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Novohispanic Imaginary Light, Shadow and Diagrams

This text is set forth in consideration with a task we have already begun to engage in Mexico, whereby some of us researchers deem necessary to engage a genealogy of the relations between (relatively) contemporary art and media, alongside a reading through the prism of media theory that articulates an archeological notion of these elements. It appears increasingly necessary to bring about a first action of inscription for this mode of thought, structuring a program that covers not only the 20th century or current times, but one that reaches back in time to substantially inquire the formation of art-technique-science relations in the Novohispanic imaginary and as concerns the birth of a “criollo” historic consciousness.

Taking entanglement as a starting point, there are two texts crucial to the development of this proposal: *Deep Time of the Media, Towards an Archeology of Seeing and Hearing by Technical Means* (Siegfried Zielinski), and *La luz imaginaria, Epistolario de Athanasius Kircher con los novohispanos* (Ignacio Osorio Romero) [*The Imaginary Light, Correspondence between Athanasius Kircher and the Novohispanics*]. As the result of a parallel reading, we were struck by a link that goes beyond a “confrontation of historical times” or what could be considered the influence of one line of thought on a diverse context.

Studies in cybernetics, nanotechnology and robotics became entangled with arduous (and dry, at first) readings regarding the astronomical science, that radical visionary proposal of the first studies in modern science of the Mexican baroque period, as put forth in the work of Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora (17th century). Another such entanglement occurred in relation to the notion of light and shadow as is manifest in the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; mainly in her classic “*Primer Sueño*” [*First Dream*], where all the attention seems to reside in the explicit associations and connections rooted in the neologism “*to kircherize*”. In attempting to contextualize this type of interpretation, we found these texts to be woven out of the tense postcolonial

gaze and its stance towards science, politics and Novohispanic religion, as well as from a line of the history of mentalities, where this type of recurrence tends to present a much more ideological tenor.

Except for a few elaborations from History of Science (the work of Elias Trabulse is of utter importance for this research), an approach that questions the notions of apparatus, machine, innovation and communication is practically inexistent within said context. Despite the importance placed during the 17th century (by Sigüenza y Góngora) and later, during the 18th century on the *time calculating machines* of “Ancient Mexico,” most of the remaining texts centralize on “mentioning” the influence the ideas of Athanasius Kircher had on Novohispanics; or well, in developing absolutely instrumental genealogies of the “reproduction” of magic lanterns and other precinematic spectacles. Yet the repercussion is rather more complex than the reaches of said expositions. One clear example of this could be inquired as follows: Why do these studies center on the struggle for ideological emancipation, leaving aside the dynamic element, the “mechanic” potentiality, of the calendar wheels perceived as *diagrams*?

The critical vision that an interest in media theory generates does not abide in the instruments as such, but in the parallelisms. It is to be found in the trace of constellations based on the points of inflection that opened a phenomenon of visibility (or exposed its opposites: forget and obscurity) in a “Criollo” production centered on questioning the concept of invention. These points of inflection emanate from the relationship between art and science, specifically from the transformation of world-visions that emerged mainly through astronomy, the study of comets and eclipses, and the (military-commercial) obsession with the specific localization of the “Valley of Mexico.” Analyzing certain key characters and their production of knowledge as signs of diversification, questions the discourse of the “distance between the centers of modernist effervescence.” This route of inquiry will surely take us to another locus of production of meaning; one which is, alas, not that of *appropriationism*.