

Video Art, Artivism and Photography as Tools for Subverting the Patriarchal Indoctrination of Advertising

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Abstract

This text is a conceptual and formal analysis of works of video art, photography and activism in defense of women's rights. It contextualizes the theoretical concepts of feminism, desire, liberty, reality, subversion or spectacle, in the framework of art and feminist critique in order to articulate an analysis running from the XXth to the XXIst century based on the theories of thinkers like Flusser, Lacan, Barthes, Debord and, more specifically concerning women, Lagarde, Beauvoir, Butler and Amoros. The aim is to show that art has had an important role in the diverse feminisms, contributing significantly to the improvement of the number of women in art and society, and that it continues to do so, being an accessible medium for reaching the dissident sector of the population, a medium that is creative in its confrontation, a medium whose duty is to communicate history and ensure that it is justly told, a tool for struggle camouflaged under the umbrella of art.

Keywords

Subvertising, Videoart, Performance, Artivism, Women, Artistic, Revolution

Introduction

Your Numerous uncertainties subsist ever today about feminism, its origin, its objectives and even its meaning. Even though studies of feminism in postmodernity begin with Simone de Beauvoir and continue in the United States with the movement led by Judy Chicago, amongst others, we need to go back much further in time to give a context to the term. The first known female philosopher was from the Balkans, in Tracia, and was called Hipparchia, a woman who fought to be able to do what men did, to devote herself to cultivating her mind rather than a family. Her reply to widespread criticism of her stance was "Do you believe that I have come to a wrong decision, if I devote that time to philosophy, which I otherwise should have spent at the loom?"¹

From the classical period in Greece onwards we can

see how representations of women became stereotypical, reflecting how women were relegated to the home. How we live now is determined by what we have learnt about ourselves through images from the past, which is why it's so important to be careful with images and even more so with how we represent ourselves in the world. Every form of representation of women in current society is a reference or model for minds that have not yet developed critical thinking capable of distinguishing between good and evil, beyond their own customs and desires.

We are not talking about anything strange, nothing that is not contemplated in the majority of national constitutions, we are talking about simple human rights. In order to amplify the context, we will analyze the following key moments: The Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, the Seventies and, lastly, the Nineties up to now. Women have been robbed of their freedom as human beings and neoliberal advertising has robbed them of their values, fostering an alienating vision that defines women in terms of domestic roles.

Art was previously the principal tool for communicating history, now it has become more conscious of the importance of its role and has focused more on questioning how we communicate history and what kind of history it is. It is a critical art that stems from an interest in human rights and the observation of society, that is not unmoved by inequality and that tries to provoke changes in consciousness, in other words, a political and revolutionary art that, at the same time, preserves its "basic" function of entertaining, telling stories and generating aesthetic pleasure.

Now we ask ourselves, if women artists have been active in cracking the hegemony of patriarchy, why does advertising still maintain a canon of beauty from the 1960's? can feminist art influence advertising? what are the most efficient tools in art for fighting patriarchy? how can new models of femininity be constructed in a medium, advertising, dominated by men? and, can

¹.Diogenes Laërtius, vi. 98

humor be a tool for subversion?

The works that we are going to analyze use the same tactics as advertising does; audiovisuals, invasive advertising, and physical pieces like web pop ups on legs. In artistic terms these are equivalent to video art, photography and street actions. If advertising is the subtlest form of indoctrination then we understand that art can subvert the message using the same tools, being easily received and assimilated by a public already accustomed to the medium.

We have decided undertake this analysis of artists who criticize patriarchy using video art, photography and actions, by taking two references for each medium, from the beginnings of the feminist struggle in art up to the selection of videos that were shown in the International Festival Fem Tour Truck 2016. In video art, we have chosen Martha Rosler and her piece *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975, United States) and Nadia Gomez Kenier with her piece *Macho sobre todas las cosas* (2015, Argentina). In the field of photography, we will examine Cindy Sherman and her piece *Untitled #153* (1985, United States) and Marisa Benito and her work *Artificio* (2015, Spain). And lastly, in the category of actions, the career of the Guerilla Girls collective (United States, 1985) and the work *Soy prostituta según la RAE* (Euskadi, 2016) by Nerea Lekuona.

