THE WORLDWIDE 'COCOON': 'ALT [C]LIT' NARRATIVES AND POSTHUMAN (INTER) CONNECTIVITY

LA 'CRISÁLIDA' MUNDIAL: LAS NARRATIVAS DE LA 'ALT [C]LIT' Y LA (INTER)CONECTIVIDAD POSTHUMANA

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Abstract

This article explores notions of womanhood and youth through new paradigms that stimulate the proliferation of novel posthuman identities and subjectivities. The Internet becomes the juncture where these material and virtual realities exist. Understanding communication as a continual flux of digital data that constantly crosses the boundaries in and out of the World Wide Web, I set out to examine how contemporary writing and literary forms, in particular the poetry of 'Alt [C]Lit' authors such as Ana Carrete, Sarah Jean Alexander and Mira Gonzalez, are redefined by mediated new technologies, such as social media, and how this influence also converges with making visible new epistemologies about identity, gender and human relations nowadays.

Keywords: interface, interconnectivity, gender studies, posthumanism, North American poetry.

Resumen

Este artículo busca explorar nociones de feminidad y juventud a través de nuevos paradigmas que estimulan la proliferación de nuevas identidades y subjetividades post-humanas. Internet se convierte en la coyuntura en la que estas realidades tanto materiales como virtuales existen. Entendiendo la comunicación como un continuo flujo de datos digitales que constantemente cruza los límites dentro y fuera de la red informática mundial, me gustaría proponer cómo la escritura y las

formas literarias contemporáneas, en particular la poesía de las autoras 'Alt [C] Lit' como Ana Carrete, Sarah Jean Alexander, y Mira Gonzalez es definida por la influencia de nuevas tecnologías mediadoras, como las redes sociales, y cómo este hecho confluye con la visibilización de nuevas epistemologías sobre identidad, el género y las relaciones humanas hoy en día.

Palabras clave: interfaz, interconectividad, estudios de género, post-humanismo, poesía norteamericana.

1. Introduction

In the American TV sitcom *Broad City,* the episode "The Worldwide Bloodstream" shows protagonists Abbi and Ilana spending a whole day inside their apartment, so absorbed by their computers that they do not realise how much time they have spent doing this activity. The different sequences of this first scene parody the amount of time people usually spend in front of either their computers or mobile phone screens, procrastinating by endlessly browsing gossip websites, watching viral videos, searching through mobile dating apps, and so forth. After a while, both Abbi and Ilana return to reality after their phone alarms sound. They are shocked to realise that they are still together in the same room: in other words, they became so immersed in the Internet that they did not remember that so much time had passed, sharing the same space inside the darkness of their living room. After such a shocking moment of awareness, Ilana exclaims, "We were so tapped into the worldwide bloodstream, we fell into the literal Matrix" (Glazer and Jacobson 2015). This quote refers to the title of the episode, "The Worldwide Bloodstream": the creators of the series, by the using the word "bloodstream", instead of the more common expression "Web", suggests an anatomical-biological connection to the virtual, through which we navigate digitally and get mentally trapped as a form of dissociation from our materially corporeal existence, as if the World Wide Web sucks our lives dry like an immaterial vampire-like entity.

Using concepts from cultural anthropology and cyberfeminist theory, such as Remedios Zafra's *(dis)connected room* (2012) and *netianas* (2005) and Paula Sibilia's *post-organic man* (2006), Gilles Lipovetsky's *global screen* (2009) and the social problematics of *hikikomori*'s isolation, this study aims to expose how online 'Alt Lit' poetry reflects current trends in society and culture, particularly in the United States. Additionally, this research will explore how these social and cultural influences impact the production of literature and other artistic artifacts which cross the boundaries between the Cartesian dichotomies of the material and the virtual, the human and the artificial, the mind and the body and the like. Moreover, I would like to explore how these dichotomies blur their limits and

question the very notion of difference and binary systems. To do so, I will use an interdisciplinary and comparative approach in which the visual works of artists Tetsuya Ishida, Polly Nor and Laura Callaghan will be drawn into conversation with the poems from Alt Lit authors such as Sarah Jean Alexander, Ana Carrete and Mira Gonzalez. I have included these visual works as part of the online cultural background that inspires the poetic work of 'Alt [C]Lit' authors.

