

VIRAL BODIES: AIDS AND OTHER CONTAGIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN LIFE
NARRATIVES

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The HIV/AIDS crisis in Latin America was overshadowed by the late phase of the Cold War, while authoritarian governments promoted discourses reflecting moral and ethical exceptionalism. People with AIDS (PWAs) experienced multiple crises—moral excision by the state, marginalization, and the certainty of death. Existing societal infrastructures of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality urged their marginalized lives into even more precarious ways of being. The authoritarian and hegemonic discourses complicated and intensified how PWAs experienced isolation, internal exile, neglect, condemnation, discrimination, and death. These exceptional conditions led to a 10-year delay before works by Latin American artists and writers emerged. My dissertation examines works by Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba), Pedro Lemebel (Chile), and Pablo Perez (Argentina) since they reveal a spectrum of intersectional AIDS subjectivities exhibiting accommodation, resistance, and transgression of prevailing national and religious norms. Drawing from the fields of exile studies, transfeminism, contagion theory, and virality, my dissertation argues that these narratives break imposed silences by radically exteriorizing the insularity, anonymity, and decomposing bodies of those dying, and living, with the disease. They intervene in national, transnational, and religious discourses. They also challenge the limits of gender and genre, while contributing to a (re)imagining of homosexual history. They offer utopian visions of kinship, belonging, and community formation and bring practices of difference such as transvestism,

sadomasochism, and spiritual fetishism into focus.

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Dedicated to my life companion Marco Moncayo, my best friend Michael Knight, my dear nephew Austin Nielsen, but most importantly to the memory of my aunt Dr. Ana Lucia Jaramillo Verdezoto, in whose footsteps I tread forward.

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FOREWORD: A TRANSTEXTUAL EXERCISE IN ACADEMIC AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF FASHIONING

When I began my PhD studies, I struggled with the idea of writing a dissertation about AIDS because the disease was an intensely personal concern for me, one that had caused tremendous existential anxiety, emotional pain, stigma, fear, denial, and isolation. I experienced several of these psychogenic disturbances, in part since childhood, because of my sexuality. What I intend to illustrate in this transtextual autobiographical exercise is how becoming HIV positive affected me and why I was not sure about choosing HIV/AIDS as the focus of my dissertation. Most of the AIDS life writing I read was testimonial or autobiographical, often published after their author's deaths. I felt that what I understood to be the genre of authenticity—the unvarnished truth—carried certain implications. Including certain details about one's life could be like dropping a bomb—revealing “truths” can be like dynamite. Contrary to the famous ACT-UP slogan “Silence equals death,” for a long time I felt that *silence equaled life*. Another aim is to illuminate how the psychogenic disturbances materialize and, as the Cuban writer Severo Sarduy who died from AIDS related complications in 1983 would put it, *written on the body*.

When I was diagnosed with AIDS in early-1993, HIV had already exacted a devastating toll. My viral load was in the hundreds of thousands and my CD4, or T-Cells called “the generals,” one of many military metaphors of the immune system that emerged in the battle with AIDS identified by Susan Sontag in *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989), were at a count of less than 200. Since I became seriously ill with numerous respiratory infections and fevers over the previous 4 years, which I thought were the flu but turned out to be pneumonia, my condition fit the legal definition of AIDS in the United States. I suspected for at least a decade before the diagnosis that I had been exposed to the virus while living in Los Angeles, where I endured what Lina Meruane

in *Viral Voyages: Tracing AIDS in Latin America* (2014) describes as the “infinite web of relationships of inevitable infections” (8). To me this notion is like the idea of six degrees of separation. I only got the HIV test because I became engaged to marry a woman I really cared about and hoped she would help me *straighten* out my life.

The day I got the anonymous results, I questioned the attendant. “Is it possible that my test is one of those false positives?” She replied, “That is a good question. But, unfortunately, in your case it isn’t. Do you see these bands here?” She pointed to the paper in front of her. I looked to where she was pointing. “This test is the result of what is called the Western Blot and we evaluate a set of nine HIV-specific bands of reactivity. Based on the pattern, we can determine if someone is positive, not positive, or if the results are undetermined, which means we order a second test.” I asked, “How many bands do I have that makes you so sure?” She replied, “You have seven of the nine bands we look for.” Alarmed, I asked, “What does that mean?” She calmly replied, “It means that you have had this for a very long time.” Even more alarmed, I asked, “How long?” She stated in a matter-of-fact way, “Oh, it’s hard to say for sure, but I would venture to say at least 10 years, or more.” I left the clinic dumbfounded, in a state of shock. I felt completely numb. It was as though someone just handed me a death sentence. When I got home, I thought long and hard and decided that all the praying in the world was not going to change a thing. I cancelled all the wedding plans, broke up with my fiancé, and resolved myself to die.

In 1996, I came very close to death. My T-Cell count was zero and my viral load had reached into the millions. I refused to take AZT or DDI, two drugs that had been prescribed to people with AIDS, because I heard that they had serious toxic side effects. Since I had resigned myself to die, I was not interested in artificially prolonging my life. My parents told me that my aunt in Ecuador had called and told them that I needed to come and meet an Ecuadorian oncologist

named Edwin Cevallos. He had discovered what I understood to be Amazonian plant-based compounds that had a stimulating effect on the immune system. My parents convinced me to go saying that since it was a natural medicine, I should at least check it out. I agreed to go. I met him when he gave his presentation in Quito and reported his findings. I felt encouraged by what he said. I purchased a three-month supply of his compound which needed to be converted into a tincture or tea. When I got back to Eugene, I began to drink what he called BIRM, which stands for biological immune response modulator. After three weeks of drinking the extract, I developed a very high fever. I went to the hospital, and they immediately admitted me. My temperature was a hundred and six. Given Doctor Wilson's orders, the nurses placed ice packs on my body and gave me Tylenol to lower the fever, but it would go down to one hundred and four for a few hours and then shoot back up to a hundred and six. The fever raged on. Doctor Wilson ordered blood tests and a spinal tap. After a week of fever, I had begun to develop blisters on my skin. I lost a lot of weight. My mother was there by my side every day. My father refused to come and see me because, I later learned, he believed I deserved what I got. I asked for it. Doctor Wilson came into my room and said that he could not figure out what was causing my fever and asked me if I had any idea what could be causing it. I told him that I believed it was the BIRM. It was the only thing I had been taking. He laughed and told me that it *definitely was not* the tea. He asked my mother to step outside with him.

About a half an hour later my mother returned. I asked her what Doctor Wilson said. She told me that he was not going to be my doctor anymore. She fired him after he told her that she needed to prepare herself because I was going to die within a few days. There was nothing else he could do for me. She told me she refused to accept what he said because her faith in God was stronger than anything a doctor believed about his medicine. She told me God was going to work

a miracle. I told her that I was ready to die, that I wanted to die, that she should just let me go. She forcefully said, “No! You’re not going to die. God is not going to let that happen!” The fever continued to rage for another week. My mother stayed by my side. I kept losing weight, my body was so weak, I could scarcely drink anything because my mouth was full of blisters. The hospital pumped fluids into me intravenously. I had begun to drift in and out of consciousness. I remember my closest friends came to see me and cried hysterically as they said goodbye. I told them that I loved them.

Perhaps it was the twelfth day of my hospitalization when I woke from my delirium to see my mother sitting in the chair next to the bed. I looked toward the entrance of the hospital room, but it looked as though a bomb had gone off and blown a huge hole in the wall. In the darkness beyond the hole, I caught a glimmer of light as though the sun were beginning a new dawn. As the intensity of the light increased, I began to make out a beach with crystalline blue water, white puffy clouds in the sky, beautiful palm trees, flowering bushes, and people on the beach. They were walking toward a white gleaming cruise ship that I could see in the distance. I got up and started walking, through the debris, avoiding the rebar that protruded out of the blown out concrete walls, and joined the people approaching the ship. When I finally arrived at the gangway, there was a man sitting at a table with a big book. He was dressed like a purser. He asked me my name and I replied, Jon Jaramillo. He started flipping through the pages and when he got to the last one, he looked up and smiled and said, “I am so sorry, but you are not on the list.” I looked at him baffled and annoyed. I inquired, “What do you mean I am not on the list? I am here. Aren’t I?” He smiled broadly and said, “If your name is not on the list you cannot get on the ship.” I started to become enraged. I came all this way. I will show him. His good cheer seemed like sarcasm to me, like a challenge. I said angrily, “Wait right here, I will be right back.”

I turned around and headed to my hospital bed and laid down, turned to my mother, and said, “Mom, where is my check book?” She looked up from the novel she was reading and looked at me as though I did not make any sense. Her face looked puzzled. She asked, “Honey, why do you need your checkbook? You’re in the hospital.” If my eyes had been lasers like Superman’s, she would have been toast at that moment. I angrily barked, “Give me my goddamn check book!” She reached over and plucked a tissue out of the box and handed it to me, but in my mind at that moment, it was my checkbook. So, I got up and marched back up to the table where the man with the book was. I wrote out the check in the amount of \$14,267 and handed it to him. I said sternly, “There. This is everything I have left in this world. This is more than it costs to go on a cruise ship. Let me on the goddamn ship.” Again, that irritating broad smile. He said in what seemed to me to be a condescending tone, “Oh you poor man. You’re just not getting it, are you? All the money in the world is not going to get you on this ship. You must be on the guest list. Don’t take it personally. Go back to where you came from.” I could not believe what I was hearing. I started shaking, and my rage turned into defeat. I started trembling and felt downcast. I turned around and trudged back to my hospital bed, laid down, and started weeping. I cried so hard that I howled like a dog or some sort of dying animal. My mother became alarmed and stood up to attend to me. She asked me what was wrong, why was I crying. I could not speak. I sobbed and sobbed, with huge amounts of mucus oozing from my nose and mouth. I started to choke. She gave me some water and I took a sip. She asked me again, “What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” I remember saying, “They won’t take me with them.” She pleaded, “Who won’t take you with them? What are you talking about?” I lapsed into unconsciousness.

The next morning, I woke up and my mother was gone. I looked around the room and the destruction from the night before had disappeared. I heard footsteps outside in the hallway and the

murmur of voices. The sunlight poured into the room from the window, and I heard birds chirping. I realized that the humming noise that had been overpowering my brain was silent. Even my internal thinking voice was silent. I was in a place of pure observation—there was no I to speak of, save for my body and my thoughtless consciousness. The door to my room opened and my mother walked in. She looked at me. She must have seen something was different. She rushed right over and began touching my face, looking for a trace of fever. She called the nurse who confirmed that my temperature was normal. My mother had a big smile on her face. She seemed very pleased. Doctor Mossberg, my new doctor, came in to check me out, asked how I was feeling, and looked amazed. She looked Japanese to me. She said, “I am going to be your new attending physician. My name is Jane. I am going to order some tests.” I replied, “Ok.” Within a few hours she came back and told me that since my temperature had remained normal, she felt it was time for me to go home. I said, “I don’t have a home.” I had sold my house and gave away all my things preparing to die. She looked at me then my mother, perplexed. My mother said, “He is going to come and stay with me for a while.” I said, “Ok.” And with that, I was soon discharged and on my way to Florence. She fed me chicken soup, like she had done when I fell gravely ill at thirteen with hepatitis. I listened to music by Enya and meditated, practicing techniques I had learned when my mother became involved with Roy Masters, an English-born American author, radio personality, businessman, and hypnotist.

In the weeks that followed. My strength gradually returned. I went to see Doctor Mossberg and she told me that there was a new protocol called HAART, highly active antiretroviral therapy. I later learned the combination therapy had a nickname, the “drug cocktail,” since it involved the mixing of three classes of anti-viral drugs. She told me that she wanted to prescribe them to me. My T-Cell count was still zero, but my viral load was under one hundred thousand. She told me

that the sustained fever probably destroyed a lot of the virions in my blood stream. Virions are individual viral bodies—strands of DNA or RNA encapsulated in a membrane. She also said that HAART was very effective, and it would help to keep my viral load down. Jane’s gentle demeanor was so effective that she convinced me to start taking the medications. In the months that followed she referred me to a contagious disease specialist in 1997 because my body was not tolerating the initial combination very well. I cannot remember the specialist’s name. She sent my blood sample to Belgium to be analyzed, telling me that the test determines which drugs are most effective against my strain of HIV, and with the information it provided, she could prescribe the ideal combination. After we tried a few different ones, I suffered through various symptoms such as headaches and nausea. The most serious symptom was elevated lipids that impacted my liver, mid-rift, and back, a side-effect called lipodystrophy. Eventually, we happened on a combination that my body tolerated best. My T-cells started to make a comeback, climbing steadily from zero to fifty and then to over a hundred. My viral load trended downward. Meanwhile, I had become involved with an organization in Eugene called HIV alliance, at first because I needed a case manager, but a few years later I joined their “Speakers in the Schools” program. HIV positive speakers go to middle and high schools to present a sort of HIV 101 lecture and tell their AIDS story. The story about the fever and my out of body experience in the hospital was part of my testimonial routine.

By mid-1998, my health had improved, and so I decided to go to Lane Community College, unsure of what the future would bring, or how long I would live. At first, I took classes that I thought would be fun, like audio production, television studio production, and film editing. I learned the “old-school” techniques, cutting audio and film with a blade and using tape to piece things together. They had limited use of computers. By the year 2000, I reached an undetectable

viral load and my T-Cells had climbed above three hundred. My life gained a new purpose, telling my story and helping others. The most important emotion in my life had become gratitude. I returned to Twelve Step programs and helped organize the first International Convention of Codependents Anonymous in Portland. I was active in the HIV Alliance program and continued taking classes. I continued to practice meditation. I realized fear was a more terrible virus than HIV. I decided to live my life fearlessly. By 2004, I completed three degrees at Lane, had produced a documentary which I titled *HIV is Not a Death Sentence*, and a forty-five-minute film I titled *Sister and I*, about poetry and assisted suicide. I also produced and recorded over a hundred original songs. I also had been accepted to the University of Oregon. However, I did not actually begin there until 2010 because many things happened that are not relevant to the limited story in this introduction. What I will say is that during that time I had to deal with a situation that brought back painful memories from when I lived in California in the early-1980s. It is ironic after everything that happened back then, I am still alive.

Looking at the bright side, the two best things that happened to me during the delay before starting at the UO were meeting Marco Moncayo and being invited to join the board of directors of HIV Alliance. So, when I finally did start at the University of Oregon, I was awarded the Diversity Excellence Scholarship that covered tuition and some living expenses. By 2013, I completed a dual major, International Studies and Spanish, with a minor in Queer theory and a SLAT certificate, which stands for Second Language Acquisition and Teaching. During that time, I met several professors who had a tremendous impact on my intellectual development, such as Robert Davis (Romance linguistics), Keli Yerian (linguistics), Spike Gildea (linguistics), Cecilia Enjuto Rangel (poetry), and Analisa Taylor (Latinx), as well as some amazing career instructors, such as Amanda Powell (Sor Juana, poetry, and translation), Maria Lara (Spanish grammar and

culture), Kelly Leon Howarth (Spanish culture), and Rafael Arias (Spanish). These people stand out in my mind as having the greatest impact in my early academic transformation. I was accepted into the Romance Languages department to complete a Master's degree in Spanish. My viral load continued to be undetectable, and I had a new Infectious Disease specialist who also became my primary care physician, Doctor Robert Pelz at Peacehealth Hospital.

I first became acquainted with Reinaldo Arenas through his book *Antes que anochezca*, which was on the reading list for a class in 2014 on the Cuban revolution. After reading the novel, I thought that perhaps Professor Lanie Millar intentionally added it to the list because she wanted me to experience it, given the little bit she knew about my life story. I was blown away by the candor of Arenas' narration, his voice I perceived through the pages. I marveled at coincidences I perceived between our past experiences, especially the parts about his childhood sexuality and his sexual adventures as a young adult. The detail of the descriptions of his sexual escapades in Cuba both shocked and excited me. I felt that as I read about his life, I was looking into a mirror. I was angered by the brutality of the persecution and silencing he suffered, how his freedom to write was denied. I could not believe he wrote in such a confessional and testimonial manner, revealing details I would have been afraid at the time to admit about my life. His words felt authentic, sincere, and radical. The denunciations and accusation he leveled at Fidel Castro, the Cuban Revolution, and Ernesto Guevara's vision for the "new man of the twenty-first century" challenged the leftist bent of my romanticization, not only of the revolution and what I thought it stood for, but what I understood about ideologies, history, memories, and myths. I could not shake the feeling that his autobiography was like a queer type of vengeance, one in which he unmasks the internationally projected *machismo* of the Cuban national project. Arenas' writing motivated me to investigate further and learn more.

I was deeply moved to tears at the deterioration of Arenas' body and his eventual suicide in 1990. I thought about how *I* had considered suicide and *wanted* to die. I wished Reinaldo Arenas could have survived long enough to gain access to the lifesaving medications, the “drug cocktail,” that I was privileged to receive. I silently said to myself, “how terribly tragic that someone so talented, so forthright, so brutally honest did not survive but I did.” I even felt a twinge of survivor's guilt as I contemplated his novel and the achingly beautiful and poetic cinematic adaptation *Before Night Falls* (2000) by Julian Schnabel, with two of my favorite actors, Javier Bardem and Johnny Depp. *Antes que anochezca* made me question my identity as a gay man, as a Latino, and as an AIDS survivor. I questioned what it meant to write an autobiographical novel and what effect was produced when using a first-person voice. *Antes que anochezca* stirred all the memories I shared above and more. It forced me to remember my troubled past and do a lot of soul searching. I asked myself. Do readers believe everything revealed in life writing or is this about a careful arrangement of events and the styling of a self? What should be included or left out? Where does one draw the line between fact and fiction? Does such a line even exist? Would *I* have the courage to write an autobiography of my life and reveal intimate details about what I did and thought—all those dirty little secrets—so others could read about them? What would family and friends think if they read about my life, who I really am, and not the person they imagine me to be? Would they blame me for becoming infected with HIV because I had many sexual partners since being penetrated as a child of twelve?

These questions go to the heart of my dilemma. Should I write about AIDS in my PhD dissertation or not? I suspected that doing so would involve the obligation, the necessity, to relate Arenas' story to mine. I was not sure I was ready to be as courageous as he. Of course, it is easy to be courageous when you are already dead. Given my apprehension, I explored alternative topics

such as the drug trade, the Atlantic slave trade, and even Arthurian romance. Once I realized that I needed to write about what I knew best, or at least what I thought I knew best, I decided to come out of the AIDS closet writ large. I compiled the bibliographies for my exams and prospectus. Besides Arenas (Cuba), I decided to include Pedro Lemebel (Chile), Pablo Pérez (Argentina), and Mario Bellatín (Mexico) as well. Little did I realize after the prospectus was approved that the topic was much deeper and more complex than I first imagined. I had to digest several new fields as my reading took me into uncharted waters related to life writing, virology, contagion theory, and virality. Because of the huge interruption with the COVID-19 pandemic which began in early 2020, I decided to leave Mario Bellatín for another time, when I expand this project into a book. This introduction is an exercise in what I call academic autobiographical self-fashioning in a PhD dissertation. I decided to name my dissertation “Viral Bodies: AIDS and Other Contagions in Latin American Life Narratives.” I crafted this introduction using first-, second-, and third-person narrative voices and points of view to illustrate what I have learned about some of the techniques that authors use in writing self-referential life narratives, how they intersect with intellectual and academic concerns, as they fashion the self or selves they narrate in the text.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Metaphors of Contagion and the Viral Body

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a global phenomenon of such magnitude that its impact on human rights is beyond the capacity of any one person or institutional scholar, research unit, national, transnational, or even supranational actor to survey. For a time, the pandemic deflated the hopeful energy generated in the wake of the Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco and the Stonewall uprising in New York in the late-1960s, when the struggle for homosexual liberation began. Utopian imaginings of a queer future, a queer nation, even a queer planet was shattered. Queer futurity and world-making became apocalyptic. Many gay and lesbian intellectuals in the United States and Europe began to theorize beyond the early identity struggles of the 1970s, to address public discourses around AIDS. Their seminal work gave birth to the field of queer theory. Numerous studies within the humanities and science proliferated. Visual artists, writers, and intellectuals imagined new approaches to making art and reimagined the relationship between scholarship, activism, and politics. The first literary and visual narratives to detail the experience of the confrontation with AIDS sought to carve out a space in which to mourn the devastating loss of loved ones and to make sense of the horror and grief they felt about the insufferable way the disease destroyed their bodies. As the death count increased and governments turned a blind eye to the suffering, people became enraged that hegemonic actors such as states, professional bodies, and the media would treat homosexuals as a contagion and the victims of the disease as disposable. Infected victims and their allies took matters into their own hands, cared for the sick, helped them to die with dignity, and organized direct action to generate funding and political will. In the process of mobilizing people and resources, they incepted a tremendous transnational archive of books, narrative films, documentaries, photographs, paintings, quilts, and other cultural artifacts that bear witness and transcend theoretical borders in remarkable ways.

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, in my close analyses of the primary texts by writers Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba), Pedro Lemebel (Chile), and Pablo Pérez (Argentina), we shall see that these authors seemed to be aware of how the metaphorical meaning of “contagion” oscillates between substance and person. These authors frequently leveraged the ambiguity of metaphorical meaning in their narrative discourses. They rely on the slipperiness of metaphorical undecidability. When the other denies the humanity of the person who takes pleasure in same-sex desire by treating them as a contagion that must be quarantined, they injure that person. They turn them into the villain of their story. The writers analyzed here treat the injury to the homosexual person by enacting a reversal. They create their own contagious metaphors that make the other and their injurious discourse recognizable as the true villains for having sought to repress, prohibit, and proscribe all the pleasures the homosexual person desires. In so doing, these writers treat their injury by subverting the logic of contagion within their life narratives. They represent the life of the homosexual as heroic to invert the discourse of blame away from their sexual decisions. They place the blame on power to show that its discourse is the truly villainous contagion. Their narrative voices become collective voices that speak for others like them. Their voices claim the personal sovereignty to determine gender and sexuality for themselves, to forge kinship, family, and community ties on their own terms. Their representations of bodies embrace various categories, such as race, gender, and sexuality, which have been used to divide people through fear and ignorance, to say that such socially constructed sources of stigma and exclusion are no longer acceptable. In their hands, such divisive categories are transformed into sources of pride.

Their labor of love overcomes one of the biggest challenges all non-compliant people face—the challenge of visibility. For this reason, I propose in my title the metaphor of “viral bodies” to help us understand these literary interventions as acts that make visible what has been

censored, that sound what has been silenced, and that value what has been despised, while recognizing that there is still much work to do. Arenas, Lemebel, and Pérez own the stigmatizing story of the other, which casts them as contagious pleasure seekers, by audaciously proclaiming something like... “Yes! I love pleasure, I provide pleasure, and I seek pleasure. So what?” They contaminate the discourse of the other by using what the other considers blasphemy. They present their homosexual desire as something spiritual, a sacred mission, even its own religion. I argue, therefore, that if a person is the signified of the metaphor of contagion because their body is infected with a virus then the logic collapses person (body) with virus (substance) such that the person becomes the virus. When I use the metaphor “viral body,” I am referring to the person and their body which have been assigned a status of contagion. The person’s body and their identity are both contagions. What they think and what they say are contagions. Even the books and the art they produce are contagions. The viral body metaphor subverts the logic of contagion by proclaiming its own “so what?” The viral body metaphor speaks as if saying... I love my viral body precisely because it is the villain of your story. I will use my villainy to undo the injuries your mythological discourses have provoked. My viral (anti)bodies will contaminate your mythology with alternate mythologies of my choosing, they will become my antibodies to the contagion of repression and blame. I will contaminate the telos of your story with the future horizon of my queer becoming. We must remember the words of José Martí in his now famous 1891 article “Nuestra América” who said, “trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stone.” The writers of my dissertation corpus demonstrate that the imagination is the body’s greatest weapon against tyranny.

In *Viral Voyages: Tracing AIDS in Latin America* (2014), Lina Meruane argues that the virus not only colonized the world silently until its debut in 1981, but it also impacted the

geopolitical panorama, “the virus became a pandemic of significations... [unleashing] ...a need for narratives that would attempt to explain the epidemic” (9-10). As Susan Sontag observed in *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), the pandemic reactivated plague metaphors. Fear of contagion sank into the hearts of many people around the globe when they heard the descriptions of the visible symptoms of the mysterious disease which manifested on the bodies of homosexuals: terrifying purple lesions on the skin and cadaverous haunted eyes that stared into oblivion. Meruane explains that “the disease gave rise to a metaphorical language among scientists and doctors, politicians, and the church and its representatives that would be deployed in mass media” (10). The descriptions of AIDS symptoms appearing in medical discourses fed into the machinations of journalists who specialized in salacious reporting, while zealous politicians and religious leaders capitalized on the scandal to fan the flames of long cultivated prejudices, using what I call “apocalyptic viral metaphors.” Headlines containing the metaphors “gay cancer,” “gay plague,” and “contagion” were used to promote the notion that the disease was divine punishment for the sin of sodomy. Meruane explains that those who narrativized the epidemic, whether their intent was to moralize and repress or to subvert, progress, and resist produced metaphors for the syndrome, “attempted to restrict it rhetorically...instrumentalize it for ideological ends...defuse the stigmatizing process of power over the affected” (10). Let us consider the case of the first news report about what would eventually become known as AIDS.

In June 1981, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published a “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report” (MMWR) describing an outbreak of 41 cases of Kaposi’s Sarcoma, which up until then was a rare cancer affecting “less than six-one-hundredths of a case per 100,000 people annually, or about two cases in every three million people” (Altman). The *New York Times* immediately published a brief story by Lawrence Altman on July 3 with the headline “Rare Cancer

Seen in 41 Homosexuals.” Altman sounded the alarm about the “rapidly fatal form of cancer. Eight of the victims died less than 24 months after the diagnosis was made.” At the time, Altman’s characterization of this particularly vicious strain of Kaposi’s Sarcoma (KS) indicated that the disease progressed aggressively toward death. Altman uses descriptions like “violet-colored spots... mistaken for bruises... swollen lymph glands... kills by spreading throughout the body.” Altman also reported that all the victims were homosexual men between the ages of 26 and 51, “who have had multiple and frequent sexual encounters with different partners, as many as 10 sexual encounters each night up to four times a week.” This sentence emphasizes the popular notion that homosexuals are promiscuous and implies that their behavior may be the cause of the disease. The stigma of Altman’s reporting does not stop there. “Many of the patients have also been treated for viral infections such as herpes, cytomegalovirus and hepatitis B as well as parasitic infections such as amebiasis and giardiasis. Many patients also reported that they had used drugs such as amyl nitrite and LSD to heighten sexual pleasure” (Altman). The first sentence points to a viral origin, while the second underscores several stereotypes and false beliefs about homosexuals: their bodies are cesspools of germs, and they are all drug crazed pleasure seekers. The “forty-one” signaled in the article’s headline were just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Altman also interrogates a couple of the medical investigators who published the findings. The researchers share information that somewhat conflicts prior symptomologies. For example, Altman prefaces what he reports from the interviews by stating the prevailing logic that “cancer is not believed to be contagious, but conditions that might precipitate it, such as particular viruses or environmental factors, might account for an outbreak among a single group.” The most interesting aspect of this sentence is the revelation that medical science had been investigating the origin of cancer through two vectors of contagion, one environmental and the other viral. When we consider

how the researchers used the word “contagion,” we begin to understand what meaning they attribute to it. Does contagion mean a substance, like a chemical or a virus, or a person? The confusing significance of the word becomes evident when Altman writes, “some indirect evidence actually points away from contagion as a cause.” What Altman means with the word “contagion” is based on information provided to him by Dr. Friedman-Kien and Dr. Curran, who during their interviews indicated that none of the patients knew each other. Dr. Friedman-Kien suggested that, given the patients’ homosexual behavior, it was “theoretically possible that some had sexual contact with a person with Kaposi’s Sarcoma at some point in the past.” This statement is also confusing given that Altman stated that cancer is not contagious. If this were true, then why would someone who had homosexual sex with someone who has KS contract the disease, unless the researchers knew something they were not willing to divulge, or perhaps some other form of logic was at work? Dr. Curran, also interviewed, claimed that those who were not homosexual were not in danger from contagion. Altman directly quotes Curran who says, “the best evidence against contagion is that no cases have been reported to date outside the homosexual community or in women.” Clearly the two researchers use the word “contagion” to signify a person who engages in homosexual behaviors. They also imply that non-homosexuals, like women, are not in danger of becoming infected, because they are not promiscuous, nor do they use drugs to increase sexual pleasure like those homosexual people do.

From this cursory reading of this early report, we can see how the metaphors used to describe the emerging disease actively reinforced stereotypes. If someone relied exclusively on this report and the two doctor’s assertions to formulate an opinion and a stance, they would likely presume that whatever this new disease was, it was exclusively linked to homosexual practices because it was the result of their behavior. The logic of such a belief seems to imply... “If I avoid

homosexuals and just say no to drugs, then I will be fine.” This is precisely how many people in Latin America thought and behaved. By regarding the person as the contagion and not the virus, they lived with a dangerously false sense of immunity. What Meruane argues is that discourses like Altman’s spread like a virus. As the metaphors and discourses replicated and mutated, infecting the narratives of other domains, they superimposed language and ideas, leading to what linguist Paula Treichler refers to as a “chaotic assemblage of our understandings of AIDS” (*How to Have Theory* 11). While paraphrasing Treichler, Meruane explains “the language of metaphor less reflects the reality of the disease than it symbolically constructs it” (10). Meruane explains that the plague metaphor operated as a sort of time machine facilitating complementary and contradictory significations to travel from the distant past to the present. As “images from the past are exhumed, ...existing or even borrowed prejudices are brought back to life...the metaphors of an epidemic are transmitted with the same intensity as the disease itself” (10). One of the metaphors that has persistently remained salient in the homosexual experience of AIDS is that of the “sodomite.” Let me linger for a moment on the undecidability of the problematic sodomite metaphor, fraught with confusion and serious material consequences, since it underwent a transformation in the nineteenth century. What exactly is sodomy? Is it the name of a place, like the Biblical Sodom it references? Is it a category built with materials taken from earlier texts? How many meanings have been inserted into this word?

According to Mark Jordan in his study *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (1998), sodomy is a medieval artifact with no trace before the eleventh century, a fearful abstraction invented by medieval theologians that produced “prurient confusions over what the word really means” (1). As theologians developed complex narratives around sodomy, the word passed from signifying a person from the land of Sodom, to a diseased other whose sexual desires

and practices infect the purity of a nation's social body, and finally to the feminized male homosexual body nearly exclusively. In the nineteenth century the sodomite became something else, as Michel Foucault observes in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) "as defined by the ancient civil and canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts... the nineteenth century homosexual became a personage... a case history... in addition to being a type of... life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (*The History* 43). Foucault observes that the invention of the homosexual as a medical category "transposed the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny and hermaphroditism of the soul" (*The History* 43). "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (*The History* 43). Foucault explains that psychiatrists, like Krafft-Ebing, in the nineteenth-century had classified thousands of sexual aberrations using zoological and entomological nomenclature, as if each perversion were its own species. Once the sodomite, patriarchy's arch nemesis, was transformed into the homosexual, the machinery of power (judicial, medical, psychiatric) focused on implanting an analytical framework onto the homosexual body, to make it more classifiable, intelligible, and recognizable. Psychiatry's well-meant intervention may have been to quarantine, but the result was what Foucault calls "the perverse implantation," it reified the pleasures it sought to control. Disparate and unorthodox sexualities and pleasures proliferated. While claiming to speak the truth about deviance, the machinery of power stirred up people's fears. The new power to medicalize deviant sexuality based on a technology of health and pathology justified the violation of human rights by subjecting bodies to intense scrutiny, examination, animalization, electrification, experimentation, isolation, imprisonment, and even death. Foucault's *History* helps us understand how those in power came to regard the whole alien strain of perverse sexualities and pleasures belonged to the dangerous evil lineage of the sodomite. It warned everyone that

homosexual bodies threatened to contaminate individuals, generations, and the entire human race. This kind of thinking gave rise to the very real threat of violent death. Let me now return to the aftermath of Altman's article to see how the abiding threat of contagion, describing a horrific set of symptoms and death, motivated many thinkers, artists, creators, and activists to emphasize the sexuality of racialized and gendered bodies to enact resistance and transgression of hegemonic norms. They turned the human body itself into the site of struggle over socio-political, economic, and ecological justice.

David France in *How to Survive a Plague: The Story of How Activists and Scientists Tamed AIDS* (2017) remembers the gay men of the "Big Apple," who read the article while traveling the ferries to Fire Island, began scrutinizing their own bodies and those of their significant others for signs of the purple lesions, easily mistaken as bruises. France says that those men on the ferries, "immediately recognized themselves in those demographics" (14). By the end of the 4th of July weekend, many found the signs of KS, and their "whole terrible future" came into focus (France 14). France identifies the first news article which ignited a firestorm of media sensationalism, and religious and judicial activism to reveal hypocrisy, as legislators everywhere rushed to enact a barrage of anti-homosexual legislation. He criticizes the criminal neglect of the Reagan Administration for not taking the epidemic seriously because of the belief that AIDS was a disease that only affected homosexuals. Whether or not the PWAs were homo- or heterosexual, their bodies came to be regarded as synonymous with homosexuality because of the logic of the contagion metaphor. PWA = homosexual = contagion = death. France situates the inaction within the broader (re)action to the gay and lesbian liberation movement that began with the Stonewall uprising in 1969. France's book highlights many of the metaphors that emerged to instrumentalize the epidemic for ideological purposes, such as the stigmatizing ones mentioned earlier. He also

includes references to those created by AIDS activists who began organizing progressive thinkers, first to inform the homosexual community, then to demand that the government act.

France was a member of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) founded in 1987, an international grassroots political group that worked to improve the lives of people with AIDS (PWA) and continues working to end the AIDS pandemic. The organization began by taking direct confrontational action. They raised money to sponsor medical research and treatment and funded political advocacy that sought to change public policy and legislation. ACT-UP also produced remarkable contagious metaphors. For example, they created the logo “Silence = Death,” which deployed the pink triangle used to mark homosexuals in the Nazi concentration camps. They created the slogan “ACT-UP! Fight back. Fight AIDS,” which was used as a chant during direct political actions in the public sphere. They created several memorable metaphors used in their “Stop the Church” campaign, which began at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City while Cardinal John O’Connor celebrated mass. The Catholic Church narrated the infection as a moral failure, and Catholic leaders were quick to link the new contagion with the ancient homophobic lineage of the sodomite. They condemned the distribution of condoms in the safe sex education efforts to control the spread of AIDS. O’Connor was an outspoken Catholic-minded critic in New York who hobnobbed with political leaders like Ed Koch and Ronald Reagan. The activists entered the church with placards that read, “Eternal life to Cardinal O’Connor now,” “Know your scumbags,” “Curb your dogma,” and “Papal Bull.” Seeing that O’Connor ignored them, they unleashed pandemonium and began to screech like banshees, throwing condoms in the air, waving their fists, and they staged a “die-in.” Many people symbolically dropped dead on the Cathedral’s steps as a spectacle designed to make the connection between AIDS and death visible. In many ways, their efforts served to inspire PWAs everywhere to break the silence surrounding AIDS.

Breaking the silence in Latin America proved to be quite difficult given the reconfiguration of governmentality that occurred due to the pressures of the Cold War and the prescriptions of neoliberal economic policy. Most governments in the Latin America relied on the hegemonic discourses of the Global North to establish local policies, but local concerns, especially discourses that were dominated by the enduring presences of what Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo theorize as the “coloniality of power.” The inner exile of authoritarianism led to an entrenched silence and censorship of most information that was deemed a threat to the patriarchal imagination of the national body. Knowledge had to be imported from elsewhere. Although the first cases of AIDS began appearing in Latin American countries in the mid -1980s, very few dared to produce local knowledge about such themes. The cultural blackout was so formidable that publishing inside of Cuba, Chile, and Argentina about any thematic concern related to homosexuality in the 1980s and 90s occurred through clandestine networks. Jodie Parys in *Writing AIDS: (Re)Conceptualizing the Individual and Social Body in Spanish American Literature* (2012) asserts that “in the context of U.S. literature, critics refer to ‘AIDS literature’ and ‘AIDS narratives’ to denote the vast quantity of fictional narratives depicting AIDS. In the Spanish American context, however, no such category exists” (2). In her research, the earliest work she found in Latin America was a play called *Pecados mínimos* (1993) written by the Uruguayan author Ricardo Prieto. The novels produced by the authors of my corpus published in the mid to late-1990s. Like Parys’ work, my dissertation examines the existential questions related to the prospect of being a carrier of a potentially fatal virus which requires a “renegotiation of one’s position in the world given the changes caused by the disease” (2). Her work encompasses both the personal and the collective planes. Like I do, Parys examines “the opposite poles of isolated exile versus the creation of community” (3). At an individual level, the protagonists struggle with family and societal taboos, while in the collective

sense, they may see AIDS as something they share and a reason to come together to form a community in the struggle with the virus. Parys' work addresses the void in Latin American scholarship related to AIDS in the late-1980s, by focusing on works that began being published in the 1990s. In my dissertation, I exclusively focus on Reinaldo Arenas' works published in the United States, Pedro Lemebel's works published in Chile, and Pablo Perez's works published in Argentina in the late-1990s and early 2000s. In the chapters dedicated to each author, I offer brief historical contextualizations to address the limitations and conditions under which each author produced and published their works. Most of the major scholarly studies related to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Latin America were published in the 2000s. Three that have proven most useful as I researched this project are *Bandera hueca: historia del movimiento homosexual de Chile* (2008) by Victor Hugo Robles, which chronicles the early struggles for homosexual liberation in Chile; *SIDA en Chile: Historias fragmentadas* (2015) by Amelia Donoso and Victor Hugo Robles, which specifically address the history of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Chile; and *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la Conquista al siglo XXI* by Osvaldo Bazán, which was updated in 2014 after Argentina approved marriage equality for gays and lesbians and includes information about the Frente de Liberación Homosexual (FLH) that included the sociologist and poet Néstor Perlongher as one of its most prominent members.

