

## She Has Many Names

Dora García

### ALP

Anna Livia Plurabelle is the heroine of *Finnegans Wake*; she is the wife of Mr. Earwicker, HCE, the hero. She is Everywoman, Everygoddess, Everyriver. She is Artemis.<sup>1</sup> She is especially Dublin's little, winding, brown-red, polluted river, Anna Liffey, which rises in the Wicklow hills and meets salt Dublin Bay at Island Bridge. She is Sarah.<sup>2</sup> The old name of the river Liffey was "Ruir tech" meaning "swift running." The river took then the name of the place whereupon it was running, called Magh Liffé, or "plain of life." Liffey-Leafy, alive, live, life. This ties Anna Livia with Eve, meaning "life" in Hebrew. Ana is also Dana,<sup>3</sup> mother of the Irish gods. Anna means "grace" in Hebrew, relating then to the Virgin Mary, and to Joyce's mother, Mary Murray, and his daughter, Lucia Anna Joyce. Robert Graves says in *The White Goddess* that if you need a single, simple, inclusive name for the Great Goddess, Anna is probably the best choice.<sup>4</sup> Plurabelle is an addition to the river names, connecting with the plurality of persons that is Eve, mother of all living, and connects with names such as Belle, Isabel, Elisheba, Laura/Daphne, Laura Belle, Rain (*Pluie*, in French). Liffey connects with life and with Livia, spouse of Augustus, but especially, with Livia, the wife of Italo Svevo, Livia Veneziani Schmitz (the real name of Svevo was Aron Hector Schmitz).

When Joyce met Livia Veneziani Schmitz, she was a beautiful middle-aged woman notable for her finely drawn face, her small perfect nose, and famously long, thick blond-reddish hair. Italo Svevo received private English lessons from James Joyce in Trieste. In the eyes of the Triestine merchant class, Joyce was a member of a lower class, and his wife, Nora, had to work. Livia was thankful to Joyce for encouraging her husband Ettore to continue writing and helping him to publish. Well aware of the terrible economic troubles at the Joyce household, *Signora* Schmitz employed both Nora and Joyce's sister, Eileen, as domestic help. In 1924, Livia Veneziani discovered that Joyce had given her name to the female heroine of his new

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, the Moon, and chastity. The goddess Diana is her Roman equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> In the biblical narrative, Sarah is the wife of Abraham. Knowing Sarah to be a great beauty and fearing that the Pharaoh would kill Abraham to be with Sarah, Abraham asks Sarah to tell the Pharaoh that she is his sister.

<sup>3</sup> In Irish mythology, Danu; modern Irish Dana is a hypothetical mother goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann (Old Irish: "The peoples of the goddess Danu"). Though primarily seen as an ancestral figure, some Victorian sources also associate her with the land.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, 1999), 378: "[M]asculinized in two out of the three mentions of her, she is principally celebrated as the mother of Aholibamah ('tabernacle of the high place'), the heiress whom Esau married on his arrival in the Seir pastures. (Ana's alleged discovery of mules in the wilderness is due to a scribal error.) James Joyce playfully celebrates Anna's universality in his Anna Livia Plurabelle. And indeed if one needs a single, simple, inclusive name for the Great Goddess, Anna is the best choice. To Christian mystics she is 'God's Grandmother.'"

novel, still called “Work in Progress.” Joyce told Svevo as such in a letter dated February 20, 1924:

A propos of names, I have given the name of Signora Schmitz to the protagonist of the book I am writing. Ask her however not to take up arms, either of steel or fire, since the person involved is the Pyrrha of Ireland (or rather of Dublin) whose hair is the river beside which (her name is Anna Liffey) the seventh city of Christendom springs up, the other six being Basovizza, Clapham Junction, Rena Vecia, Limehouse, S. Odorico in the vale of Tears and San Giacomo in Monte di Pietà. Reassure your wife with regard to Anna Livia. I have taken no more than her hair from her and even that only on loan, to adorn the rivulet which runs through my city, the Anna Liffey, which would be the longest river in the world if it weren't for the canal which comes from far away to wed the divine Antonio Taumaturgo, and then changing its mind goes back the way it came.

