VOKE

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(E)Motions: Using Animated Collage to create Metaphors for Belonging and (Dis)Location

Introduction

I am a Mexican visual artist living in Montreal. A few years ago, I made the decision to leave what is known and familiar to me – my home, my family and my community in Mexico – in order to pursue doctoral studies in art education in Canada. The life experiences that came with this change of location have influenced my choice of research interests. Perhaps most salient among these is my ongoing doctoral research, which consists of a self-developed studio practice that focuses on the de-construction (Derrida, 1997) of my cultural identity. Having been a working artist for over ten years, I consider my studio practice the point of departure that leads to the formulation of further educational research questions. In other words, my studio is a site for exploration in which I test concepts and media, and in doing so, allow my intuition to take the lead. As a result, the (E) Motions project is a self-study in which I have explored the ways in which collage and digital media (photo and stop motion animation) may communicate the experience of belonging a not belonging to a place. The results of my self-study have illuminated the possibilities of using these media in order to develop community-based educational activities engaged with the exploration of cultural identity.

The concept of cultural identity is particularly relevant in multicultural societies. Thus, concepts such as multi-, cross- or inter- culturalism are becoming increasingly common within North American educational systems. Blocker (2005) mentions two main reasons for including multiculturalism into the art education agenda in North America: 1) North American society is comprised of many cultures and 2) the "shrinking world phenomena" or globalization process (p. 27). New waves of migration around the globe are contributing to the globalization process. In this way, although migration is not necessarily a recent or new phenomenon in North America, the idea of a "multicultural art education" became a relevant issue within academic debates beginning in the seventies (Kuster, 2009, p. 33). Within those forty years, multicultural art education has gone through different stages and art educators have had the chance to reflect on what it can achieve. However, the school system is not the only place in which members of society are exposed to learning experiences or varied cultural expressions. (E)Motions seeks to reach out to people who may be experiencing some form of dis-location like working immigrants. Immigrants need to be able to assimilate different types information at an accelerated pace in order to integrate themselves into a new society. Based on personal experience, I can say the first years of this adaptation process require extra efforts in improving language skills, job hunting, or stabilizing economic income in order to improve living conditions. At the same time, the social dimension of the adaptation process takes much longer to come to fruition. Cultural barriers may lead to isolation. Therefore, community-based educational activities may be a resource for immigrants to socialize and learn more about themselves and other people who may have similar cultural backgrounds. One way that immigrants can become part of their new social context is through engagement with participatory arts. As Moriarty (2004) explains, "Immigrant and refugee communities are particularly well-organized to build bridging social capital through the participatory arts because they need to connect to the main stream communities where they now live and raise their children" (p. 45). Developing educational community-based activities that focus on cultural difference

(Bhabha, 1994) may help adult immigrants to strengthen their self-image and, are more open to those of different background. The (E)Motions project has the purpose of developing processes through which these adults are able to share the feelings of belonging or alienation that they may have to the place in which they live. I expect that developing spaces for community dialogues on this topic will provide immigrant adults with better understanding of each other's realities. This in turn will allow them to transmit positive views and values coming from their cultural heritage to their children as well as attitudes of respect and acceptance towards others. As a result, (E)Motions mixes qualitative research methods such as photovoice (Wang, Kun Yi and Carovano, 1998), which is a participatory method of data collection- and collage (Butler-Kisber, 2010 and Vaughan 2006), with stop motion animation techniques to investigate potential connections between cultural identity and place. This project responds to the following question: In what ways does the making of an animated collage communicate feelings of connection to or alienation from a place?

(E) Motions focuses on contemporary approaches to ethnography, cultural identity, geography and visual culture. The relationships that I have found among these elements will be examined in this literature review. I will also discuss the potential for practices such as photovoice, collage and animation to contribute to the development of selfreflective processes and critical thinking.

