

ABSTRACT

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MAPPING THE UNSEEN
"To Go Beyond"

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When we enter the rooms of the *Mapping the Unseen* virtual platform, we encounter three lingering questions which repeat along the spaces. We stumble upon them, as if they were meant to remind us where to look at, to re/direct our attention.

How does the unseen appear in a transcultural perspective?

How can something be represented that is not present?

How can a dialogue unfold a topic no one talks about?

These questions shape the research project of *Mapping the Unseen* as an effort to bring forward, that is, to make visible marginalized social topics. But as well, as I want to propose in the following lines, these questions are relevant to grasp the aims, methods and motivation of Artistic Research as the discipline of the arts which is mostly concerned with knowledge production and its inherent politics. It is a discipline that is otherwise difficult to pin down, define and come to terms on what it is and what it can do, questions regarding the type of knowledge that it might or not produce and for whom, that is, a question in regard its epistemological character (Borgdoff, 2005).

As represented in the virtual platform, notions of invisibility, absence and silence lurk in the background of the practice of Artistic Research and constitute the landscape in which it unfolds. They function as the negative space upon which visibility, presence and voice adopt their shapes. Already during the decade of the 60's the media theorist Marshal McLuhan conceived of artists as visionaries. As those members of a society who are able to bring forward information which is latent but veiled by layers of habit, tradition, or just pure indifference. Departing from the perceptual difference we establish between foreground and background as explained in Gestalt theory, McLuhan saw in art the possibility of rendering visible what normally would fall into the background as noise and interference, blocking our senses and abilities to grasp the consequences of the way we design our cities, media, social relationships, interactions and so on.

Taking this idea, I want us think together the background/foreground model to understand interrelationships between the artistic, the political and the aesthetic and in a second step, to see how they adopted a form in the virtual platform of the project. Furthermore, to think about the ways the unseen and the visible, silence and speech and absence and presence interact in the fields of knowledge, communication and the shaping of social relationships in a much more complex way that a mere "show and tell" exercise. We need to imagine and to relate. The connectivity fostered by the act of mapping not only connects topics and agents between different geographical spaces and among cultures, but as well poses links between different knowledge registers, some of them which are of a non-conceptual order. To become a bridge, the call for visibility implies the development of strategies towards empowerment with the will to connect collective and individual struggles and bring them out of the background into the foreground, to become a bridge we need common conceptual foundations built up in dialogue. In such a model the unsaid and the unseen, can be rendered visible and audible through a process that must first happen in the realm of imagination. Following Gloria Anzaldúa (2015), I think about imagination as the condition of possibility for new realities to manifest, that is, for the invisible to become visible and for the unutterable to enter speech, we require first the capacity to imagine new worlds, new ways of inhabiting them and as well to imagine ourselves being changed by them.