If between Italo Svevo and James Joyce there had been a real, deep friendship, recognizing each other as intellectual equals, with Joyce being invited many times to Svevo's house as a friend, there was no such friendship between Nora Joyce and *la Signora Schmitz*, who had always taken good care of underlining their class difference.

When Ellmann interviewed Livia Schmitz for Joyce's biography, she told him that when she “heard that Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* was using her flowing hair as a symbol of the lovely river Liffey, she was flattered, but when she heard that in the river there were two washerwomen scrubbing dirty linen, she was disgusted.”<sup>5</sup>

She seems to have been a bit of a snob. John McCourt writes, “More than Schmitz she attached importance to class, and more than once she ignored Nora on the street even though they had known one another from the time Nora had, in desperation, taken in washing and ironing for her.”<sup>6</sup>

If Anna Livia Plurabelle took from Signora Schmitz the name and the hair, she took from Nora the quasi-illiteracy, and her being a laundress. And perhaps her way of writing too: “Do

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<sup>5</sup> This is a reference to one of the most popular—and sublimely beautiful—chapters of the book, Chapter 8 of Book I, starting with the famous words “O, tell me all about Anna Livia! I want to hear all about Anna Livia. Well, you know Anna Livia? Yes, of course, we all know Anna Livia. Tell me all. Tell me now. You'll die when you hear.”

<sup>6</sup> “A Photo of Anna Livia's Hair,” *From Swerve of Shore to Bend of Bay* (personal blog), <http://peterchrisp.blogspot.com/2016/09/a-photo-of-anna-livias-hair.html>.

you notice how women when they write disregard stops and capital letters?" Joyce asked Stanislaus after a brief unpunctuated interpolation by Nora in one of his letters.<sup>7</sup>

## COATLICUE

She has this fear that she has no names that she has many names  
that she doesn't know her names She has this fear that she's an image  
that comes and goes clearing and darkening the fear that she's the dreamwork  
inside someone else's skull She has this fear that If she takes off her clothes  
shoves her brain aside peels off her skin that if she drains the blood vessels  
strips the flesh from the bone flushes all the marrow She has this fear  
that when she does reach herself turns around to embrace herself a lion's or  
witch's or serpent's head will turn around swallow her and grin  
She has this fear that if she digs into herself she won't find anyone that  
when she gets "there" she won't find her notches on the trees the birds  
will have eaten all the crumbs She has this fear that she won't find the way  
back<sup>8</sup>

*In Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Chicana feminist and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) dramatically vindicates feminine cultural figures that were at one or other moment in history labeled as *defectors* from the community. Gloria Anzaldúa analyzes the figures of Malintzín (La Malinche), La Llorona, and Coatlicue (identified as the Guadalupe Holy Virgin). All of them are figures of transition and syncretism.

La Llorona, the phantasmatic female figure crying for her lost (drowned) children, is an incarnation or version of Cihuacoatl,<sup>9</sup> who abandoned her child at a crossroads (and could never find it again, finding instead a sacrificial knife). Cihuacoatl is the deity presiding over childbirth and is associated as well with Eve or Lillith of Hebrew mythology.

La Malinche was the translator, negotiator, and lover of Hernán Cortés, mother of the first mestizo, Don Martín (as son of a Spanish man, Cortés, and a Nahua woman, Malinche). La Malinche was *the* key figure in the unlikely and amazing conquest of the Aztec empire; she made it possible. Forever shadowed by the great mystery of her relation to Cortés and her

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, October 3, 1906, in *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, vol. 2 (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 173, quoted in Derek Attridge, "Molly's Flow: The Writing of 'Penelope' and the Question of Women's Language," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 3 (1989): 543–565, available online at [www.jstor.org/stable/26283002](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26283002).

<sup>8</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 43 (ch. "The Coatlicue State").

