



EDITED BY  
JANE E. LAVERY AND  
SARAH E. L. BOWSKILL

THE MULTIMEDIA WORKS OF  
**CONTEMPORARY  
LATIN AMERICAN  
WOMEN WRITERS  
AND ARTISTS**

Tamesis Studies in Popular  
and Digital Cultures

Volume 3

THE MULTIMEDIA WORKS OF  
CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN  
WOMEN WRITERS AND ARTISTS

# TAMESIS STUDIES IN POPULAR AND DIGITAL CULTURES

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# THE MULTIMEDIA WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS AND ARTISTS

Edited by Jane E. Lavery and Sarah E. L. Bowskill

TAMESIS

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Please be advised that this book contains graphic images of nudity and scatological performance art which readers may find disturbing or shocking.

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All your contributions helped to shape and improve our thinking and made this project intellectually very rewarding. We hope the final volume does justice to the talent and effort of all our contributors.

In the course of preparing this volume, both editors benefited from a period of research leave supported by their respective institutions, University of Southampton, and Queen's University Belfast. We realize, in the present climate, how privileged we were and hope that the results of leave presented here go some way to justifying continued institutional support for such vital dedicated research time for us and our colleagues in future.

The School of Arts, English, and Languages at Queen's University Belfast and Modern Languages and Linguistics at the University of Southampton also generously provided funding for the translations of the chapters by Ana Clavel, Carla Faesler, Regina José Galindo, Gabriela Golder and Mariela Yeregui, Eli Neira, Mónica Nepote, and Eugenia Prado Bassi, which were expertly done by Dr. Mark Dinneen.

First and foremost, Sarah would like to dedicate this book to her academic friends near and far and especially to her friend, co-editor, and co-author, Jane.

Jane would similarly like to dedicate this book to her children, Sienna and Lucia, to her husband Simon, and particularly to her friend, co-editor, and co-author, Sarah.

This volume is perhaps the most substantial piece of work we have produced together so far, and we hope it is a worthy testament to our friendship and to the friendships we have forged with our contributors.



# Introduction: A Crosscurrent of Contemporary Latin American Women Multimedia Writers and Artists

SARAH E. L. BOWSKILL AND JANE E. LAVERY\*

A significant and growing number of contemporary Latin American women writers and artists from the Spanish-speaking Americas are combining or placing literary texts in dialogue with other media as part of a wider strategy which draws attention to the constructed nature of all boundaries, borders, and hierarchies in an increasingly globalized and digitalized world. Multimedia thus becomes a particularly effective tool for works which seek to dismantle other supposedly rigid categories and hierarchies. The creative practitioners who feature in, and who have contributed to, this volume are representative of a crosscurrent of women from across Latin America who incorporate a literary dimension into their work, are developing a multimedia practice, which may or may not be digital, and share thematic interests in contemporary gender, racial, social, environmental, and/or political issues. These women prioritize experimentation, and so we conceptualize them as forming a crosscurrent running counter to established hierarchies, canons, and traditions rather than as a movement. They are: Pilar Acevedo (b. 1954, Mexico/United States), Rocío Cerón (b. 1972, Mexico), Ana Clavel (b. 1961, Mexico), Carla Faesler (b. 1969, Mexico), Belén Gache (b. 1960, Argentina), Regina José Galindo (b. 1974, Guatemala), Gabriela Golder (b. 1971, Argentina), Mariela Yeregui (b. 1966, Argentina), Mónica González (Mexico), Lucia Grossberger Morales (b. 1952, Bolivia/United States), Pura López Colomé (Mexico), Jacalyn Lopez Garcia (b. 1953, Mexico/United States), Eli Neira (b. 1973, Chile), Mónica Nepote (b. 1970, Mexico), Eugenia Prado Bassi (b. 1962, Chile), Ana María Uribe (Argentina, 1944–2004); Karen Villeda (b. 1985, Mexico), and Marina Zerbarini (b. 1952, Argentina).

In the context of this transgressive crosscurrent of Latin American women authors and artists, multimedia is adopted as a term to analyze bodies of work which include literary texts alongside one or more of the following: painting, photography, sculpture, music, performance, net literature, digital art, and video art. Each practitioner's corpus *may or may not* include digital media as we seek to extend current discussions of multimedia cultural production to include analog as well as digital media. The emphasis we place on considering both analog and digital media in the context of contemporary multimedia cultural production as well as our foregrounding of the literary as part of a multimedia corpus represent this book's original contribution. By foregrounding the literary, we showcase how the combination of text and non-text-based forms reinvigorates the literary just as the literary can be seen to reinvigorate other media.

Where the women who are part of this crosscurrent have received critical attention, they have typically been pigeonholed as either authors or as artists because the term multimedia is more commonly associated with the non-textual and the non-literary. Artists in particular have experimented with different art forms for decades and are more likely to be recognized for their use of multimedia. Prominent examples of contemporary Latin American women artists who have embraced different media include Teresa Margolles, Coco Fusco, Lourdes Portillo, Praba Pilar, and Cecilia Vicuña. Similarly, women writers such as Diamela Eltit, Rita Indiana, and Laura Esquivel have experimented with non-textual forms. According to our definitions, all could be thought of as multimedia practitioners, but those identified as writers have rarely been thought of as such.

The multimedia portfolios of the writers are testament to their refusal to be confined by labels. "Artists" write poetry, "novelists" curate exhibitions, and "poets" perform. Breaking boundaries between the categories of author and artist as well as between what are often imagined as "pure" forms of media is symptomatic of the broader transgressive thrust which defines their work. This desire to challenge the status quo has led them to seek out new forms of expression which requires the innovative critical approaches and concepts developed in this volume. The term multimedia is thus employed not to infer that "pure" media exist and can be combined but to invite us to reflect on the artificiality of all media categories and on the relationship between form and content when it comes to the disruption of hierarchies within multimedia cultural production. We were also inspired by these women's willingness to break with tradition, take risks, and engage in collaborative multimedia practices to likewise adopt a new approach to criticism, as we include the voices of the women whose work is studied in this volume alongside traditional academic essays. In so doing, we seek to showcase the extent and diversity of contemporary multimedia cultural production by Latin American women and to develop a shared understanding

of how women's multimedia cultural production is changing the contemporary Latin American literary and cultural landscape.

