

NUEVAS NARRATIVAS:
TRANSLATION OF FAMILY HISTORY

By

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ABSTRACT

Family histories are hard to pass on when the native language of one's culture is no longer passed on to the next generation. Growing up between two cultures has created a void that is considerably complex. *Nuevas Narrativas: Translation of Family History* represents the dynamics involved with deciphering my grandfather's migration story. This investigation within family narratives illustrates the dynamics within reception, translation, and transcription of traditional narratives.

In this installation, I engage the reception of my grandfather's migration story as a way of addressing how foreign languages and historical narratives create displacement through time. The context for this work lies in the viewer's identification with objects of a specific history altered to visually represent personal transformation.

This work utilizes sound as a medium for communicating the various levels of displacement encountered when translating foreign languages. It is by this process of translation that transcripts are made and eventually read aloud in an attempt to map out a specific history. This process of mapping the story is an attempt at familiarizing myself to

my grandfather's history and as author Johannes Fabian states, "to be knowingly in each other's presence we must somehow share each other's past."¹

¹ Fabian, *Memory Against*, 25.

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INTRODUCTION

"Objects are culturally constructed to connote and consolidate the possession of past events associated with their use or ownership. They are there to be talked about and invested with the memories and striking events associated with their use. The link between past, present, and future is made through their materiality. Objects of a durable kind assert their own forms of commentary and therefore come to possess their own personal trajectories...personal biography of things."²

How is identity created without family stories? In the past, our shared experiences of history were handed down year after year, generation after next. The traditional approach of transmitting family narratives has helped in creating identity but now faces the rapid pace of technology. I am interested in the relationship between the various levels of history through object form. My focus is on the reception of traditional forms of history when they come into contact with different mediums and what happens to our identity in the process.

I am interested in how objects that communicate a specific time create or establish identity in relation to the complexities of language. What I have learned from these experiences continues to add to an even more dynamic identity that I now see as not fixed in time but as altered through time. *Nuevas Narrativas: Translation of Family History* develops this conversation to include other aspects that add to the evolving dimension of what make up the characteristics of hybrid identities and ethnic culture.

² Rowlands, *The Role Of Memory*, 144.

CHAPTER ONE: IDAHO

How did I come to find out about my grandfather's migration story? How did it all happen? The story itself is interlaced with many other stories leading up to a particular moment when I learned of the existence of an audiotape. This tape recounted for me the journey my grandfather undertook in his youth to bring his family north to America.

Every year my mother's family gets together at one central location for an annual reunion. One of the aunts designates a place for all of us to meet, and in one year's time we try to meet up. In the summer of 2009 we agreed to meet in central Idaho so that we would all have our fair share of driving.

For my family, the trek to the central Snake River Basin has many points of interest, and along the way my mother brought them to my attention. She pointed into the distance and began talking about how the farmer's fields that we drove by were similar to those she had once worked. Beyond Glenn's Ferry, off in the distance, we saw a plateau where my mother and her family had once worked.

"King Hill," my mother said as she recollected a time from her youth where she had lived in a small community with other migrant families. She spoke of the harsh winters and living in a boxcar when, after school, she would have to walk up to the plateau because the school bus would not drive up the steep grade in the snow. I looked at that road and wondered if anyone had perished traversing to the top, but I kept the thought to myself.

My family spent many days "working the sugar beets," and later I experienced first-hand the physical stress of the family business. The day consisted of working from sunup to sundown and even beyond the setting of the sun. They worked the fields while my grandfather raced past them, completing twice as much work as the rest of the family. His competitive spirit wore them out, and he would always scold them for the lethargy they displayed while working that day.

Upon the completion of the day's work, the family piled back into "that old wagon" and drove toward the boxcar they called home. Derailed from its tracks, the immobile home sat motionless up on that butte. I asked my mother if that boxcar was still up on that butte. She had mentioned a family friend named Armando that returned to write a historical account of living in the boxcars. I imagined his return to the boxcar, wondered what objects he may have found, and what history they may have produced.

We finally reached our destination where the other fifth wheel trailers and camper vans were parked. Their box-like forms covered in aluminum skin and retrofitted with the latest amenities were quite the departure from the family's immobile home of the past. These "mobile homes" did not speak of a history of migration but instead showed what two generations of hard work could afford. We situated our selves in various camping spots and parked for the weekend ahead.

We slowly inched our way out of our respected vehicles and migrated toward a central location. We greeted each other with open arms, rounder bellies, and thinning hair while the grandkids congregated to one side complaining about how bored they were. I should add that for some the car ride was an hour and for others it was two. I felt sorry for those parents who drove the latter distance. The kids eventually wandered off, led by one of the older and assumingly more responsible adolescents and continued their own

mischievous adventure. I stood vigilant watching over the motley crew while the rest of the adults gathered to prepare lunch.

Conversations begun in English alternated into Spanish and eventually passed on, melding into Spanglish. For those that happened to speak both languages, this was natural. For the rest of us, including myself, who are partially bilingual, it was confusing. The words that the older family members were saying became somber, and I heard my grandfather's name being mentioned along with my grandmother's. I found it hard to keep up, and every now and then I had to turn to my mother and ask what had just been said. There I was, in my early thirties, still asking my mother what the adults are talking about. I felt like a kid again.

I heard my aunt say that she had in her possession some tapes about grandma and grandpa. I asked her what was recorded on the tapes. She replied, "It's the story of your grandfather coming to America." At that moment, I realized that those tapes could potentially have a connection to me directly and that I needed to hear them.