<sup>9</sup> Meaning "Snake Woman," one of a number of Aztec motherhood and fertility goddesses.

long-lasting shaming as “traitor” to her people, perhaps one of the most reasonable narratives of her life is the one speaking of revenge and protection. Enslaved at the age of fourteen, she had been a slave for ten years when she met Cortés; her ability with languages elevated her to the category of translator, acquiring a power that no woman ever had before among the Aztecs. She used this power to protect her people from what she saw as unavoidable (the Spanish domination) and to seek revenge on those who had enslaved her. Her name “Malinche” is a Hispanicization of the name Malin-tzin, meaning, “Lady (Tzin) Marina” (the Aztecs could not pronounce the “r”); and Marina was the Christian name the Spanish conquistadores gave her through baptism: her real name is unknown.<sup>10</sup>

Coatlicue<sup>11</sup> was the Mother Goddess of the Aztec pantheon, her name meaning “snake skirted.” A gigantic sculpture of Coatlicue (2.5 meters) was accidentally rediscovered in 1790 in the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City, located above the ancient ruins of the Aztec Great Temple, when workers were constructing an underground aqueduct. The vision of the decapitated Goddess, two snakes coming out of her neck, with a necklace made of hearts and hands, pendulous breasts, skirt of intertwined rattlesnakes, was so monstrous that they decided to bury her again,<sup>12</sup> under the patio of the university, to preserve the Mexican youth from what they perceived not only as ghastly but also in defiance of all the European preconceptions of femininity. The case of interpreting Coatlicue’s body as monstrous falls into the pattern of European patriarchal fears projected onto the New World. Furthermore, in Christian imagery the snake represented the devil, or the temptation of Eve and the Fall of man. But for the Aztecs, snakes were sacred animals representing, through the shedding of skin, their vision of cyclical time, rebirth, and renewal.

The iconography of the snake and the female archetype goes back to the beginning of times. One example really worth mentioning is the figure of Mami Wata, or Yemayá, a water spirit venerated in West, Central, and Southern Africa as well as in the African diaspora in the Americas: Haiti, Cuba, Brazil. A large snake wraps itself around her, laying its head between her breasts. Mami Wata often carries a mirror in her hand, representing a movement through the present and the future. In her form of Yemayá, she is one of the most powerful “Orishas,” or African spirits; her name comes from the Yoruba *Yeyé omo ejá*, “Mother of fish children,” and she is connected to rivers and river mouths, female fertility, the genesis of the world, and the continuity of life. Yemayá, goddess of water and the sea, was syncretized by the African diaspora with the image of the Mother Mary. They are both dressed in blue and

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<sup>10</sup> She was one of twenty enslaved women given to the Spaniards by the natives of Tabasco in 1519.

<sup>11</sup> Ann De León, “Coatlicue or How to Write the Dismembered Body,” *MLN* 125, no. 2 (2010): 259–86, available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40606256>.

<sup>12</sup> The statue was disinterred again in 1803, so that Alexander von Humboldt could make drawings and a cast of it, after which it was reburied. It was again dug up for the final time in 1823, so that William Bullock could make another cast, which was displayed the next year in the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, London, as part of Bullock’s *Ancient Mexico* exhibition. The statue remained on the patio at the university until the first national museum was established.

white; however, Mother Mary is white, and Yemayá is black; Mother Mary is motherly and demure, Yemayá exhibits an opulent sexuality. But Mother Mary has a relation to the serpent as well: in the book of Genesis (3:15), shortly after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the garden, God cursed the serpent who tricked them and foretells its ultimate destruction: “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.”

Following Anzaldúa, the vindication of such figures underlines the transitional, mutable character of Mestiza feminism, transfeminism, lesbofeminism—and its dispossession:

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we’ve made some kind of evolutionary step forward. *Nuestra alma el trabajo*, the opus, the great alchemical work; spiritual mestizaje, a “morphogenesis,” an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.<sup>13</sup>

### **Her death: A way a lone a last a loved a long the**

“Yet is no body present here which was not there before. Only is order othered. Nought is nulled. *Fuitfiat!*” (FW, IV, 613)

“What has gone? How it ends?

