Carnivalesque Postcollectivity: Reenactment as Decolonial Subversion

Adela Goldbard

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Inside an unfinished motel room, a group of eight or ten people are closely sitting together. The green hue of the video–reminiscent of surveillance imagery–implies that it was shot in complete darkness and suggests the inconspicuous character of the actions that are taking place, discreetly, in the middle of the night. It is cold, as can be appreciated by the people's outfits. The white glow in the characters' pupils–an effect of infrared lights–gives them a ghostly and scary aura, adding to the frightened facial expressions revealed by the close-up shots. The aesthetics of the night-vision technology makes the subjects *blurry*, but they can certainly be identified as people of color, mostly men. The atmosphere is tense and the person who appears to be their guide talks on the phone and curses in Spanish with some interspersed words in Hñähñu. He then rushes the group to leave the room and to quickly hop on the back of two pickup trucks, urging them to be silent and hide. The infrared lights allow us to see, in the darkness, the terrified faces of the subjects who, trying not to move, lay awkwardly in the box of the pickup trucks. The old vehicles traverse a rough and remote semidesert landscape, brushing against tree branches, nopales and *magueys*, and lifting dense clouds of dust, stunningly visible by the effect of the headlights and the night vision cameras. The identity of the camerapersons is concealed, but the unsettling intimacy of the shots and their point of view places them in a privileged position: from above, imperceptible to others due to darkness, but able to see because of the cameras' night vision technology–similar to that used by the military and hunters.

[Image 01: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

After the pickup trucks come to a halt, the distressed subjects are brought inside an abandoned–and ostensibly looted–unfinished house, and forced to sit down on the cold concrete floor, tightly packed together once again. We can certainly sense that their journey isn't pleasant and, through the guide's dialogue with the house custodian, we soon understand that they are trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border without documents. The hand-held night-vision camera complicitly immerses the viewer in the *safe house,* providing, once again, a sensorial, baffling and problematic close-up view of the migrants, but not a hint about who is documenting the actions or about how is the camera allowed to follow the characters so closely. The safe house vigilante, before the puzzled eyes of the other *mojados* and with the endorsement of their guide–*coyote* or *pollero*–takes one of the three women that are part of the group to another room, presumably to rape her. We hear her screaming as the safe house–an American style architecture made of cinder blocks–is visible from outside.

> I was an immigrant who suffered a lot. When I left in '89, there was nothing. Nothing. All these houses you see here, there was nothing. This road, the pavement... I left in '89; this road did not exist. The Grand Canyon Park did not exist. There was no drainage, there was no suspension bridge. I left when the town was at zero. There was no water to irrigate those milpas. When I left, I felt like crying. I went barefoot. My generation went barefoot. Without shoes. We wanted to leave to bring back dollars. It's

> the American Dream. All those houses that have an American style are the American Dream of people who are living in the U.S. All this was built with the money we brought. The roads too; the government didn't do anything. The community services we have were done with cooperation. I am sharing this story with you so you can rest. That's what I do when I bring a group, I tell them about my personal life to make it more real. And I tell them about the things you experience in the border, and it's really what I've been through. I lived 25 years in Las Vegas. Yes. I speak English[1]. When I left, I didn't speak Spanish or English. I first learnt English. My Spanish is not very good, but I try to improve it. When I was a *pollero* I was in jail for three years. My children in the U.S., abandoned, and me, in jail. Just think about that. This short talk is interesting, isn't it?[2]

A hand-held stabilized camera follows the subjects closely as they continue their journey through the semidesert, now hurriedly on foot, until they reach a barbed wire fence. This precarious device clearly differs from the grandiloquent imaginary of The Wall–a fortified and invincible border–, inserting doubts about the film's spatial and temporal location. For the first time we observe two actions simultaneously, as one of the cameras now follows a border patrol car that is silently stalking the migrants from the other side of the fence. The *coyote* helps the migrants cross *la línea*, either by climbing a concrete column or by going under the barbed wire. But as soon as they set foot on "U.S. soil", the border patrol siren goes off, and the migrants rapidly run to the hills to hide and erase their footprints with a branch. We then see the border patrol agents getting out of their cars, and searching, unsuccessfully, for the undocumented migrants with flashlights. *I want you guys come over here or go back to your country*, is uttered, with a puzzling accent, by a border patrol agent using a megaphone. The precarious barb wire and the confusing identity of the border patrol agents become *fissures* in the credibility of the actions, adding to the opacity/ambiguity of the documentation.

