




Outside the Life of the Body

MIGUEL A. LÓPEZ

Fecha Agosto 4. 1931

<p>Nombre <u>Sara Butana</u></p> <p>Sinonimia <u>Sara Gutana</u></p> <p>Edad <u>25 años</u></p> <p>Raza <u>Mestiza</u></p> <p>Religión <u>Católica</u></p> <p>Nacionalidad <u>Peruana</u></p> <p>Lugar de nacimiento <u>Lima</u></p> <p>Profesión <u>En casa</u></p> <p>Dirección <u>Lima Ayacucho 1094</u></p> <p>Última residencia <u>Lima</u></p>	<p>Número de Ingresos <u>1.º</u></p> <p>Instrucción <u>Primaria</u></p> <p>Estado civil <u>Soltera</u></p> <p>Nombre de la persona o autoridad que solicita el internamiento: <u>Adolfo Minaya</u></p> <p>Relación con el paciente <u>Marido</u></p> <p>Domicilio del personero <u>Lima Pi-garro</u></p>	<p>Nombre del padre del enfermo: <u>Mamerto Gutana</u></p> <p>Nombre de la madre: <u>Clotilde Lucas</u></p> <p>Nombre del cónyuge <u>Adolfo Minaya</u></p> <p>Médicos que certifican el internamiento</p> <p>N.º del expediente de internación</p>
--	--	--

HISTORIA FAMILIAR: Abuelos sanos. - Padre alcohólico, de carácter amable y bondadoso; me-lento e intolerable cuando está bajo el efecto del alcohol. - Madre sana, sufre de infección purpúrea. Han sido dos hermanos de padre y madre, ocupando de enfermo el 1.º lugar; tiene una hermana de parte de padre, todas ellas sanas. - La paciente ha tenido 4 hijos dos hombres y dos mujeres, habiendo fallecido la 2.ª de meningitis a la edad de 9 meses.

(Árbol genealógico)

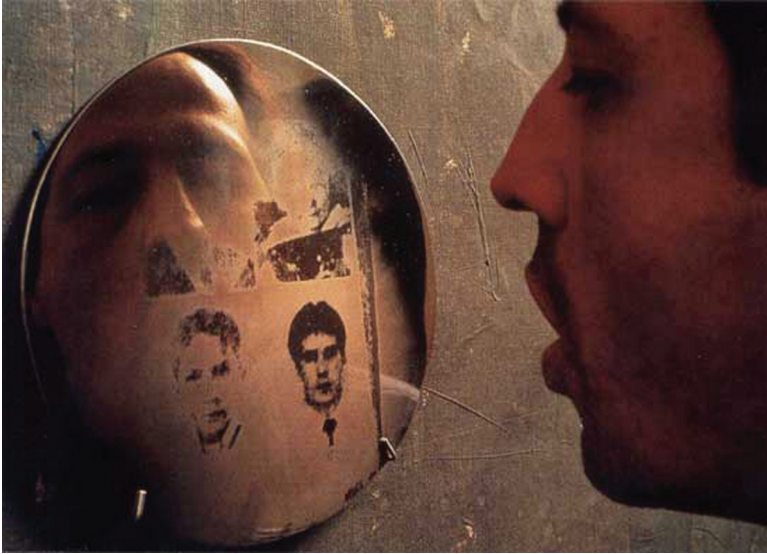
```

graph TD
    P1[17 SANOS] --- P2[0]
    P3[17 SANOS] --- P4[0]
    P1 --- A[ALCOHOLICO]
    A --- F[LA ENFERMA]
    F --- S1[0]
    F --- S2[0]
    F --- S3[0]
    F --- S4[0]
    S1 --- S1L[SANO MUNDO A LOS 9 MESES]
    S2 --- S2L[SANO]
    S3 --- S3L[SANO]
    S4 --- S4L[SANO]
    
```

Folded Pages, 1996. Toned gelatin silver print. 16 x 16 in. (40 x 40 cm)

Milagros de la Torre's photographs explore the tensions between image, power and the body. Her works have always remained skeptical of photography's desire of representation, questioning not only its apparent objectivity and its "truth effects," but also critically examining the social conventions and institutional frameworks that guide its uses and meanings. De la Torre delves into how images affect people's lives, observing the ways in which power circulates and crystallizes: that is, the ability of images to produce identities, stimulate fantasies, reorient desires and organize behavior. Her photographs confront the desire to recall and fixate history, making it clear that the story images tell is always an incomplete one. Indeed, her work interrogates the scope of this insufficient representation which is photography, that nonetheless, never ceases to be a powerful tool in the daily production of new realities that shape the world.

