Tracing, Expanding, and Making Accessible the Digital Pathways of Latinx Sexual Dissidence in the Hemisphere

by

Melissa Marie González

Digital Art, History, and Computational Media
Duke University

Approved:

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Mark Olson, Advisor

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Victoria Szabo

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Augustus Wendell

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Digital Art, History, and Computational Media in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The project aims to analyze, archive, and enable the powerful ways that contemporary Latinx intersectional queer activists, located in sites as different as Oakland (U.S.) and Santiago (Chile), use blogs, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and other globally popular media platforms to disseminate their activist-oriented cultural productions and connect with other activists. Envisioning and theorizing liberation from intersecting oppressions, Latinx activists across our hemisphere make important contributions to queer and transgender culture that are unevenly visible because they occur in ephemeral digital spaces and are incoherent from the standpoint of the most massively circulated and received ideas about gender, race, and sexuality. My project consists of the present essay, which analyzes digital formations of sexual dissidence in relation to the disciplining and extractivism of academic institutions, as well as a multi-modal website. Grounded in virtual and IRL community-based participatory research methods, the digital resource was designed to accompany the creators of Latinx sexual dissidence by using the technologies and funding I have access to in order to offer a multilingual, semi-public digital resource that supports the archiving and intra-community circulation of Latinx sexual dissident culture, thought, and activism.
Dedication

A los sueños de nuestroxs antepasadxs, las luchas del presente y las liberaciones del futuro.
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treasure memories of post-class lunch and conversation with Kelsey Brod, Kate Guillen, and Katia Schwerzmann; I think we solved all the world’s problems. I also appreciated the companionship of my kind and innovative MA cohort: Andrea Bruculeri, Clara Pinchbeck, and Anni Yan.

I have written elsewhere about the fatigue and discomfort inherent in inhabiting university spaces where some of us were quite literally never supposed to be, and I explore in this thesis the limitations and symbolic violence of universities (González 2020). Nevertheless, I know very well that the university is also my favorite refuge in the world and a privileged space for fostering deep friendship and solidarities. Part of my frustration with the restrictions made necessary by COVID-19 comes from the inability to meet with my new friends at the Durham Co-op, or any of Durham’s exceptional restaurants. I wish we had had more face to face time together, and I hope to return to Durham when the world is different.

At home, I am endlessly grateful to my goddess of a domestic partner, without whose love and support I simply could never have completed this project after returning to my teaching and administrative duties at Davidson College in the midst of the current pandemic. I am also grateful to my six-year-old for her preternatural patience with both my closed office door and her zoom school, and for all the times her silly antics reminded me of what it means to be present in both body and mind.
Finally, I must acknowledge the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s New Directions Fellowship, which enabled me to learn about ideas and tools that truly took me in directions entirely new to me, with destinations and adventures still to come. Perhaps most significantly, the grant has provided vital support to the intellectual, creative, and activist work of my collaborators in sexual dissidence—thereby participating in their envisioning of a more just world yet to come.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Scenes of Sexual Dissidence and Institutional Encounters

Theory, art, activism – it is hard to tell them apart in projects in which every artistic practice puts forward a theory, and every theory needs to be put into practice. The theory-art-activism overlaps, like much else we discovered, need to be put into action rather than talked about. Little by little we developed and formalized the concept of working groups. During the following Encuentros...working groups of artists, activists, and scholars became the backbone of the event.

(Diana Taylor 2010, 30-31)

Irina la Loca: I do what I do, I’m not interested in boxes. I had no idea I was postmodern or that I was making post-porno. Those categories are made by institutions in order to count us. And I have hacked them because I am an actress, I do performances, I’m a mother, I work in jails, with community organizations...they will never put me in any box and I’m not interested in belonging either.¹

(Camila and León 2017)

On July 22, 2016 in Santiago, Chile it was winter, but the relatively small interior of the Centro Cultural Espacio Diana was warmed by the abundance of bodies packed in the small space—a mix of local and international academics, performers, and activists attending the Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, which is part academic conference and part performance festival. Conference staff had been concerned about making sure that only registered participants were entering the crowded basement space for the evening performances and were carefully checking badges at the entrance. Local artists had been complaining about the ways that they

¹ All translations my own, unless otherwise indicated in the References.
were compensated for their performances only with access to conference events and performances, but they were barred from bringing any un-registered guests. As tends to happen at the biannual Encuentros, the formal and informal conversations among participants with academic, extra-academic, artistic, activist, Anglo-centric, and/or Latin American worldviews in English, Spanish, and Portuguese had produced plenty of frictions and failures of translation. Several performances that evening commented upon and engaged the ongoing conflicts, and the performance entitled “Tan Dichosa y Tan Feliz” [“So Blessed and So Happy”], by the Fuerza Travesti collective, did so in a particularly striking way, using aesthetic strategies rooted in the praxis of sexual dissidence.

At the start of the performance, the center of the stage showed a projection of a red background with the familiar typography of “Coca-Cola” advertising used instead for the word “Periferica,” with “Human Zoo Institut” appearing right below.

Figure 1: Irina la Loca and Wincy Oyarce of the Fuerza Travesti collective at the start of their performance “Tan Dichosa y Tan Feliz” (Photo by Roy Gomez Cruz)

2
Given the tradition of Latin American visual criticism of “Coca-Colonization,” as well as the references to the Encuentro’s theme (which referenced the “eX-centric” and “the peripheries of power”), it was clear from the outset that this performance would criticize the Hemispheric Institute, with some echoes also of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s famed 1993 anti-colonialist performance “The Couple in the Cage” (Thomas 2017; Fusco and Gómez-Peña 1993). Two performers, Irina la Loca and Wincy Oyarce, entered the stage in a gender-crossing mix of military uniforms, high heels, stockings, wigs, and make-up. Switching between Spanish and English and parodying the speech of both overly cheerful cruise directors and evil dictators, they welcomed the audience to the “Periférica Human Zoo Institut” and reminded them that only people with credentials would be allowed to see the show. “To make this more entertaining for you, and part of the culture, we present our indigenous people who will ask you for your credentials,” said Irina la Loca; while the two other performers (Maraka Barata and Anastasia María Benavente) made the rounds among the audience dressed in strips of burlap and thigh-high patent leather boots, the hosts reminded the audience to “be careful with your luggage and with the indigenous.” In addition to criticizing both gringo tourists’ neo-colonialist spectacularization of local natives as well as bourgeois Chileans’ criminalization of the Mapuche, the opening of the performance also

2 Valentina Eileen Vio Bidirinis’ thesis provides the best detail about the performers’ names, as the Hemispheric Institute Archive gives scant details (2019).
addresses the ways that academics establish authority over the meaning of performance. “Tell me, Diana Taylor, why am I like this, so blessed and so happy?” asks Irina la Loca of Taylor, the founder of the Hemispheric Institute and likely present in the audience.

The performers sing “Dominate me more, give me more, dominate me with the cross, dominate me with the word, dominate me with truth, dominate me with cruelty” as they transition to different BDSM-inflected scenes set against the background of an American flag redesigned with swastika stars and barbed wire stripes. The Chilean state, US imperialism, the Catholic Church, and the Hemispheric Institute are all mocked and denounced as systems of oppressive control, as the performers stage the dissidence and liberation of non-normative forms of sexual domination and submission.

Much happens that deserves analysis—Irina whips and sodomizes Maraka Barata with a condom-covered cross, urinates in a pitcher, mimes drinking it, and sprinkles it on her fellow performers as well as the audience while declaiming “Welcome to Chile! Welcome to Chile, the country of the embittered!”—but most relevant to my analysis is the climax that follows this scene.

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3 The phrase “tan dichosa y tan feliz” is associated with Hija de Perra, a drag queen icon of sexual dissidence in Chile, who has yet to be included in the Hemispheric Institute’s archives and artists profiles. Members of the Fuerza Travesti collective collaborated with Hija de Perra and have made various homages to her, after her much lamented passing in 2014 from AIDS-related complications.
“Something strange is happening in Santiago de Chile,” proclaims Wincy, as the formerly dominating Irina la Loca bends over on all fours, with Maraka Barata stimulating her genitals.

Bent over, Irina la Loca laments, “And they don’t pay me, not even the taxi to get here, and they don’t pay me, and they don’t pay me, all this for free, I’m working for free, I’m working for fucking free, I’m speaking English, I’m speaking German, I’m speaking Italian,” as Maraka Barata moves to simulate penetrating her from the rear and all the performers on stage make orgasmic moans. After the group climax, Irina stands apart and jerks off the dildos on her crown of dildos, which release liquid that squirts onto the stage, as she proclaims, “I love you Americans, you fucking inspire me. I love your
fucking whiteface. My blackface is my fucking blackface. It’s not from you, it’s mine.”