This dissertation takes a hemispheric approach to the question of literary AIDS as suggested by Dieter Ingenschay in "Hemispheric Looks at Literary AIDS Discourses in Latin America" (2005). He builds on the work of Ottmar Ette, who suggested that we "view the construction of the Americas as 'hemispheric'" (141). This approach "frees an individual phenomenon from the isolation of its local conditions... embeds it in dynamic relations that always take into account slumbering, global discursive contexts that are only partially developed" (141). Looking at the issue hemispherically allows for the parallels and differences in cultural processes to be perceived as complimentary. Ingenschay acknowledges that a tremendous rift exists between rich and poor countries and therefore we must "widen the binary opposition of Old and New Worlds into a triangle with Europe-USA-Latin America constituting its three sides" (141). Ingenschay stresses that we

must understand from the beginning that “quite obviously the Spanish, Cuban, German or US-American AIDS discourse does not exist, rather that its diverse individualities in a given cultural area relate to their own and foreign forms of discourse” (141). Hence the dissertation entertains a variety of theoretical horizons, but two predominant ones: homosexuality and post-colonial cultural theory. As observed by Lee Edelman in “The Mirror in the Tank: ‘AIDS’, Subjectivity, and Rhetoric of Activism” (1993), republished in *Homographesis* (1994), the historical phenomenon of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Western democracies is one that takes shape by writing and articulating another subject entirely, “a subject whose content is suggested but not exhausted by reference to ‘male homosexuality’” (10). Ingenschay explains the complicated post-colonial context thus...from a postcolonial perspective the Spanish *conquista* of America appears to be a continuation of *reconquista*, that is, the expulsion of both the Arab and the Jewish populations from the Iberian Peninsula with its triple cardinal date of 1492. Thus, the work of missionaries in America continued Christianization as a project for extinguishing others or believers of a different faith. Concrete models of discursive discrimination also accompany colonization. The Arab who is driven out after centuries of peaceful coexistence, and the Jew who is suddenly excluded for a lack of *limpieza de sangre*, become persecuted people by the fact that they are stylized into prototypical others. Such racial discrimination goes hand in hand with sexual discrimination when the Arab—and somewhat later the *indigena*—are simultaneously assigned to the space of forbidden sexuality directed towards *contra naturam* sodomy. (Ingenschay 142 emphasis original)

Ingenschay sums up the postcolonial situation and its intersection with contemporary gay theory by asserting that the “Latino is regarded as the prototypical other who, suspected of sodomy, has been regarded warily since the era of the *conquistadores*... secretly turned into an icon of desire” (142 emphasis original). Despite the Latino male’s erotic capital, the colonality of power functionally assigns him the “subaltern” status, which obligates him to accept the “passive role of the *marica* or faggot. Breaking the silence surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis in Latin America means that, like the members of ACT-UP who invaded the church during Cardinal O’Connor’s mass, must scream like banshees to be heard above the hegemonic deaf of patriarchal voicings.

My concept of viral bodies began to come together after I read Lina Meruane’s landmark study. Her reflections on the trajectories of the language of AIDS, what she calls “HIV-positive writing,” and the complex constructions of narrative discourse are where her viral voyage began. I was most intrigued by what seemed to be connections between language, metaphors, narrative,

discourse, the speed of contamination, and the symbolic construction of reality. The symbolic construction of the illness using metaphorical language constituted powerful cultural and rhetorical mechanisms that produced adverse social realities. Meruane approaches the question of AIDS in literature beginning with the idea that throughout history epidemics have crossed multiple boundaries, traveling from one body to the next, “from the known community to the imagined one” (7). In the introduction to Part One called “Logbook of an HIV-Positive Voyage,” Meruane traces the itineraries of major plagues and their geographic journeys: leprosy, smallpox, yellow fever, syphilis, cholera, and influenza, emphasizing “the impenitent nomadism of disease...seen again and again throughout history” (7). AIDS was not simply a global epidemic, as mentioned earlier, but the HIV/AIDS crisis also became a pandemic of significations. Narratives explaining the symptoms began appearing as soon as bodies began manifesting symptoms, wasting away, and dying in the early 1980s.

From the science of virology, we understand that virions are like bodies, although they are not lifeforms as we currently understand them but more like nearly invisible microscopic bullets consisting of strands of DNA and RNA. These virions, or viral bodies if you will, travel through what are called vectors, such as bodily fluids like blood, saliva, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk, while others travel through the air piggy backing on extremely tiny droplets of water vapor or dust particles, and still others can be present for a time on the surfaces we touch, the food we eat, and water we ingest. The lifeless, viral bodies of virions evoke Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “body without organs” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which in psychoanalysis refers to the conscious and unconscious fantasies of patients with psychoses or schizophrenia, expressed as bodily forms or functions that demand its liberation, but liberation is limited by the organs that maintain the steady internal, physical, and chemical conditions of the living system.

The body without organs is a body with unregulated potential, without organizational structure. Philosophers, as well as literary critics, have used the concept to explain the unrestrained manifestation of desires, the effort expended to approach unattainable goals, the necessity to eradicate stratifications and hierarchies, and like the egg, the potential to transmutate or metamorphose into other shapes and forms. The body without organs, like the viral bodies of virions, operates freely without any impositions on its constituent parts. In many ways it functions like a virus. Only since the advent of the AIDS epidemic has medical science begun investigating, identifying, and producing anti-viral alchemies to hinder the genetic reproduction of virions or neutralize their effects, increasing the potential lifespan of bodies previously sentenced to die prematurely.

The dissertation also turns to the relatively new science of virality which emerged with the advent of the internet. Virality studies the rapid spread of messages through digital networks. Virality examines human communicative interactions, and the tendency of an image, video, or piece of information to circulate rapidly and widely from one internet user to another. In this sense, virality can be understood as the quality or fact of being viral. At a functional level, we can think of the rapid spread of information like that of disease. Rather than dealing with viruses of the body, we are dealing with viruses of the mind, which travel through the microcircuitry of what Foucault calls relational modes of existence. Virality should not be confused with the biological term virulence, the degree to which a specific pathogenic organism can cause disease; or pathogenicity, the ability of a pathogen to cause disease. In other words, the two terms are related in the sense that some pathogens are more virulent than others and virulence is the measure of their pathogenicity. Pathogens are microbes that cause disease and microbes can be any number of extremely small cells or particles, like bacteria, viruses, and prions. Simply put, virulence is the

measure of severity or harmfulness of contagious pathogens and poisons. Virality is the phenomenon of accelerated spread and mutation of viral particles from host to host, body to body. But what are the viral particles or virions that travel from mind to mind?

Meruane observes in *Viral Voyages* that HIV not only transformed bodies, but it also altered geopolitical imaginations. “The virus’s geographical reach, the speed with which it spread, the slow presentation of its symptoms, and the simultaneity of its appearance across the globe all reinforced the perception of a world in which distances seemed to have shrunk and in which human beings were more connected” (Meruane 9). I started to imagine how the metaphors of virology and virality could be appropriated for use in the humanities, specifically in the criticism of culture, art, literature, and cinema. Meruane uses the terms *hyperlinked* and *global* to evoke the capitalization of shorter distances and the supposedly equalizing multidirectional flow that makes rapid transmissions possible, but also facilitates the uncontrolled spread of illness. She also observes that HIV/AIDS, “like those of all the epidemics before it, did not just trace a route through geographic space; their movements have not just had a geopolitical impact but also generated other shifts in meaning: new or renewed cultural significations of illness that both explain the society that produces them, and shape its collective imagination” (9). I sensed that perhaps without realizing it, Meruane’s viral voyage was describing the simultaneous phenomena of virulence and virality.

I realized that virality was not simply a contemporary phenomenon, but one that began long before the advent of the internet. I suspected that the antecedents of both virulence and virality could be traced to the industrial and technological revolutions of the nineteenth century. Technologies such as telegraphy, railroads, automobiles, electronic circuitry, aircraft, photography, cinema, publishing, and marketing synergized with the manufacturing processes of

new materials, objects, chemical processes, pharmacology, imaging devices, and machines. These developments allowed people and ideas to migrate more quickly. They facilitated the concentration of people in places where unrestrained satisfaction of desire and previously unattainable goals could bring about transmutations and metamorphoses of bodies and imaginations. Concentration of bodies creates the ideal conditions for rapid viral spread to occur. But one question remained. What is the vector by which viral bodies spread from mind to mind? The answer was so obvious that I could not see it at first.

The texts in my corpus share thematic concerns best described by the concept of “transtextuality” Gérard Genette’s *Architext* (1992). The central concern of the book is *poetics*, but Genette acknowledges that its definition has long been contested by scholars. Most people imagine that the term defines the art of writing poetry, which is one way to consider its meaning as a metaphor. However, Genette argues that although scholars have misguidedly imagined the knowledge their field has generated is a science, they “would perhaps sometimes be better off forgetting” what they think they know (vii). Robert Scholes, the translator who prefaces Genette’s foreword, explains that while fads in literary criticism have come and gone, Genette has persistently focused on the formal and rhetorical studies of poetics. Scholes dismisses the attempts by critics to brand Genette’s thinking as some sort of “low structuralism” within the larger pantheon of poststructuralism and deconstruction thinkers. What Genette unpretentiously claims about poetics is that literary criticism cannot get along without its rudiments. Genette also humbly points out that the history of poetics demonstrates that many doctrines attributed to Aristotle and Plato never originated with them. Critics erroneously attributed them to the founders of poetic thought. Scholes explains that “Genette traces the process by which new forms of textuality are regularly justified by being assigned ancient lineages, the thicket of poetics thus continually made

denser and more difficult to penetrate. His project is to prune this thicket and blaze trails through it” (Genette viii). In other words, Genette’s aim is to reduce the confusion and mystification surrounding poetics. Any study of texts inevitably requires situating them among a repertoire of other texts, which implies an examination of continuities. Scholes tells us that Genette’s proposal about the continuation of poetics is that “we recognize that what we call ‘genres’ are best described as the intersection of certain modes of enunciation and certain thematic concerns” (ix). Scholes explains that modes of narration are persistent across time and cultures, while the persistence of themes are marked by cultural and historical situations. “Persistent or durable links between particular modes and themes give us literary genres or ‘architexts’” (Genette ix). Genette introduces the term “transtextuality” in a sort of platonic dialogue at the end of the book in section eleven, where a brief conversation takes place between two avatars who discuss all the ideas Genette has presented in the previous ten sections. The avatars are like author surrogates who occupy a plurality of subjective positions in a narrative. We might think of the interlocutors as doubles, or second and third selves.

Transtextuality refers to the textual transcendence of a text, “namely everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” (Genette 81). Transtextuality subsumes Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality. Genette’s term also includes quotations, metatextuality, imitation, and transformation, as well as pastiche and parody, which he christens “*paratextuality* (which to my mind is transtextuality par excellence), ...” (Genette 82 emphasis original). Transtextuality is present in texts we think of as self-contained genres like life writing, autobiography, memoir, chronicle, testimony, epistolary, and autofiction. Throughout my dissertation, we will see these authors bring these genres into relation with their texts. In sum, the poetics of transtextuality allows for the continuous evolution and invention of genres within a system of genres that often overlap,

blend, and even scorn one another. The *architextuality* of texts and their *architexts* is omnipresent, above, below, within, without—all around—as it “spins its web only by hooking it here and there on that network of *architexture*” (Genette 82). In this study, we will see that Arenas, Lemebel, and Pérez make extensive use of transtextuality in their writings. When Meruane traces her viral voyage, she traces the transtextuality of viral metaphors in the HIV-positive narratives she considers.

Within the fields of contagion and contamination studies, *Contagious Metaphor* (2012) by Peta Mitchell provided the most important revelations that connected with my concept of viral bodies. Mitchell begins her book quoting the narrator of Honoré de Balzac’s *Colonel Chabert: Comédie humaine* (1832) that occurs early in the narrative. The narrator explains how the utterance of “Monsieur” affected him. Mitchell quotes just a small snippet, but I will expand the quote to capture the fullness of what Balzac writes and highlight the part Mitchell cites using italics. The narrator explains that she expressed herself “in a tone of voice that betrayed one of those emotions which are rare in our lives, and which agitate every part of our being. At such moments the heart, fibers, nerves, countenance, soul, and body, everything, every pore even, feels a thrill. *Life no longer seems to be within us; it flows out, springs forth, is communicated as if by contagion, transmitted by a look, a tone of voice, a gesture, impressing our will upon others*” (Emphasis mine). This quote from a nineteenth century novella hints at how the phenomenon of virality operates. It describes how the body reacts to the stimulation of the word “Monsieur” and describes some of the mechanisms people use to exert their will on others, through the eyes, the voice, and the body, using a non-language that is perceived symbolically and metaphorically. A raised eyebrow can communicate surprise, bewilderment, or skepticism. Variations in the tone of voice can communicate anger, remorse, or exasperation. A shrug can communicate confusion, reluctant

willingness, or a flirtation. In the case of the countess, the utterance of her single word communicated “at once a reproach and a pardon, a hope and a despair, a question, and an answer. The word included them all [...] so many feelings into a single word.” What else can this narrator be describing if not a metaphor—one that produced a thrill perceived as a contagion?

Contagion today is everywhere—it is in the financial markets, on the streets and in our computers. It characterizes our use of social networking and the way ideas spread through society. In public and cultural discourses, catchphrases such as ‘social contagion’, ‘emotional contagion’, ‘mental contagion’, ‘financial contagion’, and even ‘cultural contagion’ have become prevalent, if not commonplace, suggesting that contagion has moved beyond our bodies and has begun infecting our minds and modes of interacting with and influencing others. (Mitchell 1)

Mitchell offers many examples of metaphors *of* contagion and metaphor *as* contagion. She demonstrates how the phenomenon arises from earlier, medical, and literal meanings related to the communication of disease from body to body, to its metaphorical and figurative use in socio-cultural discourses. She claims that since the financial meltdowns of the early twenty-first century, extra-medical contagious metaphors have colonized contemporary discourses including academic language and concepts. It has also been prevalent in the arts and popular culture. She offers some recent salient examples from films and literature but claims that more can be found if we trace back. Now that we know what to look for, as in the example of Balzac, we can use the same lens to examine other literary examples.

Mitchel references Stephen Soderberg’s film *Contagion* (2011). The film shows how fear, panic, and collapse of the social order follows the initial outbreak of a virus. She references José Saramago’s novel *Blindness* (1995). This book represents how a plague of blindness leads to quarantine, hygiene, degradation of morale, and violence. She also references another book by Saramago. *Seeing* (2004) represents how a plague of nullifying votes sickens the social body and leads authorities to consider the plague a moral one, motivating them to search for a “patient zero,”

or instigator, of the moral contagion. Mitchell even notes that Saramago's writing is infected with a near lack of punctuation. Returning to films, Mitchell discusses Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010). It shows that the most resilient and highly contagious parasite is *an idea*, impossible to eradicate, when a metaphor is "implanted" and acquires a contagious and viral nature. Only the most disciplined minds can resist. Finally, she references Charlie Kaufman's *Synechdoche* (2008) with Caden Cotard who is played by Philip Seymour Hoffman. The protagonist suffers from "Cotard's syndrome," which references a zombie like condition in which the man becomes a walking corpse. In the opening minutes of the film there is a scene where a character called Mr. Virus parachutes into a children's cartoon and ominously intones, "there is a secret, something at play under the surface, growing like an invisible virus of thought" (Quoted in Mitchell 3). Mitchell goes on to offer numerous additional examples in the humanities, social psychology, economics, and meme theory, which examine "the transmission of ideas, emotions, or impulses" (Mitchell 4). She claims the traces she offers demonstrate that a clear line between the literal and metaphorical cannot be discerned. The concept of contagion proves impossible to quarantine. What Meruane calls "impenitent nomadism" and Treichler calls "chaotic assemblage," Mitchell calls "noise around emerging diseases, such as HIV in the 1980s and SARS in the 2000s" (11). We could also add COVID-19 to the buzz, when we consider how the global contagion affected our social relationships. We sheltered in place, wore masks, and practiced social distancing, which were government mandated quarantine protocols. For many people, religious and political metaphors affected their decisions. They resisted what they perceived to be the hand of a "big brother" behind the public health policies.

In the 1960s and 70s, Continental philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault became interested in Nietzsche. They published works building on the

thoughts of Mark Turner. In his 1992 essay called “Language is a virus,” Turner traced many ideas about virology, how a virus moves from one organism to another in a “communicable” fashion. In the semantic web of metaphors at our command, we are familiar with the term “communicable disease.” This term carries the fusion of various metaphors: community, communication, and disease. Turner reasons that those who have been infected with a virus typically exhibit symptoms and transmit the virus to others, who consequently develop the same symptoms. “To understand ‘language as a virus’, we map the generic-level information in *The Nature of the Virus* onto language, to arrive at the interpretation that language is something transmitted from person to person and that those who show the symptoms of ‘having language’ pass language onto others, who consequently develop the same symptoms” (Turner 732). Turner invites us to substitute the word virus for language when we consider body to body transmission. “It is odd to think of language as a communicable disease, yet we have no difficulty doing so because we possess a conceptual instrument that provides us with the requisite imaginative capacity” (Turner 732). Mitchell points out that Turner did not take into consideration the medical and sociocultural conceptions of epidemiology and contagious disease that have influenced the shaping of metaphors of contagion, but she does acknowledge that he opened the door to consider metaphor as contagion which is something that Continental philosophers considered moving forward.

Deleuze’s study *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), according to Mitchell, generated intense interest in the philosopher. His work is seen as anticipating what is called the “linguistic turn” of post-war French philosophy. When Heidegger and Deleuze produced their works in the early 1960s, there was no French translation of Nietzsche’s essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (1873). In 1969, philosopher Angèle Kremer-Marietti produced a translation. Within five years, it became “a standard reference in a growing body of post-structuralist French philosophy

that addressed Nietzsche and the question of metaphor more broadly” (Mitchell 28). Some of the works that followed the publication of the translation were Kofman’s *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (1972), Derrida’s *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), and Ricoeur’s *Rule of Metaphor* (1975). “This Nietzschean turn in post-structuralist theory both tapped into and extended Continental philosophy’s renewed appreciation of figurative language, with ‘metaphor’ increasingly standing in (synecdochically, perhaps) for tropological language in general” (Mitchell 29). Mitchell points out that Gérard Genette was critical of reducing the figural to metaphor alone, but most “post-structuralist theory tends to treat metaphor not only as the analogon of figurative language, but also as epitomizing the problem of language itself” (Mitchell 29). Deleuze and Guattari rejected any suggestion that their writing is figural, Baudrillard declared the end of metaphor. Kofman, Derrida, and Ricoeur “ascribe an unprecedented critical and creative power to metaphor, a power that has tangible and practical effects” (Mitchell 29). Mitchell summarizes that Foucault sees metaphor as a power critical technique, de Man explores it as a proliferating and disruptive force, and Ricoeur argues that it has “metaphoric” power to transform language and reality (Mitchell 29). Once Continental Philosophy turned toward Nietzsche, philosophers began entertaining the Dionysian nature of metaphorical language and the complex relationship between metaphor and mimesis.

In the Greek pantheon, Dionysus is known as the god of metaphor and of metamorphosis, a contagious god, who according to Carl Kerényi in *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* (1976), is the god of *epiphaneia* and *epidemia* (139). Kerényi explains that “in certain cult forms, Dionysos is represented as the god who arrives” bringing with him both epiphany and epidemic in his “arrival in the land” (139). Kerényi asserts that his arrival produces a divine epidemic that is implicitly linked to the notion of contagious disease because its “kinship with the

‘visitation by a disease’ is undeniable at least insofar as it was always the incursion of something overpowering” (139). Mitchell points out that many critics who have analyzed Euripides’ play *Bacchae*, represent Dionysus as contagion, mimesis, and metamorphosis, a god who produces uncontrollable reactions and collective terrors in crowds. His presence leads to the disintegration of social institutions and the collapse of cultural order. The ecstatic experience of Dionysian influence is irrational and highly contagious. Plato expressed concern through his ever-faithful avatar Socrates. Mihai Spariosu in *Plato’s Ion: Mimesis, Poetry and Power* (1984) states that the “infectious, mimetic nature of the feeling of power, which mysteriously propagates itself from the Muse to the poet to the crowd. Once it is let loose, in accordance with a familiar snow-balling effect, this feeling of power will reach ecstatic peaks and then, unless it is carefully guided, will erupt into volcanic, devastating violence” (19). Mitchell explains that at the heart of Plato’s concern is mimesis and its propensity to transform imitation into habit and second nature; it has led “numerous scholars to argue that Plato’s theory is predicated on a (strongly negative) notion of mimetic contagion” (33). In the *Phaedrus*, again through his avatar Socrates, Plato equates writing with a dead simulation of living speech. Ronald Bogue in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory* (1984) explains that writing for Plato exemplifies “bad mimesis, a simulation that creates false resemblances, whereas speech exemplifies good mimesis, a true resemblance that is properly subordinate to the model it copies” (2). Mitchell points out that Plato in *Phaedrus* also compares bad writing to a “dangerous, seductive drug (*pharmakon*) that leads to forgetfulness, a loss of understanding and wild and indiscriminate profusion of discourse” (Quoted in Mitchell 34). Jacques Derrida takes up the question of the *pharmakon* in several of his works, most notably “Plato’s Pharmacy.” He notes that even in positing speech as “good” mimesis, Plato cannot help

but resort to “scriptural” metaphors to describe how speech is “written” (*graphetai* G.) in the soul of the learner.

My concept of viral bodies builds on Jacques Derrida’s seminal work on deconstruction. As Derrida observes in “The Rhetoric of Drugs” and “The Spatial Arts,” the HIV/AIDS crisis initially disrupted biopower with its deconstructive force, because it obligated biopower to confront the limits of its control and the extraordinary force of those limits, when the crisis threatened to disrupt absolutely everything on the planet. At the time Derrida discussed his take on the situation in the late-80s and early-90s, he believed that both HIV and computer viruses had the same deconstructive force. Computer viruses regularly trespass imagined borders designed to quarantine sensitive secrets. In “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” Derrida explains that “‘Good’ repetition is always haunted or contaminated by ‘bad’ repetition” (Quoted in Mitchell 34). Mitchell concludes that in Derrida’s hands, metaphoric process becomes both “the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic” (Quoted in Mitchell 34). Derrida explains, “like writing, metaphor is the irrepressible *pharmakon* of Western philosophy, a supposedly ‘supplementary’ form of language that continually rejects its supplementarity and ‘opens the wandering of the semantic’ (Quoted in Mitchell 34). This brings us to deconstruction and something quite remarkable that Derrida said in the interview with Peter Brunette and David Willis, which appears in the anthology *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts* (1994). Their book aims to illuminate the applicability of Derrida’s deconstruction “to the visual and media arts and to architecture, an array of disciplines that might be grouped under the term ‘spatial arts’” (Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” 1). Their introduction describes many of Derrida’s interventions in the field of “spatial arts,” which the contributors to the volume map out. The anthology begins with Derrida’s interview titled “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida”. Although

the editors have an agenda and are more interested in how deconstruction can be imported into their field, it seems they try to throw him off kilter when they question his competence. Derrida responds in hallmark fashion and deconstructs the very notion of competence, which leads to an explosion of discursive thought. He interrogates their question to demonstrate his process. Surprisingly he turns his discussion to AIDS and computer viruses, a topic he also discusses in “The Rhetoric of Drugs.”

Derrida explains that he conceived of deconstruction when he began to question the structural hegemony of philosophical discourse, after he realized that many other discursive regions depend on it, like psychology, politics, and art. His deconstructive questions seek the possibility to emancipate dependent discourses from the tyranny of philosophy. He also explains that his claims of incompetence are part of his deconstructive inquiry to locate points of resistance. Since the interviewers are concerned with the spatial arts, Derrida proposes the term “logocentrism” as a substitute for the hidden hegemony and authority of philosophy within specific fields of art. Brunette and Willis then tell him they think that there is “logocentrism in all its obstinacy being confronted by what we might call the unavailability of a destination” at work in the field (Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” 11). The interviewers ask Derrida about his writing on technology, the computer virus, and anti-virus software. Derrida replies, “You are right, and paradoxically the question is more intimately connected with my work” (Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” 11). What Derrida means is that the question of the *virus is what is most intimately connected with his work of deconstruction*. What Derrida says about AIDS and computer viruses are the most interesting to me and directly related to my theorization of viral bodies. The

deconstructive force he applies to the hegemony and authority of philosophy and the discourse within its assumed domain is viral.

...all I have done...is dominated by the thought of a virus, what could be called a parasitology, a virology, the virus being many things. [...] The virus is in part a parasite that destroys, that introduces disorder into communication. Even from a biological standpoint that is what happens with a virus; it details a mechanism of the communicational type, its coding and decoding. [...] ...it is something that is neither living nor nonliving; the virus is not a microbe. And if you follow these two threads, that of a parasite which disrupts destination from the communicative point of view—disrupting writing, inscription, and the coding and decoding of inscription—and which on the other hand is neither alive nor dead, you have *the matrix of all that I have done since I began writing*. (Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” 12 emphasis mine)

To put it another way, Derrida explains that deconstruction acts as neither a living or nonliving virus or parasite that interrupts the coding and decoding of communication, including writing. Deconstructive force can even destroy the hegemony of a discourse, by introducing disorder into it.

Derrida sees a significant connection between AIDS and viruses, which he discussed in detail in “Plato’s Pharmacy” and “The Rhetoric of Drugs.”

I allude to the possible intersection between AIDS and the computer virus as two forces capable of disrupting destination...no one can follow their tracks, neither those of subjects, nor those of desire, nor the sexual and so on. If we follow the intersection between AIDS and the computer virus as we know it, we have the means to comprehend, not only a theoretical point of view, but also from the sociohistorical point of view, what amounts to a disruption of absolutely everything on the planet, including police agencies, commerce, the army, questions of strategy. All those things encounter the limits on their control, as well as the extraordinary force of those limits. It is as if all that I have been suggesting for the past twenty-five years is prescribed by the idea of *destinerrance*, the supplement, the pharmakon, all the *undecidables*—it’s the same thing. It also gets translated, not only technologically but also *technologicopoetically*. (Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” 12 original emphasis)

Given all the ideas discussed by Meruane, Mitchell, Treichler, Derrida, and Genette, it seems clear that contagious metaphor is the vector by which viral bodies spread from mind to mind, body to body. Any discussion regarding the enunciative acts and thematic concerns of contemporary

poetics must address how metaphors constitute realities that manifest in both the mind and body because new viral contagions, be they biological or technological, threaten to test the limits of power further into the future.

AIDS in the Shadow of the Condor

When the HIV/AIDS pandemic reached Latin America in the mid-1980s, the epidemic produced multiple crises for HIV positive bodies and PWAs: moral excision by the state, social marginalization, and the certainty of death. The HIV/AIDS crisis in Latin America was overshadowed by the late phase of the Cold War (1947-1991), while the authoritarian governments of the world's nations promoted discourses reflecting moral and ethical exceptionalism. A zoonotic virus began spreading while many countries of the South American continent were experiencing a resurgence of authoritarian rule. The AIDS discourses produced in the Global North through the World Health Organization in Switzerland and the Centers for Disease Control in the United States became hegemonic and governments throughout Latin America adopted their protocols and points of view. *Cold War* is a term that refers to a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet Union has since disintegrated and a new unipolar global order has emerged, there are still two prevailing world visions engaged in a clash of ideologies. Capitalism and the militant protection of private property are on one side, socialism, communism, and collective ownership of resources on the other. There are also many different religious ideologies that divide the world in different ways. I am not arguing in favor or against any specific world view.

The Castro-led Cuban Revolution was a major event that challenged the limits of the West's social engagement with leftist causes, the political diplomacy of statecraft, and the administration of economic interests in the Western Hemisphere. Castro began his militant 26th of July movement to expel Fulgencio Batista with noble intentions: restore democracy and the 1940

Cuban constitution, enact agrarian reform, improve wages for industrial and agricultural workers. However, many of his collaborators belonged to different “brands,” if you will, of Marxism (socialism and communism) such as Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, etc. Arguably the most influential collaborator was Ernesto “Che” Guevara. With his help and, perhaps under his influence, Castro declared the revolution to be communist and began to collaborate and trade with the Soviet Union. Guevara became a sort of marketing rep that helped to export the new brand of socialism for the twenty first century, “Castrism,” which was arguably “Guevarism,” based on an article published by *Time* magazine in 1960 called “CUBA: Castro’s Brain.” With Guevara’s help and that of many others, Castro gained tremendous political control and cultural influence throughout the world. But the United States, since the Monroe Doctrine, has been concerned with South America and those who would dare to interfere with a continent that they saw as their garden, a place José Martí, founder of the Cuban revolutionary party, calls “Nuestra América.” He warned his readers in the article published in 1891 that sooner than later the United States would “demand intimate relations with her, though it does not know her and disdains her.” Castro declared José Martí to be the apostle of Cuban independence and himself its messiah. When the Castro-led revolution triumphed, the United States initially regarded the change as a positive move toward democracy. After the Revolution, Washington DC was one of Castro’s few foreign trips.

Everything quickly changed after Castro legalized the Communist Party in Cuba and, together with Guevara, began executing people, including Batista agents, policemen, soldiers, dissenters, and some biographers of Castro and Guevara report that among those executed were children. In 1960, President Eisenhower authorized a CIA plan to arm and train Cuban exiles in Florida. Their aim was to overthrow Castro’s government in an invasion known as the Bay of Pigs. The invasion took place while John F. Kennedy served as president of the United States. The

invasion was a failure. Cuba was removed from the Organization of American States. The OAS began to impose sanctions on Cuba, and Castro began to move closer to the Soviet Union. By 1963 he fully embraced the USSR's communist model. That same year Castro began to intervene in the political affairs of neighboring countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as, across the Atlantic, in Africa. Guevara had developed a manual for guerrilla warfare and formulated the concept of the "new man," conceived as a political body with a decidedly heterosexual and messianic character, a true revolutionary with an impassioned spirit of love for his people and its sacred causes. The utopian concept spread throughout the Latin American left along with Marxism.

The United States, always thinking ten steps ahead, focused its attention on political and military leaders in the region to encourage collaboration in its efforts to prevent the spread of Cuba's unique brand of communism. In this sense we can think of communism as a contagion and the Cold War as quarantine. Through the Latin American Training Center – Ground Division in Panama, it trained the cadets sent there to be just like the US, "enterprising, efficient, and powerful." Lesley Gill in *The School of the Americas* (2004) claims that more than just training students in tactical operations, the students were indoctrinated "into the ideology of the 'American way of life' by steeping them in a vision of empire that identified their aspirations with those of the United States" (65). Students were recruited from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Panama, Peru, and Honduras. They were trained in, among other things, jungle warfare, urban combat, counterinsurgency, torture, assassination, dirty war methods, and intelligence gathering techniques. The express purpose was to fight International Communism, whose proponents were labeled as terrorists and subversives. As outlined in "A Brief Look at Operation Condor," a declassified memo from the CIA to Ambassador Landau in Chile, it was during the early-1970s that the intelligence and security services of several South American countries began a

collaborative effort called “Operation Condor” to engage in “executive actions” against terrorist leaders residing abroad outside of the territories of member countries. Among their enemies were members of the Revolutionary Coordinating Junta (JCR), consisting of the MIR in Chile, the ERP in Argentina, and the MLN-Tupamaros in Uruguay. The collaboration of Condor nations included the creation of a specialized communications network and training in psychological warfare tactics. Although a declassified CIA document dates the beginning of this collaboration to as early as 1974, it seems clear, based on the United States’ efforts since the founding of the School in Panama, that collaboration among national militaries was already well established. In 1973, Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected Marxist president, committed suicide after Augusto Pinochet led a successful military coup. While in 1976, a bureaucratic authoritarian state calling itself the “National Reorganization Process” overthrew President Isabel Perón and established a dictatorship that aimed to be permanent, governing the country through a succession of juntas. With the ample training their operatives received from the United States, they began a Dirty War, which is a type of state terrorism characterized by massive violations of human rights and the forced disappearance of opponents.

The anticommunist Cold War crusade, which sought to topple the USSR and eradicate communist influences from the Western Hemisphere, had already led to many US supported revolutions and military coups between the 1950s and 70s. In Southern Cone nations that collaborated in the now infamous Operation Condor, the resurgence of militant authoritarianism produced a cultural blackout, destroying decades of progress achieved by local social movements to increase acceptance and visibility for marginalized gender embodiments and dissident sexual practices. The exceptional conditions of authoritarian rule paralyzed efforts to mount a regionally

coordinated response to the AIDS crisis. PWAs became objectified like a contagion, like communism, requiring quarantine to protect society.

Conspiracy Thinking and Apocalyptic Necropolitics

The distinguished legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos issued a call in *La cruel pedagogía del virus* (2020) to thinkers everywhere saying that we need new strategies of contamination that will enter citizen's lives “por la puerta trasera” [through the back door] to overcome pandemics, natural disasters, financial collapse, the triumphant resurgent flow of authoritarian exceptionalism, and the technical circumvallation (entrenchment) around power that now edges the world toward catastrophe—not unlike the apocalyptic scenarios discussed by Giorgio Agamben in *State of Exception* (2003) and Achille Mbembe in *Necropolitics* (2019).

Why is this discussion relevant to the themes and texts that I analyze here? Because the writers I discuss propose a variety of utopian ways for homosexuals to manifest “back door” solutions to improve their existence in the world, ways that rely on erotic capital and libidinal economies, values that the major power brokers in the world resist assimilating. In many ways these writers precipitated de Sousa Santos call for a back door solution, which I understand as novel, outside the box, solutions. Given that the writers in the corpus proposed polymorphous heterogeneous sexualities at the extremes of gendered embodiments which challenge the limits of hetero- and homonormativity, I refer to their proposals as utopian because some of the ways of being in the world are still theoretical, at the horizon of queer becoming.

What do we gain by introducing these two notions: conspiracy thinking and apocalyptic necropolitics? Both Reinaldo Arenas and Pedro Lemebel raise these key issues explicitly. In *Loco afán*, after the dedication page of his book, Lemebel includes an epigraph, like the inscription on a tombstone. It reads, “La plaga nos llegó como una nueva forma de colonización por el contagio. Reemplazo nuestras plumas por jeringas, y el sol por la gota congelada de la luna en el sidario”

[The plague arrived to colonize us with its new form of contagion. It replaced our feathers with syringes, and the sun with a frozen drop of the moon in the AIDSarium]. First, we must recognize that Lemebel did nothing by accident. Everything he said and did was informed by a profound reading of philosophy in consultation with his Chilean feminist allies. The reading helped him develop the intellectual dynamite of his thoughts. I would argue that his feminist allies aimed him like a secret weapon at the male dominated Chilean history of the nation. I am not saying that he was a pawn in their game. Lemebel was more like a coconspirator in the conquest of the male dominated logos in Chile.

The neologism “sidario” is difficult to translate since Lemebel invented the metaphor to communicate the confusing experience of AIDS from his perspective. It is difficult to determine if it is a noun or an adjective. Let us consider first that the word “sida” is embedded in the metaphor, which is Spanish for AIDS. It also contains the suffix “ario,” deriving from the Latin *-arius*, which means a person working or engaged in a particular activity. For example, a person who works with stone (*-lapid L.*) is a lapidary, or a person entrusted with a secret is a secretary. The neuter form *-arium* means a place where an activity occurs. For example, an aquarium is a place for water. A solarium is a place for sun. According to the *Real Academia Española*, the suffix is added to adjectives to indicate its relationship to the base from which it is derived, for example “bancario” [banking] or “embrionario” [embryonic]. It is also added to nouns to signify, among other things, profession, for example “boticario” [apothecary] or “ferroviario” [railway worker]. The dictionary indicates that it is also used to refer to the person who concedes something and signals the place where the significance of the base is kept. At another level, the word bears a striking resemblance to the word “sicario,” which means hitman. Since AIDS relates to death, the semantic web of the neologism could easily reach a mycelium or two towards this word.

It seems most logical to consider the metaphor unsettled, open to question, like the pharmakon Derrida theorizes in “Plato’s Pharmacy” as a remedy, a poison, or a scapegoat. In its composite sense, the pharmakon hints at the means of producing something, but it also connects to Derrida’s notion of indeterminacy. I have decided to translate that sense of place communicated in the Latin suffix *-arium*, which works well with the subtitle of Lemebel’s book “crónicas de sidario” [chronicles of an AIDSarium]. Translating the neologism this way would convey the confusion of the metaphors undecidability in meaning between place and profession. So, as I turn back to the epigraph, I could say that the meaning conveyed is that AIDS is a contagion that colonizes the body, which is the place where a person lives, until AIDS kills the person. Death is AIDS’ profession.

Let us consider something else. In 1994, Lemebel went to New York City to participate in the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots and participated in the Christopher Street gay pride parade. In the documentary film *Lemebel* (2019), he discusses the trip with the director and shows a picture of his participation. He dressed for the parade in the same way as he appeared on the cover of his first book of chronicles *La esquina es mi corazón*. On the cover of the book and at the pride parade he appears in a leotard painted to simulate a body with the skin removed. Around his head is a headdress that is shaped like the halo around the head of a saintly figure. The halo is also like the rays of sunlight, only instead of rays, the emanations are syringes filled with a red liquid, simulating blood, and the needles point away from the body. On the book the expression on his face is beatific. In the picture at the parade, he looks severe, his body thin, his posture angry. He carries a placard that reads, “Chile Return AIDS.” It is a mistranslation of the Spanish to the English which should have read returns, adding the letter “s.” Lemebel explains to Johanna Reposi that the symbolic gesture meant to communicate to those in attendance at the parade that the United

States and its cosmopolitan gays brought AIDS to Chile, and he was returning them the favor. The implied meaning of the syringes is that the red liquid inside of them was AIDS infected blood. The gesture is grotesque, but he was quite pleased with the opportunity. He wrote a chronicle about the experience and included it in *Loco afán*.

One more thing we should consider is Lemebel's appearance on a television show created for the Chilean network TVN in Santiago, reproduced in Reposi's documentary film. During his appearance, Lemebel recounts that people always ask him questions. "Why must you people always be noticed? Why must you people always be so violent in your demonstration?" (*Lemebel* 54:10). Lemebel explains that when blacks in the United States were struggling for their rights, they were labeled violent, or the youth in the periphery of the city or in the barrios, people call them violent. Then he says forcefully, "Cualquier minoría que esté en lucha por sus derechos, se les va a categorizar de violentos, porque es parte de la lucha. Si ese homosexual tiene SIDA, si ese homosexual es tercermundista, si ese homosexual es pobre, si ese homosexual es indígena lo matan" [Any minority that is fighting for their rights will be categorized as violent, because it is part of the fight. If that homosexual has AIDS, if that homosexual is a Third World member, if that homosexual is poor, if that homosexual is indigenous, they kill him] (*Lemebel* 54:34). Considering these three instances, I would argue that Lemebel went as far as he could to manifest his suspicions about the origin of AIDS.

In both *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, Arenas goes further than Lemebel, not in the sense that Lemebel does, traveling to New York and participating in a parade. Arenas does it through his writing. In *Before Night Falls* he points an accusatory finger in the introduction.