CHAPTER TWO: FLORIDA

I am an Americanized Mexican. As a child growing up in Florida, I did not identify with Puerto Rican culture or Cuban culture, I would have to find my identity elsewhere. When I did attempt to fit into a particular culture, it felt awkward. My mother claims that while my brother and I were growing up, we had been given the option to not speak Spanish at home. What little Spanish I did learn was from listening to my parents argue with each other or from the swear words other kids would use. In each case, I would have to understand the words in order to make any sense of my environment.

"What did they just say?" I said to my mother as I sat at the table trying to understand the language around me. We were having brunch in what seemed like a foreign place. One moment we were enjoying the Florida weather, and then we were inside a restaurant among what seemed to be an Epcot Center-themed attraction. My father probably chose a Mexican restaurant so that my visiting family members could enjoy the local fare.

A mariachi band struck up a tune adding to the ambiance of iron wrought fencing, and polished, uneven stone floors. Piñatas hung overhead adding to the theme. It was like our own little version of Mexico in Florida, and our family seemed to be the center of it all. Suddenly, I realized that my grandfather was weeping. Until this moment, I had never witnessed any men in our family cry, and it was just as out of place as the atmosphere around me. I turned to my mother and asked her why grandpa was crying. She replied, "He is suffering from melancholy."

What? What is that I asked? That word was never a vocabulary word in school, and it was never used by any of my friends. I needed to know what it meant. My mother explained to me that the band was playing a specific song from Jalisco. Later I would come to find out that mariachi music had its beginnings in the state where my grandfather came from. I guess he identified with the music of the "old country."

My grandfather did not notice that I was looking up at him wondering about his condition; I suspect he was too prideful to admit his emotional state. Since I am not fluent in Spanish, I don't know if the matter was even discussed. The details from this particular event that I have just recalled are all that I remember of that day.

CHAPTER THREE: BOISE

When I listened to the tapes my aunt gave me, I was discouraged as I could only make out a fraction of the words. I played the tapes for hours on end, listening to my grandfather's voice, and memories of my childhood visits with my grandparents while they lived in Oakley, Idaho came flooding back. I envisioned their house and all of the random objects that my grandparents collected. I began thinking about those objects as if they were retelling that moment in history, and I realized that my grandfather's voice had been in the background. The merging of those objects and his voice are one memory I associate in relation to our history together.

As I struggled to make sense of the recordings I was able to make out certain phrases, specifically the phrase, "el norte." I realized that perhaps the tape was about going north to America. It was with this in mind that I soon realized that I needed help with translating the audio.

I approached the newest member of the MFA graduate student cohort, Luz Camerena, and asked if she would listen to the tapes in her spare time. I talked to Luz about the discovery of these audiotapes, and I beseeched her to assist me in translating what she could with whatever time she could. So I released my cassette tapes into her possession, not knowing what discoveries she might make. When I met up with Luz later on, we had a discussion about her findings. She confirmed that the story was in fact about my grandfather's migration to America.

Luz also let me know that she wasn't able to understand the recording completely, as it was hard to understand and some words did not translate. She suggested that I talk to someone that would be more familiar with the regional dialect, perhaps someone from the same region such as Adjunct Professor Lupe Galvan who also happened to be an acquaintance of mine.

Lupe agreed to take on the task of translator and transcriber. Each week I would talk with Lupe about what he was able to extrapolate from the story. My first instinct was for him to trace the places that my grandfather traveled to the story so that I might map them out.

This pace of discovery proved beneficial because it allowed me the opportunity to address my own misconceptions of migration. My grandfather's experience was hard, yes, but it was not as romanticized as walking barefoot across the desert like I had heard on many accounts. His migration would eventually consist of much more than that. It began with his cousin having an opportunity for him in the United States "working the fields." In the following chapter, a transcript details my grandfather's story.

CHAPTER FOUR: MEXICO

Transcript as Translated from the Audio

00:00:00 Then here goes the next one... well to come here, thought to myself how will I do it, how will it be done?' Oh well...one day there comes a cousin of mine, he came from the north (The U.S.), and he says to me "Hey listen, lets go north to the states...

00:00:26 Well how will I go if I don't even have a dime... I had really at most twenty-five to thirty dollars, but when you consider gas, provisions, and to leave some money to my wife...who can make that stretch...

"No, no," he says to me, "don't rush it. I will provide the ride, and I won't charge you until the trip is made." I say well in that case, that's a pretty good deal there...

Then I tell my father, "Dad, I will be taking Juanita, and you can give me money and what I may need" because you see she (Juanita) had plenty of maize, beans, and other food, food wise she had plenty but money wise she barely had any...I had actually only taken some ten dollars or so for myself and the rest I had given to her.

00:01:16 Yeah, so we left the next day and we arrived in Mexico (city), well with Dona Tula, and Dad's mother-in-law and there was also another women who didn't like me, most likely... She was a fat woman that gave me a bad vibe, and we would show up to eat and only once a day at around noon...

00:01:43 At night, I would go out – just for a little while around the area – and it's not like we were given much food wise – things would be gone if you left them out even something as simple as water, that fat woman would drink it.

00:01:54 Around that time my Dad showed up – I mean it was about eight days later when my Dad showed up, and he said "hey well, I see you haven't gone north yet." I said, "No, I can't go anymore, I lost my visa," meaning that my time has expired...so...

My father says to me – "Ah geez, well do you even know where the *estadio* (office to acquire a new visa) is?"

Well, the problem is that one still has to acquire a vehicle, pay the tolls, and costs.

My father says to me, "It's fine. We can go tomorrow then and leave early."