Throughout my doctoral research activities, I have created a large archive of digital photos of Mexican public spaces that have played an important role in my life. When I look at them in my present home in Canada, it is clear that those photographs, taken during my visits to Mexico between academic terms, hold emotional and personal meanings that may not be immediately evident. However, they exist within me and, therefore, affect my responses to the new cultural environment to which I am currently exposed. My adaptation to Montreal's cosmopolitan environment has led to an increased respect for cultural difference as a living principle. However, the roles that I play within Montreal (Mexican woman, Latin American artist or international student) are influenced by my life experiences in my home country. Therefore, the (E) Motions project deals with the contradictions between the cultural meanings inherent in seeing oneself as part of a place while also being "dis-placed".

At the same time, the notion of place has acquired a broader meaning for me thanks to the work done with the photovoice techniques and the making of the collages in general. This includes the idea that within contemporary society, place is not defined by physical location but also embodies personal circumstances. As described by Irit Rogoff 1in Terra Infirma (2000), these circumstances may include the reasons for being displaced as well as factors such as gender, class and ethnicity. At times, these factors may overlap in complex ways, making it impossible to create straightforward assumptions regarding who a person is and what their relationship to a place may be (p. 6-8). Rogoff (2000) states: "These are the political and cultural conditions of my life, and, like those of countless others, are determined by migratory, racial, sexual and class locations" (p. 6).

Contemporary Ethnographic Practices

In The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography, Ellis (2004) provides the following definition of ethnography:

> Ethno means people or culture; graphy means writing or describing. Ethnography then means writing about or describing people and culture, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation. The term refers both to the process of doing a study and to the written product (p.38).

Roughly put, an ethnographic study focuses on shared traits within a community. The researcher may be interested in this community for diverse reasons. It could be that he or she belongs to that community or is closely connected to it. Alternatively, the ethnographer could be following a more conservative approach to this practice. In this form of ethnography, the researcher is a complete outsider coming from the hegemonic power that has cast control over the community to be studied. However, due to contemporary processes of globalization, ethnography as a discipline has had to reevaluate its focus of study.

Contemporary societies are slowly leaving colonial structures behind. At the same time many of them embrace multicultural contexts in which the topics of migration, ethnicity and cultural identities are constantly emerging. In the text titled Metaethnography in the Age of Popular Folklore, Anagnostou (2006) acknowledges that ethnographic practice evolved out of colonial establishments which sought to gain control of defeated cultures. However, in many cases, historical processes have moved beyond such political systems. Therefore, ethnography as a discipline needs also to be transformed (pp.385-386). The following statement exemplifies the kind of awareness that this author is prompting ethnographic practices to acquire:

> Though the return is only implicit, we have, perhaps inevitably, come to a full circle here, from the traditional focus in ethnography to the necessity for metaethnography. For the "theoretical capital" of ethnographic subjects not only builds upon local knowledge but also is forged through regionally, nationally, and transnationally circulating circuits of knowledge: media, popular culture, academic discourses, returning immigrants, social and political movements, literature, education, and, one might appropriately add here, popular ethnographies (p. 386).

According to this author, people living in multicultural societies, like that of the United States, experience the need to define cultural identities on a daily basis. It is a practice adopted as a form of self-affirmation as well as a way of defining others (p.382). Anagnostou states: "I direct my exclusive attention to nonprofessional ethnographers who write about their own culture - a category that has received considerable attention in anthropology and folklore - and situate their work in relation to the commodification of ethnicity in the United States"(p.383). Broadly put, this author acknowledges the need for anthropologists to consider the contributions made by these new forms of ethnography and to consider what they are saying about contemporary societies. From my perspective, when Anagnostou is talking about "commodification of ethnicity", he is saying that superficial representations of folklore, for which both insiders and outsiders to the culture may be held responsible, have contributed to the propagation of (often negative) stereotypical images of the most vulnerable groups within such contexts. Regardless of this, ethnographers now have the possibility to analyze popular representations of culture and to generate new educational resources that prevent the "commodification of ethnicity" and/or cultural identity.

Autoethnography is one of these current contemporary ethnographic approaches that responds to the new contexts brought up by global societies. In the following section, I explain my personal take on autoethnography and the educational applications that I intend to explore.