AIDS is a perfect illness because it is so alien to human nature and has as its function to destroy life in the most cruel and systematic way. Never before has such a formidable calamity affected mankind. Such diabolic perfection makes one ponder the possibility that human beings may have had a hand in its creation.

Moreover, all the rulers of the world, that reactionary class always in power, and the powerful within any system, must feel grateful to AIDS because a good part of the marginal population, whose only aspiration is to live and who therefore oppose all dogma and political hypocrisy, will be wiped out. (*Before* xvii)

In the parodic novel *The Color of Summer*, Arenas goes much further, given the excess of representation and carnivalesque presentation of ideas that mark its paratextuality. In a scene where the following quote appears, a character named the queen of Holland, who is one of Arenas' many avatars in the book, reads a conference paper that was written by another character named Odoriferous Gunk, who is yet another pseudonym for the author. Odoriferous Gunk was banned from attending but managed to have the paper left on a chair for the queen of Holland to find. The conference paper details all the diabolical atrocities that machos have done to queens since the dawn of time. The queen of Holland reads the list of atrocities that queens of all stripes have suffered such as "derision...extermination...buried alive, walled up, burned, hanged, shot by firing squads, discriminated against, blackmailed, and imprisoned" (*The Color* 402). The queen goes on to read that... "There have been, and still are, attempts to destroy our kind completely. Science, politics, and religion have taken up arms against us. The creation of the AIDS virus, manufactured with the clear intention of annihilating us and all those who, like us, seek after adventure...is but the most recent attempt to bring our history to an end" (*The Color* 402). I do not think Arenas could be clearer regarding his position about the man-made origin of AIDS. He is not the first, nor the last, to manifest distrust about viral pandemics.

The zoonotic emergence of Covid-19 and the global pandemic that ensued produced a crisis not unlike the one produced by HIV/AIDS some forty years ago, when governments acted with criminal neglect as the epidemic began claiming lives. We can observe several parallels. The way people reacted to Covid-19 and HIV/AIDS were similar, only Covid claimed lives much faster, in a matter of weeks versus a matter of years in the case of HIV. In both cases, biopower sought to

reassert its hegemony through precise controls and comprehensive regulation. Fear of infection led to quarantines that involved using masks, disinfectants, social distancing, and isolation. People in the terminal stages died alone, away from the support of family and friends. The existence of the virus was controversial and led to political division over how exactly to handle it. Some believed it was man-made or blamed infected people for getting sick because they did not follow established protocols.

Specific to the case of AIDS, PWAs manifested symptoms such as tremendous weight loss, gaunt facial features, and persistent upper respiratory infections. Those who developed KS, a deadly skin cancer, had visible purple lesions on their skin. Sometimes the cancer spreads to their throats and mouths, or into their internal organs. As the virus decimated the immune system, numerous opportunistic infections attacked the body's organs, including the brain. Hysteria and fear inducing ignorance around AIDS led PWAs to experience dissociation, alienation, disaffection, isolation, fear, and silent solitude (to name a few psychogenic disturbances) which materialized as biopower reasserted itself with a vengeance. Because most of the people who manifested symptoms in the early years of the epidemic were homosexual, many people treated them as though they got what they deserved. PWAs who were forced out the AIDS closet or came out willingly often lost their jobs, home, and families, as vital lifelines were closed off due to fear and moral judgment. Rather than focus on a cure, a vaccine, or making PWA's lives more manageable, in their rush to protect the social body, many governments considered creating what Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas denounced as "concentration camps," places in which to isolate PWAs from the rest of the population.

The situation specific to Covid was more complicated. Many people had grown to distrust those in political power and regarded globalism itself as a major threat. Politicians took advantage

of the political climate to advance *fake news* and assert *alternative facts*. Ronald Reagan was president during the advent of AIDS. Donald Trump was president during the advent of Covid. Whereas it can be said that Reagan willfully neglected AIDS for several years, Trump willfully lied and misled people about Covid. Reagan kept silent, while Trump held news conferences, at first to deny Covid's existence or that it was a serious threat, then to blame China, calling Covid "the China virus." Trump polarized people all over the world. Quarantines became a point of violent contention as those who did not believe the virus was real or that they had special immunity because of their deeply held religious and political beliefs boldly and audaciously, sometimes violently, refused to follow protocols and claimed it was their god given, as well as constitutional right, to not obey the law. Such people demonstrated a posture and thought process based on a logic of exceptionalism tied to the resurgence of Christian white nationalism and authoritarian politics willing to use political violence. When the pandemic essentially shut down the global economy, many questioned the prescriptions of neoliberal economics. Major capital holders maneuvered to protect their wealth, power, and influence. Corruption escalated across the globe as money began to flow toward quarantines and vaccine development. If we consider the story of the polio pandemic, the development of the vaccine, and the aftermath of its production, we will understand how people came to distrust those in power who claim the best intentions but have no qualms about violating human rights and causing injury and death to increase their power, consolidate wealth, and assert the exceptionalism of their myths.

Distrust about vaccines started long before the emergence of HIV/AIDS or Covid-19. It began in the aftermath of the polio vaccination development and the shocking media revelations that monkey kidneys were used to replicate the virions used to create the two types of vaccines administered to millions of people world-wide and that these vaccines were contaminated with

viruses and retroviruses originating with simians. Unlike the current technology related to the Covid vaccine which uses MRNA to transmit immunity to the human host, the technology used when the first vaccine was successfully administered by the English physician Dr. Edward Jenner, was based on what virologists today call an “attenuated,” or “live” virus. Jenner’s work led to the creation of the smallpox vaccine at the end of the eighteenth century. The next major development in vaccines came from Louis Pasteur in the late nineteenth century. He produced the first laboratory created vaccine for fowl cholera in chickens. He also developed a post-exposure rabies vaccine. In the early twentieth century, with the help of the United States military, researchers began seeking a vaccine for the influenza virus called the “Spanish Flu,” which killed millions of people worldwide. While this vaccine was in development, other researchers produced vaccines against yellow fever and whooping cough. By 1945, US sponsored military researchers succeeded in producing the influenza vaccine. Shortly after this success, researchers in 1949 developed a way to replicate polio virions using monkey kidneys, which proved extremely useful in producing the two competing vaccination technologies developed in the rush to produce a polio vaccine. Albert Sabin developed vaccine using an attenuated, while Jonas Salk developed a vaccine using a deactivated, or so called “dead” virus in the 1950s. By the 1960s and 70s, vaccinations became a routine for nearly everyone as additional vaccines were created for measles, mumps, rubella, and pneumonia. By the early 1980s, most of the world’s virological researchers and leading global health experts were ready to declare victory, when the symptoms of what would become known as AIDS first appeared and the virus dubbed the “human immunodeficiency” virus, or HIV, was identified by Luc Montagnier in France and Robert Gallo in the United States. Both men received Nobel prizes for their discoveries. Public trust in vaccinations began to crumble after investigative reporter Tom Curtis published an expose on 19 March 1992 in *Rolling Stone* claiming “The Origin of AIDS”

was the polio vaccinations administered to millions that were contaminated because at the time, decades earlier, when the polio vaccines were developed using monkey kidneys, researchers were unaware of the presence of simian viruses capable of contaminating the human population. Since then, the antivaccination movement has grown and activists distrust vaccination technology and spread fears about vaccine injuries. Many activists among the antivax movement promote the idea that a conspiracy of powerful interests seek to depopulate the planet using vaccines, a conspiracy that radical reactionary politicians seek to exploit. We saw this occur frequently as the Covid pandemic played out as antivax messages became viral.

Contemporary mistrust of vaccines is indicative of a general mistrust toward what Michel Foucault calls “biopolitical power” or “biopower,” which he first theorized in *The History of Sexuality* (1978). In the book, and through the many lectures he developed in the 1980s, Foucault defines biopower as concerned with sovereignty over the entire life cycle of the species. Biopower is a power wielded to “ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order” (*The History* 138). Biopower expresses a right to seize life to promote its reproduction. As biopower sought to align itself with the exigencies of organizing, reinforcing, controlling, monitoring, promoting, and optimizing life, it contradictorily exerted power over death by imposing the sovereign right to ensure, maintain, and develop the life of the social body. The cynical and formidable power of death ironically emerged as power which sought to expand its limits with “precise controls and comprehensive regulations” over life (*The History* 137). In Foucault’s view, wars are waged under the logic of defending and protecting the reproduction of life and “entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital” (*The History* 137). The struggle for control over the world’s resources and the doctrine of mutually assured destructive capacity threatens all biological existence. Cold War superpower funded

weaponization programs at the nexus of biological, chemical, and medical technology, together with research into microorganisms, such as viruses and bacteria, along with research into poisonous and lethal substances, have created the capacity to obliterate all life. Apocalyptic destruction no longer pertains exclusively to nuclear weapons. Death can arrive on invisible wings in the form of pandemics or invisible gases. Since Foucault made biopolitics a major thematic concern, many other thinkers have made it theirs. The field of biopower and its relation to history is huge.

Questions of sovereignty and biopolitical existence have turned to *the state of exception*. Theorization about exceptionalism and sovereignty are a vital part of most critical discourses about national identity and its excesses. Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his book *State of Exception* (2005) defines it as a mechanism of power used by leaders who perceive that circumstances warrant the suspension of the rule of law and human rights. Underlying his study is the question: What does it mean to act politically? Agamben reports that “there is still no theory of the state of exception in public law” (1). The concept is situated in a legal limbo, at the limit between politics and law. Agamben reasons that if political necessity in a crisis produces the exception based on political grounds, unsupported by a juridical and constitutional rationale, then the exception exists “as the legal form of what cannot have a legal form” (1). Agamben seeks to lift the veil that hovers over this ambiguous zone so that his readers can appreciate what is at stake in the “supposed difference—between the political and the juridical, and between the law and the living being” (2). The exception has been used by states in times of civil war, insurrection, and resistance, a tool used during the direst of internal conflicts. In the twentieth century, however, Agamben asserts that the state of exception has been used to declare what amounts to legal civil war and offers the case of the Nazi state to situate his assertions about modern totalitarianism. The

Nazis used the notion of a legal civil war to justify the “physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben 2). The Nazi case established a tenuous precedent, one that has led other states since then to create what he calls a “permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense),” which for many countries, including so-called democratic ones, “has become one of the essential practices” (Agamben 2). His preoccupation with the state of exception leads him to another case study, the United States, and its implementation of the USA Patriot Act, which established a framework, removed from the law and away from judicial oversight, that allows the US government to use kidnapping, forced disappearance, torture, and incarceration without due process. Agamben compares the policy to the situation of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps. The biopolitical significance of a measure that allows the indefinite detention of those stripped of any legal identity because they are suspected of involvement in terrorist activities is alarming.

Achille Mbembe takes Foucault’s theorization about biopower and amplifies the power over death to deconstruct biopower’s asserted right to control life and death, so he could test the limits of the theory. Like Agamben, Mbembe turns to Nazism, totalitarianism, and the concentration/extermination camps to uncover “the central metaphor for sovereign and destructive violence and... the ultimate sign of the absolute power of the negative” (66). He traces the right of biopower to the slave trade and life on the plantation to theorize the “state of injury,” which he describes a “phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity” (75). In this state, the slave is valued for labor. When the master acts violently toward the slave, it may be to control their behavior, but if the master kills the slave, “it is an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror. Slave life... is a form a death-in-life” (Mbembe 75). Mbembe traces examples

from colonial history through contemporary Palestine to show that necropower means to have “the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not” (Mbembe 79 emphasis original). Necropower justifies its utter disregard for human life by regarding the death of human life as collateral damage, an unavoidable loss. The logic of necropower gives way to “an unprecedented form of governmentality that consists in managing the multitudes” (Mbembe 86). Necropower even manifests in the martyrdom of the suicide bomber who hunts down a target and acts as an invisible weapon of terror. The end game of necropower is to deploy weapons “in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (Mbembe 92 emphasis original). In sum, Necropower claims the right to use terror, coercion, and the state of siege to take whatever power wants, the rule of law be damned. The concept of necropower in the context of this discussion about conspiracy thinking and the origin of AIDS begs the question. Based on the logic of necropower, are supranational biotechnology actors willing to use cutting edge virological techniques to purposefully create new viruses that can be used to substantially reduce the earth’s populations without destroying important industrial infrastructures?

Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004) explains that when the rule of law is suspended, those in power, or those who seek to seize power by force, exercise sovereignty in the act of suspension. They self-allocate the legal prerogative to administer the nation in an extra-legal way. Only the laws that are convenient to the sovereign power they seek to constitute are subsumed into their field of tactical operations, which they use to monitor and constraint the population that seeks to resist the declaration. “That we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief” (*Precarious* xii). Butler’s

focus on injury is important to this dissertation because in the case of Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba) and Pedro Lemebel (Chile), speak from a place of injury and their writing demonstrates that they had the chance to reflect upon it, “to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear” (*Precarious* xii). Their identities as homosexuals and dissidents of new political realities established through states of exception—revolution and military coup—were the justification to deprive them of civil liberties and suppress their political dissent. Both used their bodies in distinct ways to manifest their suffering, as they purposed their voices toward representing the others that were injured along with them. I contend that the Castro led Cuban revolution and the military coup led by Augusto Pinochet in Chile are two examples of the ambiguously situated state of exception. The two leaders justified the seizure of power and then used extraordinary measures to impose exceptional conditions on their respective populations. They used the notions of crisis and the so-called political necessity to defend “everyone” (in reality a very limited category for their respective purposes) to justify targeting entire populations for persecution within their homelands and physically eliminating political adversaries. Just like the United States self-allocated the authority to enshrine extrajudicial tactical operations into law in its Global War Against Terrorism, Fidel Castro and Augusto Pinochet enshrined their power by quickly establishing new constitutions that provided a legal basis to authenticate their violence.

Given all these considerations, is it any wonder that Lemebel and Arenas suspected that AIDS was something nefarious and unnatural? These two authors certainly had privileged access to knowledge produced elsewhere. If those exercising biopolitical and necropolitical power in governmentality have delegated themselves the right to treat humanity like collateral damage, as they seek to materialize their mythical fantasies, using technologies that most people are not even

aware of, then what hope can those who seek homoerotic pleasure and adventure have? Is the path forward one of assimilation? Should homosexuals align themselves with those in power to ensure their community's survival? Or should homosexuals resign themselves to be treated as slaves, subject to the caprice of their masters?

Reinaldo Arenas ended his life because the reality he lived was too much to bear. He bequeathed his writing to his beloved fellow Cubans, but not all those in exile accept his point of view. Those who remain in inner exile on the island are still a deferred audience, since the Castro regimes' influence continues in power, despite Fidel Castro's death. We have yet to see what impact Arenas' writing will have on them if they ever get the chance to read it. Generations may pass before we know. If practically the entire human race was the target of his literary revenge, can we assume that his intended audience moves beyond fellow Cubans?

Pedro Lemebel succeeded in leaving an enduring legacy in Chile. His confrontation with the left has borne fruit as we shall see from the chapter dedicated to his pioneering work. He planted the seeds for a transfeminist revolution, forging a path forward in alignment with women and the feminine, to conquer the logos that has been dominated by men since the nation was founded. Chilean *locas* can have hope for a future in their country because Lemebel has left a trace that cannot easily be erased.

Pablo Pérez deemphasized confrontational politics and focused on the micropolitics of desire within his BDSM community. Perhaps his emphasis on spiritual pursuits provides an answer, a glimmer of hope. We will see that Arenas also looked to a spiritual transformation as the path forward for homosexuality when he reached the decision to end his life. It is my sincere desire that the reader find hope from my reading of these author's works.

Temporal Limits, Research Contributions, and Summation of Chapters

Latin American writers did not immediately respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis, rather it was well over a decade before works began to appear such as autobiographies, novels, chronicles, and films. The counter-cultural insurgency took precedence. Therefore, when the first works began appearing in the early-1990s, they narrated the lives and deaths of PWAs, but also recounted the oppressive conditions of living under authoritarian rule and its moral dictates. They intervene in national, transnational, and religious discourses, offering utopian imaginings of kinship, belonging, and community formation for those who practice transvestism, sadomasochism, and various forms of spiritual fetichism. The works recollect the memories of those who experienced the crises and died, but also those who survived. 1996 was a pivotal year, both in terms of the pandemic's progression and narrative representation, since the triple therapy known as the "drug cocktail" was approved, and PWAs started to become survivors. Therefore, the temporal limit of this dissertation is the 1990s.

This dissertation examines three authors whose thematic concerns reflect different moments in the Latin American HIV/AIDS crisis. To address the "complicated nature of gender identities and inequalities," this dissertation expands scholarship in the growing field of transfeminism, defined by scholar Emi Koyama in "The Transfeminist Manifesto" as "a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond." Transfeminism does not exclude queers, intersex people, trans men, or non-trans women and men, rather it is inclusive of all those who are sympathetic toward the needs of trans women and consider their alliance with them essential to their own liberation. My intervention in transfeminist discourse is to highlight the gendered embodiment of homosexual masculinity on a spectrum, with the hyperfeminine *loca* at one end and the hypermasculine *macho* at the other. Another consideration I would like my readers to consider is that when the virus

penetrates the body it feminizes it because the infection places the person in the passive/receptive position, the identity categories destabilize, and the body becomes charged with viral potential.

In *Abismos Temporales* (2018) Nelly Richard questions whether writing is gendered. Does writing itself have a sex? Her intervention in transfeminism and transvestite aesthetics (use of the body, gestures, and artifacts to resist and transgress gender, sex, and sexuality norms) proceeds from her examination of feminism's transvestite contortions under Chile's dictatorship and democratic transition. Her analysis reveals how queer theory is inadequate to articulate today's dissident bodies at the vanguard of resistance movements in the Global South. My analysis builds on Richard's interpretive research to show how the texts in my corpus manifest accommodation, resistance, and transgression in the narrative construction of gendered identity. The viral potential of the feminized HIV/AIDS subjectivity explodes onto the page, spreads into the public sphere, and infects readers with knowledge derived from the situations characters face, such as the injustice of policies that seek to erase communities outright.

Judith Butler's theorization of gender as socially constructed, performed, and culturally sustained through ritual repetition has been central to the discourse of transfeminism, which defends the notion that biological sex does not determine one's gender. One's gendered performance is not biologically predetermined nor authorized by nature or man-made law. New genders can be constructed and sustained through embodiment and ritual repetition. In other words, although the gender of the subject is perceived as an internalized essence, it is "manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler xv). Many people have taken Butler's assertion as a sort of permission to manufacture new gender identities through the sustained performance of gendered stylizations, which may or may not include surgical modifications of the body. It is important to remember that the subtitle to Butler's

landmark work titled *Gender Trouble* (1990) is *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. The authors of this dissertation's primary corpus subvert gender identity by pushing the limits of homosexual masculinity toward embodiments which the heterosexual matrix Butler theorizes find unacceptable. Butler asserts that "no correlation can be drawn... between drag or transgender and sexual practice, and the distribution of hetero-, bi-, and homo- inclinations cannot be predictably mapped onto the travels of gender bending or changing" (xv). For example, just because a person born with a penis enjoys wearing garments socially signified to be feminine does not mean that the male's feminized gendered performance reveals same-sex desire.

In the foreword to the 1999 reedition of her work, Butler concedes that her own views about gender performativity have changed, not only because of criticisms but also because others have given it their own formulations. She originally relied on Derrida's reading of Kafka's "Before the Law" to theorize her concept of performativity based on the notion that one waits for an authoritarian disclosure of meaning, Butler wondered if gender operated the same way, "anticipation conjures its object... it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates" (xv). Once her discussion turned to the question of race and its relationship to performativity, she concluded that "the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis" (xvi). Butler's original theorization about the trouble with gender has evolved as activist organizations such as Queer Nation and ACT-UP, whose reflections on the theatricality of queer self-representation, prompted "members of the American Psychoanalytic Association and the American Psychological Association to reassess some of their current doxa on homosexuality" (xvii). She had to reassess the positions she took in the original 1990 work after serving, between 1994 and 1997, on the

Board of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, which is dedicated to representing a spectrum of human rights issues related to sexual minorities. Prior to her engagement with the organization, she held what could be characterized as a negative view of the term “universality” in the sense that she considered it exclusive and exclusionary. Afterwards, she came to realize that “assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met” (Butler xviii). Moreover, Butler also came to realize a “second view of universality in which it is defined as a future oriented labor of cultural translation” (xviii). We will see how the works of the authors analyzed in this dissertation can be seen as performing the work of cultural translation, whose universality can be seen as oriented toward the queer horizon of an imagined future, when the communities, kinship, and family ties can materialize on their own terms. Their works anticipate the authorization that comes from self-stylization as they transgress the imagined borders of gender, as well as genre. Transgression of the imagined borders of genre is central to the discourse of life writing. The transgression question the categories through which one sees and recognizes genre.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) suggest that the enunciative act of people representing their own lives in a narrative should seem like something simple, given that their life is what they know best. “Yet this act is anything but simple, for the teller of his or her own story becomes, in the act of narration, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation” (1). They also suggest that we need to approach the notion of *life narrative* as a “moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present” (1). This dissertation reads the works of the authors in the corpus through Smith and Watson’s

notion, of a movement that is difficult to pin down because, when we grasp at any given moment of that movement, we capture a snapshot. It is a still frame of that life in the past and what their identity may have been or meant at that instant. Meanwhile the subject keeps living in the present, of both the writing and the reading. They keep becoming, transforming, evolving. The life of the subject lives in that imaginary space where the author and the reader create an intimate community and the reader bears witness to the declarations of the author. The narrated life acquires a textual body, a body whose sex and gender Nelly Richard, referenced earlier, questioned.

Yet, there is another conceptual dimension this dissertation considers, which is the duality of the subject's becoming both the active agent who lives in the narrative and their repertoire, the accumulation of memories and concerns, which the authors hope will become their reader's shared concerns. Narrating from the repertoire is different from the type identified by Derrida in *Archive Fever* (1995), a narrating which seeks the power of consignation, domiciliation, and hermeneutic authority. Life writing is more concerned with giving voice to the ephemeral and indecipherable aspects of living, as Diana Taylor evokes in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). For her, the repertoire is about the ways in which performance transmits cultural memory and identity. Life writing attempts to capture the knowledge transmitted by the observed subject's living, what Taylor calls "embodied action" and "cultural agency." The narration of the protagonist's life in the narrative then functions much like a live performance, "an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis" (Taylor xvi). The life in the narrative is something to be experienced through the reading. We might also think of life narrative as an enunciative mode that brings life, history, ethnography, and testimony into the realm of literature. Life is central to the notion of life narrative. Narrating becomes the way to connect to life, especially in the cases of the authors in this corpus, when AIDS threatens to cut life short. Living in the narrative is a way to exceed the limits of life

itself. The observations below will help to explain why I read the texts of my Latin American corpus through the genre of life writing because they transgress both gender and genre using a variety of self-referential enunciative modes to materialize the gendered bodies which live in the narratives along with the repertoire of memories, which together represent the primary thematic concerns. The identity becomes discernable and more decipherable through the repertoire, what Taylor calls “a nonarchival system of transfer” (xvii). All three authors transfer knowledge to readers in nonarchival ways.

As I conceptualize my notion of the viral body in the Latin American context, the notion of genre is fundamental. Remember that in Spanish, genre is “género,” which also translates as gender. The works by the authors in my corpus deploy viral bodies and contagious metaphors not only to transgress the limits of gender embodiment, but they also transgress the limits of generic embodiment, by including a mixture of enunciative modes critics often think of as autobiography, memoir, testimony, chronicle, diary, epistolary, essay, and narrative fiction within the same textual bodies. The identity of the subject, we as readers perceive, embodies transgression. The works by Reinaldo Arenas, Pedro Lemebel, and Pablo Pérez challenge the very notions of both genre and gender by resisting classification as they narrate their life and the lives of others. For example, even though many consider *Antes que anochezca* an autobiography, as we will see in Chapter Two, Arenas often uses enunciative modes commonly associated with magical realism, the marvelous real, and the fantastic. In other words, he often uses the techniques of narrative fiction to tell his story in what most would consider an autobiography.

El color de verano, on the other hand, is clearly a paratextual novel that uses the techniques of fantastic fiction to produce a carnivalesque and absurd world through which the author critiques the reality he faced in Cuba and what fellow Cubans face within the ongoing totalitarian regime.

The parodic fantasy allows him to question the limits of power while rendering reality to extremes some might consider pornographic, offensive, and obscene. Using these techniques, as observed by Kate Meheron, Arenas deploys what Foucault has dubbed “counter-memory” to grasp at official and hegemonic history, to uncover “the heterogeneous forces concealed by administrative and governmental processes of subjugation, which produce ‘truths’ of the self in the present” (59). With this concept in mind then we can understand how Arenas uses viral bodies and contagious metaphors in his narratives to perform something quite like what transgendered people do with their bodies, transgress the imagined borders of gender to produce a new embodiment. Arenas transgresses the imagined borders of genre to produce new textual embodiments and multiple identities. Both Lemebel and Pérez do the same things.

Within the so-called genre of chronicles, Lemebel uses the techniques associated with narrative fiction to tell his stories. We see this play out in Chapter Three. Lemebel also uses the fantastic and absurd modes to manifest “counter-memory,” to deconstruct the hegemony of the male dominated logos in Chile. He transgresses the imagined borders of gender, by radically championing the identity of the *loca* and adamantly expressing solidarity with all feminine subjects. He also transgresses the imagined borders of genre. He includes chapters that defy the limits of chronicles as defined by critics such as Vivian Mahieux, who loosely defines it as “the shared intimacy of everyday life” (1). Besides including chapters that critics would consider traditional chronicles, Lemebel includes letters, lists, anthropological and sociological analysis, essays, and even a manifesto. Although the subtitle claims that the book contains chronicles of an AIDSarium (an AIDS world), *Loco afán* cannot easily be pinned down into a single generic classification because the textual body as much as the physical body of Lemebel’s persona are

moving targets that perform a multitude of enunciative modes and gendered embodiments. Lemebel conjures viral bodies and contagious metaphors to make such transgressions possible.

Turning to Pérez, if we consider homosexual masculinity on a spectrum, with the hyperfeminine *loca* at one extreme and the hypermasculine *macho* at the other, then we can understand how Pérez challenges the limits of gender by representing the Gay leather style of sadomasochism. The physical body he materializes in the text moves away from the *loca* embodiment toward an embodiment that Lemebel, speaking from his position as the hyperfeminine *loca*, considers fascistic and violent. Like Arenas and Lemebel, Pérez transgresses the imagined borders of genre as well. The diaristic novel *Un año sin amor*, which mostly uses the first person to narrate, transgresses the diaristic genre by including enunciative modes such as poetry, emails, classified ads, and dialogue. Similarly, Pérez defies generic classification in *El mendigo chupapijas* by changing from first person to third person narrative voicings, while including genres such as diary entries, letters, emails, and poems, weaving them all together with the techniques of narrative fiction. Many times, in the narrative, Pérez encounters the limits of language itself, especially when he attempts to express what psychoanalysts call *jouissance*, experiences that exceed the limits of the pleasure principle. When Pérez invests in the rituals of his leathersexuality, producing contagious metaphors that grasp at what Deleuze calls “nonlanguage,” enunciative acts that are extremely difficult to code and decode since the experience of *jouissance* place his body outside of power’s reach. The identity of the Pablo Pérez that lives in the text is therefore in constant flux as he seeks erotic pleasures at the threshold between pain and spiritual ecstasy. As the protagonist inhabits the liminal space between reality and fiction, he disinvests in the patriarchal authority and voicings of the subject as he manifests resistance to the hegemony of narrative subjectivity.

The dissertation also advances interpretive research into philosophical liberation aesthetics, by drawing from a variety of fields and frameworks. I use exile studies, transfeminism, contagion theory, and virality to examine how literary and visual representations of HIV/AIDS contaminated a variety of Latin American social imaginaries with metaphors that challenge the ethical and moral values imposed by the authoritarian regimes in which they were produced. I argue that the metaphors derive from the Neobaroque aesthetics of liberation that radical Chilean feminist author Pia Barros calls “tremendismo” and the Argentine poet and sociologist Néstor Perlongher calls “neobarrosa.” These two forms of aesthetic representation tend to articulate identities with politically situated bodies, projecting profuse gestures, and intentionally exaggerated physical appearances, using language that can best be described as a blasphemous, bulging of meaning, overflowing with grotesque and challenging imagery, plebeian sensibilities, and a superabundance of erotic, sexual, and violent signs. The bodies of these characters are deformed by the effects of inner exile, and they defiantly resist being erased by a power structure that justifies deadly mechanisms of social control and excision camouflaged in discourses of moral and ethical exceptionalism. For example, authoritarian governments in the 1970s, like Chile and Argentina, regarded homosexuality a contagion as dangerous as communism. The Cuban Revolutionary government regarded it as a bourgeois practice seeking to feminize its project of creating a “new man.” All practiced moral excision of feminized subjects. Under such exceptional conditions, HIV/AIDS was not taken as a serious public threat because it was perceived to be a disease that only affected homosexuals, who many regarded as being biologically different.

My dissertation also engages the post-structuralist continental philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. I discuss their ideas on “becoming woman” and “micropolitics of desire” in relation to what critic Nelly Richard in *Cultural Residues* (2004) calls “local, ephemeral, practices of

difference.” I argue that while representing the lives and deaths of PWAs, the texts use metaphors of infection to discuss the lingering colonial power in their respective countries. They show how defining gender, sexuality, and sex in binary terms damages identities outside the dominant gay, lesbian and queer culture—identities which have been suppressed, silenced, or virtually destroyed by Western theology, colonization, modernization, and neoliberal patriarchal capitalism.

The concept of “radical exteriority” first articulated by philosopher Enrique Dussel and later expanded by philosopher Alejandro Vallega in *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (2014), who defines it as “thinking *from* and *with* the living configurations and excluded lineages and histories of those considered peripheral and ultimately meaningless by Western” civilization, helps us understand how an ethics, philosophy, and liberating aesthetics arises from the lives of those excluded, exploited, and peripheral to Western centers of power who think and produce knowledge (Vallega 6 emphasis original). Latin American philosophers such as Dussel and Vallega build on the theorizations of others such as Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, who theorized the “coloniality of power.” For Quijano, this power is Eurocentric. “The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established” (Quijano 533). In Mignolo’s view, “Quijano’s colonial matrix of power, gender, and sexuality is one sphere in which coloniality of power is articulated” (Mignolo 157). Mignolo recognizes, moreover, that racism and ethnicity were folded into the enduring power matrix, when the colonial nation-states of South America and the Caribbean mutated into modern nation-states after US imperialism gained prominence during the Cold War. Underscoring Mignolo’s view is the assumption that “there is no modernity without coloniality, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity... while modernity is presented as a rhetoric of salvation, it hides coloniality, which is the logic of oppression and exploitation. Modernity,

capitalism, and coloniality are aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority, of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity” (Mignolo 163). Throughout the twentieth century and into 1990s, the coloniality of power continued to thrive, in the post-dictatorial governments that sought to restore democratic institutions while adhering to the hegemony of United States led neoliberal economics. Radical exteriority, then, emerges as the philosophical thinking par excellence of a decolonial and deconstructive movement that begins with and builds upon Dussel’s *Philosophy of Liberation* (1985), which sought to emancipate Latin American thinking from the hegemony of the Western philosophical tradition. All three authors, in their own way, confront the coloniality of power hidden within what we might call the dictatorial and post-dictatorial neoliberal period, when Cuba continued to criminalize homosexuality, while Chile and Argentina transitioned from the military dictatorships to neoliberal democracies.

In chapter two, I focus on the exiled Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas and two of his self-referential works *The Color of Summer* (1991) and *Before Night Falls* (1992). I also look to another book he published called *Necesidad de Libertad* (1986), which contains important essays and literary analysis that provides important context. The two books were published posthumously after he ended his life in a suicide at his apartment in Hell’s Kitchen in New York City. In the suicide note published at the end of *Before Night Falls*, a bildungsroman in which he tells the story of his life from birth to death, he stated that he decided to end his life because he had completed his writing project, AIDS had ravaged his body, and he could no longer write or derive any pleasure from life. In the arc of the story, Arenas focuses on the aftermath of the Castro led Cuban revolution. Arenas frames the story as an epic struggle for survival during a war Castro declared on homosexual intellectuals he saw as exerting tremendous influence on cultural production and education in Cuba. In this part of the story, Arenas recalls how the repression of homosexuality on

the island converted him into a no person. I read this through the lens of inner exile. In the introduction to *Before Night Falls*, Arenas explains, in a scene in which he drags his half-dead body to the image of Virgilio Piñera, that he asks for three more years of life, so he could complete his literary project, which would be his revenge, not only against Castro, but against nearly the entire human race. My chapter on Arenas seeks to understand the nature of this revenge and his special relationship with Piñera and his poetics of *insilio*. I argue that Arenas, like Piñera before him, uses poetics of *insilio* to demonstrate how the Cuban body is trapped by the island's long-disputed history which produces a clarity that weighs heavily on all the political, literary, and scholarly projects which have sought and continue to articulate its *cubanidad*, on and off the island, before, inside, and outside of the Revolution, which mercilessly sucks the lifeblood out of its inhabitants. Arenas represents a moment in the HIV/AIDS crisis when the disease was experienced as a death sentence from the perspective of a Communist revolutionary dissident.

In chapter three, I focus on the Chilean writer, and performer Pedro Lemebel, whose political activism began with an intervention in 1986, when he read his “Manifiesto: Hablo por mi diferencia” [Manifiesto: I Speak for my Difference] to a group of proletarian men belonging to the Socialist and Communist parties operating in secrecy within the countercultural insurgency. When he read his manifesto, he was dressed in drag and wore the international symbol of Communism, the hammer and sickle, on his face. His manifesto questions what their intentions will be toward homosexuals if their insurgency proves successful and the country returns to democracy. I argue that the manifesto plants the seeds for a transfeminist revolution in Chile based on a philosophy and aesthetics of radical exteriority. The next year Lemebel, together with Francisco Casas, founded the artist collective Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis [The Mares of the Apocalypse] to confront the Pinochet dictatorship, as part of the larger countercultural insurgency, and to fight for

homosexual rights in Chile. The Yeguas represented the body of the *loca*, a feminized homosexual identity in Chile, that has long been scorned, repressed, and killed. Their interventions into the public sphere are not unlike those of ACT-UP, which was founded the same year as Lemebel founded the Yeguas. After the success of the 1988 plebiscite, when voters said “No” to eight more years of Pinochet rule, he turned his attention to writing chronicles, publishing them in newspapers, and reading them out loud on his radio show called *Cancionero*. In the chapter, I primarily read from his second book of chronicles called *Loco afán: crónicas de sidario* (1997) [Crazy Eagerness: Chronicles of the AIDSarium] with special emphasis on the chronicle titled “La noche de los visones” [The Night of the Minks], where Lemebel memorializes various *loca* comrades who died from AIDS before the return to democracy, and the titular chronicle “Loco afán,” which is an amazingly hybrid text that reads like a dissertation defense in various fields of knowledge, including philosophy, gender, and sexuality. I argue that *Loco afán* reveals the inner exile of *locas*—local male homosexual intersectional identities that consider themselves outliers of the dominant gay, lesbian, and queer culture—who have been objectified and subjected to moral excision and social ostracism by those who wield power in the nation-state. Lemebel represents the moment in the HIV/AIDS crisis when the disease was experienced as a death sentence from the perspective of a member of the communist party facing a Fascist dictatorship.

In chapter four I focus on the Argentine writer Pablo Pérez and two of his self-referential novels *Un año sin amor* (1998) [A Year Without Love] and *El mendigo chupapijas* (2005) [The Homeless Cocksucker]. Although dated entries help us to situate major events, some cannot be chronologically situated as they live in the fuzzy space time of memory, what Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel calls “zizagueo” [zigzagging]. Like many of Lemebel’s chronicles, all Pérez’s novels begin in *media res* and contain various flashbacks, by the ways, and not to mentions in their

semantic design, reflecting oblique, transversal, and nomadic forms of tracing back through time. Pérez incorporates what Gérard Genette in *The Architext* (1992) calls “transtextuality,” the transcendence of the text, “everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” (81). These two novels were adapted into a movie by the Argentine film director Anahí Berneri and released with the name of the first novel *Un año sin amor* (2005). Since the film combines elements from both novels to tell its story, I decided to read the life narrative of the protagonist across both novels to trace the arc of the character’s development through two decades. The protagonist’s name is the same as the author, and in both novels, he is also the narrator. Since readers consider that this coincidence in nomenclature invokes what Phillippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* (1989) theorizes as the autobiographical pact, I argue that the most productive way of reading Pérez’s novels is through the lens of autofiction, or what some scholars refer to as autobiographical fiction. Rather than consider the author an autobiographical narrator, I read him as “Pablo Pérez,” a version of himself loosely based on real-life events. I also argue that Pérez intellectually registers the *Zeitgeist* of a specific historical moment in Argentina when the HIV positive hero and his radical sexuality, known as *gay leathersexuality* to insiders of the Gay Leather style of sadomasochism within the subculture of the wider BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) community, confronts the existential angst and inner exile provoked by HIV/AIDS.

I also read Pérez’s first two novels through what Gilles Deleuze in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1989) calls “symptomatology” and “pornology,” to aid with comprehending the link between violent language and eroticism and what the meeting of violence and sexuality in excessive and abundant language means. Deleuze sees Sade and Masoch as clinicians, anthropologists, and artists. Not that they are clinicians on the level of those who describe plague,

leprosy, or Parkinson's disease, but rather, they "present unparalleled configurations of symptoms and signs" (16). Rather than regard their work as pornographic, Deleuze believes that "it merits the more exalted title of 'pornology' because its erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary functions of ordering and describing" (18). I argue that Pablo Pérez's first two novels are what Deleuze calls "pornological literature." Besides offering numerous matter-of-fact details in creative ways, the writing aims to confront language with its own limits. Pérez emulates the clinical, anthropological, and artistic work of Sade and Masoch in his writing by transcending the imperative and descriptive function of language toward a higher function. The "nonlanguage" places his body out of power's reach. Pablo Pérez's initiation into the gay leathersexuality allows his body to become invested with meaning that produces both pleasure, resistance, and erotic capital. The pleasure he seeks is filled with *jouissance*. Pérez represents the moment in the HIV/AIDS crisis when the disease was no longer experienced as a death sentence due to the "drug cocktail," technically known as Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) but also known as "combination therapy." He tells his story from the perspective of someone who survived the HIV/AIDS crisis in midst of neoliberal Argentina and discovers that what he ultimately seeks is an organic universal divine love much like what the author imagines was the life of Francis of Assisi.