The works of Alt [C]Lit poets are an example of the paradoxical position of Millennials as a liminal generation lingering between the material reality and a virtual existence that both connects them to a world while isolating Millennials from it. Alt [C]Lit is a concept first used by Australian writer Emmie Rae in a 2014 article about the rise and fall of Alt Lit, a community of self-promoting writers and independent editors who wrote about Internet culture and literature during the early 2010s. As a result of numerous sexual-abuse scandals and accounts of sexist attitudes among prominent male figures of the community, female writers decided to split and form an independent community of only female writers, poets and editors, currently known as Alt [C]Lit. This article includes the poems of the most representative Alt [C]Lit poets such as Ana Carrete[1] (*Baby Babe,* 2012), Sarah Jean Alexander[2] (*Wildlives,* 2015) and Mira Gonzalez[3] (*I will never be beautiful enough to make us beautiful together*, 2013). Their work has been published in online and printed zines, such as *Shabby Doll House* (2012), founded and edited by Lucy K. Shaw[4] (*WAVES,* 2016) and Sarah Jean Alexander; and *Illuminati Girl Gang* (2011-2014), which was curated by Gabby Bess[5] (*Alone With Other People,* 2013), another poet associated with the Alt [C]Lit sphere. A close reading of their works of poetry will be employed in this paper to analyse, illustrate and problematise the paradox of isolated living in a hyper-connected society that relies heavily on both the immaterial and the ephemeral of the virtual.

2. A Room of Their Own: Interconnectivity and Isolation in Internet Communities

The room —either a living room or a bedroom— has become the nexus between that which is virtual and reality, connecting our private lives with the projection of our existence into the digital. As Zafra claims, the concept of a "connected room of one's own" theorises the impact of the 'screen' as the 'quintessential window' through which "the room oscillates between the double dimension of *space* and *place*" (2012: 480, emphasis in original), reminding us of Augé's concept of "non-places" (1996) as temporary intersectional spaces for anonymous human relations in constant movement. But Zafra goes a step further by suggesting that the 'room' conditions the formation of alternative and constantly updating subjectivities

outside the traditional social spectrum by creating "bonds of belonging" instead of excluding through "social networking". The room, according to Zafra, will be "a concrete place because it contains memories", where we can "build an identity" through "virtual routes and margins" (2012: 480) that make us stay connected and return to that particular online place.

An example of how enclosed domestic spaces, identity and online lives are radically intertwined is the figure of the *hikikomori*. In Japan, *hikikomori* often deal with their loneliness by opting out, like hermits, totally withdrawing into their rooms. A group of sociologists have argued that the existence of such isolated and anti-social people has been stimulated by the manifold ways in which online media technologies enable individuals to lead a normal life alone, "making it possible to live without going out" (Kato et al. 2017: 209), which makes isolation more feasible and accessible to anyone. It seems that Kato finds a reason to explain this phenomenon directly: the addiction produced by technology becomes a kind of soothing coping mechanism to face the emptiness created by real or imaginary social withdrawal. However, Japan is not the only nation that has developed this social problem due to the omnipresence of media technologies in our daily routines all over the world. According to a report from *YouGov*,[6] the sense of loneliness felt by US Millennials is rated as higher than previous generations: "[…] they have no acquaintances (25% of Millennials say this is the case), no friends (22%), no close friends (27%), and no best friends (30%)" (Ballard 2019). The study also states that there are a series of factors that contribute to this inability to bond with other people: one of these factors is "shyness (53%)" whereas a 27 percent of Millennials claim not to need friends at all or have "any hobbies or interests" to share with a particular community of friends (Ballard 2019). This has recently increased because of the social distancing imposed by most governments around the globe since the COVID-19 pandemic.

