UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Vital Virtuality: A Framework for Polymodal Community-Based Projects

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vv743pz

Author

Aguilar, Lili Flores

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Vital Virtuality:

A Framework for Polymodal Community-Based Projects

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Culture and Performance

by

Lili Flores Aguilar

2022

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Vital Virtuality:

A Framework for Polymodal Curatorial Projects

by

Lili Flores Aguilar

Master of Arts in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Allen Fraleigh Roberts

This Master's thesis is based on a web-based multimedia project titled, "Soundscapes of Pandemia," created during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and global Black Lives Matter uprisings. A question guiding the design of this multimedia project that this Master's thesis considers is, "How can art and collaborative research design critically engage, with current historic moments?" By critical engagement, I mean how can people actively and carefully consider stimuli such as sounds as a means of producing knowledge about current moments and their relationship to possible futures in the urban environment. As an artist, activist, and researcher, I curate visual illustrations and collage the soundscapes in web-space guided by a decolonial practice of counter-mapping and emergent strategy. A collective of submissions qualified a synesthetic multimedia project expressing counter-hegemonic ontologies in transnational urban contexts of Sao Paulo, Leipzig, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, ranging from audio files to audio & video files of varying formats and lengths from nine people. A total of 41 files were submitted by the

people in the network and were transmitted from smartphone devices and a GoPro camera utilizing broadband fiber connections. I assert that by engaging with actual and virtual media through magical realism is to engage in imagining future possibilities outside of hegemonic hierarchical and temporal orders.

The thesis of Lili Flores Aguilar is approved.

Peter Sellars

Ramesh Srinivasan

Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conjecture map for participatory research design framework for the Soundscapes of Pandemia Project.

Figure 2: Call for submissions graphics incorporating remixed iconography from the Codex Borgia and Florentine Codex authored by Nahuatl scribes and Spanish Colonial Friars. Composed in Adobe Photoshop CS6.

Figure 3: "K'yawakwayina:we (Waterways)," by Edward Wemytewa (2006). Featured in the UCLA Fowler Museum Exhibition, "A:shiwi A:wan Ulohnanne: The Zuni World" (2015).

Figure 4. Two screenshots of a digital video recording of the Soundscapes of Pandemia mediascape being performed using a digital audio platform known as Ableton Live and a AKAI APC40 MIDI controller. Handwritten phrases composed in ink and translated to digital PNG files in Adobe Photoshop, "God bless everybody," and "NO MORE HATE," recorded in Los Angeles, California in a public space during COVID-19 outbreak and after Black Lives Matters uprisings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Part I:

Introduction

A project entitled "Soundscapes of Pandemia[1]" that I developed with fellow Urban Humanities Initiative alums Nylsa Martinez and Adam Boggs was conceived just before the international Black Lives Matter uprisings of summer 2020 as an effort to address collective COVID-19 quarantine experiences as a portal between fast-paced metropolitan life and possible post-quarantine social orders based on emerging recorded stimuli. When writer and political activist, Arundhati Roy wrote about the coronavirus and its impact on India and the world, she stated, "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" (2020). A question guiding the design of the multimedia project that this Master's thesis considers is, "How can art and collaborative research design critically engage, with current historic moments?" By critical engagement, I mean how can people actively and carefully consider stimuli such as sounds as a means of producing knowledge about current moments and their relationship to possible futures in the urban environment.

The soundscape project comprises part of my M.A. program requirement and is complemented by the present pages. Attention reflects how people experience the world and our project group decided to create a soundscape project as an assemblage of people's diverse sonic experiences that are connected via a prompt that would ask for input from actors in our network. We asked our extended networks to source sound clips from their respective environments to create a map counter to hegemonic visions of urban spaces that is also a memory-scape. To illustrate orders that are "counter-hegemonic," I call in the words of feminist and social activist, bell hooks; she writes, "our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (1994: 2). In other

---

[1] "Pandemia," is the Spanish word for "pandemic," and can also be interpreted as a portmanteau combining "pandemic" and "media."

words, the sounds that were recorded by the participants reflect anti-hegemonic sounds that express anti-racist and anti-colonial values that resist urban inscriptions of segregation and inequality.

We received submissions from Sao Paulo, Leipzig, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, ranging from audio files to audio & video files of varying formats and lengths from nine actors. A total of 41 files were submitted by the people in the network and were transmitted from smartphone devices and a GoPro camera utilizing broadband fiber connections. Participants asked how to extract audio which led to the submission of video files for the sake of their convenience. Through qualitative analysis, I coded the recorded content of the mediascapes based on the action taking place as represented by the digital recordings, and designated "quotidian" and "protest" as categories to organize the events. Within the quotidian, one can hear spoken Spanish, English, Portuguese, Tagalog; music; singing; prayer; sounds from birds; and alarm sounds within urban environments. Embedded in the mediascapes coded for protest are sounds of chanting protestors; *panelaço*–the Portuguese word for noisy demonstrations that feature banging pots and pans; music; bicycles; a newscaster narrating a scene; participants narrating other scenes; cars honking; and cheers.

As Diana Taylor (2003) has asserted, archival material is *performed* when it is accessed by people. In considering multi-modal experiences, we document and translate ephemeral stimuli that are often overlooked in formalized and institutional archival records. Our project is artistic and curatorial as we synthesize the emergent quality of collective counter maps and imaginings of alternative futurities that challenge hegemonic orders often designed through urban planning policies. The role of the imagination in the production of a collective counter map is informed by Black feminist writer, adrienne marie brown's "Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good." She writes, "What is pleasurable in finding a place of grace and well-being and

3

transcending oppression? If we're not imagining where we're going, then it will constantly just be pushing back outside from inside of cages, as opposed to imagining what's happening outside of cages" (Brown 2019: 59). Assembling the collective counter maps as a set of imaginings into an aesthetically designed web-based experience is an attempt to create a digital space that transcends hegemonic oppression and performs as a set of free associations bound by respective responses to the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement. What if actions of social justice that emerge from dissent can then be transformed into pleasurable imaginings of inclusive experiences and urban futurities? In creating a digital archive, there is an opportunity to engage in *fluid ontologie*s[2] that challenge linear historicities by affording new readings of information. Due to the fact that people who submitted sound recordings prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic featured a majority of sounds of protest associated with the Black Lives Matter Uprisings illustrates a dynamic knowledge structure that is responsive to the perceptions and information gathered by a collective.

This web-based project is archival in the sense that Diana Taylor explains the archive as traditionally enduring materials such as texts, documents, architecture and ancestral remains. Taylor also reminds us of the root of the word "archive," "a place where records are kept," and its Greek origin, "arke," which also means a beginning, the first place, and the government (2003:19). The effort to create a digital archive also engages with Achille Mbembe's assertion that digital communities' self-made archives provide a "minimal status of *having truly existed,* of their individual and collective cultures *having actually happened*, and therefore of making possible their insertion into history" (2016:17). Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Haitian American

---

[2]Defined by Srinivasan and Huang (2005), *fluid ontologies* are characterized as novel and dynamic knowledge structures that evolve to communities' interests based on contextual information.

