

SMALL FRAMES BIG HORIZONS
Grasping the Fragments

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"I mean, that's it! It is not that I am thinking of ideas or brochures about how society is constituted. You have to look at it in detail, it is enough. "¹

– Lucrecia Martel

So I find myself here, writing with questions on gender, identity, politics, race, but most importantly writing and creating from paying close attention to my actuality. Everyday actions, sounds, choices, voices. Everything and everyone that surrounds me, consumes me, is a source of joy, melancholy, gives me privilege, oppresses me. My context in the past, my context in the present, building through my means of expression, my context in a possible future.

The pieces I have been working on these two years, reflect on the context, questionings and experiences of existing within a Scandinavian society as a Latin-American immigrant. I consider Nation States to be problematic. But every year I pass in Norway, the more I realize how the Nation State that holded me during my upbringing years, contributes to my generational trauma, and how much that influences my gaze towards the context I'm currently in. The gaze of an outsider. This is neither right nor wrong, it just is. No matter how much I try to separate myself from the context I grew up in or the nation I grew up in. I cannot avoid mentioning how big of a part Norway has taken and put me to work within my mental health state (a subject that is not talked about enough within the system of art production and society in general).

Maybe it was the cycle within myself, with the one I entered and encountered this territory. But in my life, this is the first time where I feel a total and strong lack of a support system. Feeling as an outsider was never a problem for me, but here this feeling got amplified by how individualized society in the North can be.

The search for community, collectivity, unity, or whatever you want to call it. It has been relevant to my practice since I started having an artistic practice. Filmmaking is all about looking for that group of people that collide, agree or can bring more knowledge to our discourses, creative ideas, energy, etc. After the search, finding them to create a piece in collectivity, a piece in common, where everyone puts a little bit from their part to make a film happen. I come from this school of thought, from searching, from finding and working on a team that has a common goal.

These three years in Oslo, two at the Academy and in Covid. Have been nothing but that search, many times successful, others not so much. From being part of the working group at Non-EU artists network Verdensrommet, from trying to spark projects based on collectivity of my own and with friends. From bringing into practice a tangible project called *Otro Mundo* that was completely based on this search.



¹ Pinto Veas, I.. Lucrecia Martel. *laFuga*, 17, 2015 pp. 4



Otro Mundo is a project that came to be and grew because of my sometimes annoying search to reach out to others. I started cooking on the street, bazaars, community gardens, events, libraries, institutions, wherever they would invite me as a way to connect to people in this cold land. I found out during these years something that was always right there, in my nose...food. More specifically cooking, it's the best way to create collectivity in our societies, which strive for individualism and profit from it.

“El individuo es el motor del capital laboral y social del país que progresivamente ha hecho esa desestructuración del tejido comunitario”²

“The individual is the engine of the labor and social capital of the country that has progressively made this destructuring of the community fabric”
– Anna Puigjaner

This realization came without even thinking that the territory where I had my upbringing, Mexico, it's one of the countries that most promote and support collective dining rooms and kitchens. I grew up with this, I grew up with my mom and aunts helping each other when big events came and they had to feed a bunch of kids and men. I grew up with us helping at the time of cleaning the dishes we were fed on, whether we would want to or not. I grew up looking at many hands on small or big kitchens, I grew up with women keeping each other's turn in the tasks. I grew up with women telling other women “stop, sit down, have a coffee, it's my turn to make the tortillas and heat up the food”. All within the walls of our private kitchens, sometimes outdoors for big events.

Solitude can take one to the origin. After spending three years slowly building a community for others and myself, one of those years in complete solitude. Currently still searching to find a common ground to be able to bring this community together and be a support system for each other. Everything each one of us has been going through, made me think of that origin. I supposed that because of growing up with those role models on collectivity, it makes sense my hunger for building one.

