HCI is increasingly focused on engaging with matters of social change and human values. HCI benefits from the theories and concepts coming from feminism due to its concerns and commitments to issues related to the home environment, the construction of gender in everyday life, the indirect effects of design, emotion and embodiment, among other things (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1304). HCI can incorporate feminist approaches in order to reflect on human values, as well as on the collection and interpretation of data and its social consequences. Feminism and interaction design can be great allies. By applying feminist approaches in our design processes, we can bring clarity to the relationship we hold with technology. These approaches can contribute to revealing the way in which our experiences are both subjective and gendered, as well as raise awareness and unveil the social and cultural consequences that our designs may bring to the public. My researchcreation work undertook multiple explorations focused on understanding how to design a piece, using different technologies and levels of interaction, that could effectively create an interactive space without losing sight of my subject matter. My work articulates notions emerging from a feminist approach with a careful examination of which tools and techniques are suitable to enable discussion around delicate topics.

One key contribution emerging from feminism is the *standpoint theory*. The term *standpoint theory* was firstly coined by Sandra Harding. It "begins with the supposition that all knowledge attempts are socially situated" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 1302), and advocates for the use of women's viewpoints and experiences as a source of knowledge production. The feminist standpoint theory examines elements that may influence a researcher's perspective when conducting a specific research. The first element refers to the researcher's physical location in nature. People experience both the natural and social world differently, for example, "from menstruation and lactation to their engagement with domestic labor, women inhabit a different world than men" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 679). Secondly, the researcher may develop unique interests in and about the location that she belongs to. These specific interests will probably influence the result of the research that is conducted. Another element points to those discourses that may shape the researcher's understandings of her location. These discourses may range from metaphors, models and narratives. To quote Jeffrey and Shaowen Bardzell, "Such discourses are often created and maintained through powerful institutions, including universities, courts, the media, and governance" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 679). Finally, the researcher's perspective may be influenced by her position in the social production of knowledge. This refers to the way in which the researcher is positioned within the institution in which the research is taking place. This position will shape the knowledge embedded in the research, as well as the way in which it will be transmitted and the audience who will consume it.

Feminist research is strongly experience-oriented and it is committed to acknowledge the value of all human beings' experiences, hence, no experience should be excluded. Feminist approaches seek to emphasize the value of the data collected from everyday experience and to reduce the distance between the person doing the research and the subject matter. The feminist standpoint theory prioritizes the commonly marginalized knowledge. To quote Bardzell: "Knowledge production is inevitably enmeshed in acts of power, and in patriarchal societies, women's knowledge is suppressed (Bardzell, 2010, p. 1302). In patriarchal structures, where the main generator of knowledge is the male gaze, it is possible to assume that women's experiences have been relegated to the margins. Therefore, considering that women have different experiences than men when it comes to violence, we, women, will probably produce different types of knowledge emerging from those experiences. My creative practice builds on this notion and puts

my own experiential knowledge in the center of my artwork, this point will be examined with in the last chapter.

Feminist social science has focused on the "integration of knowledge and responsible action, with a mandate for both individual and social change, reflecting a core value of feminism: critiquing and resisting the status quo" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 675). Feminist critics have questioned the way in which knowledge is often produced within science. This questioning revolves around the fact that "social scientists fail to disclose whose interests they are working in, typically in the name of powerful institutions such as policy centres, schools, hospitals, unions, immigration services, law enforcements, etc." (Bardzell, 2011, p. 678). In the West, these institutions are often under the control of white men who represent certain agendas. These institutions have a huge influence on the lives of women and minorities, among other groups. Interaction designers should foresee the needs of the people whose lives will be influenced by their systems. Jeffrey and Shaowen Bardzell claim that if interaction designers fail to do so and instead, frame "their research to meet the needs of those powerful enough to pay for their services" they can "contribute to an undemocratic and unjust state of affairs" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 678).

Feminist research relies on methodological considerations such as the use of "pluralist strategies to access and represent different ways of knowing, and a special emphasis on accounting for female voices" (Bardzell, 2011, p. 677). Feminist methodologies "tend to be multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary, in part because feminism falls outside of traditional disciplines and because it leverages so many disciplines to pursue its goals" (Reinharz in Bardzell, 2011, p. 678). These methodologies seek to be inclusive of marginal voices and often involve a multiplicity of methods. (Reinharz in Bardzell, 2011, p. 678.) My creative practice adopts the idea of working with an interdisciplinary and multi-method approach that unfolds diverse strategies My work builds on what Jeffrey and Shaowen Bardzell propose as a feminist HCI methodology. This includes a strong commitment to moral objectives that, among other things, pay special attention to gender as a key axis of investigation and self-disclosure and transparency when it comes to the researchers' goals and political beliefs.

The notion of *critical design* emerged as a key concept in HCI research and practice (Bardzell, 2014, p. 1951). It is a research through design methodology that focuses on the exploration of alternative strategies and design values to reveal hidden ideologies and agendas

(Bardzell, 2013, p. 3300). The term *critical design* was introduced by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, who claim that this type of design "rejects how things are now as being the only possibility, it provides a critique of the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical, or economic values" (Dunne and Raby as cited in Bardzell, 2014, p. 1951). My research draws on Jeffrey Bardzell and Shaowen Bardzell's analysis of critical design. The authors explain that critical design "optimistically seeks out, tries out, and disseminates new design values; it seeks to cultivate critical awareness in designers and consumers alike in, by means of, and through designs; it views this activity as democratically participatory" (Bardzell, 2013, p. 3300).

Critical design challenges the status quo and proposes to unveil the potential ideologies surfacing from our design products. I was aware that "harmful ideologies are perpetuated through our work" (Bardzell, 2013, p. 3298), thus, I paid special attention to the ramifications that my works could have. My creative process involves an active and critical reflection around each design decision taken in the production of my artwork.

In order to untangle the concept of *critical design*, the authors borrow notions from critical theory, which refers to the family of skeptical sociocultural critiques such as semiotics, poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis and Marxism. My interest is focused on some of the categories related to critical theory explained by the authors. Critical theory often questions the agendas of social institutions such as governments, the sciences and the arts. Critical design aims to unveil and expose the forces that influence our social lives. The authors explain that:

> "Ideology, patriarchy, and the unconscious often do not manifest themselves in directly observable or measurable ways, and so their existence and operations must be interpreted; critical theory is a strategy of reading social formations and artifacts" (Bardzell, 2013, p. 3301).

For instance, notions such as gendered power relations within the social sciences would have remained invisible without feminist critics. In terms of sociocultural benefits, critical theorists have unveiled "the rampant sexism and racism of popular media" (Bardzell, 2013, p. 3301) which contributed to changing the popular media's images of women and minorities.

Furthermore, I draw on the distinction that Dunne and Raby propose between *affirmative design* and *critical design* to create a link with the earlier mentioned notions of *lovely knowledge* and *difficult knowledge*. Affirmative design "reinforces how things are now, it conforms to cultural,

social, technical, and economic expectation" (Dunne and Raby as cited in Bardzell, 2013, p. 3298). On the contrary, critical design rejects the state in which things are, and promotes the design of products that bring alternative values. It is possible to find similarities with the concept of *lovely knowledge*. This type of knowledge reinforces the story that we already know by presenting a story with which we feel comfortable. On the contrary, difficult knowledge is a type of knowledge that is challenging to digest. It is a complex and layered knowledge that disrupts our sense of comfort. My work seeks to find alternative ways to represent this knowledge and test its potential to provoke reflection and action.

Jeffrey and Shaowen Bardzell ask: who decides whether a design is affirmative or critical? I add, what are the values behind those designs that claim to be critical? Who is behind that agenda? Who is being represented and who is being silenced? These questions look like those raised by Lehrer et al. when they ask who should look at difficult knowledge? Who is being represented? By whom? And to what end?

Uncomfortable Interactions

My work explores how to creatively design using uncomfortable and painful knowledge presented in images, videos and texts. The objective behind my work is to filter and reinterpret the painful content, rearranging it and generating new knowledge by "deliberately engineering discomfort as a way of creating intense and memorable interactions and engaging with dark and challenging themes" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2004).

The design of *uncomfortable interactions* is an unconventional approach to interaction design. When carefully designed, discomfort is "an important tool in a designer's armoury that can help realize positive long-term values related to entertainment, enlightenment and sociality" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2004). Designing uncomfortable interactions implies celebrating ambiguity rather than clarity, awakening interpretation in the audience/users rather than just providing straightforward information.

Its implementation must be carefully planned to provoke positive design values related to entertainment, education and sociality. Uncomfortable interactions involve a combination of

diverse strategies applied in different degrees. Benford et al. described four principal forms of uncomfortable interactions. The first form responds to HCI's interest in the embodied nature of interaction: *visceral discomfort*. This form is related to physically unpleasant sensations. These sensations may be smell or pain and can be achieved by designing unpleasant wearables or tangibles. The second form described by the authors is *cultural discomfort*, which "seek out discomfort by creating interactions that invoke dark cultural associations" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2009). *Discomfort through control* is the third form and it is related to a central concern of HCI: the nature of control between the interface and the user. Lastly, the fourth form is *discomfort through intimacy*, it uses intimacy and works "by distorting the social norms around which it is negotiated" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2006) . It may go from isolating people to establishing intimacy with strangers or employ surveillance and voyeurism. These strategies must be "embedded into a wider experience which requires paying attention to dramatic structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and dénouement" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2013). Later in this thesis, I will examine how I applied the second and third form of discomfort: *cultural discomfort* and *discomfort through control.*

In some cases, "uncomfortable interactions are those that cause a degree of suffering to the user" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2005), it can range from "physical stress, tiredness or pain" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2005). As Benford et al. explain, the real purpose behind the use of discomfort goes beyond the creation of uncomfortable and painful experiences. The goal is to use these interactions as fruitful 'means to an end' able to promote certain values. Uncomfortable interactions are "grounded in a consequentialist approach which assesses the goodness of an action solely in terms of the goodness or otherwise of its consequences" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2012). The authors justify the use of discomfort in HCI by explaining that a "shortterm discomfort lies in longer-term benefits to participants of entertainment, enlightenment, and sociality" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2012). They argue that, for the participant, "an experience dealing with the topic of genocide might be quite traumatic and rather *unhappy*, but non-the-less considered ultimately valuable and "worth-while"" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2012). My creative practice experiments with discomfort as a design tool to achieve powerful cultural experiences.

The benefits of working with uncomfortable interactions relate to their potential to create a rich environment that facilitates the engagement with dark themes.

Related Artwork: Teresa Margolles, Regina José Galindo

How do other artists speak about gender-based violence? What are the strategies that are used to address painful subjects? The work of the Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo and the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles informed my creative practice. My work is closely related to theirs in terms of the subject matter and in the use of different disciplines merged together to shape a compelling and piercing corpus of work.

Regina José Galindo is a performance artist whose work holds a strong social and political component that looks at delicate subjects such as the Guatemalan Civil War. Galindo's work explores subjects such as social injustice, discrimination related to race and gender as well as other topics related to abuse and unequal power relations. In her piece *Desecho* (Waste), Galindo introduces herself inside a garbage bag next to a container on a street of Mexico City. The artist remains hidden inside the bag until a garbage truck picks her up. I read this performance as a reflection of the way in which bodies are discarded. This performance was documented in video and photographs, see *Figure 1*. Galindo's piece *No Violarás* (You Shall Not Rape) consists of a large-scale poster placed in a highway in the city of Guatemala, see *Figure 2*. This four by six metres gigantography relies on a simple and consistent strategy to transmit a message.