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[1] In English in the original.

[2] Federico Agustín Santiago (alias Commander), personal communications, 01/14/2019 (translation is mine; its syntax tries to convey the tone of the original conversation in Spanish).

[Image 02: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

> Here we explain to the people that they are already in the United States. This is the United States. They have already arrived, usually in Las Vegas. I tell them: "you are already in the United States, but you still have to be careful of border patrols. To be in the United States is to be afraid. Being anywhere illegally [sic], you see a light and you think it's Immigration. You see an ambulance, and you think it's coming for you. You see a city police car and you think it's Immigration. Being in the United States illegally [sic] is very scary. You are in your apartment and you see police outside and you think they are coming for you. Being in the U.S., once you've already crossed, it's not easy... without speaking English, even worse. You are in the store or in a restaurant and you don't even know what to ask for, and you have to give a 100-dollar bill because you don't know how much it is, you don't know how to ask. Once you are in the United States, another challenge begins. Not only Immigration, not only the *cholos*[3]. Another way of life that you are not used to. You start to see the gringos saying: "look at that filthy guy, look at that *frijolero* [beaner]". If you are Mexican, they humiliate you. There is a lot of racism in the United States. It is not easy. A lot of people think it's just hard at the border." This talk takes an hour, it's to tell them about all the challenges in the United States. When you are in the United States you live in fear. You are not happy

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3 *Cholo* is used in this context to name members of juvenile gangs on Mexico's northern border

> like when you were with your family. You are all the time with that fear of thinking: "At what time are they taking me?" Many challenges begin. Really, many challenges. The boss, he looks at you like you are too slow: let's go outside, where's your social security [number]? You want to drive a car. You don't have a license. You don't know English. You can't get your license because you're illegal [sic]. Just one mistake, you go to jail. Just one mistake, the American government doesn't forgive.[4]

Violence and sadism escalate as the epic continues to unfold. *Cholos* threaten the *pollero* holding a knife to his throat, and point rifles at migrants after stealing their belongings. Hitmen from drug cartels and *rancheros* (minutemen vigilantes) violently pull and push the already shaken subjects, and fire their rifles to the air in order to scare them. In a cemetery, after harassing and robbing everyone in the group, *rancheros* retain two migrant women, sexually harass them, and are about to rape them when the moon, once again, appears from behind the clouds functioning as an ellipsis to the next action. In these scenes, *unhidden* theatrical artifacts create more *fissures* in the verisimilitude of the actions. For example, the fake gestures of the *pollero* when he has a knife held to his throat, the almost comically placed corpse on a pathway, and the visibly faked mourning tears of the widow (literally triggered with an onion,) become theatrical incongruencies that question the artificiality of the documented scenes. The number, placement of the cameras and the crosscutting between images enable the disclosure of the staged nature of the film, complicating its documentary character. But even after these *cracks* reveal the "hoax" (the mise-en-scène), the narrative still feels inextricably and inexplicably real and harsh.

[4] Federico Agustín Santiago (alias Commander), personal communications, 01/14/2019 (translation is mine; its syntax tries to convey the tone of the original conversation in Spanish).

[Image 03: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

Cholo: Are you the fucking guide?

AG: No, we come alone.

Cholo: Tell me who the fucking guide is.

AG: No, we came alone, the guide stayed back there.

Cholo: I don't believe you, bring me the fucking guide, because you won't leave here.

AG: No, we have to go back, we… we are lost.

Cholo: You are going back where?

AG: That way, that way....