The piece concludes with Irina la Loca cleaning the stage, which she calls an act of consideration for the next performers, while they all sing Hija de Perra’s song “Reggaeton venereo” [“Venereal Reggaeton’’] whose lyrics include “give me your gonorrhea.” The performers continue to sing as they begin to walk among the audience, with Irina la Loca repeatedly declaiming that “in Chile, people still die of AIDs…in Chile people die of cancer…in Chile people still die ignorant.”

Two central aspects of this fifteen-minute performance form the impetus of my project. The first is a question of archiving and circulation. This performance is archived not only in my own memory and the scant notes I found it difficult to take in the darkened theater space, but also online in the official archive of the Hemispheric Institute. The Institute’s archiving has made a video of the live performance viewable by over 900 spectators, far more than the 100 or so people who viewed it live; apart from this video, Fuerza Travesti has not been featured in the Institute’s archives of artist’s profiles and reviews. At the same time, there are a plethora of other images, texts, and

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4 Here she refers to a conflict about US academics imposing their own cultural history of blackface onto Latin American performance that emerged in one of the work groups that friends of the Fuerza Collective attended.

5 Also, the Institute’s archived video of the performance includes language from the performance as it was originally proposed: “A performance celebrating the bizarre performer ‘Hija de Perra.’ There is a rite where her insubordinate spirit is invoked and revived through personas forming part of a scenic imagination in search of a visual artistic terrorism countering the state and normativity.” It does not account for the ways that the performance collective changed the planned performance in order to criticize the Hemispheric, in response to conflicts that emerged during the event.
videos of the thought work and performance of the members of the Fuerza Travesti collective circulating online, some with 40-180k views. Much ink has been spilled on archive fever, and the complex relations of the archive and the repertoire in performance; however, I am most interested in the ways that Fuerza Travesti’s performance engages ideas about sexual dissidence that circulate mostly outside of institutional archives (Derrida 1996; Taylor 2003; Tello 2018). My project responds to the fact that sexual dissidence circulates not only simultaneously excessively and ephemerally across the internet, but also, and vitally, through hard-to-access and vulnerable physical media like zines, pamphlets, and books produced by micro-presses and in face-to-face in underground spaces—through the contagious contact of bodies that Hija de la Perras song references, in the myriad small-scale gatherings of sexual dissidents in Santiago that have only diminished today because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, the performance of “Tan Dichosa y Tan Feliz” uses the aesthetic and critical strategies of sexual dissidence to speak of and against the extractive, colonialist functions of the university- and grant-funded Hemispheric Institute. The two epigraphs at the start of the chapter capture a potentially irresolvable tension between Latinx American sexual dissidence and the institutionally-affiliated researchers that may study it: researchers need to categorize, which is a form of disciplinarity; meanwhile, the theorists and practitioners of sexual dissidence will collaborate with the academy that
valorizes their dissidence, but will also push against its disciplinary conventions, and always operate at least partially outside of the university’s frameworks of comprehensibility.⁶ Working from the institutional stage of the Encuentro, the performers of Fuerza Travesti asked spectators (a mix of academics, artists, and activists from throughout the hemisphere and from vastly different socioeconomic conditions) to contemplate the ways that bodies can be valorized for their sexual dissidence and yet also be exploited, and unpaid, by relatively wealthy institutions. When I spoke briefly with Irina la Loca after the evening’s performances had concluded to complement their work, she thanked me and acknowledged that they had been quite anxious about the changes they made to the performance in order to critique the Institute on its own stage; this move did not come without risks. While the critiques provoked some laughs during the live performance, the working groups were not particularly conducive to generating conversations about the effects of institutionality and the university’s role in extractivism. Alternatively, my project pursues a multi-directional dialogue with sexual dissidence, asking what it means to design a digital counter-archive that aspires to the undercommons, to partake of the university’s material and epistemic resources, but not be fully of it.

⁶ I use “Latinx American” to refer inclusively to Latinx cultures across the hemisphere.
Chapter 2: Peripheries, Institutions, and Sexual Dissidence

Contextualizing Sexual Dissidence’s Circulations

Used mostly in Spanish and Portuguese and sometimes in the plural, “disidencia(s) sexuales” [“sexual dissidence(s)”] has emerged as a phrase that describes an intersectional, trans-feminist and queer orientation in theory and praxis. Focusing on liberation from intersecting oppressions related to sexuality, ethnicity, race, gender, ability, fatness, citizenship status, and class, trans and queer Latinx cultural producers across the hemisphere make important contributions to knowledge and cultural production. Liberation for the practitioners of sexual dissidence does not mean access to gay marriage, a fundamentally bourgeois institution. Nor does it mean increasing LGBTQ representation in governmental and academic institutions, although practitioners will collaborate with institutions as a survival tactic. Fostering liberation involves inviting people to think through questions such as “What do you permit yourself to desire?”—as does a current public pamphlet campaign by the Argentine group Frente Docente Disidente [The Dissident Teacher Front], which describes themselves in their Instagram bio as “We are teachers. We are sexual dissidence. We exist and resist in the educational spaces we inhabit.” The politics of sexual dissidence, rooted in radical and/or anarchist trans-feminist politics, fall outside the scope of, and
are critical of, the rights-based frameworks of mainstream LGBT organizing and culture.⁷

Collapsing all the nuances and differences in different bodies of thought for the purpose of approaching a global understanding of sexual ideologies, it is helpful to compare mainstream LGBT and sexual dissident thought transnationally. In this schema, I classify as LGBT the thought and activism that assumes a self-determined subject, within a liberal worldview, and sets its political horizon on the accumulation of rights within existing legal frameworks. Sexual dissidence, on the other hand, engages feminist/queer/trans conceptions of the subject and power, making performative and discursive interventions in the status quo as part of a project of imagining and prefiguring liberation from intersecting oppressions. Unlike LGBT thought and activism, sexually dissident work does not assume that individuals self-determine in the absence of structural oppressions and biopolitical management, or that policies straightforwardly produce justice. I have learned a great deal from this work about what it means to act from a standpoint of impurity, to sit with critiques that expose the inescapability of power and surveillance and yet keep creating—and when feasible, to collaborate with the state, the university, the non-profit industrial complex when it might reduce harm in the present.

⁷ See Belmonte 2020 for standard examples of this mainstream framework.
Yet, sexual dissidence contributions to knowledge and politics are largely invisible, not only because they are comparatively small in number, but also because they occur in marginalized places and leave ephemeral, or at least vulnerable, traces online that are not evenly accessible because of language barriers and limited circulation. Despite evincing distinct sociocultural contexts across both North and South America, the digital culture produced by these activists also reveals remarkable ideological convergences.

Some of the ideologically convergent yet digitally isolated cultural productions inspiring this project include: images of paper zines circulated in small lesbian feminist communities in Brazil posted on online queer magazines (medium.com); lengthy Facebook posts that make critical interventions worthy of academic publication and yet have been made “unarchiveable by design” (Ben-David 2020); digital art focused on queer undocumented immigrants in the US (Tumblr); a database documentary addressing contemporary queer culture created by a Colombian-American artist whose work has been exhibited at the Tate and Guggenheim; YouTube videos of performances intended to disrupt Gay Pride in Chile by calling attention to respectability politics; a WordPress site with the poststructuralist-infused musings of two self-described “trans fags” from Argentina that was last updated six years ago; and a “Fragmented Library” website that archives Creative Commons licensed feminist and queer texts written in or translated into Spanish.
My project aims to analyze, archive, and enable the powerful ways that contemporary Latinx intersectional queer activists, located in sites as disparate as Oakland (U.S.) and Santiago (Chile), use blogs, websites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other globally popular media platforms to disseminate their activist-oriented cultural productions and connect with other activists. Envisioning and theorizing liberation from intersecting oppressions, Latinx activists across our hemisphere make important contributions to queer and transgender culture that are unevenly visible. They occur in ephemeral digital spaces, in multiple languages, and are largely incoherent from the standpoint of the most massively circulated and received ideas about gender, race, and sexuality. Taken together, the texts and images of Latinx sexual dissidence in the Americas respond to (and reveal) globalized norms governing bodies and desires—such as the moral and aesthetic superiority of whiteness, thinness, homonormativity, respectability, and wealth. My project emerges from my familiarity with the theories and practices of sexual dissidence in the hemisphere, which in turn are, often unevenly, in dialogue with afro-feminist, third world feminist, trans-feminist, body liberationist, and anti-racist thought from around the world. In order to understand the postcolonial dimensions of racialized regimes of sex and gender in the contemporary Americas, I have found it necessary to understand intersectional queer Latinx activism and thought production in a hemispheric key. The transnational voices of intersectional Latinx activists are cumulatively visible only to those of us with
sociolinguistic access to and familiarity with the shifting, vulnerable online archives generated by these activist cultural producers, and my project’s central goal is to use the affordances of the digital to widen access to these non-archives, primarily for the producers of the theories, art, and activism of sexual dissidence in the hemisphere.