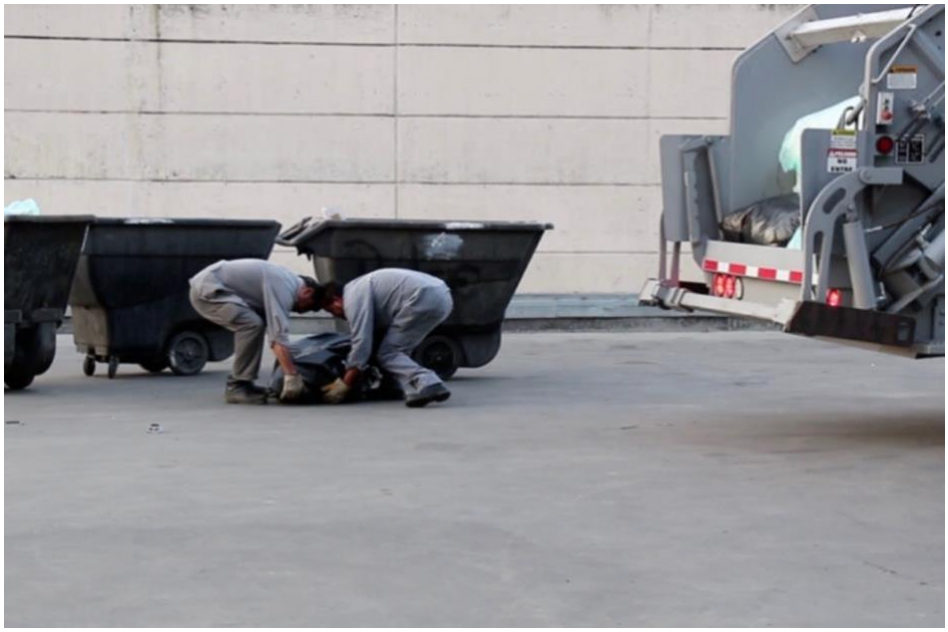


Figure 2 Regina José Galindo - Desecho

Figure 3 Regina José Galindo - No Violarás

Teresa Margolles' exhibition *Mundos* (Worlds) was exhibited in 2017 at The Musée d'art Contemporain de Montreal. This exhibition reflected on feminicide in Mexico and Guatemala. It included a diverse repertory of projects, ranging from photography and video to sculpture. The

installation *Pesquisas* (Inquiries) was a rich source of inspiration for my creative work. *Pesquisas* is "a grid of 30 large scale rephotographed ripped-up posters of missing women pasted on the city's streets" (Magazine MAC, 2016, p. 4) displayed on a large wall, see *Figure 3*. To quote the curator John Zeppetelli, this piece was "brutally alluding to patriarchal violence and police inaction or indifference and the failure to find the many disappeared women– resonating with Canada's own history of missing and murdered Indigenous women" (Magazine MAC, 2016). The most poignant element of this piece was the torn paper and the deterioration of the photographs that conveyed the passage of time and oblivion.

Figure 4 Teresa Margolles – Pesquisas

A more ethereal, but still profoundly disturbing piece, consisted in the release of soap bubbles in the middle of a large room. The bubbles resulted from the mixture of soap and water obtained in morgues after the cleaning of corpses. Margolles reflects on her piece *En El Aire* (In The Air), "every bubble bursting on contact is a body reminding us that we are witnesses" (Margolles cited in Magazine MAC, 2016).

The piece *Tela Bordada* (Embordered Fabric) was greatly inspiring, see *Figure 4*. This piece was a quilt that had been embroidered by 5 Guatemalan women. The artist borrowed this quilt from the morgue; it had bloodstains from a woman who had been violently murdered. The piece was exhibited in one of the rooms and complimented by a short documentary film in which

we could see the 5 Guatemalan women working together while a voice over was narrating their testimonies. This piece reflected on the collective act of remembering and working in collaboration to raise awareness about the victim.

Figure 5 Teresa Margolles - Tela Bordada

Related Video Games

Video games have been associated with the reproduction and naturalization of violence (Beck et al, 2012, p. 3016), however, they can serve as rich tools to raise awareness, prevent violence against women and to promote gender equality. I explored what type of video games were working with issues related to gender-based violence. This exploration showed multiple perspectives that aim to prevent violence against women, promote gender equality, reflect on bystander intervention and raise conversation about consent.

Hit the Bitch is an interactive experience available online. It was part of a campaign produced by a Danish organization against gender-based violence (Diéz Gutierréz, 2014, p. 63).

This controversial game encouraged players to beat a woman. The first-person perspective (male) is portrayed as a powerful and dominant view. The player makes more points by hitting the woman. When the woman finally falls to the ground, a message in Danish appears saying "Now you are 100% macho. %100 idiot. And now what?". The message continues explaining that there is no excuse to beat a woman and suggests the player to seek psychological help (Diéz Gutierréz, 2014, p. 63). The game was criticized because it seems to be promoting violence rather than preventing it. The end of the game shows the image of the woman lying on the floor, the audio of the woman crying keeps playing while the credits appear on the screen. This project shows a clear example of the use of violence to talk about violence.

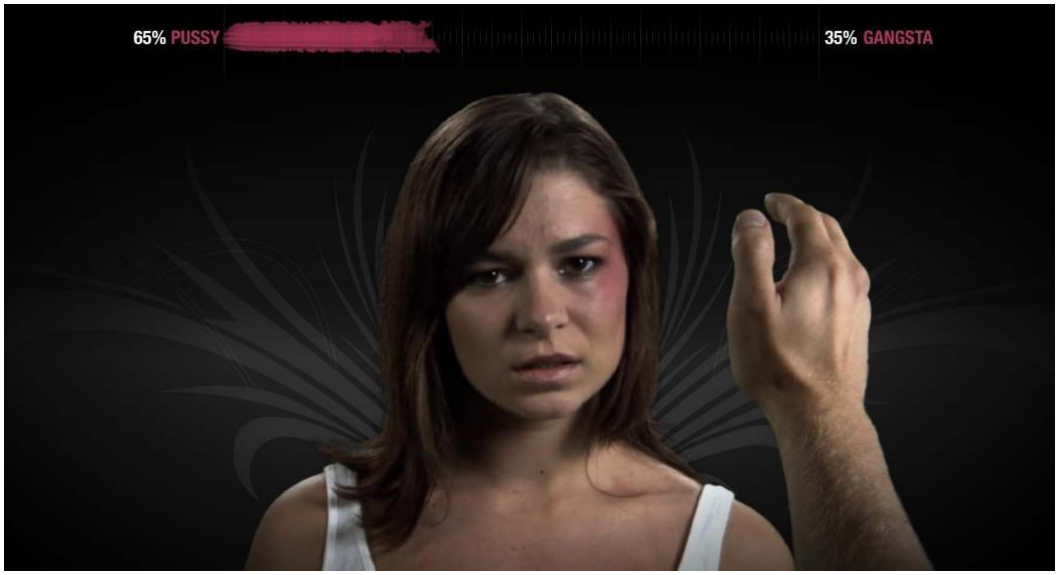


Figure 6 Hit the Bitch – (Source: http://www.janusmoller.com/hit-the-bitch/)

The game BREAKAWAY was developed by the Champlain College Emergent Media Center. As described by the creators, this project is "a free, web-hosted, interactive video game containing a narrative that uses soccer as a global language to educate boys and girls worldwide about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), gender equality, and respect" (Breakaway Game, n.d.). The game narrates the story of a young soccer player who wants to try out for a football team. In this project, the subject of gender-based violence is rooted in a larger narrative.The goal of this game is to influence attitudes towards violence against women. The relevance of the initiative BREAKAWAY is that it combines a "community-led educational

model" with a socially engaged video game (Breakaway Ga me, n.d.). This project hosts educational youth camps and opens spaces for active discussions around VAWG. It includes the participation of children, encourages dialogue and allows children to reflect on "gender equity, bullying, and gender-bases violence" (Breakaway Game, n.d.). My interest in this project focuses on how, throughout a collaborative work, it facilitates rich environments for debate.

Decisions That Matter is an interactive experience produced by a team of students named Patronus at Carnegie Mellon University. According to the team, the objective behind Decisions That Matter was to create an experience capable to "educate and inspire people towards primary intervention against sexual assault on college campuses" (Patronus, n.d.). This interactive experience adopts the form of a graphic novel that depicts the experience of a group of students attending a party on campus. The authors explain that the player is guided to be a bystander "through varying instances of harassment that can lead to an incident of sexual assault" (Patronus, n.d.). The focus on the bystander is a truly relevant aspect in this interactive experience. However, I am hesitant about the way in which this project depicts the above-mentioned instances of harassment. The situations depicted seemed to be rooted in a very simplistic way of understanding harassment and a stereotyped perspective on relationships. The player or bystander is confronted with several decisions. One in particular caught my attention. The group of students go to a party together. Natalie and Luke, two students, like each other, and the narrative indicates that Luke will make a move, Natalie seems very glad about it. At a certain point, the player/bystander approaches Natalie at the bar when she is pouring herself another drink and questions the girl about how much she is drinking. In my opinion, making this sort of observations, such as how much she is drinking, may lead to dangerous underlying messages.

My work related to the above-mentioned projects in terms of the use of an interactive medium to work within gender-based violence. However, as it will be explored in following chapters, my work takes another approach to interaction design and highlights my personal experience as a source of creation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The work explored in this thesis unfolds under the umbrella of a research-creation approach that "combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation" (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2018). My work fosters creation as a continuous research process in parallel to a theoretical and critical analysis.

My work is framed in the category of research through design, also referred as projectgrounded research and/or research-oriented design (Racine et al., 2010, p. 6). Due to the exploratory nature of my research and the combination of my background in film studies, photography, and experience working with archival footage, I was able to play with alternative ways to generate new knowledge. This knowledge emerged from an action-reflection and project grounded approach, as explained by Ken Friedman, research tends to articulate knowledge, while practice is the embodiment of that knowledge (Friedman as cited in Racine et al., 2010).

Due to the complexities embedded in creating artwork that deals with gender-based violence, I opened my creative process and worked with multiple projects rather than with a unique piece. Through a practice-based process, I created a total of four projects, including two prototypes and two finalized projects. While being tied to the same subject matter, each piece can stand on its own. This corpus of work includes two iterations of an installation piece called Cold Numbers followed by a printed piece named MoFM. Finally, two iterations of the video game SOLA and the experimental video piece Don Federico.

Cold Numbers and MoFM consist of two prototypes created during an early stage of experimentation. These projects involve interaction design and speculative design as alternative ways to create artwork focused on gender-based violence. During a second stage of exploration, I experimented with video game technologies to represent an experience. This is the case of the video game SOLA. Furthermore, I worked with the juxtaposition of appropriated footage in the experimental video Don Federico. Each piece will be examined in depth in the following chapters.

The hybrid nature and flexible methodology of my research-creation process allowed me to fuse experiential knowledge with critical and theoretical thinking. With the above-mentioned

projects, I set up to explore the combination of alternative strategies. The corpus of methods that I used to produce the work range from literature review to case studies and an iterative work.

The use of case studies provided a better understanding of the subject matter, as well as a source of inspiration. My work was informed by actual cases of feminicide in Latin America. I used victim's testimonies and interviews with specialists in gender-based violence to inform my work. The use of footage related to real cases of feminicide was a key element integrated in my creative artwork. The experimentation with archive footage was a method used for the creation of Don Federico. The objective was to use existing footage to generate new meaning embedded in a video piece. This method involved a process of audiovisual research delving into sources such as YouTube, film documentaries and news stories. This process consisted of selecting raw, amateur and accessible material, and experiment with it using montage to alter its meaning.

A key method in my work was the use of an iterative process. The prototypes and iterations produced were followed by feedback from colleagues and faculty. This iterative process is reflected in the case of SOLA I and SOLA II. The creation of SOLA I was followed by several instances of exhibition and feedback. These instances generated a series of reflections that were put into practice during the design process of SOLA II. Both iterations were created in collaboration with other designers. The first iteration of this project was made in collaboration with Etienne Brunelle-Leclerc and for the second iteration I collaborated with Samuel Bourgault. The collaboration with other designers allowed a more fruitful reflection on every stage of the design process.

The multiple prototypes, iterations and exhibitions/presentations were used as instances for reflection and debate. To track the evolution and fluctuations of my work, I kept detailed documentation of my process. I collected data from the different stages of creation, as well as from exhibitions and artist talks. This data includes journal entries, personal notes, reflections and external feedback. Finally, I compiled visual documentation which includes photographs and video and audio recordings. The footage produced documents the research and inspiration processes as well as the work in progress and exhibition instances.