Autoethnography Applied to Studio Practice

My approach to autoethography is informed by Carolyn Ellis' (2004) vision at three different levels. First, my study focuses on my cultural identity. As Ellis states: "Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (p. 37). I use animated collage to explore the cultural legacies embodied by public sites within specific locations in Central Mexico, where I was born and raised. In section 3, I describe the processes involved in the creation of these works. For now, I would like to mention that I think of them as "personal visual narratives" of place. My visual narratives are complemented by texts that incorporate both historical and sociological information about the place, as well as personal memories associated to it. This approach was inspired by Irit Rogoff's lecture titled Exhausted Geographies in the Crossing Boundaries Symposium2, which took place at the Royal Geographical Society in London, 2010. In her introduction, this author uses three different stories in order to introduce what she calls "the geographies of long term conflict" within the Middle East. As I used Wang, Kun Yi and Carovano's (1998) photovoice method to analyze the contents of my digital files, I realized that some of these sites have also been exposed to "long term conflict" as evidenced by the tremendous social deterioration Mexico has suffered within the past 20 years. As a result, without purposely looking for it, my animated collages demonstrate political awareness.

In other words, my narratives include reflections on the effects of the ongoing Drug War to the public life of my country. My animated collages along with their complementary narratives represent two different dimensions of contemporary Mexican cultural identity: 1) my own identity as a Mexican artist/researcher living outside of Mexico (a voice coming within the Mexican diaspora) and 2) the traits of the sites that inspired my collages, which in one way or another, have been influenced by the ongoing social crisis.

Second, if shared with other immigrant adults, the insights gained through my studio inquiry have the potential to transfer to the communal arena. This is consistent with Ellis's (2004) descriptions of what can be done with narratives resulting from an[1] autoethnographic study. This includes educational activities/products that focus on social issues and, in this way, promote transformation among people who have had similar experiences (p. 33). In the case of this particular project, my primary audience would be other Mexican immigrants because my animated collages contain visual references to public sites within Mexico. However, I also believe that anyone who has experienced some form of dislocation may relate to the emotions that I am portraying in these animation projects.

Finally, from Ellis's (2004) perspective, personal narratives may acquire other forms and still achieve the same objective. Referring to the use of visual narratives by educators, she states, "arts-based inquiry experiments with alternative ways to transform what is in our consciousness into a public form that others can take in and understand" (p. 215). This approach is similar to the aspirations of arts-based educational research which Eisner and Barone (1997) describe in the following way: "Arts-based research is engaged for a purpose often associated with artistic activity: arts-based research is meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities. For ABER [Arts-based Educational Research], those activities are educational in character" (p. 95).

Negotiating Cultural Identity

As previously mentioned, my autoethnography focuses on my relationship to Mexican cultural identity. In order to reflect on the meaning of "cultural identity," it is helpful to first define the term "culture." Audinet (2004) suggests that culture has shifted in meaning to better accommodate the needs of our contemporary globalized society. According to this author, the term "culture" now has a much more encompassing meaning than it once had; it not only refers to the habits of appreciating and conducting aesthetic or intellectual activities. It also refers to individual and communal daily habits, religious practices, popular traditions, and so on (p. 10-16). Audinet states:

> It no longer refers to the universal man of classic humanism: the ideal personality who could be considered a "cultural person" thanks to a good upbringing and wellrounded knowledge. On the contrary, the word designates the things ethnology focuses on, that is, human diversity, the multitude of experiences, outlooks, lifestyles and the uniqueness of each people due to their specific modes of existence, representations of the world and values (p. 13).

It is now clear that a culture is made up of many different elements. Furthermore, because these elements are related to communities' daily experiences and interactions with the environment and, amongst each other, cultures are constantly evolving. As I see it, a similar process happens at an individual level. A person is constantly interacting with other people. Hence, people are being continually influenced by their environment. Roughly put, cultural identity refers to the individual experiences that shape a person's character. Nieto (2010) reflects on the relationship as follows:

> Culture includes the beliefs, traditions, rituals, knowledge, morals, customs, and value systems—among other essentials of social life—of groups and of the individuals who form those groups. In its most general sense, then, the term cultural identities refers to the way that individuals or groups define themselves along the spectrum of these elements (p.165).

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2 Rogoff's presentation is posted online. To view the Exahusted Geographies lecture, go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJOP9l0_nbI&feature=player_embedded

This author breaks down culture into individual and tangible elements. Nieto's definition suggests that a cultural identity is determined by the way in which such components add up for each individual.