historian and anthropologist, states "to acknowledge resistance as a mass phenomenon is to acknowledge the possibility that something is wrong with the system" (Trouillot 1995; 84). I expand from participation of resistance into an artistic multimedia web-based intervention that is assembled by a collective of actants who produce a distributed urban imagination as an insertion into history. Producing archival material from the collective of participants in protests contrasts the depiction of protests by mainstream news media outlets. When defining a collective, I build upon Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (AT) (2005) to understand how power operates on individual corporeality as well as a collective body of *actants* within a network that express different ways of being and perceiving their urban environments. The term actant arises from Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory through which he aims to account for the "essence of societies and natures" (Latour 2017: 2). Mediascapes moving across borders in this assemblage grapple with injustice via subjective affective stances which challenge dominant historical paradigms often reinscribed by mainstream media. Taking into account the urban context as situated within a post-colonial framework, I draw from post-colonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty in order to show how the urban experience is variable and translatable via digital media. Chakrabarty writes, to "provincialize… [is] to ask a question about how thought is related to place. Can thought transcend places of their origin? Or do places leave their imprint on thought in such a way as to call into question the idea of purely abstract categories?" (Chakrabarty 2009: 10-11). Thus, we aim to create a web-based mediascape that serves as a counter-narrative to that of mainstream media by engaging with polyvalent perspectives and *fluid ontologies* in a collective and interactive field of actants. This experiential approach to creating mediascapes provides support for the "sovereignty of multiple ontologies or the knowledge traditions and practices of diverse communities" within urban contexts (Srinivasan 2019:123).
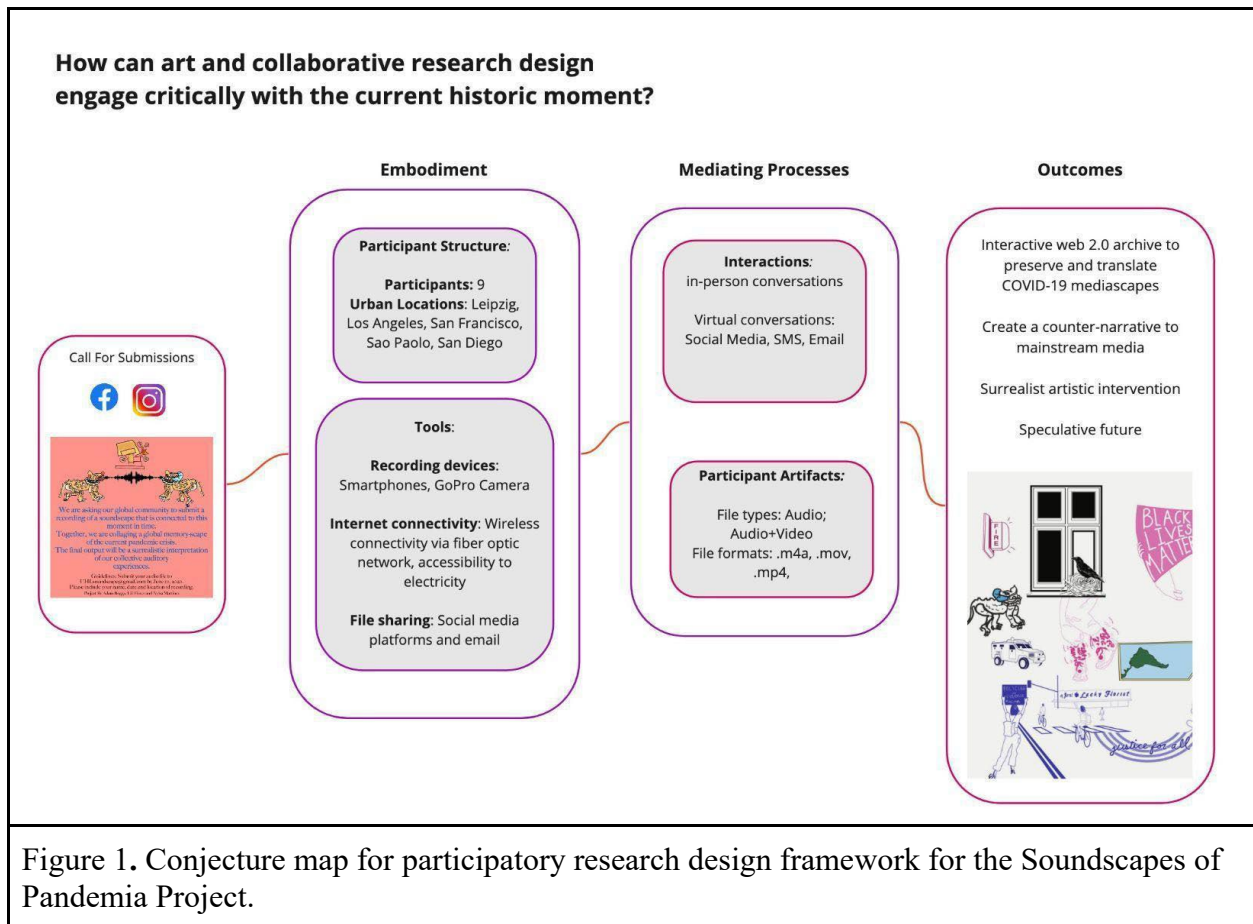
Figure 1. Conjecture map for participatory research design framework for the Soundscapes of Pandemia Project.

The participant design process included a call for submissions communicated through an electronic flyer (figure 2) and distribution through designated social media and email channels; organization of the archive and curatorial process; and hosting a web 2.0 website. The structure of the network of participation is described as "centralized," based on Paul Baran's (1964) network hermeneutics.[3] Engaging Baran's hermeneutics opens up the analysis to consider decentralized forms of web-based engagement and supports the analysis of how knowledge is transferred via an archive that is based on the framework of fluid ontologies. Furthermore, the set of actants residing in metropoles is able to transmit information recorded on their cameras and

---

[3] Baran's network hermeneutics illustrates the degrees of centralized and decentralized interactivity in social networks.

smartphone devices via electrical infrastructures that are fabricated with fiber optics cables. Fiber optic cables are asymmetrically distributed, designed and controlled by a few wealthy corporations, government entities, facilitating unequal access to telecommunications and social media (Srinivasan 2017; 27). Disparate distribution of internet communication systems via fiber optic cables, makes apparent the lack of democratic presentation often assumed with the idea of a utopian "global village." Srinivasan (2017) challenges any such idea by pointing out that unequal distribution of internet communication systems is consistent with an Enlightenment genealogy that deems Western world philosophical and epistemological production processes as inherently worthy of being preserved and transmitted. As a result, communities elsewhere in the world are ignored and/or deemed unworthy of preservation due to persisting colonial relationships between the Global South as dominated by the Global North. This "neo-imperial" relationship sees the Global North as "justified" in accumulating wealth--in this case, internet technology infrastructure--through the exploitation of low-wage labor and extraction of resources in the Global South (Lowe 2015). Creating this digital archive is a way of responding to colonial relationships by creating an archive of perspectives often left out of processes of preservation. Although the actants in our project's network of participants reflect those who have access to the internet by virtue of living in imperialist metropolitan centers, nevertheless, they created and submitted media recordings of protests and participated in public dissent critiquing the city-states in which they reside by engaging in protest, gathering in large numbers.

With support from the Urban Humanities Initiative based out of the cityLAB within the UCLA School of Arts and Architecture's Department of Architecture and Urban Development, this project was commissioned to be featured on their first virtual Digital Salon. The reason for the virtual component was a result of the COVID-19 lockdown that was mandated by federal and local governments to require people to stay at home unless they were deemed essential workers.

As university students, we worked remotely, and thus our peer-to-peer engagements were relegated to purely virtual interactions.

Our agreed-upon output for the project would result in conative bodies, meaning that the collective of actants strive towards actions that express variable experiences and desires during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our call for submissions of soundscapes (see figure 2) was expressed in English and Spanish to be accessible to actants in our networks. Our rationale was that we are situated in Los Angeles and also have family and friends of Latinx descent. According to a report by the civil rights organization Advancing Justice-LA, 46 percent of Los Angeles County residents speak a language other than English at home: 38% speak Spanish, 11% are Asian or Pacific Island speakers, and 5% of the population speak another language.
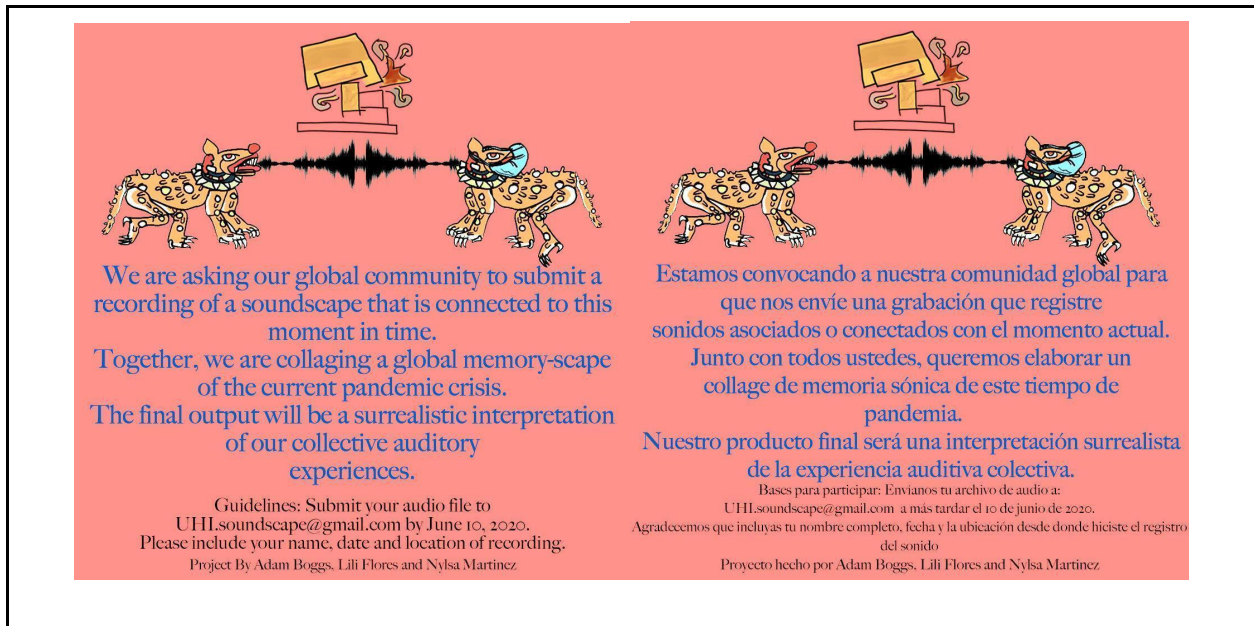

Figure 2. Call for submissions graphics incorporating remixed iconography from the Codex Borgia and Florentine Codex authored by Nahuatl scribes and Spanish Colonial Friars. Composed in Adobe Photoshop CS6. These flyers circulated on the social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram as well as SMS. June 5, 2020.