Several of her works seem to emerge as a challenge to the "excessive realism" of the photographic image, positing questions to its supposed condition of "evidence." It is no coincidence that in several of her initial projects the artist has used the grammars of police photography, of clinical surveys and even of criminology. In works such as *Under the Black Sun* (1991–1993), *The Lost Steps* (1996) or *Folded Pages* (1996), Milagros de la Torre refers to the close alliance between photography and the institutions that arise during the nineteenth-century, with which new practices of observation and a new paradigm of knowledge also emerge: a generalized archive that through the management of this new image builds "an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain."¹ De la Torre examines those institutional operations of registry and classification of subjects, which have been closely linked to the birth of the modern State and the expansion of colonial powers, signaling the way in which these official procedures allowed not only to *produce* but also to *possess* the meanings of those bodies.² These governmental practices thus consolidated the public records of national States and also the medical, legal and judicial archives, whose primary function has been the regulation and surveillance of subjects. *Folded Pages* is perhaps the project that deals with this more explicitly: de la Torre photographed entry forms of a mental hospital in Lima, which appear slightly blurred, darkened and folded, inside a small white metallic first aid kit. These forms exhibit the procedures of medical systematization to which subjects are submitted: photographs of their faces and bodies, but also descriptions of their physical characteristics, family backgrounds and a report of their apparent



Oscar Muñoz, *Aliento*, 1995. Twelve metal discs, screen-print on oily film. Each 8 in. (20 cm) diameter. Courtesy the artist and Sicardi Gallery

psychological disorders. What these documents show is not only that set of bodies declared "sick," confined and excluded from public space, but also the authoritative character of these documents through which institutions manage the "inside" and "outside" of the social body. Photography's "truth effect" also has strong implications in the private sphere: in *It All Stays in the Family* (1994) the artist "unsuccessfully" records a series of family portraits, those "ID photos" which are the major milestones of affective memory. De la Torre questions the value of these representations, reconsidering their role as producers of public and private identity but also as objects that "replace" subjects and legitimize them as social "truth."

However, the emergence of conceptual strategies that examine and appropriate archival practices, as in the early work of Milagros de la Torre, seems to suggest something else, besides the reflection on the relations between image and the power it sets. These projects also signal a change of sensibility in the ways in which, since the 90's, a significant group of Latin American artists and photographers have irreverently and skeptically approached the photographic document, proposing a different path regarding the ways to "represent" social

issues. Thus, works such as those of the Brazilian Rosângela Rennó (Belo Horizonte, 1962), the Colombian Oscar Muñoz (Popayan, 1951), the Chilean Alfredo Jaar (Santiago de Chile, 1956) and of Milagros de la Torre herself, which use images from newspapers, private archives or found documents, distance themselves from and question the realist discourse of photography that proliferated in Latin America from the 60's until the 80's as a response to the policies of the Cold War, and which, in many cases, was linked to resistance processes against the dictatorships that surfaced in several countries of the continent.³ Under the umbrella of realism, many of those photographic practices, in their intersection with the artistic, opted for the documentary and photojournalism, as the work of the Mexican Pedro Meyer (Madrid, 1935) or the Colombian Fernell Franco (Cali, 1942–2006), among others, who also promoted important discussion forums such as the Latin American Photography Colloquiums around the question of how to think a regional photographic tradition.⁴ Similarly, in the Peruvian context, the 70's and 80's meant the consolidation of documentary photography as a “weapon of denunciation and a means of political approach” associated with the renewal process of the political left and the deepening social crises throughout the country.⁵ Several of these Peruvian photographers, such as Herman Schwarz (Lima, 1954), Jorge Deustua (Lima, 1950) or Carlos “Chino” Domínguez (Lima, 1933), strongly influenced the ways of understanding the public and political meaning of photography through reportages about people's movements, labor groups and self-organized communities in Peru's provinces, reaffirming its testimonial character and its ability to expose social reality from a personal and expressive perspective. In this context, the impact generated in Lima by de la Torre's *Under the Black Sun* project, exhibited in 1994, is understandable, as it opened a discussion realm close to conceptual art that interrogated the realist legacy (and Expressionist tradition) that had been taken on by most of Peruvian photography.⁶ *Under the Black Sun* was produced in Cuzco, exploring the low cost process of street photographers in the country's provinces, who make passport photos of passers in public squares. This is a rudimentary procedure in which the negative is directly fixed on photographic paper, and then re-photographed so as to obtain the positive.⁷ De la Torre arrests this process observing a disturbing detail: the naturalized way in which photographers applied mercurochrome (commonly used for healing wounds) on the faces in the negative, obtaining paler skins in the final photograph.