Kitchenless City

Anna Puigjaner is an Architect cofounder of the architects office MAIO and author of *Kitchenless City*, which is an impressive and extensive research where she addresses the ideological role of the kitchen in infrastructures around the world. The research started as her Thesis, focused in the Walrdorf Astoria and apartments with domestic collective services

² Kitchenless Stories Anna Puigjaner. Conference IX Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo, INTERIORES, Sesión 6. 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwCWGUtxTmc&t=1410s>)

in New York City. In this first part of my paper I refer to her Thesis and later on I refer to the research project that derived from this Thesis, *Kitchenless City / Kitchenless Stories*.

Puigjaner's research project *Kitchenless City* breaks the barriers of space and time. According to her, after the civil war in the United States in 1865, apartment buildings that would share a communal kitchen were built and implemented all over the country and many of those buildings were built in New York City. These buildings were destined for the middle and lower class. Until the civil war in the U.S there were no multi-family homes. The only ones that existed were those called tenements, which were one single room that would host a lot of families together, with no bathrooms, no kitchen.



(image from *Kitchenless Stories*, Anna Puigjaner, 2019)

Because of the unsanitary circumstances of these and the big migration that occurred from rural areas to the big cities after the civil war, with a lack of living places because the construction stopped due to the war, there was a big necessity to generate a collective living space that would host this migration and that could respond to the necessities of the middle class. Middle class being a big spectrum, economic costs in relation to specific salaries, but that back then was quite extensive, it would go from the living costs all the way to personal / family lawyers. Puigjaner was able to know this because of the sizes of the plans of the apartments/homes she found. They would be very small, two rooms and a bathroom, to very big (even luxury ones) that would have sleeping rooms, libraries, dining rooms, etc. What

these living spaces had in common is that they would not have a kitchen. All of this took Puigjaner to the conclusion that not having a kitchen was not attached to economic reasons, people would prefer to live without a kitchen because they considered it a social and technological advancement.³

Puigjaner's body of research and work is a very relevant one, because her practice has broken down and deconstructed the clichés around domestic collectivity. One of them being “People share a kitchen because they cannot have a kitchen of their own”⁴.

“Back in those times the living place was started to be understood as something systemic, which meant that the collective domestic services could be paid in installments, this included services like laundries and day care centers” says Anna. At the end of the nineteenth-century an apartment building would have day care centers, elderly care, etc. The more luxurious the building, the more services existed. The living place started to be understood as something systemic, but something systemic in the spatial sense, which means one would choose the quantity of rooms one could have in your living place and like this respond to the different living needs. So when we understand our contemporary necessities, these nineteenth-century needs are not so distant.



Another of the clichés that her research fights is to “associate collectivity with certain political ideologies”⁵. Puigjaner brought up to the light how these projects in cities like New York City in the nineteenth-century, most of them were merely built, supported and developed by private businesses with a commercial objective. So multiple political ideologies were in fact part of these projects.

(image from Kitchenless Stories, Anna Puigjaner, 2019)

Kitchenless Stories

One of the reasons why I was mesmerized by Puigjaner’s research is the fact that she travelled to all the distinct geographical points she found of value to break down these so-called clichés and generalizations.

³ Anna Puigjaner, Tesis Kitchenless City, EL WALDORF ASTORIA. APARTAMENTOS CON SERVICIOS DOMÉSTICOS COLECTIVOS EN NUEVA YORK, 2014 pp. 6-10

⁴ Kitchenless Stories Anna Puigjaner. Conference IX Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo, INTERIORES, Sesión 6. 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwCWGUtxTmc&t=1410s>)

⁵ Kitchenless Stories Anna Puigjaner. Conference IX Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo, INTERIORES, Sesión 6. 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwCWGUtxTmc&t=1410s>)

Three of the countries she traveled to, in the two conferences I refer to in this paper, she explains profoundly and delivers on how multiple the political ideologies and interests are behind the projects that call into collective action.

Puigjaner points out that 40 years ago in Lima started a system of collective cooking that has been able during these last decades to not only reduce housekeeping costs but provide access to food as well as empower women in peruvian society. Most of the kitchens occupy domestic infrastructures converting any private domestic space into a collective one for the welfare of the community.