Cholo: What the fuck! You are going the other way! I don't believe you. All the fucking people say that.

AG: They got us…

Commander: It was a small test, eh. How did you like it? Isn't it scary?

AG: And what happens next?

Commander: They rape you.[5]

AG: In there, in the tunnel?

Commander: Yeah. I can make a deal with him. If I have drugs or if I have money, I

[5] Olivia Teresa Ruiz Marrujo estimates that 90% of the women that attempt to cross undocumented into the United States through Northern Mexico suffer sexual assault. De León. *The Land of Open Graves*, 17.

give him drugs and money. But if he asks me to give him two girls...
AG: Do you negotiate with the girls?
Commander: No, not with the girls, with him. I don't tell the girls anything except: "two of you have to go with them, so that they let us all pass". Of course, everyone gets scared. Yes, they cry, everyone cries here. And we never tell the whole group that everything is a simulation. Normally in real life this does happen. But here we act it, some girls from our people come, and they pull them and they scream and cry. I didn't want to tell you, but I already told you. This is where a lot of fear starts, really. They [the *cholos*] bring guns and they bring knives ... Most of them [the participants] are already crying here.[6]

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El Alberto is a self-governed Hñähñu community located in the great canyon of B'ot'ähi, the Mezquital Valley, in central México. El Alberto has resisted centuries of marginalization and oppression: in pre-Hispanic times, by the Toltecs and the Mexicas who demanded payment of tribute. Later on, by colonial governments who exploited their lands and labor, an operation that continued through the 19th century when the expansion of capitalism also meant the looting of land. There were also multiple attempts by post-revolutionary governments, especially since the 1950s, to assimilate and control the Hñähñu communities of the region. But El Alberto established self-governance since the 1940s with a communal assembly as the ultimate horizontal decision-making body, and a straightforward set of rules for collaboration though communal labor that includes the creation of commissions and yearly communal charges without payment that each member has to hold every eight years. However, sovereignty is an ongoing struggle, and the mentioned lineage of exploitation, racism and colonialism has led the community to extreme poverty and isolation, which, in turn, has resulted in a high level of migration to the United States. Since the 1980s, it became common practice for teenagers to follow the American Dream as soon as they graduated from middle school, and by the 1990s around 90% of the male adults of El Alberto had migrated to the U.S., transforming the community into a ghost town. Today, more than three quarters of the community live in the United States, mainly in Las Vegas, Utah and Arizona.

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[6] Federico Agustín Santiago (alias Commander), personal communications, 01/14/2019 (translation is mine; its syntax tries to convey the tone of the original conversation in Spanish).

> To be a citizen in El Alberto you have to do social service. You have to be here personally to do a full year's social service; so, you come back to do the social service. One does not cross the border and forget. If you want to continue to be part of the community, you have to come back when you are appointed.[7]

In recent decades, El Alberto has strengthened its autonomy and communal labor through an array of commercial projects, all of them intimately connected to their territory and to the thoughtful use of its resources, *going from a passive resistance, to an active construction based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity*[8], a unique form of *postcollective communal organization* that looks into the past and into the present simultaneously. Some of the projects that the community has created in the last two decades include: the EcoAlberto hot springs, El Gran Cañón Eco-touristic Park (named after the Arizona Grand Canyon), a water purification plant also named EcoAlberto (in collaboration with Bonafont, a company from the transnational Danone), the women-led cooperative Cooperativa "Mujeres Reunidas" that sells their ixtle fiber products to Body Shop (another transnational company), and *La caminata nocturna* [the night walk], which, according to Netflix, is a *dark tourism* attraction– a form of tourism that involves visiting places that are historically associated with death and tragedy. These communal projects have created jobs that have become the "road back" to El Alberto for many migrants and have helped the community *delink* (Mignolo, 2007) from Western modes of exploitation, extraction and patriarchal organization; they represent an *Indigenous modernity* that challenges the modern/colonial world-system, taking advantage of current capitalist trends (for example ecotourism, dark tourism, and "socially responsible" companies) while preserving a holistic and respectful relationship to the land and the nonhuman. Breaking romanticized Western imaginaries of the Indigenous way-of-life, the Hñähñu of El Alberto–as may other Indigenous communities in the country–perform a unique and radical postcollectivity, their own modernity and sovereignty, interconnected (economically) but delinked (ideologically) from Mexico's and transnational neoliberal modernities, *decolonizing power by strengthening its autonomy of government and community work*.[9]

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7 Antonino, personal communications, 12/23/2018 (translation is mine).

