



# TELL.ME 2026

MACAU . PORTIMÃO . SÃO PAULO

3rd INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
ON BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES  
IN ARTS, MEDIA AND SOCIETY

ONLINE | MAY 28 - 29, 2026

# PROCEEDINGS

ORGANIZED BY



IN COLLABORATION:





3rd INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
ON BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES  
IN ARTS, MEDIA AND SOCIETY

ONLINE | MAY 28 - 29, 2026

# PROCEEDINGS

## **Title**

Proceedings of the Tell.Me 2026 - 3rd International Symposium on Biographical  
Narratives in Arts, Media and Society

## **Editors**

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University of Saint Joseph, Macau  
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# PREFACE

## **Tell.Me 2026 - 3rd International Symposium on Biographical Narratives in Arts, Media and Society**

The 2026 edition of **Tell.Me – 3rd International Symposium on Biographical Narratives in Arts, Media and Society** takes place at a time of rapid expansion and transformation in digital media. Personal stories circulate, are mediated, and acquire cultural significance in increasingly complex ways. In a world saturated with information and shaped by algorithmic systems, biographical narratives have become essential means for constructing, negotiating, and transforming identity, memory, and social meaning.

Under the theme **The Power of Biographical Narratives**, this edition promotes a thoughtful and interdisciplinary reflection on how life stories, whether documentary, artistic, educational, or hybrid, connect personal experience with broader cultural, social, and political contexts. These narratives do more than preserve memories and knowledge; they also question, reinterpret, and transform the structures through which societies understand themselves. Across diverse digital platforms and expressive forms, biographical storytelling invites us to reconsider the role of media practices in shaping collective imaginaries and in addressing the complexities of contemporary life.

As digital media continue to evolve, it becomes increasingly clear that biographical narratives are not merely passive reflections of lived experience. Rather, they actively participate in the production of meaning, identity, and cultural memory. Tell.Me 2026 seeks to examine how life narratives, shared through different platforms, artistic media, and communication contexts, engage audiences and foster dialogue across geographical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. By emphasising the relationship between personal histories and wider social frameworks, the symposium aims to deepen our understanding of how storytelling shapes both individual and collective perceptions.

The event also invites participants to reflect on the ethical responsibilities involved in narrating lives, particularly in a period marked by rapid technological change, shifting cultural environments, and new forms of mediation. Questions of authorship, representation, authenticity, consent, memory, visibility, and participation are central to contemporary biographical practices and deserve renewed critical attention.

The symposium brings together researchers, artists, educators, and practitioners from different disciplines and regions, offering a platform for dialogue across the arts, media, communication, digital culture, education, and urban studies. As editors and educators, our own academic research and classroom practices are deeply rooted in these very intersections, driving our commitment to fostering this community. Through thematic sessions, keynote lectures, presentations, and exhibitions, Tell.Me 2026 serves as a space for examining how storytelling practices are being transformed by digital culture and how they may contribute to new forms of social engagement, cultural participation, and shared knowledge.

Within this framework, narrative, media, and society do not merely transmit meaning; they co-create it. Biographical stories increasingly unfold across multimedia, visual, audio, performative, interactive, and networked formats, challenging traditional notions of authorship, authority, and authenticity. This transformation enables participatory and interdisciplinary approaches, positioning storytelling as both a method of inquiry and a creative practice within contemporary digital culture.

As digital platforms proliferate, individuals and communities are increasingly able to share, reinterpret, and remix stories that cross traditional boundaries of genre, medium, and discipline. This collaborative environment contributes to the democratisation of narration and fosters dynamic exchanges through which personal and collective identities are continually negotiated and redefined. By embracing these evolving narrative forms, biographical storytelling becomes a living participatory process that engages audiences, encourages critical reflection, and cultivates a deeper awareness of the relationship between personal experience and broader cultural forces.

Organising an event such as Tell.Me 2026 is, above all, a collaborative endeavour. For the organisation team, this project represents the culmination of a shared, continuous effort to integrate biographical narratives into our daily pedagogical practices and research. This event reflects the dedication and collective work of an international network of institutions, researchers, artists, and practitioners committed to advancing research and practice at the intersection of arts, media, and society. Co-hosted by academic and research institutions in collaboration with international partners, the symposium reaffirms its role as a global platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and critical inquiry.

We express our deepest gratitude to all contributors, authors, artists, and keynote speakers – **Ricardo Alexino Ferreira**, University of São Paulo; **José Carlos Neves**, Lusófona

University; and **Otis Edwards**, University of Hong Kong. We also thank the reviewers, partners, and participants, to whom we extend our sincere appreciation for their commitment, generosity, and vision. Witnessing these diverse voices align so closely with the research and teaching causes we care about most deeply has been profoundly rewarding. Their contributions make this symposium not only a space for presentation and dissemination but also a site for shared reflection, experimentation, and intellectual exchange. By bringing together diverse voices, formats, and narratives, Tell.Me 2026 underscores storytelling's vital role in understanding, questioning, and shaping the worlds we inhabit.

We gratefully acknowledge the institutional support of the **Doctoral School** and the **Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Saint Joseph**, Macau, China; **ISMAT – Ensino Lusófona**, Portimão, Portugal; and the **School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo**, Brazil.

We also extend our thanks to the **Centre for Research in Arts and Communication (CIAC)**, at the University of Algarve, and to the **Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies (CICANT)**, at Lusófona University, for supporting this event through special editions of their journals, **ROTURA** and **IJFMA**. A special word of thanks is also due to **Artech-International** for the trust placed in our capacity to organise and host this symposium.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to making Tell.Me 2026 possible.

São Paulo, Portimão, Macau, 28 May 2026

**Adérito Fernandes-Marcos**

University of Saint Joseph, Macau

General Chair

**Selma Pereira**

CICANT / ISMAT – Ensino Lusófona

Local Chair, Portimão

**António Maneira**

University of Saint Joseph, Macau

Local Chair, Macau

# CURATORIAL STATEMENT

## **Tell.Me 2026: Living Archives of Memory and Identity**

The Tell.Me 2026 International Symposium Exhibition brings together eight artists and researchers from diverse backgrounds to explore the intersection of art, memory, media, and society through a transdisciplinary approach. This online exhibition establishes itself as a global meeting point for voices and cultural perspectives, bridging the Lusophone world and beyond.

At the heart of the exhibition is the use of tactile processes to recover and repair fragmented biographical narratives. For example, in "Mending the Mirror," embroidery acts as a semiotic intervention on photographic paper, where every stitch is an intentional act of emphasis, erasure, repair, or signalling. Similarly, "Linhas de Proteção" explores "drawing as weaving," using repetitive gestures on cotton fabric to articulate personal narratives of Afro-Brazilian identity and migratory experience through symbols of protection.

The exhibition also investigates how contemporary technology can facilitate a "ritual of connection" rather than creating distance. The "Anamnese In Nexum" platform utilises transmedia storytelling and augmented reality to activate "Narrative Portals," transforming communities from passive receivers into co-creators of their own intangible heritage. In "Sacred Tree: Summoning Gelora," the mobile phone becomes a tool for empathy; by physically bowing toward the earth—a gesture mirroring the artist's act of collecting discarded flowers—participants awaken digital creatures in a shared sanctuary of connection.

Throughout the exhibition, identity is framed as a distributed and relational construction. The solo performance "Panj" enacts a form of "biographical translation," using a father's photographic archive and a traditional wooden chest (peti) to trace the trauma of the 1947 Partition and the emergence of a queer diasporic identity. This movement between the intimate and the historical underscores that memory does not exist in isolation but emerges through material conditions and social structures.

By integrating artistic creation into an international scientific symposium, this exhibition reinforces that artistic practice constitutes an essential form of research and knowledge production. As a global platform, Tell.Me 2026 invites visitors to explore this collective cartography of voices and lived realities, reflecting on the stories that define us and the evolving relationship between memory, technology, and human experience.

### **António Maneira**

University of Saint Joseph, Macau

Local Chair, Macau

### **Selma Pereira**

CICANT / ISMAT – Ensino Lusófona

Local Chair, Portimão

## Organization Tell.Me 2026

### Institutions

- University of Saint Joseph in Macau / Doctoral School / Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Macao, China
- CICANT/ ISMAT-Ensino Lusófona, Portimão, Portugal
- University of São Paulo / School of Communications and Arts, Brazil
- The Artech-International Association, Portugal

### Symposium Chairs:

- Adérito Fernandes-Marcos, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO) / Artech-International (PT) (**General Chairman**)
- Selma Pereira, CICANT/ ISMAT-Ensino Lusófona (PT) (**Local Chairman, Portimão**)
- Ricardo Alexino Ferreira, University of São Paulo (BR) (**Local Chairman, São Paulo**)
- António Maneira, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO) (**Local Chairman, Macau**)

### International Scientific Committee:

- Agemir Bavaresco, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (BR)
- Alberto Sá, University of Minho (PT)
- Alicia González-Pérez, University of Extremadura (ES)

- Ana Amélia Carvalho, University of Coimbra (PT)
- Ana Gago, Universidade Católica Portuguesa (PT)
- Anamaria Rezende Galeotti, Anhembi Morumbi University (BR)
- António Costa Valente, University of Algarve (PT)
- Áurea Muñoz del Amo, University of Sevilla (ES)
- Bruno Mendes da Silva, University of Algarve (PT)
- Carlos Sena Caires, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO)
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- Cyril Jerome Law, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO)
- Daniel Farinha, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Emília Simão, Portucalense University (PT)
- Filipa Martins de Abreu, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Franz Gassner, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Gabriela Borges, University of Algarve (PT)
- Gerald Estadieu, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)

- Gilberto Prado, University of São Paulo (BR)
- Hande Ayanoglu, European University (PT)
- Heitor Alvelos, University of Porto (PT)
- Helena Barranha, Nova University of Lisbon (PT)
- Henrique Portovedo, University of Aveiro (PT)
- Hosana Celeste Oliveira, Paulista State University (BR)
- Ionat Zurr, University of Western Australia (AU)
- Isabel Azevedo, University of Porto (PT)
- Isabel Cristina Carvalho, Portuguese Open University (PT)
- João Martinho Moura, University of Minho (PT)
- João Paulo Queiroz, University of Lisbon (PT)
- José Alberto Gomes, Universidade Católica Portuguesa (PT)
- José Carlos Neves, CICANT, Lusófona University (PT)
- José Gomes Pinto, CICANT, Lusófona University (PT)
- José Pereira, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (PT)
- Leonel Morgado, Portuguese Open University (PT)
- Lucia Pimentel, Federal University of Minas Gerais (BR)
- Lucia Santaella, Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (BR)
- Marcos Mortensen Steagall, Auckland University of Technology (NZ)
- Marcos Mucheroni, University of São Paulo (BR)
- Maria De Lambert, Polytechnic Institute of Porto (PT)
- Martyn Percy, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Martsamrit Pasupa, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (TH)
- Miguel Rosa Duque, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Mirian Tavares, University of Algarve (PT)
- Mirtes Marins de Oliveira, Anhembi Morumbi University (BR)
- Né Barros, Balle teatro, Balle teatro, ESAD – School of Arts and Design (PT)
- Nelson Zagalo, University of Aveiro (PT)
- Noeli Batista dos Santos, Federal University of Goiás (BR)
- Pablo Gobira, Federal University of Minas Gerais (BR)
- Pedro Alves da Veiga, Portuguese Open University (PT)
- Pedro Andrade, Universidade Católica Portuguesa (PT)
- Pedro Pais Correia, CIAC, University of Algarve (PT)

- Priscilla Roberts, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Rachel Luna Peralta, Macau University of Tourism (MO)
- Rosangella Leote, Paulista State University (BR)
- Rui Travasso, Polytechnic Institute of Beja (PT)
- Sandra Ng, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)
- Sérgio Eliseu, University of Aveiro (PT)
- Sílvia Leiria Viegas, University of Algarve (PT)
- Sílvia Siqueira, State University of Ceará (BR)
- Sol Alonso Romera, University of Vigo (ES)
- Stacilee Ford, University of Hong Kong (HK)
- Stephen Morgan, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO)
- Thuy Anh, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (VN)
- Tiago Cruz, University Institute of Maia (PT)
- Vítor Sá, Polytechnic University of Porto (PT)
- Viviana Han, University of Saint Joseph in Macao (MO)

### **Virtual Narrative and Art Exhibition Curatorship Chairs:**

- Adérito Fernandes-Marcos, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO) / Artech-International (PT)
- Selma Pereira, CICANT, ISMAT-Ensino Lusófona (PT)
- António Maneira, University of Saint Joseph in Macau (MO)

### **UNESCO MIL CITIES**

#### **LIAISON Chair:**

- Felipe Chibás Ortiz, University of São Paulo (BR)

### THURSDAY, MAY 28TH

Macau 18h - 18h20  
Portimão 11h - 11h20  
São Paulo 07h - 07h20

#### Opening Session

**Álvaro Barbosa**, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation, University of Saint Joseph  
**Adérito Fernandes-Marcos** - University of Saint Joseph/ Artech International  
**Ricardo Alexino Ferreira** -Universidade de São Paulo  
**Selma Pereira** -ISMAT- Ensino Lusófona

Macau 18h20 - 20h00  
Portimão 11h20 - 13h00  
São Paulo 07h20 - 09h00

#### Artistic Exhibition

MODERATOR: **Pedro Alves da Veiga** -CIAC, Universidade Aberta

**Two Narratives of Memory and Identity: From Family Archive to Contested Territory**, Zoi Arvaniti  
-Independent Artist, Athens School of Fine Arts

**Sacred Tree: Summoning Gelora**, Bin Youn and Patrick Hartono -RMIT University Vietnam

**The Archive Dream Us: Where Light Remembers Wrongly, Seventeen Haiku**, Joelle McTigue  
-Independent Artist

**Mending the Mirror: Auto-Biographical Narratives through Photographic Embroidery Artwork/ Stories proposal**, Gabriela Farias Islas and Luis Daniel Herrera Romero -Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla

**Protection lines: Autobiographical narratives between lines, fabrics and memory**, Anderson Luiz de Souza -ISMAT-Ensino Lusófona

**PANJ | धन | Excerpt**, Himmat Shinhat - Independent Artist

**Anamense In Nexum: The Digital Platform as a participatory engine for Intangible Heritage valorization**, Ana Raquel Gouveia -Universidade Aberta, Universidade do Algarve, Isabel Cristina Carvalho -CIAC, Universidade Aberta, and Paulo Maldonado -Universidade de Évora, CHAIA

**Resonance of Beijing: The Breathing City**, Martsamrit Pasupa -King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi - KMUTT

*Discussion*

Macau 20h00 - 21h00  
Portimão 13h00 - 14h00  
São Paulo 09h00 - 10h00

#### Dinner/ Lunch/ Breakfast

Macau 21h00- 21h30  
Portimão 14h00 - 14h30  
São Paulo 10h00 - 10h30

#### Keynote #1: OTIS EDWARDS - University of Hong Kong, China

Nuance in Practice: Rethinking Historical Method through Practical Business Experience

MODERATOR: **António Maneira** -University of Saint Joseph

Macau 21h30 - 22h20  
Portimão 14h30 - 15h20  
São Paulo 10h30 - 11h20

#### Session 1

Echoes, Legacies and Living Systems: Media Art as Narrative and Memory

MODERATOR: **António Maneira** -University of Saint Joseph

**Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole: Generative Video Art as Biographical Testimony and Collective Memory**, Pedro Alves da Veiga -CIAC, Universidade Aberta

**VEIN: A Bio sonic Narrative of Forest Life - Translating Plant Signals into Shared Stories of Ecological Presence**, André Conde e Celeste Santos Silva -Universidade de Évora

**Wandering Air: Perceiving Breath between Taoism and Ecofeminism**, Yimou Huang -University of Dundee

**Sense of an absence: Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia**, Ana Isabel Soares -CIAC, Universidade do Algarve

*Discussion*

Macau 22h30-23h00  
Portimão 15h30 - 16h00  
São Paulo 11h30-12h00

#### Keynote #2: JOSÉ CARLOS NEVES -CICANT, Universidade Lusófona

"What's the point?"

MODERATOR: **Adérito Fernandes-Marcos** -University of Saint Joseph/ Artech International

Macau 23h00 - 23h40  
Portimão 16h00 - 16h40  
São Paulo 12h00 - 12h40

#### Session 2

Digital Platforms, Embodied Narratives and Technology as a Medium of Cultural Memory

MODERATOR: **Adérito Fernandes-Marcos** -University of Saint Joseph/Artech International

**Technology as Narrative Material: Scientific Data and Interactive Technology as Design Material in Performative Environments**, Patrick Kruse and Lorenz-Peter Grau -Hochschule Düsseldorf, University of Applied Sciences

**Corpos como arquivos, algoritmos como memória: narrativas audiovisuais autobiográficas no Laboratório Criativo Universitário Latino-Americano**, Andrea Carolina Camacho Yáñez, Sergio Esteban Martínez Benítez and Cristian Javier Baicue Castañeda -Corporación Unificada Nacional de Educación Superior CUN, Institución Universitaria Politécnico Granacolombiano POLIGRAN

**Multicultural Urban Palimpsest Evoked through Personal Cultural Heritage Narratives: A Case Study in Kavala**, Inkeri Aula-Aalto University, Manolis Pratsinakis -Harokopio University of Athens, and Masood Masoodian -Aalto University

*Discussion*

## FRIDAY, MAY 29TH

Macau 18h - 18h50  
Portimão 11h - 11h50  
São Paulo 07h - 07h50

### Session 3

AI, Ethics and Posthuman Narratives: Reconstructing Memory and Biography

MODERATOR: Filipa Martins -University of Saint Joseph

**Auto-Biographies and/or Alter-Biographies? A Critical and Ethical A.I. for de/reconstructing Silent History**, Pedro Andrade -Permanent researcher at Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**Investigação baseada na prática artística mediada por GenAI: contranarrativas visuais do feminino**, Célia Palma -CIAC, Isabel Cristina Carvalho -CIAC, Universidade Aberta, and Mirian Tavares -CIAC, Universidade do Algarve

**Transcending One's Own Finitude: Towards Artificial Immortality**, Martyna Groth -Akademia Teatralna w Warszawie

*Discussion*

Macau 19h00 - 19h50  
Portimão 12h00 - 12h50  
São Paulo 08h00 - 08h50

### Session 4

Archives, Gender and Artistic Practices as Cultural Resistance

MODERATOR: Pedro Andrade -Permanent research at Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**Her Endless Trial: Feminine Perfection and Cultural Violence in South Asian**, Afsana Sharmin -BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology

**From Archive to Narrative: Biographical Construction through Mediated Family Archives in Larry Sultan's Pictures from Home**, Nazlihan Cruz -Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS), and João Leal -The Research Institute for Design, Media and Culture [ID+]

**Reconstructing Absences in Portugal and Brazil: Feminist Artistic Narratives and Institutional Critique in the Histories of Women Artists**, Thaíssa Dilly -"University of Coimbra, CEIS20, Institute of Interdisciplinary Research

**Echoes of an Artist: Media Art Students Narratives Reframing Henrique Silva's Legacy**, Emilia Simão and Ana Clara Roberti -Universidade Portucalense

*Discussion*

Macau 20h00 - 21h00  
Portimão 13h00 - 14h00  
São Paulo 09h00 - 10h00

### Dinner/ Lunch/ Breakfast

Macau 21h00 - 21h30  
Portimão 14h00 - 14h30  
São Paulo 10h00 - 10h30

### Keynote #3: RICARDO ALEXINO FERREIRA - Universidade de São Paulo

Divulgação da Ciência na 'Memória do Eu' de cientistas e jornalistas: Diversidade em Ciência (Rádio USP, Brasil) como estudo de caso

MODERATOR: Adérito Fernandes-Marcos -University of Saint Joseph/ Artech International

Macau 21h30 - 22h10  
Portimão 14h30 - 15h10  
São Paulo 10h30 - 11h10

### Session 5

Heritage, Transcultural Memory and Biographical Narratives in the Territory

MODERATOR: Adérito Fernandes-Marcos -University of Saint Joseph/Artech International

**Architectures of Resistance: Biographical Trajectory as an Archive of Cultural Sovereignty and Institutional Dissent in Argentina**, Fernando Sosa -Ring latam

**The Mountain Knows Who You Are: Visual Storytelling, Autoethnography and Fields of Meaning**, Jaroslava Šnajberková -CIAC, Universidade Aberta, José Bidarra -CIAC, Universidade Aberta, and Mirian Tavares -CIAC, Universidade do Algarve

**Tell me [Virginia (Adriana)], how was it, that room of yours' own?! back@1938...**, Maria de Fátima Lambert -inED (FCT Research Center) School of Education, Polytechnic University of Porto

*Discussion*

Macau 22h10 - 22h40  
Portimão 15h10 - 15h40  
São Paulo 11h10 - 11h40

### Closing Session

**Adérito Fernandes-Marcos** -University of Saint Joseph/ Artech International

**António Maneira** -University of Saint Joseph

**Ricardo Alexino Ferreira** -University of São Paulo

**Selma Pereira** -ISMAT- Ensino Lusófona



# KEYNOTE SPEAKERS





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**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**  
**OTIS EDWARDS**

- University of Hong Kong, China

**May, 28th // Online**

**Macau 21h00- 21h30**

**Portimão 14h00 - 14h30**

**São Paulo 10h00 - 10h30**

**Nuance in Practice: Rethinking Historical Method through Practical Business Experience**

In this presentation, I discuss how my experience in international business has influenced the way I frame and conduct historical research. Because I did not follow a traditional academic path, my background has allowed me to approach historical inquiry with practical insights and from a broader context, especially regarding the cross-cultural interactions that are often vague or absent from archival records. It permits me to navigate legal and cultural frameworks inherent in global commerce and better recognize nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed. By treating professional experience as a procedural resource, I suggest that non-traditional paths into academia can deepen historical inquiry, fostering approaches that are both analytically grounded and critically attuned to the complexities of historical narratives.

**Short Bio**

Dr. Otis Edwards is a business historian of global trade at the University of Hong Kong. His work focuses on how capital, commerce, and elite social networks shaped U.S.–China relations in the nineteenth century. Drawing on more than thirty years of experience in China’s manufacturing export sector, Dr. Edwards brings a unique perspective to the study of trade and finance. His research traces the links between London capital markets, U.S. monetary policy, and global commodity flows, while also exploring how Americans abroad managed reputation, wealth, and obligation within elite circles.



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**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**JOSÉ CARLOS NEVES**

- CICANT, Universidade Lusófona, Portugal

**May, 28th // Online**

**Macau 22h30 - 23h00**

**Portimão 15h30 - 16h00**

**São Paulo 11h30 - 12h00**

**“What’s the point?”**

The opening of this Tell.Me mentions ‘a world overwhelmed with information and images’, but it would be just as true if we said ‘a world overwhelmed with interfaces’. Nowadays, a train chat has become an annoying distraction from our morning scroll, and a hug between friends has been traded for a quick emoji.

With this context in mind, I believe that treating the interface as an artistic object inseparable from touch is as anachronistic as it is essential. In this talk, I’m going to share some stories of interaction I’ve been lucky enough to see firsthand through the interactive works I co-authored. It’s not about my opinion or how they were built, but rather about how those dialogues unfold.

**Short Bio**

José Carlos Neves’ work is centred on Interaction Design, exploring the Interface as the cornerstone of his artistic creation. With a regular presence at media art festivals and within art-based research contexts, he holds a PhD in Communication Sciences in the field of Interactive Arts.

He currently co-coordinates InTouchLab (accessible media) and directs Lusófona University’s FabLab. As a lecturer at ECATI and a researcher at CICANT (Lusófona), he combines academia with practical experimentation, working on Art Research processes and R&D projects within the field of accessible media.



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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**RICARDO ALEXINO FERREIRA**

- Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

**May, 29th // Online**

**Macau 21h00- 21h30**

**Portimão 14h00 - 14h30**

**São Paulo 10h00 - 10h30**

**Divulgação da Ciência na ‘Memória do Eu’ de cientistas e jornalistas: Diversidade em Ciência (Rádio USP, Brasil) como estudo de caso**

O paradigma Positivista de Augusto Comte, do final do século 19, enfatizava conceitos como objetividade, imparcialidade, neutralidade e objetividade como elementos imprescindíveis para as Ciências e, mais tarde, o Jornalismo também utilizaria este tipo de princípio.

Estes tipos dos paradigmas positivistas se encontraram com muita eficiência nas Seções Científicas dos jornais no final do século 19, principalmente com as Teorias Raciais da época, em que cientistas e jornalistas retroalimentavam aquilo que chamariam como verdades incontestes.

Durante o século 20 começa-se o processo de desconstrução do Positivismo, como a Teoria da Relatividade de Einstein, a Psicanálise de Freud e a Psicologia Analítica de Jung.

Como jornalista e cientista, na pragmática da divulgação científica/jornalismo científico tenho constato que Ciências e Jornalismo muito mais que motivados pela objetividade são estimulados pela subjetividade.

O programa radiofônico de entrevistas Diversidade em Ciência, veiculado na Rádio USP, da Universidade de São Paulo, Brasil, permite observar que o cientista quando fala de sua pesquisa, mesmo quando básica, ele narra muito mais sobre si mesmo do que sobre dados frios e distantes.

O Diversidade em Ciência está no ar desde 2015. Nestes onze anos foram mais de 400 horas de entrevistas veiculadas. Tais percepções são observadas através da Memória do Eu. Neste fenômeno, jornalista e cientista constroem narrativas travestidas de objetividades.

**Short Bio**

Ricardo Alexino Ferreira is a journalist and Full Professor (Professor Titular) at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (USP), where he also serves as a permanent faculty member in the Graduate Programme in Humanities, Rights and Other Legitimacies. He holds a PhD (2001) and an MA (1993) in Communication Sciences from the same institution, and a degree in Social Communication (Journalism).

He is the leader of the research group Scientific and Specialised Midiology (CNPq).

He is the director, producer and host of the interview programme “Diversidade em Ciência” (Rádio USP, Brazil), where he contributes to the dissemination of scientific knowledge and public engagement with issues of diversity and society.

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# Two Narratives of Memory and Identity From Family Archive to Contested Territory

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## Abstract

*This paper presents two installations that investigate memory as a material and relational process. Through the use of archival objects, layered surfaces, and fragile materials, the works explore how memory is shaped by both personal experience and historical conditions. The first installation focuses on the instability of recollection through obscured family objects, while the second examines the formation of identity within the context of political classification. Together, they propose that memory operates between presence and absence, emerging through material supports and social structures rather than existing as a fixed representation of the past.*

## Keywords

*biographical narrative; memory and materiality; family archive; collective memory; contested territories; installation art*

## Reference Format:

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## I. MEMORY AS MATERIAL: TWO INSTALLATIONS

Memory is often understood as a form of preservation, a way of maintaining a stable connection to the past. However, this project approaches memory differently—as something that shifts, fragments, and transforms over time. Rather than presenting memory as a complete image, the installations explore how it emerges through partial visibility, material traces, and changing contexts.

The work unfolds through two installations that operate at different scales. The first engages with personal memory through objects from a family archive. The second addresses

collective memory through historical processes of classification and displacement. Together, they form a dialogue between intimate experience and broader political structures.



*1. Figure: found objects (family archive), plexiglass, wood. First presentation : Public Tobacco Factory, Athens, 2023*

### *A. I am afraid the details are fading away*

The first installation, *I am afraid the details are fading away*, is composed of objects placed behind a blurred plexiglass surface. Their outlines remain visible, while their details gradually dissolve. The viewer encounters them at a distance, as if through a filter that both reveals and withholds. Clarity appears only at specific points of contact, where the objects touch the surface. These moments suggest that memory persists not as a stable image, but through proximity and embodied relation—sometimes unpredictably, as when a familiar object or sensation suddenly triggers recollection.

The installation constructs a spatial condition in which perception is constantly negotiated. A wooden frame holds the plexiglass like a window or a screen, inviting the viewer to approach while simultaneously limiting access. Even at close range, visibility remains partial. What is seen is not a complete image, but a shifting field of fragments, where some elements emerge while others recede. This condition foregrounds the fragility of memory. Details fade, not only as a form of loss, but as part of the process through which memory continues to function. The work also extends beyond the personal dimension. In contexts of displacement, the loss of everyday objects disrupts the material frameworks through which memory is sustained. To lose one's belongings is also to lose the conditions that allow memory to remain anchored in the world.



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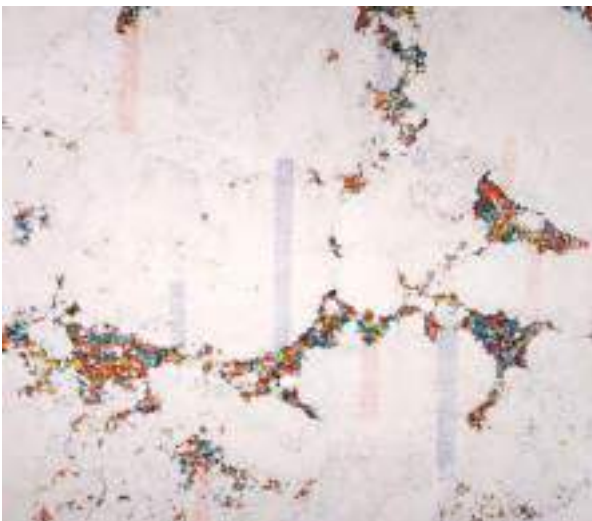
Within the installation, objects function less as documents than as traces—fragments that persist in a state between presence and disappearance. Their meaning does not remain fixed, but emerges through processes of mediation, distance, and loss.

### B. *ETABLI / NON ETABLI*

The second installation, *Etabli / Non Etabli*, shifts from this intimate scale to the domain of collective memory and political history. It refers to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, where religious identity determined displacement. The categories *éta*bli and *non-éta*bli designated those considered “established” and thus exempt from forced movement, based on a fixed historical moment.

In the installation, these terms are handwritten in colored marker on a fractured plaster surface. The gesture remains deliberately unstable: the writing can fade, smudge, or disappear. Beneath the white surface, layers of color become visible through cracks and breaks, suggesting histories that persist but are never fully accessible.

Identity, in this context, does not appear as inherent or stable. It is shaped through historical and social conditions, as well as through institutional frameworks that define belonging and exclusion. The categories *éta*bli and *non-éta*bli operate as mechanisms of classification that organize movement and identity, while simultaneously obscuring the complexity of lived experience.



2. Figure: plaster, plastic flakes, marker. First presentation: *technohoros Gazi Artspace, Athens, 2022*

The material process of the work is integral to its meaning. The plaster was cast with colored fragments intended to remain hidden, yet cracks appeared naturally as the material contracted. These fractures were not designed; they emerged through the behavior of the material itself. In this sense, the work resists the idea of unified identity, as material instability interrupts any attempt at total coherence.

## II. MEMORY AS AN INTERMEDIATE SPACE

What connects the two installations is an attention to the conditions through which memory is produced. Across both works, memory emerges through an interaction between material supports and broader structures. It is not confined to the individual, but takes shape through objects, environments, and social frameworks.

The installations propose that memory operates within an intermediate space—between presence and absence, clarity and obscurity. Within this space, biographical narratives are not fixed or complete; they appear as fragments, as partial images, as traces that continue to carry meaning even as they fade.

Taken together, the two works trace a movement between different scales of experience. The first remains close to the domestic and the personal, while the second engages with historical processes that shape collective identity. Yet both insist on the same condition: that memory is never fully stable, and that what remains is always partial.

In this sense, the project contributes to contemporary discussions on memory, identity, and displacement by emphasizing the material dimension of remembrance. Biographical narratives are not only articulated through language, but are embedded in objects, surfaces, and gestures. They exist within the conditions that allow them to appear—and within those that cause them to disappear.

Rather than reconstructing the past, the installations attend to what persists: fragments, traces, and moments of visibility. These elements do not offer a complete account, but continue to shape how memory is experienced. What becomes visible is not the past itself, but the process through which it is continually re-formed.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author thanks the Tell.Me 2026 Symposium committee for accepting this work and the reviewers for their constructive feedback. Special thanks to the Hellenic Chamber of Fine Arts (EETE) for the opportunity to present the first installation at the exhibition “*Εξόδος / Διέξοδος*” (Exit / Way Out) at the Tobacco Factory in Athens, and to curator Thetis Marianou for including the second work in the exhibition “100” at Technopolis City of Athens. Their support was essential in bringing these installations to public view.

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# Mending the Mirror: Auto-Biographical Narratives through Photographic Embroidery

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## Abstract

"Mending the Mirror" is an educational artefact developed within the Experimental Narratives course at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), Mexico. The project employs the symbolic self-portrait as a critical thinking device: students transferred digital photographs onto paper and intervened them with embroidery thread, engaging in the act of mending personal history under a single guiding rule — **No stitch without intention**. Each thread operates as a semiotic act across four operations: **Emphasis**, **Erasure**, **Repair**, and **Signaling**. The resulting works explore identity as a distributed, relational construction — built in dialogue with others, personal history, and the material world. This paper presents the pedagogical framework, the semiotic methodology, and a selection of student works that demonstrate tactile intervention as a tool for recovering collective memory and fostering social engagement.

## Keywords

embroidery; autobiographical narrative; visual semiotics; arts education; identity; photographic intervention

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

The Experimental Narratives course at BUAP's Facultad de Artes Plásticas y Audiovisuales operates at the intersection of visual arts, critical theory, and autobiographical practice. "Mending the Mirror" emerged as a pedagogical artefact that asks students to confront identity through the symbolic self-portrait, using embroidery as a semiotic intervention on photographic paper.

The methodology was structured around a single, generative constraint: *No stitch without intention*. Within this framework, every thread placed on the surface must fulfil one of four semiotic operations: **Emphasis** — to highlight; **Erasure** — to veil; **Repair** — to heal; and **Signaling** — to direct the viewer's gaze.

Students were further invited to layer personal symbols alongside cultural references, transforming each portrait into a metaphorical argument. One student rewrote a narrative of melancholy by converting sadness into vibrant colour. Another engaged in intertextual dialogue with Klimt's *The Kiss* [1], redirecting the gaze in symbolic rejection. A third explored internal wounds through surgical stitching, while others displaced the face entirely — choosing personal spaces or aesthetic codes as truer sites of the self.