The imagery on the call for submission graphic includes adapted icons of two dogs from the Florentine-Codex (a 12 part book written in the 16th century Nahua authors and Spanish Franciscan friar Bernardino Sahagún) and a glyph of a building on fire adapted from the Codex Mendoza to represent the global pandemic crisis. According to diverse Nahuatl cosmologies, dogs are guardians and guides through the after-life (Neumann 1975). As a group who aligns with Chicanx political graphics as a means to imagine alternative futures and create a new consciousness through what Gloria Anzaldua describes as a "breaking down of paradigms" via engagement with iconography found in archival codices from the early Spanish Colonial period in the nation-state of Mexico, we enact a method to blur the lines between past and present distinctions of linear temporality while also illustrating the Chicanx and often urban condition of "straddling two or more cultures" of American and Mexican cultural sensibilities (Anzaldua 2007: 102). In other words, this project served as a collective learning process that provinicialized digital media as an instance of collaborative activism that transgressed urban and national boundaries. Our soundscape project asked an international body of collaborators to record soundscapes that illustrate their changing relationships to their urban environments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the suffix "scape" denotes "a view or a picture of a scene." We urged our collaborators to consider soundscapes as portals or frames through which we gain insight to how living organisms, landscapes, and built environments are afforded different interactions.

Part II:

Theoretical Frameworks

A *vital virtuality* theoretical framework for curatorial practice emerges from a transdisciplinary engagement with interacting knowledge production processes within the context of a community-based multimedia project. My analysis of the production and curation of a multimedia project through digitally mediated communication implicates their ontological, historical and political processes. This thesis reflects movement between my background in ethnographic methods to arts-based research practices and urban and digital humanities. A goal is to consider how culture is negotiated within *colonial matrices of power,* according to Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) framework of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. Representations of cultural matters within museums and universities operating within larger city-state institutions are encompassed within what Mignolo calls the *colonial matrix of power* (Mignolo 2005; 46). "Matrix," in the aforementioned context is borrowed from the Latin and connotes "womb," meaning an environment of development.

As a means to understand how power operates on the bodies of actants within a collective colonial matrix of power, I utilize a framework of *vital virtuality* as a phrase inspired by the political theorist Jane Bennett (2010). Bennett's "vibrant matter" draws upon a post-humanist approach to materiality as composed of a "swarm of vitalities" and interacting energetic forces. The *vital virtuality* theoretical framework I propose is a pivot from Bennett's sense of vibrant matter and contingent embodiments in relation to digitally mediated virtual space. I seek to privilege an understanding of virtual and ephemeral agency as knowledge production processes through synesthetic modalities and multisensory engagements via multimedia efficacies. Development of such a framework arises from analysis of aesthetics as a cultural system. This last thought is inspired by Clifford Geertz's "Art as a Cultural System" in which he states that "to study an art form is to explore a sensibility, that such a sensibility is essentially a collective formation, and that the foundations of such a formation are as wide as social existence and as

deep, leads away not only from the view that aesthetic power is a grandiloquence for the pleasures of craft" (1976: 1478). Considering art as a collective formation, I take a semiotic approach to bypass simplistic functionalist perspectives and utilize the artistic process as a way of interpreting and translating multiple and fluid urban ontologies.

Aesthetic systems that arise in urban environments and are represented through the internet, specifically Web 2.0 technologies and multimedia, vary depending on their specific locations, architecture, and affective stances of participants in this project and its creative interventions. As an arts-based ethnographic researcher, I assess how aesthetic systems are contingent upon individual perspectives and conduits for site-specific process geographies. By using the phrase "process geographies," I gesture towards challenging static conceptions of geographic regions. When critically examining the concept of "Africa," Allen Roberts states that "Africans have been connected to other parts of the planet through a dynamic commerce of ideas and goods" (2000; 1). Similarly, through this master's project, I aim to represent the fluid ways that ideas move across urban centers and their material and socio-political contingencies. The represented process geographies focus on the movement throughout affective stances and their digital artifacts. Analyses of digital artifacts are situated within larger transnational solidarity movements such as Black Lives Matter protests and emerging varied relationalities with the urban environment due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

Specifically, I examine how polymodal, multisensory engagements recorded and transferred through digital communications networks offer insights into ways in which relational movements are constituted throughout local and global collectives. Harney and Moten's, *The Undercommons* (2013) provides a framework to understand how collectives operate within and around institutions: "We surround democracy's false image in order to unsettle it. Every time it tries to enclose us in a decision, we're undecided. Every time it tries to represent our will, we're

unwilling. Every time it tries to take root, we're gone (because we're already here, moving)" (Harney and Moten 2013: 19) In embarking on this multimedia project, I aim to define collectives by exploring the question: How do we move toward shared desires for social justice by unlearning assumptions about space, time, sound, corporeality, and knowledge production within transnational urban contexts?

The desire to unlearn assumptions is informed by the decolonial theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith and her ideas on "*Coming to know the past*." As she writes, "the pedagogical implication to hold alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things." In other words, through implementing decolonial frameworks one can understand affect, attention, and, ultimately, space and temporality depends on one's standpoint. Throughout this project, I analyze actants' relationships to digital technology in order to foreground how such technologies are *socially constructed* and are a part of design processes created through a set of values and assumptions. Furthermore, the desire to utilize digital technology to "imagine alternative democratic futures for technology that serve the agendas of the traditionally marginalized and silenced" (Srinivasan 2019; 2) is grounded in being reflexive about representation. When analyzing the media files created by participants, I incorporate Smith's critical and reflexive analysis of conceptions of space and time as they are "encoded through language, philosophy and science" (Smith 2012; 52) via the use of spatial vocabulary including "line," "center" and "outside," to establish boundaries, orientations, limits and oppositions of colonial power (ibid., 55). In order to produce a web-based archive, in our project we sought to avoid such categorizations by implementing artistic intervention such as illustration and sound collaging to create a multimedia "counter-map" of *fluid ontologies* during COVID-19 lockdowns and Black Lives Matter protests.

Utilizing digital media collected transnationally aims to bring attention to the embodied practices of resistance of racism and isolation through visual and audio representations. Viola Arduini states in her essay on counter-mapping, "Ultimately, counter mapping provides a link between land, science, and embodiment…the body becomes the center, bringing together land and histories" (2021). Through illustration and sonic collage I aim to bring seemingly disparate urban ontologies together in order to understand continuities and ruptures that are often not represented in traditional maps by incorporating people's corporeal relationships to the urban environment to challenge how histories and narratives are represented. An example of principles of decolonization through art is the work of Jim Enote[4], who is a member of the Zuni Nation. According to Enote, "modern maps don't have memory" (Enote 2021), and in order to create maps that challenge conventional mapping or cartography, he has worked with a cultural advisory committee to imagine "counter-maps."

Members of the cultural advisory committee hold that counter-maps "reclaim the names of Zuni places and depict the land of the A:shiwi as they know and see it, immersing the viewer in a landscape interwoven with culture, story, and prayer" (Steinauer-Scudder 2018). Counter-mapping contrasts with and works against colonial and political technologies of cartography through the "appropriation, demarcation, naming, and partitioning of territory" (ibid) as a means to assert imperial rule over people and places. Furthermore, in an essay found in the brochure for an exhibition titled "Counter Mapping," co-curated by Jim Enote and Viola Arduini, at 516 Arts in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Jim writes:

---

[4] Jim Enote and I met at a seminar he gave through the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies circa 2018 and we have remained in correspondence since then. In summer of 2021, I visited Zuni territory to learn more about the land, people and Jim's work with conservation and activism.

As a philosophical practice, counter-mapping exalts liberation and artistic

freedom, speaks for the revision of traditional mapping to bring about an

imaginative and refreshed society, an ethos of truth, and arranges places and

events as spirited parts of a cosmological process...counter mapping opens the

door for agency and influence for different ways of knowing (2021).

I mobilize counter-mapping as a method of understanding the multiplicities and spatial

and temporal relationship between ontologies reflected in mediascapes to tell alternative stories

of a global phenomenon such as uprisings and COVID-19 pandemic that differ from mainstream

media narratives. As someone with an intersectional standpoint described by Chicana theorist

Gloria Anzaldua as *nepantilism* (1987), I am able to traverse different perspectives. *Nepantilism*,

meaning being torn between ways, permits me to navigate the translation of pluralistic cultural

and spiritual beliefs due to my ancestral lineage which includes foci in the states of Jalisco and

Zacatecas and then translated to the context of Tovangaar, embedded in the strata of urban

development that extend from Spanish and American colonial histories. My descent is from the

Indigenous Coca community of Jalisco and another aspect of my personal identity is the

attempted erasure through Spanish colonialism's *mestizaje* (Vasconcelos 1997), via de-

indigenization as progression towards so-called Modernism. Layered with my upbringing in

West Los Angeles and having been enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District, I

experienced consternation as someone perceived as a racialized brown body of a sort especially

minoritized in the predominant Euro-American population. Places of freedom for me were in a

photo darkroom, museum galleries, and on the internet. My consciousness could move through

different places and I could imagine alternative possibilities where my creative self-expression

was boundless.