There is also the concept of national culture, which may also encompass elements similar to those included in Nieto's definition. Dizeminok (2003) describes national culture as "constituted by such elements as: mother tongue (national language), myths and symbols, convictions about ancestry, and a shared selective collective memory of common history, customs in the form of folklore and official high culture" (p. 2). However, even for people who might share the same nationality, their vision of who they are, culturally speaking, may be nuanced. In turn, these nuances are often influenced by personal experiences lived within particular social contexts of class, gender or ethnicity. As proposed in The Third Space, an Interview with Homi Bhabha by Jonathan Rutherford (1990), to talk about national culture in multicultural societies is problematic since there is no longer a unified worldview. In this interview, Bhabha proposes that multicultural societies' educational contexts work with the concept of cultural difference rather than cultural diversity. For Bhabha, the term cultural diversity responds more to a "politically correct" gesture of showing a surface-level tolerance for people who might be different, yet forcing these people to operate within the rules set by the dominant culture. In contrast, the use of the term cultural difference shows openness For Bhabha, it also represents adopting a new area of dialogue or negotiation. In this space, there are no rules set by a hierarchical or pre-established ways of doing. Instead, the interactions are dictated by the differences amongst individuals (pp. 208-209). As a result, making generalizations about cultural identity is not as easy as it often may seem. In other words, each individual may have a very unique way of integrating his or her cultural legacy into their identity. Put in Bhabha's words, "cultures are only constituted by the otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures" (p. 210). He refers to such phenomena as translation (p. 210). Finally, Bhabha believes that both cultural difference as well as the phenomena of translation allow a "third space" to emerge. This is a place that does not necessarily require a physical location, but in which "hybridization" is possible. Bhabha states: "The importance of hybridity for me is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather 'hybridity' to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (p. 211).

In a similar way, traditional views of geography, which focus solely on physical location, are no longer enough to define cultural or national identity. As expressed by Audinet (2004), "geographical reference points clearly no longer suffice. Geography was formerly a way of classifying diversity"(p.19). This author explains that multiculturalism, understood as mixing of cultures, has existed throughout history. Each time it has taken place in a more or less in a similar manner: people migrate from one place to the other in search for a better quality of life. On most occasions, cities are the sites where people of diverse cultural backgrounds co-exist. In this way, it is the people who inhabit the place who create its identity (p. 19).

Situating Contemporary Mexico

This section briefly describes the issues that I became aware of when reflecting on the role played by Mexico within the current global establishment. In order to do that, I find it necessary to start by presenting a basic definition of geography itself. The Encyclopedia Britannica (online) provides a common interpretation of this discipline:

> To most people, geography means knowing where places are and what they are like. Discussion of an area's geography usually refers to its topography—its relief and drainage patterns and predominant vegetation, along with climate and weather patterns—together with human responses to that environment, as in agricultural, industrial, and other land uses and in settlement and urbanization patterns (Britannica Academic Edition, geography).

This is the vision that a non-specialist would have of geography. In contrast, scholars specializing in this field have expressed the need to reformulate the purpose of this discipline. As seen by many, geography may engage with other social sciences with the purpose