The innovative creative practices we have identified in contemporary multimedia cultural production by women in Latin America require new ways of "doing criticism." As Claire Taylor points out, "new cultural forms [...] have made us start to think across disciplinary boundaries and learn to negotiate new tools" (Taylor quoted in Taylor and Thornton, "Modern Languages" n.p). In this volume we seek to bridge the boundary between criticism and creative practice by including both the work and ideas of practitioners and those of the academics who study their work. The collaborative approach adopted here is one of the innovative contributions made by this study and is part of a growing, yet relatively small, trend also evident in *#WomenTechLit* edited by María Mencía and a new ongoing project "Cartografía crítica de la literatura digital latinoamericana" ("A Critical Cartography of Latin American Digital Literature") by Carolina Gainza (a contributor to this volume) and Carolina Zúñiga.

We started the process of producing this volume by opening up a dialogue with a handful of authors and artists with whom we were already in contact as a result of our previous work on Pilar Acevedo, Ana Clavel, Regina José Galindo, and Eli Neira.<sup>1</sup> The multimedia work of these and the other women we initially contacted incorporated or extended our thinking about the place of the literary in late twentieth/early twenty-first-century Latin American cultural production. We emailed the creative practitioners and a group of academic contributors who had worked in related areas outlining our ideas. We asked the academics to reflect on the extent to which the work of the women they studied could be seen as examples of multimedia cultural production. We explained to the authors and artists that we were interested in conceptualizing their work as multimedia with a literary dimension. Some of the creative practitioners were already using this term while others were unfamiliar with it. When Lavery coined Ana Clavel as a "multimedia writer" in 2015, for example, Clavel adopted this designation to describe her work as well as for promotional purposes. Since inviting Eli Neira to collaborate with us, she has adopted the term "multimedia artist" and later "transdisciplinary artist" for her email signatures.

We invited all those we contacted to contribute a text to the volume which responded to this provocation and asked them to suggest other academics or creative practitioners who might participate in the project. As a result of this communication, and the kind support of all involved, we significantly extended our network. We were in regular email contact with all the contributors as we exchanged drafts of their chapters and of this introduction.

<sup>1</sup> See Lavery (2015), Bowskill (2018), Galindo (2018), Bowskill and Lavery (2020), Lavery and Bowskill (2012).



In preparation for the volume, we also worked with the practitioners to put on a small-scale exhibition as part of the Society for Latin American Studies conference in Winchester in 2018.

Some academic contributors were also able to attend a round table discussion that coincided with the exhibition. The results of this extended dialogue are presented in the following chapters, which consist of bespoke contributions by eleven authors and artists and nine academic essays. Five of the contributions (Clavel, Neira, Galindo, Nepote, and Faesler), have been translated into English by Mark Dinneen, but were originally written in Spanish. Even though the author/artist contributions come first, we encourage the reader to read the chapters in the order they wish.

Just as contributor Jacalyn Lopez Garcia invites viewers to freely explore her home in her hypermedia narrative “Glass Houses,” we hope readers will explore different paths through our volume. You might opt to read all of the author/artist contributions and then the academic ones as per the order of the volume. Alternatively, you might read the chapters as pairs, for example, Faesler’s poem-essay could be read alongside the chapter by Emily Hind, who analyzes Faesler’s novel and YouTube videos. Readers may wish to consider the digital dimension of multimedia by looking at chapters by Prado Bassi, Grossberger Morales, Hind, Gainza, Kozak, Pitman, and Taylor. Poetry could be the path you take, reading chapters by Castillo, Bowskill, Acevedo, and Faesler. We encourage you to follow the example of our practitioners and not be bound by the conventional practice of reading cover to cover!

The academic essays adopt a comparative approach and often found it useful to employ a wide range of terminology (intermedia, transmedia, etc.) that builds on the concept of multimedia in order to be more precise in describing the relationships between media in specific works. The chapters draw on multiple disciplines, and some are framed by theories of (Latin American) gender, literary, and cultural/Visual/art/Cyber and Textual Media Studies as well as the concepts of multimedia, multimodality, intermediality, transmediality, transliterature, hypertextuality, hypermedia, intertextuality, and cultural recycling. In its disciplinary openness, the work presented is emblematic of current directions in Modern Languages, Hispanic Studies, and Digital Humanities. The contributions draw on language and area-specific knowledge yet are constantly crossing traditional boundaries of study and above all those between nations and disciplines. This combination of (linguistic) expertise, situated knowledge, and skills means that “as [Modern Languages] researchers capable of reaching across into the unfamiliar and uncomfortable we have the capacity to test the limits of knowledge” (Taylor and Thornton n.p.).

The authors’ and artists’ contributions are diverse, as each responded independently to the common invitation to reflect on the importance of the literary in contemporary Latin American multimedia cultural production. In

what follows, therefore, the reader will find original reflective essays and multimedia samples, as some creative practitioners wished to allow their work to speak primarily for itself. Some, but not all, academics write about the same texts as those discussed by the writers and artists. We allowed all contributors to choose freely which works they wished to discuss. The result is that the reader will sometimes have complementary analyses and sometimes a better sense of the range of an author's or artist's work. Above all we sought to avoid a scenario where the academics were asked to affirm or contradict the writer's or artist's own interpretations in a way that would reinforce hierarchies of knowledge and run counter to the egalitarian ethos of the volume. Moreover, this approach gives the reader the opportunity to encounter a wider range of works and so develop a better sense of the extent and diversity of this cross-current of multimedia authors and artists.