All the proposed works criticize the representation of women in advertising and the audiovisual medium, using the body as a strategy for undermining the patriarchal system, appropriating elements of visual culture from the past and present with the aim of breaking down patriarchal thinking and social organization.

Questioning gender in art and advertising

To analyze feminism we need to start by analyzing its enemy: Patriarchy, defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line”, and, in general, “control by men of a disproportionately large share of power”. This definition reveals the primitive condition in which we live, where there is no room for evolution. Despite centuries of feminism we have made few advances, the most important being the now almost universal right to vote.

In order to talk about feminism, we will focus on the writings of Marcela Lagarde who analyzes the concept of

feminism, woman and sorority². In addition, for second wave feminism, we will take Simone de Beauvoir and her book “*The Second Sex*”, and its well-known slogan “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, statement with which we totally agree and in which advertising has a fundamental role. We will also look at Celia Amorós’ work on identity, for whom “woman” has been constructed as a single subject, lacking individual identity. In this text, we will always speak of women in plural, recognizing their diversity and plurality.

As far as advertising is concerned we are going to work with the vision that T.H Qualter proposes in his book “*Advertising and Democracy in the Mass Age*” (Qualter, 1994), where he defines it as the homogenization of thought, which returns us to the theme of woman, not women, and how we are the product of a society influenced by innumerable factors. In order to better analyze the influences over women we are going to refer to various works of social science and studies of public opinion from where we will extract ideas such as “agenda setting”, which is the media structuring what to see and what to think. In the area of philosophy, we will use the ideas of Barthes (2009), with special attention to his reflection on the relationship between image and text, and Lacan (2006), the concepts of desire and object, to speak of the desire that produces images that are the mirror of the other, and how individuals want to fulfil expectations in order to gain the affection of the Other, theory he names the Mirror Stage, a display of exhibitionism which is regulated by an imposed symbolic order. The theory was further developed by Jacques-Alain Miller who considered the body of the Other as symbolically more important than the subject’s own body. Ronald Berman’s studies of the effects of advertising contribute the idea that it shapes our society, as a reflection of our desire for the utopia that we would like to inhabit while maintaining us in a constant state of trying to be what we are not. It is a path towards the utopia of happiness, towards an idealized and heteronormalized (social, political, economic and cultural regime that imposes heterosexual practices and norms) model for this primitive social organization.

The main concept that unites the works of art that we will be analyzing is that of artifice, an artificial product of human creation and synonym of falseness, revealing how our subjectivities are constructed on the longing to be what we are not.

²Sorority is solidarity and mutual aid between women.

“It would be easier to understand if we would simply confess our infinite fear, which leads us to populate the world with images that resemble us or how we imagine ourselves to be, or maybe, on the contrary, this obsessive effort is the result of courage, or just stubbornness to avoid the emptiness, to not give meaning to what doesn't have meaning. Probably, the emptiness cannot be filled by us and that which we call meaning is nothing more than a fleeting combination of images that appear harmonious for a moment or on which the intelligence, prisoner of panic, tries to impose reason, order, coherence” (Saramago, 1986)

According to Nietzsche artifice is just as intrinsic to human life as reality: “illusion . . . begins with the organic world”; “Humanity and all organic beings have done it thus; they have organized the world by action, thought, imagination, until they have made it something they can use, something they can depend on”; “the ability to create (make, invent, imagine) is the fundamental ability of the organic world”; “great inventions and interpretations tore us from simple animal happiness of the past” (Nietzsche, 2001: 69).