of analyzing issues pertaining to globalization and to postcolonial social structures. In the introduction of the book titled Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds, Geography and the Humanities, Daniels, De Lyser, Entrinking and Richardson (2011), contend that geography has become an interdisciplinary practice within the past twenty years. Some of the issues that now can be addressed by contemporary geographic studies include concepts such as: "place, space, mapping, landscape, locality, globalism, environment and region" (introduction, xxvix). They define this new approach as "new geographical sensibilities" that respond to a variety of situations which include postcolonial sociological awareness, environmental concerns, and even the "location of knowledge" (introduction, xxvix). I would like to now extrapolate this vision to some ideas presented by Rogoff (2000). This author's work incorporates new ways to think and to interpret the relationship between cultural identity and place that surpass conventional interpretations of geography. These concepts acknowledge the influences that historical, social and political events may have on a place and its people. In Terra Infirma she refers to locations as sites that "resist conventional views of geography" (p.8). Some examples provided by the author include: "international free cities, no man's land, demilitarized zones, ghettos, red light districts, border areas, etc."(p.8). From my perspective, one would need to work with the "new geographical sensibilities" proposed by Daniels, De Lyser, Entrinking and Richardson (2011) in order to understand how these sites function and possibly why they even exist. In my conversations with Mexican friends and family members living in and outside of my country, many individuals agree that the Drug War has taken over everyday reality. Many think that Mexico is current going through a civil war. However, everyday people have to go on with their lives, pretending that nothing is happening and learning to live in fear. At the same time, while living outside of Mexico, I have also become aware of another trait that makes Mexico an unconventional form of geography. In Canada it is common to hear people refer to Mexico as part of South America. At the start, these comments were misleading. Were they incorrectly interpreting a map? Did they know that Mexico is part of the North American Free Trade Agreement? I soon understood that this way of referring to Mexico did not respond to an actual physical location. Mexico is sometimes classified as South America because of its cultural traits. Mexico does not correspond to the overall image that people in Canada and the United States have of "North American culture".

However, Mexico is not South America. True, Mexico shares many traits with many Latin American countries due to the shared Hispanic influences during our colonial pasts. However, Mexico is physically separated from the majority of these countries; it is surrounded by water on both sides. On the south, it has a thin boundary line separating it from its Central American neighbors, Guatemala and Belize. As a result, Mexico's most influential border interaction is that of the United States. However, cultural differences separate Mexican and Americans in more than one way. Octavio Paz – Mexican recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature— describes these cultural differences in his book titled the Labyrinth of Solitude (1950) in the following way:

> They are optimists; we are nihilists. Only our nihilism is not an intellectual reaction but an instinctive one. Therefore it is irrefutable. Us Mexicans are unable to trust; they are open. We are sad and sarcastic; they are cheerful and humoristic. North Americans want to understand; we want to contemplate. They are active; we like to remain still; we rejoice on our wounds as they rejoice on their creations. They believe in hygiene, in health, in labor, in happiness but maybe they don't know true happiness, which is intoxicating and tornado-like. In the howl of a party night, our voice explodes in lights. Life and death are mixed together. Their vitality is petrified in a smile which denies old age and death but which also immobilizes life3 (p. 22).

In short, the cultural alienation that Mexico experiences as a country located within the North American region makes me think of Mexico as one of those sites the require "new geographical sensibilities" in order to understand its current situation. I also tend to think of Mexico as an orphan, an idea also inspired by Paz's vision of Mexican identity. In Chapter 8 of Labyrinth of Solitude, Paz makes a review of the history of Mexico. This author suggests that Mexico achieved its independence (1821) from Spain but did not rid itself of its colonial ways. We had to go through

another hundred years of internal disputes and wars in which we had to defend ourselves from France's and the United States interventions during the 19th century.

This unstable period apparently ended with the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). After that, Mexican identity began to emerge but it has not quite come to its full potential. Paz suggests that all these wars were our way of cutting off the ties with Spain, France and the United States. For Paz, the mid twentieth century was a time to be alone. This solitude would force us to accept our vulnerability and learn to be individuals who have their own way of thinking and solving problems (p 174). In Paz's mind, this lack of affiliation and state of vulnerability was what made of Mexico an orphan. Nevertheless, he retained an optimistic outlook and expected this would be our motor for developing a stronger and more confident identity as Mexican people. Sadly, what happened after that [2]was not what Paz aspired for. At present, Mexico is a country without direction. Even worse, it is a country that has lost its leadership, a country running the risk of selfdestruction. As I have perceived it from abroad, at the moment Mexico does not have a clear location within the contemporary global establishment. It belongs to North America for regional trade purposes and it is isolated from the rest of Latin America. Perhaps our familiarity with pain and contradiction is the cause of our current social crisis. This crisis has led to the neglect of Mexican educational systems at all levels. At the same time the lack of job opportunities, have led many Mexican people to consider migration as an option for achieving a better quality of life. This was already a reality for Mexican people coming from the most humble rural contexts of Mexico. Many generations have migrated illegally in search of a job in the United States. Others have gone to Canada. At this time, even the middle classes are looking for ways of locating themselves outside of Mexico. This includes myself and many other people my age, who have been unable to find a job that allows them to achieve a secure and peaceful life.