Fig. 1. Student works: photographic embroidery on paper. Experimental Narratives, BUAP 2024-2025

### A. Pedagogical Framework

The artefact draws on practice-based research and visual semiotics [2] to construct a pedagogical context in which craft and critical thinking are inseparable. The transfer of digital photographs onto paper — a physical, haptic process — situates students in a productive tension between the digital image and the material trace. Embroidery, historically associated with domestic obligation, is reclaimed here as an authorial stance [3].

For several participants, this reclamation was explicitly biographical. Students who had been required to embroider as children found in the constraint of paper — a rigid,



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unfamiliar support — a new sense of agency. The chore became a chosen language, resonating with de Certeau's notion of the "tactic" [4]: the repurposing of an imposed practice into an act of situated resistance and expression.



Fig. 2. Student work: burst embroidery with cultural symbolism. Experimental Narratives, BUAP 2024-2025.

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

"Mending the Mirror" contributes to a growing body of practice-based research that positions craft as a vehicle for autobiographical storytelling and social engagement [5]. By introducing a semiotic constraint as the structuring principle, the project moves embroidery beyond decoration into the territory of visual argument.

The concept of the distributed self — central to the student outcomes — aligns with contemporary theorisations of identity as relational and non-unitary [6]. Several students did not portray their faces at all: instead, rooms, objects, and aesthetic preferences were positioned as more truthful self-representations. This challenges the portrait tradition and opens pedagogical conversations about embodiment, privacy, and visibility in image-making.

Compared to related approaches in textile art education [3][5], "Mending the Mirror" is distinctive in its explicit semiotic scaffolding. The four-operation framework gives students a shared critical vocabulary, enabling peer critique and reflective dialogue — functioning as what Schön calls a "reflective practicum" [7]: a structured space in which action and reflection are simultaneous.

The artefact also engages directly with the Tell.Me 2026 Symposium theme of biographical narratives as tools for media literacy and cultural memory. Tactile intervention in digital media — printing, stitching, layering — enacts a critical slowing-down of the image, inviting makers and viewers alike to attend to the political and emotional dimensions of visual self-representation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# Linhas de Proteção: Narrativas autobiográficas entre desenho, têxtil e memória

Lines of Protection: Autobiographical narratives between drawing, textiles, and memory

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## Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma investigação artística de natureza autobiográfica que toma o desenho como prática expandida, articulada a processos têxteis, memória e construção narrativa. Partindo da obra *Linhas de Proteção*, propõe-se compreender o desenhar como gesto que ultrapassa a representação, configurando-se como forma de pensamento e produção de conhecimento. Inserido no campo da investigação baseada na prática, o estudo articula produção artística e reflexão crítica. Na primeira parte, discutem-se as contribuições do trabalho, com ênfase na noção de “desenhar como tecer”, na relação entre linha gráfica e linha têxtil e na repetição como processo de construção de sentido. Na segunda, desenvolve-se uma discussão crítica que articula autores como Tim Ingold, Gilles Deleuze, Henk Borgdorff e Paul Ricoeur, problematizando o desenho como prática processual, a repetição como diferença e a narrativa como experiência não verbal. Conclui-se que a prática artística, ao articular corpo, gesto e materialidade, constitui um campo relevante de produção narrativa e epistemológica.

## Palavras-Chave

Desenho; têxteis; narrative; autobiografia; investigação artística; memória;

## Abstract

This article presents an autobiographical artistic investigation that approaches drawing as an expanded practice, articulated with textile processes, memory, and narrative construction. Drawing from the artwork *Lines of Protection*, it proposes an understanding of drawing as a gesture that goes beyond representation, shaping itself as a form of thought and knowledge production. Positioned within the field of practice-based research, the study articulates artistic production and critical reflection. The first part discusses the work's contributions, emphasizing the notion of "drawing as weaving," the relationship between the graphic line and the textile line, and repetition as a process of meaning-making. The second

part develops a critical discussion that brings together authors such as Tim Ingold, Gilles Deleuze, Henk Borgdorff, and Paul Ricoeur, problematizing drawing as a processual practice, repetition as difference, and narrative as a non-verbal experience. It concludes that artistic practice, by articulating body, gesture, and materiality, constitutes a significant field of narrative and epistemological production.

## Keywords

drawing; textiles; narrative; autobiography; artistic research; memory

## Reference Format:

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## I. PRINCIPAIS CONTRIBUIÇÕES DO TRABALHO

### A. Desenho como prática de pensamento

O desenho constitui, neste trabalho, uma prática que atravessa a trajetória do artista desde a infância até o presente, configurando-se não apenas como linguagem visual, mas como forma de pensamento. Inicialmente vivido de maneira intuitiva, o desenhar revela-se, ao longo do tempo, como um dispositivo de organização sensível das ideias, operando entre o gesto, a atenção e a elaboração da experiência.

Esse entendimento desloca o desenho de uma função representacional para uma dimensão processual, na qual o ato de desenhar não se limita à produção de imagens, mas participa ativamente da construção de sentido. Desenhar passa a ser compreendido como um modo de pensar com o corpo, no qual o gesto não ilustra uma ideia prévia, mas contribui para sua emergência.

Nesse contexto, o trabalho investiga a possibilidade de compreender o desenho como prática de produção de conhecimento, especialmente quando articulado a processos têxteis. Interessa, assim, analisar de que modo o gesto repetitivo, material e corporal do desenhar-tecer pode



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constituir-se como dispositivo narrativo autobiográfico, deslocando a narrativa de um campo predominantemente verbal para uma dimensão sensível e processual.

### B. Desenhar como tecer: materialidade e processo

A principal contribuição deste trabalho reside na proposição do conceito de “desenhar como tecer”, no qual o desenho é compreendido como prática temporal, relacional e material. Essa noção emerge da aproximação entre o traço gráfico e o fio têxtil, ambos configurando linhas que se desenvolvem no tempo e que implicam um corpo em ação.

A obra *Linhas de Proteção* materializa essa investigação. Produzida sobre um tecido de algodão branco, de uso doméstico, a peça estabelece uma relação direta com o cotidiano e com práticas manuais historicamente situadas. O tecido não é apenas suporte, mas campo de inscrição de experiências, carregando consigo uma memória cultural ligada ao fazer artesanal.

A pintura azul, organizada em padrões geométricos repetitivos, constrói uma superfície que evoca ritmos e estruturas associadas a práticas tradicionais de bordado. Essa repetição inicial não se limita a uma função decorativa, mas estabelece um campo de ordenação visual que prepara a superfície para a intervenção do bordado.

O bordado em linha vermelha introduz uma segunda camada, na qual o desenho se realiza através do fio. O gesto de bordar, marcado pela repetição e pela duração, transforma o tempo em matéria visível. Cada ponto registra um instante, e a acumulação desses instantes constitui a imagem.



Fig. 1. Anderson Luiz de Souza, *Linhas de Proteção*, 2026. Técnica mista (tinta e bordado sobre tecido).

A escolha de materiais e técnicas não é neutra. Ao trabalhar com um tecido doméstico e com práticas como o bordado, o trabalho aproxima-se de saberes tradicionalmente associados ao espaço privado e ao fazer manual, frequentemente marginalizados no campo artístico. Ao reinscrever esses saberes em um contexto contemporâneo, a obra tensiona hierarquias entre arte e artesanato, entre produção intelectual e manual.

### C. Narrativa, memória e corpo

No centro da composição, a imagem de uma mão em posição de figa introduz uma dimensão simbólica que articula proteção, ancestralidade e identidade cultural. Desenhada a partir da observação direta da mão do artista, em escala real, essa imagem estabelece uma relação direta entre corpo e representação.



Fig. 2. Anderson Luiz de Souza, *Linhas de Proteção*, 2026. Detalhe da representação da mão.

Essa presença inscreve-se em uma rede de memórias que remontam à infância. Entre essas lembranças, destaca-se o gesto recorrente de solicitar à mãe que realizasse desenhos para posterior pintura. As imagens eram, em sua maioria, flores, formas simples e reiteradas que, posteriormente, revelaram-se parte de um repertório presente nas práticas artesanais maternas. Essas flores reapareciam em panos de prato, toalhas de mesa e outros objetos têxteis do cotidiano, pintadas ou bordadas com variações sutis que evidenciavam o domínio do gesto e a repetição como forma de construção.

Nesse contexto, o bordado não se apresenta apenas como técnica, mas como linguagem herdada. Trata-se de um saber transmitido de maneira não formal, por meio da convivência, da observação e da repetição de gestos. Ao retomar o bordado neste trabalho, o artista não busca reproduzir tais formas, mas reativar uma relação com esse universo, deslocando-o para o campo da arte contemporânea como prática de pensamento.

As formas geométricas presentes na pintura dialogam com padrões de bordado *hardanger*, referidos no contexto familiar como “redendê”. Trata-se de uma referência afetiva, mais do que formal, evocando um modo de fazer baseado na repetição, no ritmo e na construção paciente da superfície.

A utilização da linha vermelha introduz uma dimensão adicional. Se o azul da pintura estabelece um campo estrutural e reiterativo, o vermelho inscreve o gesto, o corpo e a presença. A linha não apenas delimita formas, mas afirma o desenho como ação, como atravessamento da superfície.

A presença da figa desloca o trabalho para um campo simbólico ampliado. Tradicionalmente associada à proteção contra o mau-olhado, a figa carrega significados que atravessam diferentes contextos culturais, incluindo práticas

afro-brasileiras. Sua inserção na obra estabelece uma conexão com dimensões de ancestralidade que se tornam mais evidentes no contexto da experiência migratória.

A mudança do Brasil para Portugal intensifica a percepção dessas referências, antes naturalizadas. Nesse deslocamento, elementos culturais passam a operar como marcadores de pertencimento. A figa, nesse sentido, assume não apenas um valor simbólico, mas também identitário, funcionando como gesto de permanência e reinscrição.

A presença da mão (em escala real) reforça essa dimensão situada. Não se trata de uma representação genérica, mas de um corpo específico, que produz e é produzido pela obra. O desenho da mão remete diretamente ao gesto que a constrói, estabelecendo uma continuidade entre corpo, ação e imagem.

A narrativa que emerge dessa composição não se organiza de forma linear, mas por camadas. Memória, gesto, material e símbolo coexistem, constituindo um campo de relações. A autobiografia não se apresenta como relato fechado, mas como inscrição processual, na qual diferentes temporalidades se entrelaçam.

O gesto repetitivo do bordar, ao longo de aproximadamente vinte horas, reforça essa dimensão. Cada ponto constitui um modo de permanência, uma forma de habitar o tempo. O fazer aproxima-se, assim, de uma prática meditativa, na qual pensamento e ação se constituem simultaneamente.

## II. DISCUSSÃO CRÍTICA

### A. Linha, gesto e processo

A compreensão do desenho como prática processual encontra ressonância na proposta de Tim Ingold [1], para quem a linha deve ser entendida como percurso, e não como representação estática. A linha é movimento, é trajetória, é relação entre corpo e mundo. Ao aproximar desenho e tecelagem, este trabalho não apenas ilustra essa perspectiva, mas a coloca em operação, evidenciando que o conhecimento pode emergir do fazer.

No contexto da obra apresentada, a linha deixa de ser um elemento que delimita formas para tornar-se um campo de experiência. No bordado, a linha não apenas contorna ou preenche, mas constrói um caminho que é simultaneamente visual e temporal. O gesto de seguir a linha, de repeti-la e, por vezes, de desviá-la, configura um modo de pensar que se dá no tempo e que envolve o corpo de maneira integral.

Essa compreensão articula-se diretamente com a dimensão autobiográfica discutida anteriormente. A linha, ao ser repetida e reinscrita sobre o tecido, não apenas constrói a imagem, mas ativa memórias, reencena gestos e reatualiza saberes herdados. O desenho, nesse sentido, não antecede o gesto, mas se constitui com ele, em uma relação contínua entre fazer e pensar.

### B. Repetição como produção de diferença

A repetição, elemento central na obra, pode ser compreendida à luz da filosofia de Gilles Deleuze [2]. Longe de ser uma reprodução do mesmo, a repetição constitui um campo de produção de diferença. Cada repetição introduz variações, ainda que mínimas, que transformam o conjunto e produzem novos sentidos.

No contexto do bordado, essa ideia torna-se particularmente evidente. O gesto repetitivo não é mecânico, mas sensível às condições do momento: a tensão do fio, o ritmo do corpo, o tempo disponível, o estado de atenção. Cada ponto é semelhante, mas nunca idêntico. A imagem que emerge não é pré-determinada, mas construída ao longo do processo, como resultado da acumulação dessas diferenças.

Essa dimensão aproxima-se da experiência descrita na primeira parte do texto, na qual o gesto de bordar se configura como prática meditativa. A repetição, nesse caso, não implica automatismo, mas concentração. Trata-se de um fazer que exige presença, no qual o pensamento não se separa do gesto, mas se desenvolve com ele.

Assim, o bordado pode ser compreendido como uma forma de pensamento incorporado, na qual o conhecimento não se organiza por abstração, mas por repetição situada. O saber produzido não é generalizável, mas singular, emergindo da relação entre corpo, material e tempo.

### C. Arte como produção de conhecimento

No campo da investigação artística, a relação entre prática e conhecimento tem sido amplamente discutida. A perspectiva de Borgdorff [3] contribui para compreender a prática artística como forma legítima de produção de conhecimento, na qual o fazer não ilustra uma teoria, mas constitui um modo próprio de pensar.

Neste trabalho, essa abordagem manifesta-se na própria estrutura da investigação. A obra *Linhas de Proteção* não é apenas um resultado final, mas a materialização de um processo investigativo no qual questões relativas à memória, ao corpo e à materialidade são exploradas através do fazer.

A dimensão autobiográfica, longe de reduzir o trabalho a um relato pessoal, opera como campo de problematização. Ao mobilizar memórias de infância, práticas herdadas e referências culturais, o artista não apenas narra uma experiência, mas investiga modos de construção de sentido que emergem da relação entre sujeito e mundo.

Nesse contexto, o conhecimento produzido não se limita ao discurso que o acompanha. Ele está presente na escolha dos materiais, na repetição dos gestos, na duração do processo e na construção da imagem. Trata-se de um conhecimento que se manifesta na prática e que desafia a separação entre teoria e fazer.

### D. Narrativa além da linguagem verbal

A noção de narrativa, frequentemente associada à linguagem verbal, é aqui deslocada para o campo da materialidade. A partir da perspectiva de Paul Ricoeur [4], pode-se compreender a narrativa como forma de organização da experiência no tempo. No entanto, neste trabalho, essa organização não se dá por meio de palavras, mas através de processos.

A repetição do bordado, a construção em camadas e a duração do fazer configuram uma temporalidade própria, na qual a narrativa emerge como experiência. Não se trata de uma história contada de forma linear, mas de um campo narrativo que se constrói pela relação entre elementos: cor, linha, gesto, material.

Essa perspectiva dialoga diretamente com a dimensão autobiográfica apresentada anteriormente. A memória, ao

invés de ser relatada, é ativada. Ela se manifesta na escolha dos padrões, na repetição dos gestos e na presença dos símbolos, como a figa. Narrar, nesse contexto, não é descrever, mas construir um espaço no qual diferentes tempos e experiências coexistem.

O espectador, por sua vez, não ocupa uma posição passiva. Ao percorrer a obra, estabelece relações, reconhece ritmos, projeta sentidos. A narrativa, portanto, não está completamente dada, mas se constrói na interação.

#### *E. Entre subjetividade e compartilhamento*

Ao articular memória, corpo e materialidade, a obra constitui um campo profundamente situado, atravessado por experiências individuais. No entanto, é precisamente nesse caráter situado que reside sua potência.

Os elementos que compõem o trabalho (a repetição do gesto, a presença da mão, o uso do tecido, os padrões geométricos, a figa) operam simultaneamente em níveis distintos: pessoal, cultural e sensível. Essa sobreposição permite que a obra ultrapasse o âmbito estritamente autobiográfico, abrindo-se à experiência do outro.

A subjetividade, nesse sentido, não se apresenta como fechamento, mas como ponto de partida. Ao tornar visíveis processos internos (memória, repetição, atenção) a obra cria condições para que diferentes espectadores estabeleçam suas próprias relações com o que é apresentado.

Assim, a narrativa autobiográfica não se encerra no sujeito que a produz, mas se expande no encontro com o outro, configurando-se como campo relacional. É nesse espaço entre o singular e o compartilhado que a obra se afirma, não como resposta, mas como abertura.

#### **AGRADECIMENTOS**

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# Carrying the Peti: Biographical Performance, Postmemory, and Digital Mediation in Panj (ਪੰਜ)

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## Abstract

*Panj (ਪੰਜ — Punjabi for five) is a solo interdisciplinary performance weaving together live storytelling, psychedelic rock fusion music, and video projection. It traces five pivotal moments in the creator's Punjabi Sikh family history: from the trauma of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, through successive migrations from India to Britain and from Britain to Canada, to the emergence of a queer artistic identity in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal). The work is biographical in nature and relates the reckoning between a son and his father, a relationship fractured by silence after the son came out as queer. The rupture is deepened by the father's sudden death in 2006, robbing them both of the possibility for reconciliation.*

*A key dramaturgical motif is the peti, a traditional Indian wooden chest. A diaporama of family photographs is projected onto the open lid as video. This staging enacts a form of digital mediation of postmemory: the late father's photographic archive, inherited by the son, is brought back to life as the projected archival images land on a physical object — the peti.*

*Panj can be seen to reference various perspectives such as Stuart Hall's theorisation of diasporic identity as always in production, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and Diana Taylor's archival / repertoire distinction. This paper advances the premise that Panj constitutes a mode of biographical practice that is simultaneously therapeutic, archival, and performative. The work mobilises digital projection technology not as spectacle but as a metaphor for how memory itself operates: the past is projected onto, and transformed by, the bodies and objects that receive it.*

## Keywords

*biographical performance; postmemory; Punjabi Sikh diaspora; digital mediation; live archive; interdisciplinary practice*

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

### A. Biographical Performance as Intergenerational Repair

*Panj* occupies a distinctive position within biographical performance practice. Unlike life-writing, in which an individual explores diverse dimensions of their own identity, *Panj* stages the rupture between biographical knowledge and emotional truth: a son reuniting with a father who died before their estrangement could be healed. The work's five-movement structure functions like a symphony, connecting a set of inherited traumas and silences. Each movement constitutes an exercise in unearthing; the performer excavates memory in real time before an audience.

*Panj* can be situated within what Stuart Hall calls the "double inscription" of diasporic identity: looking simultaneously backward toward an origin and forward into the present [1]. The work does not narrate diaspora as a completed journey but enacts it as an unfinished and ongoing dialogue — between languages, between generations, between what was inherited and what was lost or suppressed. The 1947 Partition stands not as historical backdrop but as the original wound: the root cause from which subsequent silences emerge, including the father-son estrangement.

The creation process itself was inseparable from this repair work. *Panj* was developed through a parallel process of therapeutic healing, intergenerational conversation, and archival excavation. This confluence, the creative act as simultaneously artistic and psychological, constitutes one of the work's central contributions: a model for what might be called therapeutic biographical performance, in which artistic production and inner healing are not merely analogous but structurally intertwined. Figures and Tables

### B. The Peti as Live Archive

The dramaturgical function of the peti in *Panj* straddles Diana Taylor's distinction between archive and repertoire; between material, transmittable documents and embodied, ephemeral performance [2]. The peti (a traditional Indian wooden chest) is physically present centre-stage throughout the performance. Digitized family photographs from the father's personal archive are projected as video directly onto the open lid.

This staging collapses Taylor's binary: the peti is simultaneously archival object and live performer. It is a

container of inherited memory (archive) made present through the performer's body and the audience's gaze (repertoire). The technology of projection enacts a specific kind of biographical work: the photographic image. The representation of the father's gaze and his chosen record of family life reincarnates, transformed, enlarged, and made to pulse with the intimacy that the living relationship never found space to express.

In this sense, *Panj* represents an example of what might be termed embodied digital biography: a practice in which digital archival materials (photographs, documents, images) are not displayed on screens but made to inhabit physical objects, collapsing the distance between past and present, between the inherited and the felt.

### C- Postmemory and the Photographic Archive

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory describes the relationship of children to the traumatic experiences of their parents — experiences so powerful that they are transmitted as memory, even though the child did not experience them directly [3]. Hirsch's framework emerged from Holocaust studies but has since been applied broadly to intergenerational transmission in diasporic communities.

In *Panj*, postmemory operates on two distinct registers. First, the Partition of 1947: an event the performer did not witness but whose impact is felt viscerally. This root trauma is identified as the source of, and provides the framework for, the silences and ruptures of family life — including the cultural codes around masculinity, belonging, and shame that shaped the father-son estrangement. Second, the father's sudden death in 2006: grief that arrived before reconciliation was possible, and that demanded a posthumous biographical reckoning in order for healing to take place. The photographic archive mediates both registers simultaneously. The father's photographs document the life of his family and his children; they also articulate a language that could not be expressed through words.

Crucially, the digitisation of this archive for performance purposes constitutes its own biographical act. To scan, select, sequence, and project a family photograph is to perform an interpretive reading of it — to propose a meaning for an image that was never intended to carry such weight. *Panj* makes this interpretive labour visible: the audience witnesses the son doing, in real time, the retrospective reading of a life.

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

### A. Digital Mediation: Projection as Biographical Method

The use of video projection in live performance is, by now, a well-established dramaturgical convention. What distinguishes its use in *Panj* is its specifically biographical function: projection is not scenographic illustration as background, but the primary mechanism through which the past is made present. The projection of family photographs onto the *peti* lid enacts, materially, the phenomenology of postmemory — the way inherited images are not merely remembered but experienced as if from within. It is as if the *peti* contains memory; the act of opening and closing the lid alternately gives or takes away access to memory.

This connects to broader questions about digital mediation in biographical narratives. Hoskins [4] has argued

that digital memory fundamentally alters the relationship between individual and collective remembering; the availability of photographic archives at scale changes what it means to have memories. In *Panj*, this theoretical claim is articulated live, in performance: the digitised photograph is an act of preservation that is simultaneously an act of transformation. Every digitisation involves a process of reformatting that includes choice of resolution, of cropping, of sequencing. The photographic archive, once digital, is no longer constrained by the limitations that characterise a physical archive. It is no longer merely inherited; it is actively re-authored.

The *peti* itself complicates any straightforward celebration of digital mediation. As a physical object, an heirloom, heavy with material history, it resists the frictionlessness of digital reproduction. The *peti* is a gift the father creates with his own hands, maintaining artisanal traditions of the Ramgharia Sikhs, to pass down to his son on his 40th birthday. The projection onto the chest is not a metaphor but a literal operation: light falling on wood, image inhabiting object. This friction between digital lightness and material weight is, arguably, the central affective experience of the work. Both the material and the ephemeral become channels for the transmission of memory across generations.

### B. Limits and Tensions

A critical reading of *Panj* must acknowledge the power asymmetries embedded in biographical performance. The father is no longer able to speak for himself; the performer constructs a portrait of a man who cannot contest it. This is not a problem unique to *Panj* — it is a structural feature of all posthumous biography — but it carries particular weight when the biography is embedded in unresolved estrangement. The work is ethically alert to this asymmetry: it does not claim to represent the father's experience but rather the son's retrospective encounter with his father's image-archive.

There is also a tension between the therapeutic function of the work and its public reception. The creation process, as noted, was inseparable from personal healing work. This raises questions about the relationship between artistic form and psychological process: how does the therapeutic investment in the material impact its resonance with audiences who do not share its autobiographical context? Audience responses at the 2022 premiere at Montréal Arts Interculturels suggested that the work's specificity, its rootedness in a particular Punjabi Sikh family history and a particular queer coming-out narrative, was precisely what gave it its affective force for diverse audiences. Specificity, it seems, generates rather than forecloses identification.

A related tension concerns the relationship between *Panj* as standalone performance and the ongoing project *Milāpa* (ਮਿਲਾਪ: reunion, coming together), currently in development with the intention to offer in two versions: both memoir and performance. *Panj* is designated the first movement of this broader autobiographical practice. This raises productive questions about the temporal and formal relationship between completed and developing work: how does the existence of *Milāpa* (which explores the performer's self) retrospectively alter the meaning of *Panj* (which explores the relationship between the performer and his father)? How does biographical performance differ from biographical memoir as modes of self-knowing? These questions are not

yet resolved — they are the animating questions of the ongoing practice.

### C. Contribution to Biographical Narrative Studies

*Panj* contributes to biographical narrative studies in at least three ways. First, it models a practice of *embodied archival biography* in which digital materials constitute rather than supplement live performance.

Second, it extends Hirsch's postmemory framework into the context of queer diasporic masculinity. Here, the transmission of intergenerational trauma intersects with the suppression of sexual identity, leading to a specific kind of inherited silence. Sara Ahmed's figure of the melancholic migrant is illuminating in this context. Ahmed argues that the migrant who refuses to assimilate — who holds on to the unhappy inheritances of racism, displacement, and cultural rupture — functions as what she calls an "affect alien": a figure who exposes the cracks in the nation's self-image as welcoming family [5]. The father in *Panj* can be seen through this lens. His silences — around Partition, around his son's queerness — are not simply personal failures but structurally produced: the cost of navigating a culture that demanded performed happiness as the price of belonging. Crucially, Ahmed's framework in *The Promise of Happiness* addresses the unhappy queer alongside the melancholic migrant, giving *Panj* a single theoretical touchstone for both of its intersecting axes of inherited silence.

Third, the work demonstrates how the act of artistic creation can function as a biographical method in itself: the performance does not document a healing process completed elsewhere but is the process, made visible and shareable.

In staging the *peti* — an object that was always already a container for inherited memory — and illuminating it with digitised family photographs, *Panj* offers a model for how biographical performance might work at the intersection of archive and body, of the digital and the material, of the private and the public. The chest is carried. The photographs are projected. The silence, finally, is interrupted.

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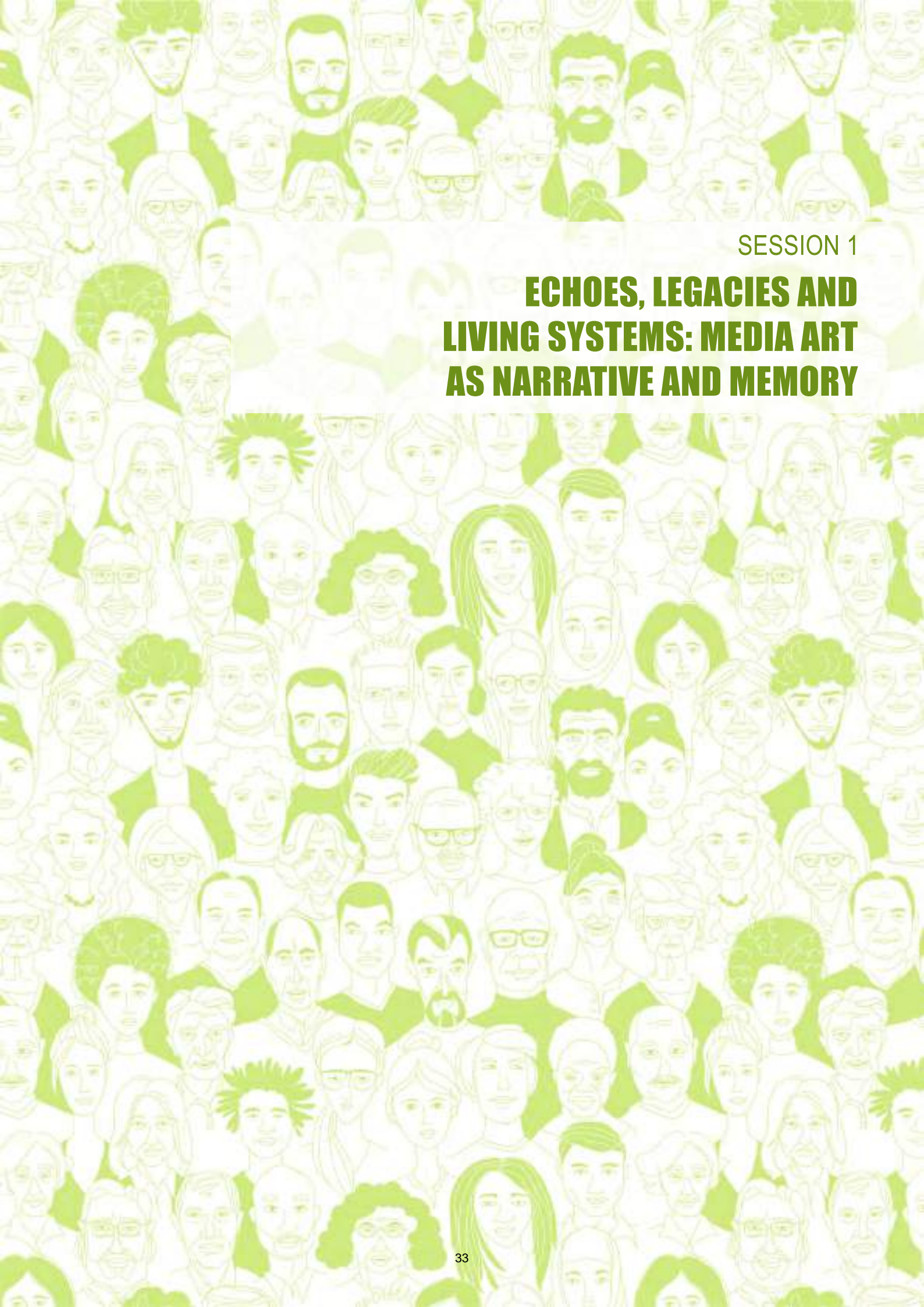
*Panj* premiered at Montréal Arts Interculturels (MAI) during Festival Accès-Asie in May 2022. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of MAI and Festival Accès-Asie, and the collaborators, interlocutors, and ancestors whose lives and silences this work attempts to honour.

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# SHORT PAPERS





SESSION 1

**ECHOES, LEGACIES AND  
LIVING SYSTEMS: MEDIA ART  
AS NARRATIVE AND MEMORY**

# Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole

## Generative Video Art as Biographical Testimony and Collective Memory

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### Abstract

The poem “Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole” (*They Shot at the Sun*) by Italian Resistance poet Alfonso Gatto constitutes a biographical document of historical witness: a personal act of testimony that crystallises collective experience at a specific historical rupture. This paper presents a generative video art installation of the same name, which reinterprets Gatto’s poem as a living biographical archive through a dual synchronic and anachronistic approach. Developed under the a/r/cographic creative methodology, the work employs computational image retrieval, three-dimensional generative geometry, and stochastic verse–image pairing to render the poem’s testimony across both its original historical register — the Italian Resistance of the 1940s — and contemporary forms of resistance, including anti-COVID civic mobilisation and anti-neofascist citizen movements active in 2021. Drawing on Nora’s conceptualisation of *lieux de mémoire*, Manovich’s database–narrative dialectic, and the concept of multimodal algorithmic memory, the paper argues that generative art can function as a form of collective biographical memory: open, iterative, and capable of connecting generations across temporal rupture. Three analytical concepts organise this argument: digital *détournement*, understood as the critical redirection of circulating imagery from its original ideological context toward counter-hegemonic ends; activism, designating artistic practice that intervenes in public discourse through form, circulation, and site-specific address rather than merely representing political concerns; and multimodal algorithmic memory, a generative process in which image, text, and code jointly produce a dynamic reconfiguration of testimony across iterations — neither archival storage nor illustration, but active reactivation.

### Keywords

generative video art; collective memory; a/r/cography; digital activism; performative temporality; multimodal algorithmic memory



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Alfonso Gatto (1909–1976) was among the most significant voices of Italian hermetism and one of its most politically committed poets. Written in response to the Italian partisan Resistance against fascist occupation, “Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole” (*They Shot at the Sun*) is simultaneously an intimate lyrical act and a document of collective biographical witness. Its verses render the deaths of young partisans as figures of light — “*i ragazzi che avanzano in cielo*” (the boys who advance through the sky) — transforming individual loss into a meditation on sacrifice, hope, and the continuity of human struggle [1]. The generative installation presented in this paper<sup>1</sup> takes Gatto’s poem as its biographical and conceptual engine. Rather than illustrating the poem, it treats it as a living archive: a testimony that can be renewed across time without altering its essential truth. The poem is rendered in(de)initely, cycling through its verses in a continuous generative loop, each iteration pairing the text with a new combination of visually processed images drawn from both the historical period of the poem and the contemporary world. This paper documents the work’s development through the seven stages of the a/r/cographic creative methodology, articulates its conceptual framework at the intersection of biographical narrative and collective memory theory, and reflects on the implications of generative art as a form of temporal biographical practice.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The relation between biographical narrative and collective memory has been extensively theorised. Nora’s concept of

<sup>1</sup> The video can be seen here:  
<https://pedroveiga.com/hanno-sparato-contro-il-sole/>

*lieux de mémoire* — sites of memory — describes how communities construct shared memory through symbolic objects, practices, and texts when the living transmission of memory can no longer be taken for granted [2]. A poem produced under conditions of historical extremity functions as precisely such a site: it crystallises individual testimony into a transmissible form, simultaneously biographical (anchored in a specific person’s historical moment) and collective (constituting a shared cultural inheritance). Gatto’s poem, composed in the immediate aftermath of partisan violence, belongs to this category. This biographical function of memory-making objects has been substantially complicated in the digital context. Van Dijck argues that digital media do not simply store memories but actively shape their formation, distribution, and social meaning — transforming memory from a private cognitive act into a mediated cultural practice [3]. Hoskins extends this analysis through the concept of connective memory: in networked digital culture, memory is not archived but continuously reconnected across distributed nodes, making it volatile, contested, and productive rather than stable [4]. Generative art systems operate within — and critically exploit — precisely this connective logic: rather than preserving testimony, they mobilise it across time, reactivating it within new perceptual and political horizons. Manovich argues that the database and the narrative represent two opposing logics of cultural organisation: where narrative imposes sequence and causality, the database enables combinatorial openness; software, in turn, has become the primary medium through which cultural processes are expressed and experienced [5]. Generative art operates at the intersection of these two logics, deploying computational processes to produce experiences that are sequential in reception but combinatorially open in their underlying structure — a dynamic extensively analysed in recent generative art scholarship [6]. This tension is productive for the reinterpretation of biographical testimony: the poem’s verses provide a fixed narrative thread, while the generative image system introduces the open, associative logic of database culture, enabling the viewer to encounter new conjunctions of historical and contemporary imagery on each iteration. The stochastic dimension of image selection is not incidental but constitutive. Ugander and Epstein argue that randomness and chance in algorithmic processes produce a form of cultural reproduction that is neither repetition nor invention, but combinatorial emergence — each instance unique, yet shaped by the same underlying logic [7]. This is precisely the experiential condition that the installation enacts: the poem remains fixed; the imagery surrounding it is perpetually new. The concept of multimodal algorithmic memory — provisionally defined as the dynamic, performative operation through which generative systems articulate images, texts, and temporal structure in real time, functioning as a living archive rather than a static repository — is directly pertinent here [8]. Where archival memory preserves the past as fixed record, multimodal algorithmic memory produces the past anew on each iteration: it is not the storage of experience but its computational re-enactment. Previous work has argued that generative systems of this kind enact a performative temporality: each execution of the code constitutes a singular, ephemeral, and irrepeatable event, in which memory is not preserved but produced [8]. *Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole* exemplifies this logic: the poem’s verses are the structural memory that the system repeatedly activates, each time generating a distinct combination of

imagery and temporal rhythm. The a/r/cographic methodology positions the practitioner simultaneously as artist (a), researcher (r), and communicator (c), formalising a seven-stage creative process — Inspiration, Trigger, Intention, Conceptualisation, Prototyping, Testing, and Intervention — and locating artistic knowledge in the process itself rather than exclusively in the resulting artefact [9, 10]. This framework both organises the development trajectory of the present work and constitutes its reflective epistemological grounding.