These new forms of social isolation were also depicted by Japanese artist Tetsuya Ishida (born in 1973, Yaizu) in an image described as follows by the Gagosian art gallery:

> The work depicts a young man —perhaps a likeness of the artist— seated at a computer. In place of a mouse, a disembodied finger attached to a black wire points toward a square hole in his desk, from which a minuscule staircase leads downward into darkness. The subject's spine has sprouted branches, which burst through his T-shirt, and he seems to be turning toward us as if to speak, with an expression that is part dismay, part resignation. (Gagosian 2022)

This image can be associated with that of the *hikikomori*, the one that *Broad City* also brilliantly depicts: the physical disintegration of the anatomical body, which is virtually absorbed by a liminal space, specifically the online realm. Like Ishida's

painting of a robot-man, a hybrid humanoid made up of ears morphed into a mobile phone while carrying on his shoulder a man dressed in white, working impassively on his computer (Ishida 1996). Therefore, the priority of the world going on behind our computer screens is what Lipovetsky described in *The Global Screen* as "screencracy", which is defined as "a flow of images that transforms the hypermodern individual into *Homo pantalicus* […]" (2009: 270, my translation).[7] As he argues, due to the technological shift the Internet has brought into our lives, "there is a will of the subjects to take over the screen and the tools of communication" (274, my translation).[8] Hence, the boundaries between material and virtual communication are 'decentralized' (273) and have been appropriated by users by becoming a by-product of individual expression.

Sibilia speaks about the *post-organic man* as the new humanistic ideal to transcend this fleshly prison-(cell), as Socrates once referred to the body in Plato's *Phaedo*, and how this new paradigm has replaced the concept of the hypermodern man. Finally, the soul —our subjectivity— has found a way to eliminate the burden of its bodily existence at least momentarily by employing the virtual. This is what Sibilia argues in the following extract: "As it happens in the 'angelic' tendencies of the cyberculture and tele-informatics, with their proposals of the immortal mind through artificial intelligence and the overcoming of the physical space through the virtualisation of the bodies in the data network […]" (2006: 118, my translation).[9] As she explains further, the quest for the hypermodern man is to search for the "ethereal and eternal 'essence'" by employing "artificial intelligence and biotechnologies" that contribute to "cut off life by separating it from the body" (118, my translation).[10] This is what Deleuze and Guattari defined as the "body without organs": "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the fantasy, significance, and subjectification as a whole" (2005: 151). This form of disembodying the mind —our subjectivity— from its fleshly carcass, responds to this accelerating form of identity formation online. The battle between the mind and body has intensified in recent years due to the proliferation of various technologies, including biological procedures and the expansion of the Web, through which this Cartesian dichotomy has been exploded to unimaginable limits: plastic surgery; Photoshop programs; Snapchat, Instagram and other app filters; and so on. As Sibilia puts it, the "technologies of the virtual and immortality" are affecting our "subjectivities and bodies" since the first ones have created a "new way of understanding and living the limits of space and time" (2006: 68, my translation).[11] Since time and space have been redefined by these innovative technologies, we are still reconfiguring our notions of being and living in the current times, which are determined by hectic, fast-paced developments which are surpassing, somehow, our human abilities to cope with reality.

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3. Alt [C]Lit Poetry: The Netiana Paradox and Lyrical Virtuality

As described above, the traditional notions of positioning oneself in space and time have been dramatically challenged by the emergence of virtual realities, which proliferate the online sphere. This is what Sarah Jean Alexander (1988, Baltimore) melancholically proposes in the poem "You by way of me" (2015). The title of the poem suggests that a connection established between people is conditioned by our positions regarding others. Locating the body in both time and space is determined by the hypervisual, as stated in the following lines:

> If you look at the moon at midnight
> And I look at the moon at 7 PM,
>
> We will be on the opposite sides of the Atlantic
> Staring at the same spot in space. (2015: 32)

In the lines above, Alexander points out that the dematerialisation of bodies does not imply a disconnect with our position in space and time, but an expansive possibility for transgressing the very notions of subjectivity and engaging with others. The time zones stated in "at midnight" and "at 7 PM", which make two people "look at the moon", from "the opposite sides of the Atlantic" (32) are a clear allusion to the "abstraction of existence" that Lipovestky points out in *The Global Screen*, which originates from the "advanced process of derealization" at the same time that "a decorporalized and desensualized universe" (2009: 276, my translation)[12] is expanding as a result of how the body stops being a reference for reality and material existence. As Alexander suggests in her poem, people prefer interacting through a screen, a reference that is implied in the line "staring at the same spot in space" (2015: 32). This line acknowledges that one's presence online has become the epitome of existing: we are stared at, therefore we exist; as if Alexander twists into contemporary terms Descartes' famous lines. In the purest Cartesian sense, our subjectivities transcend our bodily existence in ground-breaking ways. But, at the same time, the voice of the poem is aware of how this can exponentially become a threat, as it follows:

> No one ever tells you to stare at the sun.
> That would be dangerous. It would hurt too much
>
> But if we are being honest with each other,
> Isn't this supposed to? (2015: 32)

At this point in the poem, Alexander seems to be reflecting on one of the primary effects that Alt Lit literature attempts to achieve through writing: showing how the Internet allows the artificial performativity of what A.D. Jameson calls 'New Sincerity', which consists of a simulated display of honesty on behalf of the author; honesty being understood as "the illusion of transparency, of direct communication [...] *by means of artifice*" (Jameson 2012). Considering that Alt Lit is a literary movement that originated in a highly artificial medium —that of the Internet— its authors long for the authenticity and naturality which is currently missing from social media, and actively react against the literary legacy of postmodern irony and cynicism.

In Alexander's poem, the "sun" stands as the metaphor for illuminating as a means of achieving truth, as Plato stated in his allegory of the cave: "The ascent for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible; then you will own what I surmise; since that is what you wish to be told. […] In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness" (Plato 1941: 231). As Alexander also states in her poem, honesty, understood as one's truth, can "be (so) dangerous" for even others that "it would hurt too much" (2015: 32). This means that revealing our true, naked, honest selves can potentially harm others while this form of revelation of oneself inflicts pain on oneself. That is why our online persona is just an idealised projection of the self: the truth is always too ugly to be freely and openly revealed to others, because it may cause pain in an uncontrolled and unexpected way. According to Han, these new media and forms of communication "dismantle" the "relation with the different", since the processes of "virtualization and digitalization" make any real opposition "disappear eventually" (2017: 43, my translation).[13] With the Internet, mediated phantasies are closer to becoming our immediate reality.

In the chapbook *Internet Girls* (2014) by Ana Carrete (1988, San Diego), which was also published in the Alt [C]Lit magazine *illuminati girl gang* (vol. 4 2014), one can find the prototype of what Zafra called *Net(i)Ana(s)*. This is a generation of "posthuman and immaterial" women, an "alternative theoretical figuration of the Internet subject" that transgresses "the frontiers of gender, class and race" and "creates new questions on ways of being and relate to the online universe" (Zafra 2005: 23, my translation).[14] What Zafra tries to explain is that the virtual world has opened the door, at least theoretically, for exploring subjectivity and finding ways of subverting realities through the new languages available on the Net. These new forms of construction of the immaterial are directly connected to the production of the "immaterial", "desire", "meaning" and "affection and emotivity" according to Zafra (2005: 148). Similarly, at least in the first lines of this long poem in the form of a chapbook, these "internet girls" Carrete speaks about are similar to

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the ones Zafra calls *netianas*, since both terms allude to the creation of affective networks through the virtual medium:

> and hello hi internet
>
> girls
>
> come to mama
>
> haha just thought
>
> about deleting that
>
> and typing 'cum 2
>
> mama' instead but
>
> whoa that's dumb
>
> just kidding hey sup
>
> what is shaking
>
> internet girls […] (Carrete 2014: 1)

What makes Carrete's poem so relevant for this analysis is that she acknowledges that girls conform to a relevant group of participants in the online sphere. Also, it is interesting to notice that the language employed is like that used in Internet chat rooms or apps, which is evident in the use of informal terms: "hi", "mama", "cum", "sup"; and exclamation words like "haha", which expresses laughter; "whoa", which shows surprise; and "hey", which is used to draw someone's attention. This kind of language is typical of conversations, which have now been translated into digitised textual formats, through instant messaging conversations, which attempt to reproduce discourse phonetically by these exclamations and try to imitate spoken expressions. This creates a sense of spontaneity and improvisation that is intensified using the apparent lack of content in sentences and the irrelevant triviality depicted through them, mimicking a daily-life conversation. This artificial display is directly connected to Jameson's claim on Alt Lit New Sincerity, which depicts the poet as a real person in an artificial context such as the online one. At the same time, the lines "hey sup/ what is shaking internet girls" (2014: 1) show a need to connect with others, a need to reach out to someone like her in the immense vastness of the World Wide Web: a group of girls bonding that reminds one of the importance of human relations, even when these are transformed by the mediation of the Internet in our daily lives, as well as in our intimate interactions.

