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The GIF that Cries: Digital Representations of Peru's Post-conflict Condition

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine digital representations of the post-conflict condition in Peru and to locate them within the larger Peruvian visual cultural ecology. Through the analysis of a series of popular meme pages, videos and other examples of digital art, I expand on understandings of how Peruvian visual culture has been shaped by the repercussions of the Internal Armed Conflict, and more precisely by the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. I observe that digital spaces of visual expression have become ways for many young Peruvians to critically engage with the realities of Peru's recent history and current condition in ways made impossible by traditional visual media. However, such discursive practices permitted within the digital are sometimes contradicted by aesthetic trends that foster a romanticization of the period coinciding with the Internal Armed Conflict. This article thus highlights the friction between the potential and the limitations of digital tools and platforms when it comes to representing and discussing the Peruvian post-conflict condition.

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INTRODUCTION

Peru's Internal Armed Conflict between state forces and the Maoist guerrilla group Shining Path, the main phase of which spanned the 1980s and 1990s, had a myriad of effects on the country. Beyond the unimaginable human loss, estimated at 60,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of displaced people,[1] the effects of the conflict can be observed in the subsequent restructuring of Peruvian political, economic and social life. The second half of this period coincided with Alberto Fujimori's dictatorial regime, which was marked by high levels of corruption and crimes against humanity. The slow decline of Shining Path following the capture of their leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992, along with Fujimori's resignation and self-exile to Japan in 2000, opened the door for interim President Valentín Paniagua to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate the causes of the conflict, understand its impact, and establish a series of recommendations.

The publication of the TRC's final report in 2003 was not only a cornerstone of the country's transition to democracy but has also become a means for many Peruvians to understand this period, regardless of their involvement or links to its violence. Not only has it given artists new frameworks through which to understand the violence of the time and given many a language to reflect on their own relationship with the past (Chauca), it has also been at the centre of emerging academic and institutional practices and endeavours, such as the development of visual anthropology in Peru (Dietrich and Ulfe).

This new space for thinking about and discussing the country's recent history offered by the TRC's final report also ushered in a shift in Peru's visual ecologies. Visual narratives became a privileged space of meaning making. However, the new visual language that has developed since the publication of the TRC's final report has become a contested space, in which some visual representations have served to support and disseminate the testimonies of victims of this period's violence, while others have contributed to the creation and promotion of a post-conflict narrative in which economic growth has retroactively justified the state-led violence of the period, eschewing any forms of historical or social justice. The post-conflict cultural sphere in Peru has thus become a contested space in which the effects of the Internal Conflict are often re-signified (Ulfe).

Since then, artistic practices as well as human rights activism in Peru and Latin America have been heavily influenced by digital technologies and aesthetics. Entire generations of Peruvians have been brought up in the post-conflict era and the post-TRC art world. For many of these young artists and creators, two influential moments in their practice coincided historically: the early stages of this transition to democracy which initiated a long process of reconciliation, and the arrival of the Internet and digital technologies to Peru. This creates a particular context in which contemporary digital aesthetics, trends and artistic practices become intertwined with Peru's recent history.

While the ideological and political implications of post-TRC visual productions have been thoroughly studied, very little attention has been paid to the role that digital cultural productions have played within this conjuncture. This article seeks to address this gap by including digital representations of the Peruvian post-conflict condition in pre-existing debates regarding Peru's wider post-conflict visual culture.

The article is split into three sections. The first explores the visual shift that took place following the publication of the TRC's final report. More specifically, it establishes the ways in which new digital spaces have become a necessary tool for many to circumvent the ideological pitfalls of traditional Peruvian visual culture. The second section examines a selection of emblematic Peruvian meme pages and hashtags that serve as examples of these new digital spaces. These are the Facebook page *Meme No* and *Rayo Pudiente*, the Instagram account *Daddy Velasco* and the cross-platform hashtag #NoAKeiko. The third and final section looks at the use of digital aesthetics such as Vaporwave and early digital nostalgia in these new social media practices, and how they reveal cracks in the supposed subversiveness that these spaces represent in contemporary Peruvian political and visual culture.

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[1] Due to the nature of armed conflicts, the exact numbers of victims and affected people are difficult to establish. Studies as recent as 2019, however, have offered new models to estimate the number of deaths and the responsibility of both state and terrorist violence. According to Rendón, the total number could be lower than the TRC's estimates, but the proportion of these deaths attributed to the state is perhaps much higher than originally thought.

My methodological approach utilizes a two-pronged discourse analysis that combines 1) an analysis of the "web of intertextuality" in which these images are embedded in order to "[address] questions of power as they are articulated through visual images themselves" (Rose 169), as well as 2) the "articulation of [these] discourses through institutional apparatuses and institutional technologies … [which] produce the objects and subject positions associated with various institutions" (Rose 195). This article thus looks at the selection of images as being connected to others within the visual ecology of Peruvian digital cultural productions, but also as products of the digital technologies that embed discourse within these images.

This is in keeping with a visual studies understanding of "visuality" as "the craft, techniques, and processes of seeing" (Heywood and Sandywell), through which we understand "the visual image as the focal point in the processes through which meaning is made in a cultural context" (Dikovitskaya 68). Visualities are thus constructed not only as a series of images that form a discursive thread, but also by the institutions, platforms and technologies that frame the act of seeing.

My approach to researching this corpus also considers what Rodríguez-Ortega calls Digital Social Sciences and Digital Humanities of the South (DSSDHS), which they describe as a

> consubstantial critical dimension of DH … [that] arises from the recognition of two realities: first, an imbalance in the processes of access, production, and distribution of knowledge and culture, with the consequent prevalence of certain political-cultural models over others; and second, a dynamic by which these models are imposed (often by highly localized and naturalized means), even though they are not always best suited to local contexts and territories or do not fit at all. (Rodríguez-Ortega 104)

Considering that the web's supposed neutrality is a First-World fantasy (Ginsburg; Nakamura; Cánepa and Ulfe), our reading of these digital visual objects considers the colonial dynamics at play within digital spaces – these being a part of homogenizing projects that generate a subalternation of knowledge. The coloniality of power (Mignolo) that is often masked within digital spaces (hiding behind the idea of the digital as a level playing field) is legitimized by these very notions and is then weaponized to invisibilize *other* ways of using the digital and of creating knowledge within it. From a visual studies perspective, this corresponds to Martin Jay's idea of "scopic regimes" or Barriendos's "coloniality of seeing" in which colonial dynamics influence how we engage in the act of seeing, how we interact with images and make sense of our world through them. To resist these regimes, other forms of engaging with visual culture, or what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls "countervisualities", need to be created: "the only alternative is another regime, another more or less coherent form of visual life with its own internal tensions and coercive as well as liberating implications" (Jay 111).