The examples of Latin American women multimedia artists and writers showcased in the volume are presented as paradigmatic examples rather than an exhaustive catalog of what is an exciting and growing array of multimedia work produced by contemporary Latin American women authors and artists. The focus, in line with the editors' area of expertise, is on practitioners from the Spanish-speaking Americas. The influence of Brazilian concrete poetry on contemporary multimedia cultural production, and especially digital poetry, is acknowledged and is discussed by Debra Castillo in the present volume.<sup>2</sup> Trends identified in the present volume also apply to Brazil where, as in the rest of Latin America, there is a longer standing tradition of media crossings within visual culture that do not have a literary dimension. Recent examples of Brazilian women whose multimedia output incorporates the literary, and is therefore akin to that of the women whose work is studied in the present volume, include Leonora de Barros, Giselle Beiguelman, Nicole Della Costa, Mariana Collares, and Terezinha Malaquias. From a thematic point of view, there are many shared interests identifiable in the work of Brazilian and Spanish American multimedia women as seen, for example, in Collares' videopoem "Isto" (2014), which explores the objectification of women, resonating with the work of Regina José Galindo, and in Beiguelman's experimental documentary "nhonhô," which explores memory through the built environment in a way that invites comparison with the work of Gabriela Golder and Mariela Yeregui. Thus, our findings extend to Brazilian multimedia cultural production as well as to that produced in the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America not represented here. Given the broad relevance of our findings, "Latin American," which was the preferred term used by our contributors, refers to

<sup>2</sup> On women concrete poets from Latin America and beyond, see Balgiu and de la Torre's *Women in Concrete Poetry: 1959–1979*.

an identity that is not bound by geography and so includes works produced by Latina authors and artists based in the United States.

As feminist critics we decided to engage specifically with the work of women multimedia authors and artists because we are particularly interested in how women find creative opportunities and challenges often operating against the grain of traditional publishing and art institutions and practices.<sup>3</sup> Our choice to focus on the *oeuvre* of women is informed by a political position underpinned by a feminist ethos, seeking to give voice to these female creators within a broader historical context in which women creative practitioners have been generally excluded from privileged creative arenas where consecration occurs. For too long female writers and artists have been included merely as footnotes in male art and literary history and continue to be invisible and valued less than their male contemporaries *because* of their gender (Fajardo-Hill n.d). In response, feminist literary critics, art historians and curators have been addressing these absences, time-honored stereotypes, and imbalances in conferences, by writing feminist revisionist scholarly studies or by organizing exhibitions dedicated exclusively to women's artworks.<sup>4</sup> Recent examples of women-only exhibitions in which contributors to this volume

<sup>3</sup> Examples of other men and women multimedia writers include: José Aburto; Milton Läuffer; Doménico Chiappe; Verónica Gerber; Mario Bellatin; Tammy Gomez; Elia Arce; Rita Indiana; the Chilean *Orquesta de Poetas*: Federico Eisner Fernando Pérez, Juan Pablo Fante, and Felipe Cussen; Cristina Rivera Garza; Eve Gil; Dolores Dorantes; Amaranta Caballero; Jorge Volpi; Malú Urriola; Nadia Prado; Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez; Iván Marino; Gustavo Romano; Argentines: Charly Gradin, Fabio Doctorovich, Ladislao Pablo Györi; Chileans Carlos Cociña, Martín Gubbins, Cecilia Vicuña; Méxicans Benjamín R. Moreno, Rodolfo Mata, Eugenio Tisselli; Peruvians Enrique Beó and Luis Alvarado; Colombian diaspora: Praba Pilar.

<sup>4</sup> For a more extensive discussion of feminist revisionist art history and literary studies see: Fajardo-Hill, "The Invisibility of Latin American Women Artists" and "Performative Bodies." Fajardo-Hill provides a comprehensive overview of feminist/female-based exhibitions and art history studies in Latin America and the United States mainly, and beyond, including Lippard's *Mixed Blessings* and Nochlin (145–78). Exhibitions bringing together Latin American and Latino/a artists include Deborah Cullen's *Latin/o Arte ≠ Vida. Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000*. For revisionist literary feminist criticism from a Latin American/Latinx perspective see for example: Medeiros-Lichem's *La voz femenina en la narrativa latinoamericana: una relectura crítica*. In Mexico, the Taller de Teoría y Crítica Literaria "Diana Morán" has produced a number of valuable studies and a more recent series, *Desbordar el Canon: Escritoras mexicanas del siglo XX*, which are testament to feminist literary critics' commitment to the re-framing of Mexican literary history. Other such studies include Castillo's *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* and Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba's *Border Women*.

have participated include *Rebeldes: laboratorio experimental de practicas feministas* (2022), where Eli Neira performed her arts-engagement and community inspired *Oda a la propiedad privada* (2022). The overall exhibition was created with feminist solidarity and resistance strategies in mind: “¿Cómo vivir la sororidad en sociedades capitalistas, postcoloniales, discriminatorias y sexistas? ¿Cómo encontrarnos y crear redes a pesar de los privilegios desiguales? ¿Cómo conectar nuestras protestas? (Artishock).” This volume is produced in a similar spirit of feminist sorority and solidarity.

Naturally, feminist critics have often favored foregrounding works which can be interpreted as being aligned with feminist values while too often privileging white, Eurocentric understandings of feminism and ignoring the fact that in Latin America diverse forms of feminism are frequently in tension with each other.<sup>5</sup> Segato (2019), for example, contrasts *feminismo letrado*, associated with European-influenced feminisms in the Southern Cone, and grassroots feminism rooted in Central American liberation and revolutionary struggles. Many of the women whose work is presented and studied in this volume explore issues of gender and sexuality, often from an intersectional perspective. Some identify as “feminist,” while not necessarily agreeing upon a definition of the term, and others reject this label for a variety of reasons. Yet we do not seek to prioritize “feminist” voices nor to produce exclusively “feminist” interpretations of the works studied. Most importantly, we do not wish to suggest that there is a connection between feminism and multimedia practice except to the extent that some forms of multimedia cultural production may prove useful when it comes to bypassing traditional mechanisms for bestowing prestige which have too long worked to exclude women.