### III. THE WORK: A/R/COGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

**Inspiration.** The work’s biographical origin lies in Gatto’s poem, which served as the conceptual and emotional catalyst. The Inspiration stage engaged with the poem’s historical context — the Italian Resistance, the figure of the partisan, the politics of fascism and its opposition — and with Gatto’s poetic strategies: hermetism inflected with political urgency, the transformation of violent death into luminous imagery. The poem was approached as a biographical document whose historical charge demanded reactivation rather than mere commemoration.

**Trigger.** The Trigger was an invitation from the Alfonso Gatto Foundation, to participate in the In Strada Festival in Salerno, Italy — Gatto’s birthplace. The goal was to create a site-responsive work for public space exhibition in November 2021. The specificity of the site deepened the biographical resonance: exhibiting in the city where the poet was born, in a public space accessible to residents with direct or inherited ties to the Resistance, placed the work within a living biographical community rather than an exclusively art-world context.

**Intention.** The work’s governing intention was anachronistic recontextualisation: to demonstrate that the poem’s political and ethical charge had not been exhausted by its historical moment. The “resistance” the poem memorialises was to be shown as an ongoing biographical thread, connecting the anti-fascist partisans of the 1940s to the anti-COVID-19 civic mobilisation and anti-neo-fascist citizen movements active in 2021 — proposing the poem as a trans-historical biographical document rather than a closed historical artefact.

**Conceptualisation.** The HSCIS genotype combines images obtained by the author and photographs provided by the Alfonso Gatto Foundation — including portraits of the poet and period documentation — with visual content retrieved via search engines. Keywords drawn from the poem’s semantic field — “Salerno”, “Italian Resistance”, “Alfonso Gatto”, “anti-fascism”, among others — were combined with contemporary keywords — such as “migrant crisis”, “COVID”, “neofascism” — to source photographic material, in a process of digital *détournement*. This is a practice with roots in the Situationist International’s strategy of diverting existing cultural material from its original ideological context to destabilise dominant representations [11], and, in its digital form, a mode of critical appropriation that redirects publicly circulating imagery toward a counter-hegemonic biographical narrative. As a form of digital activism — the use of digital tools and networked media to intervene politically in public space and shared cultural memory — the work combines aesthetic practice with civic intent. The original synchronic image database was thus expanded through an anachronistic approach, shifting the

notion of resistance to the present day through search terms evoking the rescue of migrants, pro-science and anti-extremist citizen movements. The three-dimensional elements were algorithmically generated as a set of rotating three-dimensional cubes, each face bearing a distorted and colour-processed image, symbolising different events, spaces, and times that interpenetrate and influence one another in a continuum where cause and effect were almost indistinguishable. The movement of the geometric structures alluded to the passing of time, like gears in a time machine; the cyclic variation of individual scale and rotation speed being symbolic of the differing weight of historical events: from revolutionary transformation to individual gesture, yet all intrinsic to the same continuum. The sound genotype comprised atmospheric elements alongside more specific sounds — a train whistle, children at play.

**Prototyping.** The system was programmed in Processing [12] and developed iteratively without the use of any artificial intelligence tools. The prototype addressed two main technical challenges: the management of the stochastic image-selection engine and the real-time verse-overlay mechanism. As each new verse appears, the image set is renewed. By introducing randomness into each run, the system produced unpredictable pairings: some image–verse combinations appeared semantically connected, reinforcing the poem’s referential horizon; others felt disconnected, inviting viewers to construct their own meanings from unexpected juxtapositions — an instance of what Ugander and Epstein describe as the productive indeterminacy of algorithmic chance [7]. Overlaying the images with the current verse through partial transparencies produced an ethereal visual context, alluding to the associative imagery that forms in the mind when absorbed in reading poetry.



Fig. 1: A representative frame from *Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole*. The verse “Non s’ode nulla ma il vento” is rendered across the generative cube composition; the second line appears at reduced opacity above, contextualising the succeeding verse. The image set juxtaposes historical Resistance photography (left) with contemporary refugee crisis documentation (right), enacting the synchronic–anachronistic dual structure.

**Testing.** Testing was conducted under pandemic conditions during the winter of 2021, initially with close contacts, and subsequently with the Italian venue team to determine the technical specifications required by the public space installation — most notably the ultra-wide aspect ratio of the video output, which required iterative adjustment of the generative engine’s compositional parameters. Figure 1 shows a representative frame from the resulting work, displaying the first verse overlaid across the cube composition, with the second line visible at reduced opacity above.

**Intervention.** The work was first publicly exhibited in Salerno, in the Piazza Porta Nova, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2021, remaining *in situ* until the end of that year. The choice of Salerno as the exhibition site added a further biographical layer: as Gatto’s birthplace, the city is itself a *lieu de mémoire* in which the poem’s historical testimony intersects with civic identity and local memory. The public space context — reaching an audience that included residents with direct biographical connections to the events and figures the poem commemorates — fulfilled the communicative intention of the work: to return Gatto’s biographical testimony to the biographical community from which it emerged. A full reception study was not feasible under the conditions of the public exhibition, particularly given the constraints of the pandemic period and the informal character of the setting. The observations gathered during the installation were limited to occasional exchanges with passers-by and did not amount to systematic evidence. For that reason, claims about audience interpretation should be read as provisional, indicating a promising line of inquiry rather than a demonstrated result.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The installation’s generative logic produces a form of biographical narrative that is open at both ends. The poem provides a biographical core — Gatto’s witness, historically specific and emotionally particular — while the generative image system introduces variability, contingency, and the viewer’s interpretive agency. The stochastic pairing of verse and images does not destabilise the biographical testimony at the poem’s centre; rather, it enacts the way memory actually operates: associatively, incompletely, and productively. Each viewing is a unique act of biographical encounter. This dynamic corresponds precisely to what has been theorised as multimodal algorithmic memory [8]: a mode of operation that does not preserve the past but produces it, situating the poem’s content within the perceptual present of each iteration. The dual temporal structure — synchronic (images from the poem’s historical period) and anachronistic (images from 2021) — proposes resistance as a trans-historical biographical thread. The work does not argue for the equivalence of historical experiences; it argues that they share a biographical grammar: the confrontation of ordinary lives with political violence and injustice. The three-dimensional cube geometry structurally reinforces this: each face presents a distinct moment, but the cubes rotate and interpenetrate, making visible that these moments are not discrete but continuous — each shaped by and shaping the others across time. The resulting performative temporality is not the time of the clock but the time of lived experience: nonlinear, associative, and ethically charged [8]. Contemporary generative art practice has increasingly positioned this capacity for temporal disruption and biographical recontextualisation as one of the field’s defining contributions [6]. The implementation process also surfaced productive tensions that deserve analytical reflection. The stochastic engine produced image–verse pairings of strikingly uneven semantic density: some conjunctions reinforced the poem’s register directly and with considerable emotional force, while others appeared arbitrary to the point of disruption. In the context of a public space exhibition — where attention is fragmentary, entry into the work is contingent, and most passers-by will encounter a verse other than the first — semantic discontinuity functions as an attentional device, soliciting active interpretation rather than passive reception; the apparent mismatch between image and

text compels the viewer to supply the connection rather than receive it.



Fig. 2: The first verse of the poem, encompassed by rotating cubes, with face-mapped imagery as well scaled wireframes.

The variability introduced by the participants is not a flaw but a constitutive property of the system, and it raises a question that purely archival or commemorative framings cannot accommodate: how much interpretive openness can a politically committed work sustain before its ethical address becomes indeterminate? Conventional documentary or commemorative practice maintains authorial control over the image–text relation; the present system deliberately cedes that control to combinatorial chance, distributing authorial agency among the poet (whose testimony remains fixed), the practitioner (who curated the image corpus and designed the system logic), the algorithm (which governs each iteration) and the public (who have their first contact at a random moment of the artwork’s flow). The Salerno exhibition context sharpened this question without resolving it: the public space setting and the biographical community of the audience introduced a degree of interpretive stakes not present in gallery exhibitions. Whether the stochastic openness amplified the work’s political resonance or attenuated it remains an open question — one that points toward a central issue for practice-based activism research, and that a structured reception study could begin to address. Situating the work within the a/r/cographic framework draws attention to the communicative dimension that a purely artistic or archival framing might obscure. Operating in public space in the city of Gatto’s own biography, the work addresses an audience not specialised in media art. This communicative register — reaching people through the street rather than the gallery — is constitutive of the work’s meaning, not supplementary to it [9, 10]. The poem continues to be rendered indefinitely, immutable in content but reinterpreted across time: a biographical continuum made visible through code. Two limitations should be acknowledged. First, the interpretive claims advanced here are based on the analysis of the work and on informal observation rather than on structured audience research. Second, the political and historical specificity of the case means that its insights cannot be transferred mechanically to all generative art practices. Even so, the project offers a useful model for thinking about how computational systems may reactivate testimony without reducing it to static archive or illustrative commentary.

### CONCLUSION

This paper contributes a practice-based account of how generative video art can function as a biographical memory device rather than a purely visual or commemorative form. By combining a fixed poetic core with stochastic image generation, the work demonstrates that memory in digital art can operate as a process of reactivation, not just preservation.

The case also shows that the communicative dimension of a/r/cography is especially relevant in public-space installations, where artistic meaning emerges through the relation between site, code, and accidental encounter. Gatto’s poem remains the immutable core — its words unchanged, its biographical charge undiminished. What the generative system adds is temporal extension and associative breadth, connecting the poem’s witness to the living present and inviting each iteration’s audience to enter the biographical continuum it constructs. This paper’s central contribution to knowledge is the articulation of a framework in which generative art functions as biographical memory: not as archive or illustration, but as a performative, combinatorially open reactivation of historical testimony. This extends existing theorisations of digital and connective memory [3, 4] by foregrounding the generative artwork as an agent of memory production rather than storage, and connects that theoretical claim to a concrete practice-based case developed under the a/r/cographic methodology. The alignment of Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* with the stochastic logic of the generative system demonstrates that the distinction between site-specific memory and algorithmically mediated memory is less categorical than it may initially appear: both operate through acts of cultural activation rather than simple preservation. The uneven semantic density of the stochastic pairings should not be read simply as a technical by-product. Rather, it reveals a central tension in the work between memorial legibility and interpretive openness. When the pairing is direct, the image-text relation reinforces historical testimony; when it is less obvious, the system asks the viewer to participate in meaning-making. In this sense, ambiguity is not a defect but a condition of reception in public space, where attention is fragmented and memory must compete with distraction. The work therefore tests how far a politically committed generative piece can disperse authorship without losing ethical force. To conclude, *Hanno Sparato Contro Il Sole* shows that generative video art can operate as a mode of biographical testimony in which historical memory is renewed through computational variation. The paper has argued that this process is best understood through the combined lenses of *lieux de mémoire*, connective memory, and a/r/cographic practice. Future research should examine audience reception more systematically and explore how different forms of stochastic design affect the balance between political address and interpretive openness.

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# VEIN

## A Bio-Sonic Narrative of Forest Life through Plant Bioelectrical Signals

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### Abstract

*VEIN is an artistic research project that investigates the translation of plant bioelectrical signals into bio-sonic narratives. The system captures real-time electrical fluctuations from vegetation in a forest ecosystem (Alto de São Bento, Évora, Portugal) and transforms them into structured sound through a hybrid analog-digital workflow. Conductive sensors record variations in plant bioelectrical activity, which are amplified, digitized, and mapped onto sonic parameters such as pitch, timbre, and rhythmic density.*

*Rather than treating sonification as direct representation of data, VEIN frames it as a situated interpretative process in which biological and technological systems co-produce perceptual structures. The main contribution is the proposition of narrative as an emergent property of temporal biological variability rather than a human-centered construct.*

*This approach is critically positioned against conventional sonification frameworks that prioritize analytical transparency and data fidelity. Instead, VEIN aligns with ecological listening and sound studies perspectives that emphasize relational perception and situated meaning-making. The project contributes to ongoing debates in bioacoustics, media art, and ecological sound practices by proposing a model of bio-sonic narration grounded in more-than-representational processes.*

### Keywords

*Bio-sonification; plant electrophysiology; ecological listening; sound art; data sonification.*

### Reference Format:

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### I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR WORK

VEIN introduces a real-time system utilizing the "Symbiotic Biodata" device to translate plant bioelectrical signals into sonic material through hybrid mapping strategies, focusing on perceptual emergence rather than direct data representation.

#### 1.1. Bioelectrical-to-sonic translation system

A real-time system was developed for capturing plant bioelectrical signals using conductive sensors (Fig.1)



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Fig. 1. System architecture (signal-to-sound pipeline), 2016

placed on vegetation. These signals are amplified and stabilized using the Symbiotic Biodata device and converted into digital MIDI data for sound synthesis and processing. The system enables continuous transformation of physiological plant activity into sonic material, grounded in established research in plant electrophysiology [1,2].

### 1.2. Hybrid sonification and mapping strategy

Bioelectrical fluctuations are translated into sonic parameters including pitch, timbre, and rhythmic density. The mapping strategy prioritizes perceptual emergence rather than direct data representation, aligning with contemporary approaches to sonification as interpretative mediation rather than transcription [3].

The system integrates audio interfaces and digital audio workstations, enabling real-time transformation of biological signals into structured sound.

### 1.3. Bio-sonic narrative model

VEIN proposes narrative as an emergent structure arising from temporal variation in biological systems. Instead of linear storytelling, narrative is understood as the perceptual organization of change, continuity, and repetition within sonic transformations of living processes.

This model aligns with ecological listening frameworks in which meaning emerges through situated engagement rather than representation [4,5].

### 1.4. Study Site and Ecological Context

The Alto de São Bento forest ecosystem (Fig. 2) (Évora, Portugal) was selected due to its ecological heterogeneity and its role as an educational and scientific field laboratory. The area consists of a Mediterranean woodland landscape shaped by variations in soil composition, humidity, and solar exposure, supporting diverse microhabitats and plant communities.

The research developed at the Macromycology Laboratory focuses on the taxonomy and ecology of fungi, with particular attention to their interactions with Mediterranean flora. This work investigates how mycorrhizal symbioses enhance the resilience of native plant species,

contributing to conservation and ecosystem regeneration processes where fungi and plants coexist.

The Alto de São Bento site constitutes a granite outcrop of high geological relevance, where acidic substrate conditions and intense solar exposure shape a distinct ecological system that preserves elements of original vegetation. The site functions as a living laboratory, articulating local geodiversity with historical and cultural heritage linked to traditional milling practices.

The flora of Alto de São Bento is characterized by high resilience, comprising herbaceous and shrub communities adapted to skeletal soils and water-deficient regimes, alongside diverse assemblages of bryophytes and saxicolous lichens, as documented in regional floristic surveys [6]. The stability of this ecological niche relies on symbiotic relationships between host plants and mycorrhizal fungi, whose mycelial networks—often described as the “wood wide web”—are crucial for sustaining vegetation under xeric conditions.

Within this environment, the botanical landscape unfolds between spontaneous vegetation and cultivated ritual gardens (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Study site (Alto de São Bento ecosystem, Évora), 2016



Fig. 3. Top left: Mediterranean Mustard; Down left: Black Salsify; Right: Sage and System architecture

Species such as Mediterranean Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) demonstrate ecological independence by thriving without mycorrhizal associations, while others, including Sage (*Salvia officinalis*), rely on fungal symbionts that enhance biochemical processes such as essential oil

production (Fig. 3). The botanical narrative continues with Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) and Rue (*Ruta graveolens*), which bridge the gap between medicinal utility and magical folklore, alongside Lemon Verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*) and Black Salsify (*Scorzonera hispanica*) (Fig. 3), whose historical use in infusions and traditional confectionery illustrates the refinement of wild resources [6,7]. This ecological survey culminates with the Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*), the sentinel of the Portuguese landscape. Beyond its economic value, the tree sustains the ecosystem through an invisible "symphony" of underground mycelial networks, where symbiotic relationships between roots and fungi ensure life's continuity in challenging soils.

This ecological framework provides a critical foundation for VEIN, grounding the bio-sonic translation of plant electrophysiological activity in a context of interconnected biological processes and environmental responsiveness [1,2]



Fig. 4. Cork oak, National Tree of Portugal

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

VEIN critically departs from conventional sonification frameworks, which prioritize faithful data representation, transparency, and analytical interpretability [3]. Rather than treating bioelectrical signals as stable carriers of pre-defined meaning, the project frames sonification as a situated and interpretative process in which perception emerges through the interaction between biological variability, technological mediation, and listening practices.

Research in plant electrophysiology has demonstrated that plants produce measurable electrical signals associated with environmental stimuli and internal regulatory processes [1,2]. These signals are typically approached as physiological indicators within scientific paradigms. VEIN, however, shifts this perspective by treating bioelectrical activity not as data to be decoded, but as generative material for perceptual and narrative formation.

This shift becomes more significant when considered within the ecological context of Alto de São Bento. The plant

signals captured by the system do not originate from isolated organisms, but from species embedded in a dense network of ecological relations. Mycorrhizal symbioses, extensively documented in Mediterranean ecosystems, establish underground connections between plants and fungi, enabling nutrient exchange, signaling processes, and adaptive resilience. These distributed networks—often described as the “wood wide web”—challenge individualistic models of biological agency and suggest instead a relational ontology of life processes.

Within this framework, the signals sonified in VEIN can be understood as expressions of a broader ecological field rather than discrete biological events. The variability detected in plant electrophysiology may reflect not only individual responses but also indirect interactions mediated through soil composition, microclimatic fluctuations, and symbiotic exchanges. As such, the resulting sonic structures are not representations of singular entities, but emergent articulations of interconnected ecological dynamics.

This perspective aligns with ecological approaches to listening, in which sound is not treated as an object but as a relational event unfolding between environment, medium, and listener [4,5]. VEIN extends this understanding by embedding ecological relationality within the technical system itself: the mapping strategies, signal instabilities, and temporal modulations all contribute to shaping a perceptual field where meaning is co-produced rather than transmitted.

Furthermore, the concept of narrative proposed in VEIN resonates with this ecological paradigm. Instead of linear storytelling or symbolic encoding, narrative emerges as the perceptual organization of temporal variation—patterns of intensity, continuity, disruption, and repetition—arising from the ongoing activity of living systems. In this sense, narrative is not imposed onto the data but unfolds through the listener’s engagement with dynamic processes that exceed human-centered structures of meaning.

By integrating plant electrophysiology, mycorrhizal ecology, and sound studies, VEIN proposes a model of bio-sonic narration grounded in more-than-representational processes. The project challenges the epistemological assumptions of both scientific sonification and narrative theory, suggesting that meaning does not reside in data or organisms alone, but emerges through distributed relations across biological, technological, and perceptual domains.

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# Wandering Air: Perceiving Breath between Taoism and Ecofeminism

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## Abstract

*This paper explores how concepts of nature and materiality can be reimagined through artistic practice. Through the project Wandering Air, it investigates how philosophical ideas—particularly from Taoist philosophy and ecofeminism—can be transposed into perceptual and material experiences. The work understands “air” and “breath” as relational processes connecting human and more-than-human entities. Drawing on Taoist concepts such as Qi and wuwei, alongside ecofeminist ideas of care, relationality, and non-human agency, the project develops a practice-based methodology that engages with natural forces as co-creative participants. Through experiments using balloons and clay, the research materializes the movement of breath and reveals the dynamic interplay between control and unpredictability. The findings suggest that both Taoism and ecofeminism challenge anthropocentric perspectives and propose a relational understanding of existence. By situating artistic practice within ecological processes, the project offers a cross-cultural framework for rethinking the relationship between humans, materials, and nature.*

## Keywords

*Taoism; Ecofeminism; Breath; Qi; Wuwei; Practice-based research*

## Reference Format:

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper reconceptualises breath as a material and relational process that connects Taoist philosophy and ecofeminist thought. Rather than treating breath as an abstract or purely biological phenomenon, this research demonstrates how breath—understood as Qi—can be perceived, experienced, and materialised through artistic practice. Second, through experiments using balloons and clay, the research translates philosophical concepts such as Qi and *wuwei* into tangible processes of generation, transformation, and dissolution, allowing philosophical ideas to be tested through material interaction. The research reveals the active role of natural forces and non-human entities in the formation of the artwork. Environmental conditions such as wind, rain, temperature, and multispecies encounters are not treated as external influences, but as co-creative agents that shape the work. This challenges anthropocentric models of authorship and supports an ecological understanding of art as a relational process. Together, these contributions position artistic practice as a site where philosophical concepts materially enacted and experienced.

Building on this connection, this section examines how nature may be understood as an active and relational process rather than as an object of knowledge or control. In Western philosophy, nature has often been understood as an object of knowledge and control, particularly since the early modern period, when it became associated with measurable and manipulable matter. Aristotle, in *Physics*, defined nature as the principle of movement and growth inherent in things themselves, since nature resides directly within them [1]. In contrast, both Taoism and ecofeminism propose a relational understanding of nature, emphasizing processes of becoming rather than fixed entities. In Taoist thought, nature is a self-generating process described through the concept of *ziran* (self-so) which things unfold according to their own inherent tendencies [2]. Central to this worldview is Qi, often translated as air or breath literally, which represents the dynamic flow through which all things emerge, transform, and dissolve. In Taoist philosophy, Qi refers to the primordial substance of the cosmos, the vital medium that regulates the interaction between Yin and Yang. This



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sense of Qi is especially evident in traditional Chinese painting. Through Qi, Chinese painters establish a vital connection with the world. As the philosopher and Sinologist Francois Jullien observes in his discussion of Chinese painting:

Chinese painters paint coming out of the original confusion or sinking back into it, following the great respiratory alternation, breathing in and breathing out, that brings the world into existence (Julien, 2009) [9]

Rather than a stable substance, Qi is understood as a continuous movement of condensation and dispersion. Concepts such as *wuwei* (action through non-action) further emphasize alignment with these processes rather than imposing control upon them. Ecofeminism similarly challenges anthropocentric and dualistic models, arguing for an interconnected web of life in which humans and non-human entities coexist through relations of care, reciprocity, and difference. Rather than erasing differences between species, ecofeminist thought emphasizes the relational interdependence of humans and non-human beings, while remaining attentive to difference, agency, and the critique of domination [3]. Breath, is literally translated to ruach רוח in Hebrew, which means: “wind”, “breath”, “spirit”, etc. Ruach רוח is also a feminine concept in the Hebrew Bible, which is related to ecofeminism in some way. Breath can be understood as a biological, ecological, and spiritual process that links human and more-than-human existence through continuous exchange. As both Taoist and ecofeminist frameworks suggest, breath is a relational event, situating all beings within a shared field of transformation, which draws bodies, materials, and environmental forces into a shared field where forms, perceptions, and relations are continually transformed.

This research will use a/r/tography as a methodological framework to explore the points of interaction between the two philosophies. In the article *a/r/tography as Living Inquiry Through Art and Text*, it is suggested that artists, researchers, and teachers should become active practitioners engaged in the living processes of inquiry, creating meaning through the senses, thought, and emotion. A/r/tography can be understood as a process of double imaging, in which artistic creation and written text illuminate and relate to one another, thereby generating new meanings [4]. This research seeks to practice, verify, and experience how Taoism and ecofeminism touch nature at the material level which is also a way of thinking — a process of thinking through making.

From an a/r/tographic perspective, this process can be understood as a practiced-led mode of inquiry, in which artistic practice, theoretical reflection, bodily sensation, and material encounter unfold together as interwoven modes of knowing [4]. In this sense, knowing is not treated as a purely cognitive or theoretical act, but as something produced through the relations between making, writing, sensing, and reflecting. A/r/tography does not separate the artist, researcher, and teacher into fixed identities; rather, these positions overlap and inform one another through practice. The artwork, the written text, and the embodied process of making therefore become interconnected sites of inquiry, each producing forms of understanding that cannot be generated by theory alone. Through interactions with materials and natural processes, such as the movement of air

and the act of breathing, art becomes a bodily philosophical experiment. Giuseppe Penone’s *Soffio* [5] offers a relevant artistic parallel to this process. In this work, Penone gives material form to the immaterial act of breathing through terracotta and the imprint of his own body, turning breath, clay, and bodily presence into a material inquiry into the relationship between the human body and nature. Similarly, in *Soffio di foglie* [6], the artist’s body and breath are recorded through the movement of leaves, suggesting that art can emerge from the encounter between air, matter, and the living body rather than from the artist’s control alone. In this process of breath, materials are no longer passive objects to be shaped, but active participants in the formation of meaning. The artist is no longer positioned as the central subject who controls matter, but as a relational node within a broader ecological network. This shift resonates with both Taoist thought and ecofeminism, as both suggest that the world is not composed of isolated entities, but of dynamic, interdependent relations.

A/r/tography allows this artistic process to be understood as an embodied and material method of inquiry. The act of breathing becomes both subject and method: it is what the work investigates, and also the process through which the investigation takes place. In this sense, breath is not only a biological action, but a relational movement between body, air, material, and environment. Each inhalation and exhalation becomes a small event of exchange, revealing the porous boundary between the self and the world.

I began to wonder how the invisible substance of air might be made perceptible. I first used balloons as containers to collect and hold the wandering air around me. I inflated each balloon with my own breath. As the balloons gradually expanded, I could see the movement between each inhale and exhale. The balloon became a temporary lung, a fragile membrane through which the invisible became visible. It did not simply represent air; it rendered air as a material presence. In this a/r/tographic process, the balloon, the breath, the body, and the surrounding atmosphere worked together as co-participants in the production of knowledge.

After inflating the balloons, I pour a layer of clay slip over their surfaces. Clay, as a material of recording, can preserve every trace, including the movement of Qi. When the surface of the clay begins to half-dry, I let the balloon slowly deflate. As the once full surface collapses and shrinks, it produces complex and diverse textures and forms. The entire deflation process resembles exhalation — the release of breath. Through the medium of clay, I have captured the flow of Qi. During my first experiment, I conducted indoors and could better observe how the clay moved on the balloon’s surface. I fixed the inflated balloon on a stand, then poured the prepared clay slip over it. As the clay flowed down the balloon’s surface, I was reminded of the primordial state of the cosmos — chaos. This shapeless fluidity resonated deeply with Taoist cosmology. As described in the *Huainanzi* (淮南子) chapter:

“Tao begins in the void and gives birth to form; before form divides, it is called chaos.” This means that Tao represents the original state of the universe — an undifferentiated whole where form, Yin and Yang, life and death, have not yet separated.

As time passes, the surface clay begins to partially dry, and at that moment, I make a small puncture in the balloon. The balloon then starts to shrink gradually, and since the clay coating lacks sufficient structural support, it too collapses with the balloon’s deflation. The resulting folds and textures are the imprints of Qi — traces of its invisible flow becoming visible through matter. In the inhaling and exhaling of the balloon, unique textures and forms emerge.



Fig.1 Yimou Huang, 2025, Ballon surface detail

From the perspective of a/r/tography, this process can be understood as a form of “living inquiry”: knowledge gradually emerges through the mutual negotiation of body, breath, clay, air, and time. Air gives volume to the balloon, while the balloon, through its fragile membrane, temporarily holds this invisible force. The clay, in turn, receives and records the traces left by breath, pressure, drying, and collapse. The final form is not shaped solely by the artist, but co-generated through the flow of air, the elasticity of the balloon, the moisture of the clay slip, the pull of gravity, the duration of drying, and the moment of rupture. This interdependent material relationship resonates with the Taoist understanding of Qi: the world is not composed of isolated and fixed entities, but is continuously transformed between emptiness and fullness, abundance and depletion, condensation and dispersion, formation and dissolution. At the same time, this process also responds to ecofeminist critiques of anthropocentrism and dominant modes of thinking. Clay is not a passive material waiting to be shaped, and air is not simply an object to be contained; rather, both participate in the formation of the work through their own material properties. Here, the artist is no longer the controller of form, but more like an observer, collaborator, and node within a network of relations. Through this material practice, the work becomes a site where the Taoist cosmological view and ecofeminist ideas of material agency encounter one another: life is generated through relations, responsiveness, interdependence, and the continuous exchange between visible and invisible forces. After the indoor clay experiments gradually began to produce relatively stable results, I started to realize that if this work was truly to respond to Taoist and ecofeminist reflections on nature, the body, and material relations, it could not remain within a controlled indoor environment. Indoors, everything was controllable — the constant temperature, the still air,

the predictable conditions. Yet to me, Taoist philosophy is inseparable from nature, so I decided to move the experiment outside. For the first outdoor experiment, I chose a spot near my school. It was December 2024 in Dundee, and the daytime temperature hovered around freezing. I hung the balloons on tree branches. They swayed gently in the wind, forming a poetic and ephemeral scene — the balloons shimmered faintly, reflecting a blurred light, as if they were living organisms. The ground was covered with a thick layer of fallen leaves, which became the background of experiment. As I poured the heavy clay slip, the wind-blown balloons gradually grew heavier. They transformed from light and floating to dense and armored, as if wrapped in thick armor. After piercing a small hole on the top of each balloon to let the air out, I left them overnight. The next day, I found the clay-coated balloons severely shrunken, covered with tiny, intricate cracks — as though they had been delicately carved with a knife. Upon closer inspection, I realized these cracks were caused by the freezing and thawing of the clay surface. This result was ideal. The naturally collapsing textures were not solely formed by Qi; the forces of nature had also intervened in shaping the patterns and forms. This co-creation with natural processes was precisely what I sought.

This mode of making responds to ecofeminist critiques of anthropocentrism and the logic of domination. Val Plumwood criticizes the long-standing dualistic structures within Western thought, such as human/nature, reason/body, subject/object, and male/female. These dualisms often place nature and the body in passive, inferior, and controllable positions [7]. My outdoor experiments attempt to disrupt this relationship. On the contrary, they all participate in the formation of the work through their own material properties. Here, the artist is no longer the master of form, but an observer, collaborator, and witness.



Fig.2 Surface of ballon after 24hours shrinking, 2025

The weather in Dundee is famously changeable — one moment it’s sunny, the next it’s raining. I remember one day in January 2025, I went to Arbroath Bay, a small coastal town near Dundee, to test how the high humidity would affect the clay’s drying process. Since it was difficult to find a proper anchor point by the sea, I tied the balloons to the rocks along the cliffs. As I poured the clay slip, heavy rain suddenly began to fall. Rainwater mixed with the clay, flowing together over the balloon’s surface. Although the final form never solidified — the continuous rain washed away the clay before it could set — I still felt that this process was deeply connected to both Taoism and

ecofeminism. It evoked the Taoist idea of cosmic chaos, while also revealing the agency of matter. The mingling of clay and rainwater became a metaphor for material vitality — matter’s own ability to act and transform. When I moved the experiment outdoors, wind, rain, temperature, and clay all became active participants in shaping the form. The balloon was no longer merely an object I “made,” but a co-performer with natural forces. The wind swayed the balloon gently; the raindrops changed the clay’s moisture and flow; freezing and thawing left unexpected fissures. These transformations were beyond my control, yet they continuously generated new forms and meanings. In this process, nature became a co-creator, and I was merely a witness and participant. Although I did not obtain a final complete form or object, as the heavy rain continuously washed away the clay. However, this approach reflects a decentralized artistic stance — one that seeks a reciprocal and equal relationship with it. As Val Plumwood argues in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Western philosophy has long treated “nature” as a metaphor for the feminine — passive, malleable, and controllable. In contrast, ecofeminism calls for recognizing the agency of nature, acknowledging that matter has its own life and intelligence [8]. In *Wandering Air*, the forces of nature become visibly manifest. These forces include humidity, temperature, wind, rain, and even insects. In different environments, their influence produces distinct effects on the work. We are compelled to recognise that nature and matter possess their own vitality and intelligence; like me, they participate in the making of the work.



Fig.3 Yimou Huang, 2025, Surface of balloon in rainy day

One day in March 2025, I placed the experiment in a forest. By then, Dundee had begun to warm; animals and insects had awakened and returned. While observing the work, a small insect flew by and landed on the still-damp clay surface. Its tiny feet sank slightly into the soft texture, leaving almost invisible traces. Sunlight caught its wings, and their subtle vibration caused the clay’s surface to quiver. I held my breath, afraid to disturb this fleeting encounter. At that moment, I realized the insect was not merely landing on my work — it had entered it, becoming part of it. Its footprints, its presence, its breath all became part of the sculpture’s becoming. I was reminded of Donna Haraway’s words in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016):

“Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages.” [8]

The insect’s arrival transformed my work from a dialogue between myself and nature into a multispecies co-creation. It was a participant — a nonhuman co-author with its own intentions, perceptions, and rhythm of life. Its delicate traces on the clay surface became a living testimony to the breathing, interdependent world we share. This encounter can be understood through an ecofeminist framework of care and responsiveness. Rather than asserting control over the situation or treating the insect as an external disturbance, I chose to pause, to remain attentive, and to allow its presence to shape the work. In this moment, care did not manifest as protection or intervention, but as restraint — a willingness to slow down, to relinquish authorship, and to accept vulnerability and unpredictability. In *Wandering Air*, this multispecies encounter embodies ecofeminism’s challenge to anthropocentric artistic practice. The process does not seek to represent nature, but to situate itself within ecological processes, allowing non-human beings to co-author its material becoming. By accommodating the insect’s trace without correction or erasure, the work affirms an ethics of care that values responsiveness, openness, and the acknowledgement of non-human agency.