Feminist becoming through technology and internet

Currently, one of the principal media for anti-patriarchal activity is the intangible universe of the Internet, where feminist, trans, queer, intersexual, lesbian and gay collectives have found a space for representing themselves outside heteronormative institutions. Internet is a medium for us to recognize ourselves and to experiment with our bodies, from the material of virtual environments we generate our own cyborgs, as Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1983) calls them, trying to justify her intention to abolish gender in order to abolish inequalities. Her theory, that never loses sight of humor, is built on the idea that the union of human and machine would eliminate the strict coding that limits bodies to stereotypical roles. I can think of a lot of artists who work with the body and feminism in art but I am going to make a small selection to illustrate how these themes are being explored from a technological perspective. I will then relate these works to two videos that were selected in the Fem Tour Truck festival to show how videoart is uniting proposals that come from photography, installation, performance and technology. I often tell my students that nothing is original, inspired by Kirby Ferguson's ongoing video series “Everything

is a remix”, so I encourage them to express themselves freely, just as these videos do, they aren't inventing anything, they are compendiums of ideas taken from the feminist revolution in art, politics and society, they are narratives of untold history, a revolution in which communication through visual images has transcended and narrated itself, from the first photographs to complex transmedia works. These videos are a cocktail of media and ideas, uniting photographic, audiovisual and action based processes, interactive projects, network projects and installations in the single medium of video.

Of all the projects of art and technology that question gender I always begin with Lynn Hershman, known for her feminist focus, and her work “DINA” (2000-2006), an artificial intelligence that evolves in time, precursor of systems like SIRI which, through online search programs and generative software, are driving the evolution of artificial intelligence. There is a great variety in how women have related to technology in art, for example Quimera Rosa create performances where their bodies become interfaces, questioning the role of different and at the same time useable hybrid bodies, provoking the transfiguration of the body to produce new non-essentialist identities.

“Roberta Breitmores” (1973-1979), another work by Lynn Hershman, explores female sexual identity in the virtual space of internet where it is easier to break the formal limits of the body thanks to the dreamlike and fantastic space of virtual environments, the artifice which we commented earlier. The Colombian artist Jocelyn Bernal has a piece which uses tools appropriated from the hacker movement or discipline, the so-called hacktivism which pirates webs, carries out DoS (Denial of Service) attacks or creates encrypted private networks. Actions which remind us of the story of Wikileaks where DoS attacks were common. Bernal combines John Cage's piece 4'33" (1952) and DoS attacks to carry out a work that moves between art, activism and hacktivism, something we could call activism. The work consists in attacking the servers of artistic institutions in Spain and Latin America during four minutes and thirty three seconds in order to denounce the resistance to change of the classical systems of representation or the silence to which dissident art forms are condemned.

Other net projects are aimed at fighting against the micro-violence of the networks in a humorous way, such as “Alerta Machitroll” (2015) by the Karisma collective from Colombia, which manages an online observatory

of sexist practices in internet, offering fun manuals for defusing macho troll violence.

In the Fem Tour Truck 2016 open call several videos were received that focused on this feminist becoming through technology, like Lauren Valley's "Picture this" (2016, USA) in which a girl in a 3D environment explains to the viewer how to avoid attacks from men through different mechanical extensions of her body. Myrte Van der Molen, in her work "I want to be selfish again" (2016, Holland), deals with the same theme of implanted mechanical devices to resist sexual attacks, but in a cold aseptic manner, a long way from Valley's humor. The other work I wish to refer to isn't actually a video but rather a video game called "Homozapping" (2015; Mexico), available online, which tests the knowledge of the users of their own bodies and questions social conceptions of the forbidden, the sexual, the strange, the exciting... showing us a reality that we either don't know or don't want to see. This game created by PlayLabXY01 in a laboratory organized by ARSGAMES was exhibited in the Fem Tour Truck Festival as an interactive video installation.