CHAPTER 2 – THE BODY WITH AIDS AND THE LOCA MULTITUDE

The Poetics of *Insilio* – No One Can Leave

In the poem "La isla en peso" (1943), Virgilio Piñera synthesizes the poetics of *insilio* using the titular metaphor "weight of the island" to signify corporeal, cultural, and linguistic entrapment, but also its unique form of sociability. *Insilio*, or what Paul Ilie calls "inner exile" in *Literature and Inner Exile: Authoritarian Spain 1939-1975* (1980), is a term first used by the Uruguayan poet, literary critic, and professor, Diego Pérez Pintos, to describe a condition of marginalization that a compatriot was likely to suffer under authoritarian rule. Inner exile, according to Ilie, opens the door to innovate literary expressions.

¡Nadie puede salir, nadie puede salir! / La vida del embudo y encima la nata de la rabia. / Nadie puede salir: el tiburón más diminuto rehusaría transportar un cuerpo intacto. / Nadie puede salir: una uva caleta cae en la frente de la criolla / que se abanica lánguidamente en una mecedora, / y "nadie puede salir" termina espantosamente en el choque de las claves. //

[No one can leave, no one can leave! / The life of the funnel and on top of that the cream of rage. / No one can get out: the tiniest shark would refuse to transport a body intact. / No one can leave: a cove grape falls on the forehead of the Creole / who languidly fans herself in a rocking chair, / and "no one can leave" terrifyingly ends in the clash of claves. //] (*La isla* 42-43).

In these verses, Piñera signals the condition through the beat of anaphora: trapped bodies, marked by the vertigo produced in the whirlpool funnel of a stifling and frothy fury. Cuban bodies are constrained and insulated in such a way that not even the smallest shark allows a body to pass unscathed—they all want their piece of the prize. What prize? The Cuban body—its *corpus cubensis*—a dizzying entanglement of bodies representing its history, literature, beauty, resources, and musical rhythms that comprise the shades of its transcultural rainbow of pigmented human bodies. The clarity that dominates the scene described by the poet represents the instability and complex dynamic of a historical reality that gyrates, reverberates, pulses, and melts the Cuban body with the withering intensity of a beacon of light in an absurd fantasy.

The verses above read like the lyrics of a son or conga, with the *vaivén* [sway] of a chorus that repeats “nadie puede salir, nadie puede salir,” while the shocking crash of claves provides the climax in a vocal crescendo that sings, “nadie puede salir.” Not only is everyone trapped by the water, but the mesmerizing heat is like a fever that numbs the senses such that the body of the creole woman, synecdochically representing the Cuban body politic, can only fan herself to keep cool, while tilting back and forth in a rocking chair like a ship. A cluster of sea grapes (*coccoloba uvifera* L.) deliciously hangs near her forehead, beckoning, but its nourishing beauty is ignored. The heat can be understood as a potent gaze upon the body like that produced under a powerful microscope. The self-fanning is a form of self-care the body needs to survive, while the rocking motion is a form of cradling the soul needs to assuage its discomfort and resist the environment. The powerful rays of the sun, representing the hegemony of Cuban body’s history, glaringly scrutinizes the body, surrounding it with the intensity of its light, while the soul withers and its creative potential desiccates. The *guiabara* represents the natural beauty and wonder of the Edenic paradise of the island, which can turn salt into sugar. It can easily quench the thirst of the creole woman with its sweetness and provide much needed rejuvenation, but the desiccating heat and the insular condition of her body freezes time and consumes reality itself. She is no longer conscious of what existed before history began shining.

I argue that Arenas, like Piñera before him, uses poetics of *insilio* to demonstrate how the Cuban body is trapped by the island’s long-disputed history which produces a clarity that weighs heavily on all the political, literary, and scholarly projects which have sought and continue to articulate its *cubanidad*, on and off the island, before, inside, and outside of the Revolution, which mercilessly sucks the lifeblood out of its inhabitants. Arenas intimately links his writing to Piñera and his poetics of *insilio* in his self-referential, parodic novel *The Color of Summer* (1991) and his

autobiographical novel *Before Night Falls* (1992). In both novels, Arenas imitates the clarity in Piñera's poetics and transforms it to focalize his struggle—survival and resistance—with the totalitarian politics of Castro's regime and the mysteriously destructive power of AIDS.

Let us turn to first line of the poem, “La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes...” [The damn circumstance of water everywhere...] (*La isla* 37). Arenas sees in the fatality of this first line the poet retracing a variety of Cuban calamities and traditions: invasions, slavery, exploitation, religious indoctrination, hypocrisy, existential anguish, and the concept of original sin. He sees a people whose essence has been repeatedly castrated, always trying to recover. The Cuban body for Arenas is the only mistreated treasure of value, but the clarity of the light of its history assaults it with its claws as it desperately tries to cover itself “con pencas de palmas, con yaguas traídas distraídamente por el viento, con cotorras y pitahayas, con sombrías hojas de tabaco y restos de leyendas tenebrosas” [with palm fronds, with yaguas distractedly brought by the wind, with parrots and pitahayas, with gloomy tobacco leaves and remains of dark legends] (*La isla* 45). How do we know that the light is the Cuban body's history? The poet uses the crescendo of apostrophes and the beats of anaphora to indicate the environment.

¡Hay que tapar! ¡Hay que tapar! / Pero la claridad avanzada, invade /
perversamente, oblicuamente, perpendicularmente, / la claridad es una enorme
ventosa que chupa la sombra, / y las manos van lentamente hacia los ojos. //

[Cover up! Cover up! / But the advanced clarity invades / perversely, obliquely,
perpendicularly, / clarity is an enormous suction cup that sucks the shadow, / and
the hands go slowly towards the eyes. //] (*La isla* 45)

The clarity attacks from all sides. The only shelter the body has, are its hands, behind which it hides from the assault. No one can escape it because its light descends from all angles and its intensity produces no shadows. In the next ten lines, the poet drums the anaphora “la claridad” eight times to reveal, “Los secretos inconfesables” [The unconfessable secrets] (*La isla* 45). What are those secrets? *The clarity* moves everything: tongues and arms. *The clarity* pounces on the

foliage. *The clarity* pounces on both blacks and whites. *The clarity* even pounces on itself. *The clarity* moves convulsively from one side to the other as *the clarity* flares up, bursts, and cracks, until *the clarity* shines with the most horrifying intensity that it begins to give birth to more *clarity*. “Son las doce del día. / Todo un pueblo puede morir de luz como morir de peste” [It’s noon. / Everyone can die from light like they do pestilence] (*La isla* 45). Like the noon day sun, the damned circumstance of the water is a plague. The water that surrounds the island is the mirror that reflects its light, the eternal history that always shines radiantly “rodea como un cáncer” [encircles like a cancer] (*La isla* 37). The poet also drums the anaphora “las eternas historias” [the endless histories] (*La isla* 42). These *endless histories* face the eternal history of the noon day sun. The *endless histories* of a land that gives birth to jesters and parrots. The *endless histories* of the blacks that were the whites that were not. The *endless histories* of the whites, blacks, yellows, reds, and blues—the entire chromatic spectrum explodes above the head of the poet like flames. The *endless histories* of cynically smiling Europeans. I translate *eternas historias* as endless histories to differentiate between *la historia eterna*, which I translate as eternal history. The poet’s vision sees them all too clear but also speaks of a time before, “en otro tiempo yo vivía adánicamente” [in another time I lived adamically] (*La isla* 37). Before the arrival of history, with its original sin, the Cuban body lived in the divinity of paradise, without any threat. Something similar could be said of the homosexual body before AIDS, when it celebrated the triumph of its rebellion. For a time, it lived in a paradise, enjoying pleasure without limits, liberated from the effects of original sin, but it was oblivious to the virus that was silently spreading, consuming it like a cancer from within.

In *Necesidad de Libertad* (2001) Arenas analyzes Piñera’s poem in a section titled “La isla en peso con todas sus cucarachas.” In his analysis, Arenas sees the light of Cuban history, which

moves obsessively throughout all Piñera's works, reaching its absolute definition in the line that reads, "la claridad es una enorme ventosa que chupa la sombra" [the light is a huge suction cup that sucks the shadow] because history absorbs all. It reigns over the four chaotic temporalities of the poem: morning, midday, afternoon, and night. In the radiance of such a hegemonic presence, Arenas asks. What can save us or at least offer us an instrument we could use to leave a trace that we existed? The answer is clear: memory, imagination, and invention. "La eterna miseria que es el acto de recordar" [The eternal misery that is the act of remembering] (*La isla* 37). Arenas claims that the only sovereignty Piñera has, is over his imagination. In the act of remembering he both manifests and mythologizes the recuperated island and its people's sense of rebellion and triumph. In *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, Arenas uses the sovereignty of imagination to record his memories and leave a trace of the eternal misery he suffered.

If the Cuban body is the cockroach who scurries away from the light of its history to survive, the *cuerpo sidoso*—the body with AIDS—is the viral body who resists and survives in the terrible light of homosexual history. Both suffer the effects of an *insilio* of fear and terror that have been internalized and travel with them wherever they go, like the icebergs in Piñera's *Presiones y diamantes*. *Insilio* is both a poetics and a mental condition. Arenas reproduced a similar movement when he imagined the island of Cuba detached from its anchor to the continent and the people rowing it to shores unknown in *The Color of Summer*. *Insilio* is not anchored to a missing homeland, it is not about geography, rather, it is about a state of disaffection, desolation, and determination to survive. Arenas crafted the five self-referential novels of his *pentagonía* in a narratively chronological order beginning with *Celestino antes del alba* (1967), *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* (1980), *Otra vez el mar* (1982), *El color del verano* (1991), and *El asalto* (1990), although *El color de verano* was published posthumously along with *Antes que anochezca*

(1992), because AIDS was closing in, and his writing was a race against time. Arenas intended that all six be read as companions, or soul mates, if you will, because they each contain parts of his life and experiences. By reading all six, we get the full picture. In this study we are looking at a narrow slice.

In this chapter I argue that Reinaldo Arenas made state terrorism, HIV/AIDS, and their combined effect on the mind and body the primary target of a queer discursive vengeance against the authoritarian Stalinist biopolitical mechanisms of the social revolution led by Fidel Castro in Cuba. HIV/AIDS and the repressive state become thematic concerns recreated through a wealth of narrative modes, voices, and paratextual techniques. His embattled relationship with the repressive state sent him first into inner exile on the island and then into exile abroad. I also argue that Arenas appropriates, imitates, and transforms Virgilio Piñera's poetics of *insilio*—the inner exile of a marginalized body that deteriorates within a reality turned absurd under the pressures of hegemonic history. Arenas is a master of paratextuality, a term Gérard Genette uses in reference to parody and pastiche. Genette claims they are examples par excellence of transtextuality, everything that brings the text into relation with other texts. Arenas' *pentagonía*, a sequence of five self-referential novels written over a period of 30 years, stands as evidence of this claim. I will closely read here a few key instances which illuminate Arenas' masterful transtextual parodic mode.

In this chapter, I focus mainly on *Antes que anochezca* and *Necesidad de libertad*, which function like owner's manuals that help assemble a machine shipped in parts. They provide important context about Arenas' life and thinking. I will also refer to the last interview Arenas gave before his death with Carlos Espinosa Domínguez titled "La vida es riesgo o abstinencia" [Life is Risk and Abstinence], published in the magazine *Quimera* in 1991 where he discusses how

his inner exile, an intimate aspect of the exilic paradigm—like exile’s alter ego—traveled with him from Cuba to North Atlantic civilization and influenced his writing. Using this interview and these two novels as “manuals”, I closely read from *El color de verano*, the penultimate in a series of five self-referential novels that Arenas calls his *pentagonía*. In both *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* Arenas presents bodies with AIDS, which is one type of viral body I analyze in my dissertation. I will closely examine the introduction to *Antes que anochezca* where Arenas discusses the how AIDS impacted his body and mind using a unique autobiographical mode that incorporates thematic concerns critics often associate with genres like magical realism, the marvelous real, or the fantastic.

In my analysis, I will often quote from *Before Night Falls*, a translation of *Antes que anochezca* produced by Dolores Koch, and *The Color of Summer*, a translation of *El color del verano* produced by Andrew Hurley, who translated all the books of Arenas’ *pentagonía*. Since these six novels are available in translation, I will let the reader decide if they want to consult the Spanish. I will quote from the English translations when citations are longer than a phrase, but I will preserve the Spanish for certain words and phrases whose translation I feel elides cultural nuances specific to the Latin American homosexual experience. I seek to avoid, as much as I can, the imposition of terminology produced within LGBTQ identity politics in North America and Europe. A salient example is how the translators render Arenas’ use of the term *loca*. Dolores Koch translates the word as *gay*, while Andrew Hurley translates it as *queen*. *Loca* is a derogatory term in many countries in Latin America and often used to refer to feminized homosexual bodies but is also used to refer to homosexuals in general, based on the ideological assumption that all homosexuals are feminized and inverted sodomites who commit a sin against nature for using the anus as a substitute for the vagina. According to this logic, sex is not for pleasure but for

procreation. Although the term's origin is derogatory, writers like Reinaldo Arenas, Pedro Lemebel, and others revendicate the term, transforming it into a word in which those who embody its meaning can feel pride, much like the way the term *queer* has been recuperated and resignified by LGBT theorists. To translate the term *loca* as gay or queen elides the local historical and contextual specificity of its Latin American semantic web. Gay and queen do not have universal meaning throughout Latin America, since these terms implicate questions of gender, race, and socioeconomic class. Some view the terms as being imposed by hegemonic theories about identities specific to North Atlantic Civilization. The use of such terms in translation have provoked a reaction among Latin American thinkers such as Diego Falconi, Joseph Pierce, and others, who caution scholars to take care in their analysis and knowledge creation, when applying these terms to Latin American literature, so as not to erase identities that do not fit within the LGBTQ identity spectrum.

It is my contention that *The Color of Summer* is what critics call “self-referential autofiction”—life writing that Reinaldo Arenas narrates through protagonists Virgilio Piñera conceived of as “muñecos,” or ventriloquist dummies, in a short story called “El muñeco,” published in 1943. Even though the story had nothing to do with Fidel Castro, revolutionary authorities controlling publishing on the island suppressed it from Piñera's life work anthology, stating that the story did not support revolutionary ideals. Piñera's concept of “muñeco” helps us, in part, to understand how inner exile and exile in the form of geographic displacement split Arenas apart, initially into two beings. One is the shadow self who was forced into inner exile and then escaped into exile, while the original Arenas is the authentic self, who like a specter, remains forever etched in the memory of his beloved Cuba. Piñera's *muñecos* manifest in Arenas' texts as autofictional avatars, or author surrogates—often in drag—who remember, recuperate,

mythologize, and transform the homeland, but also communicate highly controversial assertions and painful realities that Reinaldo Arenas obviously felt, at the time, he dared not release to the public while he was alive as non-fiction.

Some of the controversial assertions appear in *Before Night Falls* but they are stated in coherence with the overall testimonial mode of the autobiography. Whereas the same assertions are stated in *The Color of Summer* as various avatars question the insularity of their entrapment on the island. Fifo, the island's dictator, has decreed that no one can leave and that all forms of pleasure are banned. Inhumanity and violence, along with malignancy and bodily decay, are themes connected to Piñera's poetics of *insilio*, which Arenas reproduces in his works using a carnivalesque discourse to portray the Cuban body caught in the web of Fifo's machinations. While historicizing the body, with picaresque contours, Arenas uses what Foucault calls "counter-memory" to dissipate unitary formation of power and knowledge. Kate Meheron in "Queer Territories in the Americas: Reinaldo Arenas' Prose" in *Prose Studies* (1994) recognizes how this "this effective use of history strives to discover the heterogenous forces concealed by administrative and governmental processes of subjugation, which produce 'truths' of the self in the present" (59). Drawing from the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World*, counter memory both cannibalizes and carnivalizes the dominant ideologies of history to construct narratives that act like a type of communal performance marked by displays of excess and grotesqueness to rupture the boundaries between performers and spectator, narrator, and reader. The social space opened in the rupture allows diverse voices to be heard, interact, and utopian freedom become visible, so that it can be reimagined and expanded through syncretic and ritualized pageantry. Carnivalization questions the limits of power, abolishes rank, levels hierarchies, and promotes equality among individuals, subsuming them into a living collective body. *The Color of*

Summer hyperbolizes and escalates the carnivalesque rendering of reality to extremes that some might consider pornographic, offensive, and obscene.

Ediciones Universal, the company that originally published *El color del verano*, included the following disclaimer. “El autor tanto en vida como después de muerto, assume todas las responsabilidades sobre el contenido de esta obra literaria y exonera a su editor, a sus herederos y a su agente literario” [The author, both in life and after death, assumes all responsibilities for the content of this literary work and exonerates his publisher, his heirs, and his literary agent] (*Antes* 5). *Viking Books* inserted a modified and expanded disclaimer on the copyright page of *The Color of Summer* (2000). “This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either a product of the author’s imagination *or are used fictitiously*, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental” (*The Color* 1, emphasis mine). The disclaimer is not unlike those that appear at the beginning of motion pictures and demonstrates that the translator and publisher were aware that they were dealing with explosive content. The phrase *or are used fictitiously* in the disclaimer is there because names and likenesses to real persons, places, and events in *The Color of Summer* are thinly veiled and some are not fictionalized at all. For example, the villain of the story is called Fifo, who is a dictator of an island nation from which no one is allowed to leave. Many readers, including myself, construe Fifo to be Fidel. Another example is Alfredo Güevarara, which is a thinly veiled paratextual reference to Alfredo Guevara, the founder of ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos), who is one of several targets that Arenas lampoons in *The Color of Summer*. The change of spelling in the last name phonetically resembles the word “güevón,” which is a slang term in Spanish which, depending on the country, can be used to call someone a “dick,” “stupid,” “dumb,” or “jerk.” It conjures both eggs and testicles in its meaning.

Although Arenas asserts theories and levels accusations situated within a fictional construct, the writing produced a backlash. *The Color of Summer* blasphemes the creation myth of Christianity and many of its tenets and dogmas. For example, one of the author surrogates suggests that Jesus Christ regularly had sex with his apostles and that the apostle John was his special lover. I will discuss what is arguably Arenas' most controversial assertion, which subverts the Judeo-Christian creation myth of Adam and Even in a section below. The narrative also ridicules the sacred ideals of Communism and Capitalism, suggesting that their myriad philosophies and pseudoscientific theories are camouflaged neofascist ideologies that mostly harm homosexuals. In both *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, Arenas reveals that he has AIDS, a bombshell public revelation in the early 1990s. Up until the posthumous publication of his two final books, only Arenas' most intimate circle of friends knew he suffered its effects. He did not even tell his mother during their final visit together. The only other book published around that time that may have had a similar impact in the revelation of AIDS is Hervé Guibert's book *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (1990), published posthumously in French, where Guibert reveals that Michel Foucault, who appears in his novel as Muzil, was a leather Master who actually died from AIDS-related complications and not cancer as the public was led to believe. Beside revealing his AIDS status, Arenas asserts in both books that HIV is a diabolical, man-made contagion created by powerful reactionary interests to systematically destroy the life of human beings among the marginal populations of the planet. After the books were published, critics accused him of hyperbole, exaggeration, and fabrication, but since he was already dead, no one could harm him like those who harmed Salman Rushdie, who suffers persecution and violence since the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Rushdie appears briefly in *The Color of Summer* to insist that the irrefutable evidence of the existence of the devil be presented. Situating life writing within a

fictional construct can act like a disclaimer that creates the necessary legal distance to avoid lawsuits and hopefully violent repercussions, as many critics of life writing have asserted about autofiction and autobiographical fiction. Nevertheless, there are always “true believers” who fanatically espouse religious and political ideologies willing to use violence to achieve the sacred mandates they imagine have been delegated to them. The Stalinist Castro regime in Cuba certainly used violence and state sponsored terrorism to institutionalize its agenda. In this chapter, we shall see how Arenas frames the arc of story he tells in *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer* in terms of persecution, resistance, survival, exile, revenge, AIDS, and spiritual redemption.

The Body with AIDS and the Author Function

In this section I will discuss the different ways Arenas presents the body with AIDS in *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*. In both novels, Arenas explains that he began writing them while he was still on the island of Cuba. He had written portions of both novels, but since the revolutionary authorities sought to silence him for being what they considered a counterrevolutionary because of his homosexuality and for writing stories with homosexual themes, which his friends Jorge and Margarita Camacho helped to smuggle off the island and publish outside of the revolution without official authorization, they seized his papers and manuscripts. In the chapter called “The Flight” in *Before Night Falls*, which describes what happened to him while he was hiding out in Lenin Park after being arrested on trumped up charges of moral corruption of youth and escaping detention, Arenas describes the circumstances of how he began to write it. While he was hiding out in the park, his friend Juan Abreu eluded the authorities who had been surveilling him and provided Arenas with some basic supplies: a knife to shave, a small mirror, a copy of Homer’s *Iliad*, and a small notebook so he could write. The first thing Arenas wrote was a desperate letter directed to the International Red Cross, the United Nations, and UNESCO, where he provided details about what was happening to him. “For a long

time, I have been the victim of a sinister persecution by the Cuban regime” (*Before* 171). After detailing the atrocities that he witnessed and experienced firsthand, worrying that some would doubt his claims, he added... “I want now to affirm that what I am saying here is the truth, even though under torture I might later be forced to say the opposite” (*Before* 171). A contact named Lagarde sent by the Camachos arrived to meet him at the park and Arenas handed him the letter and a note he wrote to the Camachos instructing them to publish the letter in as many places as they could. He also instructed them to publish all the manuscripts they had in their possession. Juan Abreu gave Lagarde all of Arenas’ previous writings that he had given him to hide before being arrested, so Lagarde could smuggle those out of Cuba as well. Once he had dispatched everything he could, Arenas continued to hide in the park, where in the notebook he received from Juan, he began to write his memories and decided to name it *Before Night Falls*.

Arenas also explains why he felt the name he gave his autobiography, the story of his memories, was appropriate. He had to write before it became dark because in the park, he had no artificial light. I contend that there are other ways to read the metaphor. First, he had to write before he was captured by authorities, who later threw him into a dark prison, after convicting him without due process. Of course, he hoped that what he had already written would get smuggled off the island like his other writings had, but it seems like he never got that chance. And second, he had to write in case he was executed. There is a fourth dimension to the metaphoricity of the title. Once he was diagnosed with AIDS and faced death, he had to write before the disease destroyed his capacity to create art. AIDS replaced Fidel Castro as his *verdugo*. When Arenas escaped Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift and became a political refugee in the United States in 1980, he left with just the clothes he was wearing. He had to reconstruct the parts of *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer* that were seized. Reconstructing what he had previously written was not new.

He had to rewrite his novel *Otra vez el mar* [*Farewell to the Sea*] three times from memory because the manuscript had been confiscated by Revolution security forces before it could be smuggled out. Arenas had an incredible memory and was very meticulous about details.

One of the first things he did before he established himself in New York, where he continued to write and publish, actively denouncing the Stalinist character of the revolution and engaging in erotic encounters with other men, was to revisit the manuscripts of his novels that were smuggled out of Cuba. Before any new editions could be published, he assumed the task of correcting and revising the Spanish versions, which were previously translated and published off the island. The 1982 edition of *Celestino antes del alba*, published by *Argos Vergara* in Barcelona in 1982, retitled *Cantando en el pozo*, is the first manuscript Arenas revised. The English translation by Andrew Hurley *Singing from the Well* (1987) is based on the renamed edition sanctified by Arenas. The other novel he corrected, revised, and purified was *El mundo alucinante*, which was published first in French as *Le Monde hallucinant* (1968). The first Spanish edition was published in Mexico by *Editorial Diógenes* in 1969 and adds the subtitle *Una novela de aventuras*. In the prologue appearing in *Celestino antes del alba* (2002) published by *Fábula Tusquets*, which is based on the revised edition published by *Argos Vergara*, Arenas attests that the version the reader has in their hands is the definitive edition because multiple erroneous versions of the novel, suffering numerous textual errors and distortions, motivated him to correct, revise, and authorize what from then on would be published. Once he became established in New York, he began to offer interviews. He participated in conferences and documentaries. He wrote more novels. Exile for him had become a double-edged sword in the sense that their mixed feelings about being away from a beloved country of birth that, had acted so ignorantly and ferociously in its political persecution of him, repressing his homosexuality, and targeting his ideas.

Arenas asserts that the positive side of exile manifests when the writer is no longer politically proscribed. The freedom afforded him in the receiving country removes his muzzle. He is free to write whatever he pleases. The negative side is the tremendous price the exiled writer must pay, the loss of the home, the nostalgia for the nation. Arenas explains, “El universo perdido, aquel país que era nuestro paraíso, aunque en realidad fuese un infierno, lo volvemos a recuperar una vez que estamos lejos de él. Lo mitificamos, lo reconstruimos y lo recreamos a través de la palabra. Esa visión totalizadora de una realidad sólo la tenemos cuando la podemos observar desde lejos” [The lost universe, that country that was our paradise, although it really was hell, we recover it once we are far from it. We mythologize it, we reconstruct it, and we recreate it through the word. We only have this totalizing vision of a reality when we can observe it from afar] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). When the exiled writer writes, the blank pages become the new country and the pages are filled with a world mediated by new perspectives and wisdom acquired because of critical distance. Arenas continues, “las vamos llenando en una tierra donde, por lo menos, no somos perseguidos políticamente. Esa es la tragedia del exiliado: mientras crea, va dejando un testimonio de su vida” [we fill them up in a land where, at least, we are not politically persecuted. That is the tragedy of exiled subjects: while they create, they leave behind a testimony of their life] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). In other words, one aspect of the tragedy for the exiled writer is bearing witness to the life they had, before the exceptional conditions they faced forced them to flee.

Arenas further explains that if he had not left Cuba, he would not have been able to write or publish everything he had in the eleven years before the interview, or at least he would have written differently had he remained. “Esa es la parte positiva del exilio, la posibilidad de crear una obra que solo podemos crear desde la lejanía y, por tanto, de profundidad que nos permite” [That is the positive part of exile, the possibility of creating a work that we can only create from a

distance and, therefore, with the depth it allows us] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). As the exile writes in the new country there is tremendous pain at the thought that those who remained burn in the flames of ignorance and are precluded from expressing themselves, deprived of their creativity, because their focus is on surviving the barbarity and persecution that manifest as terror within. The negative side, as mentioned above, is the terrible price exile exacts. “Un exiliado es, en el mejor de los casos, una sombra” [An exile is a shadow at best] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). Wherever he goes, no matter what he does, “hay dos personas: una sombra que está paseando o visitando esos lugares y otra persona que fui yo, que se quedó en Cuba y que me está llamando, reclamando. Un exiliado nunca podrá recuperar su total autenticidad. ¡Imposible!” [there are two people: a shadow who is walking or visiting those places and another person who was me, who stayed in Cuba and who is calling me, complaining. An exile can never recover their full authenticity. Impossible!] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). The psychological conditions that Arenas highlights in this interview are the results of the exceptional conditions he faced in Cuba before becoming an exile: becoming a muzzled, non-person, and shadow of his former self. When Arenas assumed the task of reconstructing *Before Night Falls*, he and the shadow self who travels with him collaborated to recover what was left behind, to recreate the lost paradise, as well as hell.

Although *Before Night Falls* is a bildungsroman because it tells his life story from birth to life, Arenas mythologizes the life and country he remembers and narrates. Not only does he bear witness and offer testimony, but he also adds new vital perspectives made possible because of the critical distance exile afforded him. Arenas began *Before Night Falls* with an introduction called “The End” because he wanted to show how the exceptional conditions of AIDS, which materialized on his body and in his mind, gave him new perspectives on the exceptional conditions he faced on the island. The trouble we encounter from a readerly point of view is perceptual. To

resist the temptation to factcheck and argue with the information he presents, we must accept that there is a mythical dimension at work, as he explained in the interview with Espinosa Domínguez. It is an undeniable dimension of literature written in exile. If we do that, then we will have no trouble apprehending the authenticity of the self-referential identity we seek as a reader. We will also begin to see that there is tremendous coherence between all the characters he creates in his novels, especially those in the *pentagonía*. “Entre mis personajes hay, indiscutiblemente, una gran coherencia. Todas mis novelas, incluso mis poemas, forman parte de un mundo y de un personaje que va atravesando por diversas circunstancias [...] el protagonista de todas en el fondo, el mismo” [Among my characters there is, indisputably, a great coherence. All my novels, even my poems, are part of a world and of a character who is going through various circumstances [...] the protagonist of all of them is basically the same] (Espinosa Domínguez 57). The protagonist is him; and the avatars and author surrogates that begged to speak in his novels. They are conflated like the shadow self he mentions in the interview and the voices of his characters who contaminated his thoughts long before he committed them to paper. “A mí, los personajes empiezan a afluirme a la cabeza como rumores, como voces, como metáforas. Vivo con ellos durante mucho tiempo, sin necesidad de sentarme a escribir. A veces andan conmigo durante quince años, como es el caso de *El color de verano*” [To me, the characters begin to flow into my head as rumors, as voices, as metaphors. I live with them for a long time, without the need to sit down and write. Sometimes they walk with me for fifteen years, as is the case with *The Color of Summer*] (Espinosa Domínguez 59). They are the inhabitants of the house of spirits that is his imagination.

Many critical studies consider *Before Night Falls* to be an autobiography, which according to Phillippe Lejeune involves an autobiographical pact, a concept he coined in 1971, between author and reader that is sealed like a contract when the author signs his name to the work as both the

narrator and hero of the story. Readers expect that what is represented in the text is authentic. But we must remember what Arenas said, “un exiliado nunca podrá recuperar su total autenticidad. ¡Imposible!” [an exile can never recuperate their authentic self. Impossible!] (Espinosa Domínguez 61). So, we must consider, as more recent studies seem to suggest, the possibility that *Before Night Falls* is something else, some other form of self-referential life writing, like autofiction, autobiographical fiction, or even panfictionalism. If the reader considers his work to be his real-life story, stressing the *real* implies the unvarnished truth, then they will certainly be taken aback when thematic concerns such as magical realism, the marvelous real, fantasy, absurdism, or surrealism suddenly appear in the text. Therefore, since the “boom” of deconstruction, as Carole Allamand observes, Lejeune’s “critics such as Paul de Man, Michel Beaujour, and Serge Doubrovsky, to name a few, concluded that its author got things backwards, mistaking as autobiography’s ‘starting point’ what was in fact its unreachable horizon” (52). Readers have become much more sophisticated in their approach to reading in the postmodern era. They have been “trained,” if you will, to accept the fragmented elasticity of identity in a text that narrates in first-person, where fiction and reality coexist. They can accept the intrusion of an author with the god-like omniscience of a narrator who is also the hero of the story, just as Lejeune continues to believe in “the Holy Spirit of the first person” (*Le pacte autobiographique* 30).

One of the most important places in Cuba that Arenas mythologizes is the beach. For him, the beach and the water are where he finds the most erotic pleasure, where life is worth living to its fullest. Reflecting on the sexual relations he had with other men after going into exile, in the chapter “El erotismo” [Eroticism] in *Before Night Falls*, Arenas says “I found that sexual relations can be tedious and unrewarding. There are categories or divisions in the homosexual world. The queer gets together with the queer, and everybody does everything. One sucks first, and then they

reverse roles” (*Before* 106). In other words, with everyone sucking one another, sex in exile provided little to no satisfaction because it lacked the visceral vitality of the sexual encounters he had with “real men” back in Cuba. “What we are really looking for is our opposite. [...] We would find that man, that powerful recruit who wanted desperately to fuck us...under bridges, in the bushes, everywhere, by men who wanted satisfaction while they penetrated us” (*Before* 106-07). What he found most satisfying about sex with other men in Cuba is that they did not have to pretend to be somebody else, they did not have to be “a homosexual to have a relationship with a man; a man could have intercourse with another man as an ordinary act” (*Before* 108). This claim goes back to the idea expressed in my first paragraph. Arenas sees homosexuality as an integral part of Cubanness.

In the Global North, on the other hand, gay liberation produced the gay/straight dichotomy. Arenas complains about what he perceives to be segregation, gays over here and straights over there. “In Cuba gays were not confined to a specific area of a club or beach. Everybody mingled and there was no division that would place the homosexual on the defensive” (*Before* 107). Arenas describes the beach in Cuba as a utopian, democratic space, where homosexuals do not stand out because they are already integrated into the mainstream and feel no need to stake a claim. The implication is that no one there discriminates. Arenas acknowledges that gay liberation provided formidable benefits for homosexuals in the Global North, where everything is regularized with social groups and societies, “but what has been lost is the wonderful feeling of meeting heterosexual or bisexual men who would get pleasure from possessing another man and who would not, in turn, have to be possessed” (*Before* 108). From this description, we can now appreciate what Arenas meant when he used the term “hombres de verdad,” or real men.

It may well be true that the fantasy of many passive homosexual men is to be desired by a heterosexual man, and for that man to possess him as though he were possessing a woman, whether it be in the mouth or rectum. Since Arenas does not mention condoms or safe sex, we can assume that he implies raw penetration. What Arenas does not discuss in this discourse about differences in homosexual practices, comparing sex in Cuba before exile and sex in the Global North after exile, is that in the early 1980s, when AIDS cases first began appearing, the fear of becoming infected dramatically changed sexual habits in the Global North. After news reports appeared in 1981 reporting that gay men were dying from Kaposi sarcoma and PCP pneumonia, many people became terrified. The following year in 1982, activists within the gay liberation movement in San Francisco began promoting safer sex practices in a pamphlet at a gay pride parade, which urged gay men to use condoms and explore other sexual activities where bodily fluids would not be exchanged. An example is the idea that dry humping saves lives. In May 1983, Berkowitz, Callen, and Dworkin publish a booklet called *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach* that advocated condom use for gay men and focused on self-empowerment for those living with AIDS. By September that same year, the Centers for Disease control identified that AIDS was transmitted through blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breastmilk, ruling out transmission by casual contact, water, air, or environmental surfaces. Gay men began to realize that risk of infection could be expressed as a spectrum of sexual practices on a continuum of risk. Clearly, intravenous drug use was the highest risk because direct blood to blood contact practically assured infection. The second highest risk was unprotected anal sex because the anal tissues do not have the same elasticity as vaginal tissue and so anal tissues are more prone to micro fissures where in the anaerobic environment of the rectum, semen can penetrate the blood stream. Eventually, people figured out that the one being penetrated was at greater risk than the one penetrating. As we move

down the risk spectrum, since saliva, tears, urine, and feces were not able to be vectors of HIV transmission, then oral sex became perceived as the sexual activity with the least risk. Of course, condoms were touted as offering a greater than ninety percent capacity to prevent infection if used properly, oral sex was the closest to raw anal penetration, and so sucking became a popular way to experience and give pleasure. Unfortunately, Arenas did not live long enough to gain this vital perspective, or he was oblivious to the specter of AIDS, which is a possibility, since he was so focused on his battle with Fidel.

Arenas frames his struggle for survival and his ongoing resistance to the circumstances of AIDS as an escape, like what he did when the opportunity presented itself to flee Cuba in the Mariel Boatlift. In 1987, a doctor diagnosed Arenas with AIDS and although he reported he intended to die that year, he survived a close call with death thanks to the swift action of his friend Lazaro Carrillo, who went to Miami to retrieve him. Once back in New York, Carrillo took him, unconscious, to New York Hospital, but Arenas had no health insurance and could not afford to pay. With the intervention of a French doctor, who was acquainted with Jorge and Margarita Camacho, the hospital admitted him despite his having less than a ten percent chance of survival. When Arenas was hospitalized, after Lazaro brought his body to the hospital unconscious, the staff intubated him. While he was being treated for the pneumonia, he contracted Kaposi sarcoma, phlebitis, and toxoplasmosis. Arenas was quickly buried in opportunistic infections, like one of Piñera's short story characters is buried in cockroaches, requiring specialized care and medications for each condition.

When he regained consciousness, he scribbled what he could to communicate. His treating physician, Doctor Olivier, tried to cheer him up by asking him to write some verses so that he could synchronize them to his music. Olivier frequently brought music to the hospital ward where

AIDS patients were kept comfortable as they slowly passed. Arenas considered Doctor Olivier's talent as a musician superior to his talents as a doctor. "I, of course, could not speak, having in my mouth a tube that went down to my lungs; in fact, I was alive only because the machine was breathing for me" (*Before* xi). Lazaro visited frequently and read poetry to him randomly from a book, but sometimes Arenas did not like the poem. "If I did not like the poem, I would move one of the tubes stuck in my body and he would change to a different poem" (*Before* xi). While he was hospitalized, Jorge Camacho phoned to get his opinion about specific words when his novel *The Doorman* was being translated to French. At first, he could only respond with tremendous effort, but once his condition improved, he was moved to a private room. Even though he could still not move very well, he felt some peace. Once the intubation was removed, he could finally speak, but his hospitalization lasted three and a half months.

After a prolonged stay and excellent medical care, he survived, and the doctor released him from the hospital so he could return to his run-down and shoddy apartment in Hell's Kitchen. Arenas skims through the final years of his life in the introduction to *Before Night Falls*, which is titled "The End." Completing the writing of the *pentagonía* motivated him to continue resisting and surviving until he could complete *The Color of Summer*. When he began writing the novel, "I still had some IVs stuck in my hands, making writing somewhat difficult, but I was committed to continue" (*Before* xiii). Arenas explains the sequence of his writing. He began (re)writing *Before Night Falls* beginning with the chapter "Las tortiguaguas," then after he was released from the hospital, he completed the writing of *Before Night Falls*, but left the introduction for last. He then turned his attention back to *The Color of Summer*, while working on revisions for his other novel *The Assault*, which was published in 1990.

He reports that when he arrived from the hospital in 1987, he dragged himself to where he had a photograph of Virgilio Piñera, who died in Cuba a year before Arenas escaped the island. Arenas pleads to Piñera, “Listen to what I have to tell you: I need three more years of life to finish my work, which is my vengeance against most of the human race” (*Before* xvii). Arenas uses the reflexive Spanish verb “arrastrarse,” which means to drag oneself. This verb in the context of narrating operates like a metaphor that conjures the image of his supplication: Arenas prostrate on the floor, extremely frail and on the border of death, speaking to the image of Piñera, who is like a deity capable of altering reality. It reads like a moment when Arenas directs his *plegaria* to someone he considers a saint. He asked for three more years to finish his work. Asking the image of Piñera for three years is like asking a powerful genie for three wishes. Not only does he want time enough to write, Arenas wants revenge, not only against Fidel Castro for what he did to him while he was on the island of Cuba, but also against nearly the entire human race. These are lofty demands for someone who up until that moment was practically an atheist, or agnostic, at best. Like most Cubans, Arenas held the door open to fantastic, magical, and mysterious things to exist in his reality, but an organized system of faith and religion was never on his radar. The issue of belief began to change in 1985, when several things occurred that transformed reality into manifestations of the supernatural.