So the next day, we get up early and on the way to the *estadio* (office), we met up with a man (friend of my father's) [who] asks me about my visa – I say, 'Well, it's already expired.' The man says "Give it here, I will make it good"... So sure enough he made it good again, only he made it good for himself so he bought it from me, I sold it to him for I think three dollars – and he came to the U.S. in my name.

00:02:53 ...So we make to the *estadio*, and we encounter another of my father's friend. So the office man tells us that I can no longer purchase a temporary visa in my name and that if either one of us wanted to go north, we had to purchase our own. So my father buys one for himself, and of course because I had already sold mine, so I stayed behind at god's mercy.

00:03:20 ...So when my father arrives he calls me and tells me, "Hey you need to hurry up and make arrangements for yourself and your woman – you need to find

a way.” So I went to another *estadio*, called White Earth. It was there that I encountered some people asking what my business was – they asked if we were looking for work. I said no, just me. They replied that they might happen to have work available. They asked me where I was from, I replied San Miguel.

00:04:10 He tells me “Ha! Everyone that comes through here says they are from San Miguel! Let's see, give me some reason, who do you know from around there?” I say, "Well, I know the Martinez's, Hernandez's, Uncle Robledo, and Jose Robledo." He says, “Oh, well then, I guess you really do know some people... I'll give you a job...come along.”

So I went to work with him. I was there working some days. Then one day comes a guy with a friend in a fancy new car. They approached me and asked, “...are you looking for work? I say, "Ha! You guys are those people going around screwing everybody, someone pays you and you don't arrange for them to get their passport (visa)!" They said, “We are contractors, who work government to government! But we don't charge.”

00:05:12 I say, "Oh really, well if you aren't charging, then that's good! Sign me up!" So they sign me up and ask me how many people I was working with. I replied thirty. They said, "That's good!" So then came the time when the ranchers were arriving at the dairy...and they were signing up. Signing and signing, everyone! Everybody signed up except for one. And the contractors say “Where are there more?” I replied –"Over that way – there are two more other stables – from the same boss that owns this place.” And they go over there and almost everybody there signs up...so they acquired a lot of people!

00:05:56 So then later on, when it was time for one of us milkers to take the milk to town, we were supposed to bring back the newspaper. And between all of us we were supposed to gather up the money to pay the cost of the newspaper – something like five cents a piece, and all of us workers were supposed to be featured in the paper. I scoffed in disbelief!

00:06:20 Then one day, one of the milkers comes back and says, “Here it is!” It was the newspaper- sure enough, there we were, all of us that had signed up to work in the states. From there we were to show up at the Buena Vista Station to make the trip, but that was still before going to the states. We still had to first go and get physical exams and whatnot...in Selaya, Guanajuato. There in Guanajuato was where the office was located. And I thought, oh, I don’t even have money earned to eat, let alone for the train fare. When will all this happen? Well turns out that the train from there Mexico (city), runs from there to the states, and to Selaya. So I arrive at Selaya...drops all of us off and of course we were supposed to pass the physical exam...luckily I passed and pretty much everyone else too.

00:07:24 And I run across this guy and I asked him, "What’s the matter? You seem down." He says, “Well, I’m down because I don’t have any money left to eat and my wife also nothing to eat.” I say, "Don’t let that get you down. I have some money here. Here is some for the both of you (about a dollar each.)" Poor guy, we ended up chatting. Later he puts his hand in the moneybag I gave him...and says, "Here, take all your money back!" I replied, "No, it’s a gift. Buy some food and things you need. He says, “Thank you very much...I hope God will repay you.” The guy’s mother was there with us and she says, “Ah what luck that he (my son) found a great friend and

companion." I said, "Well sure, you know there he was, all alone"... She says, "No, no my son is a good person!" I said okay then.

00:08:38 So we arrive at Selaya and did our paperwork; later we reboarded the train and left...and in the middle of the night I was struck with an intense fever, and I felt I was actually dying! And I had no appetite...and on the train there were a few doctors, so the other passengers calls on one of them and says, "Examine this man, he is sick, see what you can do for him." So they gave me some aspirin and some other pills that I don't know what they were, but the fever remained.

00:09:24 ...We arrive at states (U.S.)

00:09:44 And for the meanwhile there we were, all of us, in some large waiting room...then the ranchers started arriving – and they came in saying, "Hey I need you five guys," or another would say, "I need you six guys, and another would say, "I need you five guys" and there were a few men left, and they were talking amongst themselves, and those were the only workers left –I was amongst those men... then came an old man, and he said to the interpreter "I need two men." The interpreter points us two out. The old man says, "Okay good, I will take them then."

00:10:20 ...So we went with the old man. The interpreter says to the old man, who was an American, "this man here is sick, take him to the doctor before you get home, on the way you can stop by the city, see a doctor and have him give him some medicine so he can recover." The American agrees.

So we go to the town, and we drive around looking for doctors, and the consensus was that there weren't any around. So we stop at some generic clinic; we asked for some medicine. Well it must have been some kind of medicine because after I took two pills, I

ended up with a more severe fever sonavabitch! Those pills made me sweat a lot! At night I kept waking up to keep turning over the mattress because it was soaked –it might as well have been raining in there.

00:11:17 I awoke well and sane but I had some slight vertigo... the boss brought us a pitcher of milk...and I said, "What's with the milk?" He said, "Don't drink the water, here we only drink milk, we don't drink the water. I said, "Holy!" Well then early the next day the boss came to check on me and asked how I was doing. I said I am better. He says, "Don't rush anything; take some more pills tonight"...and... I don't think we actually started working until the next week, because I remember it was raining, the soil was soaked so we really couldn't do anything at that point.