Anticipating that the category of “woman” might prompt critiques of essentialism, we provide here a critical disclosure of what this term implies (and what it does not). Discussing the attitudes of Mexican authors to the label “women’s writing,” Lavery and Finnegan, drawing from Irma López, state:

On the one hand, they find the adjective helpful in explaining their own way of seeing and interpreting the world (and it is from this perspective that their books have evoked interest), but on the other, some still share the concern that they will be pigeonholed as writers within a subgenre. This apprehension increases when their work is linked to feminism, a political position that many of them consider too radical and in other ways limiting. Yet all of these authors agree that as changes in culture and mentality continue to take place in Mexican society there will be less of a need for

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of feminisms in Latin America, see, for example, Rita Laura Segato “Heterosexuality”; Gloria Anzaldúa; Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, Diana Gómez Correal, and Karina Ochoa Muñoz, *Tejiendo* and María Lugones “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” and “The Coloniality of Gender” 2008.

such distinctions, they will eventually disappear, and the literary skill of a genderless “writer” will be discussed instead. (Irma López, cited in Finnegan and Lavery 32)

More than a decade since these words were written, we still perceive the usefulness of the distinction as a means to counter women’s marginalization from the cultural sphere and to challenge and transform deterministic ideas surrounding women and gender. This ongoing need is evidenced by the fact that women writers generally accrue less prestige than their male counterparts. While isolated exceptions to this rule are frequently held up as evidence that women authors are no longer disadvantaged in the literary field, Bowskill (*The Politics*) presents compelling statistics about the percentages of women winners of major literary prizes, demonstrating that Spanish American women still seldom win literary prizes.

In both modern art and literary history, the idea of women as artist and writer has to be re-addressed, given the systematic erasure they have faced in the fields of history of art and literature. However, we agree with Griselda Pollock that women artists and women writers are not a

homogeneous category defined by gender alone. Women are agonistically differentiated by class, ethnicity, culture, religion, geopolitical location, sexuality, and ability. Gender analysis includes the interplay of several axes of differentiation and their symbolic representations without any a priori assumptions about how each artwork/artist might negotiate and rework dominant discourses of gender and other social inflections.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the analyses of women’s multimedia cultural production will be cognizant of differences in race, nationality, class, religious, or geopolitical location and be informed by a decolonial impetus, as per María Lugones (2010). The decolonial approach is evident in the way that contributions seek to “restore, elevate, renew, rediscover and acknowledge, and validate the multiplicity of lives, live-experiences, culture, and knowledge of Indigenous people, people of color, and colonized people as well as to decenter hetero/cis-normativity, gender hierarchies and racial privilege” (Decolonising Humanities Project, “What is Decoloniality?”).

In addition to prioritizing women’s multimedia contributions that incorporate a literary dimension, the volume also has a temporal focus on the last twenty-five years. In this way, we seek to reclaim space for non-digital as well as digital media under the umbrella of multimedia cultural production. As Finnegan points out in the present volume, however, the practice of working with

<sup>6</sup> Pollock, “Women, Art, and Art History.” <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920105/obo-9780199920105-0034.xml>.

what have historically been considered different media stretches back to the pre-Hispanic tradition of the Amoxltli, commonly translated from the Nahuatl as “codex,” which combines symbology, pictography, and script in a bound book format (188–9). More recently, as Debra Castillo notes in her contribution, the Brazilian concrete poets also combined text and image in a way that anticipates contemporary digital literature. Contemporary multimedia work thus builds on a longstanding legacy of hybrid cultural production in Latin America. Indeed, the notion that Latin American cultural production has been always already hybrid, mixed, and “impure” has been extensively theorized by Néstor Canclini and others.<sup>7</sup> Canclini’s observation that cultural hybridization provides opportunity for “improvisation and acts of imagination, that imply the constitution of new agents and new actors,” is clearly applicable to the multimedia practitioners and their hybrid output as explored in this volume (quoted in Balderston et al. xxi).

The women studied in this volume have produced literary texts in diverse genres, including novels, short stories, and poetry. Their use of the literary in the context of broader multimedia projects invites us to think in terms of what Domingo Sánchez-Mesa and Jan Baetens have called “literatura en expansión” or expanded literature, which includes, for example, street signs, and graffiti as well as more canonical genres (8). The texts are not necessarily printed on paper, as these women experiment creatively online on their own websites and are using social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. The result is that today “*print* is not a monolithic or universal term but a word designating many different types of media formats and literary practices” (Hayles and Pressman xiii). By producing (at least some of) their cultural production online, these women combine text, image, sound, and even touch, to produce new forms of communication and blur the boundaries between referential and imaginative/poetic language.

The importance of considering the relationship between the literary and the digital is recognized in the pioneering work of Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman (“Introduction”) and in the *Revista 404* produced by Mónica Nepote until 2018. More recently, Scott Weintraub (2018) has studied Latin American male authors’ use of technopoetry to reflect on scientific discourses and, in collaboration with Luis Correa-Díaz, produced the “Dossier de Poesía digital” and “Latin American, Spanish and Portuguese Literature in the Digital Age.” Correa-Díaz also studies Latin American digital poetry in *Novissima verba: Novissima verba: huellas digitales y cibernética en la poesía latinoamericana* (2019). Eduardo Ledesma (2012, 2015, 2016) takes a long view and explores

<sup>7</sup> See García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures* and for a general overview of cultural hybridization theorists such as Fernando Ortiz or Ángel Rama, see Burke’s *Cultural Hybridity*.

the relationship between radical form and content in *Radical Poetry: Aesthetics, Politics, Technology, and the Ibero-American Avant-Gardes (1900–2015)* (2016). Feminist perspectives and studies of digital cultural production by Latin American women can be found in María Mencía's (2017) collection *#WomenTechLit*, which, like the present volume, incorporates reflective essays by authors writing about their practice. Here, in addition to focusing on Latin American women and combining academic and practitioner perspectives, and in contrast to the aforementioned studies, we focus on the way the creative practitioners studied in this volume use digital and analog multimedia cultural production as a means to explore transgressive content.

## CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Before providing an overview of the individual chapters in the volume, we will outline some of the key concepts which underpin the discussions. From the outset, it is worth reminding ourselves of the truism that all categories are constructs. Nevertheless, by grouping the women together as producers of Latin American multimedia work we seek productive rather than reductive ways of engaging with and promoting their work. Combined with the literary, multimedia provides the link that allows us to group them together as part of a crosscurrent without overriding significant differences. In studying the ways their work cuts across the boundaries of what have conventionally been considered distinct media, what is important for us is not so much the nature of the relationship between and within media but the fact that what they are doing challenges the status quo. The media and any combinations of media are, of course, inherently politically neutral, but, as will be seen, form combines with the content of these women's work to acquire a political charge. The crossing of borders between media thus frequently draws our attention to how other borders are transgressed.

In the words of Hayles and Pressman, “[t]he deepening complexities of the media landscape have made mediality in all its forms, a central concern of the twenty-first century” (vi). Definitions are produced by critics often operating within different frames of reference and disciplinary backgrounds. Most often though, “multimedia,” and its related terms discussed in the following section, has been theorized by male US and European-based critics writing about US and European cultural production. By including in our volume Latin American/Latina female multimedia practitioners and Latin American and European/US academics who are engaging in new ways with, and theorizing about, Latin American cultural production, we seek to bring new voices and practices to the fore.



Proliferating definitions produced by academics and practitioners with an interest in media gives rise to ever more nuanced terms of which multimedia, the term used in the title of the present volume, is just one. These terms capture the small but potentially significant differences in the ways each creative practitioner is using different media. The weakness, of course, is that the definitions contradict one another or overlap so much that it is impossible to differentiate. In some cases, we may wonder whether the definitions are so general that they could be applied to every “text” and so are rendered useless.<sup>8</sup> While being cognizant of the strengths and weaknesses of some definitions and the constructedness of all of them, we nevertheless perceive such terms and their fuzziness as, broadly speaking, a site of opportunity. The dialogue is ultimately more important than the label itself.

## MULTIMEDIA, MULTIMODALITY, AND INTERMEDIA

Based on our work, discussions with the creative practitioners, and our readings of their contributions here, we understand a multimedia practice to primarily refer to an *overarching* practice in which an author or artist uses different media separately (e.g., they write poetry and paint) *as well as* the combination of different media in a single piece of work (e.g., a novel with images alongside the text). In the latter case, as will be discussed, additional terminology (e.g., intermedia or hypermedia) can help to further specify the nature of the relationship between media.

Our understanding of media in the past is shaped by the present digital media landscape. Perhaps for this reason, the vocabulary we use to discuss media and the relationships between different media remains hotly contested. In selecting multimedia as our umbrella term, we reject the way the concept of multimedia is increasingly restricted to the realm of the digital and separated from the literary. We concur in this respect with Ana Clavel, who in her chapter in this volume defines multimedia as referring to “‘many media’ even though today’s culture takes it to mean almost exclusively audiovisual and digital platforms” (35). In her definition Clavel perceives how our understanding of multimedia tends to be shaped by the present digital media landscape.<sup>9</sup> Sánchez-Mesa and Baetens’ recent discussion is typical in this respect, as it proposed reducing the critical vocabulary to a basic dichotomy between intermediality and transmediality in the broader context of “literature in expansion” and “multimedia digital culture” (8). We recognize that media combinations

<sup>8</sup> “Text” in inverted commas is used to refer to the text independent of media.

<sup>9</sup> In this respect, an interesting source for retrospective considerations of analog media brought about by digital media is Monjour’s *Mythologies postphotographiques*.



are doubtlessly facilitated by digital technologies as seen, for example, in the work of Jacalyn Lopez Garcia, who produces video and computer art that incorporates poetry, storytelling, music, and photography. As a reminder of the importance of the digital in contemporary multimedia cultural production, Pitman in this volume proposes a “study of pioneering hypermedia works” to “provid[e] examples of specifically digital multimedia cultural production that may serve as a counterpoint to the more analog or mixed analog/digital multimedia works studied elsewhere in this volume” (237).

Our definition of multimedia, like the work of Eduardo Ledesma, Claire Taylor (“Entre ‘Born Digital’”; “From the Baroque”), Claudia Kozak, Dolores Romero López, and, in the present volume, Debra Castillo, locates contemporary multimedia cultural production in relation to a longer tradition which predates the digital era. Such an understanding is an important corrective to tendencies to overstate the newness of multimedia practices. Indeed, as Claudia Kozak rightly observes, “the fusion of media preceded the era of computers, and so multimedia is therefore also present in other contexts” (“Multimedia” 180). While we consider it important to divorce the idea of multimedia from the exclusively digital, as we note above, we are also cognizant of the fact that artistic or literary practices which are not “of the Internet” or “to be consumed on a computer” are still, at some point of their lifespan, mediated by some kind of digital or computational medium: photography, sound, video recording, and file sharing are some such examples. Another example of analog cultural production being mediated by the digital is seen, for example, in the printing of books in our day, which is, indeed, a highly technologized and industrial endeavor. In this respect, and as Hayles and Pressman note, “so intermixed are digital and print media through modern printing and publishing machines that they must be considered comparatively to make sense of their production at all” (Hayles and Pressman xiv). Such a comparative approach is enabled by our understanding of multimedia practice as one that may or may not include the digital but most often spans this divide in often complex ways.

In using multimedia as our umbrella term, we nevertheless recognize that there is no such thing as a “pure” media with which we can contrast different types of media combinations and fusions. In other words, multimedia is an oxymoronic term because all media are made up of multiple media. Once we might have read a definition, such as that put forward by Claus Clüver in 2007, according to which a multimedia “text” is one which “comprises separable and individually coherent texts in different media [...] an opera score that contains the libretto is a multimedia text” (Clüver 25). Our emphasis on the *overarching* multimedia practice, rather than only on the presence of various media within a single work, means that for us, contrary, for example, to Claus Clüver (25) or Ginette Verstraete, to be considered a multimedia practitioner the women studied in this volume do not have to produce single pieces of

work which contain what would traditionally be considered distinct media. The different media are not necessarily presented “synchronously” nor “within one object,” as per Verstraete’s definition of intermediality, for an author or artist to be considered a multimedia practitioner (10). Today, we are more likely to encounter statements such as the following by Irina Rajewsky: “to speak of a ‘medium’ or of ‘individual media’ ultimately refers to a theoretical construct” (54). She continues:

The question of how a medium should be defined and delimited from other media is of course always dependent on the historical and discursive contexts and the observing subject or system, taking into account technological change and relations between media within the overall media landscape at a given point in time. (54)

In a similar vein, Lev Manovich asserts that to persist in thinking about media is to “follow the old tradition of identifying distinct art practices on the basis of the materials being used – only now we substitute different materials by different new technologies” even when these new forms are not really media in any traditional sense (“Post-Media Aesthetics 36). Faced with such problems, discussion of media is increasingly being replaced by consideration of modes and multimodality.