...

Forget! remember!

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<sup>13</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Consciencia de la Mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 102–3.

...  
Forget!"  
(FW, IV, 614)

"If I lose my breath for a minute or two don't speak, remember! Once it happened, so it may again." (FW, IV, 625)

O  
tell me all about  
Anna Livia! I want to hear all  
(FW, I, 8, 196)

*Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce is a book that contains all books and a story that contains all stories. Multiple threads can be picked up to lead our way through the *Wake* maze. The one thread I would like to pick up now is one of the characters, Anna Livia, and the final part of the book, Book IV. Among many other things, *Finnegans Wake* is the story of a family, the Earwicker family (or sometimes the Porter family), composed of a father, a mother, two sons, and a daughter. Characters, in *Finnegans Wake*, are principles. And so, the father, HCE or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, is every father, everybody's father, every male figure of authority, risen or fallen; and a mountain. The mother, ALP or Anna Livia Plurabelle, is all mothers, the mother of everyone, the stem mother, and a river, the river Liffey. The children are Shem and Shaun, twins, one a writer and man of observation, the other a postman and a man of action, one a tree and the other a stone, one time and the other space: and Issy, the daughter, every pubescent female, and a cloud. The book is structured in four parts that correspond to the cyclic theory of history by Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), consisting of three phases separated by thunder: the first is the age of the gods, a primitive society producing language, religion, and the family; second is the age of the heroes, with endless wars; and third is the democratic age, of people, where everyone is equal after several revolutions. After these three ages follows a period of chaos and collapse whereupon we return (*ricorso*) to the age of the gods.

Book IV, Chapter 1 (FW, IV.1), is the section of the *ricorso*, leading back to the beginning of the book. It is as well the phase of the death of ALP, the river Liffey reaching the sea.

This chapter 1 of a four-sectioned book is structured as well into four parts. The first three parts, pages 593 to 619, are representative of the rest of the book, with this language that appears to be English but is in fact *Wake*se, a language where all languages are present

simultaneously, where every word has multiple meanings.<sup>14</sup> But the fourth part is different. It begins with a signature: “Alma Luvia, Pollabella.”—“Alma” (“soul,” in Spanish, Italian, Latin) “Luvia” (“rain,” in Ladino or Old Spanish), “Pollabella” (multiple meanings: hen, multitude, many people, beautiful).

In this page 619, we learn that ALP is signing all preceding pages, that the whole book is a letter that she signs now. She did not write it, as she is illiterate. She dictated it to her son Shem, the scrivener; her other son, Shaun the postman, will deliver it. This is done and finished.

What follows, pages 619 to 628, will be the slow death of Anna Livia Plurabella, and her farewell. The language is different: these are the true sounds of the wind, of breathing, of lips, of whispering, of the rustling of leaves, of language, of murmurs, of memory, of the “hearseyard” (621), of the “traumscraft” (dreamscript, 623).

These are the final words of Anna Livia (Liffey) Plurabelle:

... Yes,  
tid. There’s where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush  
to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us  
then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thous-  
endsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a  
long the

Ending in “the,” to connect immediately from this final page 628 to the first page of the book, page 3: “riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, ...”

The time of *Finnegans Wake*, the eternal death and resurrection of Anna Livia (the river into the sea and then back to the young cloud and the spring and the tiny stream...) is a dream time, a mythic time, a cyclic time, an eonic time, the breakdown of linear time, the time of “Yes.”<sup>15</sup> Freud repeatedly stressed that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time.

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<sup>14</sup> One does not read *Finnegans Wake* but rather deciphers it, unravels it, knowing that the maze is ultimately unsolvable, a bottomless pit of language. One can read *Finnegans Wake* as the narration of a dream, a night of endless interconnected nightmares, a journey into the unconscious. We will refer to Jacques Lacan here, because it is very pertinent: the unconscious is structured like a language in the sense that it is a signifying process that involves coding and decoding, ciphering and deciphering. That’s how you read *Finnegans Wake*.