00:12:09 So the next week we started working beets...and like that just like that I was doing very well. So at this point there were three of us, companions... well it turned out that one of our companions was awful one; he even at one point wanted to kill us! He wanted to kill us because he wanted us to cook for him... All that was left was for us to literally feed it to him... He was very demanding, and we weren't passive about it. He kept demanding us to pay for things...food etc. He wanted to take advantage of us!

00:12:49 ...And he would throw fits! But the other companion was a good one; he was from Mexico (city) his name was Jesus something or other, I don't remember... The *smart ass*, the *bad* one, he would say to us "Hey why didn't you guy make any food for me?" We told him, "Well, we don't have servants around here. This isn't a restaurant where you have people waiting on you hand and foot." Then he says, Well, I thought we were friends?" I told him, "Well, not in that sense we aren't, and besides you wake up late; you don't make food; you don't do anything, and you don't

even wash the dishes; you don't even know how *we* eat; you even stay sleeping when we go to work. I don't see any obligation why we should feed you!"

00:13:30 Well he grabs a pitchfork, and he tried hitting me from behind, but luckily my friend stopped him in time... my friend laid into him hitting him with a backhand, and I got a good one in as well... so I tell the boss to take that guy away. I told him we didn't want him around in our room – not even for a second! So the interpreter comes around and took him away. But then they brought another guy who was even worse! He was a crook, the new guy! Oh geez...

So we left early one day to work the beets, so we were topping beets (cutting off the stems), and it was already fairly late in the day... and the boss comes and say, "Hey where is the other guy, isn't he here with you guys?" We said, "No he hasn't come yet. Maybe he stayed sleeping." Well next thing you know we could see some guy in the road walking with suitcases in each hand. Oh holy, he's probably off with our clothes or something... and surely enough, yeah he had already stolen our things, but luckily the supervisor took off after him in the truck and caught up to him, and he brought him back and said, "Look through for you your things." And in with all the stuff, he had taken a pair of my shoes, shirts, pants, and the same with my friend's things... Well, how could one stand for this? So the boss took *him* away and took him to the INS office...and that *one*, they sent him right back to Mexico immediately! They didn't give him any notice, just right back to Mexico!

00:15:08 ...And from that point we lead a fairly sad life...suffering, at least until we could receive a contract (another work contract). It took about two years of working there before I decided to go...*the year* that I came over illegally. I contacted my wife, and I asked her how much money do we have saved? She told me it was very little.

I asked, "Well, how much exactly?" She said it was about two hundred to three hundred dollars...I thought oh man I thought I had more money. So I told her, come up here, after all there, in our land (Mexico) there isn't any work, and the pay is lousy.

00:15:56 And I was living like a rat, a fucked rat! So I returned to Mexico, and in Monterrey I reunited with my wife and left her there in Monterrey and met up with some friends from San Miguel, and we crossed the border illegally ("as wetbacks"). So we were here again (in the U.S.), and we got work with a rancher in Texas...we worked for about a year or two, and at that point we brought our wives...and after that we made a life that was...a little better.

00:16:39 We had to cross the river, you know as 'wetbacks' but oh well...So one day one of the workers there had been speaking about getting an actual passport, and we said, that if it turned out to be real, that he should show us how to get them as well. He got his passport and told us how to get ours. He said, "It's very easy! All you need is a birth certificate. Get all of your certificates from Mexico, birth, marriage etc"

00:17:24 ...So a friend and I decided to go forward with it. I thought well, how am I going to pay for this? My friend, he had money. So I thought well I'll have to figure something out. So I go up to my boss and say, "Look, I want to arranged to get a passport, but I don't have any money, and I need you to lend me some...you can take it out of my pay. He replied, "Yes, well are you eligible?" I said, "Well I don't see why not, I haven't killed anyone; I haven't stolen anything, and I don't have any bad history in Mexico or here. He says, "Okay sure, that's fine but obviously what you need right now is money; how much do you need?" I replied about one hundred dollars. He replied, "Oh

yeah, that's fine; I can lend you that." So he lent me the money, and I headed to Mexico. There I obtained copies of my birth certificate, marriage etc., I returned right after that.

00:18:40 ...So when I arrive back in the states I call the ranch house to let them know I had returned. A woman answered the phone and tells me that the man who lent me the money had died. I reply, "What do you mean he died!" She says, "Yes." So I tell her, Well if he is dead, then I suppose now it's you who can take over." She says, "No, I don't know the terms in which you guys were doing business – I can't do that kind of thing; I can't lend you money. We (the dairy) already lent you one hundred dollars, that's a lot of money!" I replied, "Yes, that is a lot of money, but you will be paid back taken out of the pay, on top of that what I give in return *is* also a lot; what I give back is immediate." She says, "No, I can't lend you anymore." I replied, "Well, if you can't lend me any more money then I have to find another place or job that can and so I wont be able to work for a while. She replied, "Well I already told you..."

00:19:32 So I left for San Juan, Texas to meet up with a man who owned a store there, I think his name was Roc Elaza. He says to me, "Come by here; I can convince the woman to lend you the money." So I loaded some cargo into his car, and we returned to the dairy to speak with the woman. He says to the woman, "Miss, so I understand you wont lend this man any money?" She replies, "Well, he already owes us one hundred dollars." He replies, "Don't you see he is trying to get his passport, become legal etc., all of this is so that he can continue to work! Well, *I* am going to lend the money to him, but this is going to be from me, in fact I'm not going to lend it to him; I am going to give it to him – and I am way poorer than you!" She says, "No! Why are you doing this?" He says, "I need him around, I am going to give him the money but he is coming to work for me!" She replies "Oh no, well, how much do you need?" I tell her,

"Well overall for the rest of my family, at least another one hundred dollars." She answers, "Fine! Here you have it!"