Boundaries or borders to full liberation came in many forms within my schooling and were countered by my peers and our social and political movements. Today, I realize how pivotal my secondary school experience remains as I reflect on my meetings with LAUSD superintendents advocating for my peers and my becoming disappointed at the prospect that my position as a student limited my ability to enact change. Venice High School and its history of protest continue to live on in my inclinations towards countering hegemonic or broad assumptions that perpetuate social inequalities. Music and art on the internet were places that liberated my consciousness, and so I live with the question of how to extend these places in material and virtual worlds.

Figure 3. "K'yawakwayina:we (Waterways)," by Edward Wemytewa (2006). Featured in the UCLA Fowler Museum Exhibition, "A:shiwi A:wan Ulohnanne: The Zuni World" (2015).

Throughout this paper, I also draw from Arjun Appadurai's (1990) concept of *mediascapes* as image-centered expressions of global cultural flows, and I expand the focus to include sound in order to assess how actants inscribe associations on digital media via a synesthetic approach. Following Paulo Freire (1993), my thesis asks, can *mediascapes* that include sound collages nurture development of *critical consciousness*? Such a question leads to analysis of socio-political systems of inequality that incite transformation of social conditions, calling into question Mignolo's *colonial matrices of power*.

Through a project posted as SoundscapesofPandemia.info, the outcome being a polyvocal and polymodal engagement with protests and responses to the COVID-19 quarantine orders, I consider how social relations are constituted from "messy" entanglements and disjunctions. Qualitative analysis is undertaken of digital audio recordings, video recordings, and web-based technologies utilized during COVID-19 lockdowns and Black Lives Matter uprisings in 2020. Drawing from sensibilities explored through Chicanx art, the mediascape I assemble consists of a collage of graphics and digital sound as an archive of heterogeneous actors expressing unconnected urban localities brought into proximity with each other via a mediated curatorial process. This latter includes archiving media submissions on a hard drive and through Google drive, creating metadata about provenance such as date and time of mediascape file creation, initials of submitters, cities of origin, descriptions and iconic images that emerged through my own affective responses as I listened to and watched a particular mediascape. Noting the asymmetry and disjunctures that govern such relationships opens an opportunity to question the politics of representation embedded in transmission processes. Affect is inscribed through the ways actants subjectively orient their attention, offering insights into how actants coordinate activities situated within matrices of power. Such power creates avenues for information flows,

thus giving insight into political and inextricably material dimensions embedded in transmission processes of information.

Through analysis of my curatorial process of the *mediascape*, I posit how the agency of individual actants during the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests express differing ontologies and epistemological processes relative to their local urban contexts in public commons and intimate places, thus performing as a *palimpsest*. The term palimpsest refers to traces and fragments of inscriptions effaced from but still apparent beneath the surface, similar to the "densely layered architectural, social, political and cultural palimpsests" (Presner et al. 2014: 28) that characterize ever-changing metropoles across the globe. Working towards *critical consciousness,* palimpsestic inscriptions of cities that are composed through embodied practices of dissent to challenge institutional narratives inform the aesthetic vernacular of this project as I utilize the materiality of *mediascapes* as an opening to political dimensions. Representation through a diverse array of sounds and images are collaged. Such representation is also informed by Chicanx political graphic sensibilities that are grounded in the production of counter-narratives of the lived experience, more specifically those of Self-Help Graphics in East Los Angeles, California. By documenting and preserving counter-narratives which challenge racialized discourse in news media, the Soundscapes of Pandemia project broadens the attention of people to possibilities outside frameworks of crisis that are dependent on the "possibility of heroic overcoming" (Jacobs 2000: 9). By examining alternative inscriptions and spatial entitlement carried out through production of mediascapes, an alternative interpretation may be proposed of how place-making practices transform "ordinary residential and commercial sites into centers of mutuality, solidarity, and collectivity" (Johnson 2013: 1).

Fluid urban ontologies as expostulated here– remain subjective through illustrative icons and text drawn from audio and visual data submitted by actants for the project. Through the

method of collaging, juxtaposition of sounds recorded asynchronously across variable urban locations is informed by a rhizomatic assemblage sensibility. In considering a mediascape as a rhizomatic assemblage, I draw inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988: 7): a rhizome is a system defined by the ceaseless connections amongst available dimensions such as "semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles"; and an assemblage, is "a multiplicity" with emergent contingencies, meaning that an assemblage is defined by the potential to increase in dimensions as it expands in rhizomatic connections (ibid., 8-9). A mediascape as a rhizomatic assemblage thus has the potential to expand in meaning-making processes through interactions in a web 2.0 context as well as a live performance of the archive using a digital audio workstation known as Ableton Live™[5].

Thus, a mediascape hosted on a Web 2.0 site becomes what sociologists of technology theorize as a boundary object. As Srinivasan explains, a boundary object "serves as a pivot between different ways of knowing, linking-community-specific and shared meanings (Srinivasan 2017; 129). Furthermore, he states that such objects help people to reimagine systems through deconstruction and critique (ibid.). The present paper critiques institutions by disrupting hegemonic practices by collaging perspectives of dissent. Drawing from a diverse collective of actants varying in age, ethnicity, and education level and who engage in spatial entitlement in physical and digital realms, I seek to foster Freirean *critical consciousness* (1993) as a reflexive move to counter how participatory fragmentation and urban and information infrastructures create stratified networks that centralize dialogical exchange.

---

[5] Ableton Live™ is a digital audio workstation for MacOS and Windows developed by Berlin-based Ableton. Ableton Live's software is an instrument designed for live performances, composing, recording, arranging, mixing and mastering.

Part III:

Analysis as Praxis

We called for submissions stating we would utilize a surrealist intervention to arrange the media, but in actuality we used a magical-realist intervention. Surrealism, with its connection to the philosophical manifestations, "aims to revolutionize the human experience. It balances a rational vision of life with one that asserts the power of the unconscious and dreams" (Tate 2021). Written by André Benton in 1924, the Surrealist Manifesto states that surrealism is defined as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought" (1924: 19). Following such logic, the soundscape of our project can be understood as a surreal manifestation of collective thoughts responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter uprisings. Simultaneously, free associations are afforded by audio and visual collaging, juxtaposition, disorientation of conventional mapping and a disregard for relative scale, challenge material constraints as a means to make virtual dimensions tangible.

Our initial inspiration was that expression of the unconscious value of hidden psychological tensions served to uncover dreams and possible desires emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, engagement with the counter-hegemonic corpus of mediascapes created by the collective of actors reflected political concerns through a postcolonial discourse. Moreover, such engagement reflects ongoing imperialism within nation-states and the typology of magical realism includes inversion of discursive power ordered by imperialist and nation-State hierarchies through expression of desires for liberation (Aldea 2010). These latter are found in the potentialities represented in the virtual, or as Aldea posits, "the creative act of Being that the virtual embodies in the sign of art can be a revolutionary act as an invention of a new people" (2010: 148). In other words, the virtual transcends the constraints of the actual. Aldea's main assertion is framed by a Deleuzian (1992) approach aiming to simultaneously highlight socio-historical and political specificities as well as the magic, or rather the virtual elements that cannot

be reduced to the real or rigid conditions of society and therefore affords the opportunity imagine alternative possibilities within and amongst people, peoples, and cultures–or in the framework of this Master's thesis, actants. Returning to actants also takes into account how people interact and are simultaneously contingent with material and virtual dimensions.

By collaging sounds and illustrations, I create a zone of indiscernibility as one synesthetic field. This blending is an attempt to illustrate antinomy of virtual and real through the manipulation of aural time-based media and the contestation of transnational borders and politics. Illustrating antinomy through polymodal and polyvocal approaches warrants an ontological and phenomenological approach. involving documentation of the everyday lived experience that reflects the diverse ways of being and desires of the contributors as they orient their attention to particular sounds. As a result, arranging collected soundscapes into an interactive web 2.0 experience illustrates fluid ontologies embedded in urban environments. The recorded sounds are composed as a sound collage that creates associations amongst and between actants in wider networks, allowing more engagement and exchange of ideas for an unfolding future. Furthermore, this archive accounts for the fact that cognition is contingent upon social and material relationships which are a result of processes that constitute the rhizomatic assemblage and palimpsests of a mediascape.