It can be said that the "internet girls" that Carrete speaks about in her poem have an identity of their own, which can be associated with or even included in one of Zafra's *netianas*. This is because "the visual-digital" has become a "new

power location, connected to the body as an inscription field of socio-symbolic codes which converges with the machine" (Zafra 2005: 23, my translation).[15] Therefore, these digital media make gender a more complex construction which is mainly developed in an online context (2005: 22-23). According to Jaquet-Chiffelle and his group of researchers, contemporary identities are a complex topic to deal with since the proliferation of new subjectivities online has affected the way one perceives a subject: "On the Internet, it can be hard to know if the entity we are interacting with is of flesh and blood, or only digital. We are now facing a complex reality both in the 'real' world and in the information society. We have to deal with subjects acting behind masks" (2009: 78). For this very reason, their research on the *polymorphous* nature of contemporary identities is categorised into two main ones: "physical" and "virtual (or abstract)" entities (80). Also, Jaquet-Chiffelle's study points out the conceptualisation of the "mask" as role-playing through which "virtual persons" (82) perform and even develop an alternative identity parallel to their material presence.

How language is displayed by users on the Internet is also an important point to consider when one reads Carrete's works. In another of her self-published chapbooks, *Why Fi* (2014), there is the poem "404 NOT FOUND", which is full of Internet imagery, and perfectly poeticises the hybrid condition of the postmodern individual, a sort of prophecy turned into reality: the dystopian fantasy that Haraway wrote about in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, originally published in 1984. In Haraway's text, the cyborg identity is presented as a "creature in a postgender world" (2016: 8) that transgresses the thin boundary between human and animal and gracefully sneaks out of the "distinction between animal-human (organism) and machine" (11). Ethereal, invisible, cryptographic, the cyborg identity becomes an alternative future to the collapsing totalitarian-identity system we remain immersed in now. As Haraway argues, the "informatics of domination" is implicit in the transition from "an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system — from all work to all play, a deadly game" (28). This cyber-hybridisation of the organic with robotics is reminiscent of the paintings mentioned in the previous section by Ishida, whose work is full of examples of the mechanisation of human beings for the benefit of capitalistic exploitation and repression: workers are represented as isolated machines that repeat routines and working processes until exhaustion. In the poem "404 NOT FOUND", Carrete displays computing's dominion over Millennials' existence as how computers function, as it is shown at the beginning:

> open a tab and type loading
>
> turn airport off
>
> page fails

turn airport on

loading my love life on the internet

chemicals happening getting excited about the world

wide web that cocoons me

cosy warm wide web

long silky envelope (2014: 4)

The language employed mixes Internet terminology with lyricism to make the following statement: the boundary between the virtual world and the real one is becoming blurry. The pull of the online world is so strong that the average amount of time a person spends in front of a computer with Internet access has been increasing over the years. According to many reports, people use social media an average of "more than six hours a day", according to a report made by Hootsuite and We Are Social (Jiwani 2019). In this sense, one can remark on the extreme importance the Internet has on people's lives. The Internet's influence on our way of understanding the world and how we interact with it are closely connected at the same time. The title itself, "404 NOT FOUND", refers to an HTTP standard response code indicating that the client could not communicate with a given server. Still, the server could not find what was requested: it usually appears when a user attempts to follow a broken or dead link. This phenomenon is exactly what happens in the poem, which describes in detail many people's routines when getting in front of their computers or mobile devices: "opening a tab". A "tab" is a computer interface used for navigating web pages, and where you "type" a web address for "loading". But the speaker playfully types "loading", disabling the airport connection to have access to a wireless signal; nonetheless, the "page fails" (Carrete 2014: 4). Then, the poet describes the process of enabling the airport connection again, which is switching off the Internet connection. In this sense, the poem leads us toward a stream of consciousness in which the poetic voice reflects on Internet addiction as if it were a toxic verbosity of intimacy. This linguistic display of our intimacy is connected to how people feel comfortable making their personal lives public through various online media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter.