Figure 1. Screenshot from the video game "Homozapping"

Politico-artistic artifice in video art vs. advertising

Templates The audiovisual image is the most consumed in postmodernity and its powerful ethical and social role in the structuring of society cannot be ignored. In the case of Ecuador, the country has laws which legislate what can be shown in the media, if these laws are obeyed they end up structuring the collective imaginary and thus influencing how individuals behave, but Internet is a jungle of information that is very difficult to control.

Advertising continues to perpetuate the woman/housewife, man/hero dichotomy, while remaining

obsessed with idealized bodies which can only be real in virtual reality, bodies made into objects, into things. In videoart we find the other extreme where household advertising and empty models are strongly criticized.

According to Martha Rosler, the early use of video in art was a critical position against the structures of the artistic institutions because video was still not accepted in art circles and neither were women. So, working from the periphery and with excluded media they created critical work that was aimed not at entering into the system but at changing it by "mixing art and social life [...] in an effort to open a space where the voices of the voiceless could be articulated" (Rosler, 1990: 31, 32).

We cannot lose sight of the fact that audiovisual media have an intrinsic narrative quality which has become essential as a vehicle for feminist protest and as a tool for change (Juhasz, 2001: 3). Video, cinema or documentary films offer different forms of struggle which are in themselves pedagogical actions.

At the end of the sixties two important events took place: the launch of the video recorder by Sony and the feminist revolution in the United States. The artists used their own bodies to talk of what had been prohibited and discovered an escape route in audiovisual media. Several decades later came distribution by Internet which is still, for the moment, the least monopolized and politicized medium. The pioneers of the exploration of female imaginaries in video art are artists like Valie Export, Pipilotti Rist, Tracey Emin or Sadie Benning.

In the Latin American context, there are now many artists who define themselves as feminists but the movement arrived later than in the United States where it started in the sixties, in Spain in the eighties, and in Latin America in the nineties (with notable earlier exceptions such as Monica Mayer in Mexico), peaking from 2000 onwards. Regina José Galindo, Rocío Boliver or Marta Amorocho are some of the contemporary artists who question the inequality of gender, appropriating strategies of communication that use action and reaction as means for provoking movement towards equality (Irene Ballester, 2013). The visibilization of gender based violence is common to many artists involved in feminism and especially in Mexico, world leader in femicides. This word was imported into Spanish as *feminicidio* by Marcela Lagarde, sociologist and anthropologist, from the writings of Diana Russell and Jill Radford who use the term to refer to violent crimes against women for the mere fact of being women.

**“Semiotics of the kitchen” by Martha Rosler and
“Macho sobre todas las cosas” by Nadia Gómez Kenier, a domestic artifice**



Figure 2. Demonstration of the ironic use of a rolling pin. “Semiotics of the Kitchen” (Martha Rosler, 1975)

Let’s start by analyzing this video performance realized in 1975 by Martha Rosler and now part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA). We see the artist in a domestic setting, in the kitchen, in a carefully composed image with her in the center, echoing the domination of a system that leaves nothing to chance. Rosler then begins to show us the kitchen utensils in alphabetical order, saying its name first and then giving an example of how to use it. Her attitude is resigned and angry and as the piece progresses this becomes more marked, revealing the aggressivity generated by domination and seclusion in the kitchen, oscillating between drama and humor. She writes the names on a blackboard in a very rudimentary way, showing her anarchist and revolutionary spirit in a struggle against the system.