Under the Black Sun examines the political dimension of the photographic image not strictly bound to its representation, proposing instead to rethink the set of social relations that allows for certain behaviors associated with its production. It is precisely the technical procedure (the work of “visual makeup” of the negative) of these street photographers that becomes “a powerful metaphor for the construction of personal and collective identities in a country dominated by racism.”⁸ De la Torre’s work thus recalls, indirectly, a conflicting social legacy of the photographic medium: the historical uses of photography in the construction and consolidation of what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano calls the “coloniality of power” in America, i.e. the establishing of a pattern of domination organized primarily around the notion of “race.” In this pattern of power, a repressed identity of the colonized population (which comes into existence as “negative identity”), product of colonial domination, and an imperial identity that is identified as “European” (or more generally, a “white” identity) collide.⁹ The manner in which that colonial matrix and that aesthetic imaginary of physical beauty are perpetuated, thus emerges in unconscious and seemingly innocuous actions, such as the bleaching of the skin through street photography.¹⁰

However, this renewed mistrust towards photographic realism is not a resignation of the desire for social transformation from photography, but a search for political meanings beyond representation’s “truth effect.” And perhaps this is also an indirect comment on documentary photography’s shortcomings in highlighting how the social and cultural experience of the continent was being reinvented during the 1990s, when the end of military dictatorships, the establishing of democratic governments (in several cases corrupt), the emergence of neoliberal policies and a new form of globalization through the massive expansion of telecommunications converged. Thus, this new outlook managed to reveal that the relationship between a photograph and any reality is always highly problematic. It is telling how *The Lost Steps* (1996), an early series of fifteen photographs of crime “evidence” (from Lima’s Courthouse archive), not only allegorizes the State’s police gaze but also the affective stories that envelop and modify the meaning of these objects in the public sphere, which is also an index of how Peru’s collective memory has been shaped during those decades. Each photograph includes a phrase that indicates the origin of the items as recalled by the chief archivist, Manuel Guzmán, who collaborated with the artist.

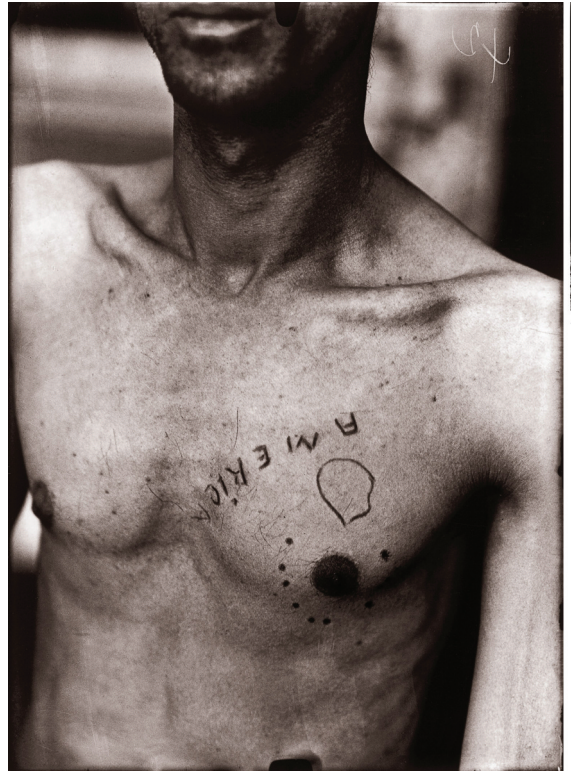
The results are enigmatic portraits of objects, some seemingly harmless (a mask, a dress, a letter . . .) and others of aggressive connotation (a knife, a crow-