<sup>15</sup> “Yes” is the fundamental word in the final soliloquy of Molly Bloom, the predecessor of Anna Livia, closing the book *Ulysses*: “I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.” James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1968), 704.

The statue of Coatlicue had been ordered to be destroyed by the Spaniards after the capitulation of Tenochtitlán;<sup>16</sup> but the inhabitants did not dare to destroy the Mother of All Things and instead buried her. When she was uncovered again, the devotion to her was intact, and the people of Mexico rushed to bring flowers and offerings, to the exasperation of the Catholic priests. The people referred to her as “Tonan-tzin,” meaning “Our Sacred Mother” in the Nahuatl language, the same name they used for the Virgin of Guadalupe, that syncretic figure which was able to catholically sugarcoat the persistent cult of Coatlicue. They did not only have serpents in common: both had also been impregnated by a “ball of feathers,” or a bird. Through the ear. They both gave birth to their sons without male intervention: Jesus and Hutzilopochtli. Both will bitterly weep for the death of their sons.

The cult and legends of the Mother Holy Virgin Mary, Coatlicue, and the Pietá/La Llorona converge in the cult of the Holy Death or La Santa Muerte. The Holy Death is celebrated on October 31 (the traditional *Día de Los Muertos*, Day of the Dead) and is a modern cult (dated 2001<sup>17</sup>) with very ancient roots: the sacred feminine in pre-Hispanic Mexico was associated with blood, dismemberment, decapitation, and death (the sacrificial knife or *tecpatl* of Cihuacóatl). La Santa Muerte is a semi-clandestine cult of a deity of the night; she helps taxi drivers, mariachis, bartenders, policemen, soldiers, gays, prisoners, prostitutes.<sup>18</sup> She has been associated with criminal gangs and *narcotraficantes*.

Sayak Valencia notes in her fundamental book *Gore Capitalism*<sup>19</sup> that if, according to Marx, wealth, in societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production, is presented as an immense accumulation of products, in Gore Capitalism, this process is subverted, and the *destruction of bodies* becomes the product, the merchandise. The accumulation now is defined by the number of dead, since *death has become the most profitable business*. This accumulation of bodies is the result of the explosion of unlimited and overspecialized violence, in the interstices of capitalism. Life is not important anymore, there is nothing to lose, and there is no future that can be anticipated. This is the result of neoliberalism, unable to generate belonging, community, or a believable future. Neoliberalism cannot propose any model of social integration unless it is based in consumerism and the distortion of the concept of labor. The border/*frontera* city of Tijuana shows the symbiosis of violence

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<sup>16</sup> “The Fall of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire, was a decisive event in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. It occurred in 1521 following extensive manipulation of local factions and exploitation of pre-existing divisions by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, who was aided by the support of his indigenous allies and his interpreter and companion La Malinche.” Wikipedia contributors, “Fall of Tenochtitlan,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall\\_of\\_Tenochtitlan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan).

<sup>17</sup> “The clandestine cult of La Santa Muerte became public in Mexico City in 2001 when Mrs. Enriqueta Romero installed a six-foot-tall figure of La Niña Blanca in an altar built especially for her in Calle Alfarería, in the Tepito neighborhood of Mexico City.” Patrizia Granziera, “Coatlicue and the ‘Holy Death’: Two Terrible Mothers of the Mexicans,” *Researcher: European Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2019): 39–52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018).



as an object of consumerism, death as spectacle and way of life, perhaps inherited from pre-Hispanic culture.

Mother Holy Virgin Mary, Coatlicue, the Pietá/La Llorona, La Santa Muerte, are not fiction. Myth is the very basis of the human, an infrastructure that goes beyond the biological but also determines it: dreaming, stories, songs.

### **A woman with power is feared. Heartbreak.**

In the text *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter To 3rd World Women Writers*, written by Gloria Anzaldúa on May 21 1980<sup>20</sup>, we read:

Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared.