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Through the artistic practice *Wandering Air*, I came to see that Taoist philosophy and ecofeminism emphasize that all things exist through continuous flows, processes of becoming, and relational interdependence. In this sense, nature is a processual network co-constituted by all beings, within which humans participate only temporarily. The human body, materials, and the environment thus enter into a shared rhythm of becoming. However, the two philosophical trajectories differ in the sources from which their understandings of “relation” arise. Taoist philosophy reveals the immanent order of the world through the generation and dissipation of Qi; relationality here does not emerge from moral or ethical imperatives, but from the intrinsic mode of operation of the cosmos itself. Ecofeminism, by contrast, foregrounds responsibility, care, and responsiveness within relationships, framing interdependence as an ethical stance that must be actively cultivated. For example, allowing insects, rain, and other natural forces to shape my work implies an unintentional redistribution of my attention toward forms of existence that are small, fragile, and transient. In *Wandering Air*, this difference manifests concretely as, on the one hand, an attunement to and letting-go of natural processes, and on the other, a practice of respect for and collaboration with non human forces. *Wandering Air* effectively transforms philosophical reflection into perceptible experience. The continuous flow of things—such as the weathering of rocks or the alternation of day and night—is often difficult to perceive directly. It materialises the movement of Taoist Qi, recording it through ceramic material, while allowing natural and non-human forces to act upon the sculptural forms. In doing so, the work brings the two philosophical trajectories into a shared material encounter.



Fig.4-5 Yimou Huang, 2025, Artwork *Wandering Air*

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# Sense of an absence: Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia

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## Abstract

*In Production of Presence, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht reflects on how different “materialities” interfere with the meanings they convey (2010: 32). The possibility of engaging with materialities as vehicles of meaning emerges through the concept of “production of presence,” a mainly spatial and tangible concept. As an effect of the production of presence, tangibility arises through materialities and communicational supports. Being primarily spatial, the process of producing presence is also temporal. Yet both time and space are subject to processes of proximity and distance, physical or metaphorically (38–39).*

*From these considerations I reflect upon my research on Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia (1944–2022), a presence summoned from the past that different materialities simultaneously impose and obscure, within a narrative from which the biographical subject seems constantly to elude. Having access to an extensive photographic archive, as well as filmic records dating from 1972 to 1991 and to variably reliable information regarding her creative biography as a director, screenwriter, and actress does not necessarily result in the reconstruction of moments and lived experiences from a biographical past that I seek to understand. How, then, can one arrive at the meaning of this creator when her presence must emerge from a montage of composite elements — not necessarily historical — anchored in a present that is compelled to disregard the very desire to render a particular past present? How can one apprehend or construct a presence out of such a striking absence?*

## Keywords

Portuguese women filmmakers; Portuguese documentary; autobiography

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

As the main contribution of this work, I hope to offer some insight into the biography and works of Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia. The complexity of the research



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connected with the intricacy of the archives around herself and her creations.

### a. Context – Portugal, circa 1974

At a moment when cinema made in Portugal is being reassessed through retrospective highlights which intend to reconsider the role women have played within it, it becomes particularly important to bring attention to a creator who remains, to a great extent, unknown. Presenting the biography of Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia requires a historiographical approach that is at once broadly reflective – and which bears in mind the historical panorama emerging from this renewed attention –, and intimate, since the discovery of her creative trajectory reveals a complex personality and a life in which doubts and interrogations considerably outweigh the consistency of the available documents.

The broader perspective underlying this research stems from the urgency of revisiting film history from viewpoints that, throughout the nearly century-and-a-half existence of cinema, have remained largely outside the focus of scholarly inquiry. Although film historiography benefited from the “cultural turn” of the 1970s, which gradually integrated film studies into academic programs in Europe and the United States, its practice long remained attached to approaches that academic historiography itself was seeking to abandon: perspectives centered on figures deemed “major” within the cultural objects and events under study; an emphasis on large-scale and highly visible productions; and the reproduction of systems of value not necessarily grounded in academic criteria, such as popularity or traditional social hierarchies. Traditional film historiography has privileged canonical directors, large-scale productions, and stable archives, within a theoretical frame in which the predominant focus is on interpretation. Hans Gumbrecht’s attempt to counter this predominance, in *Production of Presence* is particularly illuminating in a shift of attention towards a dimension of presence. According to this scholar, “Interpretation alone cannot do justice to the dimension of ‘presence,’ a dimension in which cultural phenomena and cultural events become tangible and have an impact on our senses and our bodies” [1]. The present research on Marie Canto da Maia is not simply an interpretive recovery of the “meaning” she might have had at a given period in European cinema; rather, in an attempted encounter with the surviving materiality of her existence (incomplete filmographies, unstable spellings of her name, missing works, fragmented archives, audiovisual traces), it entails the convocation of multiple vestiges for the construction of a creative narrative. The apparent inconsistency of these vestigial fragments is

understood not as a deficit or a weakness, but as part of the historical experience itself.

More than seventy years after *Cahiers du Cinéma* proposed the centrality of the film director as author – following François Truffaut’s influential call [2] for a cinema expressing the individual vision of artists whom he identified primarily as directors (and predominantly male ones), rather than, for example, screenwriters – cinema can and should be understood as the complex art form that it is: a collective set of practices continuously challenging fixed notions of authorship and gendered control. Such a reassessment is compatible with critiques of the auteur model centered on a sovereign figure and enables analysis to shift toward collaborative, discontinuous practices often difficult to archive and to retrace.

As in many other national cinemas, the creative processes of Portuguese film have always involved both women and men. In the Spring of 2026, the Portuguese Cinematheque devoted, for the first time, a program to the “pioneers” of filmmaking in Portugal, grounding the initiative in a reconsideration of the very concept of “cinema” by challenging the predominance of the feature-length fiction film and by paying attention to various creative roles also occupied by women filmmakers. This critical exercise has brought visibility to names such as Raquel Soeiro de Brito, Margot Dias, Isaura Pavia de Magalhães Lisboa, Vera Wang Franco Nogueira, and Edila Gaitonde, whose film work, largely unknown to the public and even to specialists, was developed during the first half of the twentieth century and up to the democratic revolution of 1974, a landmark accepted in Portuguese film historiography as a major historical turning point.

The same revisionist perspective can be applied to the still relatively small number of women who worked in Portuguese cinema in the years subsequent to the Carnation Revolution. Shortly after the democratic transition, despite advances toward gender equality, the pre-1974 scenario remained largely unchanged, and only a few women stood out in the film art in Portugal [3]. Cameras continued to be operated mostly by men, and the exceptions included Margarida Gil, Solveig Nordlund, Monique Rutler, Noémia Delgado, Maria Lino, and Margarida Cordeiro, (creative partner of António Reis). Other women worked in film production during both the Estado Novo dictatorship and the democratic period right after the revolution; however, the role regarded as the highest within cinema – that of director – remained overwhelmingly male in the years following the transition into democracy.

Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia (1944-2022) must be understood within this historical and historiographical context. Her first film, *Compact* – a short adaptation of Maurice Roche’s 1966 novel of the same name, in which she also acted – resulted from an award granted by the French *Centre National de la Cinématographie* (currently *Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée*). It was reportedly screened at Cannes in the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs*, as well as at the Tours and Hyères Film Festivals in 1971. In 1975, she directed the unusual actor-centered exercise *Feeling*, a short film shot in the studios of her father, the sculptor Ernesto Canto da Maia, in the Azores, and which she affirms was screened at the Saint-André-des-Arts cinema in Paris’s Latin Quarter in April and May 1976. During the following three years, she filmed *Dialogue With My Father* (*Dialogue avec Mon Père*, undated [1978-79]) on the island of São Miguel in the Azores, and that footage would eventually be reworked into *Love Hymn* (*Hymne d’Amour*,

1991), a documentary of approximately one hour about her father, combining interviews recorded with him and testimonies from former students and critics after his death.

These, however, are only three among the works created by Marie Canto da Maia, whose artistic trajectory has been at the center of my research since late 2021, when, within a project dedicated to documentary production by women in Portugal and Brazil [4], I first came across *Hymne d’Amour*. Since then I have consulted different archives, interviewed people and searched libraries trying to find the vestiges of this creator. At one point in *Dialogue avec Mon Père*, Marie tells her father that she had already directed “five short films,” which led me into further research. In the archive of ANIM (the Portuguese Archive of Moving Images), the films identified under the authorship of Marie Canto da Maia – whose name appears with disorienting graphic variations – include, in addition to *Hymne...* and *Feeling*, the films *Westminster* (undated), *A Day at Ribeira Grande* (*Um Dia na Ribeira Grande*, 1979), and *Canto da Maia* (1990, quite possibly another title for *Hymne...*, since no corresponding material survives). Excluding *Westminster*, all of these postdate *Dialogue...* Since *Compact* (1972) was located in the archives of the Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée, and *Feeling* (1975) in the ANIM archive, at least two short films mentioned by the filmmaker remain untraced: *One Day, Along the Seine* (*Un Jour, au Bord de la Seine...*, 1972), which she claims to have written, produced, directed, and acted in, and *Zouzou at the Psychoanalysts* (*Zouzou chez les Psychanalystes*, 1974), which she states to have written, produced, and directed.

Marie Canto da Maia was born and died in Lisbon, though much of her life was spent in Paris, and at different periods in London and Italy. Most of the films in which she worked as an actress were foreign productions, yet an important part of her directorial work was carried out in Portugal. *Compact* was directed in France, but both *Feeling* and the biographical films devoted to Ernesto Canto da Maia were shot in the Azores. The title *Westminster* suggests an English-speaking setting, though this remains to be confirmed. Before I viewed *Feeling* at ANIM, the title suggested foreign production, but I came to discover that it had in fact been filmed in the sculptor’s studios on São Miguel island. The crews with whom she worked frequently included foreign professionals. Yet, despite the apparent detachment of these films from the national context, they should be considered part of Portuguese cinema production. A body of seven or more films, even if mostly short works, is significant at a time when very few women were directing films in Portugal.

In trying to systematize the information gathered in recent years regarding the life and work of Marie Canto da Maia, it becomes clear that her activity in cinema was not limited to directing and screenwriting. Besides acting in several of her own films, she appeared in films by other directors, an experience related to the various theater courses she attended between the late 1970s and early 1980s in France, Italy, and the United States. Between 1977 and 1979, she reportedly studied theater with Elisabeth Depardieu at the Théâtre de Bougival, near Nanterre, as well as opera singing with Sandra Yakovleff at the Russian Conservatory of Paris and classical dance with Jacqueline Finnaert. In the last months of 1981 and 1982, she attended intensive workshops for professional actors in Paris led by John Strasberg, son of Lee and Paula Strasberg and one of the continuators of the Actor’s Studio method. She also claimed to have spent six months at John Strasberg’s “Actor’s

Studio” in New York between these two workshops, although no records of this period could be found either in the Actor’s Studio archives at the Beinecke Library, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, or through John Strasberg himself, who founded his own studios in 1983. Further research into Marie’s contact with these and other acting schools will be essential in order to contextualize her methods and creative processes.

Many of these details remain to be confirmed, given both the complexity of access and, frequently, the absence of consultable archives. The information originates from Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia herself in what she described as her “curriculum vitae,” a two-page undated document attached to the screenplay for the documentary on Ernesto Canto da Maia, then entitled “CANTO DA MAYA ou LE CHANT DE L’ILLUSION”, and completed in 1991 as *Hymne d’Amour*. The screenplay is signed, in this order, by Violante do Canto, Girolamo Palmieri, and “Ysabelle Canto de Maya,” and corresponds closely to the structure of the documentary, whose production and direction followed a troubled path spanning more than a decade, and in which Marie appears, as does her half-sister Violante. Yet, not only is Marie’s the only name that appears in the film as the director, but the written document ultimately functions as a professional presentation of Marie Isabelle Canto da Maia herself, even providing a Paris address and contacts for agents in Rome, Paris, and New York. Neither Violante nor Girolamo Palmieri appear to have contributed substantially to the screenplay’s text, which begins with an “avant-propos” voiced exclusively by Marie, explaining her motivations (“My father, the sculptor Ernesto Canto da Maya, always fascinated me. (...) This is one of the reasons why the desire arose in me to give him a voice in a film” [5]), as well as some of the difficulties she encountered in bringing the project to completion.

Enumerating the artistic activities in which Canto da Maia was involved throughout her life is both difficult and fascinating, and it is often possible to perceive that the same phenomenon or characteristic lies equally at the origin of both the fascination and the difficulty. If the material location of the works themselves is complex – the films she directed, the films and plays in which she participated, the theater companies or collaborators with whom she worked – then the multiplicity of names used to identify works and individuals in the documentation consulted also creates obstacles to the continuity of the research project within a scientific framework. Yet this same complexity, and the uncertainty surrounding the trajectory and sequence of the projects and experiences through which she moved, invites the researcher into constant acts of imaginative construction, in an attempt to fill elliptical narrative gaps.

Consider, for example, the variety of titles the author gives to the same project. What led her to alter those titles? The documentary about her father begins as a “dialogue with my father,” thus centered on the conversation effectively shown in the 1979 footage; it is then presented as *Paradise Lost*, passes through the wordplay on the surname “Canto” (Portuguese for both “song” and “corner”) in *Chant de l’Illusion* (“Song of Illusion”), and concludes as *Hymne d’Amour*, the title of one of Ernesto Canto da Maia’s sculptures.

The graphic variations with which Marie Canto da Maia signed her own name (“Isabel Canto da Maia”, “Isabelle Canto da Maya”, “Maria Couto da Maia”, “Isabelle Marie Canto da Maya”, “Ysa Canto da Maya”, “Ysabelle Canto de Maya”, “Marie-Ys.”, or “Isabella Kent”) deserve equal

attention. They suggest an identity in permanent alteration and search, consistent with some of the confessions she makes to her father in *Dialogue...*, and summarized in *Hymne...*: “Je fais ce film (...) pour aller à la recherche (...) de mon histoire (...) avec toi.” The formulation situates the film within an unstable autobiographical practice, poised between autobiographical pact, self-representation, and self-fictionalization (cf. [6], [7], and [8]). At the same time, it complicates archival research within the various institutions connected to Isabelle Canto da Maia’s biographical and creative trajectory.

In the course of this research, I located two texts published by Isabelle Canto da Maia, both signed as Isabelle Da Maya: the piece “Images et écriture,” included in the journal *Ça Cinéma* in 1973, and the dramatic essay “L’Enfance, le Rêve, et le Cinéma,” published in the anthology *Paroles... elles tournent* (1976) [9]. The first text consists of a series of reflections derived from conversations with two writers about their books. In the brief introduction to these conversations, Canto da Maia enumerates questions prompted by quotations from those books, revealing some of her creative concerns and artistic understanding: “To externalize this flow of images. To materialize it in such a way that a camera might film it. To make films. To read books or write them. To listen to music or compose it. To let Energy act within oneself” [10]; or again: “Let us return to the conception of film itself. What can be said of words, of dialogue?” (ibid.). The author justifies her interest in literature through a cinematic impulse: “It therefore seems interesting and desirable to draw upon literary texts of this kind in order to accompany the image track, whose depth of field is considerably enlarged by the verbal message” [11].

Both texts relate to the search for identity mentioned in connection with the multiplicity of spellings of her name. In the first, Canto da Maia repeatedly questions the writers about the role played by childhood and the unconscious in creativity (“the choice of writing or image as a means of expression” [11]). The second text is a dramatized essay deserving of deeper analysis than can be offered here. The play follows a structure that seems to govern the author’s written and cinematic works alike. Just as *Hymne...* incorporates excerpts from an earlier film, “L’Enfance...” at one point includes “an excerpt from the screenplay of *Climax* [12], identified in her *curriculum vitae* as having been written in Rome in 1974. Similarly, the beginning of the play reveals a moment of introspection in which the author questions how to express the central idea of the text, intended for an anthology of women’s writings on cinema:

Which word should one choose to begin a text on “women and cinema”?

To think about expressions, and no longer about images, colors, sounds.

Which words obsess me? Childhood... dream... and cinema. And what if I played with them? Perhaps if I transformed them into characters in an imaginary theatrical play? [13]

The initial question addresses the motivation behind the anthology itself. The Musidora collective, responsible for the first women’s film festival in France in 1974, gathered in that volume a series of testimonies and manifestos by filmmakers, actresses, scholars, screenwriters, editors, and other film professionals involved in the festival, which took place in Paris at the ARC and the Olympic theatre. At that moment, Canto da Maia’s work appears energized by movements affirming women’s voices. Yet the films she shot in the Azores during the second half of the decade, centered

primarily on documenting her father's life and work, suggest a suspension of that impulse. During the 1980s, she rediscovered her creative drive in theatrical activity and in acting in other filmmakers' works, while continuing to engage in film production, photography of actors and film or theater sets, and screenplay writing.

In 1975, she had founded her production company, "Les Films Bleus et Verts", after having already written screenplays for four films: the aforementioned *Compact*, the short *Un jour, au bord de la Seine* with Fabio Gamma, *Immense et Rouge*, and *Climax* (of the latter two, only the titles seem to survive). That same year, she reportedly produced a photographic series around the "Magic Circus" with the intention of making a film. Two years later, in 1977, she planned a book entitled *Emotion*, for which she intended to interview figures from theater, cinema, and literature. In 1983, she stated that she co-wrote, with Benoît Fresco, the screenplay for a film entitled *Renaissance*, though no additional information about the project could be located.

Canto da Maia's experience as an actress also found expression in cinema from 1980 onward, when she played the character "Rosina" in the dreamlike childhood-memory scene recalled by the protagonist Snaporaz (Marcello Mastroianni) in *La Città delle Donne* (Federico Fellini, 1980). As an extra without significant spoken lines, her participation was often left uncredited. She appeared as an extra in the feminist crime comedy *Mersonne ne m'aime* (Liliane de Kermadec, 1981). She appeared in *Quartet* (James Ivory, 1981), in *L'Amour Trop Fort* (Daniel Duval, 1981) and in *Diesel* (Robert Kramer, 1985). In 1983, she briefly appears in episode 60 of the TV series *Les Enquêtes du commissaire Maigret* (Jean-Paul Sassy). She refers having acted in "[i]nterprétation comme actrice dans le film *Le Volcan*, d'Hubert Egrot," and performed in *Lien de parenté* (Willy Rameau, 1986), as well as in *Le baiser perché* (Patrick Lambert, 1988). None of these films could be located for viewing, and Canto da Maia's name does not appear in any of the digital identification records consulted.

## II. CONCLUSION

The urgency I referred to in the beginning, the need to revise film history from perspectives distant from its most illuminated focal points, requires accepting the documentary disparities in the biography of a creator. It also requires keeping open the categories of creation and the many roles involved in the creative processes of films, plays, theatrical performances, literary texts, and photographs. It demands that the notion of authorship itself remain open to revision.

*Hymne...*, for example, belongs to the trajectory of a cinematic biography – primarily documentary in nature; but it also opens itself to interpretation as a private, almost confessional or diaristic record. In this sense, it approaches forms of subjective and essayistic cinema that Laura Rascaroli associates with the presence of a "personal camera" [14], or what Fátima Chinita conceptualizes as subjective documentary modalities or "cine-graphies" [15]. This confessional tone, this writing of the self through cinema, together with the artist's interest in the unconscious and in childhood, is present in Isabelle Canto da Maia's published writings and defines the conditions through which access to her work and biography becomes possible. The artist always appears mediated through images, archives, and a filial relationship that simultaneously illuminates and

obscures her own work. The fact that her father's artistic production generated an extensive documentary, historiographical, and critical archive reinforces this obscuring effect and has often hindered a clearer identification of the daughter's artistic biography, which frequently appears as an appendix or mere extension of the father's work.

It remains however evident that her life constantly flows into her artistic production, becoming both the setting and the material of what she creates. The difficulty of stabilizing her biographical trajectory is related to the scarcity and dispersion of archives of many documentary types, not only filmic and photographic. The fragmentary collection process to which I have dedicated myself has involved institutional and private archives, as well as testimonies – sometimes contradictory, though more often incomplete – from family members and professionals who knew her. The largest collection made available to me is photographic. It is primarily through family photographs, and through a small number of images documenting the shooting of *Hymne...* that I have been able to construct an understanding of this filmmaker.

Marie's image emerges through a fragmented and elusive body of work, apparently rich and highly diverse. Yet it is the vast family photographic archive, composed of hundreds of images, that most powerfully summons her figure. For Margarida Medeiros [16], revisiting archives is a process that may "constitute the basis for the construction of contemporary identity, for which the possibility of connection to a past, to an intertwining of memories, seems increasingly important". Identity results thus from a dynamic of construction rather than reconstruction: to summon the past is not to reconstruct it, but rather to enable its permanent and repeated construction in the present. Producing presence in this research is a process of montage: a situated, interpretive act that assembles disparate materials into provisional configurations. Rather than resolving the tension between presence and absence, I explore the conditions under which presence can be produced from and through its own fragmentation. It is this work of construction that I continue to pursue: not the restitution of a lost biography, but the critical composition of a presence through traces, images, unstable names, and incomplete archives.

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SESSION 2

**DIGITAL PLATFORMS, EMBODIED  
NARRATIVES AND TECHNOLOGY AS  
A MEDIUM OF CULTURAL MEMORY**

# Technology as Narrative Material

## Scientific Data and Interactive Technology as Design Material in Performative Environments

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### Abstract

*Scientific data and interactive technology are increasingly deployed in contemporary performance contexts, yet their role often remains limited to infrastructure or visual spectacle. This paper argues for a different approach, in which data and technology function as design material that actively co-authors narrative meaning in performative environments. Drawing on the Gaia scene within the theatre performance MAMI WATA — a collaboration between the art collective KAINKOLLEKTIV and the MIREVI research group — two design decisions are analyzed to demonstrate how technological choices carry dramaturgical consequences. Oceanographic data from the Copernicus Marine Service, anchored to the biographical home regions of five performers, transforms scientific measurement into geographic and cultural presence. Webcam-based face tracking translates a performer's speech into an oceanic visual form, positioning the technological system as a sixth performer on stage. Together, these examples suggest that meaningful immersive storytelling depends not on technical sophistication, but on dramaturgical intentionality — on treating data and technology not as medium, but as narrative material.*

### Keywords

*data-driven performance; narrative design; immersive storytelling; creative technology; stage design*

### Reference Format:

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Scientific data and interactive technology are increasingly present in contemporary performance and stage design. Yet their role often remains limited to two familiar functions: as infrastructure that enables technical processes backstage, or as spectacle that generates visual impact on stage. In both cases, technology operates as a medium — a carrier of content that remains itself meaning-neutral. This paper proposes a different approach, grounded in practice-based experience at the intersection of communication design and interactive technology, in which scientific data and interactive technology function as design material that actively co-authors narrative meaning<sup>1</sup>. When technology is treated as material rather than medium, its inherent properties — the structure of a dataset, the logic of a sensor, the behavior of a tracking system — become part of the dramaturgical process. Decisions about which data to use, how it is mapped, and how performers interact with it are not technical decisions alone. They are narrative ones.

Within artistic data visualization, data can operate as sensory and emotional experience rather than solely as analytical information [1] — functioning through sensation, interaction, and narrative to engage audiences on a conceptual and experiential level. Narrative visualization further demonstrates how datasets can structure narrative environments and guide audience engagement with complex systems [2]. This paper extends these premises into the performative context of stage design, where data and technology become material for dramaturgical decision-making and where, as this paper argues, they can enter the performative space as active participants rather than remain backstage.

This perspective is explored through the Gaia scene within the theatre performance MAMI WATA, developed in collaboration between the art collective KAINKOLLEKTIV and the MIREVI research group. The scene integrates oceanographic data from the Copernicus Marine Service into an immersive stage environment in which projections, sound, and lighting dynamically respond to environmental

<sup>1</sup> The author is a member of MIREVI and was involved in the creative and technical development of the project. The observations and

arguments presented in this paper are therefore informed by direct, practice-based engagement with the design decisions described.

parameters and performer interaction. The environmental data is anchored to the five geographic home regions of the performers, making scientific data a carrier of biographical and cultural specificity. The conceptual foundation draws on James Lovelock's Gaia theory, which describes the Earth as a self-regulating system in which biological, chemical, and physical processes are in constant interaction [3], particularly his characterization of the ocean as a regulatory environment where parameters such as salinity, temperature, and currents function as indicators of systemic interdependence [4]. In the dramaturgical logic of the Gaia scene, the ocean becomes a shared medium connecting five distinct biographical origins within a single systemic narrative.

The guiding research question is: How can scientific data and interactive technology be employed as design material in performative environments, actively co-generating narrative meaning rather than merely functioning as medium or decorative spectacle?

## II. TECHNOLOGY AS NARRATIVE DESIGN MATERIAL

The Gaia scene serves as a case study for examining how specific technological decisions function as acts of narrative design. Two examples illustrate how data and interactive technology move beyond infrastructural roles to actively co-generate meaning within the performative environment.

### A. Scientific Data as Biographical Anchor

Environmental parameters like salinity, water temperature, ocean currents, turbidity, and chlorophyll concentration were retrieved from the Copernicus Marine Service [5] and mapped to five specific geographic locations corresponding to the home regions of the five performers: Nea Makri (Greece), Manoka (Cameroon), Tschalus (Iran), Quebec (Canada), and Durban (South Africa). These are not generic oceanic measurements, they carry the geographic identity of specific people. On stage, this becomes a dramaturgical statement: the performers are surrounded by data derived from where they come from, and the audiovisual environment responds to the conditions of their origins. Using Rokoko Smartgloves [6], performers could additionally navigate through these geographic datasets in real time. With a physical gesture that makes the act of biographical exploration visible and legible to the audience as a performative act rather than a technical operation. The selection of the dataset and the choice of interaction modality are therefore not technical conveniences but narrative acts, establishing a relationship between scientific measurement, geographic identity, and bodily presence on stage.

### B. Speech, Data, and the Performing Environment

Using webcam-based face tracking via MediaPipe [7], the mouth movements of one musician during spoken text passages were translated into an abstract visual structure projected onto the central sculptural stage object, a form resembling the mouth of a manta ray. This creates the impression that the stage environment itself is speaking, connecting the act of human communication to the broader environmental system the scene inhabits. The manta ray form situates the performer's voice within the marine imagery that

structures the entire scene. Rather than disappearing behind the narrative, the technological system itself becomes a performer — a sixth presence on stage that embodies the data, responds to the human performers, and co-authors the story being told. In this sense, data and technology do not support the narrative from the outside; they inhabit it from within.



Fig. 1. (Left) Two performers using Rokoko Smartgloves to navigate geographic datasets in real time. (Right) The manta ray visual projected onto the central stage sculpture, with a dancer interacting with the data-driven environment. Photos: Patrick Kruse.

## III. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The two examples suggest that treating technology as material rather than medium has concrete consequences for how narrative meaning is produced in performative environments.

Anchoring environmental data to biographical origins raises a broader question about the nature of scientific data in artistic contexts. Scientific datasets are typically understood as objective measurements independent of any particular observer or location. In the Gaia scene, this assumption is deliberately unsettled: by tying oceanographic parameters to specific human biographies, the data acquires situatedness — it belongs to someone, it comes from somewhere, and it carries the weight of that origin into the performative space. The data is no longer merely evidence of a process — it is the presence of a place. This suggests that the question of which data is chosen, and whose geography it represents, is a design decision with ethical and narrative dimensions that extend beyond the technical.

Across both examples, the technological system does not recede into the background once operational. It remains present as a responsive, generative force — a co-performer whose dramaturgical behavior must be designed as deliberately as any other element of the scene. If the system is understood as a co-performer from the outset, design decisions are evaluated not only by technical functionality but by narrative consistency: How does the system respond? What does its response communicate? These are questions that belong to both the designer and the dramaturg.

This paper has examined how scientific data and interactive technology can function as design material in performative environments — not as neutral infrastructure or decorative spectacle, but as active co-authors of narrative meaning. For

designers working at this intersection, the most consequential decisions are often not the technical ones — they are the decisions about which data to use, whose story it tells, and what form its presence on stage should take. It should be noted that this paper does not provide an empirical evaluation of audience experience; the observations are grounded in the practice-based perspective of the project team. Future work could extend this inquiry empirically through audience reception studies, and conceptually through further engagement with questions of cultural diversity, collective memory, and the ethics of data representation in artistic contexts.

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#### STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

Claude (Anthropic) was used to support the formulation and translation of this manuscript. Perplexity AI was used for initial literature research. All sources were independently verified and all intellectual content and arguments are the authors' own.

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# Bodies As Archives, Algorithms As Memory: Autobiographical Audiovisual Narratives In The Latin American University Creative Laboratory

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## Abstract

*This article analyzes eight audiovisual projects from the ICONOLAB University Research Incubator: Laboratory of Audiovisual Narratives and Algorithmic Memories, CUN, Colombia 2026, developed as part of the collective proposal \*Algorithmic Memories: An Anthology on the Latent Image and Sensitive Montage\*. The proposal presents a new paradigmatic approach for university research laboratory studies regarding artificial intelligence, audiovisual production, and the cultural and historical engagement of narratives. Based on a research-creation methodological approach [1][2], the projects are analyzed through cultural analysis and inductive thematic categorization. The results reveal five emerging categories: (1) archival corporealities, (2) territories of fractured memory, (3) synthetic memories and algorithmic archives, (4) visual anachronism and sensitive montage, and (5) research-creation as audiovisual epistemology. The theoretical framework brings together studies of cultural memory [3][4][5], digital autobiographical narratives [6][7], and the theory of the living archive [8]. The findings demonstrate that the seedbed, functioning as a Latin American university creative laboratory and operating under the research-creation paradigm, constitutes an epistemic space where audiovisual media becomes a tool for the construction of collective memory, territorial identity, and critical reflection on technological mediation. Its international relevance lies in its contribution to debates on audiovisual pedagogies, biographical narratives in contexts of armed conflict, and the role of artificial intelligence in the reconfiguration of Latin American cultural archives.*

## Keywords

*autobiographical audiovisual narratives; cultural memory; research-creation; algorithmic archive; university creative lab*

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## 1. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

### A. Background and Problem

Since 2000, digital technologies and artificial intelligence have brought about what Hoskins [9] calls a “connective turn” in memory studies. That is, memory ceases to be a private, linear process and becomes a distributed, algorithmically mediated phenomenon. Latin America occupies a unique position in this context, as the region bears the weight of histories of political violence, forced displacement, and armed conflicts that have turned cultural memory into a field of epistemological and political contention [10].

In Colombia, more than five decades of armed conflict have created a pressing social need to construct narratives that preserve, transmit, and reinterpret the experiences of historically silenced communities. The ICONOLAB University Research Incubator: Laboratory of Audiovisual Narratives and Algorithmic Memories, affiliated with the National Unified Corporation for Higher Education (CUN) in Colombia, addresses this urgency through the research-creation paradigm [1], as students in the Audiovisual Media Direction and Production program simultaneously produce artistic works and knowledge-production tools.

### B. Theoretical Framework

Smith and Watson [6] conceptualize autobiographical narratives as discursive practices situated historically,



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socially, and technologically. Halbwachs [4] demonstrated the social dimension of memory through “cadres sociaux.” Meanwhile, Assmann [3] distinguished between communicative, oral, and generational memory; and cultural, textual, and—fundamentally—historical memory. For his part, Nora [5] introduced the “lieux de mémoire”—spaces where collective memory crystallizes when the natural medium of memory has disappeared. In the projects analyzed, places such as Mapiripán, Plaza de Bolívar, or the family kitchen function precisely as such places.

Manovich [7] proposes the database as the dominant cultural form of new media and transcoding as a process of translation between cultural and computational logics. Along these same lines, Taylor [8] distinguishes between the archive—as document, text, and image—and the repertoire, which refers to habits and customs, gestures, and rituals. Thus, he introduces the term “living archive” to designate practices that combine both dimensions. Hirsch [11], on the other hand, develops the concept of “postmemory” to describe the relationship of later generations to traumas they did not experience directly but inherited as mediated memories.

In this context, Borgdorff [1] defines research in the arts as that in which the creative process itself is the research process. Similarly, Haseman [2] refers to it as the performative paradigm. In Colombia, Minciencias [25] has institutionalized research-creation as a legitimate form of knowledge production, granting scientific recognition to projects such as those of the “semillero.”

### C. Methodology

This article adopts a cultural analysis approach [12] aligned with the principles of research-creation [1]. The corpus comprises eight audiovisual projects that are part of the collective audiovisual research initiative \*Memorias Algorítmicas\*, documented in a matrix that includes a narrative synopsis, a description of the relationship to the SENSO/grafías concept, a log of prompts, visual treatment, copyright analysis, and an academic summary.

The analysis was conducted in two phases: (1) inductive categorization [13], extracting central themes, narrative types, relationships with memory, and technologies used; and (2) comparative analysis to identify cross-cutting patterns. The methodological framework is embedded in the multiple case study [14], where validity rests on interpretive density [15] rather than statistical representation.

### D. Five categories that have emerged as a result

**1. Archival Corporealities.** The most consistent finding is the conceptualization of the human body as the primary archive of memory. In the audiovisual projects \*Latencia\*, \*Colapso\*, and \*El sabor de su recuerdo\*, this approach is not a rhetorical metaphor but an aesthetic and epistemological choice. In *Latencia*, the body of Don Raúl, displaced from Mapiripán, does not represent the conflict; it is that embodied memory, inscribed in his posture, gaze, and fragmented narrative. Connerton [16] calls this “habit memory”—that which is inscribed in the body through repeated practices and resists discursive representation. In *Colapso*, meanwhile, AI materializes intrusive memories as sensory stimuli, activating Assmann’s [3] distinction

between functional, integrative cultural memory and potential, latent, and activatable cultural memory.

