

**Vibrant maps. Exploring the reverberation
of feminist digital mapping**

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Resumen

En los últimos años, activistas feministas en varios países de América Latina han creado mapas digitales de feminicidio: las muertes violentas de mujeres relacionadas con el género. La intersección del activismo y el mapeo ha sido explorada desde la academia y por activistas que han abordado la naturaleza performativa, participativa y política de los mapas, y por académicas feministas que han analizado —y promueven— la reivindicación del mapeo y de los Sistemas de Información Geográfica (GIS por sus siglas en inglés) por y para las mujeres y el pensamiento y la acción feminista. En este ensayo, uso el caso del mapa Feminicidio Uruguay y tomo ideas del nuevo materialismo para proponer un novedoso abordaje metodológico para estudiar esta intersección. Un abordaje que podría revelar una comprensión más compleja de la agencia de las *cosas* digitales creadas en la apropiación desobediente de objetos cotidianos, como Google Maps.

Palabras clave:

activismo feminista, mapeo digital, metodología, vitalidad, agencia de las cosas

Abstract

In recent years, feminist activists in various Latin American countries have been creating digital maps of femicide —the gender-related violent deaths of women. The intersection of activism and mapping has been explored by scholars and activists who have addressed the performative, participatory and political nature of mapping, and by feminist scholars who have analysed and advocated for mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to be reclaimed by and for women, and for feminist thinking and action. In this essay, I use the case of the Femicidio Uruguay map and draw from some of the ideas of new materialism in order to put forward a novel methodological approach to study such an intersection. An approach that might reveal more complex understandings of the agency of digital *things* that are created in the disobedient appropriation of everyday objects, such as Google Maps.

Keywords

Feminist Activism, Digital Mapping, Methodology, Vibrancy, Agency of Things

Feminicidio Uruguay

Feminicidio: muertes violentas de mujeres por razones de género. Este mapa es un registro no oficial, y seguramente 25,234 views

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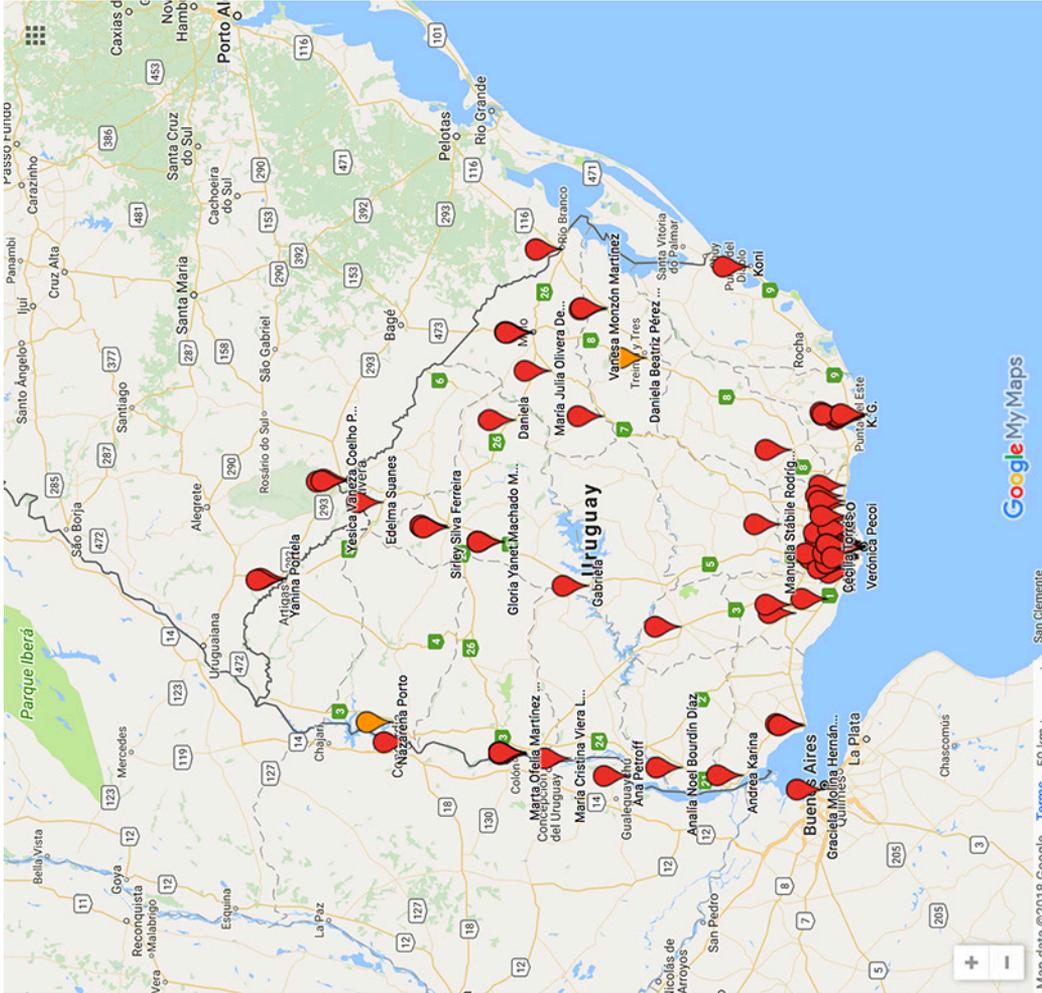


Fig. 1. Feminicidio Uruguay, an interactive Google map showing cases of femicide that occurred in Uruguay since 2015; ongoing (Suárez Val, n.d.).

Feminicidio Uruguay

In 2015 I started registering cases of femicide in Uruguay in the form of an interactive Google map, on which I place a marker every time a gender-related violent death of a woman takes place. Each of the markers shows the name of the woman, the date when the case happened, a short description of what happened and a link to a newspaper article referring to it. Google Alerts e-mails me every time a case is reported in the online Uruguayan media outlets. Occasionally, I have found out about a case from the social media posts of friends or relatives of a victim, or by watching the news on the TV screen in some bar. Since 2017, every time there is a new case of femicide, I take a screenshot of the map centred on the relevant marker. I publish this on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with a link back to the map, and share the posts on several online feminist spaces. Put together, the *Feminicidio Uruguay* map and social media accounts are my contribution to a range of actions coordinated by the wider feminist movement in Uruguay.