The long production process of the film *Amor Rojo* (2023) - four years long, mainly due to COVID-19 pandemics - was mostly a process of reading the public texts and private correspondence of Marxist feminist, Soviet revolutionary, and sexual activist Alexandra Kollontai, guided by Mexican historian and Kollontai scholar Rina Ortiz. The film is a documentation of this reading process and of the tracing of its infinite connections with the present and the future of feminisms. It is both heartwarming and heartbreaking to discover the intricate relation between the private and the public life of Kollontai, her energy, her determination, her enthusiasm, her disappointment, and her own rebirth from her "ashes" - a term used by Kollontai in her letters. *Enthusiasm, disappointment, and reawakening* were the three phases we established in her life, phases that could as well be applied to 100 years of feminisms and if fact to any struggle for rights. Her big heartbreak due to the collapse of her marriage to Pavel Dybenko runs parallel to her defeat as part of The Workers' Opposition in the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (1921) and subsequent ostracism. Kollontai the fighter, the adamant, the powerful writer whose pamphlets were printed and read by the thousands, described her defeat as follows:

It was painful to sense this wall of hostility between us and the committee, as we spoke, Shliapnikov and I. Radek spoke so impertinently against us, mainly against me, saying: "Here I do not polemicize with a lady, but with an enemy of our party". And no one, *no one* protested! My old friend Clara (Zetkin), even she remained silent! How widespread has servility become, cowardice of the soul! ... At least someone dared to tell the truth. And it won't just slip away, it will make them realize that it

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<sup>20</sup> Originally written for *Words In Our Pockets* [Bootlegger: San Francisco), the Feminist Writers' Guild Handbook.

can't continue like this. And most importantly, it will become easier for workers. They have not decided what to do with us ...<sup>21</sup>

In a more intimate tone, she writes:

Interventions ended. I cross the room to the exit. Nobody pays attention to me. I knew this would happen, but it hurts. I feel gloomy and full of grief. There is nothing more painful than disagreeing with the party.<sup>22</sup>

And, to close the full circle of heartbreak:

It is sad to admit that I will never return to my favourite job, between women workers. I know that in my new destiny the ties so dear to me will be broken, the ties with the thousands of Soviet women citizens, who greeted me with enthusiasm: "Here is our Kollontai." I will no longer be "our Kollontai"<sup>23</sup>

### **The end, again: *Segunda Vez* and *Amor Rojo***

In the year 2001 I made my first video/ videoperformance, *The Breathing Lesson*, barely one year after having started to work with performance (*The Tunnel People*, 2000). It started with a simple idea, a sentence, like all the sentences that were the instructions or micronarratives at the origin of the performances titled *Inserts in Real Time* (*Proxy*, *The Glass Wall*, *The Notebook*...). For *The Breathing Lesson*, this sentence was something like "an adult woman teaches a child woman to breathe". I understood videoperformance at that time like a *controlled* performance, where I had control over the frame, what was hors-champ, what was in the frame, control over duration, control over what the spectator got to see. This was much more control than what I had in the off-screen performances. But it was nevertheless much less control than what you have in "conventional" cinema. I had a necessity to respect the documentary form. Before the filming, the actors were instructed about the "situation": you are this character, and this is what you do. Once this was understood, we began filming, and whatever happened was the right thing to happen. We could do second takes, but no cuts. All takes would be different and unrepeatable.

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<sup>21</sup> Unpublished handwritten pages, as found in the RGASPI archives, dated 12th of March 1922

<sup>22</sup> Citado por Mijaíl Trush, *From the politics of the revolutionary struggle to victories on the diplomatic front. The path of Alexandra Kollontai*. Moscow: Librokom, 2010, p. 158. Source: Rina Ortiz, *Algo hice por las mujeres*, published in *Amor y revolución (Kollontai)*, Arcàdia and MACBA, Barcelona, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> A. M. Kollontai, *Diplomatic Diaries, 1922-1940*. Moscow: Academia, 2001, 2 vol. 1, p. 45. Source: Rina Ortiz, *Algo hice por las mujeres*, published in *Amor y revolución (Kollontai)*, Arcàdia and MACBA, Barcelona, 2020.

