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Introduction Female Networks in Arts and Technology

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INTRODUCTION

Summary

The types and evolution of the social networks and cross-border relations that function today globally are supported by the telecommunication and information technologies development. How women get connected transnationally can only be understood through the lens of ITC history. Firstly the transatlantic and transnational relations pre wars, then the global village that McLuhan described with the mass media in the 60s gave a further step with the appearance of the new ITC and the Internet in the 90s. Social networks that existed previously had the way to remain connected and to create new communities and alliances virtually. Parallely with the evolution of Western and global feminism, women (mainly in Western countries) working in the intersection of arts and technologies have been actively collaborating transnationally (cross-borders). The international panorama of Arts and Technology, in addition to the possibilities of the global virtual world of the Net, have allowed the formation of a transnational rhizome of women artists and professionals that grows since the middle 90s. Women involved in a wide range of feminist and women-only initiatives in the intersection of arts and technology, with also local and offline activity, have sewed a network of interaction, collaboration and influences cross-borders thanks to ITCs. This fact bring us to the assumption that women allie towards a resistance in a male-dominated technology sphere through art and activist practices, and the ITCs have allowed this in a transnational level.

Research Questions

The first impulse to write this dissertation was based on the sudden appreciation about the considerable number of projects related to women in the arts and tech world. Specially compared to other visual arts that exist nowadays. What were exactly these social, activist and artistic initiatives? What is the context in terms of gender equity and equality to make all these initiatives grow? Initially we mainly aimed to identify and locate them, but during the process we realized that besides not all of them have an international membership or agenda, there is a strong network of connection and

influence between the members of all of them. Therefore, these paradigmas were the spotlight of our research:

- What are the projects of women, art and technology?
- How many there are? Since when are they active?
- Where are they based? Where are their members from?
- Why these women get together/connected (before and now)? Context
- How they used to it (before and now)? methods
- Why in arts and technology? Content
- How are these projects categorized or defined: do they have a common nexus? Are all of them feminist?
- What has changed from 1991 2019 - almost 30 years.

Observing and deducting from the cases of study of our research, we have come across different scopes trying to understand the context that gave rise to them. Within these scopes we have structured our dissertation. During the process of the research we started having the assumption that, there was a complex causal context as background in terms of gender and technology and feminist issues, and that through these initiatives women were creating an alternative space of resistance and creativity.

Importance of the study

Through the present dissertation we aim to make a contribution to the history of women in digital arts, as to the women's and feminist associations history, concretely in the intersection of the arts and technology. Within this objective, we will identify, register and describe different formats of feminist and women-only associations internationally in arts and technology with local and global, offline and online activity. With the results, we will create a visualization of the transnational network of activity, connections and influences that exists between them through a visualization map that is available online.

Additionally, we will also make a practical contribution through the management and curating of the feminist project Atenea: a project to connect women in STEM and women in Arts nationally with international perspective.

Conceptual Framework

Since the domestication of the telecommunication technologies and the Internet, the global society of information reaches almost every part of the world. Topics of social interest like those designated by Western feminism, inspire girls and women internationally towards a methodology of activism happening local and virtually. The current critic situation in referring to the lack of Gender Diversity in Computing and Technology in Western countries has been faced by feminist approaches through online and offline activism. In addition, the lack of Gender Diversity or male-domination in the sphere of Arts and Technology is another reason for women to allie towards a resistance.

The relation of women with technology in the intersection with visual arts finds its roots in the Computer, Computer Arts and Telecommunications history. Parallely with the evolution of Western feminism(s) and its scopes and strategies, we find the origins of the women-only and feminist associations in arts.