8 Gaete Balboa, Pablo Genaro and José Francisco Monroy Gaytán. *Economía Social y solidaria hñähñu: Descolonialidad del poder en la comunidad de El Alberto, Hidalgo.* Mexico City: CLAVE Editorial, 2018, 11

9 Gaete Balboa, *Economía Social*, 101.

> "This is where the real truth begins. Here you are going to obey, if not, you go back. There are not going to be any more questions on the way, there are not going to be any more answers. Here you hold hands and team up; here we are going to start the real journey." After praying we have another conversation… "We are going to talk about what you are going to do in the dangers. If I tell you that you have to run, you run. If you say: "I'm not going to walk anymore", I'll leave you there. I am not going to lose the whole group because you can no longer walk. I leave you in a small road if anything, so that the *migra* can pick you up." Right now, I'm telling you this softly, because when I'm an actor, it's different: a very deep voice, very heavy, very angry, no smile, no happiness. Like the guides, all the time at the border they are very drugged, so as not to be afraid. All the time they take out the cocaine and go to the nose. Marijuana and cocaine. All the time it is danger. There is no laughter, no play. All the time it's fear.[10]

Members of El Alberto have been reenacting their border-crossing experiences as a touristic attraction for more than 15 years, under the name of *La caminata nocturna* [the night walk] *to raise awareness among people [...] to make people aware of how difficult and hard it is to cross into the United States* [11], but also as a collective cathartic/sadistic carnivalization of trauma, a regenerative and decolonial mode of memory making, and a source of economic wellbeing.

The reenactment takes place in El Alberto's canyon and valleys. Their semidesert ecosystem of mesquite trees, magueys and nopales, according to the ones who have crossed the border, very accurately resembles the Sonora/Arizona landscape. The Hñähñu people of El Alberto rely on their vast and embodied knowledge of their territory to trace the different routes for the reenactment. Without a map or a compass, they navigate the territory they have stewarded and defended for centuries: from the Toltecs, from the Mexicas, from the Spaniards, from the Mexican government, from exploitative companies, from neighboring communities. The Sonora Desert, with ICE's (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) nonhuman allies, is displaced to Hidalgo. The Tula River becomes the Río Bravo and El Alberto becomes Altar, the last town migrants usually stop at before advancing into the desert. In preparation for crossing, participants of *la caminata* pray at El Alberto's church; they buy water, crackers and canned

[10] Federico Agustín Santiago (alias Commander), personal communications, 01/14/2019 (translation is mine; its syntax tries to convey the tone of the original conversation in Spanish).

[11] Gerardo, personal communications, 12/23/2018 (translation is mine).

tuna in the general store, and wait for the *pollero* in the only hotel in town; in the cemetery, they hide to rest. The unfinished Americanized local architecture becomes safe houses and drug trafficking facilities. Empty sewage tubes are traps where the *cholos* hide and corner migrants to rob and rape them.

Community members of El Alberto leverage human and nonhuman agency and employ the particularities of the local architecture to generate a subversive embodied *re-creation* of their cross-border narratives–impossible to retell only verbally because of the incommunicability of extreme violence–more than two thousand kilometres away from their original location in the border. Time and space spiral in this reenactment.