Thus, both discourse analysis and decolonial understandings of digital spaces are essential to our reading of our corpus. Not only do they consider the overarching power structures that inform how these images are produced, disseminated, received and understood, but they also recognize the complexities and paradoxes of digital spaces. Mainly, I understand this corpus as being a part of a space which is simultaneously subjugated to the dynamics of colonial power structures while at the same time existing as the space necessary for its creation. This allows for a nuanced approach to digital representations of post-conflict Peru.

THE POST-CONFLICT SHIFT TO VISUAL NARRATIVES

To begin, it is important to investigate how the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's final report created a new framework that has shaped how many have come to understand, represent and remember both the events of the conflict and its aftermath. With regard to the visual dimension of the post-conflict transition, the TRC placed particular importance on visual narratives to foster common spaces and expand the "circle of the we" (Alexandre in Saona 11) through the dissemination of testimonial accounts. The most emblematic of these is the organization of the photography exhibition entitled *Yuyanapaq* ("to remember" in Quechua), a collection of photographs that serve to tell the story of the victims of violence during this period. This exhibition was inaugurated by the TRC in 2003 and was recommended to be placed permanently in the Museo de la Nación. The exhibition was meant to invite non-victims to empathize with victims, consider historical wounds to be shared wounds, and take part in the process of collective memorialization by "distilling stories and findings from the TRC's vast work and presenting them in a clear and emotionally compelling fashion" (Fieldman 66). The success of this strategy has been celebrated by Degregori, who points out that the importance of art in memorialization processes lies in its potential to make the population interact with material that they would not see under normal circumstances (Saona). Cynthia E. Milton also points out the need to visually present the results of the TRC:

> Art may help not only those who have gone through traumatic events to put shape and give meaning to their experiences – to express something about the pain, to paraphrase Sánchez – but art may also help those who have not directly experienced such events to come closer to a sympathetic awareness of them. (Milton 3)

While the focus on creating spaces of remembering through arts and culture by the TRC has been applauded, it is important to highlight that the recommendations of its final report emphasized a way of understanding the violence of the conflict as resulting from "a structure favourable to the expansion of violence as the grammar of social relations in Peru" (Drinot 25), and considered both Shining Path and state forces to be equal authors of the most serious crimes of the period. These recommendations were made with the aim of giving more space to victims, as most were not aligned with either side of the conflict. However, as Paolo Drinot highlights, this more democratic form of remembering, which places the victims at the centre, must compete with another form of remembering the conflict that seeks to justify the Fujimori regime's counter-violence. This form of remembering is

> an attempt, beginning in the mid 1990s, on the one hand, to counteract the forgetting of the violence that Peru had experienced, a forgetting that was being imposed by the Fujimori government (a forgetting, moreover, that appeared consecrated by the amnesty law of 1995) and, on the other, the official *fujimorista* narrative, that presented itself, as the official *pinochetista* narrative in Chile had done, as a "memory of salvation". (Drinot 19)

This has made post-conflict visual culture in Peru a space of contention, as not only have victim-focused narratives used visual storytelling as a privileged tool, but the discourse associated with the "memory of salvation" has also carved out a space within this visual ecology. Film and television productions, art exhibitions, plays, advertising campaigns and other manifestations of visual culture have become fertile ground for the struggle between these two discursive proposals. Examples that demonstrate the tension that characterizes contemporary Peruvian visual culture are not difficult to find and are closely linked to different political, ideological and economic interests and the ways in which certain elites benefited from the concentration of power during the conflict period, specifically in the field of visual arts, where enthusiasm for more socially aware art practices has intersected with a growing neoliberal economy (Borea).

Because of the tension between forms of representing the past centred on victims and historical truth, and those focused on redeeming Fujimori's legacy, associating the former with terrorism has been the calling card of many who support the latter. With numerous cases of artistic works or public institutions being accused of advocating for terrorism, creating, hosting or displaying art in Peru means navigating the political dynamics governed by this ideological dichotomy (and its consequences).

The examples of discursive violence exerted on the artistic community are numerous. Perhaps the most emblematic and commented upon case of this phenomenon is "El ojo que llora" [The Eye that Cries], a monument located in the city of Lima created by Lika Mutal. This public monument features a monolith in the centre of a labyrinth formed by stones, each including the name, age and year of birth of a victim of the Internal Conflict. The monument has been vandalized by pro-Fujimori supporters on several occasions, their motivation being that supporting all victims listed in the TRC's report is automatically an apology for terrorism, as it does not serve to glorify the results of the state's intervention in the conflict. This type of reasoning is often at the centre of the now common weaponization of the term "terrorist" against any attempt to honour the lives of victims or seek historical justice (Fowks).

However, although the way in which the monument faithfully includes and represents the TRC's findings and conclusions can be applauded, Mabel Moraña points out its ideological blind spots, mainly the fact that the monument, from its conception to its location, exists in white, urban and middle-class spaces. On this paradox, Moraña writes:

> These themes confront us once again with the controversial relationship between history and memory, experience, and discourse, and with the problematic connection that memorialist projects have with the established power, which often manages to co-opt them and reabsorb them into the dominant ideology. (Moraña 277)

The search for spaces of commemoration after the period of violence also included the creation of the Lugar de memoria (Place of Memory), a space dedicated, as the name suggests, to artistic and intellectual manifestations relating to remembering the conflict. This space has been the target of criticisms such as those aimed at "El ojo que llora", that is, that it was built, conceptualized and kept in the hands of groups little affected by the violent events of the conflict period. Spaces meant for remembering thus fall prey to a double attack, on the one hand from invalidation by proponents of a "memory of salvation" and, on the other, through their efforts being co-opted by influential institutions.

As the ways of remembering the violent past in Peru have been divided between modes focused on forgetting, connected with the "memory of salvation", and others focused on human rights and historical justice, the language of memory, as María Eugenia Ulfe and Carmen Ilizarbe point out in their analysis of the recent pardon granted to Fujimori, becomes a tool that can be usurped and politicized "in the fight to control the narrative around the country's recent history" (Ulfe and Ilizarbe 139). Since the publication of the TRC's final report, the logic behind a "memory of salvation" has also served as the ideological basis for political projects of national renewal and the construction of new forms of citizenship focused on entrepreneurship and economic growth. Post-conflict governments have been characterized by their emphasis on economic reconstruction, with a strong concentration on individual entrepreneurship, exports and tourism.