The first occurs in the chapter “The Announcement” in *Before Night Falls*, when Arenas received the news that two of his greatest friends, Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Jorge Ronet, had passed away, Monegal from cancer and Ronet from AIDS related complications. Monegal was a Uruguayan professor at Yale originally from Montevideo, who before moving to the United States had an illustrious career in Latin America as a literary critic and writer. He is known for staunchly defending Jorge Luis Borges from critical attacks and being the founder of a literary magazine in

1966 called *Mundo Nuevo*, which received the ire of Roberto Fernández Retamar, when he was director of the magazine *Casa de las Américas*. Retamar accused Monegal's magazine of being an instrument of the CIA because it received funding from the Ford Foundation and was associated with the Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura. Arenas credits Monegal for being "the person who had best understood my books" (*Before* 310). As for Ronet, Arenas remembers him for being the one person "with whom I had enjoyed wonderful nocturnal adventures" (*Before* 310). Ronet is one of the people interviewed in the documentary film *Conducta impropia* (1983) directed by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal which also included interviews with other Cuban exiles such as Juan Abreu, Heberto Padilla, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Arenas himself, along with sympathizers such as Susan Sontag and Juan Goytisolo. The film asserts through testimonial interviews that the UMAPs were in fact concentration camps where Cuban intellectuals, especially those who were homosexual, were punished and persecuted. The title of the film was likely derived from a metaphor used by Raul Castro, Fidel's brother, who declared in April 1966 that those in the camps were not political prisoners, but men engaged in military service. "El primer grupo de compañeros que ha ido a formar parte de las UMAP se incluyeron jóvenes que no habían tenido la mejor *conducta* ante la vida" [The first group of comrades that became part of the UMAP included young people who had not had the best conduct in life] (*Zayas* emphasis mine). The title of the film *Conducta impropia* amplifies the metaphor of impropriety to draw attention to the persecution of both homosexuals and intellectuals, implying that their conduct was one and the same—inappropriate. The film ignited a firestorm when some progressive sectors in the gay press reacted to the portrayal of Castro as the intellectual architect of a masculinist national policy of homophobia leading a campaign of sexual orientation cleansing in Cuba.

Given Arenas' sexual proclivities, one can imagine what the adventures with Ronet were like, based on the detailed description of his *sexcapades* and *sexhunts* in Cuba described in the chapters "A Trip" and "Eroticism." In one year alone, Arenas estimates that he and his buddy Delfin "Hiram" Pratt had over five thousand sexual partners each. The number seems like an exaggeration, absurd hyperbole, but Arenas does not specify what kinds of sexual encounters were included, if they involved penetrations, exchanges of bodily fluids, or... They well could have been encounters that involved fondling, erotic verbal exchanges, or even sexually charged visual encounters that led to erections. Arenas leaves the number dangling in the air like the very large male members he enjoys so much. Five thousand in one year mathematically translates into nearly fourteen partners every day. Whether the number is literal or figurative is not as important as communicating reality from his utopian perspective—Cuban men were horny little buggers and that sex between men in Cuba does not carry the politically charged identity of gayness, as it does in the Global North, but rather sex is just sex. This notion is very clear when he describes his sex life on the beaches of Cuba, before and after the Revolution took power. Ronet's death marks a very important turning point both in the narrative of *Before Night Falls* and in Arenas' life. The threat of AIDS became (corpo)real. "Jorge died of AIDS, the plague that, until then, had been for me nothing but a distant though persistent rumor; now it had become something real, palpable, obvious: the body of my friend was proof that, very soon, I could be in the same condition" (*Before* 310). Arenas uses the short little chapter called "The Announcement" as though the deaths of his friends were like the prophetic proclamation of an angel sent from heaven to herald the second coming.

The second example of the supernatural I would like to highlight comes in the chapter called "Dreams." Arenas begins explaining that dreams and nightmares have occupied the better

part of his life. “I always went to bed like someone getting ready for a long trip: books, pills, glasses of water, clocks, a light, pencils, notebooks. To go to bed and switch off the light has been for me to submit to a totally unknown world, full of delicious as well as sinister promises” (*Before* 311). In other words, for him the dreamworld is a never-ending journey for which he enters well prepared because once he enters it, he has little control over what will take place. Like his imagination in the waking world, his dream world is where fantastic, absurd, magical, and supernatural events take place. Arenas proceeds through the chapter recalling various dreams he had since childhood which were the most significant to him and which he was eventually able to interpret. For example, he recalls dreaming frequently about a giant mouth with teeth that made an unusual gnashing sound as it pursued him. The moment he was about to be devoured; he would wake. Another dream that repeatedly occurred was meeting extraordinarily colorful and luminescent beings, who approached him and offered their friendship through uncommon smiles. Yet another frequent dream he found exhilarating was flying. He dreamt of Lezama like a father figure between whose legs he felt safe. He also dreamt at times, after his exile, that he was flying in a plane that was forced to land in Cuba and, once there, he was not allowed to leave, “I was condemned to stay there forever” (*Before* 312). This dream bothered him a lot because he had already traveled the world and knew freedom and the thought that he could never escape was a nightmare. I will not elaborate all the dreams he details because he narrates an incident that is important because of its supernaturality.

In 1986, before going to bed, it became a custom for Lazaro Carrillo to read to Arenas from the book *A Thousand and One Nights*. After the reading ended one night and chatting a while, Lazaro left but had not yet exited the building... “when I heard a tremendous blast in the room; it sounded like a real explosion” (*Antes* 337). He thought perhaps it was a jealous lover or a burglar

who broke the window from the street using a crowbar or other blunt instrument. When he rushed to the bedroom window, the glass was completely intact. Then he realized, “something very strange had occurred in the room: the glass of water on my nightstand had exploded without my touching it; it was shattered” (*Antes* 338). Arenas rushed to the door of the apartment and called out to Lazaro to come back and together they inspected the apartment from top to bottom to discover the cause. Arenas thought that perhaps it had been the work of Cuban state security forces since they threatened his life on many occasions. He also carried with him the memory of how they treated Virgilio Piñera when he died from a heart attack under mysterious circumstances and the Cuban state seized his manuscripts and sealed his home. I will discuss this incident in greater detail ahead when I turn to the question of their special relationship. During the time he had lived in that apartment, on several occasions he came home to find the window open, and it appeared his personal belongings had been ransacked. He believed it was not a burglar because nothing was stolen. The self-shattering glass of water by the side of the bed was a complete mystery. What could have caused something that was clearly not a dream?

After a week had passed, Arenas says that he understood... “that this was an omen, a premonition, a message from the gods of the underworld, a new and terrible message announcing that something truly different was about to happen to me or was already happening” (*Before* 314). Arenas interpreted the explosion in his bedroom the week before as a supernatural sign. “The glass full of water was perhaps a sort of guardian angel, a talisman; something had penetrated the glass that for years had protected me and shielded me from all dangers” (*Before* 314). In other words, the glass which had protected him at the worst moments of his life suddenly turned into a herald angel, warning him that the grace he had been living under nearly his entire life was about to come to an end. “Something more powerful, more mysterious, more sinister than anything I had ever

experienced seemed to be controlling my fate” (*Before* 315). The self-shattering glass meant his salvation had come to an end. “It was the deity that protected me; it was the goddess that had always accompanied me, it was the Moon herself, my mother had turned into the Moon” (*Before* 316). What follows in the last paragraph of this chapter is an apostrophe in the form of a prayer to the Moon Goddess, the anthropomorphic deity Yemayá, who is worshipped in the religions of Umbanda, Santería, Yoruba, Ifá, and Candomblé. Yemayá is known to the faithful as the goddess of the sea, the guider of fertility, the protector of home, family, boats, and fishermen. She is a loa who traveled from Africa to Cuba with the people who had been enslaved because of the ignorance of colonial traders who never understood their worth as human beings. She, who protected her people from the barbarity and persecution of those who dared to call themselves “owners” had been his *real* mother his entire life.

My great goddess, my true goddess, you who have protected me through so many calamities; I used to look up toward you and behold you; up to you rising above the sea, toward you at the shore, toward you among the rocks of my desolate island, I would lift my gaze and behold you, always the same; in your face I saw an expression of pain, of suffering, of compassion for me, your son. (*Antes* 340)

The shattering glass symbolically, supernaturally, meant that night had fallen. “Dreams” is the last chapter in *Before Night Falls*. What follows is Arenas’ suicide note, written as a letter to his friends. He states that because of the precarity of his health and the terrible sentimental depression he felt about no longer being able to write and fight for the freedom of Cuba, he has decided to end his life. “During the past few years, even though I felt very ill, I have been able to finish my literary work, to which I have devoted almost thirty years. You are heirs of all my terrors, but also of my hope that Cuba will soon be free” (*Before* 317). Arenas felt satisfied that he could contribute to the project of Cuban liberty, to rid his beloved country from the Frankenstein monster, created by Fidel Castro, that continues to dominate the island from which no one can escape, not even in exile, as he explained in the interview with Espinosa Domínguez. “There is

only one person I hold accountable: Fidel Castro” (*Before* 317). Arenas did not want anyone to feel bad about his decision because he saw his suicide as a necessity like a heroic final act. He wanted to be remembered as one who struggled for the freedom write and have glorious erotic sex before AIDS became the ultimate prison of insularity, inner exile, insilio.

Arenas kept his AIDS status a closely guarded secret from the international press. The revelation after his suicide note was published gave his work the punch it needed to scream about the sinister virus which he claimed was the work of a scientific genius. He understood this to be a possibility given his knowledge about biology. After the diagnosis, he received various treatments for pneumonia, toxoplasmosis, and Kaposi sarcoma, which had invaded his mouth. He says, from his perspective in 1991, that AIDS is a mystery because doctors only treat the opportunistic infections and secondary illnesses—the symptoms—but have no true knowledge of the causative agent. “Nobody really knows” (*Before* xvi). He questions the nature of the disease. “I can attest, though, that as a disease it is different from all others. Diseases are natural phenomena, and everything natural is imperfect and can somehow be fought and overcome” (*Before* xvii). Disease causing organisms will not survive if they kill off all their hosts. The human immune system adapts to their presence and hosts survive. Perhaps what he says next provides a clue about why he kept silent about his status and decided to reveal it through the last two novels he completed before taking his life in a suicide. He did not dare express what he really thought about AIDS before night fell.

AIDS is a perfect illness because it is so alien to human nature and has as its function to destroy life in the most cruel and systematic way. Never before has such a formidable calamity affected mankind. Such diabolic perfection makes one ponder the possibility that human beings may have had a hand in its creation. Moreover, all the rulers of the world, that reactionary class always in power, and the powerful within any system, must feel grateful to AIDS because a good part of the marginal population, whose only aspiration is to live and who therefore oppose all dogma and political hypocrisy, will be wiped out. (*Before* xvii)

From our perspective in 2023, this idea is not new. Since the HIV/AIDS crisis began, there have been those who documented evidence to help support the theory that HIV was man made. These ideas are not born out of mental illness or speculation based on unfounded facts, they became salient because the symptoms that arise amid withheld facts produced suspicion toward the official story or explanation. Many people have learned not to trust authority figures. That is the way it has been for a long time. Arenas had good reason to suspect that AIDS was a conspiracy of biopolitical power because he knew about strategies used by state security apparatuses such as the KGB and the CIA with their highly specialized means of assassination. As neurotic as Arenas became about persecution, even after he went into exile, as we see when the glass exploded next to the bed in “Dreams” and the first idea that came to his mind was that the Cuban security forces were somehow responsible, dropping what to him might have seemed like a bombshell at the time would be a major reason to keep silent about his AIDS status till after his death. His worry would have been that the sinister forces that created the deadly plague would retaliate, at best turn him into a no persona and censor his writing, like they did in Cuba, or even worse, kill him and those he cared about the most. He had no interest in an encore performance of that magnitude. It is also important to mention that there are those who claim that Fidel Castro may have used biological warfare against Cubans, inside and outside of the Revolution. But that is another rabbit hole that I do not currently care to explore. Silently acquiescing to AIDS while continuing to write gave Arenas hope that his fellow Cubans, his homosexual Latin American kindred spirits, all those who loved the freedom to create art, to express their thoughts in a free society, and read his work would learn important lessons that he learned because of his stubbornness and zest for life. Since AIDS represented an unnatural force that he could do nothing about. His silence about AIDS during his life became the seeds of his life after death.

One cannot negate that the final scene in which Arenas prayed to Virgilio Piñera for three more years of life amounted to a near-death experience that was surreal, or at the very least, fantastic; much like the narration of the final chapter of *Before Night Falls* called “Dreams.” Do these scenes that describe supernatural events as the reality of his life reflect the enunciative acts and thematic concerns associated with magical realism, the marvelous real, or the theater of the absurd? Should we merely attribute the scene’s fantastic or surreal aspects to the delusions of an AIDS infected mind? Did Arenas not claim *Before Night Falls* was an autobiography? Arenas says that in response to his insistence for three more years of life, “I think Virgilio’s face darkened, as if I had asked for something outrageous” (*Before* xvii). Was he *really* asking for too much? In the moment of writing the introduction and the narration of the scene, Arenas reflects in the next sentence. “It has almost been three years now since that desperate request” (*Before* xvii). In other words, he got his wish, he lived long enough to complete his autobiography and his *pentagonía*, which could be understood as agony in five installments. Does the autobiography count as a sixth? The sequencing of ideas in “The End” is deliberately fashioned for maximum emotional impact and to frame the story he is about to tell, which is a mostly chronological account of his life from birth to death. In 1991, unable to write due to the extreme deterioration of his body because of his AIDS and no longer feeling sexually desirable but having completed his major writing goals, Arenas ends his life in a suicide.

Zoe Valdés sees Arenas’ suicide as continuing in the tradition of so many Cuban intellectuals and politicians since Jose Martí, who mounted a white horse and galloped into the enemy's oncoming bullets. She finds it curious that the last thought on Arenas’ mind was Fidel Castro. I find it curious as well, but only because it casts him as the ultimate villain in the story. Like the dying word “Rosebud” on the lips of the publisher in *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles, Fidel

Castro on Arenas' dying breath creates a mystery that the reader will likely feel compelled to solve, a mystery that cannot be solved by merely reading *Before Night Falls*. At the very least, they will submerge themselves in the *pentagonía*, then *Necesidad de libertad*, perhaps a few academic articles. The valuable lesson the reader will hopefully learn is that our lives only survive in the memories of others, and when those memories are written down into a coherent narrative, we continue to live when the narrative continues to be read. Unlike history that records dates, facts, and numbers, memory records emotions, experiences, and desires. Memory does not rely on linearity and chronology. It allows a movement back and forth through time that ultimately diminishes time's importance in telling a story and conveying meaning. This movement is present in the narratives crafted by Arenas through flashbacks and tangents, as he zigs zags through the past on the magic carpet of his memory and imagination. If the story and its meaning are compelling, then the narrative continues to be read when one reader recommends it to another. History is more about noisy promotion, whereas memory is more about silent attraction.

Many literary critics and historians have written about Reinaldo Arenas, his autobiography, novels, poetry, politics, sexuality, and death in relation to the question of what it means to be Cuban. Anyone interested in reading his works and studying his life will find no shortage of those who feel invested in their perception of who they think Reinaldo Arenas is and what he means to Cuba and the global community. What I have attempted to do in this first section is to highlight some of the contagious metaphors and viral bodies that he uses in his narrative to express his blasphemies, the erotic splendor of his fantasies, and the tender mercies of his beloved deities. What most people who study Arenas do not realize is that an encounter with the discursive world that surrounds him is somewhat like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The reader falls down a rabbit hole into a fantastic world where reality and fiction collide in what seem like impossible

stories. But for people like myself, a grateful long-term survivor of AIDS, there are many parts of his story, absurd as they may seem, that ring true and accurately reflect realities I lived in the flesh.

The best way to visualize how all the stories written *by* Reinaldo Arenas interconnect with the stories written *about* him is to think of a mycelium, the incredibly tiny “threads” of a greater fungal organism that wrap around or bore into the roots of plants and trees. Together they form a network that connects individual living organisms so that water, nitrogen, carbon, and other materials can transfer between them. When it comes to Reinaldo Arenas, those nutrients are his contagious metaphors and viral bodies. Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) proposed the terms “rhizome” and “rhizomatic,” metaphors that invoke the image of a giant mass of roots, to refer to an “abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field” (7). Their rhizome metaphor “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (*Plateaus* 7). In this concept of what can be understood as the many non-hierarchical connections between history and culture, the “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (*Plateaus* 25). Stated differently, there is no genesis or origin since the rhizome resists chronological organization and favors nomadic growth and propagation. Arenas’ *oeuvre*, his life’s work, is a rhizomatic abstract machine that functions in a similar manner as what Deleuze and Guattari describe. Moreover, in Foucault’s sense of the “author function” in “What is an author?” (1969) published in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (1998), author Reinaldo Arenas is the hero at the center of a rhizomatic structure of discourses that underscore the kinship between exile, inner exile, writing, and death.

Unlike the hero in a Greek epic, who gains immortality by accepting an early death, and whose acceptance of that death is justified in the narrative, Arenas murders the author and assumes the role of the dead man in the game of writing, allowing first, second, and third person narrators to appear in his texts as a variety of egos, second-selves, avatars, or what some critics call “author surrogates,” who occupy a plurality of subjective positions within the narratives. Their speech acts grant him immortality, even after Arenas chose death by suicide. Contrary to Foucault’s assertion about the limits of the author function in literary production, Arenas’ function as an author *is* what Foucault calls “transdiscursive” because, even as a novelist, he created the rules for the formation of other texts (a theory of the novel) and established the endless possibility of discourse. We see this in the ever-expanding universe of critical essays, book chapters, monographs, and dissertations that continue to either echo or contradict his concerns.

Homosexual Persecution, Marketing, and the Macho War on *Locas*

Aviva Chomsky, in her (2011) book *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, characterizes Cuba’s rupture with its past, as embodied in the heroic vision of Fidel Castro triumphantly entering Havana on January 1, 1959, with his troops, by stating that “the war was over, but the revolution was just about to begin” (43). Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara had secured a place both in the Cuban cultural imaginary and the global gaze as inspirational Cuban symbols of macho masculine virility. Krissie Butler in her dissertation “Deconstructing an Icon: Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Masculinity” argues that the gendered representation of these two men have not only left an indelible mark on Cuban cultural geography, but they are also intimately linked to power through the portrayal of hegemonic and legitimizing patriarchal authority that produces gendered revolutionary subjects. Krissie Butler analyzes the politics of gender and the definition of masculinity which construct Castro as a macho to construct a theoretical model of hegemonic masculinity. Even though many resist the imposition of revolutionary manhood, the resistance

inevitably fails due to the vigilant policing of gender codes. Erotic homosexual and homosocial encounters are forced into clandestinity where the potential for violent abuse increases as gendered revolutionary subjects strive to protect the public perception of their masculinity.

Even before the triumph of the revolution in 1959, Fidel Castro had different goals in mind, which evolved based on the circumstances he confronted. Chomsky points out that when discussing Cuban Revolutionary history, “the Revolution refers to a 50-year process of consciously creating a new society with many different phases, twists, and turns” (43). The “50-year process” Chomsky refers to is the unique character of the Cuban revolution, which Sartre in 1961 describes as a series of *improvisations*, “una técnica defensiva; la Revolución cubana debe *adaptarse* constantemente a las maniobras enemigas” [a defensive technique; the Cuban Revolution must constantly *adapt* to enemy maneuvers] (6, emphasis original). What this means is that the revolution in Cuba has been in a constant state of (re)defining its ideology, even since before its inception, as signaled by Rafael Rojas in his book *Isla sin fin* (1998), wherein he traces a genealogy of elite intellectuals, the messianic character of the Revolution and constructs an archaeology of Cuban national discourse.

In the overall arc of Arenas’ story, Fidel Castro is the deadly Jesuit educated master manipulator that studied law and social sciences, who audaciously declared himself the supreme leader of Cuba’s destiny—he would define what it meant to be Cuban. We see the impunity of his intentions in the four-hour speech he gave at the sentencing hearing following his trial after the failed assault on the Moncada and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes barracks on the 26th of July. Castro based his defense on the argument that Batista’s government was illegally constituted through a military coup and that citizens had the inherent right to rebel against such an illegal government. He credited Jose Martí as the intellectual author of the attack, dubbing him the apostle of Cuban

independence, and himself, a faithful acolyte. He projected himself as an indispensable messianic figure whose destiny was to serve the fatherland. The tribunal was not convinced, and Castro received a fifteen-year sentence. Sympathizers smuggled his speech out of the prison, it was turned into a manifesto, and then published as a book by Haydée Santamaria with the iconic phrase from his speech “la historia me absolverá” [history will absolve me] as its title. Santamaria was one of Castro’s coconspirators in the assault on the Moncada barracks. After the revolution triumphed, she founded Casa de las Américas, arguably Cuba’s most important cultural institution. Once Fidel Castro occupied the seat of power in Cuba, he veered away from the central thesis of his manifesto and gradually embraced totalitarianism. With the help of key allies, such as Haydée Santamaria founding director of Casa de las Américas, Alfredo Guevara director of ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos), and Nicolás Guillén founding director of UNEAC (Union de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) he seized control of the canons of the island’s cultural history and began to exert tremendous influence on knowledge creation in Cuba and later throughout Latin America. Castro assigned himself the task of steering the course of Cuban history and defining the future limits of its cultural production.

Arenas responded to Castro’s claim of historical absolution in *Necesidad de libertad*. “...los que por más de veinte años hemos padecido el siniestro esplendor del neofascismo con máscara humana, tenemos derecho a afirmar que la verdadera historia, la historia de los pueblos, no es la historia de sus dictadores. Y que esta historia—discriminada y difuminada de millones de víctimas, no absolverá jamás a sus asesinos” [Those of us who for more than twenty years have suffered the sinister splendor of neo-fascism with a human mask, have the right to affirm that the true history, the history of the peoples, is not the history of their dictators. And that this history—discriminated against and blurred by millions of victims—will never absolve their murderers] (24).

With this declaration, Arenas defines the terms of his engagement in the cultural war against Fidel Castro and his totalitarian regime. The pompous officialism and judgement of a canonical history that portrays Fidel Castro as a loyal acolyte of the founding fathers of Cuban independence would be contested with what Arenas calls the true history of the people, an alternate history that recuperates the memory of the multitude of bodies subjected to an endless parade of enslavements, exterminations, executions, exiles, expulsions, concentration camps, political, sexual, and religious persecutions, military actions, massive raids, forced disappearances, and compulsory adoration of totalitarian leaders. For Arenas, the canon of the true history of Cuba, what he calls “the secret history,” can only be inscribed from memory. Arenas’ entire body of work is dedicated to this endeavor.

Fidel Castro leveraged ideas proposed by Ernesto Guevara, the young Argentine medical student he met in Mexico in 1955, to establish the nation’s teleology. Castro moved quickly to capitalize on Guevara’s international appeal, so he could impose a new destiny on Cuba and its cultural imaginary. Cubanness would henceforth be constituted in the idea of creating a *new man* for the twenty first century, conceived as a political body with a decidedly heterosexual and messianic character, a true revolutionary with an impassioned spirit of love for his people and its sacred causes. To begin the institutionalization of the new man and protect its hygiene, Castro declared the Revolution to be socialist/communist and established a decidedly Stalinist political structure, which sought to identify enemies, both inside and outside of the revolution. One of these enemies he identified were homosexual intellectuals who held influential access to cultural production inside Cuba. To deal with this enemy, Castro proceeded methodically, since he was carefully fashioning a public persona that relied on the goodwill of leftist sympathizers within the imperial power that he claimed his revolution struggled against. Castro played to an international

left in the West that had begun to include homosexual concerns in their politics. With both Castro and Guevara giving interviews to press in the United States, few could resist the romantic notion of a “new man” for the twenty first century, especially if they were going to resemble the bearded macho personas projected in the media by these two men. To counter the narrative of the new man and the telos of Cuba’s “official” historical canon, Arenas exalts the autobiographical self-fashioning of memory to recall thousands of homosexual encounters with revolutionary men which he narrates in both *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, to demonstrate the hypocrisy of revolutionary masculinity and show that Castro’s recruits were just as queer as he was. The target of his discursive vengeance are the pillars of totalitarianism and neofascism embodied in the synecdoche of Fidel Castro, who Arenas holds in the same regard as Adolf Hitler, Primo de Rivera, and Juan Domingo Perón.

Author Zoé Valdés, a Cuban exile like Arenas, claims in *La ficción Fidel* (2008) that Fidel Castro’s genius, beside his ability to concentrate (*masificar*) people into tight spaces, was to inoculate them from the poison of totalitarianism. Valdés sees Castro as a master manipulator and seductive hypnotist whose revolution is a case study. “Porque Fidel Castro ha sido el más grande especialista de marketing que ha dado la historia contemporánea. Creó un producto: la revolución, y todo el mundo se la compró. Creó un héroe, el Ché, y creo que le ha ganado a Marilyn en ventas de camisetas con su cara” [Because Fidel Castro has been the greatest marketing specialist in contemporary history. He created a product: the revolution, and everyone bought it. He created a hero, Ché, and I think he has beaten Marilyn in sales of t-shirts with his face] (Valdés). The image of Guevara’s face Valdés refers to is known as “Guerrillero Heróico,” taken by Alberto Korda in March 1960 at the La Coubre memorial service, which critics like Michael Casey argue has been transformed into a logo like the Nike Swoosh or McDonald’s Golden Arches. His face has become

a form of branding for the revolution. But above all, Valdés claims, “se creó a si mismo; él es su propio Doctor Frankenstein, él mismo cosió al monstruo” [he created himself; he is his own Doctor Frankenstein, he sewed the monster himself] (Valdés). It is this Frankenstein monster that Arenas lampoons in *Before Night Falls* and most of the other works he produced, just like Valdés does in her works. I am aware that Cuban exiles are not a homogenous group: their literatures in exile posit a variety of political messages and imagine the nation left behind in distinct ways. But much like Arenas, who took inspiration from the poetic praxis of Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima, Valdés receives inspiration from them all. One writer infects the next with their poetics, which we can understand as thematic concerns and enunciative modes. Valdés sees Arenas as a visionary, not only in his appreciation of Cuban reality from the perspective of an exiled writer in the United States, but also in his appreciation of what she calls “el caos americano” [American chaos]. She admires Arenas’ fortitude in the face of the terrible adversity he encountered in the US, “por causa de llevar el emblema libertario en contra de los regímenes totalitarios, y como amante estudioso de la cultura europea y de su situación económica y social” [because of wearing the libertarian emblem against totalitarian regimes, and as a studious lover of European culture and its economic and social situation] (Valdés). In addition to Arenas’ perspectives as an exiled Cuban writer, Valdés values his incessant questioning aimed at the mediocrity of a conceptually stylized revolution. She honors that in his last breath, Arenas directs a letter to Fidel Castro stating, “Cuba será libre. Yo ya lo soy” [Cuba will be free. I already am] which appears in his suicide note at the end of *Before Night Falls*. Now, let me move back in time to explain the circumstances of how the persecution of homosexuals began under the Castro led revolution in Cuba.

In *Before Night Falls*, *Necesidad de libertad*, and to a certain extent in *The Color of Summer*, Reinaldo Arenas tells the story about how a prohibition to express same sex desire in art

and literature escalated into what Carlos Franqui, former director of the newspaper *Revolución*, characterizes as “gang warfare disguised as revolutionary politics... a collective exercise in machismo” (150). Franqui is the author of *Family Portrait with Fidel* (1981). He was a media savvy and loyal supporter of the revolution, who also worked with Ernesto Guevara in the clandestine radio station *Radio Rebelde*. Castro defenestrated Franqui after he angrily pointed out that Castro’s revolutionary security forces were overly preoccupied with homosexuality. Franqui explains in his book that many intellectuals were “troubled by his [Castro’s] antihomosexual movement” (140), especially after Virgilio Piñera was arrested in 1961 “in his house at midnight, dragged down to the Principe [a notorious castle converted into a prison], and dressed in his uniform—a scene right out of one of his own absurdist stories” (140). The other prisoners at the Principe could not believe that Piñera was a prisoner like them rather, they thought he was some sort of revolutionary agent, or spy, sent there to collect information. The ordeal overwhelmed Piñera. “He was surrounded and threatened, and only survived because he fainted” (Franqui 140). Piñera was eventually released and allowed to return to his home, but his psyche and his faith in the revolution were shattered.

It was clear to Franqui that Castro’s henchmen led by Ramiro Valdés (no relation to Zoé) were bitterly determined to mimic the Soviet, Chinese, Vietnamese, Czech, and German policies toward homosexuals, which they consulted and planned to use: “execution, twenty years at hard labor, reeducation camps” (Franqui 140). Franqui’s rage exploded after Valdés led what he calls “Operation P,” a violent police raid, in October 1961. Franqui explains that the operation was “the first massive socialist raid of the Cuban revolution” (139). According to Franqui, the letter P stood for “prostitutes,” “pimps,” and “pederasts” and, “like a Cubist phallic symbol,” was sewn onto the backs of the black and white striped uniforms the prisoners were obligated to wear (140). The

link with Nazism becomes corporeal when we consider how the Nazi's used pink triangles to mark homosexual bodies during the Holocaust, which Castro's henchmen used to produce a similar humiliating and dehumanizing effect. Franqui explains that Cubans would never use such terminology to refer to homosexuals, since they had other more colorful metaphors they used in everyday speech, like *maricón* and *pájaro*. Franqui confronted Ramiro Valdés for his excessive use of force of the moral purge which not only targeted homosexuals, but also “vagrants, suspicious types, intellectuals, artists, Catholics, Protestants, [and] practitioners of voodoo” (138). The two men ferociously argued.

Valdés initially thought Franqui was mad about Piñera being arrested, but Franqui was mad about the violent way the operation was carried out. “I told him I protested the persecution of people who, according to the Marxists themselves, were nothing more than victims of the old society” (Franqui 140-41). Valdés wanted to bring an end to homosexuality and degeneration in Cuba. Franqui pointed out that “none of the great tyrants, Hitler and Stalin among them, had managed such a thing” and “that historically the greatest prosecutors of homosexuals had themselves been homosexuals” (141). Valdés became enraged at Franqui's insinuation that seemed to question his machismo and accused him of defending homosexuality and corrupting revolutionary morality. At this point Fidel Castro and, then president of Cuba, Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado intervened to assuage the two men. They announced that the prostitutes would be rehabilitated and made into “new women, with new jobs;” the pimps would be fully prosecuted; and homosexuals would not be prosecuted, but they would never be allowed to influence art, culture, or education in Cuba ever again (Franqui 141). The same year Castro issued a directive during a speech known as “Palabras a los intelectuales” [Words to the Intellectuals]. During his speech to the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas, Castro explained his vision for Cuban artists within

the Revolution: “Creo que esto es bien claro. ¿Cuáles son los derechos de los escritores y artistas revolucionarios o no revolucionarios? Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, ningún derecho.” In other words, those who would not use their talents to further the revolutionary ideology would lose any privileges they had. They would lose their right to work in any cultural capacity. What Castro’s words foreshadowed was legislation that would come later, depriving all artists of the right to hold copyright to their intellectual property.

Although in theory the raid was meant to install law and order and clean up the Bohemian sectors of Havana where sex trafficking occurred, Franqui describes the raid as a pretense because it became something more than just a roundup. The real intent was to terrorize homosexual intellectuals and inaugurate a “Reign of Terror” (Franqui 141). “The police invaded private homes because they had lists of people they wanted. And all this with no warning, without even the pretense of legality” (Franqui 139-40). As the Argentine poet Néstor Perlongher describes the situation in his reading of Franqui’s memoir during a talk called “Loca Sex” published in *Plebian Prose* (2019), the power-mad *machistas* of the revolution declared war on the *locas* (21). In *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, Arenas characterizes the revolution’s adoption of the policies of other communist nations toward homosexuality as a sort of sexual orientation cleansing, a way of silencing those who did abide by the standards of revolutionary masculinity and obey its morality. Arenas points out, however, in several of his writings that there were homosexuals who worked for the revolution and mysteriously occupied powerful special positions, such as Alfredo Guevara (no relation to Che), who was named director of ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos). Alfredo Guevara is one of many targets Arenas lampoons in his writing.

To protect the carefully crafted public image of the gendered revolutionary subjectivity, the regime's extreme homophobia institutionalized machismo through the creation Defense Committees, or CDRs (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución). Inaugurated in 1960, the CDRs were arguably the most powerful of Castro's biopolitical technologies. Because of its centralized, panoptic structure, it operated at the grassroots level as collective community surveillance. Besides functioning as health, hygiene, and economic promoters, individual members of the committee's became deputized to denounce any behavior that could even remotely be considered counterrevolutionary. The CDRs effectively silenced nearly everyone from speaking critically about the revolutionary government but had a more deleterious effect on homosexual intellectuals who were seen as pariahs with the potential to contaminate and subvert the national project of the new man.

Another biopolitical innovation were the UMAPs (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción). Although they were officially created by Fidel Castro in 1965, the campaign against homosexuality in Cuba in the form of raids, incarceration, and forced labor had begun years earlier as pointed out by Carlos Franqui. The most notorious UMAP was in Camagüey. Castro did not merely target homosexuals but anyone who did not conform to the standards of revolutionary masculinity and morality. All people who physically or verbally manifested a countercultural appearance, which included young hippies with long hair, were sent to these camps to be reeducated, forced to cut sugarcane, and labor on other agricultural tasks. Arenas strategically called these places "concentration camps" to explicitly link Fidel Castro with Adolf Hitler and the plight of Cuban homosexuals with the agony of homosexuals in the Nazi concentration camps during the Shoah. The connection did not go unnoticed by the Castro regime. Raul Castro vehemently denied the accusation saying that the camps were created to help wayward youth

reform their lives. The explicit threat Arenas wanted to communicate to the international community was that extermination of homosexuals in Cuba was imminent because Cuba's Stalinist ideology regarded homosexual bodies as disposable. Arenas knew that the persecution unleashed in 1961 was camouflaged amid claims that the actions taken were aimed at rehabilitating effeminate men and other forms of gendered deviance like prostitution. He also knew that Castro sought to influence the opinion of leftist sympathizers among the international intellectual community and hypocritically engaged them using outright fabrications. Castro's disingenuous engagement with outsiders is one of the reasons why Zoé Valdés accuses Castro of being a marketing genius. If the connection Arenas makes between Cuba's camps and those in Nazi Germany seems like hyperbole, consider that Ernesto Guevara (no relation to Alfredo Guevara) ordered a sign posted at the entrance to the camp in Camagüey, with a slogan which read "Work will make you a man." The meaning conveyed was that hard labor would rehabilitate the so-called deviant lifestyles of the homosexuals imprisoned there. Guevara emphasized "work" because he believed, like many socialist and community hardliners, in the Soviet ideology that equated homosexuality with capitalism, laziness, and medical pathology. Also, it is hard to miss how Guevara's slogan echoes the slogan posted at the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp, which read "Arbeit macht frei" [work sets you free]. The problem for homosexual intellectuals around the world was that no one knew just how far Castro and Guevara would go, if they would resort to genocide at a massive scale. The metaphorization of the term concentration camp contagiously communicated the exceptional conditions of persecution and repression in Cuba that for homosexual dissidents became an existential threat.

Carlos Franqui's take on machismo in the section titled "Fidel: Origins and Education" provides us with a valuable context and a different perspective with which to apprehend the way

Arenas views *locas* and homosexuality. To my knowledge, Arenas and Franqui were not direct interlocutors in the early 1960s when the war against homosexual influence in Cuba began. Franqui traces Castro's education and how his earliest formation was under Marist influence and later Jesuit. While enrolled at the University of Havana, Castro tried to make a name for himself practicing what Franqui calls "gangsterism." The university at the time in 1945 was home to two active political groups, the MSR (Movimiento Socialista Revolucionaria) and the UIR (Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria). "Fidel joined the UIR, which had fewer ideological pretensions, and which was composed of less corrupt individuals" (Franqui 150). Also, Franqui casts doubt on the belief that Fidel Castro was a communist. "No one thought Fidel was a Communist. I mean no one" (Franqui 150). Besides telling the story of Castro's trajectory in becoming a leader, Franqui paints him as a sort of mob boss presiding over a gang of machos, a man who took delight in manipulating people to do his bidding. In the *Color of Summer*, Arenas introduces a phantom figure who represents machismo personified using the term "bujarrón," which Hurley translates as "bull macho," "butch," "macho's macho," and "true top." In the chapter titled "HM, Top, Seeking Same...", Arenas portrays him as an ailing old man whose greatest tragedy was that "he still craved an ass to screw. And not just any ass, mind you—it had to be an ass-fucker's ass...his prick would come to attention only when it was saluting another top" (*The Color* 63). This mysterious macho figure, who thought of himself as Cuba's only *real man*, a glorious bull super macho top, the only *non-faggot* left on earth, kills himself at Fifo's palace when he realizes that Fifo was just another one of those "pansy faggots...passing themselves off as tops" (*The Color* 64). The bull macho became disillusioned unto death when he walked in on Fifo in an orgiastic daisy chain with Ché Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos.

When Arenas discusses machos, he uses what I call a “bottom-up” approach. For Arenas, all machos are really *locas* pretending to be machos. When Franqui discusses machos, he uses a “top-down” approach. Franqui claims that machismo creates its own life in which everything negative is feminine, including art, music, and culture, which the macho despises because he thinks such expressions are homosexual. According to Franqui, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes have pointed out that everything considered feminine is already always screwed. This would explain why in revolutionary masculinity the man in the active role can be forgiven since the man in the passive role, the one who is penetrated, is to blame for using his inverted femininity to corrupt and seduce the macho who was merely acting out of natural instincts. Franqui theorizes that Latin American machismo “derives from its amalgam of Indian, Spanish, and black cultures. Its negative hero is the dictator...and its positive hero is the rebel. They are at odds in politics, but they both love power. And both despise homosexuality, as if every macho had his hidden gay side” (150). We can think of some of these machos as the closeted *locas* Arenas mentions in his categorization of *locas*, which I will read in a section below. In the chapter with the bull macho, Arenas seems to suggest that for those pretending to be machos, possessing a *loca* sexually is a way to assert the power of their machismo. Franqui asserts that the macho “idealizes the country because the city, for him, is the scene of degeneration and homosexuality” (150). Fidel Castro did not believe that the Cuban countryside produced homosexuals, but Franqui pointed out that Castro’s perception was incorrect, asserting that the campesinos who awakened to their homosexuality moved to the cities where they could blend in. “He refused to believe me” (Franqui 150). According to Franqui, besides questions of gender and sex, machismo is also tied to race. “It’s true that the two brands of machismo, conservative and rebel, are quite different. The conservatives (generals, soldiers, police) always defend the establishment, while the rebels attack it. Nevertheless, both groups share

the same views about morality and culture” (Franqui 150). Franqui explains that machos hate popular culture because of its contamination with non-white elements such as Indian and black. This means that within the culture of machismo, surveillance mechanisms are essential to protect the hygiene of the macho’s perceived whiteness. Phallic symbols become extremely important instruments to shore up the macho’s fragile ego and sexuality. According to Franqui, the macho symbol par excellence is the pistol, which became Castro’s principal fascination, “the gift he gives to those he esteems” (151).