**Sequence shot**, that was my first important cinematic term, and this went from a static shot such as the one in *The Breathing Lesson*, to a follow-the-character shot as it happened in my second video, *The Glass Wall*, which was the straightforward filming of the performance of the same name<sup>24</sup>. The duration of sequence shots was once determined by the length of the celluloid roll; but in digital media, it is only determined, like reality itself, by the variable attention-span of the viewer. And this had an important consequence: when the camera films non-stop, one tends to forget the camera, and the self-awareness produced by being filmed disappears ... and reappears. Those who are on-screen step in and out of character, as they remember or forget that they are, after all, being filmed, they are part of a representation.

**Subjective camera**, that was the second cinematic term I had very present. I was obsessed with the first four minutes of *Halloween* (1978) and with the film *The Message* (1976, a biopic of prophet Muhammad where the prohibition to represent the prophet is solved by turning the camera into the prophet himself). Subjective camera makes the spectator into an accomplice, an ally, someone who participates in the action, someone who is, also, *morally* co-responsible for what is happening on screen.

**Surveillance camera** is the last cinematic term that was to determine how I understood videoperformance and later, film itself. I had to rethink the term "documentation" in the performances I did between 2000 and 2003. Having a lot to do with the "invisible theater" of Augusto Boal, the presence of a visible camera in those created situations would completely disrupt the relation between "those in the know" (actors, a certain part of the public) and "those who do not know" (the passers-by, the "captive public"), giving away immediately the scripted character of the said situations. To avoid this, there were two options, at that time where phone cameras were not yet omnipresent - to film nothing, or to film everything. This last option, to film everything, was the one chosen for performances such as Proxy and The Kingdom<sup>25</sup> - to film everything through a surveillance camera. In surveillance cameras, there is no choice, there is no filter; everything is equally important, *everything* is filmed. The choice, the judgement, the decisions, or the scripting is left to those who analyse a posteriori, is left to those "expert eyes" (the term used by the Stasi to refer to the agents who would analyse the endless hours of dull spy filming) who will decide what is significant and what not. A film that is exemplary of this Surveillance camera concept was "Rooms, conversations" (2006)<sup>26</sup>, in which one of the characters says:

"What seems normal, futile, or banal, is indeed full of messages, that only the experienced eye can decrypt.

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<sup>24</sup> See page xxx

<sup>25</sup> See pages xxx and xxx

<sup>26</sup> Zimmer, *Gespräche*, Dora García, 2006, 28'47", colour, German spoken.

Everything means.  
Each book carries a secret message.  
Every gesture in the street means something.  
Every deviation from the complex choreography of the good citizen means something."

Surveillance camera (everything, even the most ordinary, is loaded with meaning to the expert eye) + subjective camera (the one watching is part of the situation, not only action-wise but also shares responsibility) + sequence shot (the question of duration, when does a situation begin, when does it end, when are we camera-conscious, when not) - these three cinematic elements are the main parameters in later, more complex film exercises, such as *Segunda Vez* (2018) and *Amor Rojo* (2023).

In *Segunda Vez*, four situations are intertwined.

Two are repetitions of happenings by Argentinian author Oscar Masotta, each of the two with their own scopic regime paradoxes and tensions. In *To induce the spirit of the image* (happening first in 1966), the viewer is accomplice of the class-conscious-guilt gaze of a bourgeois-public endurance-staring at "the poor"; all of them, bourgeois-public and "the poor", being actors for the camera, some professional actors, others not. *The Helicopter* (happening first in 1967), which I understand partly as a superego archetypical representation, and partly as an angelic representation (The Helicopter mirroring The Annunciation), exposes the role of the event or happening, the roles of being witness and bearing witness, and the role of transmissible narrative in the process of community creation.