This dissertation is composed by five parts. The first part will abroad the origins of the international women's movement as the first attempt for a transnational get together cross-borders and discuss the recent story and evolution of the women-only spaces in Western societies. We will also look back to the presence and work by women in history of Computers and Digital Arts. In the second part we will present the list and describe the diverse types of alliances by women in the intersection of arts and technology through feminist and women-only projects. In the third part we will registre the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the interviews, questionnaires and surveys. In the fourth part we will present our project Atenea, its agenda of activities and the platform, and finally in the fifth part we will show the visualization of the results of the research in a transnational network.

Many feminist and anthropologists have boarded the study of female collaboration strategies, but as the same range of feminist epistemological approaches there are today, there is no closed conclusion or consensus about an inherent tendency towards collaboration in females.

Based on biological or social reasons, the fact is that women get together and work in gender segregated spaces since ancient times and in different cultures. Our cases of study, within all the different methodologies and formats that they implement, are taking part of the female networks history. The first part of this dissertation will abroad this question, looking for the roots of an international women's alliance and the retrieval of the women-only spaces by the second wave of feminism. Assuming that most of our cases of study describe themselves as *feminist*, to better understand how and why they get together, it is necessary to track the steps of the international women's movement (feminism), its roots, its evolution, phases and branches. Within this, we will be able to comprehend the ideological background of terms and methodologies that they follow and share in common besides the location of base. In this part we will compare the initial steps of the international women's movement by three major transnational women alliances with the last phases of Western feminism in aims to get global. We will discuss the similitudes in order to see how before the IIWW and the appearance of the ITC, the issues that women had to face towards a transnational alliance have not been solved but repeated (have worsened).

As Western and global feminism would have not spread the same way it has done without the domestication of the ITC, the artistic practices with computers and then the Internet would have not existed without the evolution of the first computers of the world wars to the domestic/use ones.

Currently the situation of gender diversity in STEM and specially in computer science is one of the main topics of feminist and women involved in these fields. However, the relation and epistemological approaches towards technology by women and feminist has been registered in a considerable number of research, books and works since the 80s (Wajcman, 2016). Technology has been seen as an enemy as an allie for women for feminist in different periods and branches, but always considered. Actually, the presence of women in the history of Computers and Computer Arts has been ignored for decades until scholars and artists have retrieved it as inspiration and activist

material. Since the first computers designed for the IWW to the first labs of human computer interaction in US, women have taken a very important role in the development of these technologies. Moreover, it is in computer and telecommunication arts and not in traditional visual arts where women took an active part from the beginning, working in mixed groups and feeling appreciated for their technical skills (CITA). When in the 70s, Judy Chicago might found the WomenHouse for the male-dominated environment in visual arts, the women involved in computer and TC arts were working in mixed or female collectives and labs.

The combination of the women's rights that feminism had achieved in advanced capitalist Countries and the investment in Computer Arts labs by the 70s and 80s, made possible the work by women in the first computer art creations internationally.

As the decadance of women in Computer Science fields in the 80s happened inexplicably, in the 90s the environment in Arts and Technology spheres had dramatically got a male profile. Fortunately, by then an international network of experts in computer, digital and electronic arts was already established by different events like international Festivals, exhibitions, journals, etc. This is the context that gave rise to our first cases of study: an existing social and professional network within the world of Art and Technology, where a critical situation of lack of gender diversity and male-dominated environment made women start to get connected virtually and transnationally. Our case of study that exemplifies this is FACES mailing list and Old Boys Network.

Within the scope of Internet and Net Art practices, Cyberfeminism is born as the exemplification of the feminist epistemological approaches about women and gender relation with technologies, and the beginning of a virtual female alliance based on artistic radical activism. Since 1991 and the VSN Manifesto, the Cyberfeminist theories and practices have reached a wide range of formats and topics: bio hack, gender abolition, networked feminism, etc. Considering the activism by feminist through the Net the base of description of cyberfeminism (that claims not to have a close description) , nowadays we find uncountable platforms and social networks dedicated to feminist issues and women's rights like virtual harassment, rape, that get out of the scope of the visual arts. Nevertheless, the hopeful theories about women's and gender liberation that cyberfeminist holded in the beginning, has been

replaced by pessimistic critics seen the results of girls interaction in the net and the repetition of violent and aggressive behaviour by male users towards them (Zafra).