In the video Rosler also converts her body into a utensil by using it to form the initial letter of each utensil evoked, visualizing the patriarchal assignment of women to the domestic space. From now on we are going to take into account the analysis of the body in feminist artistic practices, where the body is a battlefield, a political body, and above all the resignification of woman and her struggle to decolonize her body, reclaiming women’s ownership of their own bodies. The use of the body is a recurrent theme in art and not only by women artists, Vito Acconci, Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp or, more recently, Marcellí Antúnez have delighted us with works focussed on the body but it is from another point of view that “video performers like Marina Abramovic,

Yoko Ono, Linda Benglis, Joan Jonas, Gina Pane, Martha Rosler or Valie Export show, through parody, fragmentation of the social order, criticism of language and inversion of roles, another reality of women through the use of video.” (Bouhaben, 2015)



Figure 3 A man reproducing the advertisement of a shower gel for women. “Macho sobre todas las cosas” (Nadia Gómez Kenier, 2015)

Continuing with our analysis, we have the piece “Macho sobre todas las cosas” (Kenier, 2015), a playful video that mixes media reality and real life. Kenier divides the work in four scenes, each of which uses an advertisement aimed at women, appropriating the visual part of the advertisements by reenacting them with male actors and keeping the original audio. “Macho sobre todas las cosas” criticizes the image that is expected of women and calls attention to the gender disparity of these expectations, that a man is ridiculous in these advertisements shows that they do not face the same demands as women. We return to domestic space and to a whole series of preconceptions associated with women and their representation, like in the last scene where the artist appropriates an advertisement for diet food. This is clearly an exercise of subvertising which attacks the patriarchal concepts embodied in audiovisual media, breaking the “agenda setting” of the patriarchal system by changing the relation between sound and image, disconnecting and decontextualizing the situation in order to articulate a critical vision, once again situated between drama and humor. But this humor shows the drama of the relation subjectobject of consumption, that it is not the object that is being sold but the desire for what she lacks, in this case a perfect female body, because if we change her for a man the advertisement no longer makes sense.

By definition human beings are unsatisfied,

permanent happiness does not exist and this is the key to consumption, we know that we will always want more and advertising is there to remind us. Consumption in itself is neither good nor bad, advertising offers services, health, education... the problem is the values that are trampled to obtain it. In the line of pedagogic videos focussed on this question we would like to draw attention to “Consume hasta morir” (Consume until you die) by *Ecologistas en Acción* (2005), a documentary film that was created to reveal what is behind the multinationals and their advertising strategies to attract and identify the masses.

Politico-aesthetic Artifice in Artistic Photography vs. Advertising

Another of the principal tools of women’s art is photography, expressed from the body and understood as subjectivity, the mechanical eye that connects us and initiates us in technology and our cyborg becoming. In the sixties, the first consumer cameras appeared but photography was still not considered as an art, which meant that women had the “right” to use this minor medium to express themselves. Artists like Nan Goldin or Sally Mann subvert the system with their photos, generating new representations of women in the images. Goldin centers much of her work in showing the normality of gender violence through self-portraits in which she exaggerates the marks of violence while maintaining a heteronormative narrative. Once again we see the rupture between desire and reality, the image of what is desired or hoped for and the reality, so close to the experience of many women. Mann on the other hand follows a different path, she explores a model of woman (in this case girls, her photographic subjects are always her daughters) without intervention or poses, as close as possible to reality, even leaving it up to chance to decide when to press the shutter. Once again we are breaking molds as chance is not part of the system, the State cannot permit leaving things to chance, everything must be programmed.

Both artists question the norms of beauty shown in advertising and elicit a reconsideration of reality and fiction. It is the struggle of artifice and reality; humans don’t want to see what they really have but rather desire what they don’t have. We don’t live in the present or in reality, we live in the hyperreality of the media, in man-made artifice, where our struggle for equality often becomes a war of the sexes.