[Image 04: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

Undocumented crossings of the border increased exponentially after the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994, and the Mexican economy, once again, crashed. The U.S. government responded with the Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD) policy: fortifying the traditional urban crossing points through fencing and stationed border agents to redirect the routes of migrants into the Sonoran Desert and to "discourage migrants from crossing." *The basic premise was, and continues to be, that if they can't stop the huddled mases, at least they can funnel them into remote areas where the punishment handed out by difficult terrain will save money (or so some foolishly thought) and get this unsightly mess out of*

public view, which it did.[12] This strategic and tragic policy enrolled nonhumans as perpetrators targeting migrants: the desert's extreme weather, lack of water, inedible vegetation and poisonous wildlife made the Border Patrol's job less strenuous, since they could *draw on the agency of animals and other nonhumans to do its dirty work while simultaneously absolving itself of any blame connected to migrant injuries or loss of life*.[13]

> Well, it was very difficult. We crossed during the cold weather… I imagine you have some idea of how cold it gets in a desert, right? At midnight, the coyotes howled, wild dogs, as we call them. We had to look for some nopales, roast them, eat them without tortillas, without salt, to endure those five days we were there.[14]

Costumes, props and mockups of border patrol cars add realism to an experience that for the reenactors tells their truth and *is* real. We witness how embodied memory *makes* history while narrating it, or as Natalie Alvarez points out*: the overarching gesture of this reenactment is not recuperative so much as generative, instantiating conditions of possibility still to come. The reenactment operates in a transtemporal mode–a present-past that looks back on the reality of migration within the experience of the reenactment from a future perspective*.[15] Every border-crossing experience condenses and expands in this performance: *historical memory is reactivated and at the same time reelaborated and resignified in subsequent crises and cycles of rebellion.*[16] Truth, fiction and memory merge in a temporal spiral movement that *corrects* the past in the present and gazes into the future, producing a continuously regenerated, subversive, empowered, communal and thoughtful narrative of migration that integrates to the (contemporary) cosmogony and identity of the Hñähñu people of El Alberto. Events are reenacted from the interpreters' memories, but the perspective used is reversed: the victim becomes the oppressor, subverting power relations and empowering the oppressed. Reenactors *become* border patrol agents, *cholos*, drug dealers, and, as them, are violent and sadistic. When Hñähñu migrants play border patrol agents, speak in English, and use the words that the agents used to repress them, social roles are inverted and reality is suspended and transformed. The victim/perpetrator dichotomy of border-crossing is subverted, and, in

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[12] De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves. Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 6

[13] De León. *The Land of Open Graves*, 43.

[14] Gerardo, personal communications, 12/23/2018 (translation is mine).

[15] Alvarez. *Immersions,* 119.

[16] Rivera Cusicanqui. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 6.

this *carnivalesque* world, we witness the defeat of power by performing power, by embodying the oppressor, by using violence to neutralize violence; reenactment as subversion. In this carnivalesque performance, individual experiences are collectivized, each body represents the community's body, and storytelling becomes cosmogony, inextricably linked to spiral time.

> Here, pick-up trucks arrive. We "load" people in them, but they are going to catch us. It's a show, it's an action where Immigration catches the migrant. Here a *corretiza* will take place. If you run, if you hide over there, as I told you, then you come back later, and we meet in the same place when Immigration leaves. I like this scene very much. If they catch you, they tell you that you will go to the detention center, to jail, that they will sentence you to three years, five years, for crossing the border, it is a federal crime. Here I like this show, because here Immigration acts half in Spanish and half in English. Here I like this show a lot. Well, I like everything.[17]

[Image 05: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

La caminata has been perceived by the government as an insurgent, rebellious and dangerous act of resistance–which it certainly is. This reenactment challenges the *politics of memory–who wants whom to remember what and why*[18]–,questions imposed modes of memory-

[17] Federico Agustín Santiago (alias Commander), personal communications, 01/14/2019 (translation is mine; its syntax tries to convey the tone of the original conversation in Spanish).