Chapter 5: Creation

Exploration & Prototyping

Simple Medium, Complex Subject: Cold Numbers

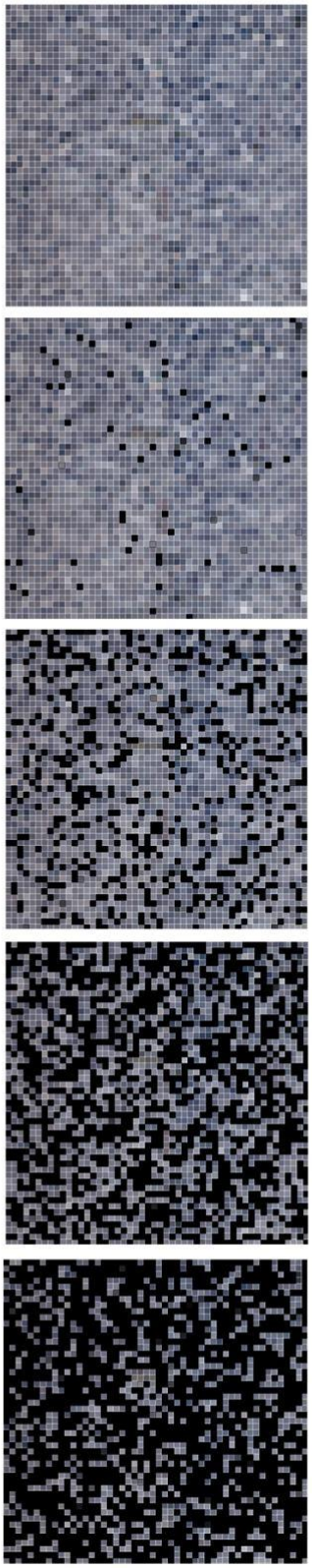
Cold Numbers is a prototype of a one-screen video installation. I borrowed an image from Google Maps showing a specific location in Buenos Aires, see *Figure 5*. The image was deconstructed into its digital cell, the pixel. Each pixel was represented by a simple shape, a square, see *Figure 6*. Cold Numbers draws on the commodification of the female body as an object or a number in the case of feminicide statistics. I played with the idea of a symbolic system in which a dead pixel represents a missing body, a binary code of on/off, dead/alive, present/absent. Using data collected from a study on feminicide in Argentina, I based my work on the following quote: "a woman is victim of feminicide every 30 hours in Argentina" (MuMaLá, 2017). This statistic was interpreted into a pixel dies every 30 seconds. This piece was meant to be displayed over prolonged periods of time and these pixel/squares slowly turned off on the screen (by turning black), see *Figure 8*.

Figure 7 Google Map View - Buenos Aires City, Argentina

Figure 8 Google Map View - Buenos Aires City, Argentina

In the book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff explores the notion of *personification* (Lakoff, 1980). The frequently used idea of a dead pixel involves imputing human qualities to something non-human, as if a pixel could stop breathing and die. This illustrates one way to generate a metaphor through *personification*. By using a pixel to represent a body, rather than an organic element, I am critiquing the idea of the body as a thing, a number, a code. I am both using and critiquing the coldness with which statistics work, a girl dies, and therefore, she becomes a number. The simple and cold nature of my prototype became qualities relevant to the interpretation of the piece.

In this project I used time presence as a key parameter to invoke reflection. To quote the authors of *Slow Technology*, Lars Hallnas and Jonas Redstrom: "the distinction between fast and slow technology is not a distinction in terms of time perception, it is a metaphorical distinction that has to do with time presence" (Hallnas and Redstrom, 2001, p. 3). In Cold Numbers, time awareness, or time presence, is used to reinforce the notion of an ongoing problem: feminicide. In this piece, time is amplified and stretched in order to create a reflective space. We, as audience, become aware of time passing and with time, dead pixels begin to fill the image, or in other words, female bodies begin to disappear.



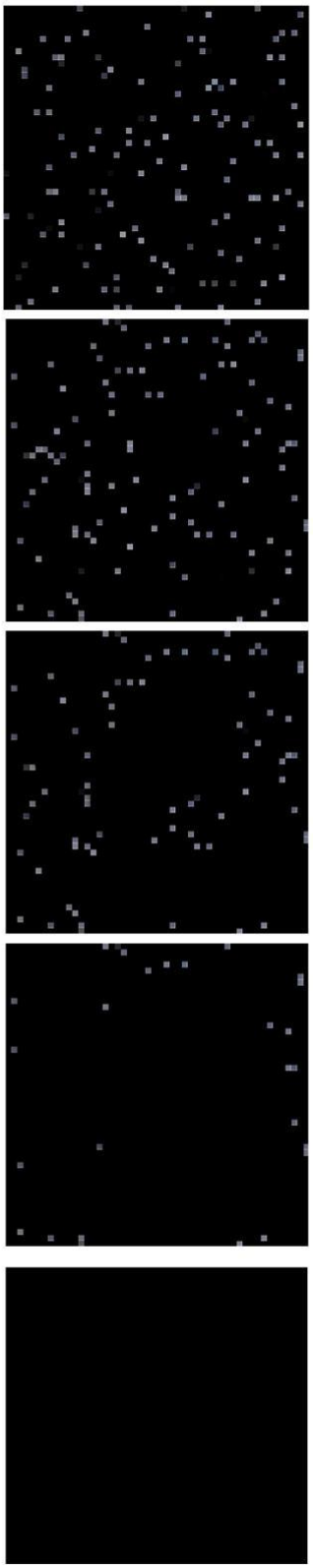


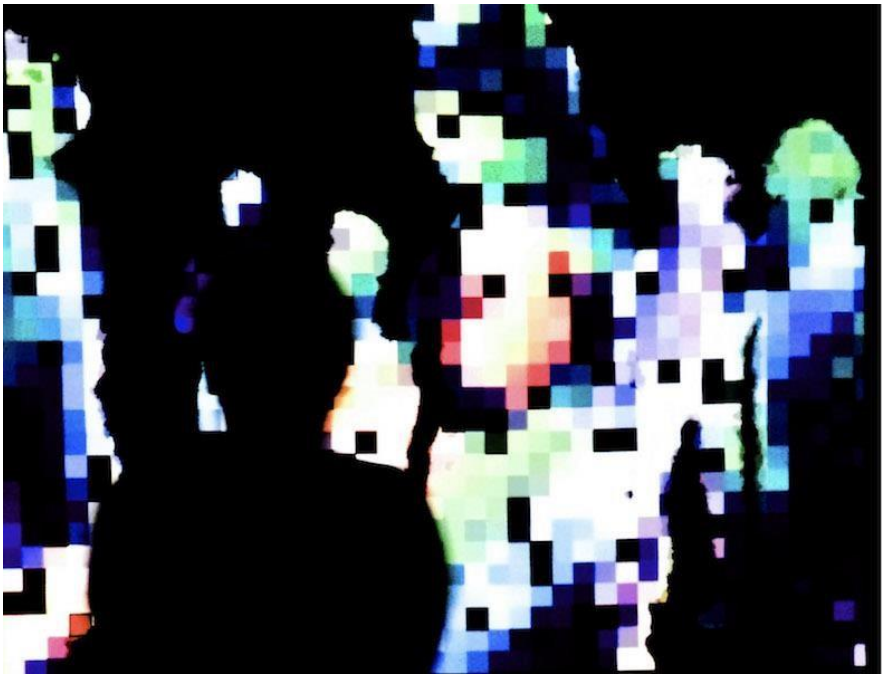
Figure 9 Video Installation Cold Numbers

The next stage of my research-creation process involved the experimentation with an interactive medium. Drawing on Cold Numbers and inspired by the feminist movements and protests happening in Latin America to combat gender-based violence, I integrated the idea of activist gathering and collective action.

This experimentation allowed me to create an immersive and interactive space. I explored the use of Kinect, which uses a camera to detect the presence and movement of the user. The audience entered a room where they could find a Kinect and a projector. The audience was invited to explore the space. The camera read the silhouettes of the participants and these shapes were projected on a wall and acted as a canvas through which the image *(Figure 9)* was revealed, see *Figure 10*. The participants used their silhouettes to discover the image behind: "The work is mirror, image, and window combined" (Rokeby, 1996). By incorporating interaction in my work, the presence of the body became the key to enter my piece: "Embodied interaction is the creation, manipulation and sharing of meaning through engaged interaction with artifacts" (Dourish, 2004, p. 28). The goal in this iteration was to shape a space in which participants could work collaboratively with the same objective: finding each other and staying together to reveal the image.

> "...how can we achieve, between different individuals, a common experience of the world, and a shared framework for meaning? (...) how can we ever understand each other or come to any understanding of the world around? How can the relationship between two people's subjective experience be maintained?" (Dourish, 2004, p. 13).

Figure 10 Google Map View used in this prototype - Buenos Aires City, Argentinahttps://www.google.ca/maps/place/Buenos+Aires,+Argentina/@-34.6211488,-58.4239929,14.28z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x95bcca3b4ef90cbd:0xa0b3812e88e88e87!8m2!3d-34.6036844!4d-58.3815591



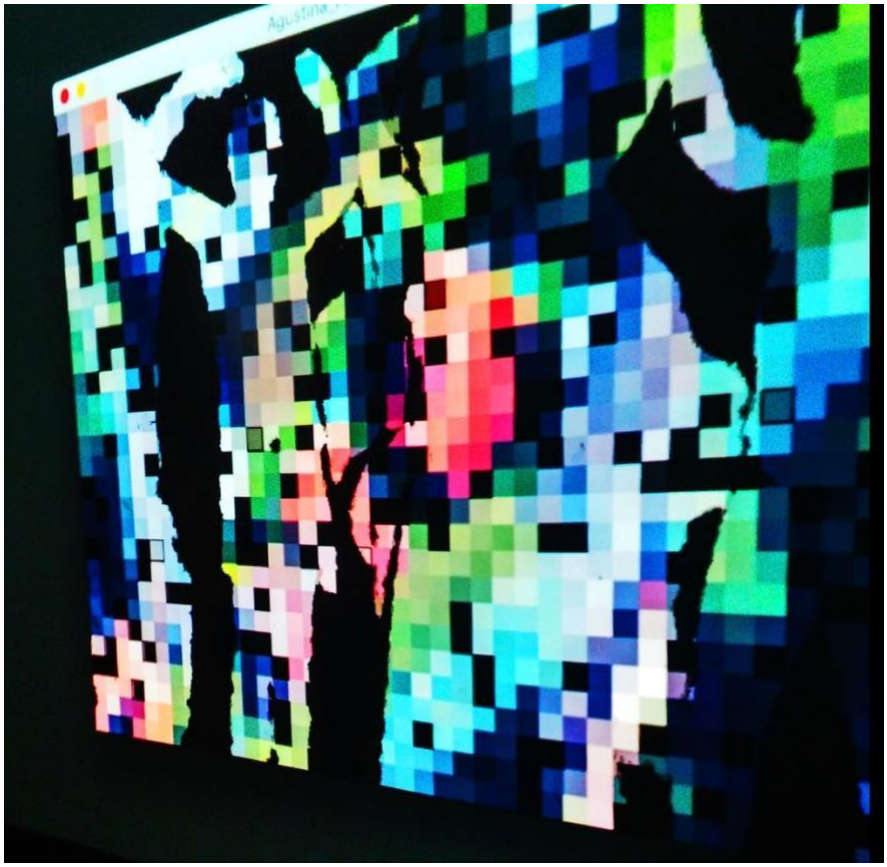


Figure 11 Cold Numbers Interactive Installation

Speculative Design and Gender-Based Violence: MoFM

Speculative designs can create spaces for discussion and debate about alternative presents or futures while encouraging people's imagination to flow. In speculative design,

> "a combination of informed extrapolations of an emerging technology and the application of techniques borrowed from film, literature, ecology, comedy and psychology can be used to develop and present plausible futures" (Auger, 2013, p. 11)

Design allows to explore alternative futures of uncanniness by linking recognizable things about our reality to an imaginary future. I used speculative design to illustrate a made-up path between where we are now in relation to the endemic issue of feminicide and where we could be in the future.

The notion of *dark tourism* served as inspiration to create this project. This type of tourism involves those sites where massive killings, violation of human rights, torture and terrorism took place such as concentration camps. Dark tourism refers to sites related to suffering that have now become museums or memorial sites.

This project draws a link between dark tourism and domestic violence. To link these two ideas, I produced a series of photographs that pretended to be postcards sold at a museum's gift shop. These pictures showed a bedroom scene, more precisely, they showed a bed, bedsheets and pillows, see *Figure 12*. I used the bed to represent the private space, the safeness of the familiar, the shelter.

In cases of domestic violence women are hostages in their own houses. The house-shelter can become a haunted space, it can be the witness of human atrocities, as those sites of *dark tourism*, where the violation of the human body was perpetrated massively. The images called for the viewer's imagination and interpretation. The pictures were pleasing, visually enjoyable, they took the viewer into a journey to the private life of "someone." One could imagine what kind of person owns this room, it could be the room of a teenager, a child, a married couple: "a design speculation requires a bridge to exist between the audience's perception of their world and the fictional element of the concept" (Auger, 2013, p. 12).