**Considering the University: The Hemispheric Institute and Our Objects of Study**

My project, including both this thesis and the digital resource, participates in the transdisciplinary field of hemispheric gender and sexuality studies in the US academy, and it attempts to do so critically, without assuming any decoloniality or even reciprocity inherent in the relationship between researcher and object of study. Instead, my project attempts to participate critically and self-reflexively in this academic field by considering the norms and institutionalizing processes through which fields of scholarship arise—considering them from an impure and implicated standpoint, to be sure.\(^8\) In the case of hemispheric gender and sexuality studies, the 1998 founding of The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics by Diana Taylor has played a key role in the growth of the field, and it has both empowered and disciplined the objects of study. As Taylor tells it, The Hemispheric Institute began, supported by US funding, as an attempt to rectify the elusiveness of the object of study for scholars working on Latin

\(^8\) Alexis Shotwell’s *Against Purity* makes a compelling case for “the usefulness of thinking about complicity and compromise as a starting point for action” (Shotwell 2016, 5).
American performance, supported by funding from various US organizations (Ford, Rockefeller, Mellon).

The materials were not published. They were not archived. And even if they had been, the scholars, artists, and students who might find them interesting would not have had access to them. Libraries in Latin America are woefully understocked; books rarely circulate from one country to another; language barriers complicate access; few people have money for professional travel to specialized archives and libraries, even if these had been collecting performance materials. When we started, online archives and libraries were still a dream. So what would constitute our object of analysis? (Taylor 2010, 26)

Thanks to the globally systemic inequalities in the circulation of knowledge and culture engendered by our transnational political economy, the general situation Taylor describes in 1998 is not much changed in terms of the circulation of materials within Latin America and throughout the hemisphere, which continue to be severely limited. Still, the problem Taylor frames in the quote above is primarily a performance scholar’s problem: access to the “object of analysis.” In other words, artists and activists have always had access to their own and local performances, as well as to extra-academic spaces in which to theorize them. Taylor’s framing of the problem also collapses to some extent the differences among performance scholars located in different institutions and nations, and their access to materials, which makes sense given that the issue Taylor addresses is inseparable from the generalized marginality, in 1998, of performance studies in the academy. Over two decades later, performance research is a much more established academic field, more so in the North than in the South, as is to be expected, thanks in no small part to the institutionalization and work of the Hemispheric Institute.
Thinking about Taylor’s description of the performance scholar’s problem in 1998, which is still some scholars’ problem, I have two contemporary considerations that shape the impetus of my own project here. First, I am preoccupied with how the problem of access to the object of analysis is determined by the scholar’s institutional and geopolitical conditions. Over two decades after Taylor made the observations above, scholars located in the global North, like myself, still enjoy significantly greater access to resources that scholars in the global South can rarely count on. But, rather than reinforce oversimplified formulations of the “rich” North versus the “impoverished” South, I find it important to look inward at the socioeconomic conditions of Northern scholars within the United States, where, for example, the new faculty majority of contingent faculty (now more than 70% of all faculty) have woefully insufficient access to the time and resources needed for researching any object of study, including less marginal ones (Facts about Adjuncts). Inequality and impurity are always already the conditions of our neoliberal institutions in the global North, and remembering this supports a hemispheric perspective that avoids oversimplifying our positionalities and facilitates broader, transnational solidarities.

In the past decades of the neoliberal university, the marked increase in contingent faculty, alongside the increase in the volume and monetization of scholarly publication, suggests great success in doing more, faster, yet with less resources. In their rearticulation of the anti-neoliberal, feminist-collective authored concept of “slow
scholarship,” Eli Meyerhoff and Elsa Noterman insist that the argument for slow scholarship must critique not just the neoliberal university but its own standpoint in order to accomplish its decolonial aims; otherwise, it remains bound to the settler colonialist epistemologies it seeks to disrupt—after all “critiques of neoliberal tendencies in higher education can imply nostalgia for a liberal-democratic ideal of the university” that, for example, depoliticizes the inequalities and hierarchies that exist between tenure-class and contingent-class faculty (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2019, 227). They point out the importance of “tracing, for example, how the (slow) scholarship of (tenured) faculty is already dependent on the (sped-up) time and labor of graduate students, lecturers and campus service workers—as well as the temporalities of those outside the university, such as prisoners and domestic workers” who make the office furniture that several state universities purchase and clean the houses of tenure-class faculty (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2019, 221). Considering the vast inequalities, not only material but also temporal, between scholars and practitioners of sexual dissidence across the Americas, my project intends to leverage my own access to resources in order to, albeit humbly, redirect the extractive flows of knowledge and resources, as described further below.
**Methods and Orientations from the Undercommons**

la paperson, also known as K. Wayne Yang, provides a powerful framework for uncovering the decolonizing ghost in the colonizing machine of the university, offering the concept of the “scyborg” as a decolonizing agent:

Regardless of its colonial structure, because school is an assemblage of machines and not a monolithic institution, its machinery is always being subverted toward decolonizing purposes. The bits of machinery that make up a decolonizing university are driven by decolonial desires, with decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery and part machine themselves. These subversive beings wreck, scavenge, retool, and reassemble the colonizing university into decolonizing contraptions. They are scyborgs with a decolonizing desire. You might choose to be one of them.

(la paperson 2017, xiii)

La paperson acknowledges that the decolonial is always already amid the colonial and the standpoint of an “impossible” position as a “colonialist by-product” in the university (2017 xvi; xxii). Note that la paperson is the pen name of K. Wayne Yang, who coauthored with Eve Tuck the important essay “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” which notes that the prevalence of metaphorizing decolonization in academic spaces dangerously supports the “settler desire to be made innocent,” relieving guilt while failing to make any structural or material changes (2012, 9-10). The decolonizing desires la paperson explores exist under the university machine’s paradoxical conditions of both impossibility and potential. For example, la paperson refuses to offer any “utopic description for a strategic decolonizing machine (for utopias go to the second world)”
Instead he defines “theorizing contingently” as acknowledging that, as university professors, our work is legitimized by and “contingent on the apparatus of legitimated colonial knowledge productions that ought to be abolished” and to theorize contingently within this framework is not to formulate an argument about what is ultimately possible in abolition but rather to “make space” for indigenous, Black, queer, and I would add, transfeminist, Latinx, sexual dissident, and all forms of minoritized knowledges (la paperson 2017, xxiii). Drawing from and deviating from Donna Haraway’s formulation of the cyborg, la paperson formulates the “scyborg” whose agency lies in their ability to reorganize the institutional machinery of the university, a being in assemblage, whose agential capacity exists beyond their individual being, “into the system’s capacity,” hence the “s” la paperson places in front of “cyborg” to signal that the scyborg is entangled in the system (2017, 60-61).

Agreeing with la paperson’s diagnosis of the complex ways that a third world university appears contemporaneously within first world universities through scyborg assemblages, I have intended my project to both operate within the limits and impossibilities of the first-world university I inhabit and also “appropriat[e] university resources to synthesize a transformative, radical project” (44). In many ways, the Hemispheric Institute’s mass-scale institutional project has informed and guided my

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* See the entire chapter for a helpful explanation of la paperson’s conceptualization of first, second, and third world universities as well as their imbrications and intersections (2017, 33-53).
much smaller and humbler institutional project, and I have discovered a direction for
my own decolonial desires in the frictions generated between the Institute and sexual
dissidents on its stages. In its most common usage, “extractivism” refers to transnational
corporations’ extraction of natural resources from the global South with the cooperation
of local governments, as in Macarena Gómez Barris’ analysis of the ways that even the
progressive governments of the Latin American “Pink Tide” turned against the
undercurrents of “eco-feminist, transgender, anarchist, artist, youth, and Indigenous
activists” that had enabled their rise to power, participating in the long Latin American
tradition of complicity with the globalized politics of resource extraction (2018, xi). la
paperson offers a slightly different, more human-centered framing of “the technology-
assisted ways that Global South people’s vital energies are sapped and redistributed to
support the lives of the Global North” that is also a form of extractivism (2017, 61). The
2016 Fuerza Travesti performance for the Hemispheric Institute audience, however,
staged a response to a specifically academic extractivism, one that criticized the ways
that the academic institution did not adequately compensate performers as well as the
ways that the institution came to extract performances from Chilean bodies without
fully comprehending their local cultures, indigenous histories, or racialization processes.

The tension between my decolonizing desires and the extractivist conditions of
the academy I inhabit is an impetus for this project, which asks: Grounded in virtual and
IRL community-based participatory research methods, how can I best support the
creators of Latinx sexual dissidence by using the technologies and funding I have access to in order to build a multilingual, semi-public digital resource that supports the archiving, production, **translation**, and intra-community circulation of Latinx sexual dissident culture, thought, and activism?

Since 2006, I have spent seven summers conducting field research on sexual dissidence in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and the US—involving not only participant observation, but also the building of friendships that exceed the most common scholarly frameworks. These friendships have opened up not only new solidarities and affective bonds, but also new knowledges—as the best friendships do.