In Lars Elleström’s conceptualization, the different modes are: material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic (15). Differentiating between media and mode and drawing on the work of Gunther Kress and Theovan Leeuwen, Claudia Kozak usefully explains in her chapter in this volume that we may talk about:

different media, for instance cinema, video, photography, books or the Internet, but different languages or modes of discourse: verbal, visual, sonic, haptic, etc. It is usual to speak then of multiple media and languages in terms of a multimedia and multimodal perspective. (206)

But, modes are also not so clear cut. Just as there is no pure media, there is no single mode text. As Jørgen Bruhn states, “even the apparently monomedial text always consists of several modalities” (227). Moreover, Marie-Laure Ryan notes, “‘mode’ is as difficult to define as medium is, and Kress and van Leeuwen’s attempt to list and classify modes of signification are similar in their apparent randomness to Borges’s Chinese taxonomy” (28). Furthermore, Ryan argues: “modes of signification do not make the concept of medium dispensable, for there must be a way to distinguish the various cultural forms in which a given mode appears” (28). Thus, she proposes the definition of media which we will use in this volume as “culturally recognized forms of communication” (28). Multimedia then refers to an *overarching practice* which includes the use

of media which, at the time of writing, would *conventionally* be thought of as a single culturally recognized form of communication.

For those cases where different media are combined in a single work, intermediality comes into play. Verstraete points out that all media is “always already intermedial” (8). Nonetheless, definitions of intermediality seek to specify the nature of the relationship between media. Since Dick Higgins’s seminal definition of intermedia in (“Intermedia”), Jen Schröter has identified the emergence of a broad consensus view held by Chapple, Eicher, Prümm, Rajewsky, and Wolf, to which we also ascribe (2). According to this consensus, intermedia refers to the way in which conventionally distinct media are combined within a single “text” or multiple “texts” presented synchronously side by side, for instance on a website. Extending Bruhn Jensen (“Intermediality”), who uses implicit and explicit to differentiate between intertextuality as implicit linking and hypertextuality as explicit linking, we differentiate between implicit and explicit intermedia. Where more than one form of media is present synchronously or within one object so that there is a fusion, this is explicit intermedia. Where the different media do not physically impact, and may or may not be presented synchronously, but where intermedial dialogue can be *inferred*, we differentiate using the term implicit intermedia, which has a parallel in the literary term intertextuality.

For us, one key aspect of intermediality, and more broadly multimedia, is the aspect of transformation. This emphasis on transformation is derived from Verstraete, who notes in relation to intermediality that the interaction of different media “is such that they transform each other and a new form of art, or mediation, emerges” (9).<sup>10</sup> Another fundamental characteristic of intermediality is how, as Kozak notes in the present volume, it leads to “a different artistic experience only possible in the ‘in between’” (206). Kozak’s definition reflects the significance of border crossing in the context of intermediality also seen in the work of Lars Elleström and Irina Rajewsky (Media, Modalities, and Modes 27; “Border Talks” 64). It is through this theoretical and practical engagement with the notion of borders/in-betweenness and the idea of the construction of borders, that we are able to highlight in the work of a crosscurrent of Latin American multimedia creative practitioners how media conventions, and the separate domains of expertise they suggest, as well as other types of categories of gender, race, or culture, are, to paraphrase Rajewsky (“Border Talks 64), highlighted, dissolved, or transcended.

<sup>10</sup> Spielmann also emphasizes this transformative element in both intermediality and intertextuality (57).

## TRANSMEDIA AND THE (TRANS)LITERARY

Implicit intermediality, where different media do not physically impact and are not present synchronously but where there is a stated relationship, may, in some circumstances, also be understood as transmedia. “Transmedia” was coined by Marsha Kinder to refer to the “deliberate move across media boundaries – whether it’s referring to intertextuality, adaptations, marketing strategies, reading practices or media networks” (n.p.). For Sánchez Mesa and Baetens there are two types of transmedial cultural processes. Both are symptomatic of Henry Jenkins’ notion of “convergence culture” in which content flows, media industries operate, and audiences migrate across different media (*Convergence* 2). The first type of transmediality involves adaptation, in the most traditional sense of the word, from one media to another. The second type of transmedia process involves “demediated content” which can be “re-elaborated” or “expanded” in various media, without this process of expansion having to be underpinned by a source “text” (Sánchez Mesa and Baetens 10–11). The relationship between adaptation and transmedia is a hotly contested one, but Sánchez-Mesa and Baetens’ second understanding of transmedia is in keeping with Henry Jenkins’ concept of transmedia storytelling.

Transmedia storytelling refers to cases where a work of fiction is produced, often simultaneously, across various media “for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (Jenkins “Transmedia Storytelling 101). Typically of transmedia studies, however, Jenkins’ case studies in *Convergence Culture* focus on the entertainment industry and in particular large-scale, Hollywood mega-productions. Yet, as Matthew Freeman and William Proctor have demonstrated, and as Bowskill shows in the present volume, applying this label in other contexts leads us to rethink both the works studied and the concept of transmedia itself.