**2. Territories of Fractured Memory.** The projects of the creative audiovisual laboratory, *Latencia*, and Bogotá: Perception and Memory share the conception of territory as a space where collective memory—fractured by violence—is inscribed. Massey [17] distinguishes between abstract space and place as a space endowed with meaning; Nora [5] introduces the concept of lieux de mémoire. In Colombia, the CNMH [19] documented how the armed conflict destroys the bonds between communities and territories. By making the territory a narrative actor, these projects teach us to read space as a “cultural text” [18], a palimpsest of overlapping memories.

**3. Synthetic Memories and Algorithmic Archive.** The incorporation of generative AI, through diffusion models and algorithm-mediated montage, introduces a high degree of analytical complexity. The projects in the Semillero produce visual hypotheses of memory—images that do not claim to be historical documents but rather aesthetic possibilities of how the memory of the lost territory might manifest itself. This operation corresponds to what Ernst [20] calls the “dynamic archive” of a system that does not preserve the past but continuously processes it. The project—*art-sano*, for example—poses the ontological question: what distinguishes memory from a simulacrum? [21]

**4. Visual Anachronism and Sensitive Editing.** The most sophisticated aesthetic strategy in audiovisual works is anachronistic editing, understood as the deliberate juxtaposition of historical periods, image regimes, and visual textures. Didi-Huberman [22] argues that images are never entirely contemporary with themselves, as they carry layers from earlier times. In this regard, the projects of the Semillero Iconolab, which incorporate 16mm or Super 8 textures onto digital images, perform an epistemological operation that affirms the coexistence of historical times within the present image—not as nostalgia but as politics. Rancière [23] calls this a “distribution of the sensible”: the distribution of the visible and the sayable with direct political consequences.

**5. Research-Creation as an Audiovisual Epistemology.** The most elaborate projects demonstrate that this collective audiovisual initiative is not merely a space for student production but an epistemological laboratory. The requirement to document prompt logs, analyze copyright issues, develop visual treatments, and produce academic abstracts transforms the production experience into research in the full sense of the term [1]. Jenkins [24] argues that participatory culture requires critical, ethical, and collaborative skills. In this sense, ICONOLAB: Laboratory of Audiovisual Narratives and Algorithmic Memories trains not only audiovisual directors and producers but also media-literate citizens capable of engaging in cultural and political debates.

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

### Audiovisual Pedagogies in the Global South

The five categories resulting from this research-creation practice contribute to contemporary debates on audiovisual

pedagogies, biographical narratives, and algorithmic mediation. ICONOLAB demonstrates that research-creation, when applied in contexts of historical violence, generates forms of knowledge that conventional academic writing cannot produce. In this sense, the combination of artistic practice and theoretical reflection, institutionalized by Minciencias, Colombia [25], offers an original pedagogical model for Latin American higher education. One that not only transmits technical skills but also shapes research subjectivities capable of articulating experience, memory, and critique.

### Biographical Narratives and AI: A New Epistemological Frontier

The emergence of “synthetic memory” as an analytical category points to an emerging field of research. The tension between algorithmic processing and human memory, evident in the student projects \*El arte-sano\* and \*Colapso\*, gives rise to debates that Hoskins [9] and Ernst [20] have only just begun to map out. These student projects provide empirical cases that advance the theory and demonstrate that AI does not replace human memory, but rather sets it in motion, renders it unstable, and forces it to confront its own gaps and fictions. From this vantage point, the concept of “synthetic memory” emerging from the corpus of this research points toward a new epistemological category with international significance.

### The Political Dimension of Visual Anachronism

Following Rancière’s framework [23], the aesthetic operations carried out by these audiovisual projects have ultimately become political acts. That is, they are redistributions of the visible and the sayable that challenge the hegemonic narratives of Colombian history. Students who learn to construct visual anachronisms simultaneously learn to think of history as a palimpsest—as layer upon layer—rather than as a linear sequence, which has direct democratic implications. This pedagogy of anachronism constitutes, perhaps, the most valuable contribution of the research-creation incubator to Latin American audiovisual education.

### Future directions and boundaries

One limitation of this study is its focus on a single university institution, which raises questions about its generalizability. Future research should therefore compare the ICONOLAB model with similar Latin American university creative labs to determine whether it represents a regional epistemological pattern or an exceptional case. Similarly, a longitudinal analysis of students’ trajectories will allow for an evaluation of the impact of triple subjectivation. That is, whether they are and will be, simultaneously, researchers, directors, and audiovisual producers, as well as cultural and historical citizens, as proposed by this pedagogical model.

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# Multicultural Urban Palimpsest Evoked through Personal Cultural Heritage Narratives: A Case Study in Kavala

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## Abstract

*This study examines how Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) narratives can be captured and applied to animate the multicultural layers of an urban heritage site through an immersive eXtended Reality (XR) installation. To study the personal histories in the Panaghia neighbourhood in Kavala (Greece), this research has combined ethnographic interviews and narrative workshops with different activities – sensory walking, personal mapping, postcard writing, and storytelling. These narrative inquiry methods have elicited multisensory, intergenerational memories anchored in the everyday environment, revealing the interwoven fabric of the neighbourhood in successive mobilities. The material is being analysed, and scripted into compiled narratives, drawing from several different participant accounts, to safeguard privacy while conveying significant shared experiences. The narrative inquiry is also used to inform the production of an immersive XR installation, which aims to animate the urban palimpsest of migration histories in Panaghia. With the audio-visual media contents of this installation, our work aims to not only communicate human dimensions of heritage, but also to evaluate whether this type of engagement can enhance understanding of contemporary challenges related to immigration and multiculturalism.*

## Keywords

*Intangible cultural heritage; tangible cultural heritage; personal narratives; storytelling workshop; sensory walking.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*“The grandmothers of the neighbourhood, they sat on these little stools, all of them, dressed in black. One opposite to another, discussing all their problems, and we played around them on the street. They told us stories and we would sit and listen. Beautiful songs they sang to us. They talked about the homeland, how their house was, how their garden was with orange trees and lemon trees and with what pain they left and came here with nothing, just a little bundle.”*

A compiled narrative of several study participants, Kavala, October 2025.

The historical old town of Kavala on the Northern coast of Greece is composed of multilayered histories of migration, dislocation, settling and relocation – from antiquity through to Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern Greek era. The historical neighbourhood of Panaghia is a steep peninsula hill surrounded by the Aegean Sea, with a traditional stone fortress overlooking stone walls, wooden structures, narrow streets, uneven alleys, and houses climbing the slope beneath. Large and small Ottoman houses that have withstood the passage of time stand alongside newer constructions, forming part of different architectural layers shaped by continuous informal extensions added over the years to accommodate growing families.

Much of the architectural and urban landscape, now promoted as a cultural heritage site and placed at the forefront of Kavala’s tourist imagery, is largely the result of decades of adaptation and persistence by generations of its residents. Growing commercial interest, state regulations, and urban renewal initiatives have turned Panaghia into a focal point of investment and heritage preservation efforts, while for the permanent residents, the neighbourhood is gradually losing its character as a living community.

In the EU funded INT-ACT [5] research project we are investigating how the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) related to tangible heritage sites can be captured and shared, with the aim of attending to different societal challenges [2].



Fig. 1. The Panaghia community centre, an old Ottoman era madrasa (left), where storytelling circles were held (right).

In Panaghia, we have been exploring multiculturalism and immigration as important dimensions of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. One of the objectives of INT-ACT is to incorporate the findings from this exploration – in terms of people’s ICH related to their experiences and daily lives in the past, present and future – into an immersive eXtended Reality (XR) installation we are developing in collaboration with the municipality of Kavala and the other INT-ACT consortium partners. This installation will be available across a number of different locations in Panaghia, and it will animate people’s personal experiences and stories through audio-visual media contents.

## II. ETHNOGRAPHIC LIFE NARRATIONS ON MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE

The importance of developing participatory methods targeting ICH research is being increasingly promoted [1]. As a methodological experimentation for capturing personal ICH narratives related to the Panaghia neighbourhood, we have combined deep ethnographic interviews, sensory walking, personal mapping and storytelling with local residents. Building on fieldwork conducted by the second author – a social geographer – we organised a series of map-based storytelling workshops hosted by “Panaghia’s Cultural

and Beautification Association To Kastro” at their community centre, an old Ottoman era madrasa or school (see Fig. 1, left) next to a former 16th century Halil Bey mosque built on top of an older church (see Fig. 2) – with its foundations still visible through a glass floor. Both old local residents and newcomer – with different feelings of belonging – were invited to take part in the workshops we held in October 2025.

The narrative workshops comprised three events with different groups including older adults – the oldest participant being 100 years old – and younger Panaghia residents, among them descendants of the 1923 Greek refugee families, other immigrants, and recent incomers. Participants selected one of three easy walking routes proposed by us, and undertook a short quiet walk alone or in small groups along their chosen path. Upon return, they annotated a simplified map of their walk with notes, and wrote a postcard to an absent friend or family member about their walk, highlighting what Panaghia meant to them. These exercises were followed by a storytelling circle (see Fig. 1, right), during which each person narrated a short story (around 10 minutes) about the past experiences



Fig. 2. The 16th century Halil Bey mosque, built on top of an older church on a different orientation, which is now visible through the glass floor.

and memories of Panaghia. This part was audio and video recorded for transcription and analysis.

Many study participants shared stories rooted in displacement and resilience, while carrying memories of forced migration and war. After the Greco-Turkish war, in 1923 a population exchange pact evicted Muslim families from Panaghia, and Greek Orthodox refugees from Asia Minor, Pontus and Thrace moved into their emptied homes in

much larger numbers. Interviewees recounted their families moving into houses that contained familiar Ottoman features, where they rebuilt their lives and turned Panaghia into essentially a refugee neighbourhood for decades.

The walking, mapping and storytelling methods used in these workshops proved effective in eliciting layered, multi-sensory and intergenerational memories anchored for instance in the seaside, former multi-family houses, and the everyday sociality of the narrow streets and squares of Panaghia, its castle. While the mapping exercise had limited success in leading to visual drawings being added, it led to short texts being written on the margins of the maps, and was further complemented by a reflective dimension afforded by the postcard activity. As planned, however, the main focus was directed towards individual narratives in the storytelling circle session, where each participant could tell a personal story about the neighbourhood without interruptions. Hosting the workshops in a meaningful community space, with shared food and familiar surroundings, aided in building trust, comfort and agency.

### III. SHARING ICH NARRATIVE THROUGH IMMERSIVE XR STORYTELLING

An important contribution of the INT-ACT project is in its development of methods for sharing ICH narrative through immersive XR storytelling. XR installations have been promoted as an effective medium for presenting cultural heritage [3]. We have, therefore, used our ethnographic fieldwork to inform the development of immersive audio-visual installations (see [6, 7]) for preserving and sharing ICH. While outdoor XR installations have been used to animate heritage histories (e.g., see [4]), the media contents of our installations aim to communicate not just the historical facts but also the emotional, experiential and environmental dimensions of cultural heritage, thus highlighting how ICH is formed by diverse mobilities that continue to shape our modern lives even today. The heritage site apparently paved in stone preserves multiple layers of migration and transnational movements, accessible through personal and family stories.

In our immersive XR installation focusing on Panaghia, we are aiming to represent the invisible and visible effects of the mobilities that have shaped the local neighbourhood. In addition to the main influx of refugees after 1923, Kavala has also witnessed a long chain of migrants arriving from the countryside to work in the local tobacco industries, and fishing and seasonal labour. Further, after World War II, many residents migrated to other parts of Europe – and even further afield – contributing to house maintenance via remittances, and sometimes later returning. Similarly, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, many new incomers contributed to labour force and revitalisation of the area. Today a camp for the refugees of current times is located elsewhere in the city, and the residential population of Panaghia is ageing. The small homes with difficult access via the narrow streets are increasingly turning into tourist accommodation and holiday homes, many of those owned by people from elsewhere.

With the background of fleeing from war and conflict, many family histories in Panaghia contain tragic dimensions and intimate personal experiences. To understand the human interaction between people from different origins, we pay

attention to the topics of human connection and communality in the co-produced ethnographic material. Following a thematic analysis of interview and storytelling transcripts, we compile generalised narratives which bring together accounts from several study participants into a composed story to be used in the forthcoming public installation. The method of using compiled narratives, together with visual expressions, enables the ensuring of privacy and protection of individual data of our study participants, while simultaneously affording for more comprehensive and evocative accounts of the multiple cultural layers and human experiences in the community.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

With our methodological approach to an urban heritage site with multicultural layers of history, we argue that inputting results from ethnographic methods into an audio-visual XR installation is an efficient way of communicating both the temporal and spatial dimensions of human connections and disconnections, often invisible for newcomers, visitors, and residents alike. As such, through both our research study and an XR installation, we aim to animate the multicultural histories of the Panaghia neighbourhood, to help people appreciate the area not only as a historical heritage site, but also as a living archive of belonging and change. We also plan to evaluate how immersing in the emotional and experiential dimensions of the ICH of an urban heritage environment could facilitate understanding of the neighbourhood's current societal challenges, which in this case are related to immigration and multiculturalism.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

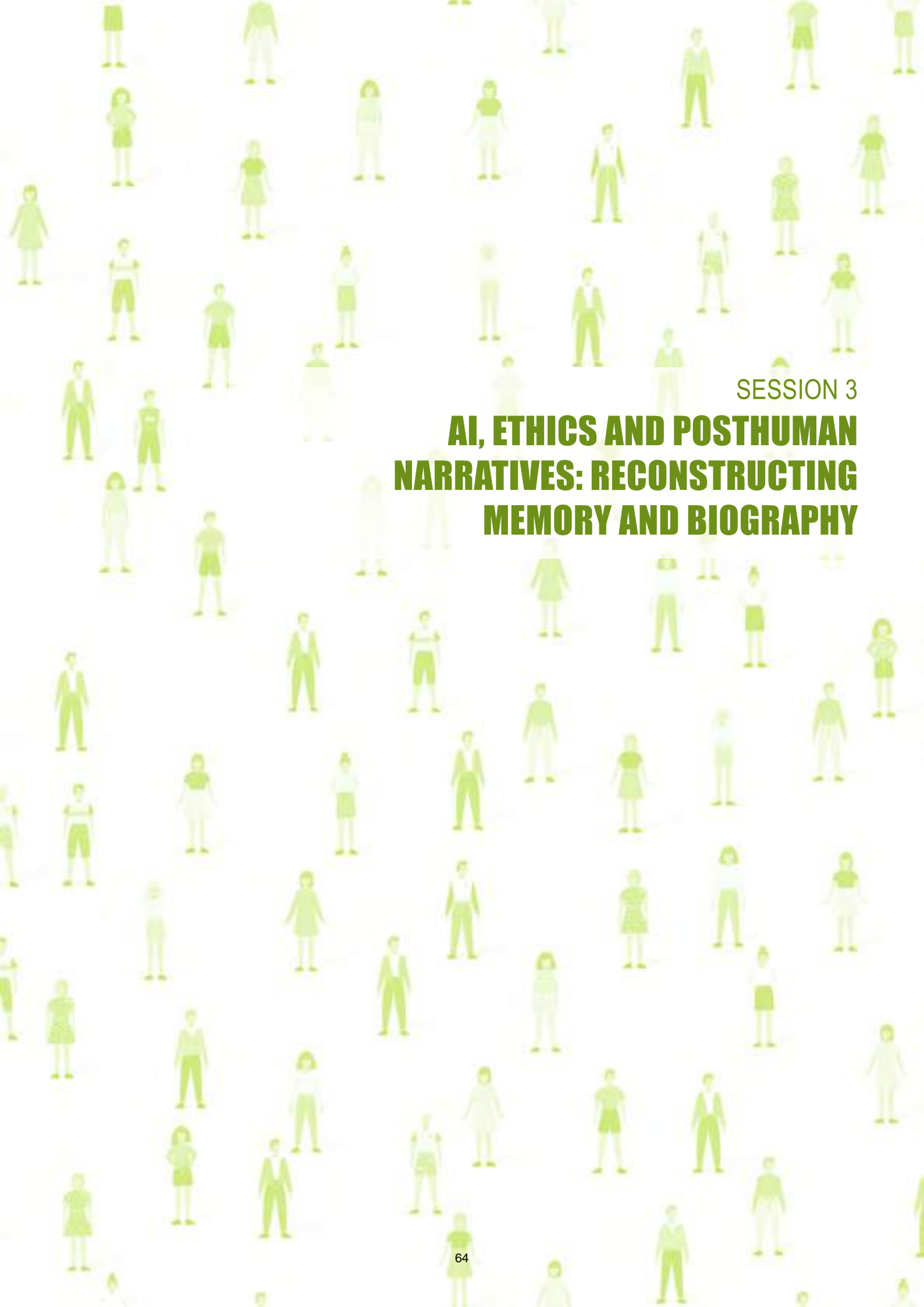
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SESSION 3

# **AI, ETHICS AND POSTHUMAN NARRATIVES: RECONSTRUCTING MEMORY AND BIOGRAPHY**

# Auto-Biographies and / or Alter-Biographies? A Critical and Ethical A.I. for de/reconstructing Silent History

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** This paper explores the intersection of biographical narratives and contemporary sociological practices, particularly in the context of marginalized communities, by confronting Auto and Alter Biographies. It aims to address the challenges of representing diverse life experiences through innovative methodologies, including the use of Critical/Ethical AI and participatory practices. The research questions focus on how biographical narratives can be deconstructed and reconstructed in ways that address the complexities of social identities and differences, memories and social justice. **Research Methods:** This paper just presents the first phases of a future research, and focus on a preliminary debate on its core questions and hypotheses. Future empirical research will employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques. In particular, key methods include Auto and Alter Biographies. The study also emphasizes community involvement through participatory action research, ensuring that biographical subjects retain agency over their narratives. **Discussion and Analysis:** The research underscores the importance of biographical justice, advocating for the accurate and respectful narration of diverse life experiences. It critiques traditional biographical forms for their inadequacies in representing the complexities of contemporary lives, particularly in the context of global/local urban transformation. Its debate argues for the development of new biographical practices that are participatory and multimodal, capable of capturing the collective dimensions of lived experiences. **Conclusion:** Innovative biographical practices, particularly those that incorporate participatory methods, can significantly enhance the representation of marginalized voices. Forthcoming research should not just using AI, but also questioning/auditing AI tools for bias, and establishing

biographical justice as a principle in democratic AI governance.

## Keywords

Auto / Alter Biographies, Biographical Justice, Silent History, Critical-Ethical Ai, Biographical Archives

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## I. INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL AND ETHICAL INQUIRY INTO BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES, THE POLITICS OF STORYTELLING AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The paper draws on a broad interdisciplinary state of the art, engaging with diverse authors to theorise the entanglement of narrative identity, algorithmic mediation, and ethical responsibility. It introduces the concept of **alter-biography** as a critical counterpart to autobiography. Alter-biographies mean stories told *about* and *by* others, particularly those on the margins of dominant social orders, such as isolated communities or individuals, migrants, gender-nonconforming individuals, older and retired adults, disabled people, and whose displaced memories risk erasure. Methodologically, the text is equally diverse but fusional. It presents biography not merely as a literary or archival genre but as a social living, an embodied **storytelling practice**, one that can take the form of sociological research, media literacy work, or participatory art. A centrepiece of this methodological argument is the concept of **Sociological Comics**: a hybrid genre including collective biographies that fuse the sequential visual grammar of comics with the rigour of sociological inquiry, including research questions, hypotheses, fieldwork, and empirical verification. Fully developed case studies using Sociological Comics about auto-biographies and alter-biographies within social, political



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and cultural phenomena, such as austerity, public art and activism, were already discussed in other author writings [1] [2] [3]. In what regards the work in progress, some significant disparities in biographical representation are being detected, especially concerning women and marginalized groups such as migrants and older adults, among others. Future case studies will illustrate the urgent need for ethical frameworks in biographical research that prioritize the voices of those historically silenced within **Silent History** narratives and discourses, by using both **Auto** and **Alter** Biographies. Moreover, as a planification for the research empirical work, this paper highlights the potential of AI-assisted methodologies to enhance biographical literacy, while also cautioning against biases inherent in AI systems. For such purpose, it interrogates the conditions under which biographical narratives are produced, contested, and transformed, in an era of accelerating technological change.

In sum, situating itself at the crossroads of biography studies, media arts, sociology, digital humanities, and AI ethics, this research asks a foundational question: how might a **Critical and Ethical Artificial Intelligence** reshape the ways in which individual and collective lives are told, remembered, and made meaningful? From Sociological Comics to the multilayered urban fabric of Lisbon, this essay introduces to mapping the terrain of biographical practice across power, place, and precarity.

## II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: WHAT IS A BIOGRAPHY? FROM GENRE TO CRITICAL PRACTICE

The biography as a genre has a history stretching from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (c. 100 CE) to the algorithmically curated life-narratives of contemporary social media. Yet beneath its apparent continuity lies a deeply contested set of assumptions about truth, selfhood, power, and representation. As the literary theorist Paul de Man [4] argued in his influential essay "Autobiography as De-Facement," biography is never a transparent window onto a life, but always a rhetorical and ideological construction. In other words, a *prosopopoeia* that gives a face to what is, at best, a fractured, partial record. This insight has proven generative for biographical studies far beyond literary theory, opening onto questions that are now central to social sciences, digital humanities and AI ethics alike.

On his turn, Paul Ricoeur's concept of **narrative identity** [5] remains a foundational touchstone. For Ricoeur, the self is not a pre-given substance but a narrative achievement: we understand who we are by telling and retelling the stories of our lives, integrating contingency and change into a provisional, always-revisable coherence. His distinction between *idem-identity* (sameness) and *ipse-identity* (selfhood-as-promise) has particular resonance for biographical practice in the age of AI, where the computational modelling of "personality" risks reducing the living complexity of *ipse* to the statistical regularities of *idem*. Ricoeur's framework, as Strawson [6] has contested and as Schechtman [7] has elaborated, continues to anchor debates about whether biography can do justice to the non-narrative, episodic, and contradictory dimensions of human experience.

From a sociological standpoint, Pierre Bourdieu's [8] critique of the "**biographical illusion**", a concept that may be defined as the ideological fiction of a coherent, directional life-trajectory, remains equally indispensable. Bourdieu

argued that the life-narrative is always a retrospective construction shaped by the social fields in which the subject moves, and that the sociologist who takes biographical accounts at face value risks reproducing the very ideologies they should be analysing. More recently, this critique has been extended by scholars working at the intersection of narrative sociology and critical race theory, most notably in the work of Patricia Hill Collins [9] on Black feminist epistemology and the politics of self-definition, and in the testimonial tradition theorised by John Beverly [10] in his account of Latin American life testimonies.

## III. ALTER-BIOGRAPHY VS. AUTO-BIOGRAPHY: A CRITICAL COMPARISON

The distinction between auto-biography and alter-biography is central to the theoretical and political project of this text. Auto-biography, meaning the narrative of the self by the self, has a long and distinguished history in Western literary tradition, from Augustine's *Confessions* to Rousseau's *Confessions* to contemporary personal essay and memoir. It has been theorised as a genre of self-constitution by Lejeune, [11] or of self-fashioning by Greenblatt [12] and of self-inscription by Smith and Watson [13]. It also has been the subject of sustained feminist critique for the ways in which the autobiographical canon has historically privileged particular kinds of subjects, for example white, male, educated, bourgeois, and simultaneously rendering other life-narratives invisible or illegible. The concept of alter-biography, as developed in this essay, denotes a distinct but related biographical form: the narrative of another's life, produced by an author or authors who are positioned differently from the biographical subject, whether by virtue of social location, institutional role, political commitment, or artistic practice. The alter-biography is not equivalent to the conventional literary biography, which typically aims at comprehensive historical accuracy from a position of narrative authority. Rather, the alter-biography, as theorised here, is characterised by its relational, positional, and ethically committed orientation: it is produced in, and about, the encounter between self and other, and is explicitly concerned with the social, political, and institutional conditions that shape biographical representation. More synthetically, first of all, a biography may be an **auto-biography**, as stated above, when the self narrates the self. Here the emphasis is on interiority, memory, self-constitution, risk of narcissism and selective memory, or even the epistemological privilege of lived experience. Some examples are: memoir, personal essay, life history interview, digital self-narrative. Differently, an **alter-biography** happens when the self narrates the individual Other or the social Other such as social and cultural marginalities. Emphasis is placed on societal positioning, power, ethical responsibility, risk of appropriation and misrepresentation, or epistemological challenge of alterity. E.g.: oral history, ethnographic biography, documentary, community storytelling, Sociological Comics, written on and by others.

## IV. ETHICS OF ALTER-BIOGRAPHY: SPEAKING FOR AND WITH

The ethical dimensions of talking/writing on and by others have been most searchingly explored within feminist, postcolonial, and disability studies scholarship. The

foundational question, whether it is ever legitimate to speak for another, and if so, under what conditions and with what obligations, was posed with particular urgency by Linda Alcoff [14] in her influential essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others." Alcoff argues that the decision to speak for others is always a political act with potentially serious consequences for those spoken for, and that it must be approached with what she calls "interrogating the bearing of our location and context on what we say". This is a reflexive practice of positional accountability that has direct implications for alter-biographical research. Recently, in the context of an **AI-mediated alter-biography**, these ethical stakes are considerably heightened. When an AI system is trained to generate biographical narratives about members of marginalised communities, by using data scraped without consent, producing outputs that may be inaccurate, stereotyping, or actively harmful, the political economy of speaking for others is compounded by the opacity, scale, and speed of algorithmic processing. Moreover, the **"alignment problem"** in AI ethics, as seen by Russell [15], signifies the challenge of ensuring that AI systems act in accordance with human values. And a de/reconstructive framework for ethical alter-biographical practice, whether AI-assisted or not, may also be inspired on disability studies scholar Alison Kafer's [16] concept of **"crip futurity"**, which insists on the full inclusion of disabled people in imaginative projections of the future. Other useful seminal idea is the feminist **relational ethics** developed by Carol Gilligan [17]; or the **decolonial ethics** of Emmanuel Levinas's [18] account of the face-to-face encounter with alterity. Together, these resources point towards an **alter-biographical practice** grounded in genuine dialogue, informed consent, ongoing accountability, and the active cultivation of conditions in which biographical subjects can contest, correct, and co-author the narratives produced about them.

## V. DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND PARTICIPATORY BIOGRAPHY

The cycle model of **participatory biographical practice** (cf. Fig. 1), adapted from J. Lambert [19] and Gubrium & Harper [20], positions biography as an ongoing, iterative social process rather than a fixed product, and may be proposed as one of the models for **AI-assisted alter-biographical work** advocated throughout this essay.



Fig. 1 Alter-biography good practices via community storytelling and Critical/Ethical AI

## VI. BIOGRAPHICAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The concept of **biographical justice** means the right to have one's life narrated accurately, respectfully, and in ways that recognise one's full humanity. It is, by definition, a concept shaped by social inequality. The **biographical archive** of any society reflects, and reproduces, the power relations of that society: the lives that are recorded, preserved, and disseminated are disproportionately those of the powerful, the educated, and the socially normative, whilst the lives of those who occupy marginalised social positions, such as migrants, people with disabilities, older retired adults, gender-nonconforming individuals and isolated communities, are systematically underrepresented, distorted, or rendered invisible.

On this behalf, Judith Butler's [21] account of **"precarious life"** and the differential distribution of grievability (circumscribed as the condition of being mournable, or mattering enough to be mourned) provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding these biographical inequalities. Butler argues that not all lives are treated as equally real or equally worthy of protection and memorialisation: some deaths are reported, grieved, and publicly mourned, while others, particularly the deaths of racialised, colonised, and economically disposable populations, are treated as tragic but unremarkable, unworthy of the narrative resources that constitute **biographical recognition**. AI systems trained on historically biased biographical data inevitably reproduce and amplify these differentials of grievability, making the development of critical and ethical AI biographical tools a matter of urgent social justice.

## VII. CRITICAL AND ETHICAL AI: DEFINITIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

The conceptualization of a Critical and Ethical AI by the author of the present text [22], as deployed throughout this and future texts, draws on a cluster of overlapping frameworks that have emerged over the past decade within AI ethics, critical data studies, and feminist technoscience. It is not simply a normative checklist, including the norms "do no harm," "be transparent," "ensure fairness", but a more radical epistemological and political orientation that asks: whose values are inscribed in AI systems? Whose lives are made legible, and whose are rendered invisible or distorted? How do the temporal logics of machine learning (trained on historical data, optimised for measurable outcomes) relate to the irreducibly temporal, open, and contested character of biographical experience, and in particular of alter-biographical practices? Some of the answers for the precedent questions may be found here: Kate Crawford's [23] *Atlas of AI* offers one of the most comprehensive accounts of what a critical AI framework requires, mapping the material, political, and ecological infrastructures of AI, from lithium mines to data centres, that biographical AI researchers must reckon with. On their side, Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias [24] concept of **data colonialism** further sharpens such critique, arguing that the extraction and commodification of personal data by **platform capitalism** constitutes a new regime of appropriation structurally analogous to historical colonialism. For biographical practice, this means that any use of AI tools to collect, process, or narrate life stories must

be understood within, and critically oriented against, these extractive political economies.

### VIII. CASE STUDY: WOMEN'S ALTER-BIOGRAPHIES: POWER, VOICE, AND FEMINIST COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The feminist critique of the biographical tradition has a history nearly as long as the tradition itself. As Virginia Woolf [25] observed in *A Room of One's Own*, the lives of women have been systematically excluded from the biographical canon: not because women's lives are less interesting or less significant, but because the social conditions necessary for the kind of self-reflection, literary production, and institutional recognition that biographical subjecthood requires (for example, time, privacy, education, economic independence) have been systematically denied to women throughout most of human history. Woolf's analysis defines "Anon" as the nameless, genderless author behind much of the oral and vernacular biographical tradition. It anticipates by several decades the feminist recovery projects of the 1970s and 1980s that sought to reconstruct the biographical archive of women's experience.

Contemporary feminist biographical scholarship, as represented in the work of Liz Stanley [26] Carolyn Heilbrun [27] and Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce, and Barbara Laslett [28] has moved beyond simple recovery to develop theoretical frameworks for feminist biographical practice that take account of the structural conditions of women's biographical production and reception. Particularly important is Heilbrun's argument, in *Writing a Woman's Life*, that the available narrative templates for women's lives (for instance, the romance plot, the religious conversion narrative, the domestic idyll) are inadequate to the complexity of women's actual experience, and that feminist biography must develop new narrative forms capable of representing female ambition, desire, anger, and autonomy. In the context of AI-assisted biographical practice, feminist scholars have been among the most incisive critics of the ways in which machine learning systems reproduce and amplify gender bias. In addition, D'Ignazio and Klein's [29] analysis of gender bias in natural language processing systems demonstrates that GPT models systematically associate women with domestic and emotional roles and men with professional and cognitive ones. This has direct implications for any AI system used to generate, analyse, or classify women's biographies. Therefore, corrective measures are urgently needed, including the development of feminist-curated training datasets, bias auditing protocols, and participatory design processes that involve women as co-designers rather than data subjects. Their work on *Data Feminism* provides a constructive complement to such critical genealogies, proposing seven principles for feminist data practice: examining power, challenging power, elevating emotion and embodiment, rethinking binaries and hierarchies, embracing pluralism, considering context, and making labour visible. Each one of these orientations has direct application to AI-assisted biographical research. Together, such frameworks constitute one of the theoretical infrastructure for the approach adopted across this essay: a practice of biographical

AI that is simultaneously epistemologically humble, politically committed, and methodologically rigorous.

### IX. CONCLUSION: INTERPRETING COMMUNITIES DISPLACED MEMORIES

In sum, the present debate underlines the communicative and community dimensions of the issues above-discussed. In particular, the concepts of **displaced memory** and **isolated community** point to facets of biographical marginalisation that are spatial, temporal, and cultural rather than primarily identity-based. Displaced memories are the biographical residues of communities whose material and social conditions of existence have been radically disrupted, by forced migration, colonial violence, environmental catastrophe, or political repression. This happened to the point where the transmission of biographical knowledge across generations has been interrupted or severed. **Isolated communities** are those whose geographical, linguistic, or cultural distance from metropolitan biographical culture means that their life-narratives rarely enter the mainstream biographical archive, even when they are not subject to active suppression. Paul Connerton's account of **social memory** connotes to the ways in which communities remember and transmit their shared past through commemorative practices, bodily habits, and narrative conventions. This may provide a foundational framework for understanding displaced biographical memory. His more recent work, *How Modernity Forgets* [30] argues that modernity's characteristic temporal orientation drives towards the new, the future, the innovative. This produces systematic forms of biographical forgetting that are especially damaging for traditional communities, but also for post-industrial working-class communities, and the residents of gentrifying urban neighbourhoods. Therefore, in order to de/reconstruct **Silent History**, one recommendation is that further research should create inclusive biographical datasets, community-owned biographical archives, and the integration of these alternative and hybrid methodologies into educational and research institutional networked settings.

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# Investigação baseada na prática artística mediada por GenAI: contranarrativas visuais do feminino

Artistic Practice-Based Research Mediated by GenAI: Visual counter-narratives of the feminine

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## Resumo

A crescente integração da Inteligência Artificial Generativa (GenAI) na criação artística tem vindo a reconfigurar os modos como autoria, criatividade e produção de imagens são compreendidas nas culturas digitais contemporâneas. Enquanto tecnologia que intervém na produção imagética e na construção de conhecimento, a GenAI exige abordagens críticas capazes de problematizar os seus modos de interpretação. O artigo procura compreender de que modo a investigação baseada na prática artística, mediada por GenAI, pode contribuir para a produção de contranarrativas visuais em contextos algorítmicos. O estudo centra-se no projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, no qual se articulam videoarte, arquivos etnográficos e imagens híbridas geradas por GenAI. O projeto integra metodologias qualitativas, experimentação artística e documentação reflexiva, apoiando-se em epistemologias feministas que reconhecem a fragmentação, a memória e a experiência como formas de conhecimento. Arquivos etnográficos, nomeadamente imagética, vozes e cânticos femininos da série *Povo que Canta*, de Michel Giacometti (2010), são apropriados como dispositivos de mediação, estabelecendo um diálogo entre memória cultural e processos de criação algorítmica de imagens.

A GenAI é integrada como dispositivo de criação partilhada, em que o processo artístico resulta da relação entre artista, algoritmo e arquivo cultural. Aproxima-se de uma perspetiva pós-humanista de coagência, onde os sistemas algorítmicos operam como extensão do processo criativo.