As I learned from these relationships and encounters, I intentionally sought to acknowledge my positionality as a US-based scholar—first as a funded PhD student (until 2009), then an Assistant Professor (2010-2017), and thereafter as a tenured Associate Professor. I have leveraged my institutional resources to support my collaborators and have discussed with them strategies for sharing knowledges without extracting them, and instead making space for multi-directional knowledge sharing. Over this period, I have conducted formal and semi-formal interviews and/or observed the public performances, protests, and presentations of more than 100 practitioners of sexual dissidence. These experiences led me to design the current project, for which I received a Mellon New Directions fellowship. In the summer of 2019, thanks to the Mellon grant, I conducted community-based participatory research with 21 collaborators
in Argentina, Chile, and Brazil in order to explore goals and strategies to support the digital dissemination and access to their work, as well as their own access to both the academic and community-based knowledges that are often blocked by paywalls and lack of translation.

**Sexual Dissidence as an Undisciplined Object-Subject of Analysis**

In addition to the work of acknowledging and making visible the inequalities that make academic work possible, another contemporary consideration that drives this project is the need to reframe the “object of analysis” of sexual dissidence in its digital manifestations. While the contemporary performance scholar’s primary challenge may still revolve around issues of access, the “object of analysis” is increasingly difficult to contain. Sexual dissidence produces and is reproduced by an enormous amount of digital media, in the prolific and often unmanageable iterations of online archives, including social media, that have emerged since the late 1990s. The online archives and libraries that Taylor notes were “still a dream” in the 1990s have turned into digital realities vaster in potential and scope than we imagined two decades ago.

The institutionalized Hemispheric Institute has fostered networks that both counter limitations in scholar-object relations by providing flourishing cross-cultural collaborations supported by university and US non-profit resources, and also, sometimes, reinforce the same extractivist hierarchies of knowledge that structure the hemisphere. This is what Fuerza Travesti’s performance of “Tan Dichosa y Tan Feliz”
contested from the Institute’s own stage. Today, the Hemi, as it is known by most participants, is housed in NYU but has over sixty member universities and cultural centers throughout the hemisphere—in Latin America, Canada, and the US. It hosts online archives and video libraries of performance, residencies, and large bi-annual conferences that attract performers, activists, and scholars from throughout the region.

Hemi’s Encuentros have often, if not always, been sites of not only encounter, but also friction, mistranslation, misrecognition, and contestation directed not only at external political formations but also inward. In an essay entitled “We Have Always Been Queer,” Taylor addresses a controversy that erupted at the 2014 Encuentro when Anglo trans people were hurt by lesbian Mexican performer Jesusa Rodriguez’s feminist parody play featuring an eighteenth-century intersex Central American character. Although Taylor frames the conflict engendered in 2014 as one of mistranslation and cultural differences among queers in the hemisphere, Fuerza Travesti’s performance in 2016 points to the extraction of labor and the exclusions that result when the Institute attends, as it has been designed to, to the restrictions and rules of the spaces they rent for their Encuentros around the world, and the US-dependent funding models they use. In an essay that references Fuerza Travesti’s 2016 performance, Jorge Díaz, a key theorist and practitioner of sexual dissidence, decries the fundamental barrier imposed by the assumption that theorizing emerges exclusively from the academy when in fact sexual dissidence exceeds the structures of institutions (Díaz 2018). My digital project intends
neither to contain nor extract the work of sexual dissidence for northern audiences, but rather to accompany it as an accomplice. Nevertheless, I also depart from the premise that there is an extractivism inherent in the university, one that a scyborg decolonizing desire can interrupt, but not eliminate in any utopian sense. I also acknowledge the many vital ways that the Hemispheric Institute has both extracted and supported the work of sexual dissidence.

Although the Hemispheric Institute did not center sexuality either in its founding documents or in its contemporary mission statement, its focus on the feminist and “anti-colonial” politics of resistance have made it a key site for engagement with the performance and activism of sexual dissidence (Mission Statement). Every Encuentro, the large-scale international gathering hosted about every two years by the Hemi, has featured key ideas and performances related to sexual dissidence, as well as more mainstream engagements with LGBTQ politics—hence the popular “Hemisexual” t-shirt that some long-time attendees sport. The very first Encuentro was held in 2000 in Rio de Janeiro, and its schedule is helpfully archived in the Hemispheric website, in accordance with the deep archival impulse that propelled its founding. This 2000 conference featured panels and seminars on “Gender, Sexuality, and Performance,” “Homoeroticism and performance,” and “Performance and Queer Theory.”

I attended my first Encuentro in Bogotá in 2009. This was where I first encountered the performance of Tango Queer in Ecuador and the fascination of Latin
American artists/activists/artistivists with queer theory, or teoría cuir, which was understood as locally valuable despite emanating from the North and being Anglo-centric. Queer theories from the Anglo North are both imperialist and useful, and thinkers who produce, from sites across Latin America, what could be called “queer theory” in translation were engaged with the queer theory that was available to them. The archive of hegemonic, Anglo-European queer theory available to Latin Americans has always been constrained by the “under-stocked” libraries that Taylor describes, as well as the costs and barriers around translation. Archives of queer theory, however, have been partially liberated by their digitized circulation, circulations which have intensified with the growth of data transferred through the internet.

Marlene Wayar, Argentine travesti activist and author of *Travesti: Una teoría lo suficiente buena* [*Travesti: A Good Enough Theory*] (2018), gives a compelling account of the multiple directions of theory in the hemisphere, as well as of its economic constraints and digitized possibilities in an essay “El sur también deshace” [“The South Also Undoes”]—a reference to Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004). The essay also describes the international Brazilian gathering of academics, activists and artists in 2015.

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10 “Travestí” describes a social identity, with local manifestations across Latin America, rich with collective solidarities, abundant self-theorizing, and cultural expressions. Travestí or travas are people assigned a male gender at birth who live as femme women and/or as travestí, are popularly associated with sex work and often occupy public spaces as sex workers in ways that are generally more publicly visible in Latin American metropolises compared to US and Canadian ones. Some travestí embrace a “trans” identification, which occurs alongside a broader range of class associations; others prefer an exclusively travesti identification and its working class association.
by the same name ("Undoing Gender"), which Butler attended in addition to speaking in Buenos Aires and other key sites of sexual dissidence. On the one hand, Wayar tells Butler that she considers the world-famous gender theorist a “liberator” like “San Martín, Bolívar, Belgrano y Moreno” for those in trans/queer/anti-racist social movements, and that “technology and networks” have made her work accessible to the young people who devour her work (Wayar 2015). On the other hand, Wayar notes the excitement of meeting a Brazilian trans thinker, Jaqueline Gomes de Jesús, and realizing that, “We are thinking in parallel, despite not knowing one another” or knowing each other’s work until this conference brought them together. It is typical that sexual dissidence thinkers in Latin America have greater access to the work of globally famous Anglo-European theorists like Butler than to the work of fellow sexual dissidence thinkers who reside hundreds of miles closer, but across geopolitical borders. Wayar also notes the force of recognition of a full room of people in Brazil who know the work of Susy Shock, Wayar’s fellow Argentine travesti public thinker, author, and cultural producer. “¿YouTube?” she muses is the source of this transnational engagement of travesti culture. In Wayar’s telling, face-to-face encounters with Brazilians like Gomes de Jesús, with whom she has been thinking in parallel despite geopolitical barriers to collaborative thinking, and Butler, whom she reports pays for her own travel to Latin America instead of accepting university and community organization’s money, are transformative. But, although Wayar does not specify how she came to read Butler
before meeting her, it is also the digital circulation of Butler’s texts (and other media, such as videos of her talks, and edited interviews) that have the broadest liberating effect on her readers across the world, and it is also digital circulation of her videos, images, and texts that made possible the sizeable Brazilian audiences that came to hear Shock and Wayar speak about trans and travesti politics and thought in the region. This is important to my digital project because it seeks to facilitate the digital circulation of both the minoritized texts of sexual dissidence as well as the already canonized texts of queer theory.

