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Silvia M. Pease

LasTesis: mass-collaboration + mass-contaminated language = changing the story

“...*think we must; we must think. That means simply, we must change the story; the story must change*” Donna Haraway

LasTesis, a Chilean performance group that choreographed a feminist dance and chant titled *Un violador en tu camino* (2019) (A rapist in your path) gathers women of all ages and backgrounds. Their bodies dance and chant in unison echoing the tethered notions of collaboration and contamination as thinking, as a massive contamination. This article explores how contamination affects identity and how it also enables the trace of a traumatic past while imagining different futures that are imminent and important. I argue that this knowledge and assertive action exemplified in the performance *Un violador en tu camino* involves a physical reclaiming of space, a collaborative assertion, an assemblage of bodies that create a human barricade, leading to a mass-contamination (mass and massive referring to the viral reach of the video performances). Indeed, women not only confront the State, but they proclaim agency saying ‘No more!’ proposing a collective re-thinking from a shifted position.

The writings of the anthropologist Anna L. Tsing suggest that looking at people’s history means that they *have* history and that they *are* history too. I insist that our knowledge also includes our relations and influences, our willingness to examine the past and to stay in the present, where we take an active role: we re-think and unfold meaning. Tsing recognizes that knowledge is constructed through interactions and contaminations, pointing out that the process

of contamination is essential and meaningfully diverse (38-39). In similar ways, both Haraway and Tsing, address collaboration as a required participatory gathering of collective re-thinking for ethical practices. *Un violador en tu camino* perfectly illustrates this point, their collective choreography gathers women from diverse backgrounds from Chile, Argentina, and many other countries worldwide. During this assembly of dancing and chanting, women are mimicking the abusive behavior of those in power. They challenge authority by questioning patriarchic cultural practices in the process of re-thinking and re-telling the story from a woman's perspective.

Urgency: to stay in the present and to make trouble

The title *Un violador en tu camino* (A rapist in your path) encapsulates LasTesis' sense of urgency and the need for awareness for meaningful mass artifacts and actions that will dismantle the latent rapist, the abuser who prays and intersects a woman in her path. Haraway, in *Stay with The Troubles*, insists on the concept of urgency as a way to stay in the present and make trouble. *Un violador en tu camino*, urges women to eagerly participate and embrace the radical joy of the feminist collaboration without expecting a consensus as proposed by Chantal Mouffe in her book 'Agonistics.' This act of collaboration or *working with*, exemplified in the performance *Un violador en tu camino*, tells a story of systematic abuse of women in patriarchies, who in turn, dance and enact through choreographic moves mimicking the abusive behavior experienced. They use the public space of indeterminacy where "[c]ollaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die" (Tsing, 28).

Additionally, Haraway notes that: "[E]ach time a story helps me to remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise. Such exercise enhances collective thinking and

movement in complexity (29). *Un Violador en tu camino*'s storytelling brings new knowledge of emancipation and crucial collaborations that are capable of creating and propelling new alliances among women in Latin America and beyond. Haraway describes in her language that “[c]ollaborations among differently situated people—and peoples—are as crucial as, and enabled by, those between the humans and animals [...] specific crossings from familiar worlds into uncomfortable and unfamiliar ones to weave something that might come unraveled but might also nurture living and dying” (16). *Un violador en tu camino*'s choreographed bodily movements that metaphorically tell the story of systematic gender abuse in Latin America is an “uncomfortable and unfamiliar” world for many, but the women that join show us that we must stay with the troubles, which means that it is necessary to detangle sad realities that affect millions of women globally. Thus, bringing to the fore simultaneous storytellings and collaborations as multiple replications of “heterogeneous co-participants” in different languages and localities (Haraway 10).

The performance *Un violador en tu camino*'s message and communication model does not present linearity. It is not a one-way process in which one party sends the message, and it is received by another. It is not a straightforward message that contaminates and alters identity, it rather moves quickly, up, down, left, right, in all angles and directions going beyond linearity. Eduard Glissant has questioned the problem of linearity, he writes that “fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition” (225). The multi-directional and simultaneous message expands the gendered battle lines, its mass-contaminates. *Un violador en tu camino* is a massive performance of women dancing and chanting, re-thinking, sending a message, in complex multiple ways, evoking both the need for action and for listening. According to Haraway's compound language, this type of message can be defined as the “interconnection and

weaving of thoughts” (Haraway,13). It is at this moment of interconnection and embracing togetherness when the effects of contamination occur, altering the original story. Furthermore, Haraway writes, “think we must; we must think. That means simply, we must change the story; the story must change,” emphasizing the need for thinking, collaboration, and contamination as crucial components for the development of a new ethical thought (40). Understandings that are informed by these interconnections and relations of “heterogeneous webbed patterns” moving away from the individual benefit towards the collective (60). Furthermore, Tsing reminds us of the blindness of the capitalist and industrial culture towards the ‘indeterminacies of the encounter,’ as well as the diversity interfering with our capacity to participate in collaborations and contaminations which are essential and meaningfully diverse (38-39).

Mass-embodied artifacts are tentacular and active

Tsing’s blindness of the capitalist and industrial culture towards the indeterminacies of the encounter go in tandem to Haraway’s language of terra and tentacular thinking, in which she remarks the need for *Sympoiesis or thinking-with*, away from the capitalist individual benefit, towards a revised ethical belief that goes beyond inherent categories and capacities. How does this tentacular thinking apply to *Un violador en tu camino* and other feminist collectives? How do mass-embodiment artifacts propel women’s visibility?