To consolidate these efforts and encourage the participation of the general population, a national branding project called "Marca Perú" was established, which also opted for visual narratives. Through economic projects, advertising campaigns and marketing strategies, the Peruvian state wanted to sell an image of a country open to tourism, foreign investment and economic exchange. This economic and political project was deployed both abroad and within the national territory, as it sought to encourage citizens to act as "ambassadors" of the national brand. The campaign message was based on the idea of self-improvement through economic success, individual entrepreneurship and national pride. Implicitly, it was suggested that this economic growth was the way to "heal" the country after the conflict. According to the logic of Marca Perú, the economy is the only way to overcome the past, which requires the formation of a new Peruvian nation based on utopian ideas of progress. In this new order, symbolic citizenship is accessed through economic participation and not through memory or human rights. Gisela Cánepa places this within the context of the neoliberal reforms pushed by the dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori. In this,

> folkloric cultural expressions as fashionable cultural resources gained prominence within these new national epics. In the public debate such cultural ethos is being invoked to explain the outstanding economic growth of the last two decades. At the same time, it is summoned as the foundation for a new national utopia that gives way to a new social contract that would be inclusive of cultural diversity. (Cánepa 10)

This public policy, "which aims to intervene in the country's national symbolic references and in the social ties of its citizens" (Cánepa and Lossio Chavez 18), prevents memorialization processes focused on historical justice and human rights, considering them "politically inconvenient" (Milton and Ulfe 28). Thus, the "memory of salvation" is positioned as the only option to access symbolic citizenship, when nation branding is considered "as the appropriate means to redefine the place of the nation as a political, economic and cultural entity within the framework of global networks and alliances" (Cánepa and Lossio Chavez 23).

This logic, posited as a way to emerge from the economic and social effects of the Internal Conflict, does not leave any room for cultural products relating to themes such as memory or historical justice, or perspectives coming from historically marginalized voices, as they are deemed not "marketable" or "profitable" enough to be considered a part of the new nation. This has informed many aspects of contemporary Peruvian arts and culture, as it has made it more difficult for conversation and memory to find spaces where they are not threatened.

FROM THE EYE THAT CRIES TO THE GIF THAT CRIES: THE *MEME*IFICATION OF THE POST-CONFLICT CONDITION

The debates surrounding representations of the violence of the period and its repercussions, and the public backlash that artists and activists have faced over time, have made it difficult for visual artists and creators to participate in spaces of discourse around issues pertaining to the Internal Conflict period. The dichotomy created by the opposition between forms of representation based on salvation and those based on human rights has excluded many who perhaps neither agree with the salvation discourse nor feel they have the authority to speak on issues of human rights violation, but do want to express feelings regarding the country they have inherited. However, this vacuum has been in part filled by new spaces created by digital technologies. The years following the main period of the conflict (and the end of the Fujimori era) coincidentally aligned with what was, for many Peruvians, the point when they gained access to digital technology and the Internet. This creates a three-pronged situation where 1) digital spaces and social media have become a space for many to escape the dichotomy of the "salvation versus human rights" forms of representing the legacy of the Internal Conflict by widening access to these tools of representation; 2) seeing as both historical moments coincided (the advent of Peruvian digital culture and the transition to democracy), such new digital representations of this period often simultaneously denounce the violence of the period while being nostalgic for the aesthetics and references of that period; and 3) digital tools have been used as ways to create new networks that transcend local or national art systems and promote regional or continental solidarity and practice.

As the turn to the visual became a central element of the cultural dynamics of the post-conflict condition, it is not a surprise that the development of digital culture would also add to the ways in which the conflict has been remembered and represented. In this section I seek to understand how the visualization of the post-conflict period can be understood as a process of memeification of recent history and how the ideological dichotomies presented in the previous section function within this new digital reality.

To begin, by memeification of the post-conflict condition I am referring to the ways in which memes have become a tool for many Peruvians to engage with their country's recent history and its aftermath. The meme thus becomes a collective vehicle for discourse. According to Shifman, memes can be defined as "(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (Shifman 7). This is a departure from the traditional Dawkinsian understanding of the term, which posits the meme as a form of transmission of ideas from user to user. Shifman insists on memes as "socially constructed public discourses in which different memetic variants represent diverse voices and perspectives" (Shifman 7). The meme, in this case, is seen as both an individual and collective instance that allows us to observe the "stances" behind each meme, or

> the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers. [They] can decide to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation. (Shifman 40)

Following this understanding of the meme as a visual object (still or moving image), transformed and shared by multiple people, which can reveal how individuals relate to and dialogue with larger conversations, leads us to consider the political nature of the practice of meme making. The use of memes as a tool for political expression can be linked or compared to the use of political cartoons, campaign slogans and posters, but with the difference that they are a vernacular form of communication, as they are not the idea of a sole author but an accessible and bottom-up form of collective expression (Chagas 300). This is important to note, considering the complex history of visual culture in the Peruvian post-conflict context, in which the visual ecology is a battleground for meaning making and resignification of the country's history. Memes can thus be considered an entry point into the political opinions of a population that, historically, did not have access to public debate (Chagas 305).

The spaces created by digital culture have given way to new aesthetics and ways of expressing political positions or discontent with the political situation in Peru. Something that has significantly changed the visual space around political expression has been memes. In some cases, social media accounts specifically dedicated to the creation of original memes have emerged in the context of a scandal or specific news story. We can think of the *Meme No* page that started as a mockery of the campaign to impeach the then mayor of the city of Lima, Susana Villarán, who was accused of accepting bribes. As a vote was called for her ousting, the campaigning was divided between the "Sí" side, which sought her removal, and the "No" side, which wanted her to remain in office. The memes featured on *Meme No* initially mostly referenced a series of billboards commissioned by the No campaign that featured prominent figures from Lima's arts and culture scene posing with their forearms forming an X and a slogan explaining why they supported the mayor (Figure 1).

Meme No featured many spoofs of that billboard campaign, which simultaneously highlighted the page's political alignment with the movement in support of the mayor, but also made fun of the fact that most of the people featured were members of the capital city's cultural elite. This was understood as a betrayal of the movement's intention to be diverse, inclusive and democratic (Figure 2).