bar, some bullets . . .), that claim having witnessed great tragedies. Surrounded by a halo of darkness that dissolves their contours, these objects emerge “from the shadows of memory to reactivate a story, suggesting it more than revealing it.”¹¹ This visual treatment produces in the viewer a degree of skepticism that sees these “corpus delicti” as if a repertoire of minor fictions.

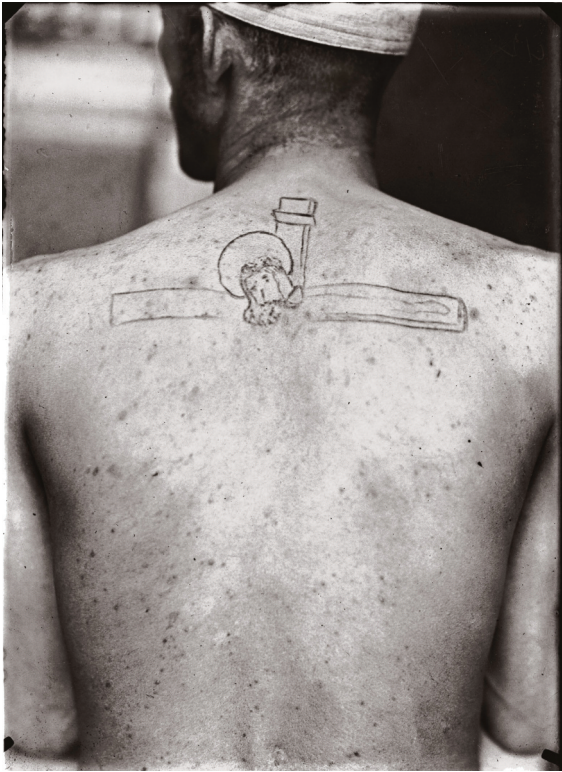
A tension arises there which also runs through other projects of the artist: a friction between the cold and informative view of the photographic document and its institutional uses, and the more intimate and intersubjective dimension of personal memory. In this aspect, her work seems in dialogue with the work of Rosângela Rennó, who uses state and private archives to produce experiences that renew and expand the social meanings of those images, forcing a crisis where photography is bound to recall particular experiences that go beyond the institutional functionality for which it was produced. This is what occurs in the installation *Cicatriz* [Scar] (1996–1997): the Brazilian artist recovers negatives made between 1920 and 1940 in the State Penitentiary located at the Carandiru Complex, in São Paulo, which she combines in space with newspaper articles from various sources, commenting on prison conditions in Brazil, but also poetically exploring the limits of what these photographed bodies can make visible. In another project such as *Imemorial* [Immemorial] (1994), Rennó retrieves archives associated with the construction of Brasília, exhibiting portraits of workers and children who died in the process of monumental construction. The death of these individuals, anonymous in terms of history, is contrasted with the spectrum of utopian modernity with which the city was announced. This re-contextualization of objects and images (which occurs in the work of Rennó as in that of de la Torre) operates as a critical return on the “writing” of history, destabilizing the authority of these official testimonies in an attempt to read their flipside.¹²

Hence, it is not surprising that many writings on the work of Milagros de la Torre have repeatedly emphasized how her visual production seeks to “(re)read” archives, questioning “what it is that photography remembers and forgets and for whom and what purpose.”¹³ Her photographic practice attempts to recognize how power is established from within “modern” institutions, rethinking the way in which images institute “proper” forms of being and existing within that “general archive.” However, this reflection about the “legal reality” of the photographic image is also an attempt to think from *vulnerability*, contrasting photography’s pretensions of permanence with the ephemeral dimension of all existence. Her