Transmedia captures the sense of moving and expanding across media boundaries. Transliterature draws our attention to cases where the literary source inspired that move. Transliterature is an appropriate description for the work of some of the women studied here and is used by Lavery in her chapter to understand the work of Neira, Clavel, and Galindo. Ana Clavel embraces the term transliterature because it both emphasizes the centrality of the written text *and* the way in which the original is *supplemented* by other media. Clavel also sees transliterature as bringing new audiences to literature and as leading to new ways of reading and writing (Lavery and Bowskill 34–5). Audran, Schmitter, and Chiani propose (4) that transliterature is populated by trans peoples, is a metaliterature which thematizes transition and the crisis of literature and, following Kozak, they suggest, transliterature overflows transmedially and transgenerically (4). It is also a literature which is transnational

and embraces the communal (e.g., communities of readers, wreaders, etc.) (Audran, Schmitter, and Chiani 4). As the chapters in this volume show, however, multimedia and intermedia cultural production also lend themselves to this proliferation of crossings.

## HYPERTEXT/MEDIA, INTERTEXTUALITY, AND CULTURAL RECYCLING

Transliterature brings to the fore the literary source of some transmedia cultural production, just as hypermedia draws attention to multimedia in the context of the digital. Hypermedia derives from hypertext, and, as Thea Pitman states in this volume, it is “the lifeblood of the Internet though most criticism still tends to discuss ‘hypertext’” (Lavery and Bowskill 236). Moreover, as Pitman also observes, in a specifically Latin American context the “value of hypertext to capture the multiple and/or hybrid nature of Latin American-ness” has been much lauded (Lavery and Bowskill 239). Hypertext dominated in the early, exclusively text-based, days of the Internet, but since text is now supplemented with other forms, hypermedia is the more accurate term to describe the new diversity of linked digital media content. In hypertext (used by George Landow as a synonym for hypermedia), verbal and nonverbal information is electronically linked creating networks of texts (Hypertext 3). According to Landow, the ideal text Roland Barthes envisaged, which consists of networks which interact, with no beginning and multiple points of entry, is realized in hypertext (Hypertext 2). In this volume, Grossberger Morales speaks of her enthusiasm for hyperlinking because it enables layered, interactive works. Yet again it is possible to see how non-, and partially, digital works studied in this volume create similar networks. Indeed, although we reserve hypermedia to refer to digital media, as Landow points out hypertext does not have to be electronic, but, in his view, it is its electronic form that represents its fullest realization (Hypertext 4). N. Katherine Hayles similarly proposes “that hypertext can be instantiated in print as well as electronic media” (“Print is Flat” 22). Castillo sees digital literatures, specifically digital poetry produced by the likes of Belén Gache, as “actualizing the promise of Mallarmé’s dice throw and freeing it from the limits imposed by paper” (Lavery and Bowskill 232). Conversely, just as multimedia (and for some hypermedia) practice preceded the digital age, so too must it be emphasized that digital literatures are not a culmination of literary experimentation. Re-thinking contemporary *non-digital* multimedia cultural production in terms of its hypermedial strategies helps to fill in the existing gap between what Pitman (234) terms the “proto-hypertexts” of Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges and Doménico Chiappe’s sophisticated, digital version 3.0 of *Tierra de extracción* (1996–2007). In this

vein, the offline texts of Clavel and Prado share the same playfulness and improvisation and require the same active reader as Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963), but in their work Clavel and Prado link (proto-)hypermedially to additional web-based content.

While the academics and creative practitioners in this volume sometimes provide optimistic perspectives about the potential of digital technologies, they are cognizant of the fact that digital technologies have their drawbacks. Castillo, for example, points to the problem of obsolescence as works become inaccessible due to changes in technology. The opportunities afforded by digital technologies are also not equally available to all and come at an environmental cost, as digital waste is a growing problem. Artificial Intelligence and social media platforms are not risk free. The latter can be used to abuse and bully others as well as to build community. Claire Taylor alludes in this volume to the work of Belén Gache to showcase how the feature of digital interactivity, which confers the illusion of agency, reveals itself to be no more than an illusion, since *we too* are clones, hypnotized and trapped in the corporate system. Eli Neira has been censored by Facebook for her political outspokenness, as discussed by Hayles in "Print is Flat" but she also uses Facebook as part of her ongoing commitment to citizen journalism and politically engaged work. Most recently, she has been posting acerbic attacks on the Chilean government's mishandling of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Over-emphasis on the positive potential and newness of digital technologies and specifically digital hypermedia has also caused the longstanding concept of intertextuality to be overshadowed. According to Orr, who like us, takes a broad definition of "the text":

"Intertextuality" names a text's relation to other texts in the larger "mosaic" of cultural practices and their expression. An "intertext" is therefore a focalizing point within this network or system, while a text's "intertextual" potential and status are derived from its relations with other texts [...] it describes how cultural productions are facilitated by their (re)interpretation and adaptation in a variety of media including text, performance, the plastic, and the visual arts. (*Encyclopedia 2*)

As Orr's quotation makes clear, intertextuality "always also involves intermediality, since pre-texts, intertexts, posttexts and para-texts always include texts in other media" (Clüver 29). Intertextuality, however, is often seen as an inadequate idea in an age in which new media are decentring the hegemony of print text (Orr, "Intertextuality" 2). Yet, as previously noted in our discussion of intermediality, Jensen makes a useful distinction between "implicit intertextuality" and "explicit hypertextuality." Thus, in the present volume, we see critics identifying not only implicit and explicit intermediality but also, as per Bruhn Jensen, implicit intertexts (which may or may not have been

suggested or intended by the author) but where no physical link is present as well as explicit, (digital) hypertextual connections. Moreover, under the broad headings of (implicit) intertextuality and (explicit) hypertextuality, the women studied here engage in creative linking which sometimes extends not only into transmedia or transliterary adaptation and remediation but also to practices of cultural recycling, which has variously been labeled *bricolage*, recoding, or appropriation. All of these forms of linking serve to position texts within networks of other texts and entail making “new” objects out of a range of found materials and physical media.