00:20:36 She lent me the money. From there we went to Reynosa where I went to meet with two of Roc Elaza's lawyers. He tells the lawyers, "Here is my friend, I need you to make him legal – a.s.a.p." The lawyers reply, "Of course." I don't know what all the lawyers had to do; he worked on my file before others. I don't know how many people each lawyer was working on; his two lawyers had about one thousand people to work with to make legal...So like I said he must have bumped my file to the top.

00:21:28 About a month later or so, but I had a sick child at the time, I couldn't go anywhere any way...then I received a notice to be at the bridge (border) and have everything ready so that I could cross (into the U.S.), The man in charge of that station says to me, "How are the children?" "In good health, "I say." Well there is one in that back, but he is sleeping. "He responds, "Huh!"

00:22:09 ...We passed him and my wife...and about two miles later my friend uncovers the boy. He tells me the boy has died. I say, "What? What do you mean he died?" He replies, "Yes he is..." I knew he had been ill, but we didn't know he was on the verge of dying...but this illness was very dangerous...he got pneumonia almost immediately after leaving home...and now only to die.

00:22:35 ...We arrive at the ranch house (dairy), and we tell the woman in charge, and tell her we have arrived. She responds, "Oh very good, I am pleased!" We tell her, "Yes, but we haven't arrived pleased...our son has died." She responds, "What? How? Oh my, well don't rush anything. Listen, you guys don't have to pay me anything. Just send for the doctor and have him check the boy to see what causes he died from."

And the doctor came to tell us what the boy died from...she ended up paying for his burial plot...paid for the funeral...a friend (the boy's godfather) of mine built his coffin, free of charge. I didn't have to pay a single dime...I give a million thanks to all of those people who helped...and that was that. Here I am now...outliving everybody!

CHAPTER FIVE: SOUND

During the time that my grandfather's story was being translated, I began thinking about the potential of actually having a piece of my family's history, and I decided it was important to share it with others. Continuation of the tradition of storytelling requires that I retell his account and engage this custom moving forward. Realizing that analog audio was outdated, I began to convert the audio to a digital format so that I might share it with family members in the most accessible way, the Internet. While placing the audio file online, I realized the infinite potential of audio as a medium for art. Technology has become the newest medium for art, and I saw its potential through the manipulation of the audio. Sound became tactile for me just like all other mediums used in art making. I then began researching artists that were utilizing audio in various ways.

Technologically advanced processes of communication can be used to develop narratives in ways that blur the boundaries of our past methods of storytelling. Krzysztof Wodiczko is one such artist, blurring the boundaries with his own way of telling stories through video. In his *CECUT Project* (Plate 1), Wodiczko utilizes an integrated headset camera to capture the testimonies of the poor factory workers of Tijuana, Mexico. His projected video documents the stories of people of Mexico who have migrated north to find work, and projects their story on to the facade of the Omnimax Theater at the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT). The blurring of boundaries in this work places the speaker simultaneously as the foreground and background onto the theatre through the manipulation of video.

The politically driven content, captured live with the camera, is simultaneously emitted from two projectors onto the building emphasizing the larger issue of inequality plaguing the people of Mexico. The inequality for the people of Mexico has a correlation to the increase of demand for factory workers on the border. This demand has left other regions of Mexico impoverished as people seek out work towards the north in Tijuana. Wodiczenko is taking a form of media designed to promote Mexican culture, and refocuses it to address an issue that is not programmed on television or talked about in culture.

Susan Philipsz's 2010 Turner prize-winning sound work titled *Lowlands* (Plate 2) is one such example of an artwork that uses audio as a primary component. In this work, displayed at the Glasgow International Art Festival, Philipsz attached speakers under three bridges in Glasgow's city center. Audio played from under the bridges engulfing the space and the public in sound. The work takes three slightly different versions of the same song as they individually careen off "to take their own paths, returning to unison for the refrain."³ Philipsz's recordings utilized a traditional form of singing called a lament. This choice was inspired by a visit to the site when she noticed some flowers that marked the spot of a suicide. The lyrics to the lament refer specifically to the drowning of a loved one, and the pairing of the audio to the underpass establishes a historical context. The three laments overlap each other signifying the convergence of the architecture and the conformity of the audio to that space.

With Philipsz work I understood the potential for history, specifically that of a form of storytelling to communicate in today's world. Her method of creating these

³ Higgens, "Turner Prize Won." 1.

sound-based, site-specific works takes into consideration the history of a space and from that point an aural representation forms. Her approach to art-making is poetic as she uses the medium of sound through song.

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller incorporate multimedia works of "dramatic audio tracks" dealing with themes of time, voyeurism, dreams, and mystery. The multi-sensory work created by this couple including *The Carnie* (Plate 3), a piece in which the aural adds depth to an already visually overwhelming installation. The installation's form consists of a moving carousel with synchronized audio and lights. The affect created from this work of art builds a menacing tone as the audio moves around the space, intensified by the disturbing light display.

I see in the works of Cardiff and Miller the potential for objects to communicate complex issues in tandem with sound. *The Carnie* represents a multidisciplinary approach to art-making that is well suited to represent complex issues like "identity." Audio also has the potential to develop visual narratives further by placing the audience in a context and directing the listener from one place to the next. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller address this through their series of *Walks*. Audio, at times taken from the everyday world and at other times fabricated, is assembled in a way that builds a narrative while directing the viewer through the story as it unfolds.