But the relation by women with computers since its origins has been particularly unique, then with the contribution of women in computer arts education and creation. Both in general STEM fields and in Digital and Electronic Arts, the evolution of technology and the technology world shows an intentional shape towards a male profile (first in the 50s and 60s and then in the 90s), leaving many women interested out of it and with less possibilities (cita making technology masculine). However, compared to the situation of women in STEM fields, the artists and professionals in digital and electronic arts have established a network since the late 80s, having in most of their cases local activism. The alliance by women at the intersection of art and technology can be based on: **alternative use of technologies and social critic (feminist anti sistema), getting together women already involved in the field or creating an educational space online or offline to encourage women in technology.**

During three years we have gathered and collected information about any type of women-only and feminist initiative in the intersection of arts and technology. Due to the interdisciplinarity of the topic, we have established some parameters to select our cases of study and categorize them. Taking in consideration the multiplicity of their members, the complexity of their organizational structures, the flexibility of their agendas, and the interdisciplinarity of their activities, we have established an attempt of lineal order based on methodology, considering the overlapping of many of them in time and activities. Platforms like Old Boys Networks are online since 1997, and main members have later found another initiatives of performed related activities. Members of FACES mailing list take part of the Eclectic Tech Carnival, where members of many other initiatives also collaborate. The relation, collaboration and influence between the cases of study has been studied empirically by their data posted online, and through personal interviews and questionnaires. We have attempt to identify as much as possible all the existing connections between the members and their individual traces, but we

are aware of the impossibility of the scope, as the social interactions are hard to define, specially in qualitative terms/ parameters.

The fifth part is dedicated to the description of one of the two practical exercises: Atenea Project.

We will describe the design of the project / objectives, methodologies, strategies, etc/ and the agenda of activities. The platform, the social networks, the conference, the exhibition, the panel in the woman's week madrid and future activities. We will discuss the results and conclusions that we have after performing the real events. Also, the achievements that we have in terms of connections with existing networks and how we have provided a point of connection for those who were unknown to each other before. Case of success..

The last part will hold the conclusions with the second practical exercise of this research, that is the data visualization of the transnational rhizome based on the qualitative and quantitative data that we have been able to collect from primary and secondary sources.

The impediments we have faced:

One of the main impediments we have faced is the nature of the topic, and the methods of accessibility to the information about our cases of study.

Considering our topic not only an interdisciplinary one, but global and virtually happening, the limitations of accessibility the whole vast of information have been considerable. Internet is an open door to the endless ocean of information, a double-edged edge. Content can be access and found easily, but at the same time the range of research sources based on geographical points is very limiting. We have experience the fact of finding during the last months of research still initiatives that we had never found before in a daily research experience. Additionally, trying to find more non western projects by women in arts and technology has been a hard task to fulfil. Due to the nature of

the topic, the accessibility to technology in non advanced capitalist countries is low, but also within the developed countries, where the access to high education (and the art tech world) is still an economical barrier for people of color, immigrants, etc. Therefore we declare that we are conscious of having missing many interesting projects of women in art and technology, but we wait hopefully to keep contributing to the network rhizome in future phases of research.

Additionally, while the literature about associations in visual arts, mainly digital arts, is scarce, the literature about cyberfeminism has been perceived as vast and unattainable, specially the epistemological approaches related to gender identity, agency, subjectivity, and in short, postmodern and poststructuralist terms. We have missed more literature from a different philosophical perspective towards women in arts and technology besides the poststructuralist and postmodern ones.

Finally, we must say that working on the topic of women-only spaces nowadays can create a lot of controversy and polemic, and that unfortunately we have personally experienced frustration treating this topic when it seems to us that the erasure of the women as political subject has been intentionally erased in the feminist agenda.