In a 1987 essay on “The Race for Theory” that presaged the enduring reign of “theory” as “a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions—worse, whether we are heard at all,” Black feminist Barbara Christian laments the “takeover” of literary studies by theories rooted in the needs and desires of white, continental philosophers (1987, 51-52). In this essay, Christian plays with the word “race,” using it to describe both the mad dash toward a specific form of theory reshaping the academic institutions in which she works, and her own folk as always having been “a race for theory” (Christian 1987, 52). People of color, third world people, and “radical critics” she maintains, have always theorized, but often in narrative and other creative forms that are not recognized within the university as theory (Christian 1987, 52-3).
Christian’s points about theory’s connection to circuits of value within the university and the multiple undervalued (in the university) ways that others theorize outside of the university reminds me of the alternative values and valences of theories of sexual dissidence. Exemplary of sexual dissident thought, the theories of valeria Flores, Jorge Díaz, Caleb Luna, and Xandra Ibarra take lyrical, performative, and experimental forms; they are disseminated in a variety of online forms, including blogs, feminist web-magazines, their own websites, and social media. They are also published in academic journals (Díaz 2018; Flores and María Laura Gutiérrez 2017), art magazines (Luna “The Natural History” 2019), and museum platforms (Ibarra 2018). On the one hand, the work of Díaz and Flores—and I could add examples of sexual dissident thought from nearly every other nation of Latin America—exemplifies the ways that the walls around the Latin American university are much more permeable on the whole in comparison to US institutions; there are also vibrant public intellectual traditions across Latin America that dwarf the scope of similar traditions in the US. On the other hand, Caleb Luna’s work demonstrates the ways that US-based Latinx sexual dissidence thought is also multi-modal and public-facing—and intertwined with liberationist, abolitionist thought and community organizing—at the same time that it also crosses the lines of the academy particularly concentrated in performance studies and the arts more broadly (Luna is a PhD candidate in performance studies; Ibarra is and artist pursuing an MFA because she enjoys teaching and needs the credential to advance).
Chapter 3: DisidenciaSexual.com

Working through Academic Extractivism and Amplifying the Digital Circulation of Sexual Dissidence

The analytical essay portion of my project has argued that the convergences among the thinkers and activists of sexual dissidence reveal not only local sociocultural dynamics, but also the globalization of certain normativities of bodies and desires across the hemisphere—normativities both contested and reproduced within scholarly work and the structures of academia. On the one hand, these transnational convergences and divergences are cumulatively visible only to those of us with sociolinguistic access to—and some familiarity with—the vulnerable, imperfect online archives generated by these activist cultural producers. On the other hand, the work of Latinx sexual dissidence is especially vulnerable to the extractivist tendencies of scholarship produced by those of us operating within North American university systems—both because of the foundational inequality in knowledge hierarchies and because of the widespread academic valorization of dissidence that is too often disconnected from the communities studied. Rather than attempt, futilely, to overcome the structural extractivism of the North American academy within my project, or to stake a claim to my own exemption from it, I seek to work through it in order to respond to the stated needs of the cultural producers with whom I have collaborated and enable the further dissemination of their rich knowledges to their existing and potential accomplices, rather than for any imagined general audience. Thus, the digital resource will only succeed if it serves not
just other researchers and trans/queer publics, but also the activists and cultural producers themselves.

In the past decade, social media has enabled new networks of thought and activism in the Americas. These new networks have, in small but impactful ways, thwarted the postcolonial legacies of Spanish-language publishing in South America. The legacy of the colonial “lettered city” is such that, while Argentina has the largest number of bookstores per capita in the world, it is wildly difficult, from within Argentina, to purchase specific books by Chilean authors, published by presses headquartered in Spain, even when the author herself resides a few miles across the Chilean-Argentine border (Ángel Rama 1996). Books published and distributed by large, European-based Spanish-language presses are prohibitively expensive in local currency, and the many small booksellers cannot keep much stock. Because of logistics and business restrictions, Amazon.com did not operate in Latin American markets until their 2019 partial expansion into Brazil. Partly because of this situation, for decades, domestic low-budget micro presses have been growing across Latin America, and while their print publications are available in small runs within their metropolises, they are also largely inaccessible across transnational lines. Piracy has long been the child of necessity in Latin America and has evolved hand in hand with technological developments.

Latin American universities have photocopy centers that produce and bind photocopies with nary a thought to copyright or fair use guidelines. On the street
corners of the southern cone metropolises in particular, sellers display pirated, bound books as often as they do DVDs. Pedro Lemebel, the Latin American who attained the most international success for sexually dissident writing and performance, has also been called one of the most pirated writers in Latin America, a status he celebrated while fondly recalling his own early career in book piracy (Morales Allende 2002, 47). Over a decade before Lemebel passed away in 2015, his writing was widely shared not just on the city streets, but also on blogs, Facebook, and PDF sharing sites like Scribd.com. At the same time, a younger generation of sexual dissidents were publishing their original theoretical and activist work on their own social media, as well as with micro presses in print, using Creative Commons licenses, and simultaneously publishing PDFs on Biblioteca Fragmentada, a site that archives and publishes feminist and queer theory, produced both within and without the academy, either under a Creative Commons license or contributed directly by their author.

The rapidly expanding online communication networks of the past decade has enabled new connections between the cultural producers of sexual dissident thought—a contemporary body of thought that has legacies in the work of thinkers from the 1970s

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11 “It’s not part of my ethical system to attack or denounce the sellers of pirated texts, I also used to work doing that. I used to hit the curb, rushing away from the cops...I get excited seeing my texts on the street, to get in a taxi and have the driver show me a pirated version of the book. This allows my books to have other, more unexpected itineraries. There are lots of people who are afraid to go into a bookstore. In fact, I have never bought a book in a bookstore, at most, I’ve stolen one. In a book fair, yes...I would like to do a Pirate Anthology of Pedro Lemebel and include the best texts from my books and make a pirate edition directly, made to be pirated” (Lemebel, quoted in Morales Allende 2002, 47). [My translation]
and 80s from around the globe but has emerged in tandem with the communication technologies that have increasingly poked holes, however small, in the barriers around trans/queer knowledge production and dissemination. So, for example, around 2011 Jorge Díaz in Chile encounters online, or in printouts of online texts (he cannot remember exactly), the work of valeria flores from the Argentine Patagonia, invites her to Chile, while affiliated with the university, and she brings with her a few precious copies of her self-published and micro press work to share with him. In the Argentine Patagonia, there are many Chileans, Jorge explains, and they all read many of the same Chilean feminists, which gave them a common ground for their discourse and dissidence. A couple of years later, a small conference is organized by feminist collectives loosely affiliated with the Chilean university, and trans poet/singer/activist Susy Shock is able to make the trip to Chile from Buenos Aires. These encounters have both drawn on the mutual recognition of ideological convergences and generated new thought in the sorts of exchanges my project seeks to support, in expanded ways, leveraging the U.S.-based resources available to me.

Furthermore, my community-based participatory fieldwork revealed the specific ways that the cultural producers of sexual dissidence desire increased access to both

12 It is important to note, for those of us based at well-resourced US universities, that such trips are many times harder to organize and pay for in the context of Latin American higher education and feminist collectives, both with shoestring budgets, if that, and little to no honoraria available, and certainly nothing in the realm of what the best-resourced US universities pay.
academic and extra-academic thought and cultural production. Their insights have been critical to the framing and development of the project, as have their desires: increased access to queer/feminist/trans theory and cultural critique in translation and past research paywalls. In some cases, they desired enough exposure to Northern researchers to gain access to resources (such as funded travel to the US and honoraria).

On the one hand, my project is motivated by my own curiosity about the understudied convergences among transnational Latinx cultural producers using art, writing, and protest to envision and effect social change. For example, working in different languages, media and racialized contexts, both Julio Salgado (Oakland, U.S.) and Claudia Rodriguez (Santiago, Chile) uncover the abjection of queer and trans bodies in their respective local and national cultures; yet their work also reveals transnational convergences in the dominance of whiteness, thinness, and able-bodiedness. On the other hand, my project is motivated by specific gaps that intersectional queer activists and cultural workers have brought to my attention. Most fundamentally, activists separated by language and place have limited access to, and knowledge of, each other’s work, even as they respond to similar and related oppressions. These limitations in access are structured not only by the lack of translation, but also by the legacy of postcolonial inequalities in the hemisphere, particularly in the publishing industry.

For example, after reading Constanza Alvarez Castillo’s self-published book *La cerda punk: ensayos desde un feminismo gordo, lésbico, antikapitalista y antiespecista*, which
could be translated as *Punk Pig: Essays on Fat, Lesbian, Anti-Kapitalist, and Anti-Speciesist Feminism*, I envisioned the many fruitful ways that Alvarez Castillo’s work could be engaged by U.S. scholars like Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (2009), Amy Erdman Farrell (2011), and Jason Whitesel (2014), who have participated in the creation of Fat Studies as an academic field. At the same time, I envisioned the powerful ways Alvarez Castillo’s work could also be engaged by non-academic cultural critics who have contributed key interventions and organizing principles to the fat liberation movement in the Anglophone world, such as Virgie Tovar and Sonya Renee Taylor, as well as those academics who produce vital extra-academic writing, such as Caleb Luna—a sexually dissident Latinx thought producer, performer, and PhD student who does not research or write in Spanish (Taylor 2018).