Distinct sounds trigger visual cues allowing the listener to build a story internally with little to no physicality of a material presence. In *Conspiracy Theory- Théorie du Complot* (Plate 4), the listener follows the unraveling of what could be a crime in progress. Our expectations are unfulfilled when the audio rewinds and we assume that we are returning to the beginning of the narrative only to be misled by our assumptions and redirected by a final clue.

The installation *Nuevas Narrativas: Translation of Family History* places the listener between two cultures, two languages, and two time periods as they walk through the space. Similar to Cardiff and Miller, my intention is for the listener to experience the story as it unfolds and to feel a sense of displacement while attempting to translate or understand the story as the English version falls out of sync with the Spanish audio.

The utilization of audio as a medium in the "visual" arts can be traced back to Italian Futurist painter and composer Luigi Russolo. Russolo engaged sounds as a medium for creating compositions and the term was coined "noise concerts"(Plate 5). His 1913 manifesto, *L'Arte dei Rumori or The Art of Noises*, establishes that the industrial revolution was the catalyst for creating an art with sound. Russolo created his works in order to take sound and incorporate the noises to add depth to music that was indicative of the time that he lived in. For me, Russolo's manipulation of audio becomes visual art when the fabrication of a medium for transmitting the audio is considered.

Where the Italian Futurists used sound for creating music in a chaotic and abstract way, my installation takes the sound of my grandfather and concentrates on his memory, enabling the creation of identity. The recording of my grandfather's story represents the sound of his memory. Leslie Morris refers to sound as a sensory experience, acoustically aiding in the recalling of memory.

The sound of memory can be a tangible "recording" of how an event is remembered acoustically, while the memory of sound presupposes a melancholic elusive and perhaps more fragile and transient than the visual sites of memory;

significantly, of the five senses, sound is the only one that requires a medium for its transmission.⁴

Hearing my grandfather's voice helps me remember him and in turn helps create my identity. Through the various stages of interaction with the audio and the experience of orchestrating and navigating the installation, I formed a relationship with my culture and my grandfather that I was unable to achieve when he was still alive.

⁴ Morris, *The Sound of Memory*, 368.

CHAPTER SIX: OBJECTS FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF HISTORY

How does one communicate the transient state of migration through object form?

This was the question that I asked myself as I began my search for objects. I also started thinking about the time that my grandfather had lived, and this for me would allow the context to be established for his story. Would there be a way to communicate that specific time so that my work would emote the early twentieth century? I began, just as I had with many other project's traveling from thrift store to antique store.

I stumbled upon the first trunk at a thrift store. I began scrutinizing the object's form based on my questions that I had recited to myself, and I felt that the trunk spoke specifically about the transient nature of moving, but not really about migration. I began thinking about the history of the trunk in relation to someone else's lived experience.

Those experiences only reflected some one else's history and not my own or my grandfather's. I thought to myself about how to reappropriate the history of these objects and decided to alter them just enough to allow a person to see the object as a trunk but different enough to make one reconsider the expectations we place on history and objects. I thought to myself about the audio and the richness of the quality of my grandfather's voice, as it was so powerful that it brought me to tears. The emotions from hearing his voice after such a long period of time only reinforces the fact that he is no longer living. It was then I decided that I would employ sound as a medium for moving forward.

Sound in the installation utilizes the function of the narrative as a traditional means of communicating stories, and likewise, it is harnessed in such a way to create a displacement. This is accomplished by the juxtaposition of two different languages layered upon each other with the timing in sequence, but eventually the timing of the audio loses synchronicity. This displacement of timing is important because it refers to my experience with the language as a type of distortion that happens in bilingual conversations. Susan A. Crane addresses the issues of distortion specifically when she talks about the reception of museum works that focus on language and time.

The "distortion" related to memory and history in the museum is not so much of facts or interpretation, but rather a distortion from the lack of congruity between personal experience and expectation, on the one hand, and the institutional representation of the past on the other.⁵

Distortions related to language and history is something I see within my own misperceptions of my grandfather's experience. My expectations of his story before I heard the audio related to stereotypical representations of immigration that I witnessed on television and popular culture. What I came to understand was that each migration story is specific to each individual and that my grandfather's account had to be manipulated so that I could understand it.

Audio components are used in this work to reinforce the visual experience with the objects. The various speakers are used to transmit the audio (Plate 6 and 7). These examples show my process of wiring the audio components into the trunks. The audio

⁵ Crane, *Memory, Distortion, And History*, 44.

components show my methodology of mixing mediums and aesthetics in order to communicate complex issues.

Audio production software became the main component for mixing the analog into a digital format. The technology made for an interesting dynamic since the context for this work is specifically about re-collecting and transmitting the audio. I use electronics in a way that allows me the opportunity to continue the tradition of storytelling by taking my grandfather's story and reproducing it for others. Unlike Russolo's art of noises, I envision sound as a medium for communicating another dimension to sculpture, that of time, language, and identity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: INSTALLATION

The installation places the viewer in a space where sound is the primary medium. This is intentional because I want to emphasize the spoken narrative as the central focus, which is supported by the objects that establish the context. Entering the space, the viewer is confronted by the audio consisting of my grandfather's migration story in both English and Spanish. The Spanish version is the audio recording of my grandfather telling the story. It is juxtaposed with the translated version that I read directly from the transcript.