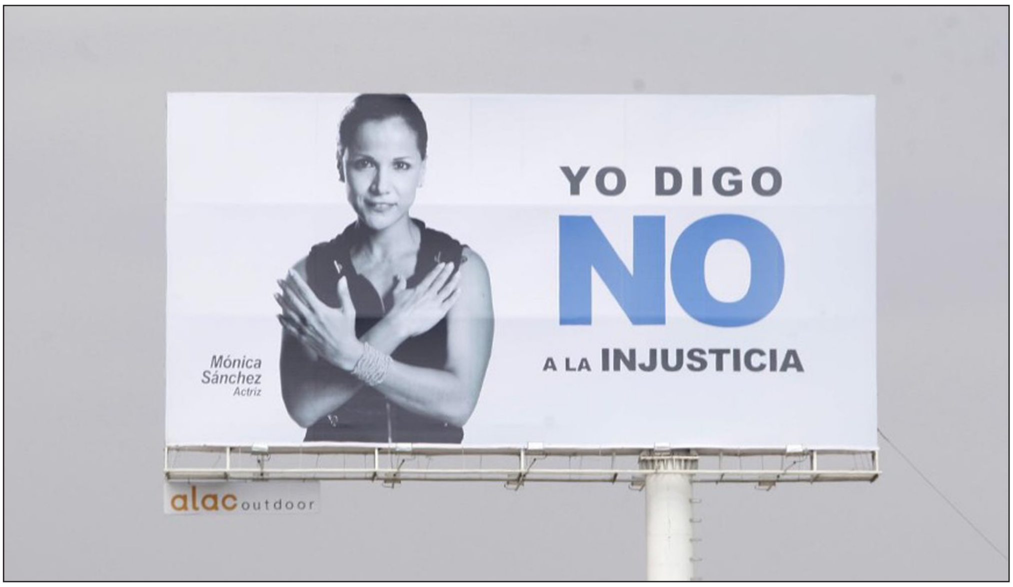

Figure 1 Original billboard ad for the "No" campaign.

Source: Twitter- @BlogdoFavre.

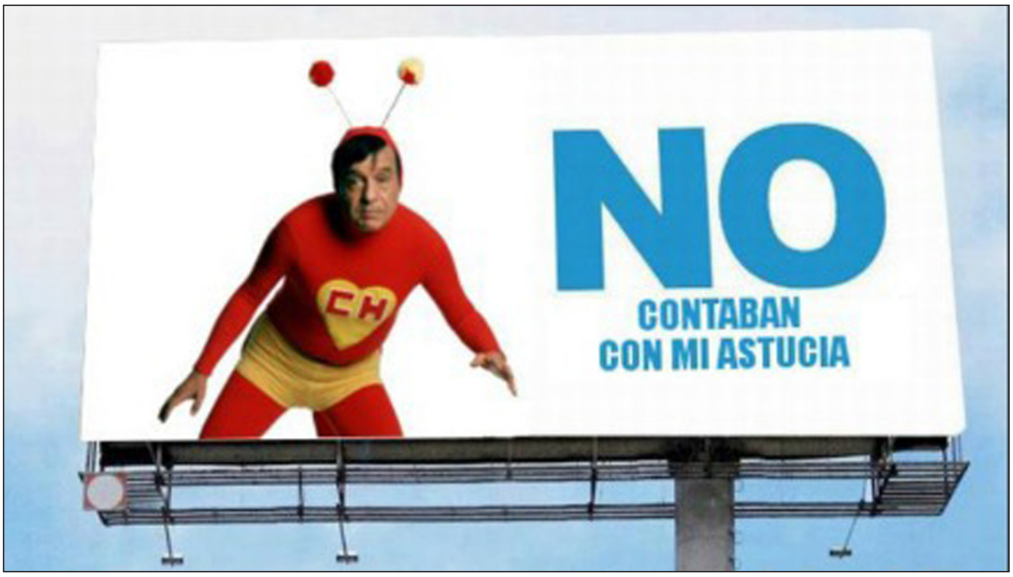

Figure 2 Meme referencing the "No" campaign and featuring a popular Mexican character Chapulín Colorado and his catchphrase "No contaban con mi astucia" [You weren't counting on my cunning].

To understand the existence of *Meme No* as only a takedown of the people featured on the billboards would be to oversimplify its impact. The popularity of the meme was also due to its format. As it was formally very simple, it was also very easy to modify, and enabled people to create their own parodies. The humour was also easy to appropriate; the only thing necessary was to incorporate an image and the use of the word "No".

However, although the use of the meme can be categorized simultaneously as an engagement with the political discourse directly *and* the creative appropriation of a template regardless of its political implications, it has been argued that either case was beneficial for the campaign (Salazar Aparcana et al. 84). That is, regardless of the type of interaction, it served the mayor's effort to avoid impeachment. While it is impossible to measure the exact impact that the sharing of these memes had on the voting outcome, it is assumed that it placed the "No" campaign at the forefront of the conversation, and as Mazzuchini and Torres comment: "social media has established itself as one of the spaces of political expression able to penetrate decision making" (Mazzuchini and Torres 9). Similarly, these memes have set a precedent in Peruvian political campaigning in which it is now understood that increasing engagement with "content once far removed from politics means that a sector of the population, once indifferent to these matters, can get involved in the conversation" (Salazar Aparcana et al. 84).[2]

Within a growing meme page culture, and a new understanding of memes as a space for political satire and influence, a slew of other accounts have cropped up in the Peruvian digital sphere with similar political penchants. One page with a similar scope and trajectory as *Meme No* is the *Rayo Pudiente* Facebook page. *Rayo Pudiente*, which roughly translates as "Affluence Laser", is a Facebook meme page started in 2015, originally titled *Limeño pudiente que se respeta* ("self-respecting affluent Limeño"). The name was quickly changed to "Affluence Laser" due to the popularity of a meme format that became its calling card. The meme featured an image of actress Denisse Dibós shooting laser beams from her eyes, transforming things commonly associated with working-class cultures into things associated with the local elite's taste (Figure 3). The model for the meme was taken from a Mexican web page called *Señora Católica* ("Catholic Lady"), which had a similar format featuring an image of a stereotypical Catholic woman turning people or objects into more "pious" or "decent" versions of themselves.

The localized version of the meme explores the theme of erasure. It highlights how, in keeping with "Marca Perú" logic, the political and cultural elites, through access and privilege, have the power to avoid aspects of local realities that they do not deem worthy, relevant or up to their level of taste. In an interview, the creators of the page linked its humour to the need for criticism of Lima's cultural elite. They expressed how social media was necessary to be able to make these sorts of remarks, as there is no space in traditional media for this kind of anti-establishment rhetoric: "You cannot do this on the radio or on TV, but you *can* do this on social media and get away with it" ("El Rayo Pudiente").[3] As this page can be considered a critique of the inability of certain media elites to engage with the reality of the post-conflict condition and connect with average Peruvians, it is understandable that the space and institutions headed by said elites would not be open to engaging with this type of humour.