In *The Color of Summer*, Arenas mentions pistols seventeen times. The machos in the story use the pistols both to seduce the *locas* and then entrap them, especially when the pistol bulges in the macho’s pants near the crotch. In stark contrast to the way the machos use the pistols, the *locas* use them to get attention, or they keep them on reserve in case they need to blow their own brains out. Although the pistols in *The Color of Summer* are not used to cause serious damage, they are symbols of the war waged by machos against *locas*, and Arenas makes the connection even more obvious through a character named Pistolprick. Arenas describes Pistolprick as a “hot-hot-hot mulatto queen” (*The Color* 399).

Pistolprick was a *stunning* specimen of manhood who worked in Fifo’s Ministry of the Interior and kept a .45 in his shorts. His secret mission was detecting which Cuban diplomat was a swish. The driver would sit at the wheel of the car with pistol bulging in his crotch, and when the poor queen, in a moment of rapture, madness, of *life*, threw herself onto the bulge, she’d find herself clutching a pistol. “If you turn it loose, it fires,” the driver would say as he took out a camera and photographed the queen with her hand in the cookie jar. (*The Color* 399 emphasis original).

According to one of Arenas’ avatars named queen of Holland, Pistolprick’s technique worked extremely well and ruined the diplomatic careers of many hundreds of functionaries whose lives were reduced to wandering in madness and degradation because Fifo used him and his photographs, showing the diplomats with their hands on Pistolpricks fly, to blackmail them.

Arenas stresses Fifo's deployment of Pistolprick and the technique he uses to entrap the diplomats, not only to symbolically connect the pistol to the phallus, but also to ridicule the hypocrisy of an undercover macho law enforcement regime that spends an inordinate amount of effort and resources to entrap homosexuals by studying and performing their erotic codes. His aim is to show how the Cuban war against homosexuals affects the productivity of their lives, stripping them of their dignity and purpose in life. In this section I have shown how Franqui's take on machismo helps us to understand how, whether left or right, rebel or reactionary, the cultural war against *locas* leaves no space in their imagined utopias for homosexuals. In the next section, I will discuss the circumstances that motivated and enable Arenas to exact discursive vengeance in his literary project, to intervene in the Cuban national discourse.

Discursive and Literary Vengeance

In this section I argue that in his writings, Arenas positioned himself as a radical subversive homosexual activist who sought to achieve a Foucauldian transformation of the Cuban cultural imaginary by creating a discourse demonstrating that same-sex desire has been an integral part of Cuban culture since before the triumph of Castro's regime. The discursive vengeance in both *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer* aims to unmask the fallacy of the revolution's heterosexual hygiene by explicitly detailing many highly eroticized sexual encounters down to the last drop of semen with gendered revolutionary subjects, such as those discussed by Ruth Behar in *Cuba, the Elusive Nation: Interpretations of National Identity* (2000). In her chapter title "Post-Utopia: The Erotics of Power and Cuba's Revolutionary Children," Behar writes "Fidel, fused and confused with Cortés, Zapata, and Bolivar, became inseparable from the revolution and from the nation—the nation gendered as male, or *la patria*, the fatherland...only the heterosexual male revolutionary could confront the emasculating power of U.S. imperialism" (138). Behar explains that transmission of power in Cuba only occurred along male lineages and that after the triumph

of the revolution those who deviated from the ideal of the new man were severely punished. “Nothing has ever threatened the utopia of new men more profoundly than homosexuality, a supposed ‘deviation’ from ‘true’ manhood” (Behar 140). In the discourse of his writing, Arenas confronts the corruption of the law enforcement apparatus and penal system that punished him for rejecting the new man ideology. He denounces the state-controlled citizen committees and artistic production unions that vilify homosexual desire, while emphasizing the ubiquity of same-sex desire in Cuba. What interests me most in this section is not only the discourse that seeks to inscribe a queer form of masculinity within the Cuban nation building project, but I will also argue in my analysis of *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer* that Arenas exacts queer revenge through a discursive and literary destabilization of the concept of revolutionary masculinity, while challenging the complex cultural geography of Cuban identity and contesting the inscription of heteronormative patriarchal masculinity. He accomplishes his intervention by attacking its foundations all the way back to patriarchal creation mythology. Arenas’ literary vengeance ruptures the continuity of patriarchal masculinity by opening an autobiographical space in which other heteronormative dissidents, from any place on the planet, can mimic or replicate the way he confronts it using fantastic, carnivalesque, and blasphemous discourse. Arenas points the way for others to harness the Foucauldian “author function” to leverage knowledges extracted from memories shared through clandestine circuits of distribution, deriving from local and international sources, and accomplish their own discursive transformations. In sum, my contention is that Arenas has become the founder of a transdiscursive field of knowledge creation.

Michel Foucault in his famous 1969 lecture: *What is an Author?* examines the relationships between texts and authors and arrives at an idea he expresses as the “author function,” which he describes as being a “discursive construct” tied to an author’s name and granted a privileged “mode

of existence, circulation, and functioning...within a society.” Furthermore, Foucault expresses in his lecture that “discourses are objects of appropriation” in the sense that other thinkers can take possession of the ideas expressed in a text and add other ideas to them and then even transform the ideas such that the original author becomes a “founder of discursivity.” They create the “possibility and rules for the formation of other texts.” In other words, an individual author can create a work that, by virtue of their notoriety, becomes the genesis of a discourse that then can be widely proliferated. Its mode of existence can be identified, appropriated, and then (re)transmitted. This idea is particularly useful as I begin to read Reinaldo Arenas because his autobiography and the many other self-referential novels he wrote, considering Foucault’s discussion of the author function, can be read as a discursive construct. Furthermore, Michel Foucault in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) describes how knowledge is accumulated and how the apparent continuity ruptures in the face of displacements and transformations. Foucault writes:

...they suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from its empirical origin and its original motivations, cleanse it of its imaginary complicities; they direct historical analysis away from the search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors, towards the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects. (*Archaeology* 4).

It is my position that Arenas’ queer discursive vengeance is such a displacing and transformative discourse because it attempts to redirect the knowledge he accumulated while working at the Biblioteca Nacional with a privileged access to books from around the world towards a new rationality, one in which other masculinities are acceptable, even effeminate ones. Arenas could have ended up like so many censored and exiled Cuban writers, relegated to oblivion both inside and outside of the Revolution.

When he was prohibited from writing inside the Revolution he continued in the face of censorship and political persecution—his manuscripts were smuggled out of the country, and some

were translated into French and English and published abroad. Arenas describes this situation about the silencing of Cuban writers both inside and outside of the Revolution in his chapter titled “Exile.”

It was a paradox and at the same time a good example of the tragic fate Cuban writers have suffered throughout our history; on our Island we have been condemned to silence, to ostracism, censorship, and prison; in exile, despised and forsaken by our fellow exiles. (*Before* 291)

It is quite clear now that oblivion was not in the cards for Arenas regardless of his exile, his conflicts with other exiled Cubans, his affliction with AIDS, or his suicide.

Arenas furiously wrote and published what he could, positioning himself in rejection to the totalitarian and Stalinist character of the Cuban state. He had already gained notoriety in many parts of the world even before his exile. His notoriety increased even more while living and writing in the United States in the short time he had been in exile from Cuba. Arenas praises his own accomplishments given all the factors that could have silenced him.

In the three years I had been out of Cuba I had taken part in three international films: *In His Own Words* (1980) by Jorge Ulla; *The Other Cuba* (1983) for Italian television, by Carlos Franqui and Valerio Rivas; and *Improper Conduct* (1983) by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal. I had also traveled through much of Europe, written or rewritten six of my books, founded a literary magazine, and managed...to get my mother all the way from Holguin to New York... (*Before* 306)

Since Arenas exacted his literary revenge, we have seen the effects of his activism lead to an explosion of publications that seek to analyze his works—we see the results of his author function playing out as critics and writers continue to construct a transtextual web of discourses, widening and amplifying the rupture he created in the telos of Cuban cultural history. Critics such as Emilio Bejel and Jorge Olivares, both Cuban scholars in the United States, have written extensively on Arenas’ works. Each new study to emerge offers different perspectives, interpretations, and transformations that in many instances come from privileged access to Arenas’ archive—the papers housed at Princeton University and the many recordings, videos, and articles that offer

direct interviews and testimony from Arenas himself. Together with the testimonies of those who knew Arenas and who have revealed tantalizing details about their experiences with the author serve to broaden the autobiographical space, created by Arenas, for thinkers of all stripes to contest heteronormative prescriptions and offer (re)interpretations of Cuban masculinity. Arenas' (re)interpretation of revolutionary masculinity served to fuel a chain of causality into the future as new readers (researchers, critics, writers, and artists), who are not Cuban but find in Arenas' works a resonance that inspires them to offer their own transformations, enter the discursive fray. These scholarly studies and creative writings function to further destabilize the Cuban cultural imagination and its discursive construction of machismo, while also serving to destabilize queer discourses as well.

Among the queer writers who have confronted revolutionary masculinity, Arenas stands out because of his intrepid contestation of revolutionary masculinity's discursive construction and his contamination of its cultural imaginary, both inside and outside of the revolution. Rafael Ocasio in "Gays and the Cuban Revolution" claims that Arenas "became for a short period of time proof that the Cuban government's literacy campaign, among the nation's first openly socialist projects, could produce literary jewels" (29). Arenas was fully aware of his same-sex desire when the manuscript of his first novel *Celestino antes del alba*, which he wrote between 1963 and 1964, won honorable mention at the *Concurso Nacional de Novela Cirilio Vallaverde* sponsored by UNEAC in 1965. The Swiss born Cuban national Alejo Carpentier presided over the jury in which José Lezama Lima was also a member. Arenas wrote the novel while he worked at the Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba and contributed literary articles to *La Gaceta de Cuba* and *Union*, two periodicals published by UNEAC. While he worked at the library, Arenas read hundreds of books a year. According to Francisco Soto in *Reinaldo Arenas* (1998), the author became friends with

Virgilio Piñera and Jose Lezama Lima in 1964 after they read the draft manuscript of *Celestino*, which Arenas says is book one of his *pentagonía*. It is safe to assume that Arenas was already aware of the revolution's war on *locas* and that Piñera had been arrested and humiliated by the Castro regime during what Franqui called "Operation P." He more than likely felt indignant that his new friend and mentor, Piñera—a man he admired and whose works he extensively read even before working at the national library—had been unjustly targeted. Arenas likely took great pains to camouflage same-sex desire in *Celestino*, although there are scenes that could be understood as emphasizing the thematic concern. According to Soto, Piñera and Lezama marveled that a twenty-one-year-old young man from the countryside could produce such a fantastic novel. They urged him to submit the completed manuscript to the literary contest.

Carpentier was one of the Cuban Revolution's "true believers," or at least what he wanted to believe, given his privileged status within the hierarchy of the Cuban state. His veto in the UNEAC's literary contest denied Arenas first prize. A big surprise, given that in *El reino de este mundo* he theorized Mackandal and Boukman as unique Americans who left an enduring legacy in the Haitian cultural imaginary, offering them as examples of what it meant to be American, which is to control one's own destiny and resist whatever power presents itself, seeking to barbarically enslave and oppress. Carpentier obviously had no space his theorization of Americanness for someone like Arenas, an autodidact homosexual peasant from the Cuban countryside. When one examines how the narrator of *Celestino antes del alba*, and *Celestino* himself, metamorphose into bugs, it quickly becomes evident that a parallel could be drawn with the scene in *El reino de este mundo*, when Mackandal metamorphoses as he is burnt to death before an audience of slaves. To my knowledge, no scholar has undertaken the comparison. Perhaps Carpentier dismissed Arenas' novel as another example of how authors use the supernatural to

distort reality through a surrealist exposition of pure fantasy and carnivalization. Or perhaps he regarded Arenas as a reckless and dangerous upstart. Despite Carpentier's misgivings, the first and only Cuban edition of *Celestino antes del alba* was published by *Ediciones Unión* in 1967 and reportedly sold out within a week. After learning who handed him defeat, Arenas' ambitions about his literary production, what he called his "necesidad de escribir," placed him on a collision course with Carpentier and the ideological expectations of Castro's revolutionary project.

Virgilio Piñera and Jose Lezama Lima also proofread and offered editorial suggestions as Arenas completed his second novel *El mundo alucinante*, which I contend is a work of autofiction disguised as a biography. "Esta es la vida de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier. Tal como fue, tal como pudo haber sido, tal como me hubiera gustado que hubiera sido. Mas que una novela histórica o biográfica, pretende ser, simplemente, una novela" [This is the life of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier. As it was, as it could have been, as I would have liked it to have been. More than a historical or biographical novel, it pretends to be, simply, a novel] (*El mundo* 81). There is an additional part of the prologue which Arenas bracketed as an unauthorized epigraphic alteration of an earlier editor when he corrected the manuscript after he escaped Cuba into exile. The novel is in part an adaptation of an incomplete copy of an autobiography *Memorias* written by Servando in Mexico. What is most important here in this three-sentence prologue is how Arenas presents his *theory of the novel*. I argue that the simplicity of his theory is meant as a jab to the baroque complexity of Carpentier's theory of the novel, which he called the *marvelous real* in the introduction to his novel *El reino de este mundo*, a work of historical fiction. Three sentences versus eight pages represents a huge difference that surely did not go unnoticed by Carpentier. The title of both authors has the word "mundo." They both narrate historical events, but Arenas claims his is simply a novel, while Carpentier claims his is intimately bound to history. Whereas critics identify two focalizing

narrators in Carpentier's novel, Arenas narrates using three: first, second and third person voicings. One voice presents how Servando's life was, another presents how it could have been, and a third presents what Arenas would have liked it to be. The three voices in Arenas' novel even dispute each other's accounts of events, a technique he carries into *The Color of Summer*.

Enrico Mario Santí, editor of the 2017 *Cátedra* edition of *El mundo alucinante* offers another possible motive for why Carpentier did not want to grant any honor to Arenas, who boldly included enunciations and themes that would become hallmarks of everything he would write in the future. Arenas explains, "Esos pasajes eróticos y homosexuales ocasionaron una reunión a la cual me citaron pues tenía que suprimirlos si quería que el libro se publicase. Por supuesto yo me negué a que mi novela fuese mutilada" [Because of those erotic and homosexual passages, they summoned me to a meeting and said I had to suppress them if I wanted the book to be published. Of course, I refused to have my novel mutilated] (Espinosa Domínguez 57). With the adjective "mutilated," Arenas underscores that his work is like a carefully sculpted body, an object of beauty, which he refuses to deface. According to Santí, Arenas' novel is not simply an allusion to *Memorias* written by Padre Mier as much as it is a hyperbolic allusion to Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* (1962). Given the three narrative voices, Santí uses Padre Mier to designate the historical person and Fray Servando to designate the double Arenas creates which Santí claims at times is also a self-referential Arenas in the narrative, when Arenas narrates how he would have liked Padre Mier to be. Santí claims that the title of Arenas' book hyperbolically transforms the words "siglo" into "mundo" and "luces" into "alucinante," which represents an excess of light (*El mundo* 43). Santí goes on to identify other parodic parallels between the two novels. Based on the observations of Andrea Pagni in "Palabra y subversion en *El mundo alucinante*" (1992), Santí sees a discourse

that questions the logic and reason of enlightened rationalism in the paralogical hallucination that erases the borders between reality and fiction—truth and falsehood.

He reasons that the veiled parodic relationship between the two novels lays in how each novel historicizes its protagonists. Carpentier's thematic concern is the repercussions of the French Revolution in the Caribbean and conjures Makandal, Bookman, and Ti Noël to focalize the Haitian marvelous real. Arenas' novel shares a similar thematic concern with revolutions, but at another level is a fictional adventure story which coincides chronologically with the life of Padre Mier. Santí's most convincing example that underscores his point that Carpentier was Arenas' intended paratextual target is chapter thirty-four titled "El saco de las lozas," which he argues is more than just an allusion, but rather a pastiche of *El siglo de las luces*. Arenas ingeniously camouflages his criticism of Carpentier's submission to political power and the opportunism of the writers who follow him. He parodies Carpentier's literary baroque and offers allusions to the political sanctimoniousness of some of Carpentier's characters. Santí claims that Arenas' satire and parody of Carpentier went well beyond personal revenge rather, it had more to do with divergent concepts of the novel, history, and revolution. When Reinaldo Arenas entered the literary scene in Cuba, Carpentier was already a literary giant, a goliath, in terms of his influence within the revolution and its cultural production. Carpentier had a school of admirers and imitators who published works throughout the sixties that either replicated his style or evoked historical realism for the purpose of creating an official chronicle of the new revolutionary reality. So, when Arenas, a self-taught peasant whose incursion into literature had been stories for children and a novel that was equal parts autobiography and fantastic fiction, dared to parody Carpentier's greatness, Arenas was squashed like one of Piñera's cockroaches.

In both *Celestino antes del alba* and *El mundo alucinante* we can see Piñera's concept of "muñeco" at work, with narrators being doubled and tripled. By the time Arenas writes *The Color of Summer*, the narrators multiply into a multitude. *El mundo alucinante* received honorable mention in 1966 only after Virgilio Piñera and Camila Henríquez Ureña, who were on the jury along with Alejo Carpentier and José Antonio Portuondo, insisted Arenas receive the honor. Portuondo had been named director of the newly founded Instituto de Literatura y Linguística the year before, and like Carpentier, was a staunch defender of the revolution's ideology. *Ediciones Unión*, which also was under the purview of both men, refused to publish the novel unless Arenas modified it to remove what they perceived to be homosexual content and criticism of the revolution's ideology. After receiving two crushing blows from Carpentier, Santí reasons that Arenas opted to continue parodying instead of imitating. He became a detractor instead of a groupie. In chapter thirty-four of *El mundo alucinante*, Arenas insults Carpentier's acolytes directly, calling them "La Gran Pajera Nacional" [The Great National Masturbation] (*El mundo* 47). Since *Ediciones Unión* refused to publish the novel, even after Piñera assisted Arenas to make modifications, his friends Jorge and Margarita Camacho smuggled the manuscript outside of the island. It was translated by Didier Coste to French and published in Paris as *Le monde hallucinant* (1968). It won the Medici prize for best foreign novel in Paris that year. Its publication in Mexico by *Editorial Diógenes* came the following year in 1969, after the publisher sent a personal representative to Cuba to retrieve a copy of the manuscript and smuggle it out of the country. Going over the heads of Carpentier, the editors at *Ediciones Unión*, and Castro's directive to intellectuals issued during the speech in 1961 led to a major crisis. Arenas became a pariah that had to be silenced for his audacity at all costs.

When Arenas was arrested in 1973 on trumped up charges of corrupting minors and taken to jail, a report produced by UNEAC proved very damaging. “All of a sudden, everything positive had disappeared from my file, and I was nothing but a homosexual counterrevolutionary who had dared to publish books abroad” (*Before* 155). Even though he had not been convicted in court, he had already been convicted by workers and guards at UNEAC where he went to collect his union salary. “...every day I was given dirty looks as if I had the plague; and now, as the final blow, I had a trial pending. Suddenly, it seemed I had become invisible; not even the door guards greeted me as I walked in; it didn’t make any difference that some of them were also gay” (*Before* 155-6). At the trial, the report appeared as an intimidating dossier which contained the title and descriptions of all the novels he had published abroad, without UNEAC’s authorization. It was signed by people who Arenas until then had thought were excellent friends. What started out as an accusation of a common crime escalated into Arenas being labeled “a counterrevolutionary engaged in incessant propaganda against the regime...everything had been set up in order to convict me. The district attorney, in his provisional conclusions, said that my crimes warranted eight years in jail” (*Before* 156). Even Arenas’ aunt had denounced him for leading a depraved lifestyle and engaging in counterrevolutionary activities. In *Before Night Falls*, Arenas describes the details of his sexcapades with revolutionary subjects in his room at his aunt’s house. There were so many men who came to see him that Arenas claims they waited in line. After the initial arrest, Arenas decided to flee the island instead of stand trial. His friends Jorge and Margarita Camacho began planning to smuggle him out of the island, but Arenas made the mistake of telling a few friends about his plans, and the next day the police surrounded his aunt’s house and arrested him. They beat him, questioned him, then beat him some more. Sometime after he was jailed without trial, the opportunity to escape presented itself, and he fled for his life.

Reinaldo Arenas, like Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima, was persecuted by the Cuban revolution because of his homosexuality and his refusal to become an instrumental sycophant of its ideologies. The campaign to eliminate the influence of homosexuality in Cuban culture, which began soon after the triumph of the revolution in 1959, imposed an inner exile on Arenas that turned him into what he frequently calls a no person, someone stripped of a public identity, personal liberty, private property, and freedom of speech. For a time, Arenas resisted and survived the barbarity, persecution, and economic precarity by dissimulating silent acquiescence and making himself as invisible as one of cockroaches in Piñera's short stories. When anonymity ceased being an option, Arenas desperately sought ways to get his manuscripts and messages out of the country and into the hands of important people who could pressure the Castro regime to change course. Whether he was fleeing from authorities, hiding out, or incarcerated, he seized every opportunity to write. He constantly imagined the narratives that he would put to paper as soon as the opportunity presented itself, by hand on a scrap of paper, in a notebook, or by using a typewriter. His mind was continuously imagining how to transform his lived experiences into written narratives. When his writing was seized by security forces, he rewrote what was lost. He found novel ways to hide his writing and sometimes placed his manuscripts in the care of others, who later helped to smuggle them off the island. Arenas' clandestine efforts to denounce the Revolution on the international stage turned him into Cuba's public enemy number one. It is a wonder the revolutionary authorities did not just outright assassinate him like they did with so many disillusioned revolutionary comrades and counterrevolutionary dissidents, but his international notoriety kept him alive until the opportunity to escape the island materialized.

Arenas began writing his autobiography *Antes que anochezca* (1992) translated as *Before Night Falls* (1993) by Dolores Koch while he was a fugitive in a forest on the island of Cuba called

Lenin Park. Arenas confronted his apocalypse with AIDS while he lived in exile in the Yankee metropolis of New York. *Before Night Falls* is arguably the crowning achievement of his life's work. However, I argue that if one does not consider *The Color of Summer* in relation to the autobiography one misses a big part of what Arenas was trying to accomplish, especially in view of his desire to exact revenge, not only against Fidel Castro, but against most of humanity.

Rafael Ocasio in "The Fight and Flight of Reinaldo Arenas" (2014) argues that Arenas' second novel *El mundo alucinante* (1966) published in Mexico was likely his first attempt to attack the revolutionary code of the new man. Emilio Bejel asserts that Arenas' confrontation with revolutionary masculinity "portrays the Cuban nation as an *epic of the oppressed*, which implies a constant striving for utopian freedom" (xvi, emphasis original). By using the word epic in his analysis, Bejel alludes to Homer's *The Iliad*, which figures prominently in Arenas' autobiography because it is a book that Arenas strongly identified with and may very well have served as a source of inspiration and identification as Arenas fled the persecution by the Castro regime and sought to articulate his utopian ideals. Bejel in his book *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001) reads Arenas' autobiography "as a resounding rejection of an oppressive system that censured and jailed him, yet also produced his persona and his subjectivity" (xvi). On the other hand, Jorge Olivares, another critic who produced a monographic study of Arenas' oeuvre entitled *Becoming Reinaldo Arenas: Family, Sexuality, and the Cuban Revolution* (2013), views the autobiography as "a portrait of a mortally ill, exiled Cuban writer who, on his deathbed, writes the story of his life, a life that is about to end far from his father and fatherland" (66). Although my reading is informed by these two critics, I read Arenas as a sexual outlaw who is exiled from his beloved country because of his discursive destabilization of national constructions of masculinity that, when faced with his imminent death from what he considers to be a mysterious and unnatural illness arising

from the diabolical machinations of powerful men, he decides to turn his autobiography into a manifesto that denounces the homophobic hypocrisy of the Castro regime by attacking its paradigmatic construction of machismo, the new man.

Emilio Bejel traces this construction of Cuban masculinity theorizing that it was constituted through a series of transformations of Cuban nationalism that “have attempted to define homosexuality” (xiii) through negation, and in so doing homosexuality and homoeroticism are inscribed “in the prescriptive models of the national Cuban narrative” (xiv). These prescriptive models are ones established through a Cuban national discourse traced by Bejel but rooted in the wider international discourse about homosexuality identified by Foucault. In sum, Bejel argues that “Cuban nationhood has been defined, in part, by its rejection of gayness and queerness” (xiv). Bejel explains that the “destabilizing effect of the queer explains, at least in part, the negative definition it has been given in the various transformations of Cuban nationalist discourse that seek coherence in a heterogeneous society” (xv). In other words, it is the expressions about homosexuality, especially erotic ones that represent men in gender transgressive roles, which are considered destabilizing to the national discourse. They are a threat to the masculine signification, which has attempted to inscribe itself through figures such as de Céspedes and Martí and their enunciative acts. Destabilizing a national narrative creates the opportunity to transform it, and this is precisely what Arenas does in *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*. By tracing his own roots and anchoring them in homoeroticism, he is revising the national narrative by relating his childhood experiences and emphasizing how same-sex desire, which he experienced since his early childhood, is as natural as the dirt, the river, and the rain.

Whereas Bejel provides us with the means to read *Before Night Falls* as a destabilizing discourse, Jorge Olivares conjectures about why Arenas wanted to exact his revenge against

humanity, although I am not entirely convinced that daddy issues are the whole story. Olivares theorizes that Arenas is angry in exile because he must face death from AIDS never having *known* his father, and that his father would never be able to give his body a proper burial in his fatherland. Furthermore, Olivares further theorizes that Arenas' sees the tragedy of his own life mirrored in Homer's *The Iliad*, a book Arenas no doubt cherishes because it is one, he keeps with him from the time he becomes a fugitive hiding out in Lenin Park and has by his side at his death. In his book, Olivares psychoanalyzes Arenas' only encounter with his father employing Freud's oedipal thesis to explain why this meeting left such a lasting impression on him. The first chapter of *Before Night Falls* titled "The Stones" recounts a day in which he meets his father by the banks of a river and his father gives him two pesos, all the while, his mother, enraged, is throwing rocks at his father trying to scare him away. Olivares, in his analysis, characterizes Arenas' mother as "aggressive and controlling," someone who shares an "affectionate and erotic bond" with Arenas (69). When the stranger, who is Arenas' father, appears, this creates a triangulation which allows Arenas to connect affectionately and erotically with the stranger thereby breaking the mother and son bond (69). Olivares then conjectures that Arenas has constructed a fantasy about his father that not only facilitates his "emergence as a homosexual subject" (69), but also serves as a "primal fantasy" at the "threshold of his memoirs" (71). Therefore, Olivares' reading of Arenas' autobiography emphasizes father and fatherland, because he wants to demonstrate that Arenas eroticizes both. Olivares sees that Arenas' vengeance is, in part, fueled by his being deprived of his father, by his mother and family, and fatherland, by the person he hates most Fidel Castro. Olivares reasons that Arenas blames Castro for all his suffering in his suicide note because Castro kept Arenas' from having an ongoing relationship with his fatherland. Although I accept the logic of Olivares' Freudian analysis explaining Arenas' rage toward Castro, I do not see sufficient

motivation to engage in vengeance against most of humanity in this deprivation of father and fatherland.

To recap, I have discussed how Arenas' autobiography is a discursive construct that seeks to achieve a Foucauldian transformation of Cuban national discourse through an articulation of homoeroticism, to redirect accumulated knowledges toward an integration of alternative masculinities. I have offered examples of how Arenas' activism and discourse has begun to reshape not only the Cuban cultural landscape but the landscape of queer discourses as well, opening spaces for resignifications to occur. I have appropriated Bejel and Olivares readings of Arenas' autobiography to advance my idea of queer discursive vengeance. Now I would like to further read *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer* to show one of the major ways Arenas accomplishes his intervention. My focus will be on how Arenas turns his autobiography into a manifesto in the face of his mortality from AIDS, how he attacks the Revolution's paradigmatic new man, and how he destabilizes queer significations. He does this by theorizing the *loca* and turning her into a multitude.

The Loca Multitude

To whom does Arenas direct his autobiography and his *pentagonía*? Are they directed at Cubans inside the revolution? Are they directed at other Cubans in exile? Is there another possible audience? Arenas answers these questions explicitly. It is all the above. Jean-Paul Sartre entertained the question of audience in his philosophical treatise *What is literature?* (1949). Sartre identifies the audience of most types of literature as the "universal reader...addressed to all men" (43). He goes on to affirm, "as a matter of fact, the writer knows that he speaks for freedoms which are swallowed up, masked, and unavailable" (43). Let us consider both the introduction and the suicide note of *Before Night Falls*. The introduction titled "The End" was written in August 1990, the suicide note is not dated, but in the note, Arenas reports that he completed his literary project,

to which he had devoted thirty years, and since AIDS had left him in a terrible depression and he could no longer write or struggle for the freedom of Cuba, he decided to end his life. Based on the content of the note and its placement at the end of the novel it seems the introduction was written before, when he had more energy to write. So, let us consider the two parts like *bookends*, if you will. What is contained between them are the colorful details of Arenas' life, including many transtextual reflections and personal revelations which together function like a giant flashback. All the pages of the text in between take the reader on a journey, in a mostly linear fashion, from the author's birth to his death—what critics call a *bildungsroman*. Arenas identifies part of his audience in the suicide note titled "Farewell," one bookend. He writes, "I want to encourage the Cuban people out of the country as well as on the Island to continue fighting for freedom. I do not want to convey to you a message of defeat but of continued struggle and of hope" (*Before* 317). From this passage we can deduce that he meant for all Cubans to read his writing. However, the epigraph of the title contains a publisher's note that states that sometime after completing his autobiography, months before his death, Arenas gave several copies of the handwritten sealed note to Dolores Koch, addressed to friends and newspapers, for mailing at the appropriate time. It appeared in major U.S. papers and abroad. This would indicate that before completing his literary project, he already planned on ending his life. Given that Arenas anticipated, writing the note and preparing for its distribution to the international press after his suicide, clearly his expectation was that an international audience would read *Before Night Falls* and *The Color of Summer*, which were both published posthumously. It is unclear how Cubans inside the revolution would gain access to his works, given that he became a *no person*, and his works are banned inside the revolution.

Arenas was a writer vilified and exiled for being a declared homosexual. He had no assurance that his autobiography would be widely circulated in his native land if the Castro regime remained in power. When he completed this autobiography, he had the expectation that it would be published, after his death, outside of the revolution where it could reach the Cubans in exile. “To be published” (*Before* 317) is written after his signature. The Cubans inside the Revolution are a deferred audience, an audience in waiting. They are his beloved *real men*, what he calls “recruits,” the new men who live by the mandates of their revolutionary masculinity. These are the men Arenas longed to connect with through his writing. Since he could not do it while he was alive, he anticipated it would happen in the future, after his death. When he writes “Cuba will be free” (*Before* 317). It seems that Arenas was certain that free Cubans will read him someday. The freedom he desired for all Cubans would only be possible with the atomization of all vestiges of the Frankenstein monster that Zoé Valdés identified in her book. This reading is certainly consistent with what Sartre has to say about freedom, “There is no given freedom. One must win an inner victory over his passions, his race, his class, and his nation and must conquer other men along with himself” (Sartre, *What is literature?* 43). In this sense we can read Arenas’ autobiography as a manifesto because it is a call to arms to struggle for freedom and claim victory. However, Sartre’s theorization suggests that the audience Arenas wants to reach is even wider than just Cubans inside and outside of the Revolution. I would argue that, beside Sartre’s universal reader, the wider audience who could derive meaning from his autobiography are homosexual men around the world who have suffered repression and persecution but gained the freedom through migration or exile to read works of literature that make homosexuality a thematic concern. I would also include homosexual men who survived the HIV/AIDS crisis either by avoiding infection or gaining access to the “drug cocktail,” the triple therapy consisting of different classes of antiviral

medications. Now let us turn to the question of how, specifically, Arenas subverts revolutionary masculinity and wages a counteroffensive to the war declared by the Cuban macho.

In exacting his literary vengeance, I find many similarities in Arenas' writing with poetics established by Virgilio Piñera decades before him. Arenas imitates and transforms them to devise contagious metaphors that could contaminate the hygiene of a revolutionary masculinity that relied on a mythologized history of maleness. When Piñera was marginalized by Ángel Gaztelu, a Catholic priest who José Lezama Lima, Piñera's longtime friend, chose over him to be production manager of *Espuela de plata*, a magazine to which many important Cuban writers of their generation contributed, Piñera summoned *Las Furias* (1941) of ancient Greece, reprinted in *La isla en peso* (2000), to exact poetic revenge. In his poem, biographer Thomas Anderson in *Everything in its Place: The Life and Works of Virgilio Piñera* (2006) surmises that Piñera refers to Gaztelu as "el maniqueo," "la serpiente de última hora." In Reinaldo Arenas' literary revenge, Fidel Castro is the Manichean serpent, a super villain. Arenas blames him for "the sufferings of exile, the pain of being banished from my country, the loneliness, and the diseases contracted in exile [which] would probably never have happened if I had been able to enjoy freedom in my country" (*Before* 317). Although Fidel Castro was his principal target, Arenas had even bigger fish to fry, as we gather from what he said when he prayed to the image of Virgilio Piñera after nearly dying from AIDS related complications. The scene is recalled in the introduction titled "The End" in *Before Night Falls*. I quoted his plea in a section above. The nature of this vengeance against most of humanity will become clear as I proceed with my analysis. The furies Arenas summons to exact literary revenge are the multitude of militant viral bodies, the *locas* he materializes in *The Color of Summer*. They are the autofictional avatars and author surrogates who speak and say things Arenas wanted his readers to know after he was dead.

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that Arenas is a master of paratextuality. *The Color of Summer* differs tremendously from *Before Night Falls* in the way it treats reality. Whereas *Before Night Falls* reads like a bildungsroman, telling the life story of Reinaldo Arenas in a mostly chronological way from birth to death, *The Color of Summer* uses irony, parody, and pastiche while it parallels events that take place in *Before Night Falls*. It tells a similar story, but with a campy tone and acidic humor, while placing the action in fantastic and absurd scenarios. As I asserted earlier, Arenas narrates using a variety of autofictional avatars and author surrogates who make controversial assertions. At times, these doubles also communicate with one another, or offer metatextual criticisms to the author about the way he writes the story, calling attention to omissions and exaggerations. An excellent example of what Genette calls transtextuality, which subsumes intertextuality, metatextuality, and paratextuality, becomes clear in the way in which Arenas recounts his theory of the *loca*, or homosexuals. In *Before Night Falls*, Arenas presents his theory in a matter-of-fact way in a two-page chapter titled “Las cuatro categorías de las locas” [The Four Categories of Gays]. In the Spanish version of *The Color of Summer*, the avatar who presents the theory is called la Reina de Arañas, whose alias in the novel is Delfin Proust, whose alias is Reinaldo Arenas. But translator Andrew Hurley Frenchifies her name to render it La Reine des Araignées (probably to preserve the sound). The point here is that the name of this avatar closely resembles the name of the author. She is like a spokesperson, but who also embellishes and transforms the theory Arenas presents in *Before Night Falls* with details that are sometimes campy and humorous, while at other times scathing. The entire theory can be summed up in the following way using the crude euphemisms Andrew Hurley chose to translate Arenas’ words in Spanish. All human men are either queens or faggots, whether they are in or out of the closet. They all love the sexual pleasure derived from having their pricks serviced orally or sticking them in someone’s ass.

He chastises men who pretend to be straight merely to protect the illusion of their heterosexual masculinity. In what I read ahead, Arenas denounces the malignant fatality of their homosexual hysteria, which has left a mountain of punished bodies in its wake.

Keep in mind that Arenas constructs his implied reader, from the very beginning of *The Color of Summer*, in a prologue titled “To the Judge.” This gesture suggests that the information he will present in the novel is evidence he will use to plead his case. He urges them not to take offense, since the novel is simply a work of fiction. I would argue that one of the targets he intended to satirize are the curmudgeons of the UNEAC who produced the dossier that helped to convict him of being a counterrevolutionary. He ridicules their revolutionary logic which regards parodic fiction as evidence of intellectual crimes.

Whoa, girl, just hold it right there. Before you start going through these pages looking for things to have me thrown in jail for, I want you to try to remember that you’re reading a work of fiction here, so the characters in it are made up—their concoctions, denizens of the world of imagination (literary figures, parodies, metaphors—you know), not real-life people. And another thing, my dear, while we’re at it—I wrote this novel in 1990 and set it in 1999. I mean think about it—how fair would it be to haul me into court for a bunch of fictitious stuff that when it was written down hadn’t even happened yet? The Author. (The Color 2)

The discourse of this introduction, prologue, or forward, whatever you choose to call it, feminizes the reader, calling them “girl.” This establishes a campy tone from the onset of reading. Since Arenas already experienced being jailed for writing fiction on the island of Cuba, this note parodies the disclaimer that seeks to create a legal distance of sorts between the reader and the author. As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Arenas uses “counter-memory” situated within a carnivalesque discourse, which Mehuron argues is an effective use of history used to uncover heterogeneous forces concealed by administrative and governmental processes of subjugation. Counter-memory produces truths of the self in the present. I also discussed how in relation to Bakhtin’s ideas about carnival, displays of excess and grotesqueness rupture the boundaries

between performers and spectators—narrators and readers. Using the idea of carnival, Arenas creates the social space where utopian freedom becomes visible so that it can be reimagined and expanded. He uses the carnivalization in the narrative to question the limits of power, abolish rank, level hierarchies, and promote equality among individuals. Narrators and readers are drawn into a collective body. Hyperbolizing Piñera’s concept of “muñeco,” Arenas summons a multitude of *locas*, so many in fact that they are too numerous to list in this chapter. Many are afflicted with AIDS. I will discuss a few of them and the specific accusations, revelations, and findings they present. Keep in mind, also, that *The Color of Summer* hyperbolizes and escalates the carnivalesque rendering of reality to extremes that some might consider pornographic, offensive, and obscene.