The other two situations in *Segunda Vez* are metafictional inspired by two metafictional novels. I understand metafiction as an equivalent of "camera awareness, being in and out of character intermittently" that we referred to earlier in the text. In the first metafiction, named *La Eterna* after the prodigious novel by Macedonio Fernández<sup>27</sup>, a group of people gathered in a library comment on the film they are themselves in, contextualising the two repetitions, *To induce the spirit of the image* and *The Helicopter*, against the background of the Argentinian dictatorship and Lacanian theory. The second metafiction, named *Segunda vez* after the short story by Julio Cortázar<sup>28</sup>, places (real) self-conscious and willing actors inside a situation of (fictional) extreme violence, subjective-camera, sequence-shot filmed.

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<sup>27</sup> Macedonio Fernández, *The Museum of Eterna's Novel*, 1967

<sup>28</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Second time around (Segunda vez)*, 1977

Two female characters are especially important in *Segunda Vez*. One is the "famous actress"<sup>29</sup> who waves sweetly to the audience who had been patiently waiting for The Helicopter. She is both an angel and the birds' eye view of the superego. The second is the character of Rita in the *Segunda vez* episode. Rita is a 22-year-old woman who has been summoned by mysterious authorities (The Annunciation again) and who engages in a casual, coquettish conversation with a young man in the waiting room. Once the young man disappears, and she is called into the scary room at the back, the same conversation happens a second time with the authority figure of the interrogator. The conversation is strikingly similar, but what the first time was joyful, is now dark and violent, a cat and mouse game, a good cop bad cop routine, suspended at the end when the subjective camera leaves the room, leaving Rita behind. If Our-Lady-in-the-helicopter sees everything and changes the everyday life of the viewers with her "injection of meaning", Rita is a sacrificial lamb, lured first into the lion's den, and then, sacrificed. In both cases, we are caught in mythical time, once and again, second time around, riverrun.

In *Amor Rojo*, these two characters, the goddess, and the victim, are fractalized - or exploded. They explode to create a collective protagonist, transtemporal (100 years of class-conscious feminism) and transnational (European socialist feminisms, Latinoamerica transfeminisms), heir to atavic figures (Coatlícuē, the stone female deities) to historical figures (A. Kollontai, C. Zetkin, R.L uxemburg) and to generational figures (Ana Victoria Jiménez and her feminist archive). This collective protagonist shatters the falacy of the biological female, the "essential" female, to crown as central characters two transexual women: La Bruja de Texcoco (*We love you, Bruja! Queen of queens!* shout the enthusiastic audience, generous in gestures of complicity and sorority with La Bruja) and La Havi.

La Havi is the woman who cries, among many other crying women in the film (*La Llorona*), sobbing uncontrollably as she remembers the violence she has been subjected to through her life. But she is also the defiant, adamant, empowered queen, showing us her tattoo "Te quiero" on her right cheek, for all to read, in response to the hate that heteropatriarchy has been throwing at her for as long as she remembers, she says, *I love you*.

Penelope is not waiting anymore. Together with Mexican feminist Margarita Robles de Mendoza, we can say, the woman question is not *the woman question* anymore, it is every oppressed collective question. That question cannot stay unanswered any longer, the disappointment will not be tolerated, we have lost patience, we will take it, we will not wait for it to be given - "it is not going to fall, we are going to tip it over" they chant in the demonstrations.

Now, after two million years, two thousand years, two hundred years, a hundred years, ten years, one year ... revolution, fulfill your promise.

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<sup>29</sup> In the original 1967 happening, it was Beatriz Matar; in the repetition for the film *Segunda Vez*, it was Itsaso Arana.



IMAGES



Livia Schmitz, courtesy of Museo Sveviano, Trieste



Coatlicue, as seen in *Amor Rojo*, (2023)





Mami Wata figure, 1950s, The Norman Gabrick Endowment for African Art



Image of the Holy Death or La Santa Muerte, *Amor Rojo*, 2023



Dora García, *The Breathing Lesson*, 2001.



*Segunda Vez, 2018*



*Segunda Vez, 2018*



*Amor Rojo, 2023*



Margarita Robles de Mendoza, 1936. Casasola archive, INAH, Fototeca Nacional, Mexico.