As I read the transcript the two stories fall out of sync. This is significant and relates to my own history with multiple languages and how I heard the world around me. Even as I read the transcript I cannot match the speed or rhythm of my grandfather. This idea of displacement is related to language and history as I confront my own inability to translate the past.

The trunks become the objects for the transmission of the narrative through the audio components that I have installed into them. I have used the trunks as signifiers of a set time period and specific history and altered them to literally transmit the narrative. Formally, the trunks are set up in the space to correspond to the cardinal directions one would see on a map. This relates to my experience of tracing my grandfather's steps on the map as I learned the story.

The portion of the audio that is in Spanish is represented in the trunks that lie on the north-south axis. This relates to the direction in which my grandfather traveled to come to America. The trunks individually symbolize the unique nature of each migration story. Those on the north-south axis are equal distance from the center as are those on the west-east axis. In a mythological approach to this work, that axis refers to the return of Quetzalcoatl. In my envisioning of my grandfather's migration, I related back to historical accounts I learned in Mesoamerican art history. I envisioned his experience of migration to be similar to historical migrations of the past.

The central portion, or the crossroads of the compass, is symbolic to me because of how I perceive that space in relation to the living and the deceased. The mustard yellow trunk represents this crossroad between the two worlds. Referring back to Mesoamerican culture, the crossroads represent the division between the place one descends or ascends to. They could be represented in an Anglo-Christian concept of heaven and hell. In the ancient cultures, this axis point equated to the "axis mundi."

The speakers that are in the trunks have been collected from various second-hand stores with the intent of becoming part of this installation. They have all been matched up with one another in a sequence that places them into the cases in a symmetrical fashion. This is a means for organizing this work further in a subtext dealing with harmony.

The white wires that come out of each trunk return to the central steamer trunk, representing how I now relate family stories as a type of ongoing purification process. When the wires connect to the boxes, this forms a connection; when the story connects to

the viewer through the sound, this forms another. The dynamics of interconnectedness refers to my relationship to this work and how history is part of that connectivity.

CONCLUSION

While retracing my grandfather's steps, I was reminded of history before his account had taken place and wondered if I would be able to identify with his story. I may not be directly a part of this issue of migration today, but I realized the significance of this work in relation to what is currently happening in the world. My only contribution to this dialogue happens in between those lines that divide Mexican-American culture still. I am trying to listen and understand so that I may better identify with my own culture through my grandfather's experience.

This installation and its reliance upon narrative, history, and language has enhanced my experience of my own culture and helped to define my own identity. The recording of my grandfather has helped establish my own identity through the process of engaging with his story and coming to terms with the possibility that I may never know who he was. I felt that while translating his story I was able to identify with him through his experience only to realize that the story did not bring me closer to him. At the same time of translating the audio, I felt a type of displacement from his story created by this act of translating

Furthermore, my experience with his history has created a lasting impact on me. His indirect influence in my life has filled in a partial void with my investigation of my family's history. This particular experience is one that has reminded me of my inquiry with my research into Mesoamerican culture. In both instances, I had been trying to understand who I was in relation to experiences of others from the past.

My utilization of technological processes is an attempt to fill the void of the traditional storyteller where the role has been left void. I intend to expand on the ideas that this installation has called to light and help others define their own identity in relation to this complex world. My story, although unique, may be similar to others who are generations removed from their original ethos and language. I envision a body of work that continues to address this topic while pushing interdisciplinary boundaries further in the process.

Upon completion of this installation I realized that everyone has a different experience with history and languages and a different approach to understanding them. In my approach, objects and sound act as mnemonics to reinforce memories of a nearly forgotten language and culture. The complexities of deciphering languages create a dynamic of lived experiences that is often unperceivable but through this installation I hope to show the dynamics of being between two worlds.



Plate 1. Krzysztof Wodiczko. *CECUT Project*, 2000, video projection with camera, (<http://web.mit.edu/idg/cecut.html>)



Plate 2. Susan Philipsz. *Lowlands*, 2010; detail (installation).
(<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/willow/soundart2010/SusanPhilipsz.jpg>)



Plate 3. Cardiff and Miller. *The Carnie*, 2010, moving carousel with synchronized audio and light. 10x15 feet.
(http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/the_carnie.html)



Plate 4. Cardiff and Miller. *Conspiracy Theory / Théorie du Complot*. 2003
Video walk, 16 minutes, 40 seconds.
(http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/the_carnie.html)