Rosângela Rennó. UNTITLED (AMERICA AND CRISTO), 1998 (dyptic). From the series *Penitentiary Museum / Scar*, 1997–1998 reproductions of photographic negatives from the Penitentiary Museum of São Paulo. B&W digital photograph (Iris print) on Somerset paper. Daros Collection, Zurich and private collection, San Diego

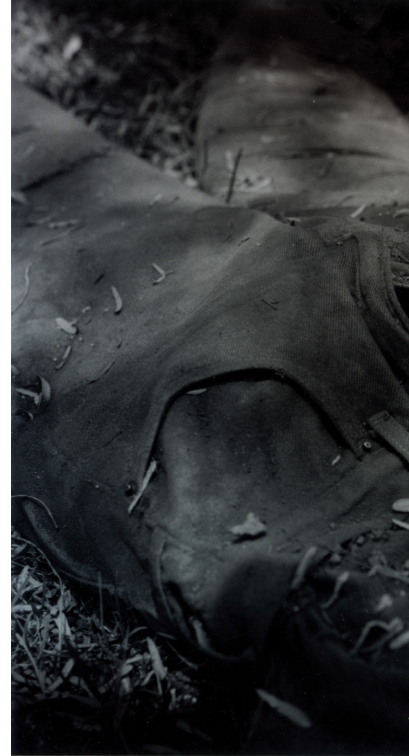


works speak to us about how all life is also defined by the ways in which it generates protection mechanisms and defense strategies. In many of her works it is possible to perceive allusions to fragility but seen through traces and remains, such as clothing or other personal items that appear as powerful metaphors of the body's perishableness. An example can be found in *Untitled, (Hanger, Socks . . .)* (1992), where seven small photographs in negative show female clothing, a hanger and a fragment of the body that signal the material echoes of a missing and precarious life. Such perspective on clothing also appears in *The Missing* (1998), a large format triptych showing landscapes of top soil, vegetation and trails of clothing in the manner of silhouette fragments on the ground. Those images allegorize the "presence of absence" in reference to the thousands of bodies detained and forced to disappear in situations of extreme horror and repression, as occurred in several Latin American countries during the 1960s



and 1990s. Even in a project like *FF* (2007–2008), a succession of close-ups of personal belongings of the dictator and fascist leader General Francisco Franco, the artist wonders to what extent is it possible to outline a narrative of turbulent political times, as Franco's dictatorship was, from the intimate history and unique map of traces, signals and blemishes that those objects hide.

These projects can also be understood as a commentary on how subjectivities are constructed in contexts of repression. It is no minor detail that Milagros de la Torre's adolescence and youth in Peru have been framed by the end of a military dictatorship (1968–1980) and the beginning of a fierce armed conflict between the Peruvian State and underground communist guerrillas, which began in 1980 and extended until the end of the following decade, coinciding with the emergence of a new dictatorship, that of Alberto Fujimori during 1992–2000.¹⁴ During those early years, due to family ties, de la Torre would always be



Untitled (The Disappeared), 1998. Matte Chromogenic green and brown color print mounted on aluminum. Triptych, 56 x 165 in. each (140 x 413 cm)



surrounded not only by criminology and military strategy handbooks, but also by people living under tight security (bulletproof vests, guns, security personnel, etc.).¹⁵ Perhaps, as a result, her work has focused on intensely exploring the effects of that tacit or explicit violence in the memory of the bodies, but, moreover, how the bodies themselves are complicit in that violence. Thus, in recent times her interest seems to have shifted from the observation of institutional matrices as places of power to the technologies through which authority is imposed and guaranteed in public space. During the last decade, de la Torre has repeatedly examined the tools designed for protection but also for the attack and domination of bodies. One such series is *Armored* (2000): five small photographs showing the particularities of armored transport in Mexico City. The minimum format and archival nature of each of these images destabilizes the severity and hostility with which these vehicles are covered, noting the degree of imminent danger and naturalized brutality prevalent in the city. That same year, the installation *Sharp-edged* (2000) presented a small inventory of photographs of bladed weapons: fifteen rustic and simple knives seized to common criminals that the artist photographs as a catalog. These images are almost the flipside of *Armored*, showing the improvised forms in which violence surfaces through small tools specifically built to harm another human being.