Interestingly, short essays by both Cooper and Luna available online have been translated into Spanish and circulated in zines, and later published in a collection of Argentine trans/queer fat dissidence, *Cuerpos sin patrones*, published under a Creative Commons License and only available for purchase through the authors and their friends, in a limited number of bookstores, and in one LGBTQ cultural center (Contrera and Cuello 2016). When I interviewed them, Caleb Luna was unaware of this

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13 Argentina has the highest number of bookstores per capita, in the world, including one of the world’s few remaining bookstores with a focus on women and feminism. Yet each one has idiosyncratic stock, and searching for a specific title usually requires trips to several shops spread out across the metropolitan areas (Goñi 2015).
translation and edited collection, or of the other translations of their online pieces, and was also eager to have access to them. As a result, Luna ended up publishing some of the Spanish translations on The Body Is Not an Apology blog that they collaborate on (Luna and Maroto 2019). Álvarez Castillo’s book is self-published under a Creative Commons license and encourages its own “free circulation, distribution, copy, hacking, piracy” in any media (2014). In fact, students in my Guerilla Translation course produced a translation of the introduction to the book, and I am collaborating with Álvarez Castillo to finish the translation myself—possibly with the collaboration of another student in the future. Luna and others look forward to reading it. However, the incomplete status of the English translation of her book is not the only barrier to hemispheric dialogue with Álvarez Castillo’s ideas. When we first met, she expressed a keen desire to access English-language sources that she had never heard of and could not read, but whose ideas captivated her (I presented them to her in Spanish). While disidenciasexual.com is multilingual, I am still working on the linguistic barriers around the archive, which I discuss further below.

The digital resource I have designed intends to intervene in, and not merely reproduce, the widespread knowledge hierarchies of North and South. Like Alexis Shotwell, I do not imagine that I can avoid complicity and instead “start from an assumption that everyone is implicated in situations we (at least in some way) repudiate” (Shotwell 2016, 5). With its trilingualism and multi-directional translation,
disidenciasexual.com aims to interrupt the longstanding extractivist dynamic in the hemisphere whereby knowledge production is considered to happen in the North, while the South produces the raw cultural material that becomes an academic object of study, with little to no reciprocal dialogue between the two. As an academic writing in English in the U.S., I could get away with writing about non-normative sexualities in a universalizing vein without citing any Latin American cultural critic—including those who have been consecrated by institutions of knowledge both in Latin America and abroad, like Néstor Perlongher, Carlos Figari, and Pedro Lemebel—not to mention those who have a much more limited circulation, like Valeria Flores. Similarly, I can write about gender in English, from the US, without citing Mauro Cabral or Nelly Richard or Josefina Fernandez. The bar is relatively low for US-based Latin Americanists to feel authorized to write about gender and sexuality with Latin American primary sources and almost exclusively Anglo-European secondary and theoretical sources. The same cannot be said of Latin American academics, who do not feel authorized to write about non-normative sexualities and genders without citing theorists consecrated by the Anglo-European academy and especially popular in Latin America, including Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Michel Foucault, and Leo Bersani. Nevertheless, the uneven, ephemeral, extra-academic ways that contemporary, intersectional sexual dissidents circulate their knowledge and cultural interventions has the benefit of complicating this dynamic to some extent, even as they are not exempt from it.
As a guiding principle, the digital resource I have designed intentionally avoids collecting material only for Northern consumption by emphasizing and encouraging flows of knowledge and cultural production in multiple directions that converge back on the communities of origin and their existing and potential queer/trans accomplices. Of course, I have myself planned and designed the multimodal site, with all the control that implies, and I control the funding used to pay the web developer and the honoraria that has and will be paid to collaborators for their feedback. The design and implementation process has of course not been decentralized or non-hierarchical. Below I describe some of the scyborg-inflected principles I used to manage the process.

**The Original Goals, Process, and Team for DisidenciaSexual.com**

I began with a version of the following overarching goals, tweaking them considerably at the end of Fall 2019 and throughout Spring 2020:

- Center and facilitate user discovery of, access to, and sharing of sexual dissidence media
- Function semi-publicly so as to frustrate the access of potential visitors who might misuse the content
- Function fully for mobile-first users as well as users without stable high speed internet access
- Feature a simple and instantly usable interface with little to no learning curve
- Be accessible to monolingual speakers of English, Spanish, and Portuguese
- Enable user-generated uploads of URLs to the MySQL database as well as PDFs, jpegs, and other files to the archive
- Archive ephemeral digital media, such as Facebook and Twitter posts, from specific linked accounts
- Be linked to social media promotion of its content, such as Instagram

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• Allow for user-generated categorization of submitted media; Websites in the MySQL database and PDFs/screencaps in the main archive will be attached to open-ended user-generated tags, as well as tags for source and place of origin
• Allow archive searches via tags

I knew when I proposed this project that I would not be able to acquire the web development skills necessary to bring into being the multi-modal site I was envisioning. Fortunately, I had the funding to assemble a team that would be able to carry it out, and as somebody who enjoys collaborative work, I looked forward to the new direction of leading a digital humanities project with one or two other collaborators. As a small liberal arts college professor, I am accustomed to supervising and collaborating with undergraduates on a variety of projects, and I hired two students for this purpose in late Spring and early Summer 2020. The first has strong programming and web development skills and the second was an underclassman whose skills were less developed, but I envisioned she would learn from watching and supporting the first student. The first student was soon graduating and starting a full-time job in IT but believed she would still be able to work on my project part-time; alas, this turned out to not be possible, but she is thriving in her new job. I eventually decided to assign the second student to another project so that her employment would be secured, and she is perfectly capable
of completing this project, though her progress has been delayed, as so many things have, by COVID-19.\textsuperscript{14}

I knew of some Latin American web developers through my collaborators, and I reached out to them. This ended up being the best outcome for the project, although it was not originally planned, and started later than I would have liked. I hired Juno Nedel, a Brazilian web developer who is also a journalist and researcher affiliated with the NeTrans research group focused on \textit{travestilidades}, transgender, and transsexuality. In retrospect, I realized that because Juno understands the ideologies and aesthetics of Latinx sexual dissidence, his ability to bring to life my wireframes has been greater than my students’ would have been—even though I can read Portuguese but not speak or write it. We are both able to communicate multilingually, and with heavy use of Google Translate, but it turns out that sexual dissidence is the most powerful language we have in common. As is part of my established practice when working with collaborators abroad, I do not base compensation on whatever the going rate is in a Latin American country, but rather on the funds I have available. On the one hand, I struggle, as a person with ADHD, with the spreadsheets and details required for successful

\textsuperscript{14} This second project emerging from my time at CMAC is an expanded and more transnational iteration of the \textit{Timeline JS} I made as part of my proseminar coursework, a tool for visualizing the histories of gender and sexuality. Once complete, it will be hosted at seegender.com and will be incorporated in the Gender & Sexuality Studies curriculum at Davidson and other institutions, whose WGS chairs have expressed significant interest in using it.
budgeting; on the other hand, I make sure that just compensation is my guiding principle.

As I have elaborated above, the ethical dimensions of the project have been a dominant concern; I also learned from my MA coursework, especially Hannah Jacob’s presentations, of the importance of establishing evaluative questions for digital humanities projects. I found an important guide for both of these goals in the work of Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. Citing Chela Sandoval, Wendy Chun rejects views of cyberspace as limitless utopian spaces by pointing out their double valence and interrogates the concept of the user as empowered—all of which jives with the impure standpoint I have been working through. Neither entirely powerless nor delusionally empowered, the user is vulnerable. The communication that happens in cyberspace is driven by this vulnerability; furthermore, considering this vulnerability is critical for understanding the democratic potential of cyberspace (75-6). To imagine and produce different futures, Chun maintains that we must engage the four layers of networked media (hardware, software, interface, and extramedial representation) together, while avoiding any “easy assertions of freedom at one level that cover over unfreedom at another,” and also explore the democratic potential of new communication technologies that emerge from our vulnerabilities (297).

**Evaluative Questions for the Project:**

- Does my project (both the thesis and the website) make any easy assertions of freedom at any of the four levels Chun identifies? Does it sufficiently account for
the ways that, as Chun asserts, “our very ‘preemptive actions’ often cause the very events they claim to be preventing” (i.e. for my purposes, does it persuasively describe the quandary rather than attempt to preempt it)?

- Does it make a full and clear accounting of the ways that some level of extractivism is inherent in any interaction between North and South housed in Northern academic institutions?
- Does it provide sufficient rationale for the project (for collaborators and future target audiences) in the face of the in-escapability of extractivism?
- Does it clearly prioritize objectives?
- Does it fulfill its objectives according to the stated priorities?
- Does it adequately explain contributors’ role in the generation and dissemination of the project?
- Does it provide a good enough rational for the value of increasing access in relation to increasing vulnerability?
- Does it pay sufficient attention to acknowledging the vulnerabilities involved?

**Description of DisidenciaSexual.com**

Inseparable from the analysis of the ideological convergences of digitally circulated or produced Latinx cultural production in the hemisphere, is my in-development digital online resource accessible to speakers of Spanish, English, and Portuguese. Right now, the Spanish URL (disidenciasexual.com) is working; for the final iteration, both memorable Portuguese and English URLs (dissidenciasexual.com and sexualdissidence.com) will redirect to disidenciasexual.com. This online resource aims, not only to enable the archiving of the marginalized knowledge produced by trans and queer Latinx activists and thinkers across the hemisphere, but also to facilitate access to sexual dissident thought in other countries and languages, as well as to scholarship on trans and queer topics. As I described, fieldwork in Summer 2019 helped me frame and develop plans for the digital resource, and I had planned to continue in Summer 2020.
Because of world-wide travel restrictions in the COVID-19 pandemic, I postponed travel to Summer 2021 and used teleconferencing for collaboration instead in Summer 2020.