However, both the humour and the success of the account have been attributed to the classist and racist undertones and references used in the memes (Cabral). This type of humour, based on racial stereotyping, is a common feature of the Peruvian digital sphere and interactions on online platforms in Peru (Brañez-Medina). In line with the idea that we should not consider digital spaces as removed from the dynamics of offline society and culture, *Rayo Pudiente* highlights the friction that lies within this reality. With regard to pages like this and *Meme No*, it cannot be denied that classism and racism are deeply embedded in their language and approach to the topics they criticize.

On the more serious and action-oriented side of the spectrum, the popular hashtag "#NoAKeiko" (#NoToKeiko) offers different approaches and strategies for bridging online and offline practices. The hashtag and associated social media accounts began gaining traction around the 2016 presidential elections that pitted centre-right candidate Pedro Pablo Kuczynski against Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of Alberto Fujimori. It was a central element of a larger movement in opposition to Fujimori's then second attempt to become president. The crux of the movement was to stop Fujimori from using the powers of the presidency to pardon her father, who was then serving a sentence of over forty-five years for several charges brought against him during his presidency, from crimes against humanity to corruption. As well, many were opposed to her candidacy because of her official role as First Lady during her father's presidency, when she

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[2] All translation from sources not originally published in English are my own unless otherwise stated.

[3] My emphasis.

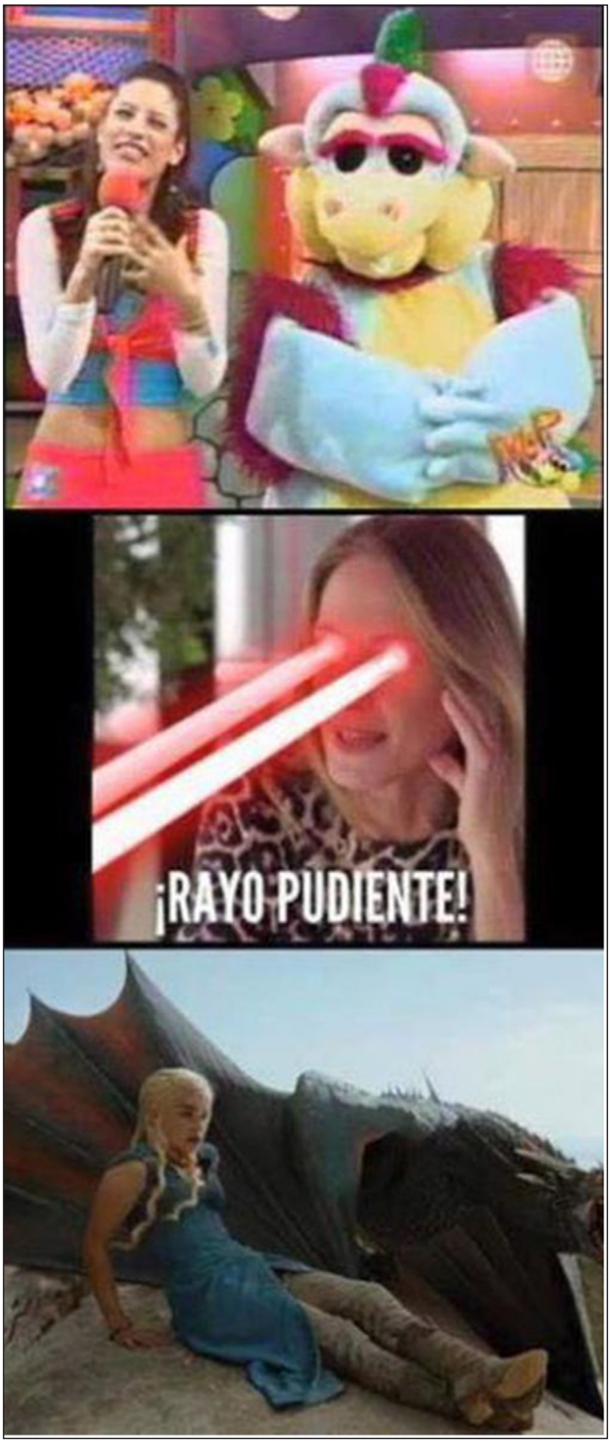
¡RAYO PUDIENTE!

Figure 3 Example of a *Rayo Pudiente* meme featuring popular 1990s Peruvian children's television characters Karina y Timoteo being "transformed" into *Game of Thrones* character Daenerys Targaryen and her dragon.

replaced her mother after her parents' divorce. Her time in office coincided with her father's approval of forced sterilization campaigns against mainly rural, Indigenous citizens (Jiménez, "Alrededor").

Like *Meme No*, the offline effects of the hashtag were noticeable, as it led to what was at the time the largest protest since the fall of the Fujimori regime, with an estimated 30,000–50,000 citizens marching in the capital's historic downtown (Jiménez, "La manifestación"). But the power of the hashtag lies in its capacity to link different social movements in a common cause, while at the same time being a repository of information, archives and community-generated content. The #NoAKeiko hashtag and associated pages have not only featured information on different protests throughout the years, but also include historical content such as newspaper front pages and archival footage from the period of the conflict. The main goal of this content is to offset the narrative presented by Keiko Fujimori and her political party and allies that positions her father in a more innocent light. We can consider this as a form of counter-narrative or *counter-visuality*, as it seeks to offer ways of understanding and *seeing* the post-conflict situation that have been invisibilized by mainstream media. This offered people a platform to share content and visual media to support a movement that took to the streets.

A perhaps more hybrid meme page within the Peruvian post-conflict digital sphere is the Instagram account *Daddy Velasco*. This page, more similar in form to *Meme No* and *Rayo Pudiente*, publishes a more general catalogue of memes pertaining to youth culture, local celebrities and current events. However, its overarching themes focus on political and cultural criticism of the post-conflict condition and Peruvian history in general. It includes a focus on class-conscious discourse and humour highlighting the realities of the LGBTQ community in Peru. This more left-leaning and queer focus is hinted at in the name of the page. *Daddy Velasco* refers to Juan Francisco Velasco Alvarado, who led a left-wing military government from 1968 to 1975 which adopted large-scale agrarian reform, nationalization of industries and the recognition of Indigenous languages as official alongside Spanish (Figure 4). The "daddy" in the name jokingly refers to the way some refer to an older man with whom they experience infatuation or sexual attraction. The page's humour expresses anti-Fujimori sentiment through an ironic romanticization of a period and a political figure at the very opposite end of the political spectrum to the economic and social realities of post-conflict Peruvian society.