Several years later, de la Torre recovers these concerns to focus her gaze on the gear and garments developed to face conflict situations, such as the series *Vests* (2007), a continuous projection of thirty-one models of bulletproof vests which allegorize that dimension of the threat to and the loss of life. Similarly, in *Bulletproof* (2008), the artist documents eleven ordinary looking items of clothing, but which actually serve as disguised protection to the wearer. As with previous projects, here emerges the death drive running through her images, which also constitutes a harsh commentary on how human relationships are formed. The artist seems to ask the bearer what kind of message is physical violence in the world, and where are the limits of what is possible in our relationship with other bodies. One finds there an inevitably melancholic mood, as if the passage from life to death was always too near. "Those pieces of clothing already have a destiny written within them" says de la Torre, pushing us slightly to the silent border of loss and mourning.¹⁶

Her last series puts us back into a reality marked by intimidation and fear. The large format piece, *Untitled (Helmets)* (2009), presents, in the manner of still

lives, four photographs of safety accessories for the human head, very similar to those used by the police, military or intelligence forces. The dryness and stillness of the images disturbs, and inevitably evokes an entire genealogy of revolt in which the disobedient body is confronted with the State's repressive constraints. In that sense, this last piece also seems to refer to how the idea of democracy is configured in our societies: confronting a conservative notion that understands it as a mere system of government, with that other, effectively political, that assumes that it only takes place in situations where the presumed order is broken and radical dissent emerges from those subjects who protest and who declassify themselves from their designated places. In different ways, her projects examine the public dimension of bodies, reconsidering how conflict, terror and intimidation are also part of the political processes of community formation, perhaps also recalling how, in many cases, that fear and paranoia can be used by governments to establish continuous forms of domination over civil society.

Her works put in the foreground the bonds that constitute us as a social body, positing questions about our state of dependency and the frameworks of ethical responsibility needed in the process of living. Beyond any legal definition of who we are (in which photography plays a significant role), what we effectively *are* exceeds any legal framework to *take place* in passion, in desire, in grief and in rage: "all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not are own, irreversibly, if not fatally."¹⁷ It is precisely these moments of dispossession which seem to be recorded in her images: that *outside* the life of the body that is also an attempt to ask how to imagine more sensitive and solidary ways of living.

