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Review: Emblem/as

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Project

Emblem/as

Project Director[Tina Escaja](#), University of Vermont**Project URL**<https://proyecto.w3.uvm.edu/emblem/Zamora/Zamora.php>**Project Reviewer**[Alex Saum-Pascual](#), University of California, Berkeley

Project Overview**Tina Escaja**

Emblem/as consist of three artifacts presenting three emblems or flags/banners that represent three areas linked to personal and geographic cartographies. As users move the cursor, words and sounds lead to new audiovisual and political constructions. These cartographies act, therefore, on both a literal and a metaphorical level, as they reveal various degrees of physical nomadism. But they also operate on existential, semantic, political, and linguistic levels, among other levels of transit or transference. Without the cursor's intervention, the three artefacts are visually static, reproducing the traditional configurations of national representation, which my intervention attempts to destabilize and resist. The words that appear as users move the cursor are created with the letters of each banner, restricting while evoking the concepts addressed.

These are the banners or emblemas:

1. *Mora amor*. ([Za]Mora Amor) - Love dwells -

This banner refers to the city of Zamora, Spain, my place of birth. The interactive words and Spanish sounds explore a sense of disengagement and nostalgia towards this city, while pointing to the conservatism and religious constraints of this area: Ora, Roma, Mazo, Amor, etc. (Pray, Rome, Mallet, Love).

2. *bARcEloNA/l cor*. (Barcelona Arena /al cor) -Sand in the heart-

This banner refers to Catalonia, with its capital in Barcelona, Spain. In both Catalan and Spanish, the voice reproduces words created with the acronym of the city of Barcelona, the area where I grew up during the diaspora of workers under the Spanish dictatorship. The meanings bring together semantics of the sea (Ona, Roca, Ancla – Wave, Rock, Anchor) with others related to work and pain (Labora, Lacera –Works, Wound).

3. *United Estados*

This banner reproduces the emblematic flag of the United States. The words and sounds, now in English, Spanish, and Spanglish, reflect political issues in my country of residence and co-citizenship. The words point to notions of anxiety, division and pain (Ansiado, Dissent, Duelo, SOS), as well as longing (Deseado).

The dynamic and fragmented quality of the piece, in perpetual motion due to the cursor's intervention, relates to the fundamental state of migration and its loss of center: the genuine territorial deconstruction whose process examines the existential condition of the nomadic subject. In this sense, the Emblem/as series functions as an archetype of the same process by reflecting a progression that evolves genealogically and that can be extrapolated to all instances of migration: first in the primordial stage of the original transhumance within a preindustrial and rural location (Zamora); then, the uprooting due to lack of opportunities and resources that caused the diaspora to industrial zones (Barcelona); and finally, the re-location within the capitalist core par excellence, that “advanced capitalism” ultimately responsible for the massive displacements of people in the era of globalization (United States).

Project Review

Alex Saum-Pascual

Emblem/as, by Tina Escaja, is not a traditional digital humanities research project, but a work of digital literary art or electronic literature. Electronic literature (e-lit) has been defined as “new forms and genres of writing that explore the specific capabilities of the computer and network—literature that would not be possible without the contemporary digital context” (Rettberg 2). Although the digital nature of e-lit places its objects well within the realm of digital humanities, I want to emphasize the importance of the literary component, which focuses the interpretation of this work around its aesthetics, rhetoric, and poetics, rather than seeking for “evidence” and “results” like most traditional digital humanities scholarly projects. As Emblem/as

shows, creativity and artistic work can and should advance humanistic claims and their pursuit of knowledge, but this kind of knowledge expands to the realm of critical speculation and figuration in the terms delineated by contemporary posthuman critics like Rosi Bradiotti, Maria Hlavajova, or Donna Haraway.

Technically speaking, Emblem/as consists of three HTML5 web pages, originally conceived in Flash, acting as an interactive tryptic. Over a black background, each page displays a title and a flag or banner representing one of three areas linked to Escaja's personal history: two Spanish cities, Zamora and Barcelona where the artist spent her childhood and youth, and the U.S., where she currently resides. At a first glance, the banners show only the colors associated with these locations, but they reveal new content as the reader moves the cursor over them. The title given to each of these banners gets reconfigured within the banners themselves through new anagrams and word formations in Spanish, Catalan, and English. In that way, the traditional national configurations associated with each banner get recontextualized and interrogated by new linguistic connotations. The collective national imaginary is destabilized by personal associations that, while originating from Escaja's subjectivity and lived experience, require the reader's interaction to emerge. As new letters appear on screen, new concepts are summoned together with Escaja's voice, captured here by a suggestive audio feature that reads along the reader's movements.

The red banner part of *Mora amor* (2017), which roughly translates as "reside, my love" or "love lives/dwells," uncovers words of religious and conservative connotations (ora, Roma, mazo, arma/pray, Rome, mallet, weapon) while also pointing back to the artist's youth memories (moza, amor, azora, ramo/young girl, love, alarm, bouquet). *baRcEloNA/I cor* or *Arena al cor* (2018) ("sand in the heart") reveals the sounds and sights of the Mediterranean port city (roca, ola, ancla/rock, wave, anchor) as these are intertwined with memories of migration and labor (labora, lacera/works, wounds) that point back to Spanish domestic migration during the latter years of Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Finally, *United Estados* (2019) explores a complex web of social and personal referents in the contemporary world, mixing English and Spanish words: "data", "dios" (god), "odio" (hate), "sense," "SOS," and even "Tina" herself. Written during Trump's America, code switching can be read as a destabilizer of normative English language, just as the overall performative result of the reader's interaction with any of these emblems reconfigures and destabilizes any patriarchal and national truths associated with the stability of any of them. Revolving around topics of migration and nomadism, these e-lit poems enact the sense, limitations, and possibilities of national movements within late capitalism.

Works Cited

Rettberg, Scott. *Electronic Literature*. Cambridge: Polity, 2019