3 Translated to English from the original text in Spanish.

Being a Mexican outside of Mexico

I will now apply the aforementioned visions of cultural identity to the process I have engaged in while exploring my cultural identity as a Mexican person living in Canada. To begin with, I have to look at the multicultural face of Mexico. Mexico has a long history of cultural and ethnical mixing processes. These date back to the start of Spanish colonization in 1521 when the Spanish defeated the Aztec empire. Carlos Fuentes (2000) describes the newly colonized land in the following way: "The Bloodshed of the Conquest flows into a new country that is Indigenous and European- not only Hispanic-thanks to Spain, Mediterranean, Greek, Roman, Arabic and Jewish (p. 12)." This explains why my narratives of place often incorporate elements that reference the hybrid identity of Mexican people. My works are to some degree deconstructions that allow me to observe diverse aspects of the syncretism that created the Mexican culture. In this way, even though my visual narratives are references to place, I also consider them to be reflective of emotional and mental environments.

It is possible that I would not have arrived at the creation of such narratives if I were not currently experiencing physical displacement. In my current geographical location, I have felt the need to look at the legacies that inform my cultural identity while also integrating the influences of Montreal's society. The following statement by Bhabha (1994) reflects on situations like mine:

> Culture as a strategy of survival is both trans-national and translational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the 'voyage out' of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement— now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of 'global' media technologies— make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather

complex issue (p. 247).

Current mobility amongst individuals around the globe makes cultural identity a complex phenomenon that cannot be strictly defined. At the same time, displacement raises issues about whether or not an individual belongs to a specific place. There are conditions that help clarify this issue. Rogoff states: "relations between subjects and places are, in the first instance, refracted through structures and orders of belonging, whether that means state-granted rights or the celebrations of mutual heritages of costumes and traditions" (p. 4). As mentioned before, (E)Motions incorporates digital photos taken from public sites in Mexico into the series of visual narratives (or animated collages) that I am presenting in this site. As I see it, these photographs represent shared or communal values and traditions within Mexican society. However, my actions of printing, cutting, pasting and juxtaposing them, have allowed me to create metaphors that attest to my individual experiences within these contexts. In the following sections, I provide further details of my inquiry process.

The Role of Visual Culture within the (E)Motions Project

The term 'visual culture' has become increasingly popular amongst many disciplines. In fact, there are universities that have developed programs focused on the analysis of visual cultures. Some examples include: Rocherster's graduate program in Visual Culture and Cultural Studies, York University's program in Curatorial Studies in Visual Culture and Goldsmiths' (University of London) Department of Visual Cultures. These programs have developed in response to the proliferation of visual images within the public arena. Some examples could be film productions of different sorts, mass media and advertising as well as popular and vernacular artistic expressions. Gillian Rose (2007) argues that "the use of the term 'visual culture' refers to the plethora of ways in which the visual is part of the social life" (p. 4). As a result, rather than separating these visual expressions from their contexts, visual culture studies aim to analyze the dialogue between images, individuals and context. Thus Sturken (2011) states: "there were numerous factors that contributed to the idea that images should be understood and analyzed across social arenas rather than as separate categories" (Oxford Art Online, visual culture). Arthur Efland (2010) supports the idea that art education should foster critical skills that are able to decipher the meanings embodied by contemporary visual culture. For him, "one purpose of art education as visual culture is to enable individuals to become
actively aware of the seductions and allure of the media as aesthetic phenomena including their power to exaggerate and misrepresent reality" (p.7). Efland's position allows me to present a short account of visual productions related to the Drug War, which, from my perspective, are contributing to the negative constructions of contemporary Mexican identity.