Once I categorized and archived the collection of mediascapes, I translated the various digital ontologies so expressed. In Walter Benjamin's 1921 essay "The Task of the Translator," he argues that "no poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience" (1992: 253). He goes on to reflect upon the role of a translator who is neither a poet nor conductor of a symphony, and their duty to "ultimately serve the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another" (ibid, 255). Via the processes of translation, mediascapes are composed of icons and symbols that embody affective responses

and spatial adaptations – in the case of this MA project, amidst the coronavirus pandemic. My role in collaborating, illustrating and assembling the mediascapes and attempt to bring to the fore the ontologies that are ephemeral in the corporeal sense and yet inscribed through digital media's record of audio and visual data.

As a researcher and artist, I see translation as an integral part of an assemblage process as a magical realist intervention, inspired by writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, and Ben Okri. Computers and smartphones are technological vectors transgressing borders while time and space are collapsed to create juxtapositions and uncanny associations. Transgression of national borders occurs by means of communication and consolidation of an archive of variable expressions of dissent and ways of relating or forming collective actions within either quotidian or protest mediascapes.

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on two instances of protest: one recorded in Sao Paolo and a second in Los Angeles. To illustrate how the translation process is implemented when creating an assemblage, I will discuss a shared field that, in turn, can be ruptured by segmentary rhizomes – that is, the sorts of lateral "meshworking" (Ingold 2010: 11) that can link people in non-hierarchical ways. Although the examples are recorded in different cities, the corpus emphasizes the multiplicity expressed in the curated mediascapes to put into practice the unity emblematic of rhizomatic assemblage. Furthermore, a design inspired by magical realism suggests tactics against the established order of the State. Documentation and associations provide the means to imagine alternative visions of agency, narrativity, and ways of engaging with actants in urban contexts. In order to achieve critical consciousness, mediascapes should be considered as phenomenological and epistemological processes that facilitate engagement with diverse ontologies found within communities. Therefore, mediascapes are conduits to imagine new possibilities to overcome political consternation based on the plural ways people represent

their perspectives of and engagements with their everyday lives, including moments of crisis which, however traumatic, may afford opportunities for transformation.

Three of the eight audio recordings produced on an Asus smartphone from one participant in Sao Paolo feature sounds of chants during anti-Bolsonaro and anti-fascist demonstrations in the neighborhood of Pinheiros. Below is the transcription of one of the audio files from Portuguese to English:

Portuguese	English
Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, fascistas! Fora! Vai foder vocês. Acabou a mamata. Acabou! Acabou a mamata! O Cunha acabou, o Moro acabou, tudo acabou, vai ser o teu cu agora, seu otário. Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, Bozo! Fora! Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, fascistas! Fora! Ditadura nunca mais! Fora, Bolsonaro! Fora, fascistas! Fora, fascistas! Uma morte a cada minuto. Genocida! Fora, Bozo! Nós vamos tirar você!	Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, fascists! Get out! You're gonna be screwed. The mamata is over. It's over! Cunha is over, Moro is over, everything is over, it's gonna be your asshole now, you sucker. Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, Bozo! [a nickname for Bolsonaro] Get out! Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, fascists! Get out! Dictatorship never again! Get out, Bolsonaro! Get out, fascists! Get out, fascists! One death per minute. Genocide! Get out, Bozo! We're gonna take you out!

These chants accompany "panelaços" banging pots and pans. Middle-class Brazilians were inspired by the Argentinean "cacerolazos" (banging more specifically on casseroles) while shouting dissent against politicians. Building on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage as it relates to the state, "Axiom 1: The war machine is exterior to the State apparatus." (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 351) In other words, exteriority to a war machine can be weaponized by

denizens to disrupt the hierarchical divisions of social order established by the state. Since the State relies on the segmentation of the body for control and extraction of labor, such rupture is defied through temporal and sonic disruption. That such protest was undertaken during covid quarantine lockdown expressed a unified affect to resist global capitalist order even as the abject vulnerability to covid that Bolsonaro advocated was in play by protesters risking transmission of potentially deadly disease. One participant described the authoritarian regime in Brazil to supplement the audio recording:

> I should also mention that Bolsonaro's authoritarian streak has been intensifying, with increasing implicit and explicit references to nazism and fascism, from him and his government crew. That's definitely not new – it was pretty clear even before he was elected president – but it's getting scarier, though he still has the support of around one third of the population, according to polls. That was the motivation for the demonstration that was happening simultaneously to the Sunday afternoon Panelaço.

Such fear of authoritarianism brings to the fore the ways in which transnational flows of ideals and organization to counter fascism cross borders and impact the construction of a racialized collective body. Bolsonaro's explicit politicization of the pandemic through his defiance of vaccination, masks, and social distancing, resulted in over 1 million Brazilians having contracted covid at the time of this audio recording, with untold numbers of dead in favelas and rural reaches. Although Brazil has its own histories of colonialism including forced migration of immense numbers of enslaved Africans, there are parallels with racialization in the U.S. I make this point to draw an association between the protests advocating for the resignation of Bolsanoro and mediascapes in California where sounds of people chanting "Black Lives Matter" bore

explicit anti-Trump messages as the American would-be dictator who politicized covid in ways mimicked by Bolsanoro.

From a transnational perspective afforded by the transfer and collage of sounds expressing dissent from Brazil to California, we can also discern how such sounds differ in their linguistic repertoire and context specific political composition. According to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's documentary, *Geographies of Racial Capitalism*, political economy has influenced definitions of race. "Capitalism requires inequality and racism ensures it." (2021). In the case of the nation-state of Brazil, Bolsanaro referred to the coronavirus as "the little flu" (Walsh 2020) and contradicted orders given by state governors and public health experts by urging Brazilians to get back to work. Extraction of value from the bodies of Brazilians – even at their own great physical risk -- reflects the dominant capitalist means of production espoused by many in the U.S.

In the United States, civil unrest in response to a policeman's public murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis was recorded through audio of crowds occupying public places to proclaim that Black Lives Matter and calling to "defund the police." Countless deaths at the hands of authorities (or vigilantes acting as such) reflect America's four hundred years of racial inequality. What remains striking about protests of George Floyd's lynching by kneeling-on-neck asphyxiation is that an uprising for the rights of Black and other oppressed people in the United States has spread worldwide. Through protest, capitalism's subject-object dialectic of exploitation of vulnerable persons and communities has been challenged through dissent is expressed through sonic, corporeal, and temporal practices.

Through resistance, people manifest their desires for solidarity and social justice as they respond to the catastrophe that capitalism has wrought through a newly life-threatening biopolitics. How can inscriptions of resistance and solidarity be made more tangible by

describing histories of capitalism and related processes of imperialism and colonialism? How do these legacies persist in dominant knowledge production, and how may emerging mediascapes like the one described in these pages counter hegemonic epistemological processes?

In answering my thesis question, I expand upon the notion of a *mediascape* as defined by Arjun Appadurai (1990), social-cultural anthropologist and professor of media, culture and communication. According to Appadurai, understanding a global cultural economy requires consideration of disjunctures between and among economy, culture and politics. The five dimensions of global cultural flow that serve as foci to analyze global cultural, economic and political differences are defined as *ethnoscapes*; *mediascapes; technoscapes; finanscapes; and ideoscapes*. Each of these 'scapes' are constructed through subjective relations between variable actors that are contingent on historical, linguistic, and political contexts.

A *mediascape* is information that can be produced by private or state sanctioned initiatives, isdistributed via electronic capabilities, and is defined as "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality," (Appadurai 1990: 299) experienced and transformed as a series of elements that include characters, plots, or textual forms. From the aforementioned elements, commodities, news, and political information amalgamate as interconnected repertoires are formed through print or electronic media. When analyzing the assemblage of recorded sounds and images, I utilize the notion of *mediascape* to investigate if an assemblage of such perspectival inscriptions can work towards developing *critical consciousness*.

Incorporating multiple perspectives is informed by a phenomenological approach theorized by Emmanuel Levinas' book *Totality and Infinity* (1961). Levinas takes a phenomenological approach to assess the ethics of a face-to-face embodied interaction with other human individuals. He delves into the experience of perceiving someone through the senses prior to inherited socially derived ideals and values that emerge from a linguistic repertoire and

27

objective stances. Levinas's main argument is that totalitarian cognition is contingent on the prioritization and reliance on visual stimuli rather than language. Totalitarian reliance on visual stimuli creates an all-encompassing neutral and impersonal inclusion and "panoramic vision" of the other as it works towards a total system of "harmony and order." It is for this reason that when I curate *mediascapes*, I utilize a synesthetic juxtaposition of modalities such as sounds and visual imagery to convey variable accounts of a collective experience across geographies.

Paolo Friere, Brazilian philosopher of education and author of the classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, espouses *conscientização* or *critical consciousness* as a process that liberates those who are oppressed in society through nurturing curiosity that leads to the analysis of oppression with considerations of race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, linguistics, and ethnicity in order to harness one's agency to transform social inequalities. Such agency to transform social inequalities is rooted in the ability to radically imagine new possibilities of being and engaging in knowledge production. According to Srinivasan, "the possibility of moving past one's own ways of knowing requires an awareness of existing biases" (2018, 126); in the case of this project, racial bias is challenged by imagining new affiliations and collectivities through collaging mediascapes via sound and iconography. Scholar of law and media Ronald Jacobs explains that racial bias is perpetuated through large media outlets as they monopolize the attention of denizens by developing a crisis via narrative linkage to a central cleavage in society (Jacobs 2000). The sound and visual stimuli embedded in the mediascapes allude to how actants respond and associate to one another through affective processes.