[18] Burke, Peter. *Varieties of Cultural History,* NYC: Cornell, 1997.

making, and gives community members access to the production of their own historical narratives. As many other forms of Indigenous communal storytelling (such as rituals, chants, and embroidery, to name a few), *la caminata* contests Western hierarchical and verbal-centered modes of memory-building. Non-written and non-verbal modes for the transmission of knowledge have been consistently ignored, discredited as non-valid, and systematically obscured by the Western cannon. This *epistemic violence* reveals how *part of the colonizing project throughout the Americas consisted [and still consists] in discrediting autochthonous ways of preserving and communicating historical understanding*.[19] *La caminata* allows a shift from the verbal to the embodied, thus delinking from Western canonical modes of retelling and remembering. Structural refusals or *obstructions*: forms of *sensate sovereignty* that act as *a limit of knowledge that is felt viscerally, proprioceptively, and affectively,* to *counteract the epistemic violence of normative writing*.[20]

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Rinxui [into the night] (Goldbard, 2019-20) is a collaborative exploration/re-elaboration of *la caminata* through the grammar of film: a translation of the embodied and live nature of the performance to an audiovisual, sensorial and immersive filmic language. Despite the lasting nature of film–which contrasts with the ephemerality of performance–*Rinxui*, due to its layered and ambiguous structure and to its sensorial aesthetic, delivers a shifting and immersive experience that somehow relates and complicates the experience of the live performance. *Rinxui* re-elaborates–for the video cameras and for a remote audience–a communal *performance of oral history* constituted as a violent and radical mode of collective social remembering. By generating a meta-narrative where ambiguity plays a central role (the equivocal nature of the characters and actions is amplified and blurs the limits between fact and fiction), *Rinxui* immerses, critically disturbs, and challenges the viewer to read the politics between the lines.

[19] Taylor. *The Archive*, 34.

[20] Dylan Robinson. *Hungry Listening* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 23-24.

[Image 06: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

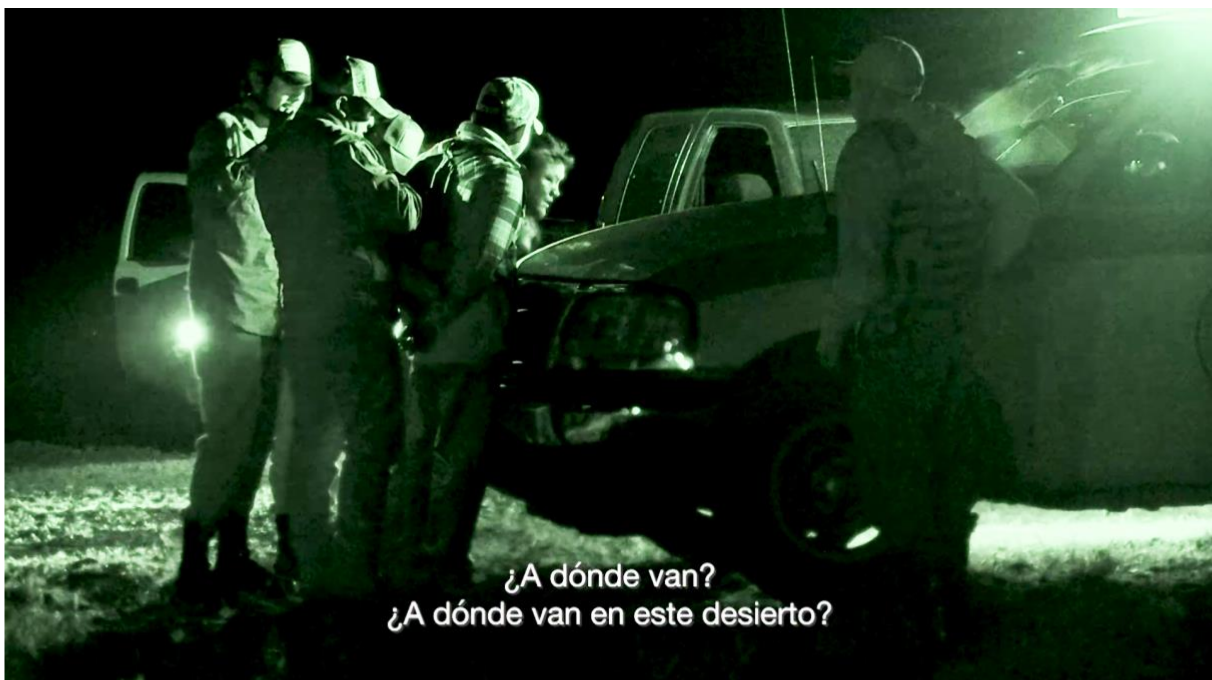
Rinxui was produced in collaboration with the board members of EcoAlberto Park, Federico Agustín Santiago, Francisco Ramón García and Eugenio Cruz García, and administrator Ivonne Castillo Hernández, and with the spontaneous help of Federico, aka Commander (the guide or *pollero*), leading the actors, taking decisions about the camera positions and angles, and rushing the crew to keep up with the actions. To focus on the Hñähñu people's point of view and experience, in *Rinxui* the tourists have been purposely left out, reverting the reenactment to its original version when only community members participated.
In the last decade, *la caminata* has drawn attention from academia, the entertainment industry and the press. Academic articles have critically addressed *la caminata's* socio-political background and aesthetics from a decolonial standpoint (Gaete Balboa et. all.) or pulling from performance studies (Natalie Alvarez). Documentaries–such as Netflix *Dark Tourism* series–and news reportages usually rely on *experiential journalism,* framing the experience of the author as/with tourist(s), usually complementing it with pseudo-ethnographic materials (interviews and portrayals of characters in their every-day lives) to counterweight the sensationalizing of the reenactment. For *Rinxui*, the conversations with board members of EcoAlberto were initiated almost a year and a half before the shooting took place. I attended several meetings with them, with reenactors, and with El Alberto communal authorities to present my idea and start a dialogue about their expectations–both conceptual/creative and monetary–and to better understand the stakes of their performance and their holistic