Contemporary Mexican visual culture is permeated by messages of destruction, disruption and degeneration. This includes images of death and crimes committed on a daily basis—and which are disseminated by the local, national and international news. This has contributed to the construction of negative stereotypical images of Mexican people. Furthermore, along with the media, there have been other forms of visual productions that have contributed to the development of a "narco aesthetics" which, to some degree, has come to be the image of contemporary Mexican popular culture. Some of these productions even include film-making projects supported by the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (The National Council of the Arts) like that of El Infierno (Hell) by Luis Estrada (2010). This film was created as a critical statement of Mexican society in 2010, year of the bicentennial of Mexican's independence. However, rather than it being a critical statement, the emphasis put on the "narco aesthetics", from my perspective, celebrates this culture. Similar examples are to be found in entertainment productions such as the TV show produced by Telemundo— television
for the Hispanic population of the United States—based on the novel by Arturo Perez Reverte (2010) Reina del Sur (The Queen of the South), in which the protagonist is a female cartel leader.

Unknown and possibly illegal film companies are also making profit of Mexican Drug War. March of this year, Julián Aguilar, a journalist from the New

York Times, published an article titled Guns, Sex, Drug Cartels, Narco Cinema! Aguilar explains that there is an "underground" industry of low budget "narco films" that do not reach the movie theaters. These films are based on real life events taking place within the Drug War context. According to the reporter, such productions have found an audience in southern Texas (New York Times, US, The Texas Tribune, 2013). Unfortunately, this is not the only site in which narco films are being distributed. During the summer of 2010, I was conducting a workshop on textile collage at the Museo Textil de Oaxaca located in Oaxaca City, famous for its rich artistic and cultural legacies. I asked participants to take photographs of what they thought represented Mexican identity. A group of them went into the market place; they found a stand of these films. As a result, we had a discussion of the way in which images of violence and corruption are permeating Mexican daily life. In short, Mexican people are getting used to being exposed to such stories and imagery. Many probably even identify themselves with them.

As an artist and educator developing a visual arts project, I am aware of the need for clearly identifying the ideas informing my works. My animated collages communicate a vision of my country's reality because they were created with photographs of Mexican public sites. For this reason, I put an emphasis on developing works that reflected the richness and depth of Mexican culture as I have seen and experienced it. At the same time, my animated collages also communicate emotional responses to the physical deterioration of some of these sites due to the ongoing social crisis. My purpose when creating these works was to create a visual discourse that reflected a different expression of contemporary Mexican identity. As I see it, this expression is closer to that of the average Mexican than to that of the drug cartel leaders, organized crime, armed groups of diverse sorts, and politicians who have taken over the mainstream communications.

Developing Animated Collages

As my doctoral studies develop, I have progressively become more confident in engaging with several mediums (arts) and methods (qualitative research) within a single research project. (E)Motions brings three of these together: photovoice, collage, and basic stop motion animation techniques. I came to the term "animated collage" in order to technically define the final visual products of my studio inquiry. I used animated collages in order to communicate a story as well as the emotions associated to it. The latter was extremely important to me. One of the most challenging situations that I have to face as an international student in Montreal is being unable to communicate my feelings to the people that surround me. This is partly due to the language limitations (which include French and English) that I have to face on a daily basis. However, I would say that my feelings of alienation for the most part are marked by the existing cultural differences between me and the other people living in Montreal (this includes Canadians as well as national identities). The studio has been the space where I am able to look at feelings of longing and alienation, and at some point, come to peace with them.

Generally speaking, my process involved first using the photovoice method by Wang, Kun Yi and Carovano (1998). After having identified the themes represented by those images, it was very easy to connect them to personal memories associated to those places. The narratives complementing the animated collages were created following Wang, Kun Yi's and Carovano's (1998) approach as well.

My Use of Photovoice

Butler-Kisber (2010) provides a thorough description of what can be done with photovoice methodologies in Chapter 8 (Photographic Inquiry) of her Qualitative Inquiry book. She mentions that the origins of photovoice took place in the mid 1990's. Butler-Kisber's (2010) description of the history and purpose of photovoice contends that this practice:

> Emerged in the mid-1990's and has strong links to social action and the field of engaged journalism. (…) this process uses photographs, often taken by participants, to elicit responses and local understandings of particular phenomena with a view to facilitating social change at both the grassroots and policy-making levels (p.127).