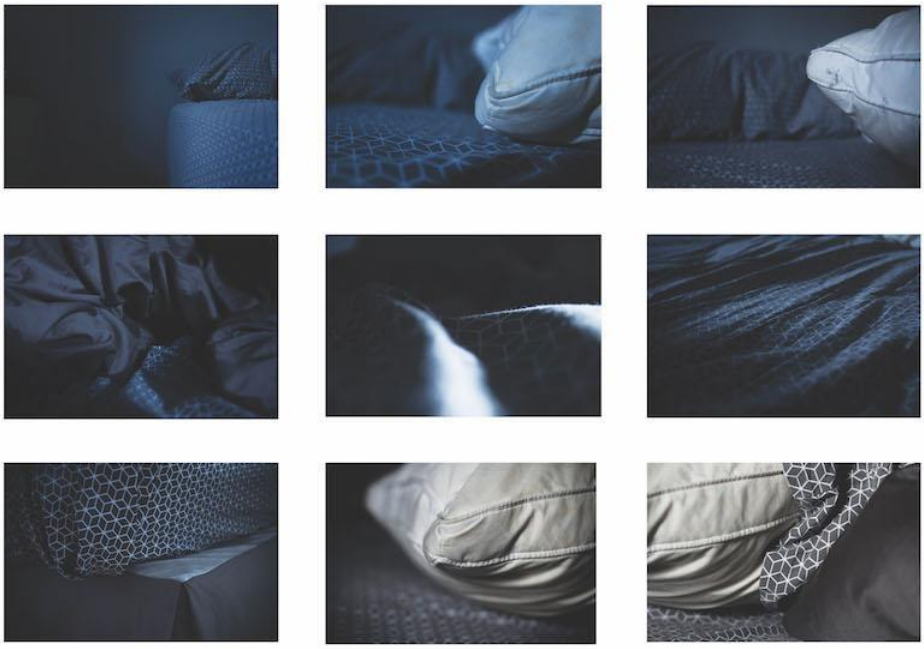


Figure 12 MoFM - Postcards front view

When the postcard is turned around, the audience could find additional information such as the name of the museum and the title of the image. The text unveiled a piece of uncomfortable information. These rooms were the crime scene of feminicide cases. The name of the museum was *The Museum of Feminicide Memory*, and each title revealed the name of a woman, their age, and their relationship with the perpetrator, see *Figure 13*. In this piece, a sense of discomfort emerges between something that the audience reads as familiar: a bed, a postcard, a museum, and something unpleasant, such as these sites associated with human suffering, tragedy, death and trauma. The balance between the familiar and the uncanny was carefully designed, as Auger explains "Careful management of the uncanny is imperative when a project attempts to deal with subjects such as death or the invasion of the human body" (Auger, 2013, p. 15).

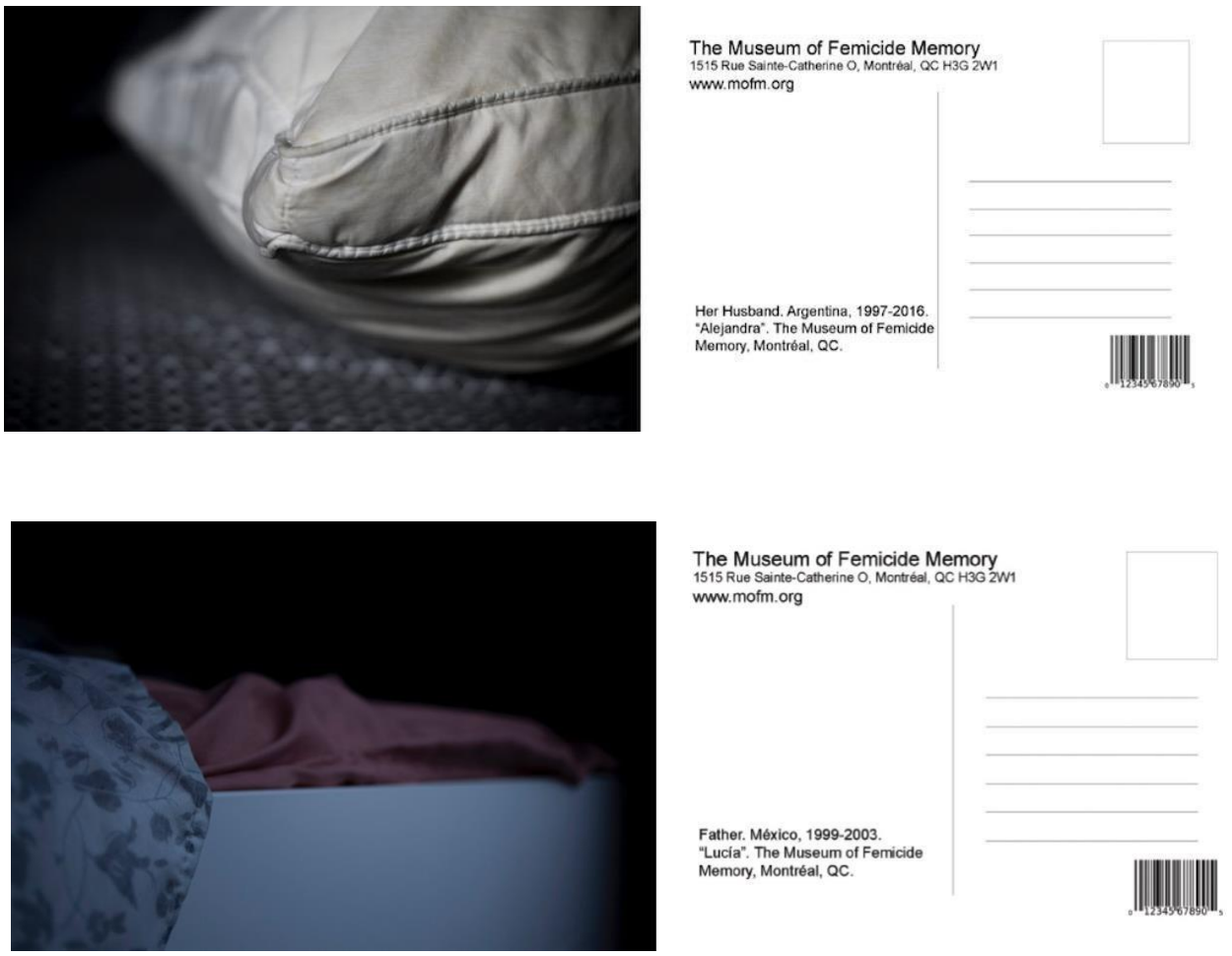


Figure 13 MoFM Postcards front and back view

The audience's imaginary world is altered when uncomfortable information is unveiled. What they thought or felt about these pictures falls apart, they need to re-read, reinterpret and reframe their lecture of the image through another perspective, a more disturbing and troubling one. The power of the disruption in the perception of an image was explored in the case of the experimental video Don Federico.

Work

Don Federico
Playing with Raw Footage

> "By playing together, people form closed communities and develop a group identity and a sense of belonging"
> (Flanagan, 2009, p. 5)

The video Don Federico was produced during an art residency in Spain at Hangar Centre located in the city of Barcelona. My stay in this residency was part of my Master research and during this time I focused on experimenting with diverse mediums. While doing research on cultural expressions that contribute to the naturalization of violence, I came across a popular children's clapping game called Don Federico. Oriol Ripoll, expert in games, explains that the origin of this song is not clear, nor since when it has been sung, but the geographical dispersion of the game - it has been found in the repertoire of Aragon, Catalunya, Madrid and countries such as Colombia and Argentina - shows that it has been present for many years and that it is transmitted through a mouth-ear effect (Pantaleoni, 2012). My piece Don Federico is an experimental video composed entirely by appropriated footage borrowed from YouTube[1]. This piece uses the song called Don Federico and creates an unsettling dialogue between a seemingly innocent clapping game and an actual case of attempted feminicide.

Through the juxtaposition of diverse images, Don Federico invites the viewer to reflect on the naturalization of gender-based violence. Don Federico makes visible how everyday actions, embedded in education and the family environment, may contribute to the naturalization of genderbased violence. This video piece is composed by approximately 20 homemade videos portraying children playing a hands game called Don Federico. This footage is mixed with news stories showing the places in which female bodies have been found. To complete the piece, audio footage borrowed from a real case of attempted intimate feminicide. At first glance, Don Federico shows a series of children singing and playing. The accent of the children reveal that they come from Spanish speaking countries that may be located in Spain and Latin America. It is only a matter

[1] Advice regarding the use of appropriated footage and copyright laws was obtained from Concordia University.

of seconds until the audience deciphers the message behind the song sang by the children. The audience's perception of the piece shifts.

Figure 14 Still from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

Don Federico killed his wife,

He chopped her in little pieces,

And put her in a frying pan,

People walking by,

Smelled something stinky,

It was Don Federico's wife,

Dancing cha, cha, cha


Don Federico killed his wife


He chopped her in little pieces
and put her in a frying pan

Figure 15 Stills from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

In a truly simple and efficient way, this video piece illustrates one of the many ways in which cultural expressions can support a system that naturalizes violence. It is a structure where killing a woman, chopping her into little pieces and cooking her in a frying pan is seen as a joke. In the case of Don Federico, the familiarity of a children's game combined with the troubling message embedded in the song turns out to be a trigger for discomfort and unease.

The goal behind this piece is to create an experience that sparks reflection within the audience. As Ripoll explains, the children singing this song should not be seen as a problem, on the contrary, it should be seen as a good opportunity to reflect on what this song says and what is the child's opinion about gender-based violence (Pantaleoni, 2012). The experience of realizing what that song really means, can be a great way for the child to reflect on their actions and values (Pantaleoni, 2012).

The audio footage used in Don Federico comes from a real case of domestic violence in Chile. Nabila Rifo is a Chilean woman who was beaten with a stone by her husband Mauricio Ortega in April 2017. The reports based on her testimony during the trial said that Mauricio Ortega pulled out his wife's eyes in an attack intended to kill her. Ortega abandoned Rifo's body in the public space, and after many hours, she was found by a neighbour. Rifo was unconscious, had suffered various skull fractures and her eyes were missing. After several days in a critical condition, Riffo managed to survive but had completely lost her eyesight.

For this piece, I used audio fragments of Nabila Rifo's testimony where she narrates the night in which Mauricio Ortega tried to kill her as well as the moment when she woke up at the hospital (La Tercera, 2017).

Attorney: "Nabila who hits your head with a stone?"
Nabila Rifo: *"Mauricio"*
A: *"Your husband Maurio Ortega… how many times does he hit your head with the stone?"* NR: *"Well, the first time I felt everything was trembling. It shook off all the drinking. It was the same the second time…because it was a heavy stone. And the third time I fall unconscious, like this, facing up"*
A: *"The first time he hits you, are you standing?"*
NR: *"Yes, he knocked me out and I fell on the ground"*

A: *"Where did you fall?"*

NR: *"On the grass"*

A: *"Then he continued to hit you…"*

NR: *"Yes, but I couldn't take it any more… I laid there on the grass and pretended I was dead"*

A: *"Why did you pretend to be dead?"*

NR: *"So he would stop hitting me"*

A: *"And then you fall unconscious?"*

NR: *"Yes, I don't remember anything else…"*

A: *"Nabila, when did you regain consciousness?"*

NR: *"Once I woke up at the hospital in Santiago"*

A: *"What happened when you woke up?*"

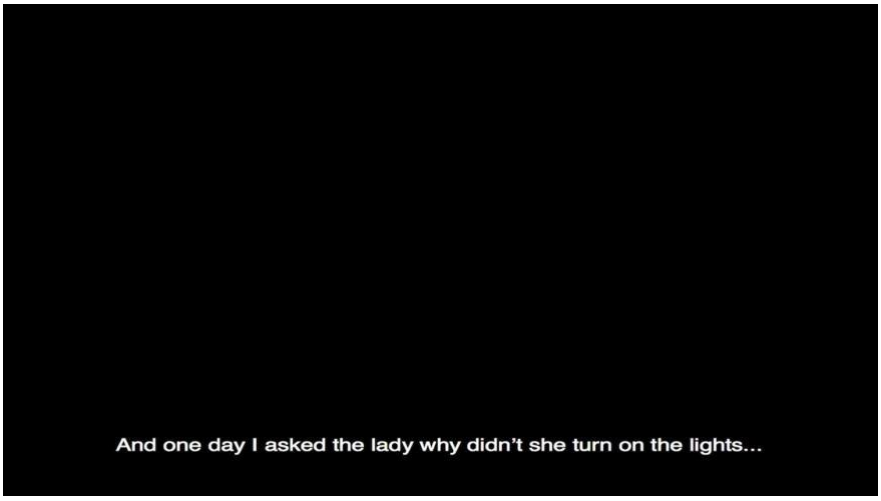
NR: *"My mind was really troubled, I thought I was with my mom, on a trip buying furniture. While I was unconscious, my mind wandered… I thought I could see the kids, Mauricio… I didn't know what was happening"*

A: *"What happened when you woke up"*

NR: *"They didn't say much"*

A: *"What happened when you opened your eyes?"*

NR: *"My eyes were covered with a bandage. And one day I asked the lady why didn't she turn on the lights. And she told me that I had had an accident*



.