When a case of femicide becomes known, the *Coordinadora de Feminismos del Uruguay/Feministas en Alerta y en las Calles* call a street mobilisation to take place a couple of days later, spreading the word by creating a Facebook event or by circulating a 'plaque' with details. A growing number of people have been joining these spontaneously organised protests, taking to the streets of Montevideo to denounce this form of violence. Alongside each protest, the collective *Caída de las Campanas* performs a sonic irruption into public space—an urban intervention that resignifies the sound of bells used in Christian rituals to signal mourning and protest (Delgado, 2016).

Sometimes, feminists coordinating actions in real life (IRL) learn about a new case from the map's updates. Conversely, I have sometimes been prompted to update the map after receiving a notification on my social media feed about a rally or the announcement of a new performance. The various formats and supports for the recorded information about the case, the ensuing performance announcements or calls to action, and the audio-visual and textual records of these events spread via social media, for days after.

Introduction

In recent years, feminist activists in various Latin American countries have been creating digital maps of femicide —the gender-related violent deaths of women¹. As part of my own feminist activism², in 2015 I started a Google Map in order to record femicide cases occurred in Uruguay: Femicidio Uruguay (femicidiouruguay.net). This map is part of a range of long-running feminist actions aiming to raise awareness about the issue, in Uruguay and the region.

There is a lot of *media* being made in —and making— the processes and actions of recording and protesting cases of femicide described above: news reports on media outlets; Google alerts; a version of a Google map, based on a data spreadsheet; screenshot images; a range of social media posts, shares, hashtags, comments and “emoji reactions” (Stinson, 2016); street demonstrations; sound interventions; audio-visual recordings; texts ... Teeming with emotions, intentions and desires, these “vibrant things” (Bennet, 2009), digital and non-digital media disobediently appropriated by feminist activists, acquire a self-propelling vitality, “continually *doing things*” (Bennet, 2009, p.112; emphasis in the original) as they move through human and computer networks and formats, being re-used, re-signified and re-shared.

As a researcher activist, I am interested in asking of all these things, but most particularly of the map: what do you do? Following Deleuze and Guattari, I could ask about the *rhizomic affects* (Fox, 2015, p.306) that are produced by the aforementioned things (and the *rhizomic affects* that these things provide): How does it all work as an *assemblage* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988)? Or, using Karen Barad’s agential realist lens, I could ask: what are the *intra-actions* enacted in, through and by this *entanglement* (Barad, 2007)? Moreover, as a feminist activist, I am especially concerned with understanding how gender discourses and practices intra-act with/in these configurations. In this article, I am interested in thinking through the research methodologies and potential avenues of enquiry that could be put to use to explore the political effects of the emergent materiality of these appropriated media. Thus, in what follows I shall consider the theoretical and methodological approaches that could be applied to studying the gendered repercussions of digital mapping as a strategy employed by feminist activists around the issue of femicide.

The intersection of activism and digital mapping has been explored by scholars and activists who have addressed the performative, participatory and political nature of mapping (Crampton, 2009; Plantin, 2015; iconoclastas, 2016) and by feminist scholars who have analysed and advocated for the reclaiming of mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) by and

¹ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Central America adopts this definition of *femicidio/femicidio* in the Model Protocol for the investigation of femicide/femicidio in Latin-America (Bernal Sarmiento et al., 2014).

² Given my personal involvement as a researcher activist, I use the first person as part of an auto-ethnographic approach, “starting research from [my] own experience” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.741) and “thinking the social through my self” (Probyn, 1993, p.3).

for women, and for feminist thinking and action (Pavlovskaya and St. Martin, 2007, p. 602; Kwan, 2002; Elwood, 2008; McLafferty, 2002, 2005). In this essay, I draw from some of the insights of new materialism (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Latour, 2005; Fox and Alldred, 2015) in order to put forward a novel approach to study such an intersection. This approach aims to reveal more complex understandings of the agency of digital things created by the disobedient appropriation of everyday objects, in this case Google Maps.

I will start by situating my work within a new materialist framework and discussing Jane Bennet's conception of *vibrant matter* (2009). Thinking through Barad's notion of *entanglement* (2007), I shall take up Bennet's "invitation" to turn things over and over until they are made strange (2009, p.vii) and follow not only "the trail of human power[, but also] the scent of a nonhuman, thingly power, the material agency of natural bodies and technological artefacts" (p. xiii). I then will move on to examine how *reverberation* —a term effectively employed by Adi Kuntsman "to describe the affective and political work of violence" (in Karatzogianni and Kuntsman, 2012, p.1)— can be used to track the rhizomic affects travelling and making these trails. I outline Rita Segato's understanding of femicide as *expressive violence* to reveal the term's vibrancy. My intent is to show how these ideas elicit specific questions that could productively be asked of a digital map of femicide: What affective signals reverberate in, from, and through it? Which of these signals are more or less vibrant? Along which trails do these signals flow? What material things, both human and non-human, do they bounce off, pass through or mark? How are they distorted, intensified, muffled, or stopped in these encounters? (Kuntsman, 2012, p.2) To conclude, I propose that, together, these ideas could end up forming the backbone of a methodology to research this type of activism, one that will allow for more complex understandings of the ways in which vibrant digital maps of femicide intra-act in and with the world, producing reverberating affects and effects.

Orientation

Bennet's invitation to *follow* draws on Derrida's sense of the term, which "points to an intimacy between being and following: to be [...] is always to be following [...], always to be in response to call from something" (Bennett, 2009, p.xiii). By now, the map and I are intimately linked, both responsive to the call of a new case of femicide. As being and following blend, I am too close to the map... I am not sure where to begin.