The multimedia artists and writers in this volume use found/waste materials from organic to inorganic objects including urinals or *cartonero* dolls (Clavel); discarded household items (Pilar Acevedo); human feces, blood, or urine (Eli Neira; Regina José Galindo); sawdust (Regina José Galindo); archaeological ruins of abandoned hotels (Golder) and, among other things, discarded radiographs (Pura López Colomé) and code (Lucia Grossberger Morales). Inspired by the growing interest in Ecocriticism and Waste Studies, we see (re) using in the context of a multimedia creative practice as a resourceful praxis leading to new mediations in new contexts and not as a form of blind mimesis. By using and combining past voices and traditions, such integration in multimedia practice suggests the intentional blurring of established forms of art and literature with other cultural expressions (such as (video) performance/installation and digital art/poetry) which have until recently, as Friedman remarks, “not previously been considered art forms” (51). We see this reusing of past voices specifically in this volume in the context of, for example, Taylor’s analysis of Gache’s reworking of a canonical Golden Age writer with a digital poem with animated, calligram-esque format.

In the using and reusing of different “texts,” multimedia creative practices involve rhizomatic contagion. The literal meaning of contagion as disease and infection is a particularly apt notion to be drawing from, given the recent global coronavirus pandemic. The discussion about contagion metaphors is found in essays by Bowskill and Lavery and is also evident in the most recent work and online activism of Eli Neira. These topics have been cast into even sharper relief as a result of recent events. Our future projects and collaborations will necessarily be informed by a consideration of the impacts of COVID-19 at societal and creative levels. Contagion as a metaphor has been identified as particularly problematic, as it is used to refer to marginalized populations including immigrants, the sick, women, and homosexuality.<sup>11</sup> Yet the metaphor is apt because, as Mary Douglas explains “pollution ideas” are

<sup>11</sup> On the uses of the metaphor in these contexts see, for example: Davis’s “Contagion as Metaphor”; Cisneros’ “Contaminated Communities”; Plummer and McCann’s “Girls’ Germs.”



used to police behavior and uphold values and rules (3). Writing about religion in primitive cultures, Douglas continues:

ideas about separation, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (4)

The women studied here, however, explicitly reject the established order that is based on a neat separation of media and the exclusion of the frequently abjected “Other” (Women, LGBTQ, or Indigenous communities) that is enforced by established binaries and hierarchies. The crossovers between media and pollution of binary forms of thinking which characterize the work studied in this volume destabilize notions of a “pure,” singular, isolated “text” or media in order to celebrate contaminated forms and hybrid categories. The idea of hybridization as a form of contagion or contamination is a recurrent idea applied to multimedia practice both by the artists and writers themselves (see contributions by Neira and Prado) as well as by the academics (see chapters by Bowskill, Castillo, Lavery, Finnegan). For us, pollution becomes a form of disruption, both thematically and formally. Both Taylor and Pitman draw from this idea of contamination in the concept of “viral latinidad,” which seeks to disrupt hegemonic representations of Latino/as in the United States by challenging “the reifying tendency of the visual power system that is race” (*Latin American Identity* 168). There is no need, as Carlos Jáuregui does with reference to online cultural production, to mourn the loss of aura (290). Nor do we have to conclude that the dehierarchization and rapid circulation of “texts” online (or indeed offline) leads to them being cheapened, as Jáuregui also contends (290). Intertextual, hypertextual, multimedia, intermedia, transmedia, and transliterary texts invite us to continue to interrogate all categories, the concept of an origin as well as notions of authority, authenticity, and uniqueness which traditional conceptions of art and literature support.

#### MULTIAUTHORSHIP, THE PROFESSIONAL VERSUS THE “AMATEUR” AUTHOR/ARTIST, ACTIVISM, AND ACTIVE READERS

Reusing not only rebuffs the Bloomian “anxiety of influence,” and by extension postmodernism’s outright rejection of past sources, but equally rejects the anxiety of authorship. Indeed, in order to produce their multimedia pieces, many of the women whose work is studied in this volume collaborate with others. They relinquish the privileged position of the solo (typically signified as male) Author/Artist-genius. Collaboration allows these multimedia practitioners to produce work which otherwise might not have been possible and



which reaches diverse audiences who may not have had access to a printed book or to a gallery. Yet such practices seem to leave women in particular open to accusations of amateurism and criticism for not “knowing their place.” As Hind notes in this volume, such labeling is entrenched in the broader context of sexism, where women have often been dismissed “for lesser intellectual and artistic talents” in counterpoint to male privileged professionals (174). Elsewhere, Hind has demonstrated that the roles of professional writer or intellectual are performed and the performance of these roles is more accessible to men than women. Women are, therefore, less likely than their male counterparts to be considered pioneering, innovative, or avant-garde and more likely to be censured for stepping outside their supposed expertise or labeled as amateur. Of particular concern for our multimedia practitioners, as Hind points out in this volume, is the fact that “[t]he subjects of amateurism and interdisciplinary research or intermedial art necessarily intertwine, thanks to the profound degree of specialization required to turn professional, which makes expert cross-disciplinary work quite difficult.” (166) Consequently, some of our contributors are reluctant to identify with some labels. Despite writing poetry, Galindo, for example, does not consider herself a poet, and Clavel says she is not an artist:

That is the reason why, when faced with the proposal made by some that I am a “visual artist” – as did the publisher Métailié which published the French version of my *Violets are Flowers of Desire* and on the back cover presented me as a “writer and plastic artist” –, that I distance myself from such labels. I tell them that above all other definitions I am a writer, and that, if anything, I am a writer who also devises multimedia projects on the basis of my books – which later I will refer to as “transliterature.” If I had to choose, I prefer the term which the researcher Jane Lavery has used to describe me: “multimedia writer.” (Lavery and Bowskill 34)

Lopez Garcia felt the need to prove herself by acquiring new skills to prove her expertise: “Conquering the learning curves associated with web authoring, and gaining enough experience and expertise in multimedia art production was overwhelming at times” (Lavery and Bowskill 93). Grossberger Morales, who worked in Silicon Valley and co-authored the Designer’s Tool Kit, a graphics program published by Apple Computer, Inc. in 1987, still says that “she feels like an ‘amateur’ when coding.” (100) In so doing she expresses a feeling perhaps akin to that of impostor syndrome that is far more prevalent among women than men but is the result of a society that constantly devalues women’s abilities and achievements. Instead of dismissing the work these women produce in areas that are outside their supposed area of expertise, this volume proposes to understand their multimedia cultural production as part of a body of work that is breaking new ground in the context of Latin American cultural production.