O estudo contribui para a compreensão da prática artística como investigação situada, evidenciando o potencial da arte mediada por tecnologias algorítmicas na produção de contranarrativas visuais e na representação crítica de experiências historicamente invisibilizadas.

## Palavras-chave

Investigação baseada na prática; Média-Arte Digital; Inteligência Artificial Generativa; Contranarrativas visuais; Identidade feminina.

## Abstract

The growing integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into artistic creation has been reconfiguring the ways in which authorship, creativity, and image production are understood

within contemporary digital cultures. As a technology that intervenes in imagistic production and knowledge construction, GenAI demands critical approaches capable of problematizing its modes of interpretation. This article seeks to understand how artistic practice-based research, mediated by GenAI, can contribute to the production of visual counter-narratives within algorithmic contexts. The study focuses on the project *"in/visibilidades no feminino"* (*in/visibilities of the feminine*), which articulates video art, ethnographic archives, and hybrid images generated by GenAI. The project integrates qualitative methodologies, artistic experimentation, and reflective documentation, drawing upon feminist epistemologies that recognize fragmentation, memory, and experience as forms of knowledge. Ethnographic archives—specifically female imagery, voices, and songs from Michel Giacometti's (2010) series *"Povo que Canta"*—are appropriated as devices of mediation, establishing a dialogue between cultural memory and algorithmic image-creation processes. GenAI is integrated as a device for shared creation, in which the artistic process results from the relationship between artist, algorithm, and cultural archive. This approaches a posthumanist perspective of co-agency, where algorithmic systems operate as an extension of the creative process. The study contributes to the understanding of artistic practice as situated research, highlighting the potential of art mediated by algorithmic technologies in the production of visual counter-narratives and in the critical representation of historically invisibilized experiences.

## Keywords

Practice-based research; Digital Media-Art; Generative Artificial Intelligence; Visual counter-narratives; Feminine identity

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## I. INTRODUÇÃO

Nas culturas digitais contemporâneas, marcadas pela crescente presença dos sistemas algorítmicos na organização da visibilidade simbólica e na circulação de representações culturais, a prática artística tem assumido um papel crítico na produção de contranarrativas visuais que questionam os modos como os sistemas participam na construção da representabilidade e da visibilidade (Crawford, 2021). A crescente integração da Inteligência Artificial Generativa (GenAI) nos processos de criação artística intensifica o



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debate sobre a produção e representação das imagens, ao influenciar a construção de imaginários visuais (Zylinska, 2020). Nesta perspectiva, a prática artística afirma-se como método de experimentação e investigação, no qual a criação atua simultaneamente como processo e produção de conhecimento (Candy & Edmonds, 2018), constituindo-se como espaço de mediação entre corpo, memória e tecnologia. Esta perspectiva permite questionar o papel dos sistemas algorítmicos nas narrativas visuais, reafirmando a responsabilidade humana na sua interpretação e contextualização crítica (Coeckelbergh, 2021).

Parte das abordagens em torno da GenAI tende a concentrar-se nas dimensões técnicas, operacionais ou produtivas da tecnologia, deixando em segundo plano a análise das suas implicações simbólicas, culturais e epistemológicas na produção de representações.

Partindo do reconhecimento de que os sistemas de GenAI não são dispositivos neutros de criação, mas infraestruturas culturais que intervêm na produção de narrativas visuais, frequentemente reproduzindo padrões hegemónicos presentes nas bases imagéticas e culturais, utilizadas na aprendizagem algorítmica (Gillespie, 2024), o projeto procura evidenciar e problematizar dinâmicas de exclusão e invisibilidade do feminino, interrogando as relações entre tecnologia e representação cultural.

É neste enquadramento que se inscreve o projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, desenvolvido no campo da Média-Arte Digital (MAD), articulando GenAI, arquivos etnográficos de memória e perspectivas feministas situadas, assentes na compreensão do conhecimento historicamente localizado, através da criação de um artefacto em formato videoarte. A prática artística atua como mediação crítica, combinando a curadoria de arquivos etnográficos com a manipulação criativa de imagens geradas por GenAI na produção de recomposições poéticas e contranarrativas. O projeto centra-se na tensão entre visibilidade e invisibilidade do feminino, ao expor o papel das tecnologias algorítmicas na produção de representações e ao explorar formas de reinscrição simbólica de visualidades historicamente invisibilizadas.

Partindo desta abordagem, a prática artística é entendida como espaço de mediação cultural capaz de “inter-ferir” (Veiga, 2020, p.244) nos regimes narrativos das tecnologias digitais, isto é, como uma disrupção crítica nos fluxos normativos da produção cultural, entendida como gesto simultâneo de rutura e reinscrição, através do qual emergem contranarrativas visuais que introduzem desvio e fricção nos processos de construção imagética. A “inter-ferência” concretiza-se através de práticas de recomposição visual que produzem narrativas fragmentadas e questionam representações normativas do feminino, produzindo contraimagens. No artefacto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, as contranarrativas visuais correspondem a práticas de recomposição imagética que procuram deslocar modelos hegemónicos de representação através da mediação algorítmica e da articulação entre memória cultural e criação artística.

Neste sentido, a integração da GenAI no processo criativo é entendida não apenas como uma ferramenta de criação de imagens, mas como um dispositivo de mediação estética e crítica que reconfigura a autoria artística. A criação emerge da agência distribuída entre artista, algoritmo e

arquivos culturais, aproximando-se de perspectivas pós-humanistas que compreendem a criação como resultado de “intra-ações” entre humanos, tecnologias e contextos culturais (Barad, 2007).

O projeto mobiliza arquivos etnográficos de memória, incluindo imagética, vozes e cânticos femininos da série *Povo que Canta*, de Michel Giacometti (2010), integrando-os num processo de experimentação artística que articula memória etnográfica e visualidades algorítmicas. Estes fragmentos operam como elementos constitutivos de uma composição estética e crítica que procura produzir representações alternativas do feminino.

A investigação contribui para o debate sobre narrativas mediadas por tecnologias digitais, evidenciando a prática artística como forma de investigação situada nas interseções entre arte, tecnologia e epistemologias feministas. Simultaneamente, procura demonstrar o potencial da investigação artística mediada por GenAI na problematização da representação algorítmica.

O artigo organiza-se em quatro momentos: numa primeira fase, apresenta-se a metodologia e o enquadramento da investigação baseada na prática; segue-se a análise do artefacto e da sua construção narrativa; posteriormente, desenvolve-se a discussão crítica articulada com perspectivas teóricas contemporâneas; e, por fim, a conclusão sintetiza os principais contributos do estudo.

## II. METODOLOGIA E INVESTIGAÇÃO BASEADA NA PRÁTICA

O projeto inscreve-se no campo da investigação baseada na prática artística (*practice-based research*), entendendo o processo criativo como metodologia de investigação, na qual a prática artística constitui simultaneamente objeto e dispositivo de análise, articulando experimentação, criação e reflexão crítica.

A produção do artefacto não é entendida apenas como a concretização visual de um conceito, mas como parte integrante da investigação que configura um espaço iterativo de ser-fazer-pensar, onde a reflexão emerge da relação entre materiais, processos criativos e diálogo com referenciais teóricos. Assim, a prática artística integra “a multi-modal process aimed at the tricky business of articulating and evidencing the research inquiry” (Nelson, 2013, p.45). Tal como refere Sullivan (2010, p.97), “there is a need to locate artistic research within the theories and practices that surround art making”.

A natureza iterativa do processo permitiu analisar de que modo os sistemas generativos participam na construção de imagens, significados e interpretações associadas ao feminino, bem como observar de que forma tendem a reproduzir ou deslocar referências imagéticas presentes nos dados que sustentam os modelos algorítmicos.

A metodologia adotada assume um carácter híbrido e processual, combinando documentação, experimentação artística e observação reflexiva. O desenvolvimento do artefacto organizou-se em diferentes etapas metodológicas interligadas: (1) recolha e análise de arquivos etnográficos, que incluem imagética, vozes e cânticos femininos das recolhas de Michel Giacometti (2010); (2) criação de imagens com recurso a modelos de difusão GenAI (Runway Gen-1/Gen-4); (3) curadoria e edição dos materiais produzidos; (4) composição imagética no contexto da

videoarte; e (5) apresentação do artefacto em contextos expositivos e educativos. Estas etapas permitiram explorar diferentes possibilidades visuais e conceptuais, assumindo ao longo do processo um papel ativo de mediação, seleção e reinterpretação crítica das imagens geradas.

A análise centrou-se nos modos como a articulação entre arquivos etnográficos, videoarte e imagens criadas por GenAI contribuiu para reativar memórias culturais associadas ao feminino e problematizar processos históricos de invisibilização das mulheres. Neste quadro, o artefacto funcionou simultaneamente como dispositivo artístico, meio de investigação e instrumento de mediação cultural em contextos expositivos e educativos. A receção do artefacto revelou leituras associadas à memória, invisibilidade e resistência feminina. A ausência de linearidade narrativa levou os participantes a construir interpretações abertas, frequentemente relacionadas com experiências pessoais e referências culturais próprias, reforçando a dimensão relacional da obra. A Média-Arte Digital afirmou-se, assim, como prática de ativismo e resistência simbólica, através da produção de contranarrativas visuais que reinscrevem experiências femininas historicamente invisibilizadas.

Paralelamente, a dimensão prática do projeto foi acompanhada por processos de documentação, registo do processo criativo e reflexão. Esta abordagem reconhece a experiência e a subjetividade como elementos da produção de conhecimento, aproximando-se das metodologias feministas que entendem o conhecimento como situado, contextual e relacional. Assume, assim, um posicionamento crítico, reconhecendo que ver implica sempre “ver a partir de”.

Neste enquadramento, a metodologia aproxima-se da etnografia *patchwork* proposta de Watanabe, Varma e Günel (2020), que legitima a fragmentação, as múltiplas temporalidades e a combinação de diferentes materiais e contextos de investigação como formas válidas de produção de conhecimento em práticas artísticas e tecnológicas contemporâneas.

### III. NARRATIVA, ARTEFACTO E TECNOLOGIA

A evolução do artefacto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, estruturada em versões protótipas sucessivas (1.0, 2.0 e 3.0) documenta a consolidação de um percurso criativo, crítico e metodológico. Cada versão corresponde a uma etapa distinta do processo de investigação-criação, refletindo o desenvolvimento conceptual, tecnológico e estético do projeto.

O artefacto *in/visibilidades no feminino 3.0* (2025) constitui a fase mais consolidada do projeto no âmbito da investigação baseada na prática em MAD, articulando GenAI, memória etnográfica e perspetivas feministas situadas. Apresenta-se como videoarte composta por imagens híbridas geradas por modelos de difusão (Runway Gen-3/Gen-4), combinadas com elementos sonoros provenientes de arquivos etnográficos, em particular os cânticos femininos recolhidos por Michel Giacometti (2010), mobilizados como dispositivos de memória simbólica. A utilização destes arquivos justifica-se pela sua relevância enquanto testemunhos da memória coletiva e da expressão cultural feminina. No plano visual, o artefacto organiza-se através da sequência de rostos femininos, texturas sonoras e

variações formais produzidas pelos modelos de difusão. Esta imagética é apropriada como estratégia estética e crítica, criando tensão entre memória cultural e representação feminina. Durante a experimentação, observou-se também que os modelos generativos reproduziam frequentemente padrões visuais associados à estetização do rosto feminino, incluindo simetria e uniformização expressiva. A imagem não procurou apenas coerência figurativa, mas construiu-se através de recomposições visuais que questionam os modos como o feminino é produzido, transformado e reinscrito nos processos da criação algorítmica.

O processo de criação artística desenvolveu-se de forma iterativa, combinando produção algorítmica (*prompt design*), curadoria e edição, recomposição visual e montagem. A integração de arquivos sonoros etnográficos permitiu relacionar memória cultural e criação algorítmica de imagens, evidenciando contrastes entre representações do feminino e tendências de homogeneização visual produzidas pelos sistemas generativos.

A obra desenvolve-se a partir da recomposição imagética resultante da interação e criação algorítmica, organizada numa composição videográfica baseada na hibridização e na evocação simbólica.



Fig. 1. Estrutura metodológica dos modelos Runway ML (Gen-3/ Gen-4), integração de *inputs* multimodais (imagem, som, texto), processos de difusão generativa e resultados em vídeo generative

O artefacto artístico foi concebido para contextos expositivo e educativo, assumindo a mediação cultural como parte integrante do processo criativo. A obra convoca o espectador para uma experiência interpretativa aberta, na qual a narrativa emerge do encontro entre imagem, som e experiência individual. Esta dimensão relacional evidencia o modo como os processos de receção, interação e interpretação participam na construção de significado, reforçando o papel da arte como meio de mediação entre experiência estética, memória etnográfica e reflexão crítica.

O artefacto *in/visibilidades no feminino* articula processos de criação mediada por GenAI com arquivos

culturais e práticas de mediação artística, explorando o modo como a tecnologia atua não apenas como ferramenta de produção de imagens, mas também como agente na reconfiguração de narrativas e regimes de visibilidade contemporâneos. Ao longo do processo de investigação-criação, o artefacto evoluiu de protótipo exploratório para dispositivo relacional consolidado, afirmando-se como espaço de produção de conhecimento situado sobre gênero, tecnologia e regimes de visibilidade.

#### IV. DISCUSSÃO CRÍTICA

No projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, a mediação da GenAI no processo criativo introduz novas formas de coautoria e agência partilhada nas práticas artísticas contemporâneas. A discussão parte de estratégias visuais e processuais presentes no artefacto, procurando compreender de que modo a transformação imagética, a recomposição visual e a articulação entre arquivos etnográficos e GenAI problematizam formas contemporâneas de representação algorítmica. Nesta relação entre criação artística e sistemas generativos, a tecnologia não substitui a ação humana, mas torna-se processo de extensão e mediação criativa. Para Arielli (2024, pp. 145–146), a Inteligência Artificial (IA) deve ser entendida não como uma entidade autônoma, mas como uma extensão das capacidades humanas, inserindo-se no paradigma da “mente alargada”. Nesta linha, os sistemas generativos funcionam como assistentes invisíveis que ampliam as possibilidades expressivas e cognitivas da criação de imagens e textos, de forma análoga ao processo de reprodutibilidade técnica descrito por Walter Benjamin (1936).

Este enquadramento permite compreender a emergência de novas formas de criação artística baseadas na colaboração entre humanos e sistemas algorítmicos, introduzindo a coautoria como reconfiguração da criatividade, frequentemente designada como autoria algorítmica. O artista deixa de ser o criador exclusivo, passando a integrar uma lógica de agência partilhada em processos híbridos e relacionais. O processo criativo aproxima-se também de uma dimensão de auditoria crítica dos sistemas de criação de imagem, evidenciando como os algoritmos podem reproduzir ou amplificar desigualdades simbólicas presentes nos dados que os treinam (Bandy, 2021). Neste sentido, o projeto adota uma dimensão artista a utilizar a mediação tecnológica para produzir contranarrativas que desafiam representações hegemônicas do feminino.

A partir de perspectivas pós-humanistas, a criação artística é entendida como resultado de “intra-ações” entre humanos, máquinas e arquivos culturais. Inspirada em autoras como Karen Barad e Joanna Zylińska, esta abordagem reconhece que a criatividade pode emergir da interação entre diferentes agentes humanos e tecnológicos. Como refere Barad (2007, p.180), “intra-actions are temporal not in the sense that the values of particular properties change in time”. Em diálogo com Donna Haraway (1988, 2016), particularmente com a metáfora do ciborgue, os conhecimentos situados e o conceito de *Chthulucene*, esta perspectiva contribui para repensar identidades híbridas e mediações tecnológicas, permitindo compreender as relações entre humanos, tecnologias e ambientes como redes interdependentes de interconexão e coevolução. Por sua vez, Joanna Zylińska (2020) problematiza as dimensões éticas e estéticas da IA na arte contemporânea, defendendo a necessidade de compreender o humano como parte integrante dos sistemas

técnicos que participam na produção cultural (Zylińska, 2020, p.54).

No projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, esta lógica manifesta-se em forma de coautoria simbólica envolvendo não apenas a relação entre artista e máquina, mas também a participação de arquivos culturais, comunidades e públicos. A utilização de arquivos etnográficos, incluindo vozes e cânticos femininos provenientes de tradições culturais, introduz no processo criativo múltiplas temporalidades e camadas de memória, permitindo que a obra se constitua como um espaço de diálogo entre passado e presente. O processo artístico aproxima-se de uma prática colaborativa expandida, na qual diferentes agentes humanos, tecnológicos e culturais, participam na construção das narrativas visuais.

A produção automática de conteúdos implica repensar os critérios tradicionais de autoria e originalidade, deslocando a atenção do resultado final para o processo de criação. À medida que os sistemas algorítmicos alcançam níveis de equivalência estética com a criação humana, a noção de “arte” torna-se mais complexa, deixando a autoria de depender exclusivamente da intervenção humana direta. Neste contexto, a GenAI atua como mediadora das relações entre memória, cultura e criação visual, possibilitando a produção de conhecimento crítico e situado capaz de questionar as representações contemporâneas do feminino.

#### V. CONCLUSÃO

A presente investigação procurou analisar de que modo a prática artística mediada por GenAI pode contribuir para problematizar formas contemporâneas de representação do feminino e produzir contranarrativas visuais em contextos algorítmicos. Através do projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino*, observou-se que a integração da GenAI no processo criativo não implica a substituição da autoria humana, mas a emergência de formas de coautoria híbrida nas quais a criação artística resulta da interação entre artista, algoritmos, arquivos culturais e contextos de receção.

A experimentação desenvolvida no artefacto permitiu observar como os sistemas generativos tendem simultaneamente à produção de recomposições poéticas e à reprodução de padrões normativos associados à representação do feminino. No presente estudo, a recomposição imagética e a articulação com arquivos etnográficos funcionaram como estratégias críticas de deslocamento dessas representações algorítmicas. Assim, a prática artística aproxima-se do ativismo feminista, utilizando a GenAI na produção de contraimagens e narrativas alternativas como formas de resistência simbólica e experimentação estética.

Sob estas perspectivas, o artefacto pode ser compreendido não apenas como produto tecnológico, mas como espaço relacional onde memória cultural, mediação algorítmica e representação do feminino se articulam de forma interdependente. A prática artística mediada por GenAI evidencia-se como espaço de investigação crítica capaz de repensar as relações entre arte, tecnologia e memória cultural. Ao integrar criação algorítmica, arquivos culturais e metodologias feministas situadas, o projeto *in/visibilidades no feminino* evidencia o potencial da MAD na produção de contranarrativas e na problematização das formas de visibilidade nas culturas digitais. Apesar dos contributos identificados, permanecem questões éticas e culturais relacionadas com a persistência de representações

normativas nos processos de mediação algorítmica. Futuras investigações poderão aprofundar estas problemáticas na produção de contranarrativas visuais sobre o feminino.

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# Transcending One's Own Finitude: Towards Artificial Immortality

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## Abstract

*The presentation examines the need to preserve the continuity of presence, memory, and relationships after the biological death of an individual, as well as contemporary technological performances that attempt to digitally “resurrect” the deceased. The analysis traces the development of such tools from early platforms for the digital archiving of identity, such as Lifonaut (early 2010s) and Eterni.me (c. 2014), to more advanced conversational systems such as Dadbot (2017), created by James Vlahos.*

*Particular attention will be given to artistic and research-based projects, including the performance GRIEF/BOT (2026), realised by Theatre Kombinat, which transforms a digital archive into a performative and responsive presence. These initiatives respond to a strong desire to maintain relationships with the deceased through access to their personal data, which - in their most technologically advanced forms - can generate interactive, simulated personae.*

*The presentation reflects on the status of these practices as forms of “technologically extended mourning,” raising questions about the boundaries between memory and simulation, archive and performance, presence and its algorithmic projection, as well as the ethical implications of grief and the human desire to compensate for loss.*

## Keywords

*artificial intelligence; immortality; transhumanism; griefbots; avatars; contemporary theatre*

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

Ageing, accompanied by bodily fragility, dependency, and declining health, constitutes a prelude to inevitable death. Humanity has grappled with this condition for centuries. Today, however, researchers across disciplines — including biology, chemistry, physics, genetic engineering — are developing increasingly sophisticated tools capable of manipulating genes and cells in order to treat disease, extend lifespan, and improve quality of life. Technology is playing an ever more significant role in these processes.

In 2011, futurist and Google AI Visionary Ray Kurzweil predicted that in 2045 advances in artificial intelligence and medicine could bring humanity to a point at which ageing would no longer be irreversible, and science would begin “recovering” more life than we biologically lose. According to Kurzweil, the inevitable trajectory of this development leads toward “the singularity” — a convergence of humans and artificial intelligence through brain–computer interfaces, resulting in a radical expansion of human cognitive capacities [1]. Today, this vision appears less abstract, not least because companies such as Neuralink have initiated the first clinical trials involving implantable brain–computer interfaces, originally developed for paralysed patients and neurorehabilitation.

Polish researcher Katarzyna Nowaczyk-Basińska references a number of contemporary initiatives advancing ideas of immortalism and the technological overcoming of death in her dissertation.

„One of the most prominent events promoting this vision was the international conference Global Future 2045, organised in Moscow in 2012 and later in New York in 2013 by Russian billionaire Dmitry Itskov, founder of the Avatar 2045 project. Around the same time, Professor John Martin Fischer launched The Immortality Project at the University of California, while Stephen Cave published *Immortality*, arguing that the desire for immortality has long served as one of the primary driving forces behind human civilisation” [2].

Today, one of the most visible public figures associated with this movement is American billionaire Bryan Johnson, who since 2021 has been conducting a self-experiment known as Blueprint. Johnson meticulously documents nearly

every aspect of his life: diet, sleep, biological parameters, medical test results, ageing processes, and subsequent medical procedures. His body functions simultaneously as laboratory, data archive, and performance broadcast through social media. The boundaries between science, biohacking, and self-fashioning become increasingly blurred — Johnson not only subjects himself to experimentation but also performs himself as a prototype of the future human.

His anti-ageing protocol, widely discussed and criticised by some experts as obsessive or based on unverified practices, gradually evolved into a broader social movement known as Don't Die [3]. The phrase has become simultaneously a philosophy, a brand, and a promise of technologically transcending death. Johnson's story is also explored in the Netflix documentary *Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever* directed by Chris Smith, in which he admits to operating "at the extreme edge of scientific possibility". Following Nowaczyk-Basińska, I describe such practices — centred on the living or dead body as a vehicle of immortality-oriented transformation — as an „ontoperformance of immortality” [4].

Ageing is increasingly framed as a technical problem requiring a technical solution, directly invoking the transhumanist vision of the posthuman — an enhanced being liberated from biological limitations and, in its most radical formulations, transcending corporeality altogether to function within a digital environment (in silico). As early as 1998, an international group of authors drafted the Transhumanist Declaration, later updated by Humanity+ [5]. The organisation's very name reflects the idea of humanity technologically expanded and enhanced. Today, Humanity+ constitutes one of the key philosophical and intellectual platforms supporting transhumanist ideas, practices, and research concerned with overcoming the biological limits of the human condition through technology.

Published in February 2026, the HumanTech Center study at SWPS University, entitled *Will We Become Cyborgs?* [6], examined the willingness of Polish society to adopt technologies extending beyond therapeutic applications — technologies designed not merely to repair the body but also to enhance its capabilities. The study involved 2,233 participants. The findings revealed a relatively high level of acceptance for body-modifying technologies, ranging from approximately 25% to as much as 67%, depending on the specific technology, particularly among younger respondents and men. The strongest support was expressed for medical technologies and those improving quality of life, while interventions affecting consciousness and identity received the lowest acceptance, though approval levels remained surprisingly high even in this category. Brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) and the prospect of direct brain-to-internet connection generated particular controversy: 26% of women and as many as 36% of men declared support for such technologies. These results may be interpreted as symptomatic of the gradual normalisation of transhumanist visions of human-technology integration, previously confined largely to science-fiction imaginaries. At the same time, the study highlights the urgent need for deeper ethical reflection concerning autonomy,

psychological integrity, and the social consequences of technologically modifying the human body and mind.

Another technological strategy for extending human presence after death involves platforms of digital "reanimation" in the form of avatars, such as Lifenaut (early 2010s) and Eterni.me (c. 2014), as well as more advanced conversational systems characterised by interactivity and immersion — including the Roman Mazurenko bot (2016) and Dadbot (2017), created by James Vlahos. Here, digital immortality is reconstructed from preserved personal data: voice recordings, messages, photographs, digital archives, and traces of online activity. Its nature is numerical and disembodied. Binary code becomes the language of communication; the interface of an application or software environment functions as the stage of representation; bodily mediality is replaced by electronic mediality. The development of artificial intelligence has significantly advanced the generation of so-called griefbots — digital simulations of deceased individuals — making such systems increasingly sophisticated and potentially more widely accessible. These techno-mourning services have attracted particularly strong interest in parts of Asia.

At this point, I would like to examine the use of digital "resurrection" within the performing arts through the example of GRIEF//BOT, realised with the participation of AI by Teatr Kombinat in Wrocław [7]. The subject of this theatrical-technological simulation was Natasza Czarmińska — a composer, poet, singer, and numerologist who died in 2004. She was privately the mother of bot designer David Sypniewski. Her personal archive — audio recordings, documentary films, and radio broadcasts — served as the narrative foundation of the performance, lending the experiment emotional authenticity and credibility.

At the same time, the performance did not attempt to create a total illusion of "bringing the deceased back to life." Natasza's voice was performed by Ewa Baraniecka, much like an actor embodying a theatrical role, while the symbolic body of the deceased mother appeared as a puppet covered with a sheet. It occupied the stage alongside a live actor, Paweł Palcat, portraying a son unable to reconcile himself with loss. The dramaturgy was based on a script written by Agnieszka Wolny-Hamkało, yet the inclusion of the bot introduced an element of partial improvisation — the technological entity never responded in exactly the same way twice. In the second part of the performance, audience interaction was also enabled, ensuring that each staging remained unique.

Narratives of grief, unresolved mourning, and the relationship between body and soul were accompanied by immersive visual projections, including textual records of AI interactions generated through prompts. The performance simultaneously explored the ethical boundaries of using the personal herstory of a deceased person through new technologies by relatives, artists, or researchers. It raised questions concerning the right to "feed" artificial intelligence with private archives of the dead, simulate their voices from audio recordings, or digitally resurrect them in alternative technological forms of presence. Are we creating a new kind of hydra — an entity potentially escaping our control? Can

grief and the desire to maintain contact with the deceased justify such practices? And finally, does digital reanimation genuinely help us process mourning, or does it instead prolong the impossibility of accepting absence?

The contemporary practices of digital/artificial immortality outlined above may be understood as emerging forms of biographical narration and performative posthumous presence. Two principal trajectories become visible here: on the one hand, an embodied ontoperformance grounded in the technological modification and optimisation of the living organism; on the other, digital reanimation based on the algorithmic continuation of human presence after death. Both trajectories reveal the increasingly complex status of the human subject in the age of advanced technologies and shift the boundaries between life, death, memory, and simulation.

Across the expanding horizon of technological possibilities, we encounter both practices of bodily hybridisation — aimed at progressively enhancing and extending the body, and in more radical visions even transcending biological embodiment altogether (in silico) — and strategies of cryopreservation after death. Simultaneously, an increasing number of digital resurrection services and tools are emerging, enabling the simulation of the deceased and the continuation of relational and narrative continuity beyond biological life. Consequently, biography no longer functions solely as an archival record of the past. It increasingly becomes a dynamic, performative, and algorithmically reproduced process of presence, continuously reactivated through data, interaction, and artificial intelligence.

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SESSION 4  
**ARCHIVES, GENDER AND  
ARTISTIC PRACTICES  
AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE**

# Her Endless Trial: Feminine Perfection, Biographical Narratives, and Cultural Violence in Indian Television Consumed in Bangladesh

## From Domestic Entertainment to Cultural Conditioning

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### Abstract

Indian Bengali and Hindi television serials have become deeply embedded within Bangladeshi domestic culture, particularly among women audiences. Broadcast through channels such as Zee Bangla, Star Jalsha, and Star Plus, these serials extend beyond entertainment and function as emotional and behavioural frameworks shaping contemporary femininity. Female protagonists are repeatedly represented through sacrifice, endurance, emotional restraint, and moral perfection, while relationships between women are structured through rivalry, jealousy, and competition.

Drawing from textual analysis and audience observation in Bangladeshi households between 2021 and 2026, this paper argues that such serials operate as distributed biographical narratives that normalize gendered self-denial and emotional labour. Through repetitive melodramatic storytelling, women are transformed into symbolic figures resembling culturally familiar ideals of Durga-like endurance and moral purity. These narratives influence not only emotional expectations, but also domestic behaviour, language, wedding aesthetics, and perceptions of feminine value.

The paper positions contemporary television melodrama as a form of cultural conditioning that silently reproduces unequal gender expectations through everyday entertainment practices.

### Keywords

Cultural violence; Television melodrama; Gender representation; Biographical narratives; South Asian media

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### I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK



Indian Bengali and Hindi serials increasingly shape everyday emotional culture in Bangladeshi households. Serials such as Parineeta, Jagaddhatri, Sreemoyee, and Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai repeatedly construct femininity through sacrifice, patience, and emotional endurance. Female protagonists are expected to preserve family stability while suppressing personal desire.

Relationships between women are commonly represented through rivalry and suspicion. Mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, sisters, and female friends compete for validation, authority, and emotional legitimacy. Rather than exposing structural inequality, conflict is redirected into female-to-female antagonism.

In Parineeta, the protagonist continues to face domestic tests despite academic and professional success. Similarly, Godhuli Alap frames female ambition as a threat to marital stability. Such narratives normalize the expectation that women must continuously prove moral worth through suffering and self-denial.

These serials also shape domestic aesthetics and emotional behaviour in Bangladeshi urban life. Speech patterns, wedding rituals, clothing practices, and emotional

performances increasingly mirror televised melodrama. Female protagonists are repeatedly framed as symbolic Durga-like figures whose value depends on resilience, sacrifice, and emotional endurance.

## II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence helps explain how television melodrama normalizes unequal gender expectations through symbolic representation. Violence here operates not physically, but culturally, by making female sacrifice appear morally desirable and socially natural.

The repetitive structure of serial storytelling produces what may be described as distributed biographical narratives. Audiences encounter recurring emotional scripts in which women gain recognition only through suffering, silence, and family preservation. Fictional narratives gradually become behavioural frameworks shaping everyday domestic relationships.

The symbolic transformation of women into morally superior, endlessly resilient figures creates an impossible model of feminine perfection. Strength is permitted only

when it remains self-sacrificial. As a result, television melodrama functions simultaneously as entertainment, moral instruction, and cultural conditioning within contemporary South Asian society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# From Archive to Narrative: Biographical Construction through Mediated Family Archives in Larry Sultan's Pictures from Home

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## Abstract

*This paper examines how autobiographical narrative is constructed through photographic and textual mediation in Pictures from Home by Larry Sultan. Through a close reading of staged photographs, family snapshots, home-movie stills, and textual fragments, the study argues that the family archive functions not as a passive repository of memory but as a performative and relational structure through which autobiographical meaning is actively produced. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of the familial gaze, Roland Barthes's understanding of photography as "that-has-been", and Ariella Azoulay's conception of photography as an event of encounter, the paper explores how photographic meaning emerges through negotiation, co-presence, and interpretive instability rather than passive observation alone. Particular attention is given to the interplay between text and image in Sultan's work, where delayed alignment, interruption, and fragmentation destabilise the transparency traditionally associated with autobiographical representation. The paper further examines Sultan's use of still frames extracted from home movies, arguing that the transformation of moving images into photographic fragments reconfigures private recollection into a reflective and narratively mediated form. Finally, the analysis situates Pictures from Home within the broader context of contemporary digital culture, considering how AI-generated imagery challenges the referential and evidentiary logic historically associated with photography and memory. In doing so, the paper argues that mediated archives do not simply preserve the past but actively participate in the ongoing construction of autobiographical meaning.*

## Keywords

*Larry Sultan; family archives; autobiographical narrative; photography theory; mediated memory; AI-generated imagery*

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## I. DISCUSSION

What does it mean when memory is no longer only selected and narrated, but also generated? This paper examines how autobiographical narrative is constructed through photographic and textual mediation in *Pictures from Home* by Larry Sultan [1]. Rather than treating family photographs as transparent records of lived experience, the study approaches them as mediated artefacts shaped by selection, framing, and narrative intervention. In doing so, it argues that family archives do not simply preserve memory but actively participate in the production of autobiographical meaning.

Larry Sultan was an American photographer whose work frequently explored the instability of domestic representation, family memory, and the constructed nature of photographic evidence. Sultan's work emerged within the broader transformation of American photography during the 1970s, when artists increasingly challenged the conventions of documentary realism through staging, appropriation, and archival reconfiguration. Although frequently associated with conceptual photography, his practice consistently moved between documentary observation and constructed representation, particularly in relation to suburban domestic life and postwar American culture. Across projects developed over several decades, Sultan repeatedly returned to everyday interiors, family rituals, and vernacular image practices not in order to stabilise memory, but to expose the cultural narratives and performative structures embedded within them.

*Pictures from Home*, first published as a book in 1992 and developed from a long-term engagement with his parents' images, combines staged colour photographs, family snapshots, home-movie stills, and textual fragments. Centred on Sultan's parents and their suburban Californian home, the project does not present the family archive as a neutral record of private life. Rather, it reworks that archive as a space of negotiation between memory, performance, and retrospective narration.

The analysis is grounded in a close reading of the book's structure, which combines colour photographs, textual fragments, and still frames extracted from the artist's parents' home movies. This hybrid form destabilises conventional distinctions between document and construction, revealing the family archive as a site where memory is continuously reconfigured. The opening

sequence, composed of stills from 8 mm films, establishes this dynamic by transforming moving images into photographic fragments, thereby shifting private recollection into a reflective and interpretive register. From the outset, the project situates itself not as a retrieval of the past but as an inquiry into how that past is mediated and narrated.