Actants' stances are organized through affective responses that are actions facilitated by their interaction with the perceptual field which is stimulated by various sensoria. By layering visual and aural stimuli, I engage in a synesthetic approach to representing how affect is inscribed embodiment. The translation of the stimuli in a representational format is inspired by

the work of Polly Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts (2019) on haptic visualities in relation to visual art that is "meant to be touched, narrated and discussed as well as simply seen" (197). I translate this approach towards sound through the blending of visual iconography which makes visible and expands our understanding of urban environments and the synesthetic experiences that accompany temporal disruptions. In this way, the synesthetic experience is integral to the framework of *vital virtuality* which comprises embodied practices that are ephemeral and which are captured by virtual means via digital technologies.

Participating in the production of mediascapes presents dissent and solidarity that appropriate urban and digital infrastructures to produce means of collective organization towards ending – or at least mitigating – racism. When curating the multimedia submissions, I consider the full spectrum of corporeality in *mediascapes* as a means to transgress oppressive pressures that articulate sociocultural, economic, and historical processes, rather than reinscribing subject-object dialectics which frames people as "spectators" or passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon. My curatorial practice which is a form of arts activism frames actants into transformers of social practices. The dramatic actions in question are the varying affective processes during the COVID-19 crisis in different urban contexts. Furthermore, Freire's notion of *critical consciousness* is predicated on the ability to shape the way information is transmitted rather than through osmosis via a subject-object dialectic which is often perpetuated by mass-media engagement.

Through analysis of the project, SoundscapesofPandemia.info, I explore if and how synesthetic *mediascapes* that are transmitted via social media and email and then mediated through my curation. Processes bring to the fore subsumed relationships often reductively represented via mass media, and particularly news media or media funded by special interest groups. Furthermore, I draw from the term *assemblage* to draw associations between, amongst,

and around *mediascapes*. The designation of *assemblage* is based on the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Guattari. An *assemblage* "establishes connections between certain multiplicities" (1988: 23), and in its creative multiplicities, acts on semiotic, material, and social flows. The flow of the mediascapes reflect a transformative force that the assemblage of participants shaped through the emergence of sounds deploy to protest State power. The emergence of State critique reflects Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of the "War Machine" as an assemblage of conative bodies exterior to the State apparatus. They assert that "affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war. The deterritorialization velocity of affect. Even dreams...are externalized, by a system of relays and plug-ins, extrinsic linkages belonging to the war machine" (1988, 356). Thus, by externalizing the participants' affective stances through the transmission of mediascapes, I compound the collective sense of solidarity advocating for socio-political change through the multimedia collage. I interpret the War Machine as challenging the corporate and State powers that influence news media outlets' narrativization of crises that reinscribe socio-political inequalities through racial bias. Considering collective *mediascapes* as an *assemblage*, I explore how they act on multiplicities through the collective processes of recording and transmitting information that can preserve moments of liberatory collective action and imagination.

Part IV:

Methodology

Given the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, I assess the agency of the mediascape-assemblage from a transdisciplinary approach that considers the embodied spatial-temporal-corporeal placemaking practices that are translated through a multimedia webpage. Drawing from E. Gabriella Coleman's *Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media* (2010), I show how actants in a network use their smartphone devices, digital cameras, and audio recording technologies to record interruptions in the capitalist spatial and temporal orderings within urban environments during the COVID-19 lockdown and protests occurring in 2020. Through interrogation of the significance of digital media, Coleman explains that "showing how, where, and why it matters is necessary to push against peculiarly narrow presumptions about the universality of digital experience" (2010: 3)., Her ethnography illuminates how digital artifacts engender new collectivities that are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. In discussing the heterogeneity of the assemblage, we can see how the translations and appropriation of stimuli through digital recordings and communications are a form of *provincializing* — a term coined by postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009), that Coleman (2010) borrows to suggest how media "have become central to the articulation of cherished beliefs, ritual practices, and modes of being in the world" (ibid). Following such leads, I analyze how the inclusion of digital media in ethnographic analysis of *mediascapes* give insight into the performance of "digital ontologies" that express "the community's overall structure of priorities and issues" (Srinivasan 2006: 510).

The reasoning behind this methodology stems from the assemblage of actors that constitute the mediascape. Thus, by analyzing the embodied practices which articulate the mediascape, the analysis reflects the organization of interacting cognitive systems – that of locally specific experiences and the multiple actors within the unedited recordings, as well as the aggregation of mediascapes – onto one platform. According to cognitive science, processes are characterized in terms of "the propagation and transformation of representations" (Hutchins

2000: 1). Therefore, analysis foregrounds the processual aspect of digital ontologies as they are articulated by mediascapes and if they are able to foster critical consciousness through their aggregation in a digital curatorial process.

  The digital curatorial process is a method informed by scholarship in the field of participatory research design methodologies. In this methodology, heterogeneous participants are considered as actors with the ability to initiate trajectories towards transformative social justice. My standpoint is as a researcher trained in the academic disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, the arts, and who aligns with feminist and Chicanx political movements. I work towards the aspirations of anti-colonial projects and struggles to subvert Western/European epistemologies via participatory research design. Incorporating standpoint theory[6] means to align with the idea that feminist research is a method to analyze the production of knowledge, social relations, and practices of power as they relate to mediascapes and the aspirational qualities they present in both their unedited formats and collaged and reperformances. The present MA project has allowed me to put into practice what it means to create an archive that reflects a shared consciousness of a group who are organizing against hegemonic and imperial state powers. Disrupting Western or Eurocentric modes of producing knowledge through scholarship while simultaneously within a neo-liberal institution provides a contradiction that is embodied through my standpoint which is defined by what Gloria Anzaldua (1987) terms as *nepantilism*. Drawing from Anzaldua, I am able to see how this movement or translation between ways is an embodied practice for myself; whether through linguistic or corporeal modalities, I find that this sensibility

---

[6] Harding, Sandra G. 2004. The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies. Psychology Press.

informs my collaborative participatory approach as I translate and archive the mediascapes that move across transnational borders.

Moreover, to investigate how mediascapes movement across borders, I cite an interview titled, "The Internet is Afropolitan" (2015) with postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe's and his engagement with the idea of the pluralization of borders. Mbembe's framework permits consideration of how the sharing of mediascapes provides ways to consider transnational biopolitics and forms of resisting hegemonic conceptions of State order. According to Mbembe, virtual interactions could potentially delegitimize physical borders. With mediascapes as foci of analysis, I study how physical borders are reinforced or delegitimized throughout the iterative process of creating an assemblage that is hosted on a website using web 2.0 technology.

Part V:

Speculation–Public Performance as Palimpsest

Addressing the limitations of the Soundscapes of Pandemia project means acknowledging that the webpage is static and does not allow for modification by visitors. I assert that interactivity that allows for input, modification, and remixing should be a part of the development of critical consciousness so that opportunities arise to imagine alternative possibilities through the repetition of synesthetic experiences that further disrupt the capitalist dialectic which would relegate a visitor to being nothing but a consumer, a passive person, or a spectator.

Through interactive interfaces that allow people to perform through writing, inscribing, and talking back to the histories of the transformation of histories across borders and media, we can extend the ethics of digital magical realism expressed in the project to the ethics of museum exhibitions. Based on my artistic practice, I assert that performance through embodied ways of engaging with sounds provides an opportunity to tell histories in a manner that can highlight how biopolitical processes function on the body and allow for the inscription of imagined possibilities of overcoming oppressive structures through forms of dissent. Given my background in museums, I suggest that exhibitions should be places where critical consciousness can flourish amongst diverse collectives. How then, through dialogue and the sharing of mediascapes in a commons, may associations be created to make transparent how capitalism and imperialism to stifle us while we seek opportunities to exchange information with one another?

In order to extend my consideration of digital interventions as a means of creating critical consciousness, I draw from performance studies to engage with diverse knowledge production processes. According to theorist Diana Taylor, performance is "a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge" (2003: 16). An opportunity is created to engage with fluid ontologies that are material and virtual. Space is reimagined as a commons similar to the open public urban spaces where dissent is performed. A commons and its palimpsests of previous purposes

36

potentially nurture critical consciousness. Critical consciousness within such a place fosters

analysis of oppressive political power which has led to loss while offering opportunities for the

retrieval of memories of earlier, more positive circumstances and so for sustaining community

cultural wealth.