Influenced by Lima, Mexico started to run a social program to relieve financial pressures of the middle class after the 2008 economic crisis in 2009 called *comedores comunitarios*. The city decided to promote community kitchens run by a mix management, half public and half private with shared responsibilities to encourage community participation and promote the city's appropriation. Making a significant impact with very low resources. The comedores comunitarios are used daily by thousands of citizens of Mexico City. "Many are family run, but some of them hire outside personnel from the community. Those who work in the kitchens have a variety of reasons to be there, some do it because of the community (more ideological) others do it because they need the paycheck."⁶

Puigjaner explains that in Japan, the third country I decided to refer to from her research, was the most rich country in her list and where she found the biggest diversity of typologies of kitchen and realities.⁷ From the Kodomo kitchens to the Share Houses.

According to Akiko Katayama, contributor writer at Forbes. Kodomo Shokudo (the organization that builds and supports these Kodomo kitchens) was born in 2012. A produce shop owner Hiroko Kondo heard from a school teacher that a seven-year-old had only a banana to eat for the day besides school lunch because his single mother was sick.⁸

Anna Puigjaner in *Kitchenless Stories* focuses on the case of a Kodomo Kitchen that was originally built by a known architect as a project to create offices for the elderly population that ended up being occupied by kids. These kids were usually alone from early in the morning until late at night, because their parents work full time. Later on, as Puigjaner explains, the elderly people of the neighborhood started to cook for them, others (including



⁶ Anna Puigjaner, Wheelright Award Conference, *Kitchen Stories*, 2018.

⁷ Anna Puigjaner, Wheelright Award Conference, *Kitchen Stories*, 2018

⁸ Akiko Katayama, *Forbes.com*, Feb 19, 2021
(images from *Kitchenless Stories*, Anna Puigjaner, 2019)

the parents) started to donate basic food such as rice and vegetables. These Kodomo Kitchens are mostly found in social housing projects, which are filled by hundreds of people. The other typology Puigjaner touches upon in her research are the small collective living projects called “Shared Houses”. The Shared Houses are designed by known architects and are very popular, some of them elitists, expensive and very hard to get into. What this typologies have in common according to Puigjaner is that “they all decide to share kitchen in order to belong to a community and socialize”⁹

Puigjaner reiterates the breaking of clichés about collectivity by sharing the case of the Shared Houses, a lot of these projects are supported and promoted by private companies such as Toyota.¹⁰ This promotion and collective living is perceived as a social advancement and it includes from Netflix series to magazine advertisements. The media involvement in the promotion of this collective way of living, refers to the private investments and economic interests behind Shared Houses. In her conference Kitchenless Stories, Puigjaner points out that this mode of looking at collective living in Japan is a consequence of the first big earthquake Japan experienced. After realizing that way too many people were living alone, a wave of reimagining the living conditions of an average person in the cities was born in the 80’s. Which nowadays has expanded to look upon Shared Houses as a social advancement to benefit investors and community.

In these three countries I use as examples in her research to position myself and you who read this paper, into some kind of colorful and multiple context of ideologies behind collectivity...I felt I reached three of them. In Peru it helped women take social and political agency over their neighborhood, body and economy. In Mexico it helped people to appropriate their neighborhoods and relieve their economic struggle. In Japan, the building of community between neighborhoods opens a network of solidarity for the youth of these neighborhoods and the search to belong into a community has become a profitable incentive supported by the private investment sector.



Cirenia E. E., *Flavors Clock*, 2020

⁹ Anna Puigjaner, Wheelright Award Conference, Kitchen Stories, 2018.