I argue that the chapter titled “The Grand Oneirical Theological Political Philosophical Satirical Conference,” in which Pistolprick appears, reads like an indictment of Fifo and the war against *locas*. It is the chapter in which the most avatars and aliases appear in a grandiose and absurd scene at a conference center attached to Fifo’s palace while the island is slowly sinking into the ocean and the celebration of Carnival has already begun. These author surrogates assert counter memories—truths and alternate histories—presented as conference papers and dissertations, which faithful Manicheans, Christians, Muslims, Communists, and Fascists—all political ideologues, on the left or the right—would consider blasphemous. The variety of discourses presented in the chapter help us realize that the macho war is not something new and specific to Cuba, but a war on a global scale, a war waged since the Judeo-Christian-Muslim creation myth, attributed to Moses in the book of Genesis, was first narrated. It is a war that is intimately tied to monotheism. One of the conference papers presented was written by an avatar named Odoriferous Gunk who chronicles the history of homosexuality from before the Judeo-Christian-Muslim creation myth

was conceived to the present day of the conference. The conference paper also offers “a detailed history of the horrors to which queer men of all stripes—both queens and tops—had been subjected from the time of Constantine to the implementation of the bourgeois morality and militant Communism” (*The Color* 398). Odoriferous Gunk was denied entrance to the conference, but she cleverly arranged to have her thesis sent to the chair of the panel of presenters, “who couldn’t refuse to accept it, since it clearly fell within the subject of the conference” (*The Color* 396). The queen of Holland, another avatar and chair of the panel, “picked up Odoriferous Gunk’s text (written in Latin) and read it without batting an eye, translating it on the fly into almost perfect Spanish” (*The Color* 397). I will come back to the contents of Odoriferous Gunk’s conference paper, but first let me explain the context.

As the chapter opens, the island is slowly sinking into the ocean and Fifo’s palace is flooding. The celebration of Carnival is in full swing, and all the celebrants must move about on anything that floats. It is my contention that, in part, Arenas uses this chapter to lampoon the self-congratulatory character of Fidel Castro, but also to show how the notion of original sin within the clarity of homosexual history affects the lives of homosexuals he refers to lovingly as *locas*, even though at times his paratextual humor can seem as though he derides them. Fifo left a theater where he had previously given a speech and navigated on a raft with a huge motor because everything was flooding and, well, after all he was the island’s supreme leader so, deserved to have a huge, motorized raft. His VIPs followed on their flotation devices. Everyone clamored to be close to the magnificent leader, but Fifo was intent on getting to a place called the Garden of Computers. On his way there he caught sight of the international conference hall. Since the conference was on his Carnival agenda, he decided that it should immediately commence. Fifo adored being adulated, so when he called the conference to order, a large table and chairs were assembled, and various

luminaries took their seats. Fifo positioned himself in his huge, motorized raft at the head of the table. A representative of the German Pen Club jumped from his raft to Fifo's raft and placed a medal on him for being the most distinguished intellectual of the West in the past twenty-five years. For some very peculiar reason, Fifo began to inflate like a balloon, which knocked the jolly German writer off his raft and his heavy body disappeared into the depths of the water. Various people jumped in after him, to search for the medal, but nothing was found. Nevertheless, Fifo took his place at the table along with various thinkers in science, culture, religion, politics, and philosophy.

At this point, one of Arenas' avatars called Sakuntala la Mala, who is reading along with the reader as if she were witnessing the text being written in real time and interrupts the flow of the narration to point out that Reinaldo the writer or narrator has made the grave mistake of literary omission. Reinaldo asks which one. Sakuntala, asks him why, as he was writing the chapter, did he not include a reference to science in the title of the conference if scientists had a seat at the table. Reinaldo responded that she was correct. "Sometimes I'm so absentminded" (*The Color* 393). Sakuntala responds, "Absentminded when it's convenient, because every time you write my name in that book of yours you manage to remember to add the epithet *la Mala*. So, I wonder if you would be so kind as to just call me Sakuntala, period. Or Daniel Sakuntala, which is the name that appears on my birth certificate in Nuevitas" (*The Color* 393). Reinaldo responds, "Yes, well, I'll try to remember dear. Now if you'll just let me get back to my salt mine" (*The Color* 393). Hurley translates "condena" as salt mine. The narrator, writer, author, continues... "As the audience made itself (themselves? —I never know about these plurals and singulars) comfortable on its (their) flotation devices, the midgets used enormous hoses to siphon out the water and keep it at an acceptable level" (*The Color* 393). The midgets in *The Color of Summer* are Fifo's deadly

minions, as are the sharks that patrol the waters around the coast to ensure that no one can leave. In these few lines can appreciate how Arenas intervenes in the text, draws our attention to him as both the author and the narrator, then distances himself by conversing with an avatar he names Sakuntala la Mala, who takes issue, not only with the omission of science from the conference, but also for adding an epithet to her name. Arenas reverses what readers normally consider an author interjection by delegating the task to one of his avatars. The internal disagreement between original and double materializes in the text and the reader is drawn into the conflict of representation. Arenas destabilizes the gendering of subject positions, but also interjects a metatextual reflection that questions the grammatical rules of the writing he produces. All these elements reveal the concealed forces at work in writing, reading, and creating meaning from a text. Arenas then summons the loca multitude to stand as witnesses and offer testimony.

Arenas writes, “There is no way to list all the famous people who took part in this conference, but let me give you some idea...” (*The Color* 393). Among the luminaries mentioned, many are Arenas’ avatars that appear elsewhere in the book like queen of Holland, Skunk in a Funk, the Condesa de Merlin, SuperSatanic, and Delfin Proust, these are surrogates that I have been able to trace back to Reinaldo Arenas through semantic clues in the text. Other notable guests are Maltheatus, perhaps a reference to Thomas Robert Malthus whose controversial ideas about population growth led to controversial misreadings of his theories; the president of the Tierra del Fuego Liberation Organization (the TLO), which could be a reference to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); the president of the World Federation of Women, which could be a reference to heterogenous feminists and their theories; the head of the Medellín Cartel, perhaps a suggestion that most men aspire to exercise necropower like gangsters; the director of the National Ballet of Chile; Jimmy Karter; the premier of the Communist International; the inventor of AIDS; and the

inventor of the neutron bomb, as well as many prince regents, dictators, and celebrated murderers. Summoning the huge multitude of characters recalls the scene from the Hebrew Scriptures where gods and angels hold a giant meeting to decide the fate of Job, who Satan argues only loves God because of all the tremendous material wealth bestowed on him. Satan suggests that if he were allowed to rain misfortune on the man, Job would ultimately curse God.

Arenas also reports that “many, many famous writers (some brought back to life especially for this occasion and even over their own objections, as in the case of André Breton)” are present at the conference (*The Color* 393). Here Arenas pokes fun at the concepts of resurrection and reincarnation. Presiding over the conference was the head of the Swedish Academy. Arenas explains that “there were also many scholars, reporters, listeners, and observers, all of whom did everything they could to get close enough to Fifo to speak to him” (*The Color* 394). In other words, besides the notable intellectuals present, there was also a multitude of groupies. Keep in mind that everything that will be spoken at this conference emerges from the imagination of the author, as he clearly stipulated at the beginning, “To the Judge.” There are many names I have left out. By listing this multitude of conference attendees, Arenas emphasizes an excess and grotesqueness that ruptures the boundaries between performers and spectators. We get lost in volume. We also get the sense that what we will hear are a diversity of voices that will interact, and in their interaction, the individuals will be subsumed into a collective body of knowledge that will be revealed.

I will skip over the opening film which Arenas uses to lampoon ICAIC director Alfredo Guevara. It is enough to say that Arenas is generous with him at this point in the narration when he states that “The movie ended to deafening applause” (*The Color* 394). Anyone who is familiar with the history of Cuba’s revolutionary cinema knows that Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa were the only two competent directors in Cuba when the institute was founded. First up

on the conference agenda was the theological panel of presenters, who the narrator says were amazing. The Bishop of Santa Maria read a statement he claimed was “approved by the leaders of every world religion [who] concluded there was only one God, and that God was Fifo. The moment was a solemn one. Fifo, who had already been invested by the president of Venezuela as one of the Caesars, now was to be worshiped as a god” (*The Color* 394). Arenas ridicules Fidel Castro who among the world’s leaders held onto power longer than any other living national leader except Queen Elizabeth II. He outlasted eleven United States presidents and nearly ignited a nuclear war. Anthony DePalma writing in November 2016 for *The New York Times*, reporting on Fidel Castro’s death, calls him a “towering international figure whose importance in the 20th century far exceeded what might have been expected from the head of state of a Caribbean Island nation of 11 million people.” DePalma also calls him “a master of image and myth, Mr. Castro believed himself to be the messiah of his fatherland, an indispensable force with authority on high to control Cuba and its people.” In recognizing Castro’s mastery of image making and mythicization, DePalma echoes the claims of Zoé Valdés. In the Roman tradition, Castro relished the position he held as Maximum Leader. Being elevated to the status of a god by the all the world’s religions communicates that those religions can just as easily worship a self-assuming totalitarian as they do an invisible entity. “Unfortunately for Fifo, however, and without appearing on the program *anywhere*, just then Salman Rushdie raised his hand and said it was impossible to talk about the existence of God without also mentioning the existence and potency of the devil and the irrefutable *proof* of his existence” (*The Color* 394). This obvious reference to Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, serves to introduce the Gnostic concept of the Kosmokrator, the lord of the world, prince of the age, who is the devil and his demons. The Gnostic tradition reverse the Judeo-Christian-Muslim

reading of Genesis; the god in the story of the Garden of Eden is the villain and the snake is the hero.

At this point in the conference proceedings an imposing figure of someone named Tomasito the Goya-Girl interrupted and claimed to have in her possession the irrefutable proofs of the existence of the devil and she proceeded to read, while wearing “a stunning new pair of platform shoes that she had bought from Mahoma” (*The Color* 395). The document had been written by Skunk in a Funk, another one of Arenas’ avatars. “The most overwhelming proof had been saved for last—the existence of Fifo himself” (*The Color* 395). Fifo did not like being demoted from heaven to hell. Although he wanted that queen executed on the spot, he did not want the spectacle of a public execution to interfere with the joyous occasion, so he quietly transmitted the order, through one of his midgets, to his brother, Raúl Kastro. The declaration created an uproar among the spectators. The two most vocal angry protests were vociferously raised by Carlos Puentes and Elena Polainatosca. The references here are obviously Carlos Fuentes and Elena Poniatowska, two of Mexico’s most important canonical writers. The uproar continued for a while until someone named Dulce Maria Leynaz banged the gavel to quiet everyone down, saying that “people could say whatever they wanted, and that there would be a discussion period after they all had given their papers” (*The Color* 395). Arenas uses her voice to question the limits of power, abolish rank, level the hierarchies, and promote equality among the individuals present.

Once everyone settled down, Skunk in a Funk, another Arenas avatar, spoke and said, “Since we are talking about God and the Devil...which in the long run are the same sinister thing, we should delve a little deeper into Hell, or Paradise—which of course are the same thing” (*The Color* 395). Her conference presentation lasted only fifteen minutes, but she took the audience on a mesmerizing journey that described the Seven Wonders of Cuban Socialism and summarized

forty years of horror which Arenas calls “the most recent Cuban inferno” (*The Color* 395). The conference proceeded with André Breton discussing “Impossible Dreams,” AntiChelo discussing “The Seven Major Categories of Queenhood,” which focused at length on the “Sublime” and argued that queenhood was divine. SuperSatanic presented on the mathematical philosophy of Blaise Pascal and reported that he could not be brought back to life for the occasion because no one knew where he was buried. Then someone name Fray Bettino presented an apologia on behalf of Hitler, Stalin, and Fifo, attacking democracy as “ephemeral and vulgar” (*The Color* 396). This brings us to the point where the queen of Holland translated Odoriferous Gunk’s paper produced in Latin on the fly.

Arenas, resuming his role as the narrator, offers context. “They had spoken of God and the Devil, they descended into the jaws of Hell, and so now clearly they needed to speak of the pleasures of Paradise, of the mission of those who dwell in Paradise and all its avatars, and of their struggles to bring about a world in which one could live happily and at peace” (*The Color* 396). If we consider that the alternate title of the *The Color of Summer* is *Or the New Garden of Earthly Delights*, then we can deduce that the avatars Arenas refers to are those that appear in the famous triptych called “El jardín de las delicias,” painted in oil by the sixteenth-century Netherlandish painter Hironimus Bosch. He is also known as *el Bosco* in Spain. The enigmatic work hangs in the Museo del Prado and is considered a national patrimony. Bosch is known for producing fantastic illustrations and paintings based on Christian concepts and narratives in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. We can draw many parallels between his art and the artistic movement of surrealism. Surely many artists have been inspired by the style of his art.

Bosch’s triptych consists of three parts, a square and two rectangles that are like doors that open and close. When the doors are closed the spectator sees the creation of the world. The image

shows a flat earth surface contained inside a transparent glass sphere. The landmass within the sphere resembles an island. We can make out hills, vegetation, and water that surrounds the island in the center. In the upper, interior part of the sphere are clouds. There is no sun or moon visible. The image of a figure, presumably God, sits in the darkness of the upper left corner of the left rectangle of the image, holding an open book in his lap. The interior of the sphere is full of light, while the regions outside of the sphere are dark in contrast. The light inside the sphere seems to come from all side and from all angles, with no obvious source. There are practically no shadows to speak of on the land mass within. Although there is a suggestion of another light source, external to the sphere, that shines from the point of view of the spectator, showing a reflection of the light on the surface of the left half of the sphere facing them. This enigmatic image visually represents Arenas' reading of "La isla en peso," which he connects with other works by Virgilio Piñera. The water surrounding Bosch's Island world recalls the famous line "la maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes" [the damn circumstance of water everywhere] that encircles the island of Cuba and the water in *The Color of Summer* that surrounds the island and is flooding into the palace and conference center. Both Bosch's image and Piñera's poem communicate the idea that "nadie puede salir" [no one can leave]. In *Necesidad de libertad*, Arenas reads the clarity and the water in Piñera's poem as Cuban history, I read it as Piñera's poetics of insilio, but I also contend that Arenas (re)signifies the elements to represent homosexual history and the island as the body with AIDS.

When we open the doors to look inside the triptych, we face three panels, with three separate images. The image to the left depicts the Garden of Eden with a Jesus like figure representing God. Adam is on his right and Eve is on his left. The distinctions between their gendered bodies are subtle. Adam has the hint of a penis and Eve, flat chested breasts. God holds

Eve's outstretched arm, palm facing up. Her eyes are down cast and the expression on her face is forlorn. Adam looks up towards God's face, but God is looking straight at us, the spectators. He seems to signal us with his right hand. His fingers—thumb, index, and middle—pointing up, held close together, while the fourth and fifth fingers are folded downward. This hand gesture is like the one in the painting called *Salvatore Mundi* thought to be the work of Leonardo DaVinci. The *Salvatore Mundi* figure gestures with the same hand and holds a glass sphere in his left hand as he faces us the spectator, looking into our eyes. The two images share similar thematic concerns when it comes to their depiction of God, or his double, Jesus in Christian mythology. The figures of God, Adam, and Eve are surrounded by what looks like an orchard with trees bearing fruit. The panel has extensive details related to the Garden, including the bodies of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and amphibians that bear mystical or legendary connotations to a time before recorded history. There is a winged reptilian, bird-like creature with three heads and a long beak that intersect with the tusk of a sea unicorn. The most striking image is that of a platypus-like-mermen-creature floating in pond in the center of the lower left quadrant of the image reading a book. The center of the image has a fantastical, soft pink crustacean-like structure that seems to be some sort of creation machine with a spire. At the base of the spire is a cylindrical object with a hole in the center and peering out from the darkness of the hole is an owl. It sits in a lake and from its foundation one gets the sense that all the animal life in the world evolved from it. Another part of the image in the upper right quadrant features a rock-like structure but with geometrical shapes that appear to be ruins. There seems to be a tunnel connecting the structure with a hole to its left, and a stream of swallows circulate in and out of the tunnel and into the sky following a curvilinear path up into the sky and passing through a spherical donut shape. We need to keep in mind the swallows and their

freedom to fly. They seem to be part of this paradise but detached from what I read as the drama of original sin playing out between God, Adam, and Eve.

The images in the other two panels, the square in the center, and the other rectangle on the right, seem to move forward in time. The center panel contains extensive detail. It shows a time beyond the drama of original sin. It is unclear if this scene takes place before or after, it appears timeless. The Garden is populated by many naked beings, most with white bodies, but some with black bodies. The best way to characterize the movement and drama of the narrative of this image is to think of Dionysius and his effect on humans. The activity of the beings is erotic pleasure, a bacchanal of naked bodies in orgiastic bliss. Men with men, women with women, and men with women, gesturing seductively to one another. The sense is that the whole world is at play, frolicking with the animals, in a world full of fantastical elements. The image communicates the idea that same sex or same gender desire is as natural state of the bodies who inhabit this paradise, filled with a luminosity in which there are scarcely any shadows. The third panel stands in stark contrast to the other two. This seems to show a time after the paradise has been destroyed by darkness, weapons, punishments, selfishness, greed, and flames. All human activity seems to be governed by what can best be described as the debris of a history that hints at modernization. Knives pierce the scene in different places. The image communicates perverted pleasures derived from mutilated bodies. All four images share thematic concerns with Piñera's poem "La isla en peso" and Arenas' novel *The Color of Summer*.

When Arenas reads Piñera's poem in *Necesidad de libertad*, it is as if he were also reading Bosch's paintings, especially if we can imagine the different dramas depicted in the Garden as the *platanal* in Piñera's poem. The drama in the left and right panels correlate with the drama in the poem. "Porque también en la fresca penumbra del platanal, desnudos y abrazados a otro cuerpo

perseguido y maldito, puede concluir la diáspora que marcó la separación, la expulsión, es decir la maldición bíblica con sus incesantes combinaciones” [Because also in the cool penumbra of the banana plantation, naked and embracing another persecuted and cursed body, the diaspora that marked the separation, the expulsion, that is, the biblical curse with its incessant combinations, can come to an end] (*Necesidad* 144). In the drama of the biblical creation myth, Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise, cursing human beings with original sin, which in Christian mythology, justifies the punishment of homosexual bodies. In Piñera’s poem, “Eva y Adán, (“la odiosa pareja” que iniciara el desequilibrio) son destruidos, y los nuevos amantes—cuyos sexos no se definen—se encuentran, libres de culpa en la plantación” [Eve and Adam, (‘the hateful couple’ that started the imbalance) are destroyed, and the new lovers—whose sexes are not defined—find themselves, blameless on the plantation” (*Necesidad* 144). The plantation is the *platanal* in Piñera’s poem. The liberation in the plantation correlates with the center panel of Bosch’s painting where the bodies with undefined genders erotically play in paradise enjoying eternal pleasure. Arenas reads the moment in the poem when the poet says, “dos cuerpos en el platanal valen tanto como la primera pareja, la odiosa pareja que ha servido para marcar la separación” [two bodies in the banana grove are worth as much as the first couple, the hateful couple that has served to mark the separation] and “Musa paradisiaca, ampara a los amantes” [Paradise muse, protect the lovers] as signaling a heresy beneath the banana tree (*the paradise muse*) that marks “el fin del ciclo infernal otorgándonos, al menos momentáneamente, el paraíso...” [the end of the infernal cycle granting us, at least momentarily, paradise...] (*Necesidad* 144). Arenas views the heresy in the poem as the salvation that ruptures Judeo-Christian dogma and tradition, to propose a perfect cosmic resolution to the tension and radiant fire of homosexual history that never diminishes but will eventually reach its end.

Let us return now to *The Color of Summer* and to Odoriferous Gunk's conference paper, which is probably the most subversive of all the papers presented because it reveals the darkest truths amid a carnivalesque spectacle that is both grotesque and excessive. Keep in mind that Odoriferous Gunk's conference paper presents homosexual history from before the creation myth to the present. Arenas as narrator contextualizes, "Odie's thesis was simple yet profound" (*The Color* 397). The queen of Holland reads his paper to the multitude in attendance.

We have lost all meaning in life because we have lost paradise, and we have lost paradise because pleasure has been condemned. But pleasure—persecuted, execrated, condemned, exploited to exhaustion, and almost vanished from the world—still had its armies: clandestine silent armies, always in imminent danger of defeat but utterly unwilling to renounce life, which is defined by giving pleasure to others. These armies...are made up of queers, faggots, fairies, and other species of homosexuals all over the world. These are the greatest heroes of all time, those who truly have the dream of paradise and hold to it unflinchingly, those who at all costs attempt to recover their—and our—paradise lost. (*The Color* 397)

Odoriferous Funk's conference paper offers many examples of same sex desire throughout history, beginning in ancient Egypt, jumping to Mesopotamia, then to the Greeks, then to the Romans, discussing each civilization's contributions to pleasure. When he arrived at the topic of Jesus Christ he wrote, "that thirty-three-year-old man who wandered about the countryside preaching, and making love, to his twelve apostles" (*The Color* 398), the queen of Holland waved her hand and a giant screen lit up with an ancient painting. The narrator explains, "Jesus Christ was portrayed with his legs spread and John, the beloved apostle, a *gorgeous* teenage hunk, sleeping placidly with his hand on his master's lap, the Christ himself and the other disciples glowing with beatitude" (*The Color* 398). The hyperbole of these claims, sexualizing the figure of Jesus Christ, strikes at the heart of Christian beliefs. It blasphemes their sacred mythology, which has carefully portrayed him as a celibate figure, who performs miracles, while practicing total self-abnegation. Arenas is not the first to insinuate the queerness of the story about the relationship of Jesus Christ and his twelve apostles. After all, it was he who ordered them to leave their homes, their wives, their

children, and their professions to follow him and become “fishers of men.” In the heretical tradition of Christian dissidence, the apostle John in the famous painting by Leonardo DaVinci called *The Last Supper* is believed to be Mary Magdalene. There are others who claim that Magdalene bore Jesus’ children, that *she* was the sacred chalice—the vessel. These ideas appear in the film *The DaVinci Code*. Another controversial depiction of Jesus that juxtaposes God and Satan and questions the divinity of Christ is the film *The Last Temptation of the Christ* (1988) by Martin Scorsese, which was adapted from a historical novel written by Nikos Kazantzakis in 1955.

The queen of Holland continued reading Odoriferous Gunk’s paper where it discusses how “the pagan feasts with their invincible armies of pleasure” were confronted by “the coming of Catholicism and widespread use of the bonfire. Beautiful naked bodies were mutilated. People covered statues’ nakedness with cloaks and fig leaves, cruelly smashed and broke off their sexes” (*The Color* 398). Here we can think of the right panel of Bosch’s painting and the perverted pleasures of mutilated flesh. Odoriferous Gunk also discusses how the Middle Ages unleashed “caped and uncapped, masked and unmasked...and today somehow still unleash, the wrath of their sordid splendor. But the battle to recover Paradise has never ceased being fought, and the army of pleasure, the true angels expelled from life, continue to practice, however and whenever they can, what inquisitors and cowards call the sin against nature” (*The Color* 398). In this part of Odoriferous Gunk’s paper, Arenas attacks the religious notion that nudity and sex are sinful. He draws attention to how during the Early Middle Age, also known as the Dark Ages, religious authorities perceived the erotic relics of antiquity to be a threat to morality. The Italian Scholar Petrarch helped to promote the binary notion that dark equated with ignorance and evil, while light equated with knowledge and goodness. Catholicism embraced the thinking of Augustine of Hippo, also known as Saint Augustine, whose fifth century writings in *On Genesis* and *The Retractions*

helped to formulate the notion of original sin, claiming that concupiscence, or libido, was the metaphysical injury, which diminished their intelligence and will. The thinking of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* gave birth to natalism. Based on a natural approach to law, Aquinas affirmed marriage and the reproductive imperative of sexual relations, while denouncing sins one might commit because of lust, such as simple fornication, adultery, incest, seduction, rape, and “the unnatural vice.” According to Aquinas, these sins violate the natural order because the indulgence in pleasure for pleasure’s sake would not produce children. Aquinas regarded masturbation, bestiality, and homosexual acts as unnatural vices. He saw them as offenses against life itself because semen is a sacred fluid dedicated to its reproduction.

Then came the part of Odoriferous Gunk’s talk, mentioned earlier, where he focuses on the part of homosexual history from the time of Constantine to the implementation of bourgeois morality and militant Communism (*The Color* 398). Arenas uses the voice of the queen of Holland to list a long list of names from history that represents the accumulated knowledge he acquired from his extensive reading at the Biblioteca Nacional, those he understood to have suffered because of their homosexual desire.

The list invoked the names of Heliogabalus, Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare, Louis XIII of France, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Edward II of England, Michelangelo, Walt Whitman, Louis of Bavaria, Petronius, James I of Scotland, Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky, Marcel Proust, Pier Paolo Pasolini, André Gide, Julio Cortazar, Yukio Mishima, Vincent Van Gogh, Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet, Federico Garcia Lorca, Tennessee Williams, Witold Gombrowicz, Jacinto Benavente, Virgilio Piñera, José Lezama Lima, and a thousand other famous men. (*The Color* 398)

Odoriferous Gunk’s paper also mentions the thousands of indigenous who were exterminated for practicing sodomy, as reported by Spanish chroniclers.

Through the voice of the queen of Holland, Arenas turns to the queens who have been persecuted in Cuba and throughout Latin America, those massacred under Communism and

Fascism. “The screen lit up to show the spellbound audience Russian queens frozen in remote gulags, queens burned to cinders in Nazi concentration camps...queens confined in Fifo’s own concentration camps...pictures of confinement camps for victims of AIDS,” and the images poured past the audience eyes “showing tunnels filled with sexual prisoners...queens planting coffee in Havana...queens cutting brush in Camaguey, queens weeding field with their bare hands in Pinar del Rio, queens crushing rocks in flooded quarries” (*The Color* 399). The flurry of images showing queens around the world shows us the aftermath of abolishing the utopian freedom of paradise and pleasure from the world. By expanding the discourse to incorporate homosexuals from all over the world and throughout history, Fifo is not just Castro and the Revolution, or simply God and the Devil. Fifo begins to represent something more. He becomes a synecdoche for homosexual history and the biopolitical power that created the homosexual holocaust AIDS.

In this chapter, Arenas hands Fifo the indictment, after he acquires an other-worldly dimension in his voice, as though he were speaking like a herald angel sent from the realm of the gods to announce a terrifying truth. It is as though he is a voice that speaks from the perspective of all the cockroaches who have had to survive and resist under the intense luminosity and withering heat of the clarity of homosexual history. The voice reflects on the horror since original sin began. Arenas narrates using a collective voice that transcends time and space, at once confession and testimony, mythological and metaphysical, declaring a naked and sacred truth that only can be spoken from within the bonfire radiance of the clarity. I quote it in its entirety because it reflects a totalizing wisdom. Arenas herewith conjures the *loca* multitude, using the solidarity expressed in the “we,” to confront the macho war with the only weapon they possess.

We queens are the members of a religious, and therefore fanatical and holy, body whose purpose is to give and receive pleasure. Over against all the horrors of the world, and even within them, we set the only thing we possess—our enslaved bodies—as the source, fount, and vessel of grace. It is this aspect of our worship

that is the justification for our beloved St. Nelly, patron saint of our aerial altars (so often vilified and smashed) –for all religious bodies must have their holy virgins (and, in our case, martyrs), who in one way or another stand for, symbolize, our unending *via crucis*. For we have experienced, and continue to experience, all the sufferings that strike the human species—domestic strife, illness, old age, abandonment, loneliness—yet in addition to those sufferings common to all we are made to live through yet more terrible calamities. We have suffered derision and extermination. We have been buried alive, walled up, burned, hanged, shot by firing squads, discriminated against, blackmailed, and imprisoned. There have been, and still are, attempts to destroy our kind completely. Science, politics, and religion have taken up arms against us. The creation of the AIDS virus, manufactured with the clear intention of annihilating us and all those who, like us, seek after adventure (for all adventure is the expression of a disquiet, a yearning, and holds out erotic possibilities), is but the most recent attempt to bring our history to an end—and yet ours is a history that cannot have an end, because it is the history of life in its most rebellious, authentic manifestation. What has been sought by every means possible is a world that is chaste, practical, and sober. We oppose that horror with all our hearts and souls, we assume all possible risks, and we wield against it that infinitely powerful weapon the only weapon that we possess—pleasure. (*The Color* 401-02)

Arenas herewith proposes that pleasure seeking same sex desire is a religion as important as any other that he has criticized through the voice of the queen of Holland reading Odoriferous Gunk's conference paper. The sacred mission of the bodies who practice this faith is to provide pleasure and restore paradise to humanity.

Throughout the conference, speaking through the voices of his avatars, Arenas points an accusatory finger at all forces, beliefs, ideologies, and powers that have conspired to commit atrocities—the genocide of same-sex pleasure-seeking devotees. Like when an indictment is read in court listing the charges against the accused, Arenas summarizes the war crimes, the wholesale slaughter of bodies, the terror. He also declares that AIDS is a man-made weapon created with genocidal intentions and accuses science, politics, and religion, which throughout history has largely been dominated by men, of conspiring to develop it and use it as a deterrent as they seek to materialize their fictions of chastity and sobriety into reality. He seems to suggest that the macho war against the *locas* is organized crime. In his reading of the macho's twisted and deadly patriarchal creation fantasy that conflates religious dogmas with pseudoscientific theories, such as

the belief that lumps sexual inversion, the feminine gender, and sins against nature with the notion of original sin, Arenas asserts that the body of the homosexual is the most punished body in recorded history and ridicules the foolhardy notion that by erasing homosexual bodies from history, machos can create their ultimate utopia in which they are no longer tempted to engage in the pleasure they regard as the ultimate sin. With this erudite, angelic voice, Arenas identifies the homosexual body and its pleasure seeking as the authentic manifestation of life free from the reproductive imperative.

Through Odoriferous Gunk's conference paper, Arenas declares that the *loca* should not reject the pejorative word *pájaro* [bird], because the "homosexual is an aerial, untethered being, with no place, no place to call his own, who yearns to return to...he knows not where" (*The Color* 400). According to Arenas, homosexuals are migratory birds in an eternal quest. The narration then switches from "I" to "we." "Our aerial nature is perfect...so it should not be strange that we have been called fairies. We are fairies because we are always...in an air that is not ours because it is unpossessable...not bounded by the walls and fences of this world...we are always ready to take flight" (*The Color* 400). Arenas is adamant that paradise lost can be recovered if the return the homosexual seeks is "unquestionably...a return to pleasure. And pleasure, as we all know, is the essence of Paradise" (*The Color* 400). Arenas is angry that homosexuals have been expelled from their paradise and that their paradise has been proscribed and blamed for the so-called sin that humanity to be expelled from paradise. He is tired that homosexuals continue to be the macho's scapegoat.

Arenas points the way for how he sees homosexual liberation, on a global scale, needs to play out. Be the migratory birds we have always been... "we are in fact, the true birds of paradise—sparkling, twinkling, multicolored beings of light" (*The Color* 400). Arenas' message to

homosexuals is clear—do not be ashamed. “One of our missions as former denizens of Eden is to fill the world with fairy dust and feathers of all colors and sizes, so that no one will forget, first, that we descended into the world from Paradise and, second, that we intend to recover that Paradise from which we were expelled” (*The Color* 400). It is at this point that he asserts a truth that turns the tables on the patriarchal creation myth. In his reading of the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden, Arenas contradicts the notion that original sin was sexual pleasure and that the original biblical couple commanded to love each other chastely gave into temptation and, God forbid, had sex for pleasure. Arenas expresses the ultimate blasphemy to the patriarchal mythology of Juedo-Christian-Muslim faith when he writes, “because the real Adam and Eve were two men (one, apparently, in drag) or two queens, or two women who broke the celestial rule because they sought their own heaven” (*The Color* 401). This assertion recalls the center panel of Bosch’s triptych, which we can now read as depicting what paradise would have been like had the concept of sin not even been imagined.

Arenas’ discourse is a call to arms, to use pleasure to recuperate paradise. To confront the cartel of machos and their war on *locas*, Arenas urges his fellow *locas* to take ownership of the insular mark of the epistemically wretched and fallen woman who brought original sin into the world from the Garden of Eden. Since he has declared that pleasure seeking is a religion, it must be defended. He proposes a sacred mission, which has been the mission since the beginning of life... “To create the army of pleasure...to continue to be soldiers in that army, its eternal reinforcements. It is a divine mission because it exalts (and for a moment makes us forget) the human. Our object is to create (or, if you prefer, preserve) a mythology and a metaphysics of pleasure” (*The Color* 401). His constitutes a new metaphysics to counter the metaphysics erected by the Patriarchs of the world’s monotheistic religions. Henceforth, the *loca*’s duty is to remind

the macho who punishes her that they were both expelled from paradise for tasting the erotic pleasure of forbidden fruit and that he was a willing participant. Arenas includes a message of spiritual redemption in *The Color of Summer*, by putting forth a “counter-memory” that posits an alternate history in which the homosexual, who has been the super villain of patriarchal history, is transformed into the hero who fights for the recuperation of a paradise lost, ever since the macho rained down war and a myriad of holocausts on their bodies.

Conclusions

Arenas appropriates Piñera’s poetics of insilio to express how the implacable light of Cuban history trapped him in a *via crucis* of inner exile while on the island. Arenas became a pariah when his second book was officially banned by the Revolution despite its winning the honorable mention; he suffered incessant censorship and surveillance because his work had been published *outside* of the Revolution in Mexico, Germany and France; he was persecuted by the military police who many times confiscated his manuscripts; he was sent into forced labor at a sugar plantation; he was framed for contributing to the delinquency of a minor and then imprisoned in the infamous El Moro Castle (all the while smuggling his work off the Island); then forced to renounce that work in 1976. He survived through silent acquiescence and hiding out like a cockroach in one of Piñera’s short stories until he was able to escape the island during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. He documents the details of the exodus in both *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*. I question how relevant a discussion about the Cuban regime’s AIDS policies in relation to the author is, when he went into exile before the first cases in the United States were reported. I discuss what he had to say about his experience with AIDS in the United States in Chapter two. I am not claiming discussing AIDS in the Caribbean is irrelevant. Certainly, the AIDS crisis in the region is a huge concern, but Arenas did not make it a direct concern in his writing. Besides writing about his struggle with the Castro regime and its politics, Arenas flung his body

across the sea to the United States to make a huge point. Perhaps he was testing the limits of freedom in a space he imagined was free.

Once he acquires his newfound freedom in exile, he begins to channel the poetics he appropriated into denouncing what he calls the “Stalinist” character of Castro’s totalitarian regime that took control of Cuba’s history and destiny. According to Rafael Ocasio in “The Fight and Flight of Reinaldo Arenas,” Arenas was among the “social misfits,” those considered gays and lesbians “expelled from the country” (358). The central question Ocasio seeks to answer in the article, besides explaining who Reinaldo Arenas was, is “why did he choose to become one of the most vocal figures among activists in exile opposed to the Castro regime, to the detriment of his literary reputation?” (359). Ocasio highlights the fact that Arenas liked to test the legal limits he confronted in Cuba, especially when it came to avoiding police raids. It was something “he often bragged about” (Ocasio 360). In many interviews widely available on social media today, Arenas claims that he is a stateless person, exiled from Cuba, but not belonging to another country. Since Arenas declared in the introduction of *Antes que anochezca* that his literary project was a major part of his revenge, we must consider his actions in exile as part of that scheme. I argue, therefore, that we must consider Arenas’ reluctance to accept the status of refugee in the United States, and the privileges and benefits such a status would have entailed, as a kind of performance, one that proved to have deadly consequences. Ocasio explains that although many Cuban emigrants, without family or friends to receive them, languished in refugee processing and relocation centers for weeks, even months, until gay associations served as sponsors, Reinaldo Arenas “was released within one day” (358). While still in Cuba, Arenas had an international reputation as a celebrated author, one who in his early twenties produced what critics like Ocasio considered “literary jewels” (360). Ocasio regards Arenas as very fortunate, compared to many other “Marielitos,” and

speculates that his quick release from the Truman Annex of the US naval facilities in Key West was likely due to an aunt living in Miami. Arenas arrived with just the clothes on his back. He had been stripped of all earthly belonging prior to boarding the boat in Cuba.

Ocasio further explains that Arenas did not arrive “as an intellectual seeking freedom of expression, but as a homosexual with a criminal record” (359). Reporter Marlise Simons writing in Havana for the *Washington Post*, who on May 12, 1980 penned the announcement of Arenas’ arrival, emphasizing that he served “a jail sentence for a homosexual offense.” Knowledge of his homosexuality would have led to a pause in his processing given the Department of Justice of the United States had “the legal obligation to exclude homosexuals from entering the United States” (Ocasio 359). A big change in the way the United States treated homosexual immigrants took place in 1979, when the Public Health Service “would no longer certify that homosexuality is a mental disease or defect” (Ocasio 359). If he was released from the relocation center in a day, his status as a homosexual was not an issue worthy of exposing him to inspection by border control authorities. Nevertheless, he wore the status of an outlaw with pride.

Ocasio reports that no sooner had Arenas arrived in the United States, he gave “numerous interviews with literary critics and reporters for Spanish-language newspapers, promoting himself as both a Marielito and a homosexual” (361). Ocasio asserts that he positioned himself as both “a political and a sexual outlaw” (361). Frank and graphic discussions about homosexual activity “became part of his political activism against the Castro regime” (Ocasio 361). Ocasio explains that the notoriety transformed him into “the most vocal and most feared of antirevolutionary Cuban writers exiled in the United States or abroad” (361). He sponsored and underwrote many of the campaigns to boycott the Castro regime, despite “living in poverty in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen district and receiving care through Medicaid” (Ocasio 361). As I seek to contextualize the

performativity of his embodiment as political and sexual outlaw, my concern is not to “blame the victim,” as they say. All choices have consequences. As one critic pointed out in a discussion about my dissertation, Arenas could have perhaps had better access to medical care in the United States, after he was diagnosed with AIDS, had he made different choices when he arrived. This much is true. However, Arenas determined the course of his life in keeping with his principles and the mission he revealed in the two novels published posthumously.

For a time, he lived in the paradise of his imagination. But AIDS cast him out, by exposing his body to a different form of inner exile—the *insilio of the cuerpo sidoso*. As the metaphor of the title of his autobiography *Before Night Falls* gained a new meaning, a race against time, he channeled his poetics in a new direction, to denounce what he believed were the man-made origins of the homosexual holocaust. After he completed *Before Night Falls* and the introduction called “The End,” including his homage to the African loa Yemayá, he turned his attention to complete *The Color of Summer*. All the while AIDS urgently turned his body into an unlivable vessel. In the burning clarity of his trace of homosexual history back to the Garden of Eden, he has an epiphany—a mandate to those who survive what he could not—which he incorporated into the novel. His message to AIDS survivors and homosexuals everywhere is clear. Do not be afraid to fill the earth with your feathers and continue fighting to recuperate the paradise lost because of the macho holocaust. The poem “La isla en peso” made it all possible because it cleared a path to survival, to a return to paradise, with its “exorcismo implacable y luminoso” [relentless and luminous exorcism (*Necesidad* 145)].