As Mira Gonzalez (1992, Los Angeles) co-authored *Selected Tweets* (2015) with Tao Lin, one of the big names in the Alt Lit scene, early social media was an unspoiled territory for experimenting with first-person narratives about one's life with the expectation, and even fear, of not being attractive enough to engage the audience: "I'm already confused as to what I'm supposed to tweet about. My life isn't interesting" (Gonzalez 2015: 2). This is supposed to be the first

tweet with which Gonzalez started her official Twitter account in February 2010. Nevertheless, she uses this first tweet as the introduction to her collection *Collected Tweets*. This example shows how the autobiographical and the use of social media as a literary medium converge to reinforce the display of New Sincerity in the Alt Lit movement.

This need for authenticity seems to be a nonsense motivation that fills the actual need to share whatever belongs to the real world and our personal lives across the World Wide Web, as it is stated in Carrete's poem: "loading my love life on the internet/ chemicals happening getting excited about the world" (2014: 4). Afterwards, the voice compares the Internet to a "cocoon", which can be interpreted as the comparison to a spider that weaves their webs to lure their victims, and then captures them by wrapping them with silk, forming a cocoon: "long silky envelope". This predatory and captivating effect the Internet has on the poet is compared to the effects that Stockholm syndrome has on its victims. This effect is reflected in the line "this short envelope that protects me from spam" (4). The protective "short envelope" embodies how the Internet makes her feel, and this is also described as "cosy warm". This image of the World Wide Web as a cocoon that traps you like the spider web catches its prey reminds one of "Stuck on You" (2015) by Polly Nor (1989, London), in which evil red tentacles reach out from a computer screen to rock a floating body that holds a phone in her hand, symbolising our emotional co-dependency with technology and that which is virtual. This shows the attraction that the Internet world exerts on people. "Spam" has some connotations apart from being the unsolicited emails people receive every day, like certain viruses or bacteria that are sexually transmitted through unprotected sexual practices. This can be deduced from the close position between the words "spam" and "babies" (Carrete 2014: 4), suggesting that the Internet somehow prevents people from having sex in the real world, mainly due to the wide access to pornographic content for free that controls libidinal impulses:

> long or in my case short envelope
>
> short envelope that protects me from spam
>
> and babies are us newsletters i don't have any
>
> babies someone make me unsubscribe
>
> these emails are making me want some
>
> turn airport on and land on my wait
>
> unbutton my tabs
>
> use cursive script on my stomach

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> turn airport on and off and on and off
>
> and on again (Carrete 2014: 4)

The struggle between the real and the virtual is stated in "someone makes me unsubscribe/ these emails are making me want some" (4), followed by enabling the airport connection again and landing "on my wait". These lines seem to refer to people's tendency to be constantly distracted by their mobile phones while waiting for the bus or the train in the "non-places" that Augé mentions. Furthermore, the process of hybridisation between physical and virtual identity turns out to be interpreted as a metaphor for cyber-sex: "turn airport on and land on my wait/ unbutton my tabs/ use cursive script on my stomach" (Carrete 2014: 4). These two lines represent this struggle of constantly living offline and online, compared to the sexual desire of total union of two separate entities: the one between human and the online persona.

Following Zafra's ideas, the mediation of the screen as "an interface" that "liminally join(s) our bodies to online relations" and becomes the "'necessary' appendixes of our habitation in a connected world" (2015: 16). What seems more evident is that Haraway's vision of the hybridisation between the human and cyborg is made by the mediation of computer and mobile devices as platforms through which we are connected. This is what Zafra has described as a need for "participat[ing] in the space that it generates with its own vital experience, committing it in a space that symbolically identifies it, which it considers its own" (2015: 25). Furthermore, Carrete also seems to explore this sickening longing for the virtual to live in her poem "y2k" from *Baby Babe* (2012), in which the author expresses her concerns about the dystopian possibility of the disappearance of technology from our lives as a tragedy:

> if computers stopped
>
> working i would seriously
>
> consider this
>
> masochistic
>
> ongoing desire
>
> and replace
>
> my eyes with marbles (2012: 49)

In this poem, two facts can be analysed: the first one is the possibility of a virtual apocalypse, in which "computers" would undergo another *Year 2000 Problem*

or *Millennium Bug*, also known as "y2k", which consisted of a computer bug associated with the inability of most computer software programs to distinguish between the year 1900 and the year 2000. Carrete employs this computer bug as a metaphor for understanding the emotional dependency that Millennials have on computers and the need to be constantly connected online: "if computers stopped/ working i would seriously/ consider this/ masochistic/ ongoing desire" (49). Carrete seems to establish a parallelism between a "masochistic ongoing desire" (49) and Internet addiction, a fact that is evident in the power dynamics established between Haraway's 'Informatic domination' and the gradual submission of people to it, since, as Braidotti stated, "technology" has become "a material and symbolic apparatus", "a semiotic and social agent among others" (1996: 348) in contemporary societies.

The poem ends with two interesting lines that bring to mind Zafra's concept of *ocularcentrism*: "and/ replace my eyes with marbles" (Carrete 2012: 49). Zafra defines *ocularcentrism* as the way of perceiving and knowing about the world through the domination of the eyes: the power of the visual to validate and interpret reality (2018: 45). As the "machines of *seeing*" allow the possibility of creating a "new form of power over subjects and bodies" (49, my translation),[16] this is actually what is displayed in our digital devices and diverse social media. Zafra names this "online culture", which is defined as "the cohabitation and construction of a *world* and *subjectivity* through the screens in a context of visual excess (image, information, data …)". This results in a new form of "*cognitive* or *informative capitalism*" (39, my translation)[17] that, according to Zafra, is what measures our social and digital interactions throughout the World Wide Web, and particularly evident, in social media networks.

In the poem, Carrete seems to notice the importance of the politics of seeing digital images, of being connected through the eyes to the screen of our devices to consume culture, which is also emphasised in the image included in this book that immediately follows the poem: a blank eye, no pupil with no iris, just a teardrop falling from the lacrimal duct. This conjures the image of Medusa turning her victims into stone, just as the blank screen turns our eyes into "marbles", unable to see outside the digital. Another popular online illustrator, Laura Callaghan [18](1991, Belfast), has portrayed Millennial culture through her colorful and detailed illustrations, like the one described above, in which a girl is surrounded by her laptop, mobile phone and other technological devices. Like Polly Noir's and Callaghan's illustrations, Carrete's image and poem emphasise the impact of technology on younger generations' lives to the point of becoming embodied, as it happens more radically in Ishida's work, as part of the body and the subjectivity, and conditioning how Millennials interact with their environment.

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At this very moment, one can imagine how most Millennial poets populate the Internet as a horde of cyber-spiders, in a way reminiscent of Carrete's poetic image, who, 24 hours a day and all year long, non-stop, weave and spin their texts throughout the Net, hunting readers through their sticky web(s) like predators. At the advent of this digital revolution, Alt [C]Lit's writing has actively contributed to the posthuman strategies of interconnectivity that also influence new realities and epistemologies that result from the proliferation of new subjectivities. Therefore, one cannot still ignore the fact that the intricacies of the Big Web that constitute our immediate socio-cultural legacy make it more than evident that the Internet, and more concretely, online writing, is the legitimate heir(ess) and successor of those (wo)men who spun, weaved, knotted and embroidered their stories, their narratives, their experiences, their emotions into the loom of history, literature and the arts, in the liminal joint between the material and the immaterial.

4. Conclusion: Futurities

Traditional notions of positioning oneself in space and time have been dramatically challenged by the emergence of virtual realities populating the online sphere. With the Internet, mediated fantasies are closer to becoming our immediate reality. Since time and space have been redefined by diverse innovative technologies, we are still reconfiguring our notions of being, living and positioning ourselves in the world. These notions are determined by hectic, fast-paced developments and also surpass, somehow, our human abilities to cope with reality.