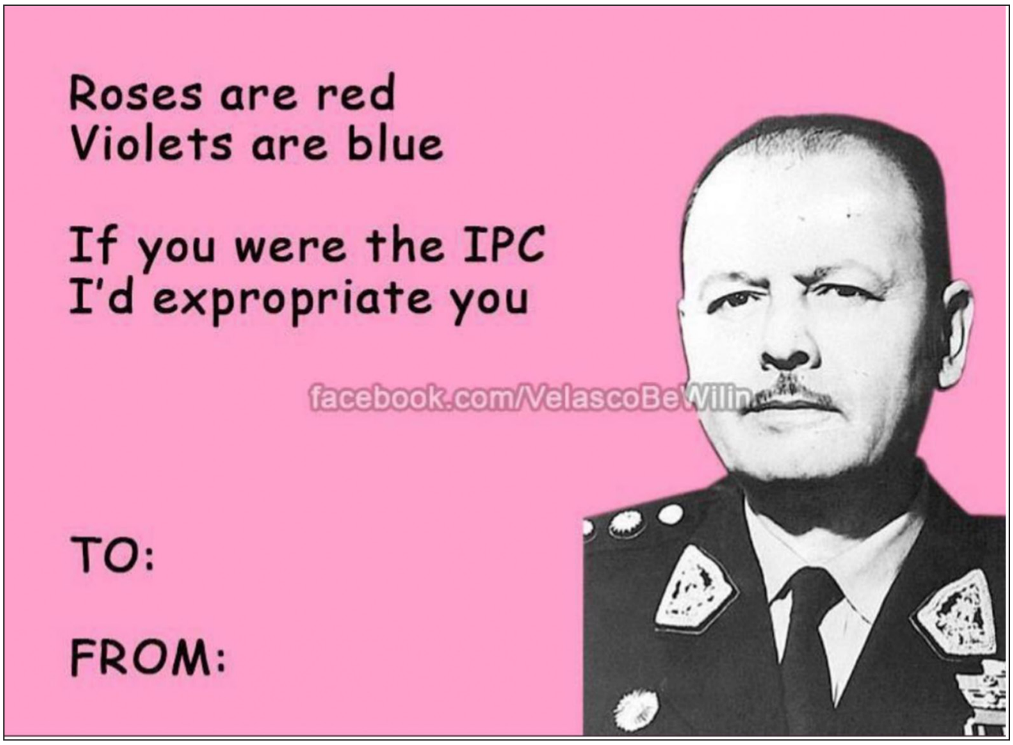

Figure 4 Meme originally posted on *DaddyVelasco* in a series of politically themed Valentine's Day greetings. This particular one references the expropriation of the International Petroleum Company following the coup that brought Velasco (featured) to power.

While the page mainly remains centred on humorous takes on Peruvian politics and history, it has been known to shift to featuring content relevant to ongoing protests, such as news archives on the anniversaries of important dates pertaining to the Fujimori era, information from activists, gathering points and itineraries for marches, etc. In times of need, it thus becomes an ad hoc meeting point for people wanting to participate in protest. For example, when Alberto Fujimori's pardon was announced, the page published a series of images of newspaper front pages reporting the crimes committed by his administration.

Quite differently than other meme pages, *Daddy Velasco* is centred on Peruvian history and society, while at first glance masquerading as a generic meme page. It includes more topical, youth-oriented content such as jokes about the high price of Bad Bunny tickets, while not shying away from more direct calls to action.

The way these pages straddle online and offline forms of political expression and participation makes it appear as though we have entered a phase in which memes and hashtags are spaces of political action, meaning making and memory practices. In the context of the post-conflict situation and the dichotomies present in the larger Peruvian visual cultural ecology, these spaces take on a particular role that offers paths, if not to fully circumvent, then at least to lessen the impact that these might have.

IS IT WRONG TO MISS THE 90S?

Within this shift to digital expressions of the post-conflict condition, wider trends have entered the Peruvian meme space and have gone through a process of localization. Throughout the post-conflict digital space there is a predisposition to engage with digital aesthetics that reference retro technologies associated with the 1980s and 1990s in a sometimes ironic or even nostalgic way. This is linked to a larger trend in Peruvian visual art that has increasingly included the use of glitches, broken machinery, obsolete technologies and analogue feedback as criticism of the violent neoliberalism, consumerism and right-wing politics that have defined post-conflict Peruvian society and culture. These works include Juan Daniel Molero's feature-length films *Reminiscencias* and *Videofilia*, which make use of recycled audiovisual material such as family home videos or gifs taken from the Internet; Samuel Chambi's photography made by scanning images with broken scanners; or Diego Collado's recycling of lost and damaged memory cards from digital cameras. Many Peruvian artists have embraced digital tools as well as references to digital aesthetics in "offline" work, much in the spirit of "post-internet art", to explore the effects and influence that the digital has had on larger society (Olson; Vierkant).

Within the Peruvian digital sphere, many Facebook meme pages have engaged with similar aesthetics that combine local references and elements of early digital culture. Often these include dystopian anime, broken machinery and obsolete technologies, and through this, they reference historical periods (the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s) which, in the Peruvian case, are linked to periods of violence and uncertainty. These pages borrow from, or are examples of, Vaporwave, a digital aesthetics centred around the nostalgic use of 1980s and 1990s visual culture, often associated with the consumerist and corporate culture of the times. While not an aspect of most meme pages, these have inspired Facebook accounts such as *Vaporwave Perú ペルー波* and the now defunct *An aesthetic city called Lima, Perú ファック*.[4] These pages feature Vaporwave-inspired images in which elements of early digital culture (1990s PCs, VHS static feedback, etc.) are juxtaposed with local Peruvian cultural references. What is interesting is that, because the era that is being romanticized coincided with the Internal Conflict, many of the elements alluded to are direct or indirect references to the period of violence.

This is typical of Vaporwave, which involves a form of "memory play". In this, remembering past times becomes a game void of criticism (Glitsos). It becomes a form of Žižekian fetishistic disavowal (Taylor), in which we are invited to forget the negative aspects of the period in order to engage with its pleasurable aspects. We are meant to engage with the "feelings" of the period, while turning a blind eye to the relations these aesthetics have with neoliberal reforms imposed through violence. In the case of these pages, this becomes impossible, as the act of remembering the 1990s in Peru cannot happen without mention of the conflict and its repercussions. These pages become spaces of heavy contradiction.