I shall begin with the readings that provided a way into this research. Firstly, two texts on methodology: Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose's *Deleuze*

and research methodologies (2013); and Nick Fox and Pam Alldred's *Inside the Research-Assemblage: New Materialism and the Micropolitics of Social Research* (2015). Coleman and Ringrose's description of methods as performative and as having a role in making reality and making a difference (p.113) points to the similarities and crossovers between research and activism. Fox and Alldred's description of the opportunities offered by "new materialism [...]" to address the concerns of those involved in analysing social research data and applying it either to explain or to change the world" (s.1.5) resonated with my desire to explain *and* change the world, and hinted at the potential of following a new materialist approach, focusing "upon the materiality of affects and of the actions, interactions, subjectivities and thoughts they produce" (s.2.7). Finally, Emma Renold and David Mellor's "multisensory mapping" of gender in the space of the nursery (2013), and more particularly their attention to vibrancy, revealed the productivity of mobilising Bennet's proposals as part of a methodological approach. Through these readings, I started understanding the map itself as research-assemblage —gathering and displaying of data on femicide—, and I also understood that I wanted to *follow* the map.

A useful starting point for my enquiry was Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's understanding of *nomadic science*, described as a science that *follows* (Cobarubias and Pickles, 2009, p.40; Karatzogianni, 2012, p.53). "[F]ollowing is something different from the ideal of reproduction. [...] One is obliged to follow when one is in search of the 'singularities' of a matter, or rather of a material, and not out to discover a form [...] And the meaning of the Earth completely changes" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.372). As well as resonating with Bennet's aforementioned call to *follow*, this idea of following led me into two directions. On the one hand, it pointed towards the way in which the map could be studied: unfolding a kind of research that, "poaching from a variety of systems of thought" (Karatzogianni, 2012, p.53), follows the reverberations within, radiating from and crossing through the map. On the other hand, it signalled towards a question: could the map itself be a *following science*? Or, on the contrary, would it be what Deleuze and Guattari call *royal science*, "involving reproduction, iteration and reiteration" where "[r]eproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of *view* that is external to what is reproduced" (1988, p.372, emphasis in the original)? If the former holds true, how is it so?

First direction: following the research

In order to disrupt my closeness to the map, to intentionally *disorient* myself and become able to *follow*, I took up Bennet's invitation to make things strange. I followed multiple meandering routes, in search of intersections between notions of *vibrancy*, *reverberation* and *feminicide*, as well as between those of *map*, *activism*, *digital media* and *gender*. As I found crossing points, through feminist theories, digital sociology, the sociology of social movements and the sociology of emotions, neuroscience, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), human geography and visual cultures, new ways of thinking about the map emerged.

Vibrancy

"We are vital materiality and we are surrounded by it, though we do not always see it that way."
(Bennett, 2009, p.14; emphasis in the original)

Bennet articulates the notion of *vibrant matter* in an ecological impulse, understanding it as a political project to "promote [...] more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities" (2009, p.x), an attention that might change the ways in which political events are analysed. In her view, *material vibrancy* is not an external force, but rather the intrinsic affective power of all "[o]rganic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects" (p.ii), the capacity of things "to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (p.viii), their efficacy "in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve" (p.20). Vibrancy is the power of things to make a difference (p.32). This positioning of vibrancy in the context of a political project prompted me to think about the ways in which the map –itself a political project–, might be a vibrant thing.

It is important to note that, while the idea of *thing-power* may seem to refer to a stable individuality, Bennet's aim is to "theorise a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (p.20). To do so, she draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *assemblage* to describe agency as distributed, emerging in and from the interaction of a multiplicity of human and non-human vibrant materials (Bennett, 2009, p.21-24). Also worth mentioning is the fact that Bennet also conceives cultural forms, such as gender, as "artifacts [...], themselves powerful, material assemblages" (p.1), by which she understands that they have their own *thing-power*. Discussing the political implications of her proposal, Bennet

suggests that “the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory [be] the (ontologically heterogeneous) ‘public’ coalescing around a problem” (p.108). Here she conceives *public* both as “groups of bodies [I would substitute it for *things*] with the capacity to affect and be affected” (p.101) and “as an ‘intra-action’ of humans and nonhumans, signifying the ‘inseparability of «*objects*» and «agencies of observation»” (Barad, 2001, referenced in Bennett, 2009, p.152;), that is to say, as an *entanglement*. According to this conception, the map, its users and myself, as well as other elements, would be the entangled *public* coalescing around feminicide.

For Barad, “[r]eality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena” (2007, p.140). Barad’s phenomena are entanglements, which, unlike assemblages, are conceived not as a coming together of pre-existing things, but as “highly specific configurations” (2007, p.74) of “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies [that] emerge through their intra-action” (p.33). Entanglements are always implicated in discursive practices enacting different boundaries, properties and meanings (p.139). In this sense, research itself is as an intra-acting discursive practice, because it performs, concurrently with other practices, *agential* cuts that “materialise the boundaries between human and nonhumans, culture and nature, science and the social” (p.140). Essay-as-research entangled with map-as-research entangled with map-in-public.

Barad points out the difficulty of studying something that changes in each intra-action (2007, p.74). As described above, the map is entangled in intra-actions with/in many things, always (in) a “process of mediation” (Kember and Zylinska, 2010, p.2). Some things appear more human: feminist activism; gender and feminicide as practices and discourses; media outlets; humans, and human bodies; (gendered) ideas of space and nation. Others appear more non-human, solid and non-solid: the various devices and screens where the map is coded, decoded and displayed; the network routing the data, including mobile towers, WiFi antennas, transatlantic cables; electricity, light and radio waves; Google and Facebook’s algorithms and hardware. Moreover, I personally face the added difficulty of being (at least) doubly entangled with the map, both as a map-maker and as its researcher (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013, p.6).³ Nevertheless, I find it exciting to take up both Bennett’s invitation to attend to vibrancy, thing-power and affects, and Barad’s challenge to responsively attend to intra-action and entanglements, diffractively “reading important insights and approaches through one another” (2007, p.30). As Sybille Lammes writes, “digital mapping interfaces [are] mediators in transformative practices” and, in order to explore their agency, it is important to acknowledge their “thingy-ness”, to conceive them “as neither object nor sub-

³ This essay produces such a specific agential cut. Different cuts of my entanglement with the map would materialise me as woman or as gendered subject, Uruguayan citizen, geek...