And I asked her "will I be able to see again?" She said, "we are going to give you prosthetic eyes. And I asked, "with prosthetic eyes, would I see again?" She said no."

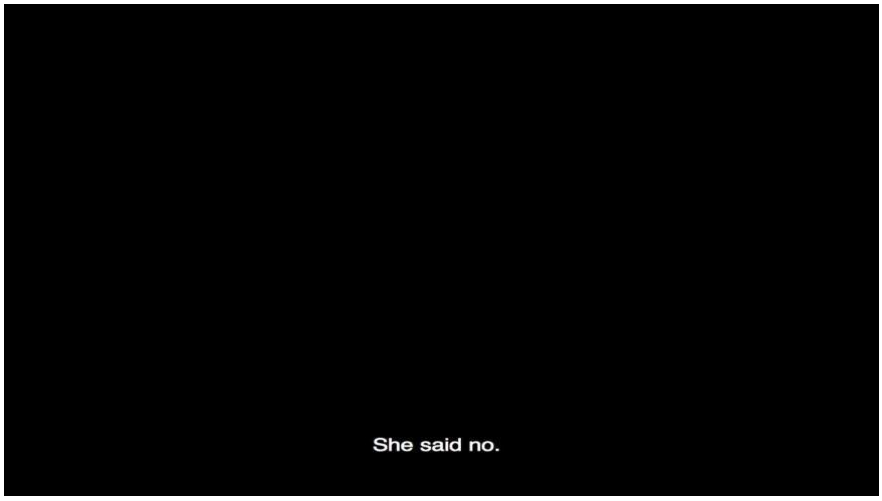


Figure 16 Stills from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

Don Federico is informed by Fregoso's definition of *feminicide:* "unspeakable and unrepresentable forms of degradation and violation, both to the body and the being of women and girls: tortured and maimed bodies discarded in public spaces, rape and sexual mutilation: disfigurement and desecration of female bodies" (Fregoso, 2009, p. 8). This definition is crucial to the creation of Don Federico given that it highlights two key points. Firstly, it stresses the extreme forms of violence that are perpetuated on the body. Secondly, it shows the relevance of the public space as those sites where female bodies are abducted and subsequently discarded. The appropriated footage used in Don Federico, both video and audio, was carefully selected in order to highlight these key points and other notions that emerge from the previously examined theory. These notions range from the naturalization of gender-based violence, the presence of violence in the public as much as in the private sphere and the extreme forms of torture inflicted on the female body. The notion of the public sphere as the space in which bodies are discarded is presented in the images coming from news stories, as well as in Nabila Rifo's audio. She explains how she was beaten by Mauricio Ortega until she was left unconscious in the street.

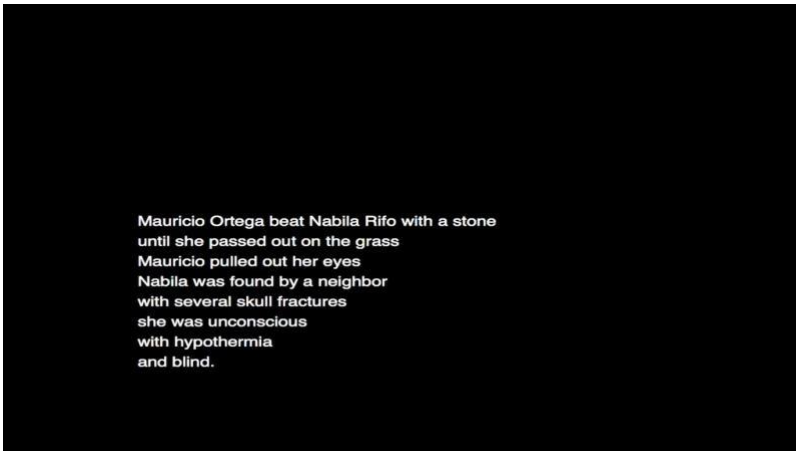
Moreover, the notion of domestic violence within the private sphere is clearly illustrated in this case of attempted intimate feminicide. The audio montage made with the victim's testimony aims

to emphasize the fact that the aggressor was her partner. To illustrate this, the audio includes the fragment of her interview (La Tercera, 2017) in which the attorney asked her:

> *"Nabila, who hits your head with a stone? (...) Your husband Mauricio Ortega... how many times does he hit your head with the stone?"*

Figure 17 Still from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

Finally, Rifo's narration illustrates the extreme violence suffered during the attack. The woman explains how her husband beat her head repeatedly with a stone. This is also reinforced at the end of this piece by a final quote on a black background:



"Mauricio Ortega beat Nabila Riffo with a stone until she passed out on the grass. Mauricio pulled out her eyes. Nabila was found by a neighbour with several skull fractures. She was unconscious, with hypothermia and blind."

Figure 18 Still from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

Playing with Discomfort

In this piece, discomfort was designed with a careful selection of audiovisual footage and its combinations through montage. The disturbing effect of the children's song is an effective resource to provoke discomfort within the audience. The juxtaposition of children playing a hands game with images borrowed from news stories showing the findings of women's bodies is a strategy that reinforces the unsettling dialogue proposed by this piece.

Another strategy used to intensify discomfort is the repetition of the song. The total length of the short film is ten minutes During seven of those ten minutes, the audience is exposed to different videos playing the same song in a loop. As a result of this endless looping, the song of Don Federico plays in the audience's mind even when they move away from the piece. This effect creates a disturbing and lasting experience.

Finally, an aspect that was brought up by the audience is related to the source of the videos: who is behind the camera? Who is recording these children singing a song about killing a woman? While collecting these videos from YouTube, I found that they were shot mostly by themselves or the children's parents or teachers. I wonder, what games are we teaching children to play?

As Mary Flanagan explains in *Critical Play*, *play* is "a tool to understand the self" (Flanagan, 2009, p. 5) and adds that according to several anthropologists "*play* is the way children work out social and cultural norms" (Flanagan, 2009, p. 5). To quote Flanagan: "Play is an integral

and vital part of mental development and learning, and playful activities are essential aspects of learning and creative acts" (Flanagan, 2009, p. 4). The author quotes the anthropologist Sutton-Smith: "play can cure children of the hypocrisies of adult life" and argues that "children's play spanning from early childhood to teenage years offers narratives that negotiate the risks of the real world: "These stories exhibit anger, fear, shock, sadness, and disgust" (Sutton-Smith cited Flanagan, 2009, p. 5).

Every day we hear in the news dreadful stories about women like Nabila Rifo or Angeles Rawson. The latter was a teenager whose body was thrown in a garbage container, picked up by a garbage truck, thrown in a dump and her body was torn into pieces by the machinery. Or the case of Lucia Perez, who was drugged and impaled by two men. I wonder… how far is Don Federico's song from reality?

Figure 19 Figure 18 Still from Don Federico (https://vimeo.com/286434251)

SOLA

Playing SOLA: Representing an Experience

SOLA is a video game that embodies the climate of tension, discomfort and fear experienced by many women in Latin American cities where violence is embedded in their everyday life. After many instances of experimentation with diverse mediums, I found in video games a *medium of expression* (Flanagan, 2009, p. 4), a way to push my work to another level while exploring a different approach:

> "In art there is no such thing as perfection. And a creative lull occurs always when artists of a period are satisfied to pick up a predecessor's work where he dropped it and attempt to continue what he was doing. When, on the other hand, you pick up something from an earlier period and adapt it to your own work an approach can be creative. The result is not new; but it is new insomuch as it is a different approach" (Duchamp as cited in Flanagan, 2009, p. 3)

SOLA's creation process opened a spectrum of possibilities that was unknown for me before. The design process was used as a strategy to reflect through making. Throughout this process, I reflected on multiple aspects related to gender-based violence, my experiential knowledge, as well as on the possibilities of the medium.

The game was inspired by my experience of walking the streets of my hometown: Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina. In cities where street harassment is embedded in everyday life, we are taught to be constantly afraid while doing something as simple as walking alone at night. We learned that WE must be careful, WE must avoid dressing or acting in certain ways, WE must avoid walking in specific areas, narrow alleys and dark streets, basically, we are taught that it is OUR responsibility to not be aggressed, raped or even killed.

In 2013, I moved to Montreal. It was only once I removed myself from my context that I could understand the way in which fear conditioned my relationship with my environment and with people. I gradually understood how the presence of fear in my everyday life was fading out. This new context made visible the patterns that fear had built in my daily routine. During my childhood, I was taught how to walk with fear, how to be suspicious of strangers, how to avoid dark alleys.

The experience of changing my perspective showed me the freedom of not walking with that burden on my shoulders. Relearning how to walk without fear became a creative trigger that made possible the design of SOLA. While designing this project, I found myself standing in a new context, but looking back into my own experience in Argentina to create an embodiment of fear. Removing ourselves from the environment that shaped us during our lives may bring to light the structures that sculpt our behaviours. These structures may go from basic and simple everyday habits to profound and hidden fears. During the design process of SOLA, I understood that fear to me looked like the repetition of many unconscious acts deeply embedded in my daily life.
Behaviors that I had repeat every day to prevent any risks.

Figure 20 Menu SOLA I (in collaboration with Etienne Brunelle Leclerc)

Using my personal experience as a starting point, I created a video game in which the player is invited to transit the feeling of discomfort and anxiety. How does it feel to be afraid of your own environment? How does it feel to navigate the city feeling the incessant burden of fear and vulnerability? How does it feel to walk asking yourself: "How should I get back home? Should I walk or take a cab or a bus? Should I take a short cut, or a better lit path? Should I let someone know that I am on my way home just in case I never arrive?"

Figure 21 Still from video Intro – SOLA (Source: https://vimeo.com/256777050)

The name *SOLA* means alone in Spanish in its female form. I chose this title to refer to the idea of being alone. The idea behind the title was to set the player in a certain role before experiencing the game. SOLA had two main iterations, the first iteration was developed in Unreal Engine, which is a suite for game development and the second iteration was developed in Unity, another platform dedicated to game design, simulations and visualizations. I will refer to them as *SOLA I* and *SOLA II* when I examine specific aspects of each piece. I will use *SOLA* when referring to aspects common to both iterations.