For this multi-modal resource for the activism, critique, and cultural production of intersectional Latinx sexual dissidence in the Americas, the target audiences consist primarily of the producers, and, to a lesser extent, the scholars of sexual dissident thought and culture in South and North America. As I have explored in detail in sections above, the digital resource acknowledges and attempts to interrupt the longstanding dynamic in the hemisphere whereby knowledge production is considered to happen in the North, while the South produces the raw cultural material that becomes an academic object of study, with little to no reciprocal dialogue between the two. In contrast, the resource’s multilingualism and instructions for accessing scholarship in multiple languages signals that it is not curating material only for Northern consumption by emphasizing and encouraging flows of knowledge and cultural production in multiple directions.

To this end, I have developed my own principles of design justice, which dovetail with those articulated by Sasha Costanza-Chock, whose book was published after my project was already underway (2020). This has involved departing from the assumption that design tends to reproduce “the matrix of domination, through varied mechanisms, including the distributions of affordances and disaffordances that we encode into technologies” (Costanza-Chock 2020, 217). I grounded the planned design in
the needs expressed by the sexual dissidence communities the resource intends to serve first, favoring these over the needs of scholars. Also, I factored in the desire and need for a counter-archive that plays well with social media posts and a diverse array of media, rather than a traditional archive governed by university norms. Given that the most vulnerable intended users reported mostly accessing the internet from a smart phone, I made it a priority to plan first from a mobile perspective and to check the first iteration of the site from mobile. In the sections below, I describe in greater detail some aspects of the design process, which aimed to center sexual dissidence produced in Latin America.

**What Are You Looking For? : The Landing Page**

I have described the resource as “semi-public” because, while it should be easily accessible to cultural producers and scholars engaged with sexual dissidence, my collaborators emphasized reasons for partially limiting access to their work. They reported on some of the unwelcome aspects of sharing their work online, such as having their online photography stolen by people who posted it on porn sites and mockery threads, as well as experiencing online bullying via social media. Furthermore, beyond protecting producers from the harms posed by misappropriation and mockery, there is an additional rationale for limiting access to the larger digital resource for

15 Here is an initial mock up for a mobile-first iteration of the site I made in Adobe XD at the end of Spring 2019.
intersectional Latinx sexual dissidence. Namely, that the cultural production of sexual dissidence subcultures engages and disseminates minoritarian knowledges whose producers often desire that it only be accessed by those with existing understanding of and commitment to them. The larger resource is decidedly not meant to serve as an introduction to intersectional sexual dissidence for outsiders; rather it archives the aesthetic and political work of a specific set of disparate and overlapping communities, including scholarly ones, to serve the needs of those communities.

I proposed to my collaborators that the site would be first accessed via a memorable URL in three languages (the Spanish one is disidenciasexual.com), and that I wanted to propose ways to prevent immediate access to anybody who was not already knowledgeable about sexual dissidence when accessing the full site. Thinking alongside them, I proposed the idea of a short quiz to determine access to the site, which they found a worthwhile solution they were happy to participate in creating. I developed an initial three question quiz (down from my initial plan for five questions) that presents visitors to the main URL with multiple choice questions.

**Figure 3: Original Landing Page**
On the one hand, anybody active in sexual dissidence would discern the sexually dissident answers relatively easily; I tested and confirmed this with five collaborators. On the other hand, visitors seeking a 101-level introduction to sexual dissidence would be warned that the site was not for them. I anticipated it would provide a soft barrier to bad actors, even though it was not a formal security measure—answers leading to the site were accessible to anybody knowledgeable enough to glance at the code, and even without access to the code, the multiple-choice answers that led to the main site could be arrived at through a mix of luck and trial and error.

As I thought through options for structuring and revising the quiz, I centered feedback from collaborators that it should not feel too onerous or take too long. First, I reduced the total number of questions, which I had originally envisioned as a total of five, drawn from a larger bank, as in this initial user flow, below.
Then, as I considered different ways to structure the quiz questions, I reflected on how the mechanism and structure of any quiz is inseparable from both the disciplinary effects of testing in educational institutions as well as the psychological baiting of the popular Buzzfeed and Facebook quizzes designed to capture user attention and direct it to advertisements. I decided to pursue a different option for the soft barrier to the site, one that would not only be quicker and easier to navigate, but also not enact the disciplining it sought to avert. Following Chun’s insights about the inherence of user vulnerability, I thought about how the landing page might intend, not to prevent vulnerability, but attend to the ways that, as Chun asserts, “our very ‘preemptive actions’ often cause the very events they claim to be preventing” (302). I use the term “landing page” intentionally, aware of its marketing connotations. I envisioned a landing page that would ask users to reflect on what they sought in using the site, and also to enhance community and elicit communication. Images, I imagined, would communicate more quickly and evocatively than the words in quiz questions. Instead of asking multiple questions, the revised landing page asks one user-oriented question, what do you seek here?

As in the wireframe below and live on disidenciasexual.com, users who enter the memorable, main URL are not directed immediately to the home page, but are instead presented with two images, one a scene drawn from mainstream LGBT culture, the
other a scene of sexual dissidence. When visitors respond to the question, “What are you looking for?” by selecting the image of sexual dissidence, they are directed to the home page, which orients users to the Discover, Archive, and Access pages, as described further below. When users, or potential users, select the mainstream LGBT image (the Ricky Martin cover in the example below) instead of the sexually dissident one, they are presented with a modal window, whose text reads, in three languages:

Are you sure you wish to proceed? You have selected an image that is not related to sexual dissidence. The digital resource that lies ahead is not for users with little to no knowledge of sexual dissidence. It is a digital resource for and by intersectional sexual dissidence in the American hemisphere with a Latinx focus. It is neither an introduction to sexual dissidence nor a tool for extracting the knowledges of sexual dissidence.

The modal window presents two buttons below this message. One button reads “Continue” in three languages but does not lead to the main page of the site. Instead it leads to a search page, with the message “It seems we can’t find what you’re looking for. Perhaps searching can help.”

16 The images of sexual dissidence and mainstream LGBTQ refresh at specific times of day.
Figure 6: Final Landing Page Wireframe

In order for the landing page to function as intended, the images must speak visually, regardless of whether an intended user speaks only Spanish, English, or Portuguese. For example, the Ricky Martin cover above is multilingually accessible because of the cognate “gay,” which is recognizable in all three languages, and because of the transnational fame of Ricky Martin, as well as of People Magazine. In the example below, “imperio” is a cognate of “empire” in English and “império” in Portuguese, but a user does not need to realize this in order to read the image on the left.
Below is an example of two image texts that only work if the user can also read the Spanish on the protestors’ signs. For this reason, it is not a viable option for the landing page, I realized, after putting it together. I decided that Landing Page and Modal Window should be presented trilingually so that users perceive the polyvocality of the site before entering the home page, where they will select a language.
The Discover Page

The main functionality of the digital resource is concentrated on the Discover, Archive, and Access Pages. The Discover page encourages users to click to load a randomly generated URL from a MySQL database. Inspired by my memories of the now-defunct StumbleUpOn.com, the Discover Page invites readers to click a button to peruse a series of websites related to sexual dissidence. They can choose to 1.) keep clicking to pull up websites in the iframe, 2.) click the displayed URL to navigate away from sexualdissidence.com to open the URL in a new window, 3.) Click a tag to navigate to an Archive page with the tags for the image entered and processed in the search field, or 4.) Click on “See more like this” to pull up within the iframe sites with related tags.

The Discover page also features a field for users to upload websites to the archive. In December 2020 and January 2021, 10-15 of my collaborators will provide feedback on the overall design and usability of disidenciasexual.com and also upload at least twenty URLs and five files into the archive. They will also be asked to tag uploads. I intend this testing phase to not only grow the archive, but also gain user-generated feedback that I will incorporate into adjustments to the site design.

Below is an initial wireframe I developed for the Discover page, followed by a screenshot of the live site:

17 Of course, one notable difference is that, unlike StumbleUpon, DisidenciaSexual.com is not seeking to capture and monetize user data. Instead, it is about user-serving discovery.

18 “See more like this” will be added before November 20.
Initially, Juno discovered that Instagram pages do not work in the iframe; this is a problem that needed to be overcome because there is a significant amount of sexual dissidence media on Instagram. He found a workaround that worked beautifully, but further testing revealed a conflict between the URL randomizer script (http://disidenciasexual.com/testing-page) and the upload form script, so that both work well when they are on separate pages, but they don’t work well when they’re on the
same page. He recently rolled back to a simpler version of the script, which already randomizes the sites automatically after the page loads and interacts well with the form. You can see this simpler version currently working on the Discover page (https://www.disidenciasexual.com/english/discover/). However, this version does not display Instagram posts properly. I expect that this issue will be resolved before November 20.