To understand this, we might look to accelerationist theory as it relates to these aesthetic engagements. Accelerationism posits the end of capitalism not by fighting against it, but rather by encouraging its spread to bring it to its breaking point. This allows for debates around the aesthetic possibilities of a society under an unsustainable economic system. For accelerationists, the only way out of a crisis is not "to wait for its collapse in the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding and abstractive tendencies" (Avanessian and Reis 9).

In the "Manifesto for an accelerationist policy", Williams and Srnicek argue that the necessary conditions for the development of this movement have been a neoliberal right that has become the status quo, and a divided left:

> We believe that the division most important in the left today is among those who are concerned with a folk politics, direct action and uncompromising horizontalism, and those that make up a policy that we could call accelerationist, without going up in abstraction, complexity, globality and technology. The former are content to establish small temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, shunning the real problems that come with confronting intrinsically non-local enemies, abstract and deeply rooted in our daily infrastructure. (Williams and Srnicek)

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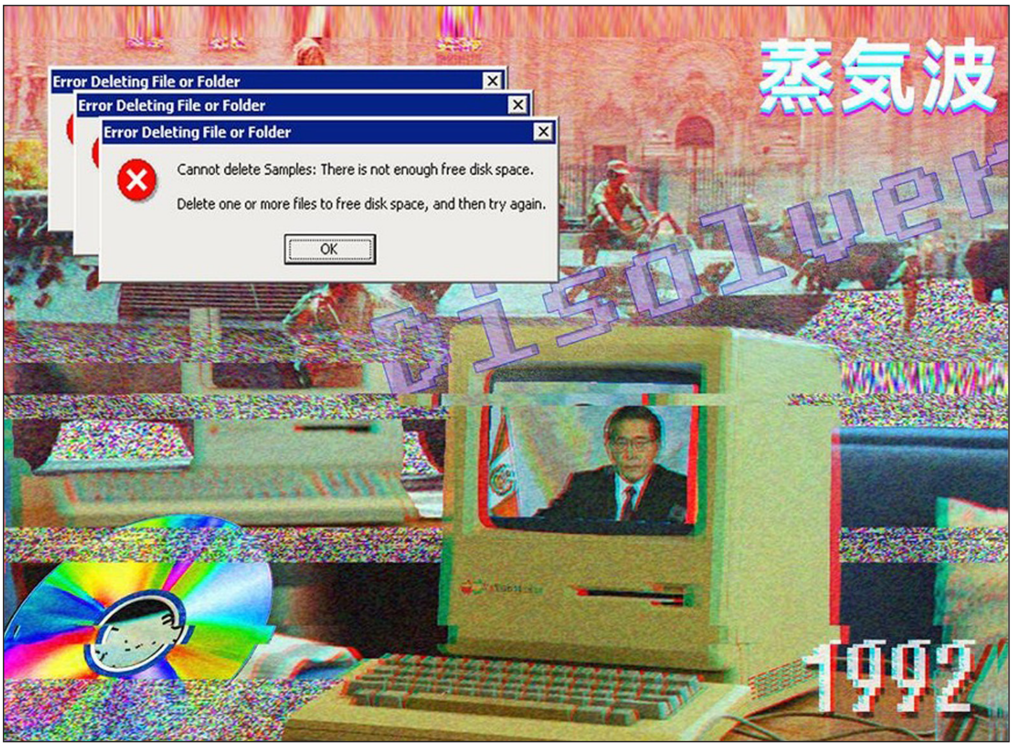
[4] The Japanese included in each of the pages' titles translates, respectively, as "Peruvian wave" and as an expletive for sexual intercourse.

It is interesting to note that this same situation characterizes the Peruvian political scene of the past decades. In the context of a weakened left and a pro-Fujimori right that prevails as the natural option, this obsession with the broken, the obsolete, the destroyed, becomes a space to explore the idea of unsustainability while remaining distant and apathetic. The aesthetic references used in these pages, which make us feel the "speed" of capitalist society (Rombes), are a way of representing the collapse of the system while never daring to show the results of this collapse. This, for Steven Shaviro, allows the spectator to experience a certain catharsis, giving them the possibility of imagining an end to our society through signs of a potential rupture that exaggerate the non-viable aspects of the system. Shaviro frames this in a context in which subversion no longer exists under late capitalism:

> Neoliberalism has no problems with excess: far from being subversive, transgression is now entirely normative, nobody is really offended by Marilyn Manson or Quentin Tarantino. Each supposedly "transgressive" act or representation expands the investment field of capital, opens new processes from which to extract surplus value. (Shaviro 174)

What characterizes accelerationist art is the attempt to reflect the speed of the growth of capitalism, giving us the sensation of reaching a breaking point. The fantasy of a broken system is only momentary and serves as a tool for renewal of the capitalist system itself.


Error Deleting File or Folder
Error Deleting File or Folder
Error Deleting File or Folder
OK
蒸気波
Dissolver
1992

Cannot delete Samples: There is not enough free disk space.

Delete one or more files to free disk space, and then try again.

Figure 5 Meme originally uploaded by the Facebook page *Vaporwave Perú ペルー波*

An example of a Peruvian Vaporwave-inspired meme from the Facebook page *Vaporwave Perú ペルー波* features a collage that includes images of obsolete technologies (CDs, old computers) overlayed with glitches and error messages typical of the 1990s and early 2000s operating systems. On the computer, we see a still from the announcement made by then President Alberto Fujimori dissolving Congress, in what is known as the autocoup of 1992 (Figure 5). The typical Vaporwave aesthetics clash with the reality of the events represented in the meme. This highlights the inherent contradiction of using a digital trend that involves a smoothing over of history to engage with nostalgia for a period associated with political violence and armed conflict. The cathartic engagement that is sought in Vaporwave-inspired creations is blocked by this reminder of the history of the period referenced.

However, although these examples present a transgression of what Vaporwave has typically stood for, they still fall victim to the accelerationist pitfall of not being able to critique the structural failures that have led to this situation. While these images add to our understanding of what Vaporwave can be as it expands into non-Euro/North American digital spaces, it does not offer much more than a series of contradictory visual elements. The central element of these memes remains a nostalgic look into 1990s aesthetics and early digital culture.

This specific use of Vaporwave and Vaporwave-inspired aesthetics in the Peruvian digital sphere can, however, still be understood as a space for expressing feelings of frustration and apathy in relation to the current situation. While not the direct call to action that other pages have come to be known for, nor the genuine but perhaps clumsy attempts at social criticism of others, these projects do speak to a need to express rejection, as contradictory as it might appear.