- ¹ Allan Sekula, "El cuerpo y el archivo", in: Glòria Picazo and Jorge Ribalta (editors) *Indiferencia y singularidad. La fotografía en el pensamiento artístico contemporáneo*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2003, p. 140. [T.N. Original version in English: Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive", October Vol. 39, Winter 1986, p. 10].
- ² This development was linked to the new demands of social registration (census, taxation, identification) and the emergence of new social and anthropological sciences (criminology, psychiatry, comparative anatomy, etc.) that established the body as their main area of expertise. See: John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation. Essays on Photographies and Histories*, New York: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1988.
- ³ Many of the military dictatorships that violently surfaced into the Southern Cone (in countries such as Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, among others) were controlled by military juntas. Their purpose was to stop the advance of social movements and socialist ideologies, committing human rights crimes (enforced disappearances, torture and murder), many of which remain unpunished to this day.
- ⁴ The first three international colloquiums were organized in 1978 and 1981 in Mexico, and in 1984 in Cuba.
*Editor's Note: For a discussion on the topic see: Sagrario Berti, "Fernell Franco: On the Edge", in *Fernell Franco: Amarrados* (Bound), 2009. Ed. G. Rangel. New York: Americas Society, p. 6-15.
- ⁵ Natalia Majluf and Jorge Villacorta, "Documentos. Tres décadas de fotografía en el Perú", in: *Documentos. 1960-1990. Tres décadas de fotografía en el Perú*, Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 1997, p. 24.
- ⁶ *Under the Black Sun* is first exhibited individually in the National Center of Photography, Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 1993), then in the Cultural Center of the Municipality of Miraflores (Lima, 1994) and finally in the Photo Gallery of the San Martín Theater (Buenos Aires, 1995).
- ⁷ It is interesting to note that since the early 80's some Peruvian photographers such as Fernando Castro (Lima, 1952) and Roberto Fantozzi (Lima, 1953) insistently record "the southern Andean itinerant photographers, or the small studios of remote towns", which begin to appear as a "central issue", generating new avenues of dialogue and filiations from "high art" with folk photographic practices. See: Natalia Majluf, "Sobre Fotografía. Una autonomía esquivada", en: *Sobre Fotografía*, Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 2006, p. [17].
- ⁸ Natalia Majluf, "Bajo el Sol Negro", in: *Milagros de la Torre*, Lima: Banco de Crédito del Perú, 1994. By 1984 the Chacacayo Group, a collective of three gay artists located on the outskirts of Lima, was also using these cameras of street photographers to produce self-representations in a kind of obscene erotic-mystical iconography that confronts colonial imagery and sexual and religious repression as the country's cultural matrix. On this and other collective experiences in the 80's, see Miguel A. López "Discarded Knowledge. Peripheral Bodies and Clandestine Signals in the 1980s war in Peru", in: Ivana Bago, Antonia Majaca and Vesna Vukovic (editors) *Removed from the Crowd - Unexpected Encounters*, Zagreb, BLOK & DeLve - Institute for Duration, Location and Variables, 2011, pp. 102-141.
- ⁹ On the concept of the "coloniality of power" and the relations of modernity/coloniality from a Latin American perspective, see: Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del Poder, Eurocentrismo y América Latina", in: Edgardo Lander (editor) *La colonialidad del saber. Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*. Buenos Aires, CLACSO, 2000, p. 201-246. (In English: Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America", *Nepentla: Views From the South*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp. 533-580).
- ¹⁰ The writer Mario Bellatin puts it more bluntly: "It should be identified, for example, what sickness of the spirit of a given community can lead to the discoloration of the skin of individuals to be formalized in a photograph. Examine what strange mechanisms operate for street photographers in a given region to discover that mercurochrome, normally used for healing wounds, put on photographic negatives produces bleached faces. Even worse, not only do they discover it but put this finding into use in a way

- as compulsory as it is perverse. Mario Bellatin, "Formas de preferir los gatos a las liebres", in: José Jiménez (editor) *Una teoría del arte desde América Latina*, Madrid: Turner, 2011, p. 24.
- ¹¹ Olivier Debroye, "Clue. Photography as Proof and Revelation", *Exit* 1, January 2001, p. 110.
- ¹² For another comparison between the work of Milagros de la Torre and that of Rosângela Rennó, alongside the work of the Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn, see: Charles Merewether, "Archives of the Fallen", *Grand Street* 62, 1997, pp. 44–47.
- ¹³ Charles Merewether, "Leyendo el archivo", in: *Milagros de la Torre* (catalogue), Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1997, p. 5.
- ¹⁴ The main actors in this conflict were the Communist Party of Peru "Shining Path," the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the Peruvian government. All armed actors in the war committed human rights crimes. According to the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) there was a total of 69.280 people killed, an estimate with a 5% margin of error. See: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Informe Final*, Annex 3 "¿Cuántos peruanos murieron? Estimación del número total de víctimas fatales del conflicto armado interno entre 1980 y 2000", Lima: CVR, 2003.
- ¹⁵ The artist's father had the rank of General of the National Police and Chief Commander of the Army Counter Terrorist Division, and was trained in strategies against crime and terrorism in Washington DC, USA. See Edward J. Sullivan's interview with the artist (New York, May 17, 2011), and the interview reproduced in this publication: *Living Cordially with Violence, Milagros de la Torre in Conversation with Anne Wilkes Tucker* (New York, November 1, 2011).
- ¹⁶ Edward J. Sullivan's interview with the artist (New York, May 17, 2011). www.as-coa.org/visualarts
- ¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Vida Precaria. El poder del duelo y la violencia*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2006, p. 51. [T.N. Original version in English: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso, 2004, p.25].