The Archive and Access Pages

The Archive page will accomplish the following: 1.) allow for searches of tags (creator, place, and user-generated) applied to both URLs in MySQL database used for the Discover page and PDF/.png/.jpg files uploaded to the Archive, 2.) allow for browsing of tags, and 3.) allow for uploading of media and associated tags. Note that the Discover page will receive only URLs that can be displayed in the Discover iframe; meanwhile, the Archive page will display and allow for searching of both URLs and files via tags. The following is an example of the ongoing work required to make the trilingual archive accessible in ways that impact the archive. Juno is working on a script that will automatically sort tags according to language, which I requested in order to reduce the reporting burden on the user who is adding to the archive and also to explore the searchability the archive enables. The script would accomplish the following: when a user enters “trans” and the script assigns it additional tags of “español” “English” “portugués”; a user enters “transfeminista” and the script assigns it the additional tags...
of “español” and “portugués” not “English”; if a user enters “feminist” it assigns the additional tag of only “English”.

The Access page will guide users through a series of resources for accessing scholarly articles that may be behind paywalls, as well as other texts relevant to sexual dissidence that are nevertheless difficult or impossible to access. For example, it will introduce users to sources of scholarly articles that would be otherwise largely inaccessible to them, via open-access sites, institutional repositories, and sites like Sci-Hub and LibGen. The Access page will also have a field for requesting specific pieces of academic scholarship; I have confirmed with librarians that sharing paywalled materials with individuals for the purposes of research is generally considered to be covered by fair use. Although my original goal was to have this process be as automated as possible, the user flows I have brainstormed and the process of planning and guiding the site development have demonstrated to me that I need to develop and maintain longer-term structures for enabling access. At present I have a bilingual first-year student working for me who will receive and respond to requests for specific articles and book chapters; although I can likely depend on this student until his graduation in 2024, I need to develop a plan for longer-term support.

**Project Timeline:**

November 20-January 20, 2021: Collaborators test and provide feedback on the site; honoraria compensate them for the time spent adding URLs and files to the archive.

Summer 2021: Promote site abroad, with travel supported by Mellon grant (will be virtual if necessary); make decision about moderation of user submissions based on initial usage.

Fall 2021 and beyond: Establish plan for the long-term maintenance of the site.
Chapter 4: Conclusions

Mel Y. Chen posits that “everyday archives,” such as an individual social media account documenting FTM transition as well as an art project once hosted on www.malepregancy.com, are “live, constructed, presentist, futurist, real” (157). Chen concludes with the following description of the affordances of such simultaneously vulnerable and vital archives on the web: “In their dynamism, their virtuality, their interconnectedness, their evanescence, their craft, and their readiness, these archives might be thought of as viral: not alive, since digital; not dead, since mobile. They are not archived reliably, and so they must be concocted again and again; even if identity itself is forestalled and forestalled and forestalled, the archives make and make” (157). In one very important sense, my project seeks to be a node, and a counter-archive, for many of the everyday archives of sexual dissidence in the Americas. And as much as it responds to the everyday archives of sexual dissidence that “make and make,” it also requires ongoing making and the forestalling of conclusion to meet the goals I have outlined above.

As I considered how to conclude here, I focused initially and exclusively on the challenge of coming to a conclusion when the digital resource was still under development, and especially before extensive testing of the digital resource with collaborators enables me to (semi)finalize its form. I eventually realized, however, that my conclusions must remain iterative and in-progress even after I have adapted the
website in response to feedback from some of its intended users. On the one hand, I cannot conclude because design, which is most frequently conceptualized as initial and preparatory, functions differently in a networked, digital context that demands revision from time to time, and also, design should be considered as ongoing in a justice-informed approach. On the other hand, I cannot conclude because in order to meet the goals stated by the evaluative questions and collaborative goals I have elaborated above for the project, the project must remain ongoing and open. Finally, a conclusion is a type of foreclosure that my project seeks to avoid by staying open and iterative.

First, as I elaborate the reasons for nonconclusion given above, I will note the inherent, practical reasons for approaching a multi-modal site as iterative; namely, any site hosted on the web remains usable only as long as it is updated. At the most basic level, this involves creating a system for making back-ups of the site, paying annual hosting fees, and fixing the elements of the site that will inevitably break over time, both through intentional sabotage from bad actors as well as because of the evolution of supporting web technologies. From the moment it is hosted, the obsolescence of any website is already underway, and only regular maintenance can prevent the sort of premature obsolescence that would nullify the site’s stated goals. Some of this maintenance remain my individual responsibility (such as remembering to pay annual hosting fees); other parts of it require my project management, which involves the coordination of a team that will necessarily evolve over time. Part of my planning
involves brainstorming with my collaborators about if or when the project should be allowed to die online—that is, to cease to exist except as a counter-archive archived by the Internet Archive.\textsuperscript{19}

I have turned to the affordances of the digital to realize this project for fundamentally pragmatic reasons. Etymologically, \textit{pragmatism} and \textit{practicality} are related to \textit{praxis} and \textit{process}, and for my project the connection between them also revolves around the goals of design justice. Namely, working towards justice requires working through processes that are more iterative than static. In particular, working through academic extractivism is not just about following the lead of sexual dissidence thinkers who simultaneously theorize the liberations of the future and pragmatically collaborate with state actors when it reduces harm in the present. It is also about acknowledging the democratic promise of the digital that lies in between 1980s dreams of cyborg futures and the practical effects of the work of scyborgs whose work takes place within the institutions they inhabit. Such work requires iterative processes that both consider and take advantage of the affordances of the digital, as well as ongoing and open-ended collaboration between users and creators that both acknowledges and resists the hierarchies we inhabit.

\textsuperscript{19} A future iteration of disidenciasexual.com will include such information in the About section, which is not, at present, complete.
Appendix

The DisidenciaSexual.com Website Backend

by Juno Nedel

Disidencia Sexual is based on Wordpress, a free, open-source content management system (CMS) written in PHP that uses a MySQL database. Wordpress uses PHP and JavaScript as backend languages to communicate with the database. It is a versatile CMS used from smaller to bigger websites, as the core Wordpress software can be extended by plugins that add multiple functionalities. Wordpress powers many known websites as NBC, Time, Airbnb and Spotify.

Wordpress platform manages both the backend and the frontend of the website. The WordPress backend is also known as the wp-admin or WordPress admin area.

Figura 1: Wordpress admin dashboard.
The WordPress backend is divided into pages that are either WordPress core pages like Media, Plugins, Appearance or custom pages that are registered and rendered by third-party plugins or themes. Some menus may have submenus. All of these pages are displayed on the left of the admin panel, as you can see in the screenshot above.

The main pages of the backend are:

- Posts – A built-in post library, useful for many features besides blogging. It is also where you draft, edit, publish or delete articles;
- Media – A page used to manage media uploads (images, audio, video, and other files);
- Pages – Where you manage static pages (Home, Landing Page, Discover...);
- Comments – Where all the user comments are stored. Disidencia Sexual will not use this feature;
- Plugins – Where you install apps that extend your website’s capabilities;
- Appearance – Section that manages the website frontend, including page layout, widgets and menus, etc;
- Settings – Site settings. It is advisable not to change the saved configuration.

As the website is mostly constituted of static content, it will not be necessary to cover all functionalities of the dashboard.

DISCOVER PAGE

Discover page is divided in two sections: 1 – the random URL section; 2 – The URL upload form section.
The upload form is based on a Wordpress plugin called USP Plugin. I made changes to the scripts of this plugin so that it would meet the site's functionality. This plugin is written in PHP and uses wordpress PHP functions to allow users to submit posts to the wordpress built-in post library. Thus, each URL sent by users will be converted into a "post" and stored in the "post" section of the backend (see image below).

![Posts section](image1.png)

**Figura 2: Posts section**

![Discover Page posts section](image2.png)

**Figura 3: Discover Page posts section**

As Wordpress has a native built-in post management section, I chose to use this tool to implement Discover Page, as it has more documentation, frequent updates and more secure solutions. USP Plugin also uses nonces to strengthen WordPress security.
USP Plugin documentation is available here:

<https://plugins.trac.wordpress.org/browser/user-submitted-posts/>

Any content sent by users, as long as it meets the requirements of the upload form, will automatically create a new uncategorized post in the post library and be classified as “Pending” content. Only published content will be displayed on the Discover Page (posts marked as "pending" will not be considered, as they lack moderation).

Figura 4: Edit content sent by users

Figura 5: Random URL section
As the random URL section is still in development, there may be some substantial changes to this point. Basically, this section runs a PHP script that chooses a random post from the library and displays it along with the tags. This function refreshes every button click. One of the current versions of the page uses a plugin to randomize posts (Advanced Random Post) and the other uses a PHP script written by me.

The plugin documentation is available here:

<https://plugins.trac.wordpress.org/browser/advanced-random-posts-widget/>
References


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