communal socio-economic project. During the community engagement and pre-production phases of the film, I carried out open interviews with several participants where they narrated some of their border-crossing experiences (some quotes in the previous sections of this essay are taken from those interviews). The impromptu conversation that I recorded while Federico aka Commander showed me, the cinematographer and the producer of the film the route of *la caminata* during the scouting, was a fascinating interdisciplinary practice of decolonial critique, oral history, and acting, in which time and place expanded and collapsed in a spiral, replicating the mechanisms that the reenactment implements. In a split second, Fede shifted back and forth between: interpreting/embodying Commander–a fictious character based on his real experiences as a *pollero*–; explaining how he addressed tourists (and scared them) in the discursive parts of *la caminata*; making fun of my crew members for not being brave enough, for being tired or scared–similarly to how he mocks tourists, in a gesture of *decolonial revenge*–; retelling his own experiences as a migrant; literally pointing out how El Alberto had changed over time due to remittances*;* and relating the success of their communal project, specifically of la *caminata*. When *in character*, Fede used a harsh and aggressive voice; when *out of character*, he switched back to his regular voice and employed a tone that was by turns condescending, sarcastic or serious. The layered complexities of this conversation-turned-monologue mirror the reenactment's multidimensional character: a communal and embodied oral history that functions both as a touristic attraction and as a decolonial/subversive device where spatial, temporal and ontological boundaries are blurred, while normative and hegemonic roles and rules are undermined.