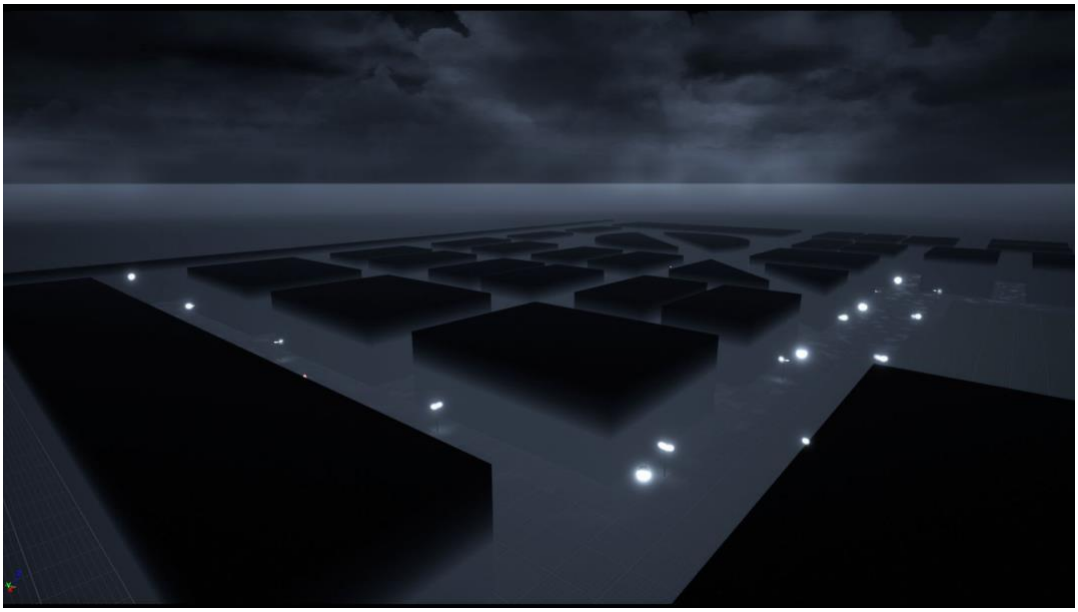


Figure 22 Map of the city - SOLA I (in collaboration with Etienne Brunelle Leclerc)

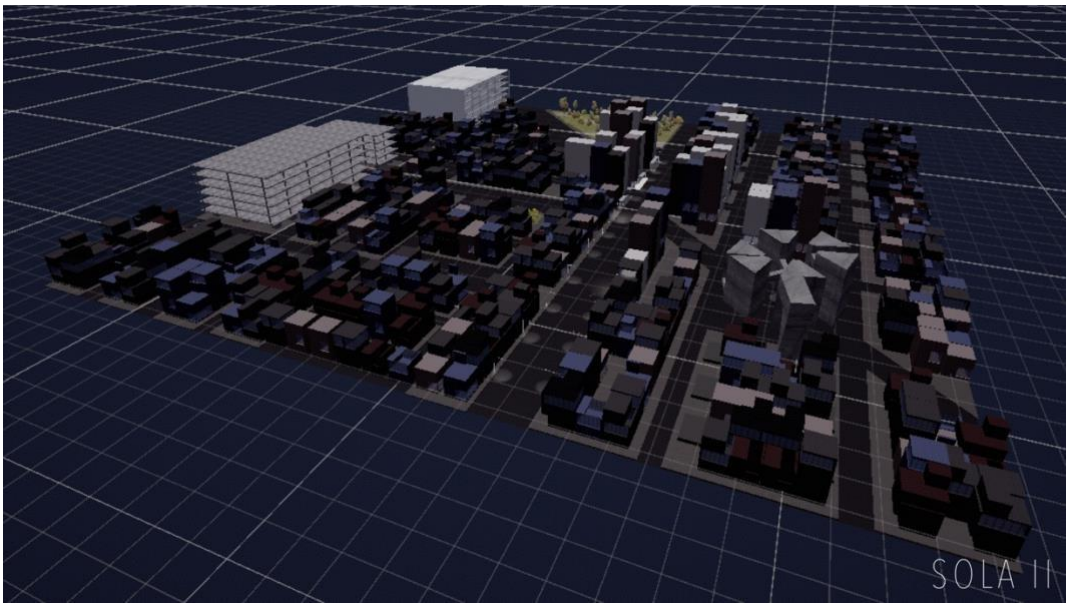


Figure 23 Map of the city - SOLA II (in collaboration with Samuelle Bourgault)

Complex Design Decisions in SOLA I

Video games typically fall in the category of entertainment media. However, their potential to provide commentary on real-world events and issues is increasingly recognized and exploited. Flanagan asks what if games have become something more than just entertainment: "What if some games, and the more general concept of play, not only provide outlets for entertainment but also function as means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, or as tools to help examine or work through social issues?" (Flanagan, 2009, p. 1). Flanagan proposes to see games as artistic, political and social critiques or interventions to highlight larger cultural issues (Flanagan, 2009, p. 1). SOLA is a serious game project that provokes, disrupts and proposes a different approach to deal with a complex social issue. This project sits between the concept of *artgames*, characterized by representing an experience, a way of experiencing the world through a particular lens, and the notion of *activist games*, focused on social issues and education (Flanagan, 2009, p. 13).

The process of designing this game triggered a discussion about the design and experiential implications that reside in the seemingly unproblematic notion of a game's goal. In SOLA I, an important design decision was the framing of the character's destination: is the character heading home? When doing a video game about gender-based violence, could I say that home a safe place? Is the city environment a threat for a woman? What are the implications of setting home as the final goal for this game?

In SOLA I, goal-setting turned out to be more problematic than expected. Originally, the player (playing as a female protagonist) was first assumed to have to get home given that the narrative was based on my own experience. Socialist feminists claim that the domestic sphere is the space where patriarchy gain strength. Expanding on a Marxist research, they claim that: "capitalism produces inequality in tandem with patriarchal relations and ideologies that position women as inferior to men" (Blunt & Dowling, 2003, p. 16). Home can be a key site in the oppression of women: "As a symbolic representation, home "serves to remove women from the 'real' world of politics and business" (Blunt & Dowling, 2003, p. 15). Following the examination on *home* made by Blunt & Dowling, I reflected on it in relation to domestic violence. Home is usually perceived as a safe space, as a shelter and has a deep emotional meaning. It is the place

that we share with our families, a space that we nurture with love and in exchange it provides us with shelter and an illusion of safety. However, the idea of the domestic space as a safe environment can easily vanish. If we remove the emotional aspect, is it still a home or a merely physical structure? What happens when this shelter becomes an active agent associated with our own suffering and traumatic experiences? The warmth of the house is lost when the walls become witnesses of torture. Victims of domestic violence may experience home as the scenario of their own nightmares, for them the family setting may be a space related to alienation and emotional turmoil. These nightmares may be lived daily, nightmares in which the protagonists may be partners, husbands, brothers or even fathers.

Defining home as the final objective for the game would imply that the private sphere is a safe space for women, and this is far from the truth. The house can be the most lethal place for a woman:

> "The vast majority of incidents of violence against women take place in the home or other private and semi-private spheres. An accurate map of urban rape would highlight far more bedrooms than alleyways and parks" (Pain as cited in Blunt & Dowling, 2003).

Through a seemingly unproblematic design decision I could contribute to the continuation of a structure that propagates gender inequality and reinforces a victim blaming system. A system where women are categorized and re-victimized by the media according to their social life, status and education. Is SOLA conveying a message that claims that we should stay inside if we want to be safe? By setting the house as the game's objective, the underlying message of this game would seem to be: *be safe, stay home.*

The Argentinian media tends to approach feminicide cases by categorizing the victim in relation to her social life, education level and lately, they tend to focus on the victim's social media activity (Arduino, 2017). By highlighting that the victim was used to going out too often, that she dressed provocatively or used to flirt with several boys, the media's underling message is that this tragic ending was going to happen sooner or later. Going back to SOLA, by guiding the female character home I would be promoting and disseminating the dichotomy between safe/unsafe, private/public, street/home, which contributes to the perpetuation of a patriarchal structure that revictimizes women. In its surface, SOLA portrays the experience of a woman walking alone, however, underneath this surface, a harmful message could be hidden.

A final concern linked to the game's destination was the risk of trivializing violence in Latin American cities. Let us imagine that home was used as the game's destination. Point A being the point in the city in which the game starts and the first interaction of the player with the city, and point B being home. Point A and B would be areas depicted as safe spaces, free from obstacles and unforeseeable dangers. According to this structure, everything in between point A and point B would be an unsafe and dangerous area. Ergo, street/city equals danger, or in other words, Argentinian cities are dangerous. The purpose of this game is by no means, to instigate fear and to represent underdeveloped countries as threatening and unsafe places. I stand against the trivialization of this issue for sensationalist purposes. We cannot deny that these countries have an ongoing lack of public security, however, this is not the message that SOLA aims to convey.

Playing with Discomfort: Anticipation, Ambiguity and Unbalanced Control

> "discomfort is a complex phenomenon, involving the combination of physical, cultural, psychological and social factors"
> (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2007).

The design process of SOLA involved the use of cultural discomfort and discomfort through control as strategies to convey its message. From the start of the game, SOLA invites the player to put herself in a delicate position and to confront a challenging theme. The subject matter of the game is explicitly laid out during the introductory video. This black and white short film shows images shot from a moving train. While the train moves, the windows reveal the darkness of the night escorted by the city lights. The following text is printed on the video:

> *Street harassment sits on the base of a structure that perpetuates a culture of violence. Feminicide is the ultimate link of a chain of violence entrenched in a structure that exploits, desecrates and discards our bodies. There was one feminicide every 30 hours in Argentina in 2017. We were told that it was our responsibility to not be aggressed, raped or even killed.* (SOLA, 2017, 2018)

Through this video, SOLA introduces a combination of fearful anticipation and suspense (Benford et al., 2012) by informing the player that *"there was one feminicide every 30 hours in Argentina in 2017"* (SOLA, 2017, 2018). This strategy "relies on the uncomfortable feeling of suspense that arises from anticipation of dangers to come" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2006) , of a threat to the player's being. This quote anticipates a danger to come, however, in SOLA, there is no menace coming to attack the player. There are no threatening situations to escape from, rather than experiencing a continuous feeling of danger to come.

Figure 24 Still from video – SOLA (Source: https://vimeo.com/256777050)

The use of anticipation triggers suspense from the very beginning of the game. The players believes that they are signing up to experience something worse than what they will actually experience. This belief enhances the feeling of vulnerability, given that it creates a climate of tension and stress that is never resolved. In my experience living in Buenos Aires, anticipation of risk was part of my daily life. This feeling was exacerbated by the continuous presence of news stories about gender-based violence cases that portrayed the extreme forms of violence inflected on the victims' bodies. This continuous exposure may create a climate of constant fear given that it intensifies the belief that: if horrible things happen to other women, something horrible may

happen to me today. In SOLA II, this strategy is explored using news footage portraying real cases of feminicide, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Sengers and Gaver claim that in interactive artwork, such as the case of a video game, interpretation is the main focus, rather than proving raw information (Sengers & Gaver, 2006). One strategy to provoke interpretation is the deliberate use of ambiguity. In SOLA, ambiguity and uncertainty play a key role in the experience lived by the players. Their relationship with the game is open to interpretation: is this meant to be a game with entertainment purposes? What is the goal in this game? Is it meant to be a pleasurable experience or an uncomfortable one?

One of the strategies applied to achieve a state of confusion in the player was deliberately delaying the interactions. The experience proposed in SOLA is not about having the player reaching a destination, in fact, there is no end in this game. While it was clear that most players would be looking for directions as to what they were supposed to do, not giving them a clear direction creates frustration and this is used as a source of meaning. SOLA does not strive to give the player a sense of agency. In fact, the game is unpredictably distorting the balance of control, "Interactive experiences open up new possibilities here through the tactic of giving the user partial control, or perhaps inexorably leading them to a crucial tipping point at which they lose control" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2010). The player experiences a sense of control over the game, however, in specific moments, the game makes the decisions. The unpredictable loss of control may cause frustration in the player which aligns with the idea of ambiguity and uncertainty that the game tries to evoke. The application of this strategy proved to be an effective tool to create a climate of vulnerability that resembles the feeling that I experienced while walking alone at night, the unpredictable control "may engender uncomfortable feelings of helplessness, disempowerment, or more neutrally a lack of responsibility" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2010).

Overall, the use of discomfort as a strategy to build an experience of unease proved to be truly efficient given that "discomfort may naturally tend to focus the participant's attention inwards onto their own feelings, increasing the subjective intensity and memorability of the experience" (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2006).

Figure 25 Stills from SOLA I (in collaboration with Etienne Brunelle Leclerc)

Figure 26 Stills from SOLA II (in collaboration with Samuelle Bourgault)

Mixed Media: Appropriated Footage and Video Games / SOLA II

The second iteration of SOLA was developed in collaboration with Samuelle Bourgault. For this iteration, we transitioned from Unreal to Unity. SOLA II was used as an archive or a container where a large portion of my research was deposited. This iteration includes topics, thoughts and experiences that have accompanied me during the three years of my research around gender-based violence. While SOLA I was mainly focused on the embodiment of fear and anxiety, the most relevant aspect of SOLA II is the inclusion of appropriated footage inside the universe presented in the video game. The videos used in SOLA II come mainly from Argentinian news footage, as well as other entertainment shows that were popular in Argentina mostly in the '70s.

Reflecting on my own experience, I concluded that, partially, the feeling of unease and anxiety while walking alone was a result of being constantly fed with images portraying the disappearance or death of women and girls. The lightness with which media naturalizes feminicide to satisfy their own morbid cravings for sensationalist spectacle was reinforcing the feeling of an ongoing and pervasive threat. The continuous overexposure to stories of violence, a new victim, a new name every day, was writing a narrative of fear and threat in my imaginary.

While playing SOLA II, the player finds a TV store, and through the window of the store, they can see nine screens showing different images, see *Figure 27*. Each screen contains real footage from media coverage of different feminicide cases from the past years, see *Figure 28.* In these nine TV screens, the player can read the names of different women: *"Camila," "Lucía," "Angeles,"* and so on, as well as the repetition of the word: *"cuerpo,"* body in English. The strategy of showing different names simultaneously was used to illustrate, as expressed previously, the idea of "every day a new victim, every day a new name."