The material qualities of these opening images reinforce this distinction. Marked by visible grain, tonal instability, and reduced sharpness, the extracted stills retain the appearance of archival fragments rather than photographs produced in the present. Across several pages, the reader encounters isolated moments taken from the movement of domestic home movies, including recurring images of a young Sultan passing through a red hula-hoop held just outside the frame by an unseen adult hand [1]. Removed from the continuity of film and reorganised within the structure of the book, these images no longer function simply as records of familial play. Instead, the circular form of the hoop begins to operate almost as a threshold through which the autobiographical narrative itself is entered. The first textual fragment that follows — “What am I looking for?” [1] — retrospectively reframes these images not as transparent memories but as elements within a process of searching, reconstruction, and interpretive return.

Sultan’s own reflections on these archival materials further clarify this dimension. Discussing the 8 mm films recorded by his parents over several decades, he explains that he came to understand them not simply as biographical documents but as “mythic pictures” and “cultural artifacts” that exceeded the limits of personal memory [2]. What interested him was not only the record of his own childhood, but the way these images embodied broader postwar narratives of mobility, prosperity, and the promise of life in the American West.

By extracting still frames from moving images, Sultan interrupts the continuity traditionally associated with home movies. Moments that once belonged to the flow of domestic life become isolated fragments, removed from their original temporal sequence and reorganised within the structure of the book. The still image therefore no longer functions as spontaneous recollection but as retrospective construction shaped through selection, interruption, and reframing. In this sense, the archive does not preserve lived temporality intact; rather, it reconstructs it according to the logic of narration. What originally appeared as private family memory is transformed into an object of reflection, arrangement, and interpretation.

This paper employs a close reading methodology attentive not only to the representational content of the images, but also to the formal and relational conditions through which meaning is produced. Rather than approaching photographs as transparent documents, the analysis considers them as mediated constructions situated within broader processes of narration, performance, and archival organisation. Particular attention is therefore given to moments in which the act of photographing itself becomes visible, revealing the image as a site of negotiation rather than passive recording.

This perspective is informed by Marianne Hirsch’s concept of the “familial gaze,” which understands family photography as a relational field structured by multiple, intersecting acts of looking [3]. In Sultan’s work, the gaze does not remain fixed but circulates between photographer,

subjects, and viewer, complicating any stable division between observer and observed. This dynamic becomes particularly evident in scenes where the act of photographing itself is foregrounded, revealing the extent to which the image is shaped through reciprocal acts of looking rather than passive documentation.

Here, performance does not refer simply to conscious staging or the deliberate posing of subjects in front of the camera. Rather, it designates a relational condition in which the photographic act is co-produced through the interaction between photographer and subject. In this sense, the image is not the result of a unilateral act of capture, but of a situated encounter in which both parties participate in shaping the conditions of visibility. Photography thus operates less as a transparent record of what has been than as a situated encounter structured through presence, awareness, and response. Performance therefore emerges not as a secondary attribute added to photography, but as a constitutive condition of the photographic encounter itself.

Sultan’s own reflections on the project further complicate the distinction between observation and participation. At one stage, he describes photographing his father as producing the unsettling sensation of being able to observe without being observed in return, comparing this position to that of a parent watching an infant [1]. Yet the project gradually moved beyond detached observation toward a more unstable form of involvement. Rather than positioning himself as an external witness to family life, Sultan acknowledges becoming implicated within the emotional and symbolic structure he sought to examine: “These are my parents. From that simple fact, everything follows” [1]. What initially appeared as an attempt to expose the mythology of the American family increasingly becomes, within the project itself, a negotiation between critical distance, identification, affection, and loss.

This tension is further illuminated through reference to Roland Barthes’s formulation of the photograph as “that-has-been,” which foregrounds the image’s relation to time, presence, and loss [4]. In Sultan’s work, photography does not function as a means of preserving the past in any straightforward sense; rather, it exposes the impossibility of such preservation. The image becomes a site where attachment and loss coexist, reinforcing the idea that memory is not simply recovered but actively constructed through representation.

A key example of this dynamic emerges in the scene in which Sultan photographs his mother while she appears to be asleep. The ambiguity of the moment—whether she is truly asleep or consciously participating—destabilises the assumption of unilateral observation. Instead, the scene reveals a reciprocal structure of looking, in which photographer and subject become mutually implicated. This moment raises a broader question that extends beyond the specific scene: to what extent is photographic looking ever one-sided, and what happens when the subject is aware of being seen? Significantly, the act of photographing does not resolve this ambiguity but intensifies it, demonstrating that the photographic image cannot fully stabilise the relation it seeks to capture.

Sultan later describes the scene through a striking reversal: “Just as I was secretly photographing, she was secretly awake” [1]. What initially appears as a moment of private observation gradually becomes a shared and uncertain

performance in which photographer and subject become, in Sultan's words, "co-conspirators" [1]. Importantly, the scene is first introduced textually before the corresponding photograph appears several pages later, establishing a temporal gap between narration and image. Rather than simply illustrating one another, text and photograph operate through delayed and partial alignment, so that meaning emerges relationally across their separation.

This separation between text and image is central to the structure of *Pictures from Home*. The photographs do not function as visual confirmations of the written narration, nor does the text stabilise the meaning of the images. Instead, each medium introduces a degree of uncertainty into the other. The temporal gap between description and photograph prevents the scene from becoming fully legible at once, requiring the viewer to move back and forth between visual and textual registers. Meaning therefore emerges not through direct correspondence but through interruption, delay, and reinterpretation. In this respect, autobiographical memory appears not as a coherent reconstruction of the past but as a fragmented process mediated across multiple representational forms. This instability also resonates with broader studies of family photography and vernacular memory practices, where personal recollection is understood not as the recovery of a fixed past but as a mediated and continuously reconstructed process [5].

What follows does not resolve this uncertainty but translates it into another visual register. In one of the subsequent photographs, Sultan's mother appears standing within a domestic interior dominated by green tones, positioned at a doorway that separates two adjoining spaces. Rather than stabilising her as a passive figure to be captured, the composition reinforces her elusiveness. She does not return the camera's gaze; instead, her attention remains directed toward a space outside the frame. Positioned at this threshold, she appears suspended between visibility and withdrawal, extending the instability already established in the preceding textual scene. Looking here is no longer organised through a single direction of observation but dispersed across the image, leaving the relation between observer and subject unresolved.

If the subject is aware of the photographic act, the image can no longer be understood as an unmediated document whose meaning exists independently of the encounter that produced it. Rather, it begins to approximate a form of implicit co-authorship, in which the subject's awareness and potential responsiveness become constitutive of the image itself. In this light, the photograph does not simply capture a pre-existing moment but participates in its formation, transforming the act of looking into a performative construction. The ambiguity of the scene is therefore not incidental but structural, revealing that photographic meaning emerges from a negotiated encounter rather than from passive observation, a relational condition that resonates with Ariella Azoulay's understanding of photography as an event of encounter rather than a self-contained image [6].

Understood in this way, photography cannot be reduced to the production of a self-contained image-object alone. Rather, it involves a network of relations between photographer, subject, viewer, and the future conditions of interpretation. Meaning therefore emerges not solely from

what is represented within the frame, but from the encounter through which the image becomes socially and affectively legible. Sultan's work repeatedly foregrounds this instability, revealing photography less as the preservation of a completed past than as an ongoing negotiation between visibility, participation, and interpretation.

Building on this analysis, the paper argues that the family archive in *Pictures from Home* should be understood not as a fixed repository of past events but as a field of material from which narratives are produced. The boundary between archive and narrative becomes blurred: photographs operate at times as documents, at others as staged constructions, and at still other moments as traces of interpersonal encounters. The archive thus operates both as evidence of the past and as a space in which meaning is actively produced. Rather than being limited to what is recorded, the archive emerges as a structure that organises how memory is selected, interpreted, and, in certain cases, imaginatively reconstructed.

A comparable narrative logic can be observed in *Afterimage* (Chien de printemps) by Patrick Modiano [7], where photographs do not function as stable carriers of meaning but as fragments through which the past is retrospectively assembled. In this context, the archive does not disclose a fixed identity but produces it through a delayed and partial process of reconstruction. Read alongside Sultan's project, this parallel highlights the temporal dimension of mediated memory, suggesting that autobiographical meaning does not precede representation but emerges through it, in a fragmented and deferred manner.

While Sultan's work belongs to the pre-digital era, its central concerns – the mediation of memory through archival fragments, the construction of narrative through selection and framing, and the instability of the autobiographical gaze – resonate strongly within contemporary digital culture. Practices such as algorithmic curation of personal images, AI-generated memory assemblages, and social media archives similarly depend on processes of selection, recontextualization, and narrative construction. As José van Dijck [8] argues, personal memory is increasingly shaped through digital platforms that structure how images are stored, retrieved, and circulated. Likewise, Lev Manovich [9] suggests that the database logic of digital media transforms the archive into a dynamic system of selection rather than a fixed repository.

However, this apparent continuity also gives way to a fundamental rupture. In Sultan's practice, the photographic image remains anchored in a referential logic, what Barthes describes as the "that-has-been," implying the prior existence of what is depicted. By contrast, in contemporary digital systems—particularly in the case of AI-generated imagery—the image is no longer necessarily captured but produced through probabilistic synthesis rather than direct inscription. While analogue photography maintains an indexical relation to the world, generated images may imitate the visual structure of memory without retaining any material connection to an originating moment. In this respect, contemporary image production challenges not only the evidentiary status of photography but also the assumption that memory necessarily depends upon a lived referent. This shift fundamentally alters the epistemological status of the image: if there is no prior moment to which the image points, in what sense can it still be understood as memory? The

problem is therefore no longer whether images faithfully preserve the past, but whether the category of memory itself remains meaningful once referentiality becomes optional.

In contrast to Sultan's practice, where meaning is produced through interpretation, contemporary digital systems increasingly participate in the active generation of images [10]. If, in Sultan's work, the subject retains the possibility of participating in the photographic act—even ambiguously—this condition no longer holds in the case of generated images. An AI-generated figure cannot be said to “participate” in its own representation, which raises the question of whether the relational and performative dimensions of photographic meaning can persist in the absence of a human referent. This shift invites a reconsideration of the archive not only as a site of selection, but as a space in which images, relations, and even past experiences may be algorithmically simulated.

In this sense, Sultan's project can be understood not simply as a historical artefact, but as a critical framework through which the shifting conditions of memory, narration, and mediation can be examined. By foregrounding the relational and performative dimensions of photographic practice, it reveals that autobiographical meaning does not emerge from the faithful preservation of the past, but from its continuous reconfiguration through mediated encounters. At the same time, the contrast with contemporary image production underscores the limits of this model, raising the question of whether such relationality can persist in the absence of a referential ground.

## II. CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the family archive, as it appears in *Pictures from Home*, does not preserve autobiographical meaning as a stable referential truth, but produces it through acts of mediation, selection, and relational encounter. Rather than opposing archive and narrative as separate epistemological categories, Sultan's work reveals that the archive itself becomes narratively operative through acts of selection, framing, and mediation. Seen in this light, the archive cannot be understood as a stable container of the past awaiting retrieval. Rather, it functions as a dynamic structure through which memory becomes narratively organised, visually mediated, and continually reinterpreted across different historical and technological conditions. Sultan's work therefore reveals the archive not as the opposite of narrative, but as one of its conditions of possibility.

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# Reconstructing Absences in Portugal and Brazil

## Feminist Artistic Narratives and Institutional Critique in the Histories of Women Artists

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### Abstract

*The historical exclusion of women artists from the history of art canon is a widely discussed topic in feminist studies [5, 6]. However, many stories of women artists remain untold or fragmented within institutional narratives. This study focuses on the artistic trajectories of Josefa Greno and Abigail de Andrade, examining how processes of marginalisation and subsequent rediscovery have shaped their place in the history of art. The main objective is to analyse how institutional structures have historically produced and maintained the invisibility of women artists, while discussing how feminist curatorial and digital approaches may contribute to rethinking their historiographical representation. Methodologically, the research combines feminist art historiography with a theoretical and conceptual discussion of a possible digital artistic practice conceived as a fragmented biographical archive. Rather than presenting an implemented artistic project or exhibition, the study proposes a prototype model intended to reflect on how historiographical gaps, silences, and discontinuities could be translated into narrative and curatorial strategies within digital environments. In this sense, the proposed prototype functions as a methodological and conceptual framework rather than a completed practice-based work. Expected outcomes include a critical reinterpretation of the selected case studies and the development of an experimental historiographical model that foregrounds absence as a significant historical condition. The study suggests that digital artistic and curatorial methodologies may contribute to reconfiguring marginalised histories, encouraging more inclusive and reflective approaches within history of art and curatorial practice [1–3].*

### Keywords

*Historical reconstruction; Artistic narrative; Feminism; Invisibility; Institutional critique. Main contributions of your work*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The exclusion of women artists from the traditional history of art has been widely discussed in feminist scholarship. This has revealed how institutional structures have historically influenced the recognition of art [5, 6]. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the reconstruction of marginalised artistic trajectories via feminist historiography and digital narrative practices, with a focus on the works of Josefa Greno and Abigail de Andrade. Both artists developed their work within the constraints of nineteenth-century academic systems that limited women's access to artistic training, exhibition circuits, and critical recognition.

Although Abigail de Andrade achieved a degree of visibility during her lifetime, her legacy was subsequently diminished, whereas Josefa Greno remains absent from mainstream historiography, exemplifying varying degrees of invisibility. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyse the mechanisms that produced such marginalisation and explore how feminist and digital approaches can contribute to reconstructing their biographies. The central problem lies in understanding how institutional practices have generated and sustained historical absence.

### 1.1 Institutional Mechanisms of Invisibility

The trajectories of Abigail de Andrade and Josefa Greno must be understood in the context of broader institutions. As Linda Nochlin famously argued, the absence of women from the history of art is not due to individual failure, but to



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systemic exclusion [5]. Art academies, exhibition systems and critical discourse acted as gatekeeping structures that limited women's participation. Even when women were admitted, they were often restricted to certain genres, denied access to life drawing classes and excluded from professional networks.

Furthermore, historiography itself has played a central role in reinforcing these exclusions. As Griselda Pollock notes, the history of art is not a neutral field, but rather a discursive formation shaped by ideological and institutional forces [6]. The cases analysed here demonstrate two distinct yet related forms of marginalisation and invisibility: the progressive erasure of Abigail de Andrade following social controversy surrounding her personal life, and the devaluation of Josefa Greno's artistic production in association with processes of social stigmatization.

### *1.2 Methodology: Feminist and Practice-Based Approach*

This research employs a qualitative methodology that combines feminist historiography with artistic research. The historical analysis uses secondary sources to reconstruct the trajectories of the selected artists and identify patterns of exclusion. Concurrently, the study proposes the conceptual development of a digital artistic project conceived as a fragmented biographical archive. This practice-based element is informed by theories of digital media and narrative structure. As Lev Manovich argues, digital environments facilitate non-linear, database-driven narratives [4]. The proposed artistic project demonstrates how historiographical gaps could be translated into formal strategies, such as fragmentation, discontinuity, incomplete datasets and non-linear navigation. Rather than resolving archival absences, the proposal foregrounds these elements as central to the narrative, illustrating a possible methodological approach rather than presenting a finalized or implemented work.

More specifically, the study proposes a prototype in the form of a digital artistic project that acts as a fragmented biographical archive highlighting gaps and absences in the histories of women artists Josefa Greno and Abigail de Andrade. However, it does not present the full practice or an actual exhibition. The intended outcome is to offer a conceptual and methodological framework that uses absence as a narrative strategy, encouraging critical engagement with institutional invisibility without delivering a finalized curatorial presentation. This prototype serves as a foundation for future development of more comprehensive digital and feminist art historical interventions.

## **2. ABIGAIL DE ANDRADE: RECOGNITION AND ERASURE IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT**

Abigail de Andrade was one of the first women to gain recognition within Brazil's academic art system. She studied at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro, an institution which only began to admit women towards the end of the nineteenth century. She was particularly

recognised for her still-life paintings, a genre traditionally associated with femininity and therefore considered appropriate for women artists. Abigail de Andrade received awards at academic exhibitions, demonstrating that women could achieve institutional recognition under certain conditions [7].

However, this recognition was limited and fragile. Abigail de Andrade was subsequently excluded from Brazilian artistic society after becoming romantically involved with a married man. Furthermore, her career was cut short by her death in childbirth at the age of 26 in France, which further fragmented her legacy. As Ana Paula C. Simioni [7] argues, women artists in Brazil were often confined to specific artistic domains and excluded from more prestigious genres, such as history painting. Despite her achievements, Abigail de Andrade was later marginalised in art historical narratives. Her relative absence from canonical accounts reflects broader historiographical tendencies to minimise or overlook women's contributions, even when they were recognised during their lifetime.

## **3. JOSEFA GRENO: ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL MARGINALISATION IN PORTUGAL**

Josefa Greno is a prime example of the confluence of artistic potential and systemic constraints experienced by women artists in late nineteenth-century Portugal. After marrying the painter Adolfo César de Medeiros Greno, she relocated to Paris, where she immersed herself in artistic circles and exhibited works with the Société des Artistes Français. Years later, the couple returned to Portugal, where Josefa Greno joined the prestigious 'Grupo do Leão' (Lion's Group).

Despite her achievements, Josefa Greno's subsequent life illustrates the fragility of women's visibility within the artistic domain. Following personal and familial crises, she became embroiled in a widely publicised scandal, ultimately resulting in her imprisonment in Cadeia do Aljube, followed by her transfer to Rilhafóles Hospital, where she died in 1904. However, sensationalist reporting overshadowed her professional reputation, and her work was largely excluded from Portuguese art historiography. This absence itself is analytically significant as it exemplifies the structural invisibility of women in the history of Portuguese art, as described by Filipa L. Vicente [8], but it also reflects the outcomes of selective preservation and historiographical exclusion processes.

The overshadowing of her career by scandal illustrates how institutional, social and historiographical forces can marginalise women artists. In the context of this study, her fragmented archive could be incorporated into a digital artistic project where missing images, empty frames and interrupted narratives transform absence into a critical and narrative strategy [6, 9]. Consequently, the case of Josefa Greno redirects the emphasis from recovery to critical analysis. Rather than reconstructing a comprehensive biography, it is imperative to interrogate the circumstances that engendered its absence in the first place.

#### 4. RESULTS: ABSENCE AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY

The analysis confirms that the invisibility of both artists is structurally produced rather than incidental. In the case of Abigail de Andrade, for instance, the recognition she received from institutional frameworks did not guarantee her inclusion in art historical narratives over the long term. In Josefa Greno's case, the dearth of archival material is indicative of more profound processes of exclusion that manifest at the level of documentation and historiography.

The digital artistic project theorised in this research proposes an alternative approach by transforming absence into a narrative strategy. Rather than presenting a coherent and complete biography, this project of artwork exposes lacunae and omissions, thereby inviting users to engage critically with the construction of historical knowledge. This approach interrogates the conventional expectation that historical narratives should be considered complete and stable entities. Instead, it highlights their contingent and constructed nature.

##### *4.1 Discussion: Digital Media and Feminist Historiography*

Digital media offer new possibilities for addressing historiographical gaps, allowing for the integration of multiple sources, perspectives, and temporalities. However, as this study suggests, the potential of digital tools lies not only in expanding access to information, but in rethinking how narratives are structured. By adopting non-linear and fragmented forms, digital artistic practices can reflect the complexities of historical reconstruction. Within history of feminist art, this approach aligns with broader efforts to challenge dominant epistemologies and to develop more inclusive modes of representation. The combination of theoretical analysis and artistic practice thus provides a powerful framework for engaging with issues of invisibility and exclusion.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the historical invisibility of Josefa Greno and Abigail de Andrade, highlighting how institutional, cultural, and historiographical mechanisms have shaped the marginalisation of women artists in Portugal and Brazil. Abigail de Andrade's still-life paintings reveal a dual process of visibility and constraint: although she achieved recognition within the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and contemporary exhibitions, her work was confined to genres considered socially acceptable for women [7]. The formal qualities of her compositions—attention to light, texture, and balance—demonstrate technical proficiency, yet the framing of her career within limited artistic domains contributed to her subsequent marginalisation in art historical narratives. This case illustrates what Linda Nochlin [5] identifies as structural exclusion: talent alone does not guarantee recognition when institutional and social constraints dominate.

In contrast, Josefa Greno exemplifies a case of archival absence. Historical records and visual documentation of her artwork are scarce, making conventional analysis difficult. This absence is itself analytically significant: it reveals how historiographical practices determine which artists are remembered, how archives are curated, and which voices remain unheard [8]. The methodological response in this research—foregrounding absence through a digital, fragmented archive—follows feminist historiographical strategies that Griselda Pollock [6] argues are necessary to interrogate structural erasures and to create spaces for alternative narratives.

The comparative analysis of Abigail de Andrade and Josefa Greno demonstrates that invisibility operates on multiple levels: production, genre constraint, archival omission, and historiographical neglect. By combining historical research with digital artistic practice, this study proposes a dual strategy: 1) Recovery and analysis of visual artwork where possible (e.g., Abigail de Andrade's still-life paintings), allowing direct engagement with material and compositional strategies; 2) Representation of absence and fragmentation (e.g., Josefa Greno's lost or undocumented works), using digital platforms to make historiographical gaps visible and to invite critical reflection on the politics of memory and recognition. These findings have broader implications for the history of feminist art and digital cultural heritage. Digital environments enable the creation of non-linear, multi-layered narratives that challenge traditional historiographical structures [4]. In foregrounding absence as a methodological and aesthetic principle, researchers and artists can critically engage with the mechanisms of exclusion while simultaneously producing new forms of knowledge and visibility.

In conclusion, this paper illustrates that the reconstruction of women artists' trajectories cannot rely solely on recovery of objects or documentation. Instead, it requires critical attention to the structural, institutional, and epistemic conditions that have historically produced invisibility. By integrating feminist historiography, visual analysis, and digital artistic strategies, this study contributes to ongoing debates about inclusion, representation, and the possibilities of technology in reshaping art historical narratives. Such approaches highlight not only what is visible, but also the political and cultural forces that determine absence, offering a model for the critical engagement of future scholarship and artistic practice.

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# Reframing an Artist's Legacy: Media Art Students Narratives inspired by the Art of Henrique Silva

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## Abstract

*This paper presents an experimental pedagogical and artistic project developed with students in Multimedia and Arts at Universidade Portucalense, Portugal in which students were invited to create artistic narratives inspired by the life and work of Portuguese artist Henrique Silva. The project explores the potential of (auto)biographical narratives as a transmedia and intergenerational process, positioning artistic creation as a form of reinterpretation, mediation, and continuity of legacy.*

## Keywords

*Biographical Narratives; Media Arts; Transmedia; Remediation; Artist Legacy; Practice-Based-Research; Art Education; Henrique Silva*

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## I. HENRIQUE SILVA

Henrique Silva (b. 1933) is a central figure in Portuguese contemporary art and art education, whose career reflects a sustained engagement with both artistic and pedagogical practice.. A former grantee of the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, he studied at the École Supérieure de Beaux-Arts (Paris, France) during the 1960s, a formative period that exposed him to the bohemian lifestyle that shaped the artistic milieu of Paris at the time and the cultural transformations of the post-war era. He later completed a PhD in Digital Media Art - with 80 years - evidencing a continuous openness to new media and evolving artistic languages across different phases of his career. His artistic trajectory spans more than seven decades, encompassing over fifty solo exhibitions and more than two hundred group exhibitions in Portugal and

internationally, positioning him as a prolific and influential contributor to contemporary visual culture.

Alongside his artistic production, Henrique Silva has played a decisive role in shaping the Portuguese artistic and educational landscape. As executive director of the *Cooperativa Árvore* for over twenty years, he was instrumental in fostering artistic training, experimentation, and community engagement. Furthermore, as co-founder of the International Art Biennial of Cerveira - one of the oldest contemporary art biennials in Europe - alongside the artists José Rodrigues and Jaime Isidoro, both key figures in the development and decentralization of contemporary art in Portugal, he contributed to the internationalization and decentralization of contemporary art practices in Portugal.

Henrique Silva was also part of the avant-garde artistic collective VideoPorto, where he explored video art as an autonomous aesthetic language, moving beyond the mere materiality of the physical object. His work contributed to a critical rethinking of the image as a continuous flow in time, challenging traditional boundaries between art, technology, and perception. This pioneering collective emerged in Porto in the 1980s and was founded by Henrique Silva and Silvestre Pestana, later joined by Abel Mendes, Adriano Rangel, António Barros, Borges Brinquinho, Ção Pestana, Fernando Ribeiro, Rui Orfão, and Mineo Aayamagushi. More recently, some of Henrique Silva's video art works were exhibited at the Semibreve (Braga, 2019) and at Museu Zero (Tavira, 2025).

His commitment to education is equally significant. Henrique Silva was a key figure in the creation of the undergraduate programme in Multimedia and Arts at Escola Superior Gallecia, currently integrated into Universidade Portucalense, where his vision helped bridge traditional artistic practices with emerging digital media. This dual positioning - as artist and educator - makes his work particularly relevant for contemporary discussions on fine arts and media arts practices, artistic legacy, and the transmission of knowledge across generations.

## II. REFRAMING AN ARTIST'S LEGACY

The project *Reframing an Artist's Legacy: Media Art Students Narratives Inspired by the Art of Henrique Silva* emerged within the curricular unit *New Media – Techniques and Aesthetics* in collaboration with workshops promoted by *ObEMMA – Observatory of Electronic Music and Media Arts*. It was grounded in a direct encounter between students and the artist, including visits to his home and atelier, as well to exhibitions at *Atelier Gondar* and *Fundação Bienal Internacional de Arte de Cerveira*.



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This immersive experience aimed to foster proximity between young students and an artist whose trajectory spans multiple personal, historical, cultural and political contexts, encouraging students to engage with his legacy beyond conventional art historical frameworks.

Rather than adopting a documentary or descriptive approach, students were challenged to develop individual artistic responses based on their subjective interpretation of the artist's life, practice, and audiovisual universe. This approach aligns with narrative inquiry methodologies, which understand knowledge as constructed through stories and lived experiences, positioning narrative as a central mode of meaning-making (Kim, 2015). Narrative inquiry operates as an interdisciplinary framework that integrates experience and interpretation in the production of knowledge, emphasizing the subjective and relational nature of understanding.

The process privileged first-person perspectives and emphasized creative freedom, encouraging experimentation across different media and formats, including drawing through performance (Fig. 1 and 2), digital collage (Fig. 3) digital art (Fig. 4) and also video art, photography and analog artifacts.

In doing so, the project sought to transform biographical material into plural artistic narratives, highlighting the potential of transmedia as a means of reconfiguring memory and identity. This approach resonates with biographical explorations through creative work, where multimodal practices enable individuals to reinterpret lived experiences through artistic processes. From a methodological perspective, the project combined elements of practice-based research and arts-based inquiry, positioning artistic production as both a mode of inquiry and a form of knowledge generation (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Arts-based inquiry fosters critical reflection and transformative learning by engaging participants in creative processes that expand traditional academic forms of knowledge (Garcia, 2023).



Fig. 1 Drawing by Francisco Oliveira. based on Henrique Silva's Paintings. Source: Authors



Fig. 2 Performance by Francisco Oliveira. Source: Authors



Figure 3: Digital Collage by Daniela Kellner based on Henrique Silva's Atelier. Source: Authors

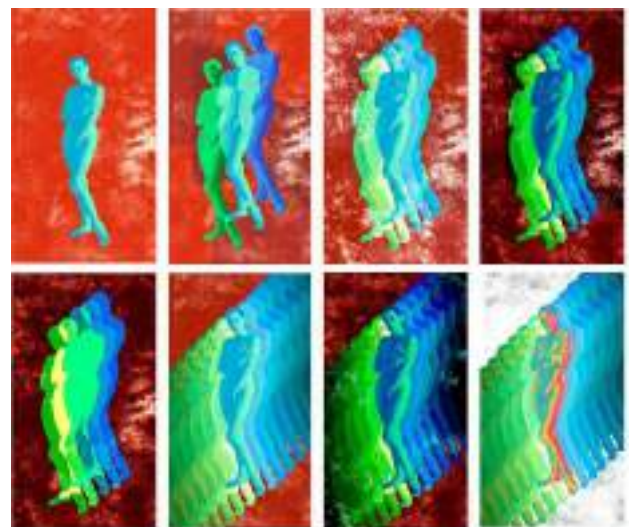


Fig. 4 Digital Art by Rafael Arantes based on Henrique Silva's original Photography and Collage. Source: Authors

In this context, the absence of prescriptive guidelines allowed students to explore diverse strategies of appropriation, remediation, and translation. The concept of remediation provides a useful framework to understand how new media reinterpret pre-existing media forms and also a mechanism for the construction of memory, identity, and cultural meaning (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Annabell, 2023). The students' works can be seen as processes of remediation, where elements of Henrique Silva's artistic language, biography, and visual references are rearticulated through contemporary media practices.

The resulting body of work reveals a heterogeneous set of artistic outcomes, reflecting different modes of engagement with the same referential source. Some projects adopt intuitive and sensory approaches, while others develop more conceptual readings, engaging critically with themes such as memory, authorship, and temporality. This diversity becomes more evident through selected examples of the projects developed, which demonstrate different strategies for interpreting the artist's work and trajectory.

In Figure 1 and 2 some outcomes of a project exploring a performative approach to drawing can be observed. In this work, the student produced a sequence of marks while blindfolded, relying exclusively on sensory and affective memories associated with encounters with Henrique Silva's atelier and specific works. This gesture shifts drawing from a visual practice to a bodily and

intuitive experience, in which memory is not understood as a faithful reproduction but as a subjective reconstruction. The process was documented through video, capturing the action in real time and making visible moments of hesitation, error, and discovery, thereby reinforcing the processual dimension of creation. In this sense, the work does not aim to directly represent the artist's oeuvre, but rather to reenact the experience of encountering it through the body and memory. In another example, shown in Figure 3, the digital composition was constructed through the layering of multiple visual elements, each incorporating references from different works by Henrique Silva. These layers function as relatively autonomous visual spaces, developed independently yet articulated within a final composition that produces a fragmented narrative. This strategy of accumulation and recombination allows for the preservation of identifiable features from the original references, while simultaneously reconfiguring them within a new visual context. Figure 4 features a series of digital illustrations and collages based on the book *Lucubrações sobre pensamentos heterogêneos*, in which the student explores the representation of the female body—a recurring theme in the work of Henrique Silva—experimenting with different textures and intensities based on the same source material.

Across these variations, a common thread emerges: the reinterpretation of a singular artistic trajectory through multiple subjective lenses, transforming biography into a dynamic and evolving narrative field. This plurality can also be understood through Lev Manovich's theory of new media, particularly his distinction between narrative and database as cultural forms. In the context of digital media, narrative is no longer necessarily linear but may emerge from the organization and navigation of heterogeneous elements, where meaning is constructed through selection and recombination rather than fixed sequencing (Manovich, 2001). In this sense, the students' projects can be seen as database-like narrative assemblages, where fragments of the artist's life, visual language, and personal interpretation are reconfigured into new narrative structures. A key aspect of this project lies in the dialogical dimension established between generations. By engaging directly with Henrique Silva, and subsequently presenting their works in response to his legacy, students not only reinterpret the past but also contribute to its ongoing reconfiguration. This process challenges linear and static notions of biography, proposing instead a relational and processual understanding of artistic identity, shaped through encounters, mediations, and reinterpretations. Furthermore, the project foregrounds the role of media and technology in expanding the possibilities of biographical narrative. By operating across different media and formats, students produce works that exceed traditional textual or visual forms. In this sense, biography becomes a transmedia construct, articulated through multiple supports, aesthetics and sensorial experiences, reflecting the hybrid, processual, and relational nature of contemporary artistic practice.

### III. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

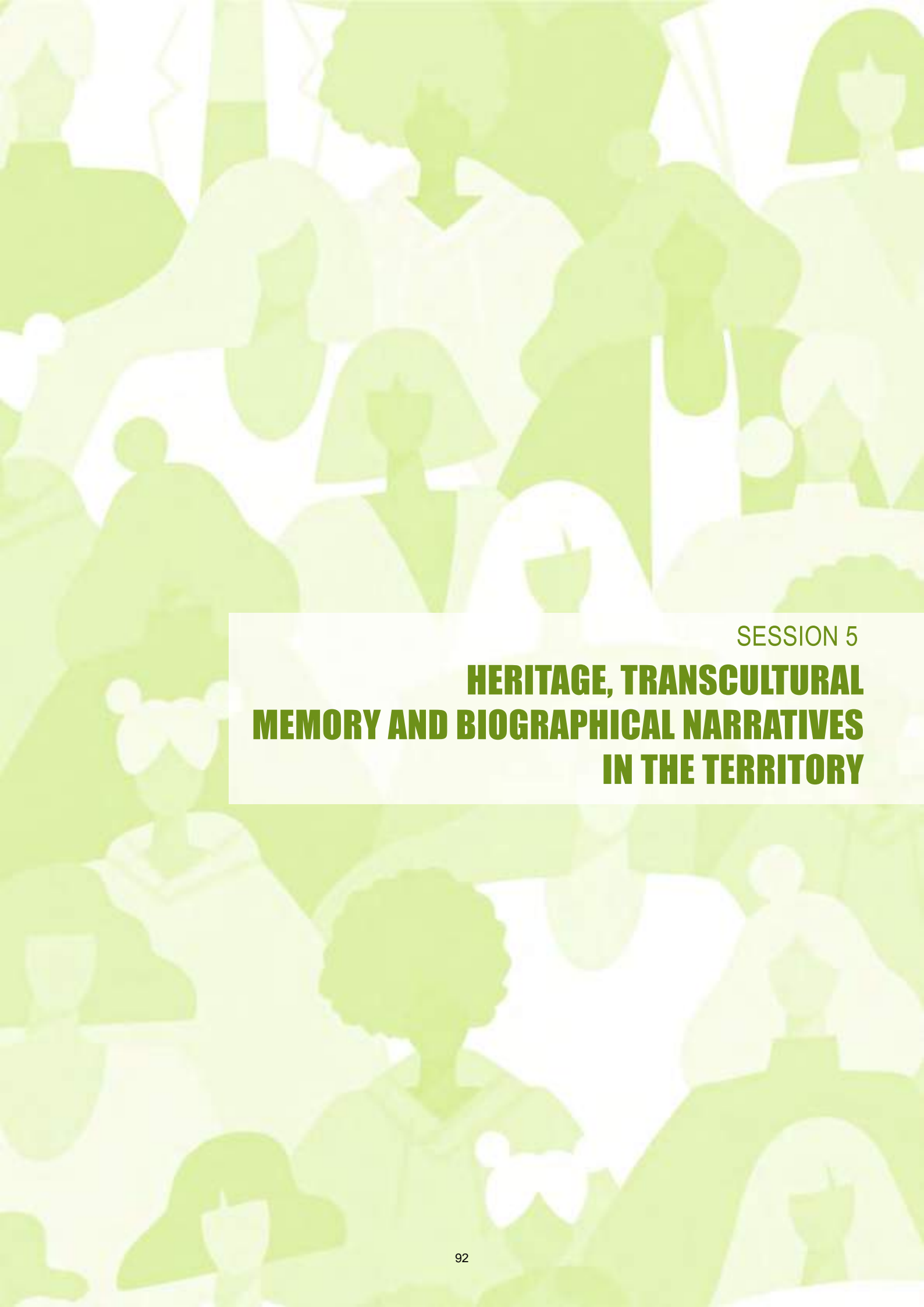
In conclusion, this paper argues for the relevance of pedagogical practices that integrate artistic creation, biographical narratives, and intergenerational dialogue within media arts education. The project demonstrates how the reinterpretation of an artist's legacy can function as a catalyst for critical reflection, creative experimentation and the production of new meanings. By transforming historical trajectories into contemporary narratives, students actively participate in the construction of cultural memory, ensuring its continuity through reinvention. Finally, the project is envisioned as an ongoing initiative, to be repeated periodically, allowing for the accumulation and comparison of different cohorts' responses over time. This longitudinal perspective opens up new possibilities for understanding how artistic legacies are continuously reframed across generations, reinforcing the idea that biography is not a fixed account of the past, but an open and evolving narrative shaped by collective and mediated experiences. The analysis of specific works further illustrates how these processes materialise in practice. By mobilising diverse strategies — from performative approaches grounded in embodied memory to digital compositions based on layering and recombination — students develop singular interpretations of the artist's work, reinforcing artistic creation as a space for critical interpretation and meaning.