If we observe how photography has been analyzed from

its origins up to the present we can see how much the understanding of its objectivity and relation to the truth has changed. At the beginning, it was seen as a technique that would liberate visual arts of all subjectivity due to its objective depiction of the real, “photography arrived in time to liberate painting from the anecdotal, from literature and even from the theme” (Banzin, 1945: 14). Vilem Flusser goes even further by suggesting that we are trapped in the relation between image and reality, in order to represent a reality, we make an image of it which is then projected and becomes an intermediary between people and the world, “a person ex-ists, that is to say they don’t have direct access to the world but only imagine it through images” (Flusser, 2001). For Flusser images are an obstacle that prevent people from living in reality because all they do is disfigure it. The photographer and writer Joan Fontcuberta talks about the idea of “disreality” (Fontcuberta, 2012: 18) to express the idea of photographic fictions and destructure the hegemonic models of the real. So the concept of photography has completely changed, it is no longer the real that is shown but what we would like to be real. Flusser calls this “idolatry”, “the omnipresent images that surround us are magically restructuring our reality, converting it into a global scenario of images that orient us in the world”. (Flusser, 2001).

Advertising, in its eagerness to appropriate reality and sell the consumption of identity, has created a stereotyping of male and female bodies. Fashion photography has taken the question of beauty even further than the reflections on the objectivity of the image or the camera because of the importance of post-production. Here it is not only the artifice of the photographer that is implicit in the image but the skill of the post-production which contributes to the construction of “disreality” just as much as the theatricality of the stage props and the makeup.

To wind up our reflections about photography we should mention the theories that Guy Debord proposes in his book “The Society of the Spectacle” where he maintains that reality has taken a backseat to the image, resulting in the “spectacle” which is “not a collection of images, but a social relation between people mediated by images” (Debord, 1967). In his writings, he criticises the secular society of consumption that is organized for the minority of beneficiaries included in the Welfare State.

“Untitled #153” by Cindy Sherman and “Artificio” by Marisa Benito, an aesthetic artifice.

In this section we are going to analyze two works, a photograph from 1985 by Cindy Sherman (United States), an artist who ridicules the concept of beauty as transmitted by the cinema by taking photos of herself in different poses and disguises, part of her second phase in which she abandons eroticism in favor of the grotesque. We will also analyze a piece of video art from 2016 by Marisa Benito (Spain) which appropriates the images of archetypal women from the imaginary of cinema in order to resignify them as artifice, word which gives the piece its title.



Figure 4. Cindy Sherman disguised as a woman from a magazine. *Untitled #153 (Cindy Sherman 1985)*

Once again the body becomes a critical tool, in this case to reveal the artificiality of female representation through photography. In this case Sherman lets us see the illusion of the reality captured by the camera

in order to ridicule the aesthetic rules of patriarchal society. Sherman tries to reproduce fashion photos while exaggerating everything, breaking stereotypes and pushing the image towards the grotesque to reveal the stigma of the female body, her body.

The somatization of criticisms in the body puts the artist in the position of a martyr who takes on the guilt of their own body, captured and expropriated for financial gain in the society of consumption in response to the eroticized gaze of men. The Lacanian theory of being seen to be desired is upset here, for in this case we wish to be seen in order to question the gaze of the viewer. Artists like Sherman, Mary Kelly, Ana Mendieta or Marina Abramovic have made a canvas and a battlefield of their bodies where “they try to visibilize the objectification and vilification of women in a phallogocentric capitalist system: the body is projected as the consciousness of being, as a subversion of the daily body” (Coccoz, 2012). The artist, both in her work and life, began to contribute to the feminist movement in the sixties when the phrase “the personal is political” was pronounced and assumed by many artists and cultural agents. Sherman after starting with the female cinema stars of the 30’s and 40’s, when beauty was the key for selling tickets, has adopted an endless variety of identities oscillating between parody and disguise.

Sherman’s photography reveals the wound and the disreality and explores female identity beyond the limits of advertising. Of course, she herself has become spectacle but it is the spectacle of the spectacle, a parody of the society of which Debord speaks, in which the artist seeks to offend us with her overacting and exaggerated decoration. Much of the sense that Sherman tries to give to the use of her own body in her work and her criticism comes from the idea that we are all part of the Society of the Spectacle.