Through the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and global uprisings stimulated by the

Black Lives Matter Movement, museums featuring performances accessible to the public have

come under increased scrutiny regarding their histories and persisting legacies of colonialism and

imperialism. One example is documented through social media accounts that published art

workers' grievances in an anonymous format to call attention to art institutions' hypocrisy and

complicity in systemic racism and labor abuses[7]. When I had the opportunity to speak with

Samoan leader Lemi Ponifasio a question over zoom in Peter Sellars' class Art as Moral Action

in 2021, I sought his insights on museums, given his extensive work with Indigenous community

mediation, performing arts, and museum engagement. He stated that "creativity is like poetry, it

doesn't lie with the work of artists. Poetry exists when you notice it." Given his articulation of

art and creativity, I thought I would ask, earnestly, if Mr. Ponifasio could speak to the tensions of

colonial legacies that ethnographic museums hold during the reclamation of cultural heritage. He

replied,

> what the museum does is create a music box effect on culture. I always get the feeling
>
> when I go to a museum that my people have disappeared. They display things from many
>
> years ago, and so of course those people have disappeared...I am also suspicious of
>
> [museums] returning these things...I tell the young people in New Zealand, don't go to a

---

[7] Wagley, Catherine. 2020. "More Than Ever, Art Workers Are Calling Out Their Employers and Others—Anonymously—on Social Media. Can It Make Real-World Change?" Artnet News. December 21, 2020. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/anonymous-instagram-accounts-2020-1932998.

museum, go to Samoa if you want to know what Samoa is because the museum is a kind of "souvenir" of the life and it rejects the immediacy of life experienced by the Samoan people and it puts everything in a kind of touristic mentality and [academics] spend so much time and money studying them and it has nothing to do with my life right now which I think is very important… Museums are a reduction of culture into a music box.

The metaphor Mr. Ponifasio uses is especially relevant to my project as I hope to avoid such static representation of a mediascape archive. What I gleaned from his response is that the power of interactivity and performance is to broaden our understanding of historical processes as persisting forces that have been translated across geographies and facilitated through biopolitics. Additionally, his astute statement regarding the display practices in museums is supported by what curator Dan Hicks asserts regarding the material considerations museums often engage. "This failure of the ethnological museum is a breakdown in its temporal and visual regimes, which use displays to make it seem like the moment of military victory against 'primitive' people is timeless and unending" (2020: 11). Technologies of display within museums are called into question and so are the methods to incorporate digital tools.

Inspiration is also drawn from the Freedom Archives, a web-based chronicleing of collections from the late 1960s to the mid-90s that present histories of the Bay Area, Los Angeles, elsewhere in the United States and through international movements for liberation and social justice.[8] My interpretation of community curation builds on de Certeau's (1984) notion of "spatial trajectories," through which one collectively recognizes the central role of the participant's spatially situated practices that create narrative structures that "have the status of spatial syntaxes" (ibid 115). The spatial syntaxes thus constitute two distinctions between

---

[8] Freedom Archives. "Freedom Archives." Accessed November 8, 2021. https://freedomarchives.org.

"place" and "space." "Place," reflects a set of formal laws or jurisdictions that imply an indication of stability, while "space" consists of "intersections of mobile elements" that are enacted by a collaborating composition of "ensemble movements" (ibid 117). My aim is to co-create "commons" as spaces of exchange where individuals and communities are free to explore the performativity of their identities to challenge dominant notions of history, economy, art, and knowledge through accessible and equitable mechanisms. In so doing, critical consciousness is nurtured by the interactions afforded in a commons. In this way, we move towards aspirations of a distributed network of relationship connections that can emerge through dialogue and the sharing of resources such as mutual aid.

One example of this connection through dialogue and community collaboration within the museum context is the exhibition, "Through Positive Eyes" (TPE). The collaborative narrative based photographic project included more than 140 collaborators from across the world who have been diagnosed with HIV and AIDS. Photographs within the exhibition were taken by project collaborators with the support of workshops led by artists and scholars. Levinas's (1961) notion of alterity and infinity is apparent in this exhibition as it offers an understanding of participants' socio-cultural contexts and personal experiences through storytelling, thus allowing exhibition visitors to transcend superficial and monolithic understandings of AIDS and HIV and the stigma associated with HIV positive individuals. The TPE exhibition emphasizes humanity and accessibility. The exhibition included performances of spoken word that engaged actors in a call and response during poetry recitations. In his celebrated *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974), Augusto Boal asserted that through a reformulation of what we consider to be formal conventions, theatre can function as a liberatory practice that may serve as a rehearsal for positive social chance and even revolution. Such rehearsal becomes accessible to museum guests and has the potential to mobilize them into a greater force by nurturing critical consciousness

that moves them beyond a spectator's role to actants' agency to transform museum galleries through reclamation. For mediascapes to nurture critical consciousness, programming can be implemented to reinvigorate the archive with ongoing possibilities of reclamation of one's own narratives, just as individuals did and continue do during iterations of "Through Positive Eyes" as a long-lived traveling exhibition

The aspirations of Community Curatorial practice mean choreographing around the creation of collective spaces that engage archival materials while critically questioning museum collecting practices as they pertain to colonial processes and how stake-holding communities can reclaim histories held by institutions. From ephemeral embodiments to tangible and intangible cultural heritage, curatorial energy can become motivated by the exchange of material and narrated histories, present lived experiences, and the desire for liberatory practices to persist into the future. By designing spaces utilizing community-based collaborative methods, I incorporate adrienne marie brown's (2019) emergent strategy alongside the decolonial practice of counter-mapping to build trust and open up opportunities for multiple perspectives to be engaged in collective presentation, knowledge building, and exchange.
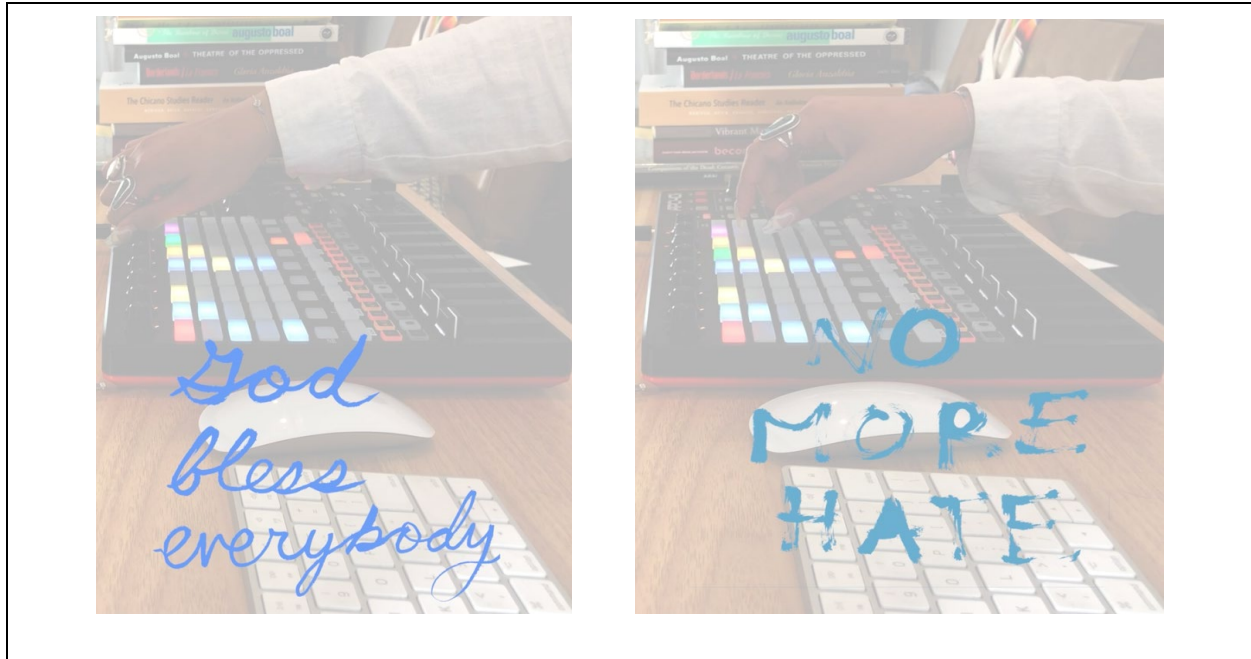
Figure 4. Two screenshots of a digital video recording of the Soundscapes of Pandemia mediascape being performed using a digital audio platform known as Ableton Live and a AKAI APC40 MIDI controller. Handwritten phrases composed in ink and translated to digital PNG files in Adobe Photoshop, "God bless everybody," and "NO MORE HATE," recorded in Los Angeles, California in a public space during COVID-19 outbreak and after Black Lives Matters uprisings.