One project that attempts to bypass this issue is the video series *El Betamax de Genaro*. Originally published on YouTube and social media platforms in the months leading up to the 2016 presidential elections, this series of short videos feature remixed and distorted television clips from the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. These videos show television programmes, telenovelas, political campaign videos, newsreels and other types of televised media in ways that highlight the horrors of the discourses conveyed on Peruvian television at the time. Mainly, the series serves to highlight two aspects: first, that many political actors of the conflict period are still active within Peruvian political institutions; and secondly, that popular media during the period was very much a tool of distraction and propaganda.

The *Betamax de Genaro* series was widely shared in more activist and protest-centred pages on social media (such as #NoAKeiko) and understood as more than a mere playful exploration of Peruvian retro content. While it does engage with the base ideals of Vaporwave, in that the content it uses to critique the post-conflict condition comes across as aestheticized and romanticized, it maintains a clear political stance. In its use of 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s Peruvian media and distortion, it stresses that romanticizing retro Peruvian pop culture is playing into the propagandistic practices of conflict-era media. This flips the Vaporwave issue on its head and denies the space to smooth over the past.

While it is interesting to observe how a global trend such as Vaporwave comes to interact with local histories in the case of Peru, the issues that come up in a North American setting still present barriers in the context of the Peruvian post-conflict condition. In order for these meme pages and viral videos to avoid the trap of empty nostalgia, they must avoid the pitfalls of the genre and actively politicize them. This not only highlights how Vaporwave, in general, might not be a tool for political activism so much as an expression of apathy, but how, in the Peruvian context, the clash between the country's history and the push for 1990s nostalgia allows a new path to emerge. The incompatibility between Vaporwave's politics and Peru's recent history demands a more transgressive and more overtly politicized memetic practice. While there is nothing inherently wrong with engaging in nostalgia and remembering the 1990s, in the Peruvian meme world this practice must confront many barriers.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

The aim of this article was to locate a growing number of politically and historically oriented digital visual practices within the larger Peruvian post-conflict visual ecology. Through the analysis of a series of social media spaces, such as meme pages and hashtags, new forms of remembering and discussing the legacy of the Internal Conflict have been identified. Such forms utilize digital tools, aesthetics and platforms to circumvent what is considered to be an ideological impasse within post-conflict Peruvian visual culture, that is, the impossibility of engaging in memory practices without risking the pitfalls of the "memory of salvation".

The visual turn brought forth by the publication of the final report of the TRC has met with constant opposition from proponents of redemption-focused discursive practices. This in turn offers challenges for the creation of spaces in which the effects of the conflict can be discussed and opens the door for digital spaces to become new centres of discussion. In this context, I looked at two aspects of these digital spaces and their implications in the debates surrounding visual representations of the Peruvian post-conflict condition. These were seen to represent new spaces that transcend the dichotomy of post-conflict visual memory.

First, I argued that a new digital generation has carved out spaces on digital platforms to engage in visual forms of memory and meaning making in the context of Peru's post-conflict condition. This shift to digital forms of visual communication and political expression, or the *memeification* of remembering the post-conflict situation, came forth as a response to the shortcomings of both the TRC's and mainstream media's approaches. Neither the TRC's victim-centric focus on visual storytelling nor the pro-Fujimori emphasis on redemption narratives offers a space for reflection and criticism for those who feel distant from the violence of the period, but who are chafing against the general social, political and economic repercussions of the Internal Armed Conflict. Social media pages and hashtags such as *Meme No*, *Rayo Pudiente*, #NoAKeiko and *Daddy Velasco* highlight the need for political spaces outside of traditional media, which are seen as unable to support this type of critical and satirical content.

Secondly, these new spaces of digital political participation and discussion use specific digital aesthetics that invite a more critical look at their ideological positions. The inclusion of nostalgia-based digital trends such as Vaporwave, early tech nostalgia and glitch aesthetics make way for a more playful, ironic and distant form of remembering the decades that coincided with the conflict. This highlights the internal contradictions of the post-conflict reality they are attempting to represent.

This suggests that while there exists a need for spaces that allow for a more flexible way to engage with the country's past – perhaps more aligned with a new generation of Peruvians – the language, both visual and discursive, offered by social media and digital technologies is flawed. While they do allow for new assemblages of political subjectivities and even participation, they do not fully escape the logics that characterize the Peruvian visual cultural ecology.

It is important to note, however, that the existence of these spaces should not be understood as a rejection of victim-centred visual narratives, but perhaps more as a testimony to the failings of both state and mainstream media in obstructing proper channels for the larger populace, regardless of their relationship to violence. Similarly, while we can highlight the power of these digital spaces, both discursively and as a way to mobilize large groups of people "in real life", they are not meant to replace non-digital democratic spaces or media institutions. Ideally, they should be complementary spaces of discourse in conjunction with political, educational and cultural institutions, both online and offline.

However, this might be a larger challenge than it seems. To take an idea from Legacy Russell:

> Suspended between on- and offline, eternally traversing this loop, digital natives steeped in a reality shaped by the New Aesthetic remain devoid of a home-land. There is no return to the concept of "the real," as digital practice and the visual culture that has sprung from it has forever reshaped how we read, perceive, process all that takes place AFK [away from keyboard]. (Russell 45–6)

The new generation that is developing a way of remembering and representing the post-conflict condition is doing so online, and is only beginning to bridge from these forms of engagement with the country's recent history to the non-digital. What remains to be seen, however, is if and how these new discourses will influence traditional media and other visual cultural spaces.

Of course, the limitations of this shift in memory and meaning making in post-conflict Peru do not end at its ironies or blind spots. For there to be a more accessible and democratic access to these spaces of discourse, emphasis needs to be placed on access to digital infrastructure and digital literacy. This will entail decentralizing the focus of these spaces from Lima towards a wider national conversation, increasing Internet stability across the country, and encouraging platforms and spaces to support and include Indigenous languages. Although the examples explored within the scope of this article serve to highlight the ways that digital platforms have been used outside of the anglosphere, it is important to consider the north–south divide as fractal (Rodríguez-Ortega), and that within the Peruvian digital landscape, the lack of geographical, class, ethnic and linguistic diversity contributes to what Sayan Bhattacharyya calls "Epistemically Produced Invisibility" and "knowledge monopolies" (del Rio Riande 254). Without a broader understanding of, and support for, a diverse digital space of remembering, the potential impact it could have on Peruvian society and politics will remain within the limitations often seen in other visual cultural spaces of memory, and a true *counter-visuality* will not be formed.

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