The artifice, “a clever or artful skill, an ingenious device or expedient, an artful stratagem or trick, false or insincere behavior”³, in her work is clear, she is commenting the absurd human condition and humorously representing it from an artistic perspective, under the umbrella of art, capable of including everything from the beautiful to the twisted.

³. Definition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/artifice>



Figure 5. Artifice of the representation of women in the media. Marisa Benito, *Artificio* (2015)

Marisa Benito's work is equally transgressive and also uses stereotypes of women taken from the cinema, working with the imaginary of beauty that these figures incarnate in their poses and surroundings. An artifice of romantic poses captured from the time that the surrealism of these images had not yet been understood but that Benito makes visible through her audiovisual post-production. A collection of images that come from visual errors, glitches, or from natural elements like fire, smoke or flowers are superimposed on the faces of these women who walk gracefully across the screen. In the words of the artist "Woman is not complete anymore: she is a fragmented body, a face without identity diluted in cosmetic artificiality. The invisible side of woman is shown as veiled in mystery and distance amongst natural elements which create a dramatic and disturbing atmosphere. The voyeuristic masculine gaze is part of the social construction of the perfect woman and what has principally generated and given form to the myth" (Benito, 2016).

"Artificio" is a reply to this masculine gaze and a criticism of the factory of dreams in which cosmetics are the principal actors of the farce. The new characters that Benito creates in this film are similar to those that Cindy Sherman interprets in her photographs, trying to explore the feminine psyche by questioning the glamor of the images, faces and identities of the 30's and 40's.

In her work Benito manipulates the image by distorting the frame itself, animating what was originally a still image with undulating or vibratory movements, breaking with photography as a static medium to augment the sensation of reality of the staging. In this procession of women, a solidarity is generated between

them, acquiring the sense of women-objects fighting to resignify themselves, a sisterhood of women as Marcela Lagarde would call it. The video ends with a woman holding a mirror in which another woman is reflected, an open invitation for us to feel part of this artifice and to know that we are also there, for, just like Sherman, both artists want to include us and make us feel part of the spectacle.

Institutional Artifice and Action Art vs. advertising formats

Activism and feminism have always been closely related and the relation with art wasn't long in emerging. Our first example is from the United States, the collective Guerrilla Girls, formed to draw attention to the inequality of gender in museums and the disproportionate number of women exhibiting in them. The first attack of an art institution by women took place in 1969 in the annual exhibition of the Whitney Museum, this led to the creation of WAR (Women Artists in Resistance) which made visible how few women were exhibiting. Another collective, similar to Guerrilla Girls, is *Mujeres Creando*, founded in Bolivia in 1992. This period emphasized the need for sorority and the creation of networks of resistance beyond the State. The majority of feminist artistic actions are carried out as groups of women but there are also individual revolutions like that of Nerea Lekuona, our second example, who extends her struggle from the personal to the social, carrying out an action on the border between performance and activism, "Soy prostituta según la RAE" ("I am a prostitute according to the Spanish Dictionary")

Guerrilla Girls and Nerea Lekuona, Fminist activism from the margins

The two works that we are going to analyze have different formats but shared strategies. On the one hand the Guerrilla Girls make visual work that functions as an activist tool due to its propagandist nature while, on the other hand, Nerea Lekuona carries out a performance that also functions as an activist proposal due to its inclusive nature and its use of public space. A performance in which she wanders the streets of Vitoria (Euskadi) wearing a sandwich board with the title of the work written in front and the dictionary definition of woman from the official Spanish dictionary behind and one of its meanings, "mujer del arte" which means prostitute. In her intervention

Lekuona distributes leaflets printed with the definition painted on the sandwich board that she is wearing. It's a very theatrical and critical action, the staging is a direct reference to street advertising with sandwich boards and the handing out of leaflets. She recorded a video of herself walking the streets on the way to the main library, in a cinematographic and televisual style rather than the usual style of simple documentation.