¹⁰ Kitchenless Stories Anna Puigjaner. Conference IX Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo, INTERIORES, Sesión 6. 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwCWGUtxTmc&t=1410s>)

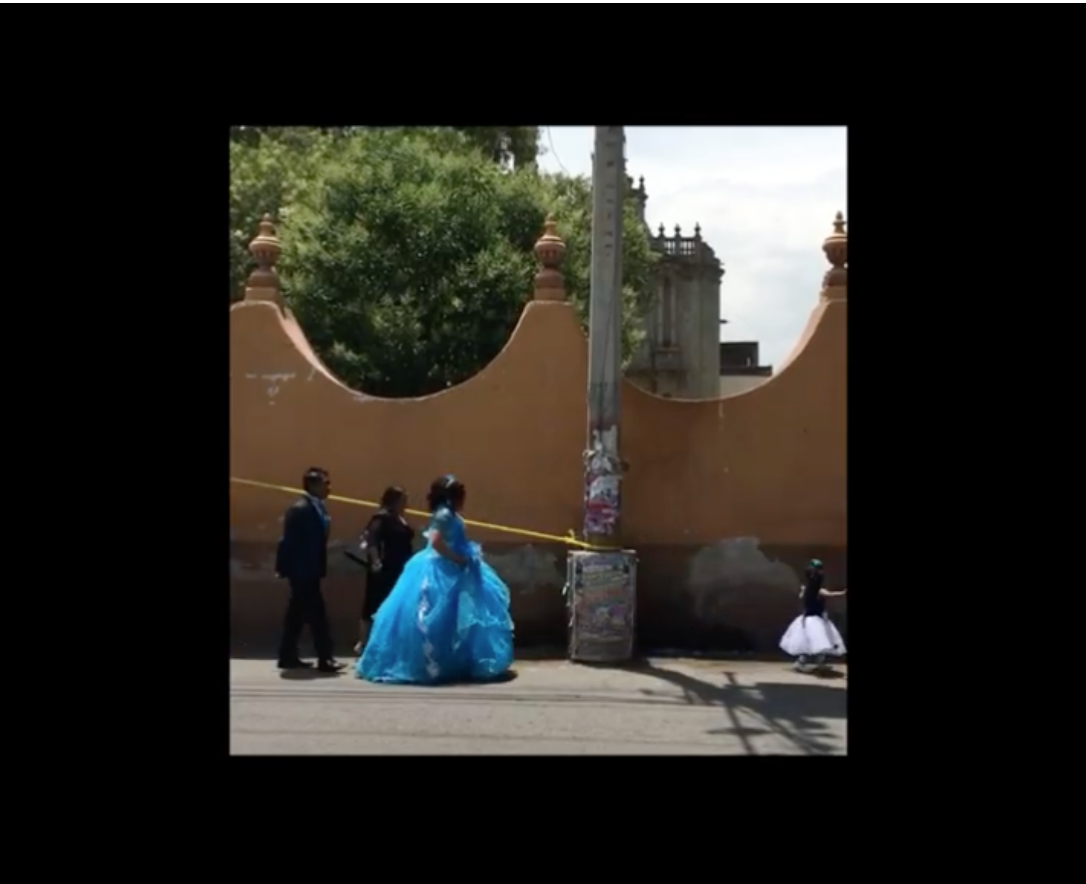
The origin, the myth and the creativity of reinvention

“For most first-time viewers of theoretical films, the most obvious element is the very lack of conventional elements: there seems to be nothing to look at. What is there to be experienced, however, is the *superstructure* of the medium, common to all kinds of film practice. These films attempt to invigorate our awareness of the nature of the cinema experience and, by extension, of the ways in which cinema normally functions in society.”¹¹

These past two years for me assimilate to words and images breaking my skull through demystifying the lie built around what I believed to be my identity or parts of it. Right before starting at the academy, I did a year of master studies that focused on the Archeology of Media. I'd say that personally, I think that many questions encountered within myself while diving into the study of the technical and theoretical aspects of film within my bachelors, were answered in that year of Masters. Studies that then extended into the theoretical and practical research supporting the pieces created (individually and collectively) since I started at The Academy. A subjective understanding (at least the grasp of it) of many of the feelings that plenty of the “critical films” I watched, like Scott Macdonald and others call them, became somehow tangible. As I develop, my language within film practice develops with me. As my time in this program and existence shortens, the more I come to have a subjective understanding of that language. The myths I grew up learning, in the media that was fed to me while growing up, dismantled.