To answer these questions, the performance *Un violador en tu camino*’s bodily gestures of women dancing can be compared with the spider weaving its web, here the bodies move, they expand their reach to all corners. Haraway’s definition of tentacular thinking through movements of “probing creepers, swelling roots, reaching and climbing tendrilled ones” (32). Considering non-human bodily gestures as a metaphor for thinking reaches places that are forlorn and inaccessible and require new bodily gestures. Thus, “tentacularity” is described as “dreadful

graspings, fraying, and weavings, passing relays again and again, in the generative recursion that make up living and dying” (Haraway, 33). The repetition of movements of the spider’s tiny multiple tentacles weaving their nets, exemplify the bodies of the women in *Un violador en tu camino* dancing and chanting in different languages and localities, slowly and meticulously sending gestural messages to every corner, re-thinking, telling a story. The “tentacular” conveys a repetitive entanglement and relation with others in life and in death, a relationship of feelings of systematic feminine suffering and femicides. To this end, impulses of contestation are passed between generations in multi movements and stories, as per Haraway’s writings “hand and brain, making and thinking” connect (13).

WE, as women and *whatever beings*, matter: Unruled Edges

Un violador en tu camino reminds us that we are witnessing the erasure of the limit between the political subject and the living subject, which was enlightened by Michael Foucault’s notion of the biopolitical power defining modern sovereignty: “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault 143). Life was introduced and defined by the political techniques of biopower which controlled and modified life processes. Hence, as per Foucault, “deployments of power are directly connected to the body” (151). Now, this way of thinking is questioned by many, including Giorgio Agamben who analyzes the undifferentiated zone between the biological life and the political life for a coming community. Giorgio Agamben proposes the indeterminacy of the limit and how to re-imagine the coming or constitution of a community. As per Agamben, WE are *whatever beings* meaning “being such that it always matters” (Agamben 1). We, as women and *whatever beings*, matter.

Clearly, Agamben does not reject the dichotomies of subject/object and potentiality/actuality outright, but rather restructure them, identifying the zone where they become indistinguishable, he writes: “Matter that does not remain beneath form but surrounds it with a halo” pointing to a zone of potentiality within the indeterminacy (33). Contrary to Foucault’s concept of Biopolitics, Agamben proposes the state of exception in the *Homo sacer*¹ as the right to *inclusion of life*², which is at the same time inclusion and exclusion. Foucault follows Walter Benjamin’s lead, arguing that the political role of humanity is to differentiate pure violence from right and to expose the innate potential within indistinguishability. He further explains his notion of “whatever singularity” acting politically when he writes:

“Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, as the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be Tiananmen, and, sooner or later, the tanks will appear” (86).

Agamben’s celebrated remarks on the indistinguishable zone of the intersection between life and politics should flow into a right to respond at all times, power cannot be unilateral, unreciprocated. The performance *Un violador en tu camino* as a mass-embodiment artifact offers a resistance to the biopolitical *in place*. It moves with unruled edges, opposing patriarchal control and regulations of individuals and communities.

¹ *Homo sacer* means “a person whom anybody can kill, but who cannot be used as a sacrifice” (Roman Law)

² Ulrich Rauff, "An Interview with Giorgio Agamben," *German Law Journal* 5.5, 2004. “the concepts of forms-of-life and lifestyles.” “What I call a form-of-life,” he explains, “is a life which can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to separate something like bare life. [...] [H]ere too the concept of privacy comes in to play”(613).

Mesh of Possibilities

I am very aware of the intensity and complexity of these discussed notions to find a non-bias way to define resistance in contemporary philosophy. How can women resist mass artifacts and gain visibility? How are their lives defined? I mean life as care of themselves, as an artifact, as presence. Both, Foucault's notion of body and Agamben's notion of bare life point to the dilemma of the *concept of life*. This is why the discovery of new ways to gain visibility for women propelling new identities is crucial to healing the past towards a future connected with respect, equality, honesty, and spirituality.

Advances in all areas and a period of renovation are with us. Haraway and Tsing are indeed very aware of these shifts and applying a collaborative way to approach the task of re-thinking as a possibility of renovation. We can collaborate which leads to contamination—not resulting in erasure—it does not have a negative connotation, on the contrary, contamination is seen as an “influential exchange” (Tsing 27). There is one life, and the “livable collaborations” help sustain it (Tsing 27). The participants' willingness to collaborate propels possibilities that are IN us, in our bodies. These bodily possibilities potentiate unprecedented transformations, as per Tsing, “contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds - and new directions - may emerge” (27). To her point, *Un violador en tu camino*'s actions are repeatably enacted, to narrate the disadvantaged women's reality and urge for a new direction of thought. During these times of re-thinking, it is important to expand our possibilities of collaborations for human and non-human survival. Thus, one supporting the other in an open-ended relation. The mass-embodiment artifact *Un violador en tu camino* presents a great example on how to re-think, bodily re-enact, collaborate, communicate an ideological message, and mass- contaminate the present to be able to conceive a future planetary community. At the heart of contemporary

resistance lies the acceptance of a multispecies planetary world described by Tsing: “Humans shapes multispecies worlds when our living arrangements make room for other species. This is not just a matter of crops, livestock, and pets. [...] Humans, pines, and fungi make living arrangements simultaneously for themselves and others: multispecies worlds (Tsing, 22). Meaning there should be an acknowledgement of diversity and room for all of us to coexist. This similar notion was explained by Catherine Malabou when she wrote that there is an “...emergence of a new form of being a stranger to the one before”—a kind of ontology that is not blind to the “accident” present in all transformations. Indeed, transformations occur as accidents and as consequences of articulations and discourses through mass-embodied artifacts. These in turn, propel a call to action that embraces the self and the alliances with others creating a tentacular new experience of re-thinking and enacting.

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