As I see it, both visual culture studies as well as photovoice represent logical manifestations of a visually oriented society. Both practices share a critical spirit that acknowledges the communicational potential of images. However, photovoice has a more socially engaged orientation. Photovoice is actively seeking a transformation of reality through participatory and collaborative research projects that may bring improvements to a community within a reasonably quick timeframe. An example of this would be that of Wang's, Kun Yi's and Carovano's (1998) photovoice project with Chinese female populations. Their purpose was to find ways in which they could support the women from Yunnan (one of the poorest provinces of China) in the process of "better understanding their reproductive health needs" (pp. 78-79). Each participant took 36 photographs that represented their everyday life. They were given a questionnaire to fill out once their images were taken. These authors provide a list of questions included in the mentioned questionnaire: "What do you see here? What's really happening here? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this problem or this strength exist? What can we do about this? (Wallerstein, 1987)" (p.80). The next step in this methodology was to form small groups in order to discuss the images and to create stories pertaining to them. The final step consisted of identifying issues and themes that were of concern for these women (p. 80).

During the winter of 2011, I visited locations in Central Mexico that formed part of my memories of growing up. When taking these photographs, I had the following question in mind: What is my connection to this place? Once having created my archive, I used Wang et al.'s (1998) photo reflection sheet to analyze a selection of these photographs. When reviewing the images, it was easy for me to identify the life experiences that I associated to the places depicted in them. Many of them included exposure to Mexican folk arts, which during my formative years in Mexico was much more common. This means that the visual culture that I was exposed to when growing up consisted of Mexican traditional crafts, garments and food and not the narco productions previously mentioned. This explains why most of the sites visited included local market places where I could find these expressions of Mexican visual and material culture. However, I also found atmospheres charged with discomfort, stress, fear and anxiety. Thus some of the themes that emerged from photovoice analysis included: 1) changes in Mexican folk arts, 2) chaotic and improvised environments, 3) environmental awareness, and 4) identity crisis.

My Use of Collage

Collage is the key concept in this research project. From a contemporary art practice perspective, it is possible to approach collage in a very open-ended manner. It is a term that is compatible, if not interchangeable, with terms such as mixed media or multi-media. Kathleen Vaughan (2009) defines collage as " an original composition in any media that brings that brings together previously independent components, encompassing associated creative forms such as montage (associated with time-based media) and assemblage (linked to threedimensional work)" (p. 13). The obvious connection is my turning of collage into a time-based art piece. Where research is concerned, my approach to collage has been inspired by one of Lynn Butler-Kisber's (2010) approaches to collage. In Qualitative Inquiry, she introduces the concept of "collage as reflection": a reflective practice that may lead to engaging thought processes and "has the advantage of producing a web of connections instead of linear ones" (p. 105). Furthermore, the actual idea of turning a collage piece into an animation was inspired by the article titled Working Towards Meaning: the Evolution of an Assignment by James (2000). This author describes her approach to photomontage within a high school art class setting. James (2000) required her students to keep a journal of the process of creating a photomontage in order to familiarize students with the concept of metaphor (p.157). Writing made them become aware of the aesthetic decisions that they made every step of the way through the selection of images and the symbolic meaning that they gave to these (p.158). My way of initiating a reflective process similar to journaling was to scan every step taken in the creation of my first collage. The next step was to link all the digital files together in order to create a sequence. This allowed me to depict the transitions between diverse states of mind and/or emotions as they emerged while working on

my collage. Finally, the actions of printing, cutting, tearing, segmenting and putting images together are metaphors of the experiences that we have to go through in life and which shape our identities.

Conclusion

The (E)Motions project is an arts-integrated self-study that combines collage and photovoice and basic stop motion animates in order to explore the relationship between cultural identity and place. Generally speaking, the theoretical framework of this research project involves reviewing leading authors in the fields of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), cultural identity (Bhabha, 1994), visual culture (Rose, 2007 and Efland, 2010), and geography (Rogoff, 2000). Because this is a self-study, (E)Motions focuses on issues pertaining to contemporary Mexican cultural identity. However, further educational research applications include informal and/ or community-oriented educational settings within North American multicultural society. The population that may benefit from this study would be working immigrant adults. In such contexts, photo-voice and collage making may be approached as elicitation sources (Butler- Kisber, 2010).

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