⁴ borrow *weird* from Jusasi Parikka's "weird materialities" (Parikka, 2012 cited in Casemajor, 2015, p.10).

ject" (2016, p.5). Through these ideas, the map can be conceived as a vibrant thing, in potentially powerful intra-actions with other human and non-human agencies –including cultural forms such as gender–, as we surround each other, all with our own weird material-discursive vibrancy.⁴

Reverberation

Things that reverberate may have a "continuing and serious effect"
(Oxford University Press; definition of reverberate)

When talking about sound, *vibrant* is synonymous with *reverberant* (Oxford University Press; definition of *vibrant*), so when I came across Adi Kuntsman's work on the term *reverberation* in relation to online violence, I pricked up my ears and I *followed* (2012, p.1).

In her introduction to *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion*, Kuntsman invites us to explore how "digital 'structures of feeling' work together, or side by side, with broader political forces" (Williams, 1977, referenced in Kuntsman, 2012, p.3) and to study the digital using the language that cultural studies, sociology, and feminist and queer theories have put forward to think about emotions, feelings and affect (Kuntsman, 2012, p.4).

Inspired by popular music studies' analyses of urban soundscapes, Kuntsman introduces the concept of reverberation to analyse digital culture. Reverberation is about "*multiple* movements of *multiple* sounds [signals],⁵ coming from *multiple* origins and bouncing off *multiple* surfaces, often simultaneously and in contradiction to each other" (2009, p.234; emphasis in the original). In this sense, it could be described as a rhizomic flow: "branching, reversing, coalescing and rupturing" (Fox, 2015, pp.306-7). Kuntsman opposes reverberation to the notions of "representation, 'narration' or 'impact'" (2012, p.1), seeing it instead as an invitation to attend to the multiple effects involved, over time, as emotions and feelings (or affects) circulate⁶ through "bodies, psyches, texts and machines" (p. 2). Read in Barad's terms, reverberation is a kind of measuring agency (a measure of the multiplication and distribution of affect), its agential cut enabling us to attend to intra-actions between vibrant things, both human and non-human (Barad, 2007, p.348). To me, this means that representation, narration and impacts should be understood as different *measuring agencies*. In this sense, they could be applied as thinking tools, provided one is always aware of the ways in which they co-constitute the object of study, making it appear to have a specific shape and related possibilities for intra-action.⁷

⁵ In Philip Tagg: "Reverberation" is understood here phenomenologically as a continuous series of decreasingly loud signals from the same original source" (1994, p.10; emphasis added).

⁶ Here Kuntsman links circulation to Sara Ahmed's concept of *affective economy* where "affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation" (Ahmed, 2014, p.45).

⁷ This chimes with Rebecca Coleman's suggestion that, while it is not necessary to fully replace the politics of representation model, attention should be paid to "how the workings of power through images have shifted" (2013, p.17).

By keeping this focus on material aspects, I aim to heed Rosi Braidotti's warning against "hasty renditions of the digital web as rhizome[, which frame Deleuze and Guattari's work within] the cult of the inorganic, the celebration of the sublimely fake and the purposefully inauthentic" (2006, pr.2). For Braidotti, "[t]echnology is at the heart of a process of blurring fundamental categorical divides between self and other[, combining] cyborgs, monsters, insects and machines into a powerfully posthuman approach to what we used to call 'the embodied subject'" (pr.3). However, she has also pointed out that such a powerful potential is at the heart of global capitalism's search for profit, through the reverberation of "ever-shifting waves of genderisation and sexualisation, racialisation and naturalisation of multiple 'others'" (pr.4).⁸

Femicide

#MachismoMata

#NiUnaMenos

#TocanAUnaTocanATodas⁹

In her analysis of femicide in Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), Rita Laura Segato, much like Braidotti, argues that neoliberalism produces and reproduces difference "by means of a progressive expansion of hierarchical distances to the point of exterminating some as an uncontested expression of success" (2010, p.87). In this sense, she identifies the murdered women –poor and mestizas– with the emblematic other, who is eminently suppressible (p.87). The shameful impunity for these crimes in Ciudad Juárez is guaranteed by "[t]he extreme asymmetry that results from local elites' unregulated extraction of wealth" (p.84).

In order to elucidate how femicide works, Segato suggests thinking it through a model she developed, whereby rape is understood as a form of *expressive violence*,¹⁰ its end being "the expression of being in control of somebody else's will" (p.75). According to this model, violence speaks its message via two axes. Along the vertical axis, the aggressor evidently addresses his victim; along the horizontal axis he addresses his peers, too: "Those who give meaning to the scene [of femicide] are other men, not the victim" (pp.76-77). Thus, following Segato's model, femicide "results from a commandment arising from the gender structure to guarantee the tribute that qualifies each new member for access to the virile brotherhood" (p.77). In Segato's view, this axial arrangement "is the actual architecture of gender relations" (2006, p.5; my translation). In such an architecture, femicide has its own terrible vibrancy, as women's bodies become the site for the violent reverberation of the communication of masculinity, in its most distorted and intensified expression.

⁸ The intra-actions entangling femicide, feminism and capitalism deserve further exploration, outside the scope of this essay. Several scholars have examined the feedback between femicide, patriarchy and capitalism (see Segato, 2016; Monárrez Fragoso, 2010; Olivera, 2010; Encinas, 2016) while others have also explored and critiqued the "dangerous liaison" (Eisenstein, 2005) between feminism and capitalism/neoliberalism (see Fraser, 2013).