Moreover, I wanted to enhance the idea of searching and finding bodies in the public space. To achieve this, the videos are displayed with a certain relation to each other to show the word "cuerpos" at the same time creating a deeper narrative. I used the repetition of "body" such as: *"Micaela's case: they found the body," "Two bodies were identified," "A woman's corpse inside a plastic bag",* see *Figure 28.*

Figure 27 Still from SOLA II - TV Store

Figure 28 Found footage used in SOLA II

Furthermore, there are two instances in SOLA where the player can find audio footage. Firstly, the player encounters a car parked on the street, the engine and lights are on, but there are no signs of movement inside. The player can hear the sound coming from the radio inside the car. On the radio, an interview of Mauricio Macri, the current president of Argentina, is playing. Mauricio Macri is being interviewed regarding street harassment in the city of Buenos Aires, and in this interview, he claims that:

"Every woman likes to be catcalled, to those who say that they don't like it, that it offends them, I don't believe it. It is always nice to be told on the street how beautiful you are, even if it comes with a swear word like "you have a great ass," it is all cool"

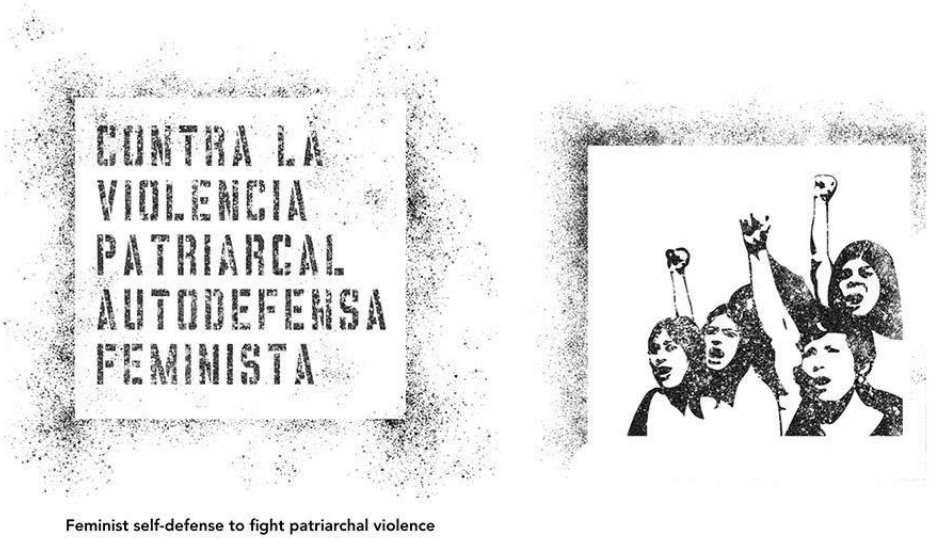
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br2LPiGaLHU&t=46s)

As stated in previous chapters, feminicide is the last link of a long chain of violence that is perpetuated by a patriarchal structure that naturalizes gender-based violence. If feminicide is the last link of this chain, we could agree that catcalling or street harassment sits on the base of a structure that perpetuates a culture of violence. This audio footage illustrates another example of how the same institutions that should be protecting our lives are the ones who enable and encourage the maintenance of a system where street harassment is allowed.

The second audio footage comes from an old radio which is playing the voice of a male journalist describing the finding of the body of Angeles Rawson. He narrates the trajectory that Angeles' body made on the garbage truck that took her to a garbage dump where she was found. In SOLA, there are two other references to Angeles Rawson's case. The first one can be found in the TV store, where news stories about her case are shown. And the second is the presence of garbage trucks patrolling the city in an almost ghostly way.

Lastly, inspired by the feminist movements in Argentina, an area of the city is dedicated to represent the scenario where a manifestation took place. In recent years, there has been a remarkable increase of protests and feminist gatherings to combat gender-based violence. The elements found in this area are graffiti with some of the following phrases, see *Figure 30*, *Figure 31* and *Figure 32*.

Feminist self-defence against patriarchal violence
We are the shout of those who no longer have a voice Where are they?
It's not a gender issue, it's a class issue
We want Us Alive
Without police there is no trafficking
Walking home I want to be free, not brave



Feminist self-defense to fight patriarchal violence

We are the shout of those who no longer have a voice

Where are them?

Figure 29 Graffiti used in SOLA II

Figure 30 Graffiti used in SOLA II

Reflections: Don Federico & SOLA

My former practice as a visual artist was mainly based on the use of video and photography. The exploration of an interactive medium opened a spectrum of new and infinite possibilities. I learned that video games could serve as great platforms to reflect on social issues. Coming from a background in film studies, I was initially set to design SOLA in terms of a script, a lineal sequence of actions, every action followed consequently by another. In the game, the encounters with other avatars were placed in very specific points within the map. Differently from working with video, and especially considering that SOLA is not a goal-oriented game, the player may or may not encounter certain elements within this fictional city. Players might not experience each encounter given that they will not take the same paths. And if they do experience every encounter, it will not be in the same order, which will affect the overall experience. Therefore, the design goal was to recreate an experience in which, even if the player did not find every element in the game's world, they would be able to feel the embodiment of fear and anxiety. This was achieved by recreating a dense atmosphere in the game using lighting and sound as key elements. In both instances of collaboration, the focus was set on creating an experience in a simple and effective way. In SOLA, simplicity meant to not overpopulate the city with too many elements. On the contrary, the team tried to achieve a feeling of anxiety in the player by using limited elements.

The learning curve in the design of SOLA was greater than in Don Federico, given that in the latter I was working within a medium that was familiar to my practice. In Don Federico my interest was focused on using appropriated footage to highlight one example of how the propagation of a simple popular game can contribute to a naturalization of violence. Don Federico presents images borrowed from people's everyday life. These images appear as familiar, ordinary and easily recognizable. This set of characteristics bring this piece closer to the audience. The world presented in SOLA is a fictional one, from the architecture to the shapes, colors and internal rules. SOLA does not try to recreate a fully realistic city, on the contrary, it presents an imaginary one. The world in SOLA was calculated and required a certain set of skills and previous planning, while the original footage used to create Don Federico was done in an amateur way, it is homemade and raw.

Figure 32 Still from SOLA II

Figure 31 Still from Don Federico

In Don Federico, the montage happened in a fluid way. To edit this video, I had to set a beginning and an ideal end to the piece to edit the videos. However, I knew that, since it was intended to be displayed as a video installation, viewers may find the video in different moments. Viewers may only watch the piece for a few seconds, or they may stay for the entire length of the piece. Despite the differences between a video installation and a video game, the multiple possibilities in the viewing of Don Federico resembles the multiple perspectives of SOLA's players. Both the players in SOLA and the viewers of Don Federico will not experience the same version of each piece.

In this video installation, the medium affords a passive observation (Lu, 2012) rather than an active engagement with the piece. In video-based works, there is a pre-established distance between the viewer and the artwork. This distance resembles the relationship between a film and the audience in a movie theatre (Lu, 2012). When people encounter a video piece, such as the case of Don Federico, there is a prior knowledge and understanding about the medium. Usually, this medium does not require the audience's interaction. The display of Don Federico does not afford any possible action coming from the viewer, except from contemplating the videos unfolding in front of their sight, see *Figure 32*. The space invited a type of engagement. The space used to show Don Federico was a narrow and closed room. The physical characteristics of the space invited the viewer to come inside and walk from one side to the other. However, nothing indicated that the viewer could sit, nor perform any action to affect the piece. The video itself, Don Federico, does not need the input of the viewer to start or to end. The images run one after the other one without

expecting any sort of interaction coming from the audience. The video self-unfolds whether the audience is present or not.

The transition between working with video and designing with interactivity was an enriching curve in my creative practice. The experimentation with an interactive medium offered me a vast array of tools to recreate an experience that was deeply embedded in my everyday life. The inclusion of interaction in my work offered a greater level of engagement.

While working with an interactive medium, I discovered the qualities of video games to promote curiosity, reflection, provocation and to question human values (Darzentas & Urquhart, 2015, p. 806). Borrowing ideas from critical design and applying a feminist approach to interaction, offered me basic notions to be critical and reflective about my design decisions (Darzentas & Urquhart, 2015, p. 806). My research on these areas contributed to position my experience in the center of my creative practice. The design process allowed me to unfold my own naturalized assumptions towards the experience of fear and vulnerability felt while being alone in the streets. This process forced me to question my response to fear by "bringing unconscious aspects of experience to conscious awareness, thereby making them available for conscious choice" (Sengers et al. as cited in Darzentas & Urquhart, 2015, p. 806). As explained before, the process of SOLA allowed me to scrutinize my lived experience in relation to fear.

The design process of SOLA showed me that I could work with interaction to create powerful and evocative narratives able to spark discussions around complex subjects. Working with an interactive medium affords immersion and a deeper level of engagement. This engagement was possible thanks to the degree of immersion offered by the walking simulation and first-person shooter perspective (McMahan, 2003, p. 67). Creating an interactive experience means to involve the player in the story that is being represented. The decisions and actions made by the player will have impacts in the digital world presented in the game. In SOLA, the interaction between the player and the computer is intuitive. When the players encounter SOLA's set up, they can immediately understand that there is some sort of action expected from them, see *Figure 32*. The encounter with a keyboard and a mouse insinuates that there is some human input expected that will be reflected on the computer screen. The player assumes that these tools will allow them to influence the events in the virtual world (The Interaction Design Foundation). SOLA needs an active engagement from the player to unfold its story. Moreover, this game uses words to describe

the desired actions. When players encounter SOLA's screen, they can see two options: *PLAY* and *INFO*. When the intro video starts, the player is presented with another option *S to Skip.* Their previous knowledge on how to interact with a computer allows the players to easily understand that they will navigate these options using the mouse and keyboard.

Figure 33 Documentation SOLA&Don Federico 2018

Don Federico and SOLA were displayed together at Synopses Exhibition (Concordia University, 2018) which was the Master of Design final show. While both works are tied to the same research-creation process, they are distinct from each other in many ways. When displayed together, these pieces create a truly powerful experience surfacing from their differences.

The particularities of each support allowed a stimulating contrast between a high-resolution image shown in a clear and smooth surface and a low-resolution image projected on a textured and cracked wall. The experimentation with a concrete wall as a projection surface offered a different way to perceive the images, the videos were almost blending into the materiality of the wall, see

Figure 33. When being inside the room and watching Don Federico from a close distance one could almost feel the materiality and porosity of the wall on the tip of the fingers.

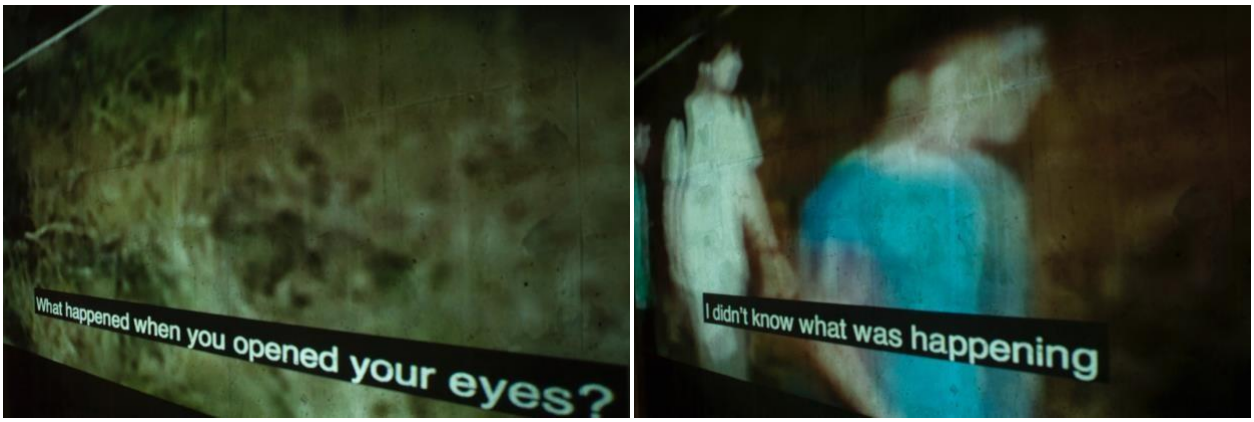


Figure 34 Documentation SOLA & Don Federico 2018

In the case of SOLA & Don Federico, I focused on working with mental discomfort, such as fear, unease or anxiety (Benford et al., 2012, p. 2005). SOLA explores physical discomfort as a strategy. The player is supposed to be standing, the idea behind this decision is to create a sense of tiredness and to better simulate the act of walking.