The famous Guerrilla Girls collective are notable for their anonymity, like Sherman they disguise themselves but in this case as gorillas, as they say, only their hairdressers know their identity. Their strength lies in the use of advertising style graphics and text, abandoning artistic formats in favor of the commercial style of the mass media. Image and text are combined in order to visualize the percentages and qualitative analysis of the gender inequality in museums. Although they began as a marginal group their boldness became so popular that they were soon included in the most elitist museum collections. The relation that they establish between image and object evokes the rupture of formats, they show a painting or a photograph of a woman, object of false representations, which they modify by covering her head with a gorilla mask, evoking the false identity that has been generated by art and the media, this "disreality" is humorously exaggerated to draw attention to the fact that the models represented by society are nothing more than unreal projections.



Figure 6 Frame from the video documentation of the artist's street walk. *"Soy prostituta según la RAE", Nerea Lekuona (2016)*

According to the distinction that Barthes makes of the relation between image and text, this is an anchoring

relation, where the text explains the image which otherwise would be decontextualized and end up as just an anecdote of subversion. In Lekuona's work the relation is different but the result is the same for she generates an image accompanied by a text, but in this case the image is physical and in movement, the image elaborates on the text, the definition, written by hand on a blackboard in the didactic style of Martha Rosler, is not critical in itself but hung on the artist's body it acquires the necessary significance and nuance. From the point of view of linguistic rhetoric, we can reflect on the meaning of hanging something from the shoulders, not just as pop up street advertising but also the incorporation of the criticism into the body itself, as we have seen in the work of Nan Goldin or Cindy Sherman in which the personal has an important role, visualizing the violence on themselves.

Both artists appropriate graphic and audiovisual advertising language to produce their subvertising of the academic and museum institution.

Reflections

In this feminist study of art, we have seen how the formulas of advertising are absorbed in order to counterattack, audiovisual language and graphical techniques are used as tools to criticize their origins and the guidelines that define advertising. In addition, due to recent technological advances the use of audiovisual media is now much more accessible. Art has the duty to relate, struggle and criticize, and by using the same tools and tactics as advertising it is thus in a position to easily reverse any positions that this may take.

Subvertising to the feminine models of cinema or the domesticity promoted in advertising has been produced since the sixties and there are now many collectives, like Adbusters, working with these practices. William Meyers has described advertising as a medium that plays with human weaknesses (Meyers, 1984) but every medium has its own weaknesses that can be subverted. Subvertising is a social revolution against the values that advertising promotes, as Chamizo (2006) proposes: "The media is known to be very influential, citizens as social subjects should know and be informed of social questions, carry out a critical reflection on the theme and their own position and be ready to act in consequence". Art appropriates advertising to inform and generate critical thought about patriarchy, a counterattack on the capitalist system and the market in favor of human rights.

Feminist subvertising has in its favor the capacity to play with situations, models and realities that are already assimilated by the public which results in easier identification. Another element shared by the works and the concept of subvertising is its revolutionary and provocative character, that it has in common with the figure of the guerrilla.

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Author Biography

Alejandra Bueno is a multidisciplinary artist who focuses her work on the visual arts and new media, with a gender focus. She was born in Vitoria, Basque Country, in 1987, she studied fine arts in Bilbao, afterwards, she studied a mastership in Valencia on visual and multimedia arts. Alejandra has produced works in different countries such as France, Germany, England, Italy and Ecuador, where she has held art exhibitions and lectures on art. And now resides in Cuenca, Ecuador, where she works as a teacher of arts education at UNAE. She is currently completing her doctorate in new media of cultural production through art and feminism. Last year she created the FEM TOUR TRUCK festival, a traveling exhibition of video art, presented in public spaces with workshops, performances, talks and video screenings, under the problem of gender violence, inequality of rights, medial discrimination, etc. This year 2017, will be held in Colombia, Ecuador, Portugal, Spain and Edinburgh.