⁹ These hashtags were circulated by the feminist movement in Uruguay in relation to cases of femicide. They translate as "machismo kills", "not one (woman) less", "if they touch one (woman), they touch us all".

¹⁰ Segato developed this model in "La estructura de género y el mandato de la violencia" (2003)

¹¹ As Aleida Luján Pinedo points out, also following Barad, the concept of feminicide is itself co-constituted in its entangled intra-action with concepts such as patriarchy, sex-gender system, sex, gender, woman, violence or gender violence (2015). Such a complexity has engendered debates along multiple lines, whose outcomes I cannot discuss here for reasons of space. For more information about these discussions, see *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010).

¹² After a relentless year of murders and street protests (40 cases were recorded in 2015 and there were actions every month) (Suárez Val, 2015), the term *feminicide* started being used in the Uruguayan media. By way of example, in January 2016, the newspaper *Diario El País* ran the following headline to report the murder of Yenny Chico: “First feminicide of the year”.

¹³ In contrast to the first bill’s punitive approach, the second bill, in line with the UN’s Model Protocol, defines different types of gender-related violence (symbolic, physical, psychological, patrimonial, etc.) to facilitate an integrated approach to eradicating it, including a budget (see *Parlamento del Uruguay*, 2016). Many feminist activists did not support the purely punitive approach, as they thought that such a bill was but a political quick fix (Sputnik, 2017). Activists also called on the parliament to reconsider changes that had reduced the second bill’s original scope (Amnistía Internacional Uruguay et al., 2017).

Yet, vibrancy is also found in the many conversations at local, national and regional levels, taking place across and between the feminist movement and the legislative bodies in Latin America, as they debate the definition of feminicide,¹¹ the specificity of its local manifestations, the pros and cons of writing it into the legislation and the different ways in which it should be approached –they discuss, for example, if the term should cover all violent deaths of women or whether more nuanced classifications should be put in place, as advocated by Segato (2006). In Uruguay, when the feminist movement coalesced and burst into the spontaneous street protests mentioned above –relying on a concerted effort to monitor news, record cases, and spread information about cases via digital media– the debate gained momentum and started reverberating through the media,¹² therefore reaching the public debate. By the end of 2017, two bills had been debated and approved in parliament: a proposal typifying feminicide as “crimes against women because of hate, contempt or undervaluing due to their condition as women” and designating it as an aggravating circumstance to homicide, and a broader bill putting forward a framework to define and tackle all forms of gender-related violence against women. Feminist and human rights activists expressed both support and reservations about the content and the reach of these bills.¹³ Strong objections to the notion of *feminicide* were also raised by conservative voices, on the grounds that it might constitute a form of discrimination against men (see, for example, Sarthou, 2015).

In this panorama we can identify the vibrancy of feminicide as a powerful term, as it reverberates in the entangled landscapes of news media, politics and activism; circulating in and through protesting bodies, theoretical texts and legislation. And digital maps.

Second direction: following the map

Following the ideas of vibrancy and reverberation, I came up with a series of questions I wanted to ask of a digital map of feminicide: What affective signals reverberate in, from, and through it? Which are more or less vibrant? Along which trails do these signals flow? What material things, both human and non-human, do they bounce off, pass through or mark? How are they distorted, intensified, muffled, or stopped in these encounters? (Kuntsman, 2012, p.2).

On the thingyness of the map (or, what materialises in/through the map-as-entanglement as it reverberates and intra-acts)

In this section, I will use the map of femicide in Uruguay (Suárez Val, n.d.) to look at how the map's *thingyness* takes different shapes depending on the manner in which it is approached (and on what the map itself approaches).

The map-as-entanglement is representation and orientation in permanent tension (de Sousa Santos, 1995, p.472).¹⁴ Boaventura De Sousa Santos points out that “the map distorts reality through [...] scale, projection and symbolisation” (p.459), for decisions are made about how much detail is shown, which features are highlighted (and which are left less distinct) and which graphic signs are used (pp.460-462). In Barad's vocabulary: as scale, projection and symbolisation enact agential cuts, phenomena materialise on the map as particular forms of reality. What is represented is a distribution of cases of femicide in Uruguay on a Google map.

Google Maps is as close to Borges's emperor's map¹⁵ as it gets, for it materialises the world in an already vibrant amount of detail. When I do the map,¹⁶ markers are added in the locations where women were killed because they were women. The image that emerges shows women who were young, old, white, black, poor, middle-class, hetero, lesbian, trans ... ; women who worked at home, in offices, in rural settings, as sexual workers ... ; who were mothers, who wanted to get abortions, who had not figured it out yet. They were burned in houses, left in ditches, shot on streets, stabbed in restaurants. The men who killed them were or had been their partners,¹⁷ for the most part. Some were related to the security forces. Too many had already been denounced by the women whom they ended up killing, women who were supposedly under state protection. The claim that the map is an “unofficial, and, likely, incomplete record” (Suárez Val, n.d.; my translation) materialises an (other state) absence: the lack of official statistics on femicide.¹⁸ De Sousa Santos indicates that “[a] given phenomenon can only be represented on a given scale. [...] As in nuclear physics, the scale creates the phenomenon” (1995, p.460). Simultaneously, mapping femicide creates and reveals the phenomenon *and* its scale. Femicide is not only violently inscribed on the body of its victims. By marking –and making strange– the familiar inverted heart-shape of Uruguay's “logo-map” (Anderson, 1991, p.250), the markers on the map show how femicide is inscribed on the Uruguayan social body. Detail on the map intensifies.

¹⁴ This realization came to me as I followed lines between femicide, maps and law.

¹⁵ To represent every detail, the map became the same size as the empire, and therefore useless as a tool for orientation (Borges referenced in de Sousa Santos, 1995, p.459).