Don Federico's audience is exposed to an endless looping sound of the child's singing coming from a set of speakers. This sound permeates the surroundings of the exhibition room. As a consequence of the penetrating and catchy melody of the song, the children's voice echoes in the gallery even when one has left the private room. The sound in Don Federico may be perceived as loud, constant and irritant for the audience, while in the case of SOLA, the sound of rain and wind may cause another effect. Moreover, the player is required to be physically standing in front of the monitor, wearing headphones to experience both sound and image.

Each project efficiently conveyed the message in distinct ways. While SOLA demands the player's interaction to engage with the experience and decode the message, Don Federico delivers its message loudly and in a straightforward and poignant way. The combination of the two, the juxtaposition of their differences, and the relation between their similarities, such as their link to play and games, results in a captivating dialogue around the subject matter of gender-based violence.

These works were also presented separately on several occasions. Don Federico was exhibited at Hangar Centre as the final project produced during my residency in Barcelona. The audience included people from different nationalities, mostly from Spain. The response was immediate, people recognized the song, either because they had played it or because they had heard it before. Some people knew the case of attempted feminicide of Nabila Rifo portrayed in the piece. The conversations emerging from the viewing of the piece were focused on who was behind the camera. Emphasis was made about the locations in which the children were filmed, especially in those cases in which the images show a classroom or school environment.

The piece was also shown in Buenos Aires, this instance showed me that the popularity of the song had a generational component, as well as contextual one. The most relevant aspect was that it sparked conversation about similar songs. This triggered a truly exciting discussion in which each person present in the conversation would remember similar songs. This remembering happened through signing those songs, which created a truly special platform for sharing and discussing. One example of a similar lyric with the same song and clapping as the one in Don Federico:

Un marinerito mató a su mujer,

Con un cuchullito de punta de alfiler

Le sacó las tripas y se puso a vender "¡A 20$, a

20$ las tripas calientes de mi mujer!"

....

A little sailor killed his wife,

With a pin-point little knife

He pulled her guts out and started selling them

"At 20 $, at 20 $ my wife's hot guts!"

(Google translate Spanish-English)

The video game SOLA was exhibited independently in different locations in North America and Argentina. The project was presented in symposiums and conferences focused on art

and technology and exhibited in video game festivals and art spaces. As an overall reflection, when presenting and exhibiting the project in North American contexts, the conversations were more focused on discussing the use of video game technology to explore social issues. I was approached by other designers who were intrigued with the use of a video game engine to convey an experience of fear and to talk about gender-based violence. Conversations happening in this context were mostly centered in the research – creation aspect of my work.

In Buenos Aires, SOLA was experienced by players of different ages, from children to young couples, parents and grandparents. Several responses came from young players and people working in education. Players' responses would relate to the potential of it being an educational tool or a platform to trigger a debate. I was contacted by a school teacher to request if the game was available to use in class as a platform for discussion about street harassment. During one feedback session in Buenos Aires, the mother of a 10-year-old boy approached me to discuss about SOLA. The woman told me that his son had played the game and that thanks to his interaction with this project he became interested in understanding what street harassment meant.

The responses obtained in this context were focused on discussing street harassment and sharing experiences and thoughts about this topic. There was a common understanding about the anxiety of walking at night in cities where violence is part of everyday life. Several players claimed that they could feel the anxiety triggered by the uncertainty of not knowing what could happen in the game's world. This feeling was similar to the one experience while being alone at night. One woman argued that she did not learn anything new by playing SOLA. The player claimed that the game did not add anything to what she already knew about street harassment. She could easily recognize the feeling of anxiety as something that she experienced every. This reflection illustrates how, in some cities, people are accustomed to experiencing street harassment on their daily routine. Another female player approached me after a presentation and claimed that she felt frustrated after playing SOLA because she was expecting something else to happen. After asking her what type of things she was expecting to find, the player told me that the introduction video anticipates a tension that is never resolved in the game and that she saw this as an issue. She mentioned that after reading the quote "*There was one feminicide every 30 hours in Argentina in 2017",* she was expecting to encounter some sort of danger to escape from. As mentioned in previous sections, SOLA is not about having the player escaping from dangers, it is about representing an experience, an

embodiment of fear. In SOLA, discomfort is achieved by using anticipation, suspense and unresolved tension. Making players believe that they will experience something worse than what they do, was a strategy to create a climate of frustration that is never resolved.

Final Reflections

Artists and designers working with subjects related to gender-based violence must be aware that their work may influence the audience's perception about this social issue. For this reason, they must engage in a deep stage of critical thinking and reflect on the message that is being raised with their work. To deepen these reflections, they may choose to participate in workshops, presentations of work in progress and exhibitions of the completed work. These instances may be rich opportunities where the artist can gather fruitful feedback. It is crucial to show the work in progress of the project starting from early stages in the design process. This will enable the questioning of methods that are being used as well as to shed light on the possible underlying messages surfacing from the artist's work.

As previously stated, the experience of working immersed in another geographically distanced location provided me a ground in which I could partially distance myself from the pain embedded in my subject matter. This distance, both geographical and cultural, brought challenges to my work. Working in another context called for more attention and a more critical lecture of people's responses.

In my work, I decided to talk about violence without showing it. This decision forced me to think outside my comfort zone and led me to the creation of SOLA in which I used a medium that was unknown to me as a creative tool before. For instance, in SOLA, there is no visible violence, no attacks, no dangers or threatening situation to escape from. The question that guided my work was focused on how to express the feeling of fear deeply embedded in my experience. Similarly, Don Federico's effectiveness relies on the contrasting effect between the innocence of the children's signing and the disturbing message explicitly revealed by the song. I encourage artists and designers working with complex and delicate topics to challenge their usual understanding on how to approach these topics. An interdisciplinary approach may reveal alternative and efficient ways to work through social issues.

Artists working with complex subjects may confront the fact that the subject matter is overly dense and painful to unfold. To overcome these frustrations, I suggest working in collaboration with others. Working collaboratively may create a learning environment to reflect on intricate design decisions and may lighten the burden of working alone on difficult topics. Having two points of view on one subject, rather than only one, may spark a greater and more fruitful discussion that can lead to relevant changes in the design process. The collaborative work with Etienne Brunelle-Leclerc in SOLA I, allowed me to reflect on the relationship between a game's goal and domestic violence: when doing a video game about gender-based violence, is home a safe space for a woman? This discussion was only possible thanks to the multidisciplinary dialogue that emerged from combining my knowledge about gender-based violence and my collaborator's perspective on video games.

My work borrowed the notion of *ethical witnesses* explored by Fregoso to reflect on a potential audience (Fregoso, 2010). The notions of *ethical witnessing* and *response-ability* reflect on people's responses to crimes related to violation of human rights, with special attention paid to crimes against women. The author claims that, generally, the act of witnessing a crime carries a burden, a responsibility that, in most cases, demands action. As explained by Fregoso, ethical witnesses refer to "humans with response-ability who envision the self as part of a global community of members who care and maintain an ethical responsibility to each other" (Cubilié as cited in Fregoso, 2010, p. 10). These concepts are embedded in my artwork and are used as a strategy to explore the act of witnessing as a trigger to spark debate and action.

Artists must reflect on how to successfully communicate their message and how to reach their audiences. Is it possible that through our artwork we can influence the audience perception on certain issue and achieve the idea of ethical witnessing and response-ability? I wonder, if a player experiences the fear, discomfort and vulnerability that I aim to represent in SOLA, is it possible that this person will think twice next time before harassing someone on the street? Or, in the case ofDon Federico, is it possible to provoke a deep reflection on what actions of our everyday life, the use of a specific language, may contribute to the naturalization of violence?

In my practice, the most effective strategy to reach the audience was to involve them in the experience. Interactive mediums can be especially powerful platforms to explore complex and delicate subjects. These platforms can be used to raise conversation around gender-based violence.

They demand action and afford a deeper level of engagement and immersion. Using a first-person perspective in SOLA allowed me to create a more immersive experience. In this case, the goal was not to have the audience witness a crime, but to embody a feeling. The combination of a first-person perspective and the interactive nature of the medium made of SOLA a more compelling experience.

To future artists and designers dealing with the hard task of creating artwork about gender based violence, I encourage them to explore and include interactivity as a tool to create meaningful experiences. However, special attention must be paid to what type of experiences are being produced and to what end. Artists and designers must be aware that there is a risk of retraumatization, therefore, working with delicate knowledge involves a great responsibility.

Figure 35 Documentation SOLA & Don Federico 2018

Chapter 6: Conclusion

My research-creation work facilitates strategies to critically engage with a social issue. Through my work, I hope to open a layered and profound debate about gender-based violence. Curating subjects related to conflict, violence, loss and death requires careful considerations. There are multiple intricacies involved in the task of using art and design to address areas related to suffering and violation of human rights. When assuming this journey one needs to be prepared to foresee the potential effects that the artwork may provoke. These effects can be the awakening of a dormant wound that may leave the audience experiencing vulnerability and helplessness, to the "commodification of pain within a framing which offers a voyeuristic spectacle of suffering" (Lehrer, 2011, p.198).

As designers and artists committed to work with delicate subjects, it is crucial to be aware that we hold in our hands the tools to shape beliefs and create persuasive experiences. These experiences may shift the way in which our audiences act or think about topics such as gender construction, naturalization of violence, commodification of the female body, among other things. The creation of work that speaks about gender-based violence comes with great ethical responsibilities: "...the designer, instead of simply making an object or thing, is actually creating a persuasive argument that comes to life whenever a user considers or uses a product as a means to some end" (Buchanan, 1985, p. 8).

Several questions surfaced while creating artwork related to gender-based violence: how do I engage with knowledge linked to violence and human suffering? How can violence be represented without perpetuating its logic? How to represent the unrepresentable, the unspeakable, the extreme forms of violence? Moreover, what if my work acts as a trigger that reactivates and opens a dormant wound inflicted on the skin of a girl who now is a young woman looking at my work? In order to anticipate effects that the piece may have, it is crucial to properly contextualize the work, closely examine each decision involved in the design process and carefully manage the flow of information. A careful management of time and information can contribute to create lasting experiences in the audience.

As Lehrer et al. claim when referring to the curation of difficult knowledge: "who should look, at what, how, and to what end?" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 1). When reflecting on these questions,

I found myself assuming the challenge of representing gender-based violence without falling into the mere reproduction of violence on the screen. I had to understand how to portray violence without reproducing it. After an examination on the ways in which feminicide was depicted in media, it was revealed to me that often the reproduction of violence can contribute to adding injustice to the victims or the victim's families. Moreover, as explained in previous chapters, the overpopulation of violence reproduced in the media may numb the viewers, and therefore, they become desensitize. To quote Lehrer et al.: "Yet in an age saturated with media images of human suffering and ever-democratizing technologies for their dissemination, simply making people face the horrors humans are capable of perpetuating seems to have lost some of its galvanizing force" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 1). The overexposure of violence will not prevent more violence, "It has been made clear that depictions of humanity's vilest deeds do not diminish our capacity for future crimes" (Lehrer et al., 2011, p. 1). Avoiding the direct representation of violence in my work became a strategy that guided my creative process.

My research and creative work were guided by a continuous examination to understand the maintenance of a naturalized violence that is imposed on the female body. My determination to reflect on and create artwork related to gender-based violence was triggered by my experiences as a woman. My creative process allowed me to reflect on the almost undetectable, yet very present, violence that was embedded in my everyday life. This subject matter has always been part of my context and it has directly touched the lives of dear friends and loved family. My reflections needed to be sharper and take into consideration the different contexts where my work was being shown. The many instances of exhibition, specifically in the case of SOLA, allowed me to test the response to my work in different contexts.

By outlining the strategies and complexities that were essential elements in my work, I share practice-based insights on concepts that may be useful for future artists and designers working with gender-based violence. My motivation to pursue this research was rooted in my will to create a corpus of meaningful, constructive and ethically responsible artwork. My work aims to trigger questions about the inactivity, silence, omission, control, power and domination perpetuated by different institutions that support a dominant patriarchal structure. By discussing and engaging in a serious reflection about the consequences that our products bring to the world, we will have a better understanding of how our products may be perpetuating a patriarchal and violent society. It

is crucial to understand that it is a social, cultural, political and economic matter and that it needs to be fought from as many angles as possible.

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