Collective experiences are arranged through the placement of materials and embodied practices which elicit a multi-modal engagement as illustrated for Performing Soundscapes of Pandemia archival material in figure 4. Through multi-modal performance, I invited community members to define and challenge the boundaries of place and space where artistic and performance interventions are held in order to make pluralities of fluid ontologies and power structures legible and socially contextualized. Vital virtuality is informed by the expanded analysis of the concept of the document by Buckland (1997) who emphasizes the importance of the social construction of meaning through material and metaphysical processes. Mediascapes as boundary objects have the opportunity to be read and reperformed when the sounds can be rearranged or remixed. Such activities and events recall Cheryl Keyes's assertion that remixing

sounds samples comes from the genealogy of rap music through "digital sampling of whole musical tracks or prerecorded musical motifs–in lieu of composing newly inspired pieces" (2002: 5). Keyes explains that rap and hip-hop music arose from the "musical fusion of Jamaican dancehall and African American-based funk music from the verbal art performance" and is thus, this such sensibility is utilized to expand interactive engagement through performance via the Soundscapes of Pandemia project. In other words, my colleagues and I have discussed material expressions of belief at three foci: the time of making; processes of spatial meaning-making from the community of origin to use as a boundary object; and lastly, the point of community-engaged design and performance, discussion, and artistic and creative remixing of the mediascape.

Through this mediascape, we have sought to demonstrate how technologies can supplement the performance of cultural engagement taking place within the public commons, whether via web 2.0 engagement or through a mixture of digital and analog engagements. In this way, palimpsests may be extended through design principles of accessibility and inclusivity to stimulate multimodal, multilingual and multisensory experiences. Integrating analog and digital technology with inputs from social media hashtags as well as analog-to-digital translations of written responses emerging from dialogue that raise critical consciousness, performance centers the stakeholders as publishers of a new type of performance document to be performed in public commons spaces.

In conclusion, the Soundscapes of Pandemia Project permitted my collaborators and me to test how performing an archive can provide opportunities for implementation of magical realism as a means to mobilize a mediascape as a War-Machine-like assemblage (after Deleuze and Guattari) to challenge the State. Engaging with actual and virtual dimensions is encouraged through magical realism to engage future possibilities outside of hegemonic hierarchical and temporal orders. Discovered limitations of the project allowed me to make translations and

expansions to my approach with curatorial practices as possible spaces where critical

consciousness can emerge from interactive fields of performance. Only through concerted effort

and with reflexive approaches to the histories of analog and digital technologies can such

liberatory practices be engaged through community curatorial practices.

Bibliography

Aldea, Eva. Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial
    Literature. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.

Antipode Online. "Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore." Accessed
June 26, 2021. https://antipodeonline.org/geographies-of-racial-capitalism/.

Avila, Eric. The Folklore of the Freeway : Race and Revolt in the Modernist City.
    A Quadrant Book. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza." (1987).

Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy."
    Theory, culture & society 7, no. 2-3 (1990): 295-310.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha. Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We
    Need. The MIT Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12255.001.0001.

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Brazil - The Economy." Accessed June 15, 2021.
    https://www.britannica.com/place/Brazil.

Roy, Arundhati. "Arundhati Roy: 'The Pandemic Is a Portal' | Free to Read."
    Financial Times, April 3, 2020.
    https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca.

Benjamin, Walter. 9. The Task of the Translator. University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Brown, Adrienne Marie. Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good.
    United Kingdom: AK Press, (2019).

"What Is a Document? JASIS 1997." Accessed December 15, 2021.
    https://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~buckland/whatdoc.html.

"Data Feminism." Data Feminism. Accessed May 22, 2021.
    https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/.

De Kosnik, Abigail. Rogue archives: Digital cultural memory and media fandom.
    mit Press, 2016.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*.
    Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza, trans." *M. Joughin, New York:*
    Zone (1992).

Enote, Jim. Zuni Nation. Lives in Zuni. Oral teaching. 7 July 2021.

Enote, Jim. *Counter Mapping Articulates What Is Between*. (Albuquerque, New Mexico: 516 Arts, 2021).

Freire, Paolo. "Pedagogy of the oppressed (revised)." New York: Continuum (1996).

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Harding, Sandra G. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. Psychology Press, 2004.

Hartmann, Dieter D. "Anti-Semitism and the Appeal of Nazism." Political Psychology 5, no. 4 (1984): 635–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/3791234.

Hicks, Dan. The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution. Pluto Press, 2020.

Hooks, Bell. All about love: New visions. William Morrow, 2018.

Hutchins, Edwin. *Distributed Cognition*. (University of California San Diego 2000).

Geertz, Clifford. 1976. "Art as a Cultural System." MLN 91 (6): 1478. https://doi.org/10.2307/2907147.

Goodfellow, Samuel Huston. "Fascism as a Transnational Movement: The Case of Inter-War Alsace." Contemporary European History 22, no. 1 (2013): 87–106.

Goodwin, Charles. "Participation, Stance and Affect in the Organization of Activities." Discourse & Society 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 53–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507069457.

Kirby, Jen. "Jair Bolsonaro Is Facing a Political Reckoning in Brazil. How Far Will It Go?" Vox, June 4, 2021. https://www.vox.com/2021/6/4/22456981/brazil-jair-bolsonaro-impeachment-protests-coronavirus.

Jacobs, Ronald N., and Ronald N. Jacobs. Race, media, and the crisis of civil society: From Watts to Rodney King. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Johnson, Gaye Theresa. Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity: Music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles. Vol. 36. Univ of California Press, 2013.

Juliano, Linzi, and Ramesh Srinivasan. "Tagging It: Considering How Ontologies Limit the Reading of Identity." International Journal of Cultural Studies 15, no. 6 (November 1, 2012): 615–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877912451684.

Keyes, Cheryl Lynette. Rap music and street consciousness. Vol. 543. University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Lowe, Lisa. *The intimacies of four continents*. Duke University Press, 2015.

Mbembe, Achille. "The Internet Is Afropolitan | The Chimurenga Chronic." Accessed April 27, 2021.

Mbembe, Achille. The Mail & Guardian. "The Digital Age Erases the Divide between Humans and Objects," January 6, 2017. https://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-06-00-the-digital-age-erases-the-divide-between-humans-and-objects/.

Neumann, Franke J. "The Dragon and the Dog: Two Symbols of Time in Nahuatl Religion." *Numen* 22, no. 1 (1975): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/3269531.

Presner, Todd, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano. Hypercities thick mapping in the digital humanities. 2014.

Roberts, Allen F., Roberts, Polly Nooter, "Enigma and Purpose: Visual Hagiographies of Urban Senegal" in The Image Debate: Figural Representation in Islam and across the World: edited by Christiane Gruber, Berkeley, CA, Gingko Library (2019): 194-210.

Romo, Terezita, E. Carmen Ramos, Claudia E. Zapata, and Tatiana Reinoza. ¡ Printing the Revolution!: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now. Princeton University Press, 2020.

Solomon, Robert, and David Sherman, eds. *The Blackwell guide to continental philosophy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Srinivasan, Ramesh, and Jeffrey Huang. "Fluid Ontologies for Digital Museums." *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 5, no. 3 (May 2005): 193–204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00799-004-0105-9.

Srinivasan, Ramesh. Whose global village?: Rethinking how technology shapes our world. NYU Press, 2018.

Srinivasan, Ramesh, Robin Boast, Jonathan Furner, and Katherine M. Becvar. "Digital museums and diverse cultural knowledges: Moving past the traditional catalog." The Information Society 25, no. 4 (2009): 265-278.

Srinivasan, Ramesh. "Re-Thinking the Cultural Codes of New Media: The Question Concerning Ontology." New Media & Society 15, no. 2 (March 1, 2013): 203–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812450686.

Steinauer-Scudder, Chelsea. n.d. "Counter Mapping." Emergence Magazine. Accessed August 31, 2021. https://emergencemagazine.org/feature/counter-mapping/.

Taylor, Diana. The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas.
    Duke University Press, 2003.

Wagley, Catherine. 2020. "More Than Ever, Art Workers Are Calling Out Their Employers
    and Others—Anonymously—on Social Media. Can It Make Real-World Change?"
    Artnet News. December 21, 2020.
     https://news.artnet.com/art-world/anonymous-instagram-accounts-2020-1932998.

Walsh, Nick Paton. 2020. "Bolsonaro Calls Coronavirus a 'little Flu.' Inside Brazil's
    Hospitals, Doctors Know the Horrifying Reality - CNN." May 25, 2020.
    https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/23/americas/brazil-coronavirus-hospitals-intl/index.html.

Ward, Alex. "You Only Need This 90-Second Video to Understand President Jair
    Bolsonaro's Failed Coronavirus Response in Brazil." Vox, May 2, 2020.
    https://www.vox.com/2020/5/2/21245243/coronavirus-brazil-bolsonaro-response-video.

UCLA. "Fowler Museum Exhibition Features Paintings Exploring Zuni Cultural
    Landscapes." Accessed August 31, 2021.
    https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/fowler-museum-exhibition-features-paintings-
    exploring-zuni-cultural-landscapes.

Vasconcelos, José. *The Cosmic Race / La Raza Cosmica*. JHU Press, 1997.

Yale University. 2018. Tanner Lectures on Human Values: "The Idea of a Borderless
    World." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKm6HPCSXDY.