As discussed earlier, Alt [C]Lit poets have exposed their concerns as a part of the Millennial generation about the challenges of a society that relies on the virtual in almost every sphere of life. By providing their voices to express themselves in new ways: the simulation of the author's authentic self and honesty through the creation of an online persona, as it happens in Sarah Jean Alexander's poems; or by reproducing and adapting the language employed on social media platforms to experiment with new forms creating narratives about the self, as happens with Mira Gonzalez's tweets. All this poetry, particularly the work by Ana Carrete, exposes the yearning to belong to a community by employing the Internet and its possibilities for socialisation, but also denouncing the dangers behind relying too much on the virtual, as it makes us more dematerialised, displaced and disconnected than genuinely connected emotionally and physically.

Therefore, the use of poetic metaphors concerning Internet imagery has been analysed to describe how this use of the virtual, as a limit of the material and the immaterial, is affecting our notions of identity, for which Zafra's concept of *netianas* will be employed to explore how the Internet subject problematises not

only fixed categories of being, such as gender, class and race, but also re-configures posthuman immateriality. Conceiving the screen as a liminal interface that connects our corporeal materiality to the virtuality of human interactions, as Zafra claims, how mediation works will be presented as a key element to understand the Alt Lit poetry in the 'connected room(s)' that we all inhabit nowadays.

Notes

1. Born in 1986.

2. Born in 1987.

3. Born in 1992.

4. Born in 1987.

5. Born in 1992.

6. YouGov is an international research firm of data analysis on public opinion: <https://es.yougov.com/>

7. "[...] entre la pantalla tamaño sello y la megapantalla gigante circula sin cesar una flota de imágenes que transforma al individuo hipermoderno en Homo pantalicus e instaura una pantallocracia cuyo poder temen ya algunos".

8. "[...] una voluntad de los sujetos de reapropiarse de las pantallas y los instrumentos de comunicación".

9. "Como ocurre en las tendencias 'angélicas' de la cibercultura y la teleinformática, con sus propuestas de inmortalidad de la mente mediante la inteligencia artificial y de superación del espacio físico a través de la virtualización de los cuerpos en las redes de datos [...]".

10. "[...] proyectos como los de la inteligencia artificial y las biotecnologías revelan sus frágiles cimientos metafísicos, que cercenan la vida al separarla de una "esencia" etérea y eterna".

11. "Las subjetividades y los cuerpos contemporáneos se ven afectados por las tecnologías de la virtualidad y la inmortalidad, y por los nuevos modos que inauguran de entender y vivenciar los límites espaciotemporales que estas tecnologías inauguran" (emphasis in original).

12. "[...] se denuncia el crecimiento de una existencia abstracta, informatizada, sin vínculo humano tangible. Conforme el cuerpo deja de ser el asidero real de la vida, el horizonte que se perfila es el de un universo fantasma, un universo descorporeizado y desensualizado".

13. "También los nuevos medios y las nuevas técnicas de comunicación desmantelan cada vez más la relación con lo distinto. [...] La virtualización y la digitalización hacen que lo real que opone resistencia vaya desapareciendo cada vez más".

14. "NETIANA: sujeto posthumano e inmaterial que n(h)ace en Internet. Figuración teórica alternativa del sujeto en red. Ficción política que rebasa las fronteras de género, clase y raza y que sugiere nuevas preguntas sobre las formas de ser y de relacionarnos en el universo on line".

15. "En su deriva por el territorio Internet, esboza nuevas preguntas y desafíos feministas que se acercan a lo visualdigital como a una nueva localización del poder, al cuerpo conectado como a un campo de inscripción de códigos sociosimbólicos que converge cada vez más con la máquina [...]".

16. "[…] las máquinas de ver crean un nuevo mundo, mejor dicho, un nuevo poder sobre los sujetos y cuerpos en el mundo".

17. "Este escenario, al que llamaré cultura-red, viene definido por la convivencia y construcción de mundo y subjetividad a través de las pantallas en un contexto excedentario en lo visual (imagen, información, datos …). Contexto caracterizado en un marco donde conviven formas de capitalismo cognitivo o informacional con otras formas de economía social que surgen desde la ciudadanía".

18. Laura Callaghan's website: <https://www.lauracallaghanillustration.com>.

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