¹⁶ When someone asks me “What are you up to?” whilst I am updating the map, my answer is always as follows: “I'm doing the map.” This phrasing might result from my entanglement in English and Spanish (in Spanish *hacer* means both “to make” and “to do”). However, I think, with Coleman, that this is more about my body “doing with the image”, as I feel and live with the map (Coleman, 2013, p.13). Another interesting slide: in Spanish “to update” translates as *actualizar*, which suggests that femicide is actualised (materialises) in the map through our intra-acting.

¹⁷ Ever since I started doing the map, all known perpetrators have been men. Some cases rest unresolved. In the illustrated case, K. G. committed suicide months after her partner sprayed her with petrol and set her on fire.

¹⁸ In the previous legal framework, gender-based violence was limited to “domestic violence”, therefore, the state did not disaggregate data about some violent deaths of women that would fall within the definition of femicide –murders of sexual workers or transgender women, for example. Some efforts were made, in the form of ad hoc reports (see, for example, Ministerio del Interior del Uruguay, 2016). With the approval of the aforementioned laws, more detailed information will become available from government sources

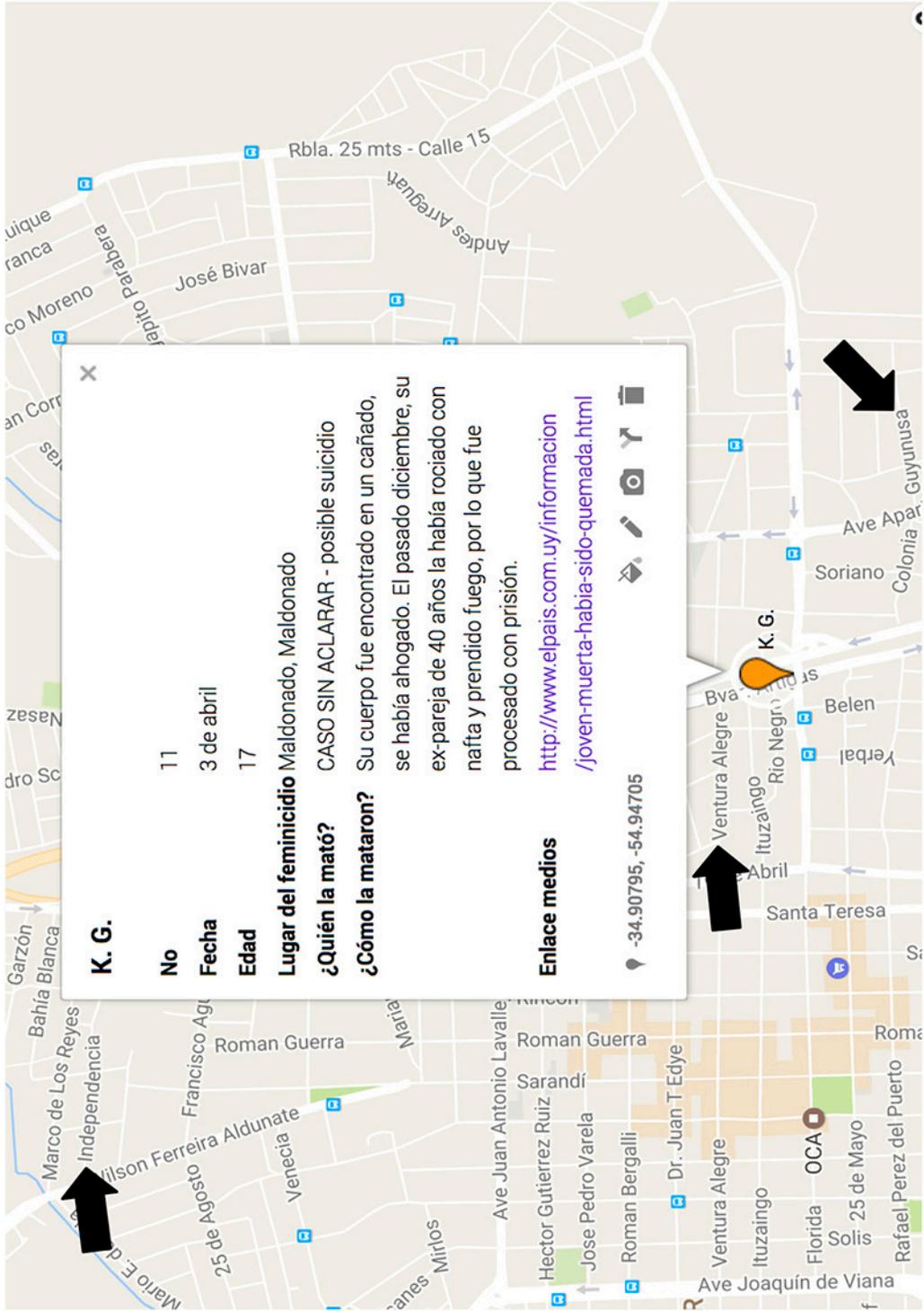


Fig.2 Screenshot of the Feminicidio Uruguay map (03/04/2017) (Suárez Vaz, n.d.). The added black arrows highlight street names referred to below.

Those areas in the map where there are markers become louder, more vibrant. Zooming into a case, noise increases with the automatic appearance of more labels for streets, landmarks, points of interest. Words vibrate and bounce off each other. For example, a case recorded on 3 April 2017 took place near streets named Independence, Happy Fate and Guyunusa¹⁹ (see Fig.2). These words *chime* with the case. In its proximity, they entangle with feminicide, making meanings resonate, change, reverberate. They add vibrancy. The graphic sign marking the spot, the familiar Google Maps marker, vibrates between being a “referential/cognitive sign” and an “emotive/expressive sign” (de Sousa Santos, 1995, p.462), loaded with meanings and affect. I (or you; anybody can do this) capture a screenshot, and share it, together with hashtags and links, on various networks. It produces comments, reactions and shares, as it reverberates through social media. The resulting cacophony signals a different cognitive orientation towards the meaning of violent deaths of women: “single isolated case” becomes “case of feminicide” becomes “activist cause”.²⁰ Furthermore, as Ahmed has shown, orientation is also linked to emotion, feeling and affect, to touching and being touched (Ahmed, 2006, p.2014).

