

# apropos

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## Corporealities to the limit

The female body as border territory from artistic practice as research

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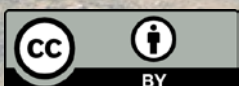
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Diana Coca

## **Corporealities to the limit**

### **The female body as border territory from artistic practice as research**

The body is the vehicle of the being of the world, to possess a body is for a living person to connect with a defined environment, to confuse himself with certain projects and to commit himself continually to them.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.**

There is no Border if there is no need to cross it. There are fences to keep out what is not wanted inside, true; but those barriers would have no *raison d'être*, no meaning, if someone did not try to cross them. In other words, the boundary prevails because there are those who wish to cross it. Every border exists only in the imagination of the one who wishes to cross it. It is an invention of the one who lives facing it. A perfect pairing.

**Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, *Instructions for Crossing the Border*.**

I propose a theoretical-practical approach to the presentation and representation of the female body in artistic creation. That is, the use of the body as a space at the limit, liminal, of danger and transgression, with the consequent potentially re-signifying effects of territory and common space through art. This narration is accompanied by the dissection of the creative process in phases and its final product, where I start from my own body, as testimony, meeting place, object and subject, studying its relationship with the context in an act of defiance to patriarchal authority. In this sense, we could relate it to the de-hierarchisation and proximity to others, in an unregulated but vital encounter of desiring, non-docile subjectivities, which eroticize politics with their irruption into the public sphere, with the intention of living, creating, loving, inventing another society, another perception of the world and other value systems.

I pose the research question that underlines the contradiction between using my own body as a place of presentation/representation, despite being a place in conflict, or precisely because of it: are we facing a body in dispute, between the images generated by the patriarchy and those that we ourselves generate as women artists? From this approach, I wish to answer the question put forward, namely what a body can do: can a body generate discourses that go beyond verbal communication? Can a body enunciate and generate discourses that transcend the artistic act itself? I will verify whether it is possible to understand performance as an extension of writing, and vice versa, to turn writing into a performative act. To

do so, I will start from the idea that thought is a hybrid between the somatic and the mental, and that the performing body is a hybrid between the somatic and the mental, and that the performing body is an interrelated system that goes from action to thought and from thought to action. Through this proposal, I will discover whether action art can become a fertile ground for de-limiting both thought (immersed in a dualistic and binary intellectual tradition that constitutes the hegemonic discourse) and the alienating cartographies that close their borders to intellectual migrations and nomadic certainties.

The observation is based on transdisciplinary assumptions, with an intersectional feminist perspective that aims to address the problematic traced through the performative by studying the generation of meanings from the body itself inserted in a communicative and geographical context, with all its political, social and cultural implications. It is a partial and situated methodology, a particular and specific embodied theory of an enunciating self, a *theory in the flesh* (Moraga, 1988) that is gestated in bodies and in the intersection of gender, class, and race. The body is what situates us in a territory, however, it is affects that are activated when we interact with the world and in the encounter with others. Thus, the linking of body, empathy and affect is central to epistemology, which includes individual experience, and with it the capacity to affect and be affected. These are elements that have been ignored in the philosophical tradition, which disavows the body in favour of an objectivity that is rarely neutral, as the subject does not have complete, total, and objective knowledge. This challenge to positivism comes from the voice of women, artists, subalterns in traditional pedagogy, excluded, who come from 'other' unofficial, marginal, unauthorized places, from another scientificity, from other forms of border knowledge that articulate gazes and texts from the disappeared, from where to construct other politics that can be attended to (cf. Haraway 1995, 244-254).

Likewise, my methodology focuses on artistic practice as transformative research, starting from the facts as I have experienced them in order to deconstruct and rethink them from a critical stance that can hypothetically maximize the human potential for freedom and equality. I use both word and image to construct and critique social and cultural issues that reproduce a reality and explain how it is and how it could become. In this way, not only does the research subject undergo a critical change throughout the process, but the artist-researcher is also transformed. To do so:

1. I start from a theoretical corpus and my artistic works produced between 2013-2019, answer the questions posed and consider whether the working hypothesis is verifiable. The objectives and the research question guide my work. I also trace themes/variables, observing how they evolve or deviate from the designed path.
2. I study the visual image as a source and medium of knowledge and understanding, using images as texts, artefacts and events that embody individual and cultural meanings.

3. I analyse my artistic process, examine diaries, notebooks, readings, writings, images of ideas and documentation used between 2000 and 2020. Through these, I highlight the characteristics and phases of my process, the sources of inspiration, and the references used.

The objectives of this proposal are the following:

- To analyse the limits of the female body in relation to outer space and social impositions. To identify whether the body itself can testify or attest to the problematization of female identity that I raise in my work.
- To discover the artistic mechanisms through which the body can bear witness to a life story and provide knowledge, as a bridge or frontier between the past and the present. Study of the body as a liminal space where the trace between the present experience and the memory of the experience lived in the past - traumatic or happy - which is inserted in the tonic memory of the muscle and in the psychic, experiencing what has been inherited, imposed, acquired, as well as the interpretation and revision of these traces in the present, materializes.
- To formulate conflicts of status, identity, gender, power, space, and hierarchy in order to reintegrate and connect with the collective.
- Identify the use of violence, with special attention to identifying the relevance of the aesthetic means I use against systems of authority, power, and control. To verify its latency in my work, inserted within a patriarchal Catholic tradition whose socio-political contexts justify the situation of violence and abuse of power towards women. Likewise, to analyse it from my situated, post-Franco-dictatorship body, a bodily register that generates intense communicative distortions, starting from silence and being encrypted in our bodies, in our ways of living, creating and researching.
- To pose/determine whether photoperformance can contribute to reconstruct the space of circulation in a choreopolitics that affirms a movement for a different, more joyful, powerful, intense, humanized life, less reproductive of the agitated and exhausted kinetics of neoliberal capitalism.

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