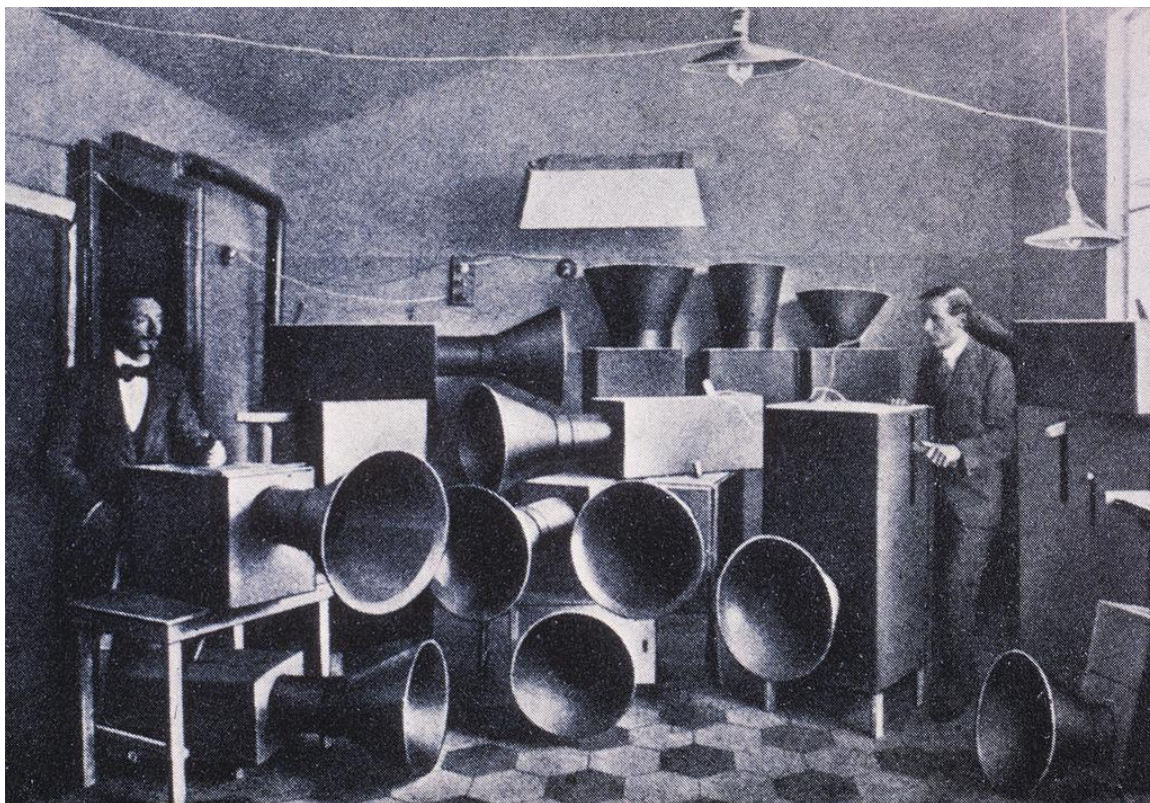


Plate 5. Luigi Russolo Russolo and Piatti with noise instruments. 1913.
(<http://library.artstor.org.libproxy.boisestate.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8CJGczI9NzldLS1WEDhzTnkrX3gsf1h0cC8%3D&userId=gzJCczkr&zoomparams=>)

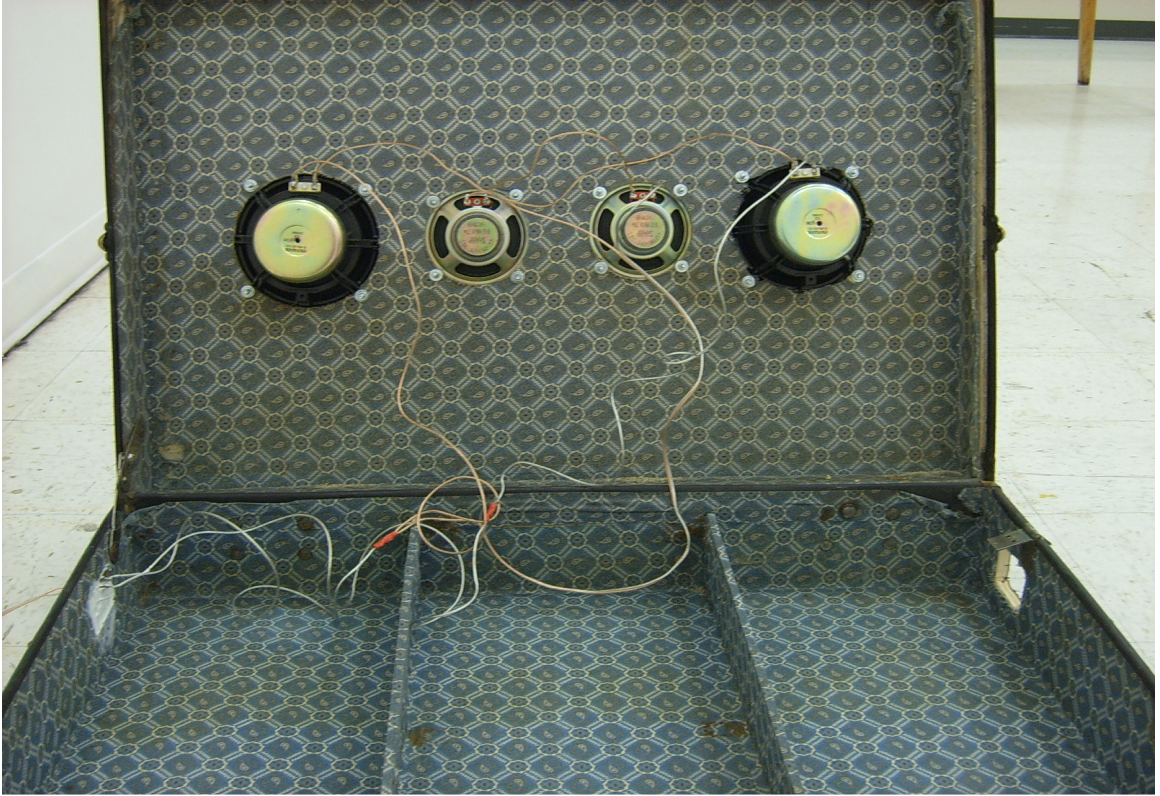


Plate 6. Miguel A. Delgado. *Nuevas Narrativas: Translation of Family History*, 2011, footlocker with audio components.



Plate 7. Migel A. Delgado. *Nuevas Narrativas: Translation of Family History*, 2011, steamer trunk with audio components.

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APPENDIX

CD

In this thesis document, I have included the CD of my grandfather's migration story as an attachment in a pocket in the back cover.