Humans in the map

As an image on a screen, the map is a thing that can be touched (physically, through touch-screens or mouse-clicks; digitally, by marking it with feminicide sites). The map can also touch, “creating an immediate emotional response” (Kuntsman, 2012, p.3). Screens are “expressive surfaces” (Jones, 2017) and both them and the images they display, are “affective, intense and interactive, as well as being representational” (p.32). Their materiality emerges, as described by N. Katherine Hayles, from the inter (and intra) action between a work’s²¹ physical elements, “the user’s interactions with the work and the interpretive strategies she develops –strategies that include physical manipulations as well as conceptual frameworks” (2002, p.33). The different ways in which the map is touched –zooming, clicking, swiping and scrolling– alter the map’s materiality (see Lammes, 2016). The orientation and the feelings towards feminicide also change, as the map proposes –in the sense of “lending of weight, an incentive toward, a pressure in the direction of one trajectory of action rather than another” (Bennett, 2009, p.103)– a specific conceptual and emotional framework, which can be accepted, rejected, or modified. But as well as touching the map, humans are also *in* the map. A blue dot marks a device’s current location: a visual cue of the fact that *you* are tangled in this entanglement. In this way, the map reveals that subjectivity is “always and already entangled and touching” (Warfield, 2016, p.2) with expressions of feminicide.²² There is also another way in which the map can touch you: as you look at the map on a (retina?) display, the map makes an

¹⁹ Guyunusa was an indigenous woman, from what is now Uruguay. She died in 1834 in France, where she was taken, together with three indigenous men, as part of an exhibit (Rivet 2002). In Uruguay, feminists have embraced her as a symbol of resistance.

²⁰ Or, in some encounters, it becomes “those man-hating feminists!” As Kuntsman points out, the map circulates within a “regime of suspicion, where digitalised evidence is always already suspected of being photoshopped, made-up, fabricated –and as such, these testimonies fail to move, cause annoyance or mockery instead of compassion” (2012, p.3).

²¹ Hayles is writing here about electronic literary texts, but her reasoning can be applied to the map.

²² Other representations entangled in the map include, for example, the Uruguayan “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) with its constitutive values, traditions, etc.

²³ We need to remember the ‘press’ in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace” (Ahmed, 2014, p.6).

²⁴ People who see the map often exclaim: “¡Qué fuerte!”, literally “How strong!”, a colloquial formulation meaning something is powerful, incredibly sad, and/or hard to believe.

*impression*²³, you become affected by it.²⁴ Even if you look away, the image captured in your retina lingers behind your eyelids, its affective signals moving through reverberating circuits in your neural network, to be encoded in “memory neurons”, “keeping information about the past available for future decision making” (Ribeiro and Nicolelis, 2010, p.45). The map inscribes you, the map is now *in* you.

According to Hayles, “inscription technologies” are devices which “must initiate material changes that can be read as marks” (2002, p.24). Upon intra-acting with the map once, twice, many times, human bodies might be inscribed with the concept of feminicide –the inscribed signal bouncing through them, reverberating into human networks, re-inscribed and remediated (p.5), as it cycles through news item to map marker, to screenshot, to hashtag, to shared post; and then through placards, street marches, sound performances... towards law amendments and, ultimately, social change.

Artificial intelligence

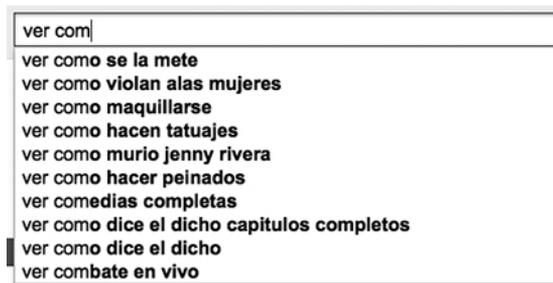


Fig.3 Screen capture (11/08/2013) showing YouTube suggestions for the search terms “See how...”. The first suggestion reads “See how someone puts it into someone”, and the second one, “See how (they) rape women”. This image was captured and posted on Facebook in the context of the digital art/activism project Ver Comentarios (Bianchic, Delgado, and Suárez Val, 2016).

²⁵ There is at least one other interesting “human” direction: tracing reverberation back towards moments of data gathering and inscription onto the map. I explored this question in my MA dissertation *Affect amplifiers: feminicide, feminist activists and the politics of counting and mapping gender-related murders of women*.

²⁶ The reference is to “relationships (between companies)”. I found it useful to think with the omission.

As I turned and turned the idea of inscription through reverberation, I realised that I had been following reverberation in only one direction: from the map towards and through the human.²⁵ In what follows, I will take another direction.

The map is data (about feminicide in Uruguay); but it is also made of digital data matter which “consists of physical inscriptions, [...] bits [...] stored in the form of magnetic polarities on hard drives, electric charges on flash memory cards, or microscopic pits on the surface of optical disks” (Casemajor, 2015, p.7). The map is disassembled into bits relayed across the network in packets, passing through routers which decide the most efficient paths to take depending on “time, politics and relationships” (Code.org, 2015)²⁶. Their decisions “change over time as [their] knowledge changes” (EURIM, 1999, p.1).

The map-as-entanglement reverberates in a myriad of directions, as electricity, light and radio waves, before its bits are “re-assembled in the proper order at their final destination” (EURIM, 1999, p.2). It is significant that routers *learn* as bits pass through them, and that this learning involves an understanding of human politics and relationships. I wonder what else routers could learn in their intra-action with bits about feminicide and gender structures.