[Image 07: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

An experiential documentation of *la caminata*, I argued in my meetings with board members, would strip the reenactment of these complexities. I instead proposed a cinematographic remake of the reenactment, with a structure and aesthetics that would add meta layers to the performance, complicating it, instead of simplifying it, for the audience. After several assemblies over months of negotiations, we agreed on the characters (only community members), method (real-time chronological filming with minimal repetitions), aesthetics/equipment (three night vision cameras plus additional infrared lights, stabilizers and tripod), logistics (one full night of shooting with two breaks), consensus (final edit of film would have to be approved by board members), and compensation for the community ($30,000 pesos fee for the location, the payment of accommodations for the crew in EcoAlberto's cabins, the payment of food for the crew and cast in their restaurant, a short-version of the film for the Park's social media to be delivered one month after the shooting, and the insertion of their logos in every version of the film). We signed a contract and sealed the deal sharing a couple of *caguamas* (1-liter beers).
On the day of the shooting, at dusk, when all ambient lights faded, the cameras' screens started glowing with an almost paranormal green shine. We spent the next hours in total darkness, only briefly interrupted by the headlights of the pickup trucks and the occasional use of small flashlights, until a crescent moon partially illuminated the canyon. Since infrared lights are invisible to the human eye, the spectral glow of the cameras' screens was our only means for visualizing the scene and its lighting. We carried three medium-size infrared LED panels–usually used for surveillance of ample locations–made portable with a DIY adaptation of heavy-duty hefty batteries. Our "invisible lights" made some landscape features and architectural elements punctually appear in the cameras' screens, while keeping most of the landscape in the shadows. But for our bare eyes, the landscape was continuously concealed. Although very different in nature, infrared light and x-rays have a shared *forensic aesthetic:* they both relate to the finding/revealing of corporeal visual evidence ultimately associated to violence and death–criminals, targets, accidents, diseases. The ostensibly translucent imagery of x-rays allows the doctor or technician to see fractures, tumors, etc. that are "invisible" to the bare eye; while the capacity of infrared light to "trespass" darkness allows the soldier, the police officer, or the hunter to see their prey. The *revelatory* aspect of these technologies places the users of devices such as CT scanners and surveillance cameras in a position of power: *cyborg vision* allows them to observe what others can't. Translucency, increased

contrast, and glow, emphasize bodies–notoriously human bodies–, “expose their guts”, dissect them, and make them vulnerable to the stimulated gaze of the “predator.”
In *Rinxui*, the cyborg night-vision the viewer is equipped with, allows them to witness what the protagonists of the film are incapable of seeing, and, more importantly, to see *them* without being seen, bringing into question the ethics and the *politics of witnessing*. Evidence of violence and death “glows” as an augmented vision immerses the viewer in *translucent darkness*. But this gaze is not only voyeuristic but violent. As the night-vision cameras move closer to the protagonists’ bodies, they become more exposed and vulnerable to the viewer’s gaze, and the viewer becomes accomplice of the antagonists. This violent transference of violence puts the viewer in an ethical conundrum that can lead to discomfort and to looking away. This discomfort is intentional: a decolonial gesture that forces the viewer to critically consider their position of power, not only within the film, but in regards to any privileged position they might hold in comparison to the reenactors, who, unlike them, are unable to turn away from the violence pictured in the film.



[Image 08: Still shot from *Rinxui [into the night]* by Adela Goldbard, 2019-20.]

In clear contrast to Hollywood’s finished, perfectionist, and flawless aesthetic, which usually leaves no space for cracks or for the “breaking” of verisimilitude, *Rinxui’s* rough, loose, and flawed aesthetic, where theatrical or cinematic artifacts are not hidden, continuously “fractures” the viewer’s expectations and throws them off balance. *Realistic* violent movies rely on non-chronological filming and impeccable editing, which gives them the artificial

appearance of being complete and truthful. This completeness detaches and distances the viewer, transforming the representation of violence into passive and uncritical entertainment for profit. The use of sequential real-time filming and unscripted dialogues pulled from memory and experience, challenges the traditional concept of realism (truthful representation) based on verisimilitude (having the appearance of truth). In a loop of unceasing darkness, the episodes of fictionalized reenactment that compose *Rinxui*, *incarnate* reality and generate an uncomfortable sensorial experience for the audience of the film (comparable to the tourists' experience in *la carminata*). The staging of communal/collective memory that brings the body to the center in the performance, is underscored in the film by the *dissecting glow* of infrared lights. This double corporeal emphasis–through embodiment and forensic aesthetics–complicitly immerses the audience of the film in the sensorial distress of an endless epic, where the radical use of dramatic violence becomes a mode of decolonial subversion and revenge. And it becomes the audience's choice to either look away or to read the politics between the lines.

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