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SESSION 5

**HERITAGE, TRANSCULTURAL  
MEMORY AND BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES  
IN THE TERRITORY**

# Architectures of Resistance: Biographical Narratives, Cultural Sovereignty, and Autoethnographic Practice in Argentine Media Arts (2000–2025)

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## Abstract

*This article examines a twenty-five-year trajectory of independent cultural production in Argentina through the lens of biographical and autoethnographic narrative practices in media arts. Challenging dominant institutional discourses that frame the decline of national comics as a crisis of creativity, the study reinterprets this condition as one of systemic abandonment, conceptualized here as “industrial orphanhood.”*

*By tracing a transmedia path that begins with the revisionist horror project *47, el muerto* (2000) and extends into digital publishing initiatives such as *Barricada Cómics*, the article proposes that independent artistic production can function as a form of cultural sovereignty. Drawing on theories of visual narrative, memory studies, and political aesthetics, the paper argues that comics and transmedia storytelling operate as “cognitive bridges” that connect personal experience, collective memory, and political resistance.*

*Positioning this trajectory within the framework of digital biographical narratives, the article demonstrates how creative practice can operate as an autoethnographic method, transforming artistic production into a living archive that resists institutional erasure.*

## Keywords

*Biographical Narratives; Autoethnography; Media Arts; Cultural Sovereignty; Argentine Comics; Transmedia*

## Reference Format:

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## I. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR WORK

### A. Introduction

For decades, Argentine cultural discourse has framed the decline of the national comics industry as a crisis of creative production. This article challenges that premise by reframing the crisis as a condition of institutional abandonment rather than creative exhaustion.

The concept of “industrial orphanhood” is introduced to describe a structural condition in which creators operate without sustained institutional support, despite ongoing innovation and audience engagement.

This study adopts an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), positioning lived experience as analytical data.

### Research Question

How can independent artistic trajectories function as biographical archives of cultural resistance within marginalised media ecosystems?

### B. Research Framework and Methodology

This research employs an autoethnographic methodology combining:

- longitudinal creative trajectory (2000–2025)
- practice-based research (film, comics, digital publishing)
- contextual analysis of Argentine cultural industries

Creative production is treated as both subject and method, linking individual experience with broader socio-cultural structures.

### C. Case Study: *47, el muerto*

The project *47, el muerto* (2000) represents a foundational moment within this trajectory. Developed as a short film, it addresses the traumatic legacy of the Argentine dictatorship through revisionist horror.

Its early academic recognition and continued circulation illustrate how marginal productions can persist beyond

institutional frameworks, functioning as forms of cultural memory.

#### *D. Industrial Orphanhood and Digital Sovereignty*

The collapse of Argentine publishing infrastructures in the 1990s led to the marginalization of local creators.

In response, digital platforms such as Barricada Cómics enabled alternative models of production and distribution, fostering forms of cultural sovereignty outside institutional control.

This process aligns with Mbembe's concept of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019), where visibility and erasure operate as mechanisms of power.

#### *E. Cognitive Bridge: Comics and Pedagogy*

Drawing on Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Scott McCloud, comics are understood as a "cognitive bridge" enabling readers to construct meaning across visual sequences.

Pedagogical applications of this model demonstrate how biographical narratives can be integrated into creative practice, transforming audiences into active participants.

#### *F. Findings*

The analysis identifies three key findings:

1. Independent production functions as a distributed biographical narrative across media forms.

2. Digital practices enable concrete forms of cultural sovereignty.

3. Creative production operates as a living archive of memory and experience.

These findings support the interpretation of independent media practices as structured forms of cultural resistance.

## **II. CRITICAL DISCUSSION**

This study contributes to media arts by reframing biographical narratives as embedded within creative practice rather than limited to textual autobiography.

The concept of "architecture of resistance" describes how artistic production, dissemination, and pedagogy form interconnected systems that sustain cultural expression under conditions of marginalisation.

These practices align with Rancière's notion of the "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2004), where new forms of visibility challenge dominant cultural hierarchies.

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# The Mountain Knows Who You Are

## Visual Storytelling Through Autoethnography

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses the concept of autoethnography used in doctoral research on digital media arts, based on long-term photographic fieldwork in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. The paper argues that photographic practice and scientific inquiry are forms of knowledge production embedded in landscape and interconnected lived experiences. The mountain landscape is considered a living being by local communities. Places called 'ezuamas' function as interwoven realities that preserve memory and are sources of ancestral teaching. Human activity exists in a network connecting people with the environment and spiritual forces. Similarly, various roles, from photographer and artist to researcher, converge in the figure of the author, and ultimately motherhood fundamentally influences the course and outcome of the research. The paper also suggests possible resonances between analogue photographic processes and digital logic. Interviews with local participants revealed parallel perspectives in which technologies may be understood as manifestations of pre-existing cosmological principles. The project was divided into two phases, fieldwork and post-production. The narrative component combines analogue black-and-white photography and digital colour audiovisual material with autobiographical notes written during stays in the region between 2019 and 2022, with subsequent analytical reflections during data processing between 2022 and 2026.*

### Keywords

*Autoethnography; Digital Media and Art; Analogue Photography; Photographic Fieldwork; Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; Practice-Based Research*

### Reference Format:

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Questions of perception and mediation increasingly shape contemporary artistic inquiry across visual and digital media. In this context, prolonged immersion in a specific environment can become a method that connects image-making, writing, listening, and everyday engagement into a single research trajectory. Such an approach challenges stable separations between individual forms of knowledge and raises the question of how lived experience and image mutually contribute to the formation of meaning. The article approaches study as an evolving spatial and temporal practice in which visual media are embedded in situated thinking.

### II. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF WORK

This project is anchored in the methodology of autoethnography, which allows the examination of one's own perception as a legitimate source of understanding. This approach is also framed through the concept of artistic practice as a process in which the technical aspects give way to the experience of unity between the artist and the subject.

As described in the context of the Japanese tradition of archery, true mastery of practice does not arise at the moment of technical perfection but at the moment when conscious control is relinquished and practice becomes an action that comes from a deeper level of the mind. From this angle, the subject and the artist become one rather than being in opposition to one another (Suzuki, 1992, pp. 5–6).

This study enhanced knowledge of the historical and traditional cosmological concepts of the communities transmitted by the elders. Since the author learned through speaking with the younger members of the communities that the people of the Sierra Nevada do not wish to be seen as exclusively traditional or live in isolation from society at large, rather than framing the situation as a tension between tradition and modernity, the study approached it in terms of an open-ended methodology to resist both romanticisation and critique. Although on the one hand, there is much emphasis on a cautious decolonial approach that involves controlled sharing and contextualisation and is mainly shaped by a historical sense of obligation (Jung, 1997); by contrast, people from the communities themselves tend to

step beyond clichéd taboos set by both Western discourse and community members. Conversations with members of the Sierra Nevada communities or collaborators from the region revealed a plurality of perspectives that cannot be reduced to a single narrative. The community is a constellation of individuals – for some, engagement with external education, travel, and digital technologies represent opportunities for exchange and self-representation. For others, these same processes may be associated with loss and transformation, creating imbalances, including changes in perception of reality due to learning new languages.

It became evident that while members of the communities often approached cultural ways of knowing from within their own inherited cosmological framework, the researcher discovered that in her own case subjectivity could not be avoided. This became particularly clear during the early years of motherhood and later, when a friend from the Iku community visited her in Berlin at the end of the research period. At that stage, the project was already being conducted remotely through archives, scholarly texts, and interviews with participants and collaborators.

The encounter marked a reversal of the original research situation. Instead of the researcher travelling to the Sierra Nevada to access the field, a member of the community entered the researcher's own social and domestic environment. This shift altered the perception of distance and difference on which the fieldwork had initially been structured. The distinction between 'field' and 'home', as well as between 'traditional' and 'modern', became less fixed and more relational. As a result, the inquiry gained a more reciprocal and human dimension, deepening the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the study.

The photographer enters the act, still quietly and unobtrusively, but she already sees she finds herself somewhere beyond her idea of reality, yet it is so ordinary and obvious and archetypal. Her mind is not able to grasp the established concept of time that flows here and in which she meets people that she recognises very well, yet in the depth of the soul, shaped by the overseas homeland, she has already forgotten it. The Iku people radiate something absolutely essential and well known into the space, but she cannot give it a name. Despite this, the photographer maintains a distance, almost a religious respect, bowing deeply on her knees, to a culture she does not know. She forgets about herself, her roots, and the past; she becomes invisible; she has her role here. Nevertheless, she takes photographs, but now she is not a photographer but just a camera, an eye, the lens of the device, or a frame of film onto which drops of light are dotted. (Šnajberková, 2019).

The aforementioned excerpt from the field diary illustrates a temporary dissolution of the author–subject distinction during the very first encounter with the indigenous community. Perception is embedded within the situation itself. The camera functioned as an extension of presence, aligning with understandings of image-making as a relational act, and thus operated as a situated interface within a network of people compared to a cosmological scheme of the loom. The people of the Sierra Nevada often refer to collaboration as 'tejer' (to weave), further developed with a

reference to the binary code originating in the Jacquard loom (Pitman, 2017).

As proximity with the subject deepened, the impulse to document was replaced by the need to preserve the integrity of the experience without mediation. Choosing not to produce an image is an epistemological stance: a refusal to overwrite lived reality.

She does not go to take the photograph. She already knows the photograph of the Kággaba men inside the cave 'los guájaros'. The darkness is saturated with the squeaking sounds of the birds circling inside as if in a closed cardboard gift box into which light flows through the ragged bends in the corners, and men in white clothes are standing at the foot of the crevice, silently observing and stretching their necks to the ceiling of the closed convex space in the rock. The presence of humans inside the animal dwelling breathes an almost ceremonial life: the men are children inside the womb, which is also the universe. (Šnajberková, 2026).

This dynamic redefines visibility and invisibility. During fieldwork, the author was not invisible in the sense of being distant; on the contrary, she was literally asked to be actively engaged in everyday life. 'Invisibility' here describes those moments when the act of photographing becomes seamlessly integrated into the situation, no longer perceived as an external intervention. Between these positions—active participation, mediated observation, and deliberate non-recording—the project unfolded as a continuous and circulating negotiation of presence involving mediation between the subject, the author, and the medium itself. It supports the concept of 'landscape' as a field of meaning which is one of the work's main contributions. The landscape is viewed as a living entity with memory and significance in the context of local communities. Locations known as 'ezuamas' function as nodes where people, nature, and spiritual forces converge. Here, relational interactions that link numerous facets of reality generate meaning.



Fig. 1. Jaroslava Šnajberková, *Kággaba*, 2021. Digitised analogue photography.

Reinterpreting analogue photography an instrument used in this research, and as a medium with a latent digital principle, is a further contribution. The testimony of spiritual authorities (Mámas) describe contemporary technologies as manifestations of principles already present at the origin of the world (Green et al., 2022). This idea enables comparisons with local cosmologies, where modern technologies are viewed as expressions of ideas that have long existed in their

conception of reality. The link between analogue and digital media rests on a shared ontological question: how does the invisible become visible—how do material and immaterial dimensions relate? In Kággaba cosmology, the concept of ‘Aluna’ refers to a pre-material realm of potentiality from which the visible world develops, in a similar way analogue photography transforms temporal and luminous events and manifests as a visible trace. Kággaba masks, as described in the Dugunawi story, function as operative devices that alter perception: when worn, they reveal dimensions of reality that remain otherwise inaccessible (Nacogui, 2025). From this point of view, both the camera and the mask can be approached as mediating boundaries between different layers of material and immaterial domains, yet interconnected.

### III. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The question of the emergence of meaning represents a key level of discussion. Theoretical approaches emphasising the role of the viewer, formulated, for example, by Roland Barthes (2005), shift interpretation of the work towards the viewer, who becomes an active creator of meaning. In other approaches, the author remains central, structuring and conveying meaning.

A focus on corporeality, everydayness, and the contextualisation of epistemology, integrating the role of technology and mediation as well, has developed in a structure of contemporary research. In dominant discourse, digital technologies are often associated with notions of novelty and discontinuity. Analogue photography in this context acts as a medium that connects the material and informational levels and allows one to consider the image as a transformative practice. By continuously tying the visual medium to long-term life engagements—including the author’s identity transformation in relation to motherhood—this work extends this paradigm. While modern scientific approaches often work with the separation of humans and nature, in the environment of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta reality is understood as an interconnected whole.

According to Ruddick’s concept of ‘maternal thinking’, knowledge is understood in relational terms, and the bond between a mother and her child is conditioned by ongoing communication and the need for authenticity and care. In fieldwork this can be manifested in having a clear goal, structure, plan, systematicity, maintaining internal strength, discipline (like people from communities) while also following unpredictable rhythms of the environment, landscape or weather. In the absence of a child, the study might have followed a more performance-orientated logic, prioritising productivity and immediate outcomes. In fact, childbearing created prolonged periods of time away from the field during maternity leave, which allowed for intuition and the organic progression of the work with greater flexibility. This approach made it clear that there is not a single, comprehensive guide or body of knowledge that does not depend on the context.

The researcher spends time by the river, sleeping on a stone in the foetal position, and the water roars beneath and through the stone. It turns into a greyscale black-and-white photograph and a mosaic of nature; it is a fluffy foam rolling over boulders and flowing into lagoons, and the sound of the river is enclosed in the jungle, and then it

falls down in a mighty waterfall along the path along which the researcher descends for a long time to the town of Palmor. (An example from the dissertation, showing how the author works with a photographic archive as a stencil for describing experience as a generative structure for narrative. The image precedes the text, shaping its rhythm and descriptive logic. Šnajberková, 2026).

### IV. CONCLUSION

The article has outlined an understanding of research as an interconnected and encompassing trajectory in which environment and mediated experience are inseparable. However, the project remains open-ended, continuing beyond the temporal and methodological frame of this paper. Future fieldwork will involve renewed engagement with the Sierra Nevada communities, now including the presence of the child, which inevitably reconfigures the conditions of perception and participation. The project thus follows an unfolding logic in which knowledge emerges through shifting relations and lived experience. This ongoing transformation resonates with the fluid nature of contemporary digital media, where boundaries between image, memory, and reality remain continuously in motion.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# Tell me Virgínia Adriana how was it, that room of yours’ own?back@1938

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## Abstract

*This article examines a transgenerational family photographic archive from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Portugal through a critical autoethnographic and feminist methodological framework. The analysis focuses on Albums produced between 1936 and 1939, conceptualized as female personal albums, and situates them within broader genealogies of amateur photography, nineteenth-century scrapbook practices, and bourgeois visual culture. The study explores how female/domestic photographic practices function as sites of memory, visual literacy, and gendered self-representation under conditions of absence and fragmentary transmission. Rather than treating the archive as a closed repository, the research adopts a constrained speculative “what if” procedure, understood as a form of thinking-with images that acknowledges loss, silence, and temporal distance as constitutive elements of meaning. Through comparative iconographic analysis, the study identifies recurring motifs—particularly the figure of women at windows—as analytical structures that condense lineage, gaze, and the negotiation between interiority and exteriority. A subsequent practice-based re-enactment, conceived as a digital studiolo, extends the archival inquiry into a socio-aesthetic investigation that integrates theory and visual practice. By combining archival research, visual analysis, and speculative methodology, this article contributes to studies of domestic photography, feminist art history, and the history of private life, proposing absence not as a limitation but as an organizing principle of archival knowledge.*

## Keywords

*Absence and archival silence; Aesthetic/artistic female education; Gendered self-representation; Photographic Album; Transgenerational visual memory; Visual Studiolo.*

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## I. Preview about the 1936-1939 Photo-Album

A body of research, between dense participated memory and affective personal remembrance, guided this research; it is tempered by loss and the chronological distance intrinsic to personal photographic Albums understood as iconographic archives. This research did not begin as a deliberate engagement with the photographic archive following Kuhn, [1], nor as a collection suitable for academic or museological classification. Instead, it arises from a non accidental impulse, but induced, as Suely Rolnik [2] suggests – that assumes the archive both as personal/inner necessity and sociocultural response. It is a kind of “locating memories through photography” Kuhn & McAllister *dixit* [3]. My iconographic archival impulse, paraphrasing Hal Foster [4], is grounded in a personal academic practice, which recognizes the archive not only as an empirical resource, but as a philosophical substance, capable of guiding artistic, literary and intermedial productions. However, it should be noted that this impulse was not shaped by internet-based sources—as is the case with some of the artistic practices discussed by Foster [4]. Rather, its origin lies within a restricted circle, informed by personal reflection and sensibility. In this sense, the research engages what Allan Sekula [5] conceptualizes as the urgency of the body and the archive; it operates within a critical autoethnographic framework, though it is not limited to it considering Anderson perspective [6], mainly when the author addresses the “evocative autoethnography” [6]. My position is one of implication rather than identification. I recall upon Sarah Pink reflections concerning the relevance of - performing - *doing visual ethnography* [7]. I am not external to the archive, yet I do not privileged access to its meaning in an exclusive subjective perspective. I position myself between the materiality of the Albums and the immateriality of the remembrance they evoke. This position entails a methodological oscillation between proximity and analytical distance, treating the absence of first-person testimony as a structural condition and employing a controlled speculative (“what if...”) approach without fictionalizing evidence. I understand the “*what if*” method not as a substitute for absent evidence, but as a mode of speculative *thinking-with* highlighted by Haraway [8], attentive to the archive rather than imaginatively superseding it. My position is one of implication rather than identification. I recall upon Sarah Pink [7] reflections concerning the relevance of - performing - *doing visual ethnography* [7]. I am not external to the archive, yet I do not privileged access to its meaning in an exclusive subjective perspective. I position myself between the

materiality of the Albums and the immateriality of the remembrance they evoke. This position entails a methodological oscillation between proximity and analytical distance, treating the absence of first-person testimony as a structural condition and employing a controlled speculative (“what if...”) approach without fictionalizing evidence. I understand the “*what if*” method not as a substitute for absent evidence, but as a mode of speculative *thinking-with* [8], attentive to the archive rather than imaginatively superseding it.

With regard to the Portuguese socio-historical context, the works of Irene Vaquinhas [9–11] and Filipa Vicente [12] were adopted as main references, complemented by early studies on women produced before the establishment of academic feminism in Portugal (Digitized Magazines and Almanachs at online – PURL - *National Library of Portugal*). Concerning access to education, the publication “*Da Educação/On Education*” by Almeida Garrett (1822) [13] stands out, as well as an overview of periodical publications – digitized historic newspapers, almanacs, magazines – that served the public domain from 1807 onwards, while presenting diverse stereotypes, considerations, arguments, and reflections. This framework is justified by the time period of the two women who preceded me, whose lives spanned from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 1970s. These historical sources were articulated with the analysis of photographic material (dispersed and in albums) and with handwritten notebooks containing literary transcriptions and original poetic and narrative texts.

## II. Women, Photography and Albums -1890/1939

This (re)research will highlight the epistemological potential inherent in family photo albums and their capacity to illuminate a more humanistic and humanizing perspective, revealing fragmentary episodes from the daily lives of a young woman (mother) and an older woman (grandmother) in the Portuguese context from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [11]. Simultaneously, it affirms the relevance of re-establishing personal lives as spaces of heritage, identity, and individuality, capable of being projected beyond—and not merely absorbed by—the concentric circles of the social collective. Thus, the theoretical foundation solicits and interweaves studies on travel, landscapes, feminism, aesthetics of taste, historical iconographies and, above all, a phenomenological stronghold that exhibits hermeneutical and anthropological concerns. From this framework, a visual essay emerged that positions itself in terms of “communicating vessels” in relation to what is written.

As an example of how a methodological exercise can be developed from images, a deliberate “what if” procedure was highlighted. I chose to engage with the photographic archive through constrained speculation rather than reconstruction. In this context, I approached the iconography of my mother in her youth not as a recoverable narrative, but as a speculative field activated by images. I situated her within fragments of quite familiar landscape of mine — the *Pergola do Molhe*, in Foz do Douro, allowing spatial proximity to mediate temporal distance. The gestures attributed to her — walking with friends, posing for

photographs, yielding to the wind of warm days — do not function as narrative assertions, but as projections disciplined by recurrent visual motifs present in the images themselves. This exercise rendered evident a paradox central to the research: her face is more vividly retained through photographs than through lived memory following her death. The psycho-affective charge embedded in such writing appeared to contradict my academic training in detachment and analytical distance. Yet this tension proved productive. It exposed the limits of conventional neutrality when confronted with fragmentary archives and absent testimony, ultimately necessitating a methodological repositioning — one that acknowledges affect, speculation, and proximity not as obstacles, but as conditions of inquiry. Consequently, I revisited my mother’s albums produced between 1936 and 1939, in order to deepen their conceptualization as *female personal albums* and to support their inclusion in aggregate studies on domestic visual practices and private memory.

I connected the aesthetic of my mother’s albums with research on Victorian-era female photographers: the cut-out, pasted, and painted photographs that proliferated in the scrapbooks of amateur artists from middle- and upper-class backgrounds during the second half of the nineteenth century. The iconographic content of my mother’s albums shifts according to age, place, and circumstance; however, certain common denominators are discernible. While portable Kodak cameras were already available in the 1930s, photographic practice remained relatively costly, making the production of such a large number of images far from usual.



Fig.1. M.F.Lambert. *Tell me Virgínia Adriana how was it, that room of yours' own?back@1938*. 2026. Slide 1. Digital mix-media.

Analysing the contents of the pages of the *1936–1939 Album*, it becomes clear that the incursions of cut-out elements are limited to flowers and small ornaments, articulated with the arrangement of photographs. Therefore, the aesthetic approach is restrained and functional, guided by a concern for location/dating—features that my mother appears to have considered relevant. Nevertheless, I find a certain naiveté and a subtle irony, traits that seem to reflect both temperament and a playful engagement with the album as a medium. Still, this practice remains far removed from the almost “Dadaist” formal solutions observable in many Victorian amateur scrapbooks, which are characterized by

greater fragmentation, disruptive collage, and more pronounced visual experimentation as Siegel refers [14]. While there is no direct evidence that my mother was explicitly familiar with Victorian female albums, such practices were widely disseminated within middle- and upper-class leisure cultures and circulated informally among social networks. It is therefore plausible that she encountered these visual traditions indirectly, whether through friends, shared albums, or broader conventions of feminine amateur photographic culture.

### III. Inside the Album 1936/1939: images & thoughts

Careful observation of each page allowed the identification of recurring visual and semantic features across the corpus. Through comparative analysis, it was possible to recognize similar issues. Frequent set of themes emerges along the Album: fragments of landscape, panoramic views, architecture and monuments, domestic interiors—primarily living rooms—alongside focused details such as tables set for lunch or tea, flower vases and books, and armchairs adorned with embroidered cushions. In these scenes, the figures depicted are seated and facing unknown photographers — possibly friends or relatives, especially in cases where my mother appears positioned in the group. In two photographs, the framing suggests the use of a time-delay mechanism for self-portraits: part of the face is cropped, and the composition lacks sufficient depth and perspective to fully capture the figure. Such images resist narrative closure. While most of the photographs can be attributed to my mother, others remain uncertain; although some locations are identified, they are not consistently georeferenced, and the time markers—precise within the album—become elusive when the photographs appear scattered outside of it. However, it is precisely through this fragmentary accumulation that the album asserts itself as a deliberate visual construction, rather than a casual record. During this phase, I selected a number of portraits for closer analysis, focusing on facial expression, bodily posture, and setting in order to examine how visual conventions align with—or depart from—social and cultural expectations. My initial attention was drawn to portraits of my mother and father in their youth, an exercise of a certain estrangement, given that I knew them only in middle age. I subsequently turned to my maternal grandparents and, later, isolated those portraits that can be identified, as depicting my grandmother in her younger years. Across these images, she appears to retain an expression marked by a subtle playfulness and restraint. Even in the well-known photograph taken at the *Palácio da Bolsa* ball in 1934, where she is seated beside my mother in the *Arab Room*, elegantly composed and socially assured, her gaze conveys a degree of defiance. This image proved emblematic in shaping a more robust understanding of both my mother and grandmother as self-possessed women operating within a social world structured by restrictive norms and stereotypes. Attention was also directed to dress codes, ornamentation, and degrees of physical proximity or distance between figures. The ways in which individuals faced—or avoided—one another provided visual cues for interpreting the familial or amicable nature of the relationships depicted. Spite of this expanded iconographic corpus, it was possible to identify recurring figures across

different photographs and episodes, both temporally and spatially. The re-collected photographs include scenes of seaside strolls, resting after a tennis match, and individuals seated in shaded outdoor settings. The portrayed groups appear heterogeneous, suggesting a social milieu shaped by transnational encounters rather than exclusively European affiliations. This interpretation is supported by the family's broader social context: my grandfather served as the honorary consul of Panama, a position that likely fostered a culturally diverse network of acquaintances and visitors. Across these representations, both women and men are predominantly young, portrayed in informal and playful modes of sociability. In other instances, they appear in group portraits at a more mature stage of life. This continuity is further reinforced by the family's longstanding connections to Brazil, which involved receiving relatives visiting Europe in the domestic sphere. Within these visual constellations, my mother repeatedly emerges as a challenging presence.

### IV. Back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century generation and now

Some isolated photographs are printed on cardstock, with the label of photographic studios, although most do not record the name of the sitter. Great-grandmother, grandmother, mother: I conceptually reconstructed a generational succession, situating each figure and tentatively assigning decades. Their gazes appear to register this temporal distancing, as if each one was already separated from herself by the passage of time. This corpus includes individual portraits, paired photographs, and group images—often carefully staged and predominantly taken outdoors—alongside those produced in professional studio settings.

In the visual essay, the photographs taken by my mother are juxtaposed over previous ones, suggesting an effort to inscribe herself within an inherited visual lineage and to perpetuate recognizable, and at times stereotypical, modes of representation. Also included are three photographs from a journey to Biarritz, via San Sebastián, for which the locations are identified in my grandmother's handwriting. Beyond these anchored traces, intermediate experiences remain largely inaccessible. What persists are fragments, through which I began to imagine the threads connecting the decisive moments she recalled. As a subsequent phase of the research process, I deliberately chose to mimic my mother's photo albums, creating a PowerPoint presentation in which the photographs were arranged chronologically. Instead of digitizing the images, I photographed the photographs themselves, producing what could be described as visual "doubles." This choice was intentional: I sought a more organic and materially resonant mode of mediation, initially inspired by the tactile logic of a quilt I embroidered during my free time. This action—repeated over several years—led to a new phase of the research, in which I allowed myself to engage in socio-aesthetic research conducted in a consciously affective manner. This methodological shift remained consistent with previous research trajectories, particularly studies focused on the construction of authorial identity -between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A central question arises: what feelings and ideas can be deciphered, identified, or recognized from what others have seen and what they have deemed worthy of preservation? At this stage, I returned to theoretical frameworks that had

guided my work previously, namely, Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotions* [15], in dialogue with the image plates of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (unfinished but published in 1927) [16], André Malraux's notion of the *Imaginary Museum* [17], and Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* [18]. All these references intertwined my conception of a highly personal visual *Studiolo*: an individual laboratory of images and ideas through which the memories of others—mediated and reactivated by me—could be anatomized and reconfigured.. Here, the materialization of a plural and remembered heritage—my own and transgenerational memories—takes shape as a digital *PPT* rather than a printed object. Its intentional immateriality and restricted circulation reinforce its status as an intimate visual construct, designed to be shared only within the interstices of personal worlds, largely absent from public record.

## V. The women standing at a window

On one of the first pages of my mother's 1936/1939 album, I found the handwritten inscription "from my bedroom window." The phrase affirms a form of mediated possession between interior and exterior space, suggesting a lived relationship with the world framed by the domestic threshold. It evoked Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* (1929). This discovery refuted my engagement with the archive. The image did not restore presence or recover memory; instead, it offered a visual framework through which absence could be read. I became attentive to the recurrence of this specific motif: women portrayed standing at a window, their gaze directed toward an indeterminate exterior. This figure—positioned at the threshold between interior and exterior space—emerges repeatedly across the archive and resonates with a broader iconographic tradition in which windows function as mediating devices between domestic subjectivity and the world beyond. The prevalence of female figures viewed from behind or in profile, oriented toward an unseen exterior, aligns with pictorial precedents ranging from C. D. Friedrich's *Caroline Friedrich at the window* (1822), to J.H. W. Tischbein's depiction of *Goethe in Rome* (1786–87), and later works by Vilhelm Hammershøi, Aurélia de Souza, and Gwen John.

At least five of such "windowed" self-images surface ruled over four generations within the female lineage. Significantly, the name *Virginia* recurs among these figures—great-grandmother, grandmother, mother, and possibly earlier—establishing a continuity that is both visual and nominal. This repetition does function as a symbolic structure through which the archive articulates lineage, gaze, and inheritance. Within the logic of the *studiolo*, the window motif thus condenses multiple temporalities and positions, transforming a recurring visual gesture into an analytical figure through which continuity and rupture may be read simultaneously. My own position interrupts this sequence: I was not named in her honor. As a child, this rupture seemed unsettling to me—an unexpected break in a line of succession. However, another form of continuity emerged through the images. After my mother's death, when I was fifteen, photographs increasingly supplanted lived remembrance: her face persisted more distinctly in the images than in memory itself. What followed—periods of forgetting and gradual reconciliation through writing and observation—did not resolve the rupture, but made it

intelligible as part of the archive's internal logic. The absence of a daughter named Virginia does not end the sequence; she replaces it.

## VI. Closing time -Mother as a female painter of remembrances

The aesthetic concern when composing the pages of the Albums is noticeable. In fact, mother attended painting and sculpture courses. She assumed the pages as blank canvas or sheet of drawing paper. Regarding the collages she inserted, I tried to identify which illustrated publications—magazines, and journals—the clippings that adorned the pages of the *1936-1939 Album* might have come from. Since this was not possible, I pursued leading clues. Connected with this focus, new references were obtained and titles of publications dated between 1822 and 1967. I was able to access its digitized PDF online: it clarified the analysed visual aspects, the stereotypical and prevailing formulations regarding the status that ruled over women in Portuguese society; the importation of canons and dominant fashions; typologies of femininity, according to established social classes, etc. Certainly, since this is not the focus of the study in question, not all issues of all available journals were reviewed, and therefore it is not an exhaustive study; it only highlights contributions (by affinity and similarity) to contextualize probable sources in the concept and practice that the author (Virginia Adriana) applied.

My first in-depth research into my mother's artistic training addressed her engagement with painting and sculpture in the mid-1930s. At fourteen years old she became a student at Artur Loureiro [20] that directed an Atelier-School in the former Crystal Palace. My grandfather, despite other professional occupations, was a caricaturist and amateur painter. He both enabled and encouraged my mother's artistic vocation, in line with the prevailing conviction that a young woman from a bourgeois milieu should receive a refined education that included artistic training—albeit without expectations of professional continuity. Loureiro's painting classes were attended primarily by young women from privileged social backgrounds. Spite the encouraged artistic environment and motivations, only a small number of the students pursued towards professional artistic careers. Until 1932, the studio hosted hundreds of apprentices who participated in a structured curriculum encompassing *still-life*, portraits (including self-portraits), and landscapes. Archival references and surviving works suggest a pedagogy grounded in careful observation and repetition. Depending on each student's position within the room, perspective and emphasis varied. This became evident when comparing paintings of identical motifs produced by the female pupils. I undertook a systematic search—maintaining as much analytical distance as possible, while acknowledging the psycho-affective and familial implications—in order to recover data relating to Loureiro's atelier. Reports published in local daily newspapers were examined, and the names of students were cross-referenced. This process revealed the possibility of tracing descendants, as certain surnames coincided with those of colleagues, friends, or acquaintances. In one specific case, contact was facilitated by the fact that a descendant, Maria João Gagean Vasconcelos, was at the time director of the Museu Nacional

Soares dos Reis (Porto), which allowed access to drawings and paintings produced by her mother and aunt during their studies with Loureiro. Other connections: descendants of the Master's former disciples, whose works are located in family homes in Porto. In July 2022, an edited selection of the materials and paintings by Loureiros' students, within this research context, was presented in the first documentary exhibition held at the Casa-Museu Abel Salazar/Porto.

Following the fundamental work of Michele Perrot [21], it becomes inevitable to reposition not only women artists, but also the underappreciated women in the timeline of heritage and social culture. Beyond its documentary value, the investigation illuminates the conditions under which young women accessed artistic training in early twentieth-century Portugal—training that fostered visual literacy and aesthetic discipline, even when professional recognition remained structurally limited.

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