A more complex kind of “learning machine” in this entanglement are the algorithms behind Google, Facebook and other digital companies, which collect, analyse and interpret (all/our/any) data, and decide which bits to foreground for us. As Deborah Lupton remarks, “[a]lgorithms and other elements of software [...] are generative, a productive form of power” (2013, p.4). Algorithms learn from us, and make decisions which materialise different worlds for us, through our expressive screens. In their discussion of the limits and challenges of algorithms, Marijn Janssen and George Kuk describe how “the algorithmic materiality is a complex socio-technical assemble [sic.] of people, technologies, code developers and designers” and link algorithms to Foucault’s conception of power and *governmentality*²⁷ (2016, p.375). As we saw above with Hayles, discourse, practices, power and bodies, intra-act in/through the materiality of technology. This includes gender technologies²⁸: algorithms are gendered.

²⁷ The “contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self” (Foucault, 1988, p.19 cited in Deveaux, 1994, p.245; emphasis added).

²⁸ After Teresa de Lauretis (1987).

The gendered, sexualised and racialized aspects to algorithms’ learning and decision-making processes have been the recent focus of controversies about Google Search (Burgess, 2017b) and Facebook’s offensive-content removal policies (Constine, 2016), amongst others. Notably, in 2013 the UN used this premise as the basis of an anti-sexism campaign displaying real (and really) sexist autocomplete suggestions whenever terms such as “women shouldn’t” or “women need to” were written in a search engine (Huffington Post UK, 2013). In Uruguay, a few weeks before that campaign was launched, a small artistic collective –in which I participated– had already noted the phenomenon and decided to start their own, much smaller, campaign (Fig.3).

Thus, if algorithms can learn to perform gender-based violence (in ways that have real consequences for embodied humans), surely, they should be able to learn how to combat such violence. Wired UK recently reported that “tech giants are using artificial intelligence to prevent suicide and self-harm” (Burgess, 2017a). They hope to achieve this by programming algorithms to identify content and search terms that suggest that a potential action might be taken by a given user, who is then provided with suitable search results or links. Visions of Big Brother come to mind, yet, this suggests algorithms could possibly be programmed to address sexism, or even to detect poten-

tial acts of gender-related violence. There is, however, another way to think through this.

The thing-in-phenomena that is Femicidio Uruguay, an entanglement of data, emotion, bodies, discourse and practice, is part of a vibrant series of similarly entangled things: a map showing streets in Montevideo named after women (DATA.UY, 2017); other maps of femicide in Latin America (Ramírez, n.d.; Salguero, n.d.; Geografía Crítica, 2016); or maps of women's activism (Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Sociales y Ambientales, et al., 2017). Not to mention a plethora of websites, social media pages and accounts, podcasts, mobile chat groups and other cyber-feminist²⁹ actions pushing towards and beyond a "feminist internet" (see Feminist Principles of the Internet, 2017). As vibrant, multiplying feminist bits –entangled into unpredictable light, electricity and radio waves– reverberate through Google and other tech giants' infrastructures, would their very gendered materiality not be configured and reconfigured in their intra-action? Are the "master's tools" (Lorde, 1983) immune to affect, or could feminist activists' disobedient appropriation of everyday technology alter the very material structure of the internet?

²⁹ Here, *cyberfeminist* refers to a "feminist appropriation of information and computer technology" (Paasonen, 2011, p.335). I use this term to gesture towards the map's insertion in the entangled genealogy of cyberfeminism, an important angle of enquiry that I cannot develop here for reasons of space.

Conclusion

*"[T]here is an emerging acknowledgement that, in part, the battle for new worlds is a battle over space and the production of spatial imaginaries."
(Cobarrubias and Pickles, 2009, p.37)*

In this essay, I have explored the potential uses of the notions of vibrancy, reverberation and intra-action to develop a novel methodology to research the effects, and affects, of digital maps disobediently appropriated by feminist activists to record cases of femicide. Through an exploration of my own map of femicide in Uruguay, I have shown how digital maps can be understood as co-constituted in data, practices, discourses, emotions, light, electricity, radio waves, cables, routers, neurons, algorithms, human and non-human bodies... –things-in-phenomena, things with their own vibrant *thingly* power. I have presented how thinking with vibrancy helps to highlight various aspects of these maps' reverberation through bodies –both human and nonhuman–, which follow the affective signals emitted from/through the map, shaping intra-acting elements in the entanglement.

I find it necessary to note some important issues that fall outside the scope of this essay but which could be further developed. They include: problemati-

zing the very use of digital maps as a tool, given mapping's inherent belonging in capitalist, colonial and patriarchal entanglements;³⁰ exploring the reverberations traversing feminism and feminist activism, in the (never unidirectional) intra-action with/in platforms created and maintained by powerful multinationals;³¹ following the potentially essentialising and/or heteronormative reverberations of the pattern of feminicide that emerges in the map; and, not least, examining the potential role of the map in the communication between perpetrators described in Segato's model of expressive violence.

More attention could also be paid to another important potential direction of research: the reverberations of the map across the landscape IRL. As the map materialises a location as a "site of feminicide", and then, in concert with other actions, as a "site of protest", "site of performance" or "site of memorial": how is the materiality of the landscape itself altered? In order to extend a methodology, one possibility would be to explore how notions of vibrancy, reverberation and entanglement could be thought through "material geographies" (Tolia-Kelly, 2013).

Taking new materialist approaches as a starting point, in this work I have explored fresh lines of thought to stimulate creative methodologies for researching –and practising– digital activism around feminicide in Uruguay and Latin America. The proposed approach reveals the usefulness of attending to the vibrancy and reverberation of things as a means to reveal both their affects and effects. Bearing this in mind, I want to conclude with a strong recommendation, which springs from these ideas: activists' disobedient doings, especially their appropriation of digital objects, could benefit from integrating an alertness to the vibrancy of matter, and a sensitivity to how emotions, practices and discourses reverberate and leave their imprint towards/through not only human, but also non-human bodies.

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³⁰ This tension is explored, for example, by Sebastián Cobarrubias and John Pickles (2009).

³¹ Some scholars have compellingly argued that "networked communications technologies [...] are profoundly depoliticizing" (Dean, 2005, p.1). Others, however, have focused on pointing to the "promise" as well as the "pitfalls" of digital feminist activism (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller, 2018).

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