Tapuya’s Volume 2 cover was developed with two ideas in mind. Firstly, seeking to increase engagement with the Latin American STS community through an open call for images that connected with Tapuya’s topic matter. Secondly, starting a tradition of featuring different Latin American countries on each cover, in order to showcase and take advantage of the richness and diversity within the region.

Let me start by thanking the author of the first image (Figure 1), Nicolás Gaitán-Albarracín, who is part of the GIDICT1 research cluster at the Universidad Nacional de Bogotá. Nicolás in fact sent us a number of beautiful images that covered a wide spectrum of topics related to science, technology and the culture and history of the Sumapaz region in greater Bogota where he currently lives and works. I’ll quote from Nicolás’ own explanation to me of what makes the region’s images so symbolically in tune with Tapuya. Sumapaz “represents 50% of Bogota’s territory but is wholly rural with over 50% of its territory designated as a Natural National Park. During the 20th century it was a site of strong agrarian struggles to claim peasant’s rights and was the victim of armed conflict. It also features an endemic ecosystem – the páramo – which is the main water harvester for the country.” Moreover, Sumapaz features elements that are ever-present in Latin American cultural contexts: a rich indigenous past and a period of colonial hardships that nevertheless strongly defined the region’s history.

Choosing only one dimension from such a rich setting is terribly hard, but a choice indeed had to be made. I confess that the final defining factor was as much aesthetic as it was symbolic. The photograph, which in the end leans towards recognizing the exquisiteness of the páramo at the almost microscopic level, is of a beauty that speaks on its own, yet is imbricated with various layers of meaning. The photo is of a moss-like lichen of the genus Cladonia (species unidentified) taken at the Los Salitres waterfall, a site in the middle of the páramo that was left uninhabited after the times of social conflict and that is particularly hard to access because of the harsh climate. As Nicolás explains, it is rather surprising that despite the journey taking a three-hour commute from urban Bogota and then a one day horse-ride, it is still essentially part of the greater “city.”

The second image (Figure 2), I’m afraid, is as self-centered as was the Volume 1 cover. After almost a decade of living abroad, I am once again back in Mexico as part of a therapeutic journey that I will not bother readers with. Temporarily based in San Miguel de Allende, a colonial town that is a cultural, historical and touristic hub in the Bajío region smack in the middle of the country (if one can speak of a middle for such a strangely-shaped country as Mexico), I was looking for some artistic counterbalance to academic woes. It was mostly serendipity that landed me in the traditional Mexican weaving course held in the workshop of master weaver Agapito Jiménez at the Instituto Allende Art School – one of San Miguel’s cultural landmarks. The workshop is a place of wonder from times long gone by, with every element of the weaving process done by hand and taught by Agapito to willing students from across the

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1Grupo de investigación en tecnologías e innovación para el desarrollo comunitario (Research group in technology and innovation for communitarian development). http://www.hermes.unal.edu.co/pages/Consultas/Grupo.xhtml?idGrupo=22248&opcion=1.

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Figure 1. Red lichen from the genus Caldonia (unidentified species) near the Los Salitres waterfall, Sumapaz, greater Bogota region. Photo kindly provided by Nicolás Gaitán Albarracín.

Figure 2. Traditional Mexican wool weaving on two-pedal floor loom, Instituto Allende, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Photo by Luis Reyes-Galindo.
globe for more than forty years (including, as he is fond of pointing out, Michelle Pfeiffer and her sister).

I had never before practiced anything related to weaving and literally had to start from zero, to exasperated sighs from Agapito, who at some point became sure that I was simply mentally unable to count beyond the number ten, as he tried to impress upon me the importance of carefully counting warp threads on the two-pedal floor loom on which I was trying to reproduce a traditional Mexican wool rug pattern. The topmost photo is of my first rug at around halfway through finishing. I will not confess to the many mistakes this poor rug suffered at my hands, though I persevered and I’m almost sure Agapito now believes that I can count to at least ten, and maybe even twenty.

As a lowly novice in the practice of weaving, and even more on the cultural, social and anthropological aspects of the craft, I would rather now draw on the work of one of Tapuya’s editorial team members, Tania Pérez-Bustos. Part of Tania’s research is immersed in a long tradition of scholarly work not only in Latin America but indeed worldwide which has focused on the connections between embroidery and weaving, technology and artisanship, and feminist studies. As she points out in a fascinating paper on the relationship between digital and artisan work (Pérez-Bustos 2017), although digital technologies and artisanal practices are often thought of as opposing and opposed practices, one can also begin the analysis by understanding that artisanal work is, in every significant way, also a form of technology. Tania’s work is focused on understanding the differences between the stereotypical presentation of technology as disembodied, universal, standardized practices and artisanship-technology as communally organized, locally meaningful, bond-forming and situated.

It is in this sense that the photo illustrates an often-neglected piece of Latin America: local technologies. My choice of the image was a nod in the direction of these studies, though for now it confessedly comes from a place of vast, vast own-ignorance. Yet having spent some eighty-plus hours at the loom under Agapito’s tutelage, to me the photo resonated with themes important to Tapuya, albeit from a different vantage point than Tania’s. Floor looms and wool are of course elements brought from across the Atlantic, yet at some point in Mexico’s history were transmuted into a “Mexican” artisanal tradition which mixes European techniques with local designs and other autochthonous elements, such as native ingredients used in the workshop’s wool-dying process and that include cochineal, the cempasúchil flower and añil. Yet it must be said that floor looms represent only a small fraction of all the immensely rich weaving traditions in Mexico, of which the prehispanic telar de cintura (backstrap weaving) is possibly its highest form. Indeed, the telar de cintura is a predominately feminine activity more in tune with the traditions that feature in Tania’s research and that appear all across Latin America. About these, the luminous Mexican poet Rosario Castellanos wrote:

Al valle de las nubes
y los delgados pinos,
al de grandes rebaños
– Zinacanta – he venido.

Vengo como quien soy,
sin casa y sin amigo,
a ver a unas mujeres
de labor y sigilo.

Qué misteriosa y hábil
su mano entre los hilos;
mezcla extraños colores,
dibuja raros signos.
No sé lo que trabajan
en el telar que es mío.
Tejedoras, mostradme
mi destino.

–Rosario Castellanos, Tejedoras de Zinacanta (Weavers of Zinacanta), 1952

To the valley of clouds
and slender pine trees,
of large flocks
– Zinacunda – I have come.

I come as I am,
homeless and friendless,
to see women
laborious and silent.

How mysterious and able
her hand betwixt the twines;
mixing strange colors,
painting strange signs.

I know not what they do
on this loom of mine.
Women-weavers, show me
the destiny that is mine.²

Luis Reyes-Galindo

²Author’s own translation.