The dialogue and encounters throughout my life until this moment, asking the incorrect and sometimes correct questions (the majority of times just being in the correct space at the correct time), has taken me into a realization of the self through others. From every encounter something is learned. For instance, while talking to the professor that supervised the research paper you find yourself currently reading, he gave me a piece of information that will help me spark a more precise dialogue with a historian I will be meeting when I travel to Mexico to continue this research. I find it relevant to mention how this piece of information found me, because it is proof of finding myself in a path that keeps breaking down myths (and for you to understand a quote that will arise later, a quote I find pertinent to grasp my practice). It started with a podcast link. *The Dawn of Everything* is a book released this year (2021) by David Graeber and David Wengrow. I haven't read the book (I want to), but this is what the podcast *The Dig* was about: David Wengrow presents this book he co-authored. Throughout the podcast he gives us valuable pieces of information and sources about historical facts, myths, etc. By the end of the podcast, he mentions for a minute (is a very short comment) that Mesoamerican societies, specifically the case of Teotihuacan, archeologists found that within the city, they created and shared a system of multi-family homes/structures where people would live. Right after listening to this, I went into *Qwant* to double check and dive deeper into the archeological find.

¹¹ Scott Macdonald, *A Critical Cinema Interviews with independent filmmakers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1988 pp. 8



Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, stills *2MILMEXICO*, 2015-2021

In the magazine *Arqueología Mexicana* in 2016 Linda Manzanilla R. Archaeologist, teacher in anthropological sciences and doctor in Egyptology writes that during the Classic, and particularly since 200 AD, the great city of Teotihuacan emerged, a 20 km² metropolis, a fact that makes it one of the largest among pre-industrial cities. Apparently it was divided into four districts: northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest, and in each district were the barrios, which are the most dynamic social units of Teotihuacan society. The neighborhoods had coordination centers and were administered by nobles. Sets of apartments were arranged around the neighborhood centers, and for the first time multifamily dwellings are found in Mesoamerica.¹²

The analysis the archeologists made of a group of peripheral departments of Teotihuacan, revealed that the three families that lived in it did not share the kitchen nor the altar of the ancestors. They were independent families, each one with its kitchen, its warehouse, its working porches, its rooms-bedrooms, its service patios, its backyards to collect waste and its ritual patio where they venerated the family patron deity. Therefore, the archeologists suppose that what brought together several domestic units in a space surrounded by a large wall, with no connection to the urban exterior beyond the entrances, was some common activity that they could also offer to the neighborhood. In each neighborhood there were probably potters, obsidian carvers, stucco workers, etc., which reveals that there were no union neighborhoods but more or less autonomous social units.¹³

With her research Dr. Linda Manzanilla R. proves that the subsistence related to flora in Teotihuacan housing complexes was linked to corn, amaranth, beans, pumpkins, chili, chenopodiaceae (huauhzontle, epazote), quelites, purslane, tomato, cacti (prickly pear, biznagas), tejocote and capulín. She denotes that the fauna remains indicate that subsistence depended on various species of rabbit and hare, deer, dog and turkey, which was complemented by aquatic birds and freshwater fish. Manzanilla breaks a myth created by archeologist David Starbuck where he suggests that around 350-550 AD there were problems in meat distribution due to population pressure. In contrast Linda points out this is not palpable in lower class populations, whose diet (as indicated by local flora and fauna, skeletal remains, and isotopic studies) appears to have been fairly balanced. By the end of the article from *Arqueología Mexicana* Manzanilla states:

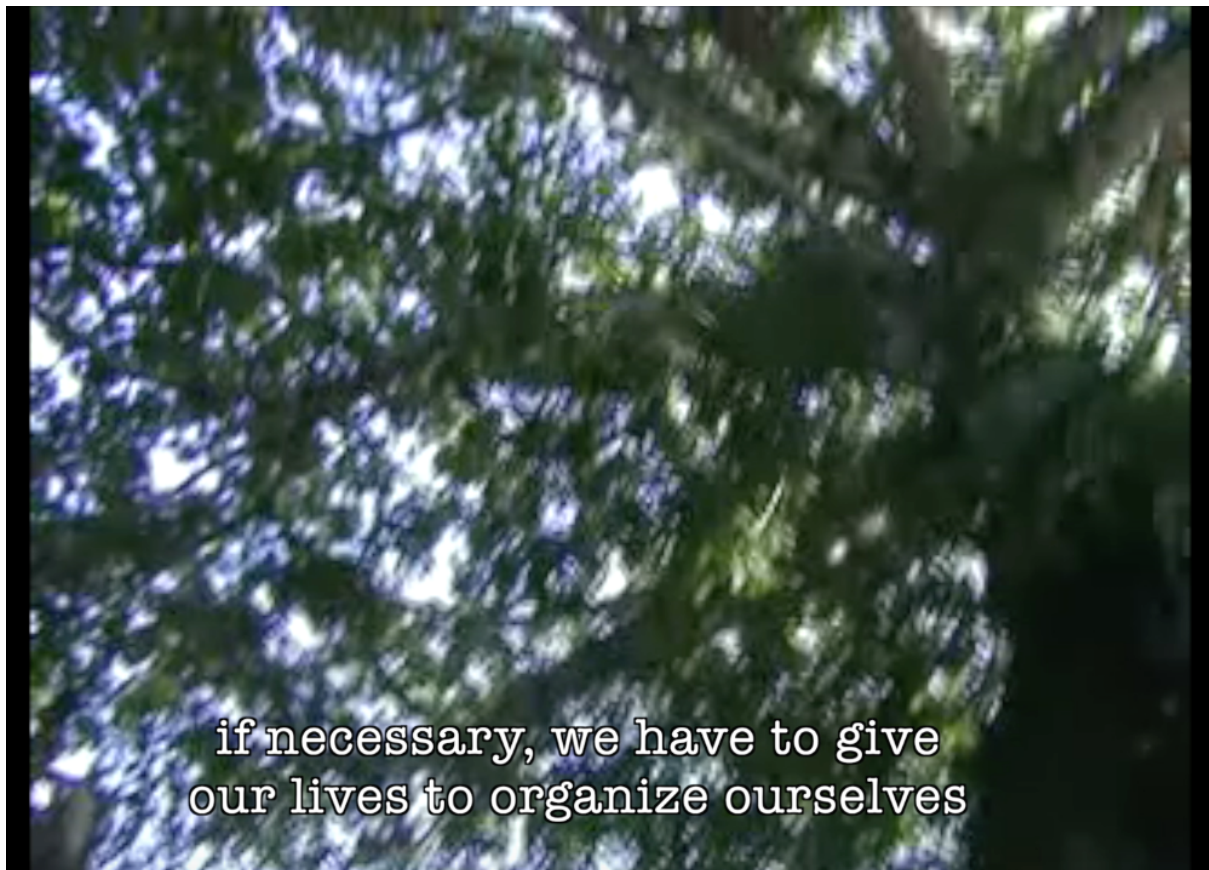
“When we take into consideration the presence or absence of botanical and fauna resources, as well as non-native materials, we conclude that the differences in access to resources between the housing complexes are slight, since all families, regardless of their social position, they had access to the same resources but in different proportions. There seems to have been a whole range of socioeconomic possibilities, without sharp distinctions between social classes but within a hierarchical structure, even in the multifamily complexes themselves.”¹⁴

¹² Manzanilla R., Linda, “Los conjuntos departamentales teotihuacanos”, *Arqueología Mexicana* núm. 140, pp. 53-60.

¹³ Manzanilla R., Linda, “Los conjuntos departamentales teotihuacanos”, *Arqueología Mexicana* núm. 140, pp. 53-60.

¹⁴ Manzanilla R., Linda, “Los conjuntos departamentales teotihuacanos”, *Arqueología Mexicana* núm. 140, pp. 53-60.

By coming upon Manzanilla's valuable research (it is more extensive than just the article I refer to), I felt all fragments of this research paper interconnect. In Teotihuacan collectivity functioned in another way and with a different purpose/agenda which was part of a social structure that benefited its population by having a fairer supply system and network that is yet to be comprehended by us.



Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, *De Norte A Sur*, 2020

Documentary is not a name

The podcast ends with David Wengrow giving a final and hopeful note (the pertinent quote I was telling you about earlier). In his opinion, and I'm paraphrasing, it is wrong to begin human history by arguing that we are natively something. What makes us human is the capacity to evaluate and navigate through alternatives. Wengrow's and Graeber's conclusion was that if you wanted to make a generalization of human capacity. If there's a pattern to the past pulled out of their research, it is precisely that we are a more playful and creative species than we generally give ourselves credit for.

"You must re-create reality because reality runs away; reality denies reality. You must first interpret it, or re-create it. . . . When I make a documentary, I try to give the realism an artificial aspect. . . . I find that the aesthetic of a document comes from the artificial aspect of the document. . . it has to be more beautiful than realism, and therefore it has to be composed . . . to give it another sense"¹⁵ –Georges Franju

¹⁵ Georges Franju, as quoted in *Documentary Explorations*, Doubleday, 1971 pp. 121, 128

My master's project is my attempt to exercise that creativity of reinvention that Wengrow mentions, and Manzanilla and Puigjaner deliver. All through film language. Recreating fragments of a story that was witnessed by me, that was sung to me and eventually performed by me. That one of building a community with all its multiple greys, because it is not only black and white. A reality that I could not grasp through how the *superstructure of the medium* was (still is) used during my upbringing years. A reality that is neither beautiful, nor truth. A fable about the past of a fragment of a future that is still yet to exist and sometimes on quiet nights I can hear breathing.

"To compose is not always synonymous with ordering-so-as-to-persuade, and to give the filmed document another sense, another meaning, is not necessarily to distort it. If life's paradoxes and complexities are not to be suppressed, the question of degree and nuance is incessantly crucial. Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized, and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties or decentralizes it. Thus, even when this source is referred to, it stands as one among many others, at once plural and utterly singular. In its demand to mean at any rate, the "documentary" often forgets how it comes about and how aesthetics and politics remain inseparable in its constitution. For, when not equated with mere techniques of beautifying, aesthetics allows one to experience life differently, or as some would say, to give it "another sense," remaining in tune with its drifts and shifts."¹⁶

I go to Mexico formulating familiar questions. Questions I don't own. Questions asked by others with similar contexts before. Questions I do not plan to answer in the film but answers that hopefully eventually will find me. How did Teotihuacan influence our modern ways of collectivity? Is it not about replicating the past, but referring to it? Who is behind the building of this network that is making people appropriate their neighborhoods? Why? How does this fit the current government neoliberal agenda? What about women? Is women labor finally being waged by making the domestic public?¹⁷ Why are women being haunted and killed still? What about people that go out of the constraints of the binary? How can I tell this story without being part of a spectacle, of a narrative that has used a language to hurt us?.

Cirenia Escobedo
Esquivel, *De Norte A
Sur*, 2020



¹⁶ Trinh T. Minhha *Documentary Is/Not a Name* October, Vol. 52 (Spring, 1990), pp. 89

¹⁷ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014

“Reality runs away, reality denies reality. Filmmaking is after all a question of “framing” reality in its course. However, it can also be the very place where the referential function of the film image/sound is not simply negated, but reflected upon in its own operative principles and questioned in its authoritative identification with the phenomenal world. In attempts to suppress the mediation of the cinematic apparatus and the fact that language “communicates itself in itself,” there always lurks a bourgeois conception of language.”¹⁸



Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, *Transcendent Flowing*, 2020

¹⁸ Trinh T. Minhha Documentary Is/Not a Name October, Vol. 52 (Spring, 1990), pp. 90

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Images/ Stills

Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, *Otro Mundo Oslo* project, 2020-2021

Anna Puigjaner, Wheelright Award Conference, *Kitchen Stories*, 2018.

Cirenia E. E., *Flavors Clock*, 2020

Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, stills *2MILMEXICO*, 2015-2021

Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, *De Norte A Sur*, 2020

Cirenia Escobedo Esquivel, *Transcendent Flowing*, 2020