CHAPTER 3 – APOCALYPSE AND THE SEEDS OF TRANSFEMINIST REVOLUTION

Exceptional Conditions

In this chapter I examine how various *locas* inhabiting the pages of *Loco afán: Crónicas de sidario* (1996) by Pedro Segundo Mardones Lemebel struggle for human rights under the shadow of a murderous military regime, an unrelenting and deadly disease, and a dubious transition to neoliberal democracy in Chile. In *Loco afán* several overlapping circumstances are framed as apocalyptic dangers that reduce the lives of *locas* to disposable bodies with a viral disease. Without implying a hierarchy, they include: first, the exceptionalism of national and religious discourses that have criminalized and pathologized sodomy and prostitution since before Chile became a nation; second, the HIV/AIDS epidemic which many regarded as a (re)colonizing plague imported to Chile in the 1980s; third, Pinochet's merciless persecution of Marxists; fourth, the censorship of media considered leftist, along with the deadly military curfew, and the endless state of exception that produced a 14-year cultural blackout; and fifth, the "negotiated" transition to democracy. Moving forward I will refer to all these circumstances using the phrase *exceptional conditions*. These exceptional conditions together produced inner exile under fascist rule in Chile.

In my view, the apocalypse metaphor can be understood as a twofold commination: a power structure like the beast with several heads in the "Book of Revelation," also called the "Apocalypse of John," and a contaminating menace like the Lernaean Hydra, a multi-headed serpentine water monster from Greco-Roman mythology as told by Gaius Julius Hyginus in *Fabulae* 30. The Hydra's breath and blood were so virulent that even its lingering odor was deadly. AIDS has often been referred to in apocalyptic terms and Lemebel invoked the Biblical metaphor when he and Francisco Casas (1959-) founded the homosexual artist collective the Yeguas del Apocalipsis in 1988 and began waging a militant struggle using extremely confrontational artistic principles to

claim citizenship for *locas* excluded by Chilean authoritarianism and its logic of exceptionalism. Lemebel explains the choice of the name and their mission in an interview with Luis Alberto Mansilla in October 1996 for the magazine *Punto Final*, quoted in *Bandera Hueca* (2008) by Victor Hugo Robles.

Creamos un dúo provocador, cuyo solo nombre produjo urticaria en un ambiente caracterizado por el conformismo y la complicidad con la represión del Estado. Denunciamos la hipocresía y el acomodamiento a la dictadura. Antes del advenimiento de la democracia, éramos los maricas quienes decíamos lo que otros no podían o no querían decir. El solo nombre ha sido nuestra mayor intervención. Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis tienen que ver con la metáfora del SIDA que, en ese tiempo, se achacaba a los homosexuales como una enfermedad de fin de siglo, una metáfora del Apocalipsis.

[We created a provocative duo whose very name raised hives in an atmosphere characterized by conformity and complicity with the State repression. Before the advent of democracy, we were the queers who said what others couldn't or didn't want to say. The very name has been our greatest intervention. The Mares of the Apocalypse have to do with the metaphor of AIDS which, at that time impugned homosexuals as an end of century sickness, a metaphor for the Apocalypse.] (Robles 27)

I argue that *Loco afán* reveals the inner exile of *locas*—local male homosexual intersectional identities that consider themselves outliers of the dominant gay, lesbian, and queer culture—who have been objectified and subjected to moral excision and social ostracism by those who wield power in the nation-state. In my reading of “La noche de los visones” [The Night of the Minks] we will see how the stigma surrounding the bodily manifestations of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the Chilean government’s criminalization and regulation of dissident sexuality created the exceptional conditions for a unique form of inner exile to manifest, one marked by ignorance, silencing fear, and death.

Militancy, Chronicles, and Guerilla Warfare Tactics in the Face of Certain Death

Because of AIDS, male Chilean homosexuals and prostitutes were forced further into the obscurity of a closeted existence under the panoptic eyes of regulatory bodies that censored and punished any form of dissident political, social, and sexual activity. Another huge obstacle that ironically encouraged the spread of HIV was the Catholic Church, whose doctrinal hard-liners condemned the use of condoms based on the theory that allowing their use would facilitate the spread of the evil in the form of contraception and the promotion of fornication. Under such conditions, mounting a coordinated community response to the AIDS crisis, offering education about preventing infection, and creating meaningful community relationships based on a visible homosexual identity were impossible. Victor Parra, a homosexual man interviewed for the book *SIDA en Chile* (2015) by Amelia Donoso and Victor Hugo Robles remembers what it was like in the 1980s when AIDS arrived in Chile.

El movimiento social estaba preocupado por el tema de los Derechos Humanos y luchando más en contra de la dictadura que respecto del SIDA. El contexto político estaba centrado netamente en la recuperación de la democracia, recordando que entre el 83 y el 86 fueron los años de las mayores movilizaciones contra la dictadura y a su vez fueron los embates más duros de represión y la agresión hacia las personas opositoras a Pinochet. Desde este escenario, las organizaciones sociales estaban centradas en el trabajo anti represivo y de reconstrucción de la participación social política, por tanto el tema del SIDA no era prioritaria.

[The social movement was more preoccupied with the topic of Human Rights and the struggle against the dictatorship than addressing AIDS. The political context was focused entirely on regaining democracy, keeping in mind that between '83 and '86 were the years of the greatest mobilizations against the dictatorship and at the same time of the greatest onslaughts of repression and aggression toward persons opposing Pinochet. Against that backdrop social organizations were focused on the work against repression and the reconstruction of socio-political participation, for which reason the topic of AIDS was not a priority.] (Donoso and Robles 28)

Being homosexual in Chile during the 1980s, with exceptional conditions looming large and casting a dark shadow on the expression of awakening same-sex desire, life was extremely

precarious. The Unidad Popular (the political coalition that voted Allende into power) did little to improve the legal situation. Chile's penal code established in 1874 declared sodomy a crime against nature and a sin against the nation's highest moral values, until it was modified in 1999 and sodomy between consenting adults was decriminalized. In 2015, Chile approved civil unions but full equality under the law for homosexual kinship remains elusive. At another level, sodomy has been treated as a disease in Chile since the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the sodomite was reclassified as the homosexual in psychological, psychiatric, and medical discourses. As observed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), the homosexual became regarded as a new *species*. In September 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA), arguably one of the most influential mental health organizations in the world, announced it had removed homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Despite the momentous change, Chile continued treating homosexuality as a disease during the 1980s through an increasingly powerful institutional system that assumed the role of protecting the health of Chilean citizens, while Chilean regulatory bodies remained willfully obstinate under the powerful influence of Catholic doctrinal hardlines. Chilean homosexual males could barely protect their precarious identities and remain anonymous if they manifested the violaceous stains of Kaposi Sarcoma (KS) on their bodies. The disease was like a neon sign pointing accusingly at them, drawing unwanted attention, as if saying, "here is a sodomite, harbinger of plague and death, finish him off." The stigma of being considered criminal, pathological, and a contagion—less than human—was too much to bear.

The Corporación Chilena de Prevención de SIDA produced a document describing a community mobilization plan that emerged in Chile in 1987, while the vigilance of the military

curfew was still a serious concern, which evokes what life was like during those dark years when AIDS first appeared.

Ser hombre homosexual en esa época fue un hecho duro. La experimentación de la sexualidad se comenzó a vivir con un profundo temor frente a una enfermedad desconocida. Cualquier mancha en el cuerpo se asociaba a la posibilidad de haberla adquirido, generando abatimiento y dolor, vividos en el más profundo de los silencios. Las personas que adquirieron el VIH tuvieron que vivir su experiencia en secreto por miedo al rechazo y a la discriminación. Recibir un diagnóstico de seropositividad era sinónimo de una muerte anunciada, acompañada por la evidente hostilidad y prejuicio de los funcionarios de salud o de otros organismos.

[To be a homosexual man during that time was a hard thing. Experimentation with sexuality started to be accompanied by a profound fear in the face of a new unknown illness. e associated any stain on one's body with the possibility of having gotten it, which produced pain and chagrin experienced in the most profound silence. People who became HIV positive had to live through the experience in secret, afraid of rejection and discrimination. Receiving an HIV positive diagnosis was synonymous with a death notice, accompanied by the obvious hostility and prejudice of health workers and other entities.] (Donoso and Robles 34)

When the first death from AIDS was reported in Chile in 1984, most cases reported in the media before then involved homosexual men. These reports gave many people the impression that the disease was specific to male homosexuals. The first Chilean AIDS cases in women appeared in 1985. AIDS in children infected through blood transfusions appeared in 1987, while cases of children infected through breast milk were first reported in 1989 (Wu et al. 11). In 1980s Chile, the term *homosexual* was most often used to refer to biological males, while the terms *lésbica* and *lesbiana* referred to females. This distinction continued well into the 1990s.

The term *gay* in Latin America was used mainly by those who identified with its use in the context of homosexual liberation movements of the 1960s in the United States. It is important to keep these distinctions in mind, since male homosexuality in Chile has been a major concern of the patriarchal imagination it inherited from Catholicism, which still regards sodomy a transgression of the natural order established by God. This logic dictates that one's sex, gender, and sexuality are determined by the genitalia one is born with and that coitus is strictly for

reproductive purposes. In the fascist ‘criollo’ government of Chile, political, institutional, and religious leaders regarded AIDS as the product of sodomite and prostitute pathologies that should be punished or, at the very least, quarantined. There are many instances in Chilean history where homosexual males have been sent to reeducation camps or killed, officially and extra-officially. In his writing and interviews Lemebel often refers to homosexual oppression obscured by history. In “Manifiesto: Hablo por mi diferencia” [Manifiesto: I speak for my difference], he singles out former president Carlos Ibáñez del Campo (1877-1960), who is remembered for being hostile toward homosexuals and rumored to have engaged in homosexual genocide.

To survive the desolation of this socially constructed reality described above, most homosexual males lived in denial, of their sexuality and in ignorance of the dangers of contracting the disease. The proletarian men who had sex with transvestite male prostitutes still regarded themselves as heterosexual based on a cultural myth that presumed homosexual bodies were biologically different. This cultural residue, product of inherited judicial, medical, and social beliefs, conferred a false sense of security rooted in the assumption that heterosexuals were immune to HIV. The lack of scientifically sound and non-judgmental information meant that very few people knew how the virus spread and salacious news reports only added to the confusion and fear. The lives of people with dissident sexualities who manifested symptoms of the disease were transformed into pariahs. PWAs either masked their symptoms from family and friends, isolated themselves to avoid state intervention, or were placed in isolation by the biopolitical regulation protocols and legal mechanisms controlling sexually transmitted infections (STIs). There were no medications in the early 1980s to treat the various diseases that PWAs developed after their immune systems had been destroyed by the virus. Although silence became equal to death in the minds of many activists, visibility around AIDS in Chile at that time would likely lead to social

ostracism and so remaining silent about symptoms allowed the infected to remain in a more tolerable social climate. For most Chileans in the first decade of the epidemic, an HIV positive test or an AIDS diagnosis was an apocalyptic death sentence.

I read the apocalypse (dictatorship, disease, dubious democracy) as the overarching villain of the stories in *Loco afán* and the *locas* as the long-suffering national heroes—the *mares of the AIDS apocalypse* who mount a transfeminist resistance to fascism using baroque *travesti* aesthetics of the body, clandestine political activism, and exuberant gestures of mutual affinity, to manifest queer kinship. Through close readings of selected chronicles from *Loco afán* and other related texts, images, and films, we will peer into the AIDS world (*sida + escenario = sidario*) Lemebel constructs to discover that the stories do much more than simply narrate the lives and deaths of PWAs facing bleak conditions and dying from a disease referred to as “la sombra” [the shadow], or “el mal” [the curse]. The chronicles of *Loco afán* intervene in national, transnational, religious, and social discourses, expressing scathing critiques and offering utopian imaginings of queer futurity. We will also come to understand that everything Lemebel wrote, said, and did was motivated by politics carefully situated within the tension between history and memory. If we were to summarize the thrust of his politics in one word, that word would be *visibility*. We are not talking about simply being visible on the street or in a poster or in a television interview, but rather we are talking about a *militant visibility* that *goes viral* in the sense that the persona Lemebel continually becomes and projects into the world saturates the senses of many who encounter him with an urgency and compulsion to share their experience with others. This phenomenon occurs locally as well as transnationally. No one can walk away from an encounter with Lemebel (artist, performer, writer, cultural critic) without being moved and obligated to take a position.

In *Loco afán* Lemebel demonstrates transnational knowledge about the disease, famous people who have stood out in the world of AIDS, as well as theoretical, philosophical, and artistic currents. By the time the book came out in 1996, Lemebel was already a celebrity in Santiago. He had already published in newspapers and hosted a radio show called “Cancionero” on *Radio Tierra*, the first station dedicated to promoting the voices of homosexuals. The clandestine press *Ergo Sum* had published his first book *Incontables*, a collection of short stories, in 1986. During the ten years between book, Lemebel devoted most of his time to the project of *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* with Francisco Casas. Other than the collection of short stories and one novel, most critics classify his prose as chronicles, but many of the writings defy critics of the generic classification expect. The political manifesto which is included in the book is a perfect example of writing that defies the expectations of the chronicle genre, because it is written in the style of a poem. Lemebel’s work with the *Yeguas* burnt the shroud that kept the vestiges of the world of *maricas*, *locas*, and *travestis* hidden in Chile and in the process revealed the zigzagging movement and fluidity of male homosexual embodiments, forever destroying the monolithic stereotypes used to name and oppress the identity. The blasphemous posture toward binary notions of gender and sexuality began with the manifesto and later became an integral stance of the *Yeguas*’ public political interventions. Later, they became a fundamental thematic concern in his writing when the performances with Casas began to wane. His writing is difficult to classify because it reveals the same third world *marica* elusiveness and marginalized distinction of all the gendered and racialized homosexual embodiments he has performed. His life experience in the margins of Chilean society is what makes his writing unique among contemporary writers of chronicles.

Vivian Mahieux in *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America* (2011) refers to the contemporary chronicle genre as “the shared intimacy of everyday life,” which is the subtitle of

her book. Chronicles are a “somewhat unstructured” genre which have “been surprisingly successful in recent years at consolidating critical recognition with popular appeal ... [and an] inherent ability to capture urban life in all of its chaotic, fragmented, and often dysfunctional grandeur” (Mahieux 1). Mahieux explains that as many Latin American cities have reached “postapocalyptic” levels, a term she borrows from Carlos Monsiváis, “chroniclers have become the intermediaries through whom the gritty reality of the city streets ... are recognized and resignified” (1). Like Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska in Mexico, and Maria Moreno in Argentina, Lemebel’s work mediates between two vastly different realms of knowledge creation: popular and academic. The “characters, cityscapes, and practices” Lemebel writes about are not “official versions of national modernity” rather, they offer “ironic, irreverent, and indispensable” reflections (Mahieux 1). Lemebel’s chronicles are part of a tradition that began with the “founders of the Spanish American literary movement *modernismo*,” which includes poets and journalists José Martí and Rubén Darío, who also “published chronicles regularly throughout their writing lives” (Mahieux 1). For a long time, chronicle writing in the nineteenth century was considered “a side job for poets in need of a salary and were pessimistic about the future” (Mahieux 1). Put differently, in the literary world chronicles lacked the prestige associated with poetry, short stories, and novels. However, in the “late twentieth century...the chronicle began to receive the systematic and critical attention it so richly deserved” (Mahieux 1). Contemporary chronicles are the ideal “bastard writing,” as Lemebel often called it, for encoding memory because of their generic ambiguity, which cuts across socially constructed borders between what is imagined as reality, fiction, history, and memory.

Lemebel was 21 years old when Pinochet led the coup in 1973 and started banning and censoring the circulation of media it considered Marxist. Under the shadow of military censorship,

Lemebel nurtured his imagination through secretive associations with feminist intellectuals and activists, reading books translated to Spanish, and devouring magazines and other unauthorized publications that circulated in the country through clandestine affinity groups and underground marketplaces that emerged after the coup. Thus, when he writes chronicles about popular cultural icons like Joan Manuel, Raphael, Cecilia, Lucho Gatica, Rock Hudson, Freddy Mercury, and Madonna; or crafts a chronicle in the form of a letter to Elizabeth Taylor; or creates chronicles about the international AIDS Quilt and the commemoration of the Stonewall riots, he bears witness to how, even under the cultural blackout and targeting of leftist intellectuals, the imagination enables the mind to circle the globe and create new knowledge from encounters with ideas appropriated from elsewhere. The spark of his imagination that lights the fuse of his organic intellectual dynamite is what led well known authors like Roberto Bolaño and Carlos Monsiváis to take note of his writing, when it was in its embryonic formation, to proclaim that he represented a new and emerging tour de force. After living abroad in Spain for many years and returning for a visit to his native Chile, Bolaño wrote about his encounter with Lemebel in a chronicle about the experience as an exile returning for a visit. Bolaño describes him as nothing short of exceptional.

Lemebel es el más grande poeta de mi generación y yo admiraba, ya desde España, la estela gloriosa y provocativa de Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis. [...] Nadie habla un español más chileno que Lemebel. Nadie le saca más emociones a su español que Lemebel. Lemebel no necesita escribir poesía para ser el mejor poeta de mi generación. Nadie llega más hondo que Lemebel [...] sabe abrir los ojos en la oscuridad, en esos territorios en los que nadie se atreve a entrar. [...] reconocí en Lemebel el espíritu indomable del poeta mexicano Mario Santiago, muerto, y las imágenes relampagueantes de La Araucana, muerta, arrinconada, pero que Lemebel hacía vivir otra vez, y entonces supe que ese escritor marica, mi héroe, podía estar en el bando de los perdedores pero que la victoria, la triste victoria que ofrece la Literatura (escrita así, con mayúsculas), sin duda era suya. Cuando todos los que lo han ninguneado estén perdidos en el albañal o en la nada. Pedro Lemebel será aún una estrella.

[Lemebel is the greatest poet of my generation. I admired, already from Spain, the glorious and provocative trail of Mares of the Apocalypse [...] Nobody speaks a more Chilean Spanish than Lemebel. No one brings more emotions out of his

Spanish than Lemebel. Lemebel does not need to write poetry to be the best poet of my generation. No one goes deeper than Lemebel. [...] Lemebel is brave, that is, [...] he knows how to open his eyes in the dark, in those territories where no one dares to enter. [...] I recognized in Lemebel the indomitable spirit of the Mexican poet Mario Santiago, dead, and the flashing images of La Araucana, dead, cast aside, but that Lemebel made live again, and then I knew that that faggot writer, my hero, could be on the losing side but that victory, the sad victory offered by the Literature (written like this, with capital letters), was undoubtedly his. When all those who have ignored him are lost in the sewer or oblivion. Pedro Lemebel will still be a star.] (Bolaño)

This is extremely high praise coming from a writer considered one of the greats of Chilean literary history. By situating Lemebel among the greats of Literature (with a capital L), Bolaño elevates him to the Parnassus of poiesis, proclaiming him a star that will continue to shine in the firmament long after other male writers are forgotten. Because Lemebel intrepidly rejected the male dominated literary canon and infused his work with the nitty gritty underground of Chilean culture from within the blackout of Pinochet's dictatorship, Bolaño characterizes him as a hero because he was a fearless *marica* willing to tread where others dared not go. Moreover, Bolaño introduced Lemebel's work to Spanish publishers *Seix Barral* and *Anagrama*, which at the time were looking for novelists like Bolaño to publish.

In an interview with Ana María Risco for *La Nación* on 18 June 1995, upon the release of Lemebel's first book of chronicles *La esquina es mi Corazón* (1995), Risco recounts how shocked Carlos Monsiváis and other prominent intellectuals were when Lemebel walked out onto a stage at the Edificio Diego Portales during a seminar called "Utopias" and read the second chronicle of the collection called "New Kids del bloque" [New Kids of the block], (an obvious reference to the internationally famous boy band), dressed in drag.

Vestido de condesa, Pedro no sólo dejó con la boca abierta a 'Monsti' (su interlocutor y una de las más prominentes figuras de la intelectualidad mexicana, Carlos Monsiváis), sino además a todos los que lo escucharon curiosos mientras demostraba que no sólo era performance, sino un discurso completo.

[Dressed as a countess, Pedro not only left ‘Monsi’ (his interlocutor and one of the most prominent figures of the Mexican intelligentsia, Carlos Monsiváis) with their mouths open, but also all those who heard him listened curiously as he demonstrated it was not only a performance, but a complete speech (León 31).

The most surprising part of this quote, beside Monsiváis’ agape jaw, is her characterization of Lemebel’s work as a complete discourse. Lemebel’s writing appropriates so many other forms of writing that it comes across as story, essay, confession, and scathing criticism, urgently pressing intellectual and emotional buttons. Time and time again Lemebel left his interlocutors off kilter as he unsettled those in the “establishment.”

Jerónimo Pimentel, who interviews Lemebel in 2004, attempted to nail things down, but encountered a slippery surface difficult to grasp. For example, he concludes that Lemebel is “una peruana en cuerpo de chileno” [a Peruvian woman in the body of a Chilean man] because of the way Lemebel describes himself, “indio y malvestido” [indigenous and badly dressed] but only after first pointing out that the “tono rosado de su tez lo hace en el Perú parte de esa discriminación categoría de ‘blancos’ que, dicen las elites con risa, son un accidente cromático” [pink hue of his complexion makes him part of that category discriminated by ‘whites’ in Peru, which, the elites say with laughter, are a chromatic accident] (León 148). Pimentel began the interview by insinuating that Lemebel was some sort of hustler who charges for the same ideas and stories told in different ways. He referred to something that Lemebel himself had jokingly insinuated in past conversations and interviews when he characterized his work as a form of pirating or brand stealing. Lemebel makes clear that what he pirates and recycles is the popular culture that people have lived in the shadows, which he brings to readers.

Primero escribí un texto que es como mi caballo de batalla. ‘Manifiesto’. Ahí partió mi crónica. Fue muy desafiante en su momento y era una pregunta a la izquierda. ¿Qué pasará con nosotros, compañeros? El texto se publicó y me lo pagaron. Y creo que la relación que tengo con la rigurosidad de la escritura es por el dinero. Lo digo con toda desvergüenza. Quizás no sea con el vil metal, pero sí con la sobrevivencia. Y de ahí sale mi primer libro, *La esquina es mi corazón*.

[First, I wrote a text that is like my battlehorse. 'Manifesto'. That's where my chronicle started. It was very challenging at the time, and it was a question I posed to the left. What will happen to us, comrades? The text was published, and they paid me for it. And I think that the relationship I have with the rigor of writing is because of money. I say it with all shame. Maybe not with base metal, but with survival. And that's where my first book comes from, *La esquina es mi corazón*.] (León 148-149)

Pimentel responds by accusing him of hypocrisy for taking advantage of the hegemonic conditions he denounces. Lemebel replies that at another level, it is like a game in which the writer creates a persona that the people recognize more than writer. “Me ubican, bueno, los homosexuales siempre somos bien ubicables, no servimos para la clandestinidad, pero las personas no saben qué hago yo” [They find me, well, we homosexuals are always easy to find, we are not good at hiding, but people don't know what I do] (León 149). In other words, he likes to keep his readers and fans guessing. He does not want to be cemented into a category. The fluidity and constant movement of his work is fundamental, even though he does not give much importance to the nomenclature used to describe his work.

Me confunden con modista, peluquero, actor, aunque de alguna manera soy todo eso en la catedral falocéntrica de la literatura. Es muy difícil entrar, en Chile sobre todo, habiendo esos falos poéticos tan potentes. No se le perdona a un homosexual proletario que escriba, y que encima escriba de otras cosas que no sean necesariamente la homosexualidad. Pero más que decir que existe una literatura homosexual, existe una letra castigada, una literatura incomprendida. Como un bolero. [...] Por eso me decido por el género de la crónica que es un poco un cadáver exquisito, una suma de retazos, materiales bastardos y géneros: biografía, poética, canción popular. Me encantó, era como tener el closet de la Lady Di. Pero la crónica no la podía definir, como tampoco puedo definir la performance. Cuando me dijeron que hacía performance, yo no sabía lo que era, pero sonaba lindo y era como un pasaje a Nueva York, que así fue. Con la crónica también, sonaba bien ser cronista, artista. La gente siempre piensa que los homosexuales somos artistas.

[They confuse me with a dressmaker, hairdresser, actor, although somehow, I am all of that in the phallogentric cathedral of literature. It is very difficult to enter, especially in Chile, with such powerful poetic phalluses. A proletarian homosexual is not forgiven for writing and writing about other things that are not necessarily homosexuality. But more than saying that there is a homosexual literature, it is a punished writing, a misunderstood literature. Like a bolero. [...] That is why I decided on the genre of the chronicle, which is a bit of an exquisite corpse, a sum

of scraps, bastard materials and genres: biography, poetry, popular song. I loved it, like having Lady Di's closet. But the chronicle could not define it, just as I cannot define the performance. When they told me it was a performance, I didn't know what it was, but it sounded nice and it was like a ticket to New York, which it was. With the chronicle too, it sounded good to be a chronicler, an artist. People always think that homosexuals are artists.] (León 149)

After the democratic transition in 1990, Lemebel traveled to New York, Havana, and Mexico City to offer presentations and participate in festivals and commemorations. His post-dictatorial associations with international academics, activist organizations, and publishers are well documented. In the chronicles “La noche de los visones” [The Night of the Minks], “La muerte de Madonna” [Madonna’s Death], and “El último beso de Loba Lámar” [Loba Lámar’s Last Kiss] in *Loco afán*, the interaction of the *locas* demonstrates innovative ways of becoming woman, forming kinship, creating a sense of belonging, collective mourning, and forging communities between the living and the dead. Their “loco afán” [crazy eagerness] in the face of certain death revitalizes hope for a queer Chilean future, as the chronicles demonstrate the value of knowledge created by *locas* from the margins of Chilean society.

In his writing and interviews, Lemebel criticizes the identity politics practiced by lesbian, gay, and queer theorists in the North because he distrusts their methodologies and discourses. He sees them as homogenizing and hegemonic. He complains that they universalize the intersectionality of bodies and embodiment, often overlooking local differences. Lemebel protests how Chilean *loca* and *travesti* identities—suppressed, silenced, and virtually destroyed by Western theology, colonization, modernization, and neoliberal capitalism—have been marginalized and harmed by a dominant cosmopolitan gay culture and its dalliance with Aryan and fascist embodiments. We see this posture most clearly in “Crónica de Nueva York” [Chronicle of New York] where he juxtaposes the bodies of cosmopolitan gay men with third world *locas* who attend a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. In the chronicle he explains that when

you exit the metro on Christopher Street, “te encuentras de sopetón con una tonelada de músculos y fisicoculturistas, en mini-short, peladas y con aritos, las parejas de hombres en patines pasan de la mano sopladas por tu lado como si no te vieran” [you suddenly find yourself with a ton of muscles and bodybuilders, in mini-shorts, baldheaded and with earrings, couples of men on roller-skates whisk past your hand as if they didn’t see you] (*Loco afán* 94). Lemebel felt invisible since he imagines they see him as a repulsive, malnourished, third world *loca*. His cynicism is evident as he continues, “Cómo te van a dar pelota si uno lleva esta cara chilena asombrada frente a este Olimpo de homosexuales potentes y bien comidos que te miran con asco, como diciéndote: Te hacemos el favor de traerte, *indiecita*, a la cathedral del orgullo gay” [How can you expect them to pass you the ball if you wear that astonished Chilean face in front of this Olympus of powerful and well-fed homosexuals who look at you with disgust, as if saying: We are doing you the favor of bringing you, little Indian girl, to the cathedral of gay pride] (*Loco afán* 94). Then he turns his attention to the commercialization of gay fetish fashions...

...las tiendas llenas de fetiches sadomasoquistas, de clavos, alfileres de gancho y tornillos y pinches y cuanta porquería metálica para torturarse el cutis. ¡Ay que dolor! Qué susto ver en la esquina ese grupo Leader’s con motos, bigotes, cueros, bototos y esa *brutalidad fascista* que te recuerdan las pandillas de machos...en Chile

[the shops full of sadomasochistic fetishes, nails, hook pins and screws and pins and all the metal crap to torture your skin. Ouch how painful! What a fright to see that Leader’s [pronounced leathers] group on the corner with motorcycles, mustaches, leather, boots and that fascist brutality that reminds you of the gangs of machos in... Chile] (*Loco afán* 94 emphasis mine).

Lemebel signals the macho men back home who made him look the other way and cross the street to avoid a gay-bashing or worse. By contrasting *indiecita* with *brutalidad fascista*, or *mosquita latina* with *potencia masculina* a little further on, we can appreciate how the *loca* and *travesti* identities Lemebel presents in *Loco afán* confront both heteronormative and homonormative embodiments. The *locas* he materializes are sometimes positioned as outsiders and other times as

outliers, who resist being assimilated or erased. And still further on in the same chronicle he describes “la zona rosa de Nueva York” [the redlight district of New York] as the epicenter where cosmopolitan gays dump tons of cash on luxuries that “valen un ojo de la cara” [cost an arm and a leg] at the “fiesta mundial” [global party] where Manhattan is decked out with “todos los colores del arco iris gay” [all the colors of the gay rainbow] (*Loco afán* 95). In this orgy of neoliberal commerce, he appreciates that the rainbow is really nothing more than one color “blanco” [white], “Porque tal vez lo gay es blanco” [Because perhaps gay is white] (*Loco afán* 95). Lemebel explains that his perception of racial bias is why he could not remain very long at the mecca of gay culture because “uno se da cuenta que no tiene nada que hacer allí, que no pertenece al oro postal de la clásica estética musculada” [one realizes they have nothing to do there, that they don’t belong to the gold stamp of the classic muscular aesthetic] where “por casualidad hay algun negro y alguna loca latina” [by chance there is a token black or a Latina queen] (*Loco afán* 95). He realizes that the city has darker, more enjoyable places to visit, “donde no sentirse tan extraño, otros bares más *contaminados* donde el alma latina salsea su canción territorial” [where one can feel less queer, other more *contaminated* bars where the Latino soul salsas their territorial song] (*Loco afán* 95 emphasis mine). In this moment of clarity and reflection at the conclusion of the chronicle, we can appreciate how he discursively positions the *loca latina* body as a *viral object*, situated in a critique of a homonormative, first world, gay male body that eroticizes embodiments Lemebel describes as fascist. The bodies he conjures out of his imagination are *viral* because they destabilize binaries, unsettle false dichotomies, and expose the instability and porosity of public and private borders.

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman in their article “Queer Nationality” in *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) analyze the groups Queer Nation (a collection of local affinity groups) and the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) to demonstrate how expressing public anger can

be productive since “visibility is critical if a safe public existence is to be forged” for those “whom the contemporary nation has no positive political value” (201). They recognize the importance of using guerrilla warfare like tactics in “concrete and abstract spaces of social communication...to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality” to assert queer nationality (196). They show the indispensability of creating counter-cultural resistance to make “explicit how thoroughly the local experience of the body is framed by laws, policies, and social customs regulating sexuality” (195). Such strategies are important when governments demonstrate a “malignant neglect” of PWAs who “die for lack of political visibility” (Berlant and Freeman 201). In their analysis of how the groups increased visibility for homosexual PWAs, they stress the vital and urgent need to conquer political space in all public spheres because “to be safe in the national sense means not just safe from bashing, not just safe from discrimination, but safe for demonstration, in the mode of patriotic ritual, which always involves a deployment of affect, knowledge, spectacle, and, crucially, a kind of banality, ordinariness, popularity” (198). Lemebel accomplishes all the elements that Berlant and Freedman observe in *Queer Nation* and *ACT-UP*, in his writing because of his prior collaboration with Francisco Casas in the Yeguas.

The Yeguas sought to denounce the human rights violations of the military regime, to influence the outcome of the plebiscite in 1988 that would decide if Pinochet would continue in power, and to fight for homosexual liberation, to ensure that *locas* would be counted as citizens. During the nearly five years of intensive collaboration, the Yeguas became notorious due to their many shocking interventions and provocative expository performances. Together they ruptured the imposed silence around issues of homosexuality in Chile by making *loca* embodiment, ravaged by the apocalypse of AIDS, one of their central thematic concerns. They used the spectacle of militant action with carefully choreographed aesthetic strategies, which they undertook to

contaminate public and private spaces to assert queer nationality. ACT-UP, founded by Larry Kramer (1935-2020), and the Yeguas began functioning the same year. Queer Nation was founded in 1990 by four members of ACT-UP who, like Lemebel and Casas, were outraged at the level of anti-homosexual violence on the streets and discrimination in the arts and media. Besides producing shocking visuals and public performances, the group became controversial because of their practice of “outing” public figures.

Lemebel deploys this tactic frequently in his writing, for example: he suggests in a chronicle in *Loco afán* dedicated to Spanish singer Raphael, who began his career under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1907-1975), that he was hiding a “pose amanerada del canto” [campy singing pose] disguised by the “romancero marucho” [romantic machosexual] image of a “joven demasiado sentimental” [overly sentimental youth] who sings: “Cierro mis ojos, para que tú puedas hacer lo que quieras conmigo” [I close my eyes, so you can do whatever you want to me] (179). Lemebel suggests that Raphael’s marriage to “una bella de la nobleza coña” [a beauty of the coif nobility] was a strategy to silence “todos esos malpensados que tragaron saliva al ver la foto de Rafa con mujer y rodeados de hijos, con tanta tradición católica como segunda familia real” [all those bastards who swallowed saliva when they saw the photo of Rafa with a wife and surrounded by children, with as much Catholic tradition as a second royal family] (180). Lemebel queers his reading of Raphael citing the songs “Digan lo que digan” [Say What They Will] and Raphael’s “interpretación...amariconando” [faggy interpretation] of Violeta Parra’s “Gracias a la vida” [Thank You to Life] (181). Lemebel could just as easily have included Raphael’s rendition of the song “Escándalo” [Scandal] to this list, especially when he performs it together with heartthrob David Bizbal, when together they sing the lyrics “Siempre la misma rutina / Nos vemos por las esquinas / Evitando el qué dirán / Mi cuerpo no se acostumbra / A este amor entre

penumbras / Es más fuerte que un volcán” [Always the same routine / We'll see each other around the corners / Avoiding peering eyes / My body doesn't get used to it / To this love in the dark / It's stronger than a volcano] written by the Cuban lyricist Willy Chirino. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Lemebel, the Yeguas, ACT-UP, or Queer Nation coordinated strategies, there is no mistaking the similarities in the guerrilla like tactics each employed.

Radical Exteriority, Memory Politics, Liberatory Aesthetics, Philosophical Contaminations, and Transfeminist Molecular Revolution

Lemebel's political strategy throughout his trajectory as a writer, artist, performer, anti-fascist activist, and cultural theorist has been to advance his own “exceptional,” self-stylized liberatory aesthetics to intervene in Chile's future. He did this by using what Elizabeth Jelin in *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003) calls “the labors of memory,” to overcome the exclusion of *loca* lives and desires from the national imagination, regardless of which way the political pendulum swings. Although other homosexual artists and organizations struggled for liberation too, Lemebel primarily focused on the intersectional identities of *locas*, *maricas*, and *travestis*. He did not feel that their concerns were being addressed by mainstream homosexual liberation movements. Jelin observes that in the face of state repression it is an “obstinate memory” that confronts the abuses of the past, to make sense of the suffering, and leads to political practices of memorialization, historization, and rituals of homage (x). Jelin does not claim to offer “a full or final interpretation on the subject,” rather her work should be regarded as a pause “in a longer-term trajectory: assessing developments in the field in order to pose new issues for future work” (xi). The ongoing work she proposes is what this chapter engages. Jelin seeks to sensitize the reader, the researcher, the academic and the activist to “the multiplicity of dimensions and the complexities of memory, silence and mourning” (xi). The main thrust of the labors of memory is that by nurturing and fortifying what scholars in Holocaust studies sometimes call historical or

cultural memory, through testification (the act of bearing witness)—a combined process of recollection, narration, and commemoration, together with the constitution of memorial spaces and artifacts, and the pedagogical functions they serve—the horrifying abuses of human rights might be prevented from happening again. In the wake of the deadly human rights abuses in Chile and the entire “*coño sur*” [cunty South] a term Pia Barros used in an interview with me, the slogan on many lips became “*nunca mas*” [never more]. The labors of memory in Chile began a few years after that fateful day on 11 September 1973 and continue unabated. The military junta established the new constitution in 1980 which remains in effect to this day and a full reckoning with the past has yet to occur. Even despite the recent election of Gabriel Boric, a leftist politician and former leader of the Federación de Estudiantes in Chile, there is still much more work to be done. Lemebel’s performative and literary legacy endures as his labors of memory continue despite his death in 2015 from laryngeal cancer. His infectious ideas continue their viral spread, crossing transnational borders and activating the imaginations of all those who share his concerns and engage with his archive.

In thoughtful reflection about his trajectory and commitment to visibility, Lemebel uses metaphors of contamination and a campy ironic tone to intrepidly reveal the molecular dynamite that drives his decisions. During an interview in 2004 with Flavia Costa for the Argentine magazine *Revista Ñ*, just after the release of his fifth book of chronicles called *Zanjón de la aguada* (2003), Lemebel explains what motivates his work (performance, radio, video, film, writing, etc.).

Para mí siempre hay una decisión política que *detona la puesta en escena* de mis irrupciones en el campo cultural. Es más, los géneros—escritura, visualidad, activismo—se *contaminan* de acuerdo a la pulsión de mis afectos y resentimientos. Por otro lado, lo performativo de mi trayectoria político-cultural existió siempre, lo coliza (de loca, homosexual, en Chile) se me notaba desde el satélite. Siempre fui un cuerpo notorio en su *deseante sexualidad transversal*. Nunca salí del closet, en mi casa humilde no había ni ropero.

[For me there is always a political decision that triggers the staging of my irruptions in the cultural field. What's more, the genres—writing, visibility, activism—are contaminated according to the drive of my affections and resentments. On the other hand, the performative aspect of my political-cultural trajectory always existed, the *coliza* (of crazy, homosexual, in Chile) was noticeable from the satellite. I was always a notorious body in its desiring transversal sexuality. I never came out of the closet, in my humble house there never was a closet.] (León 144 emphasis mine)

When Lemebel states that he always was a notorious body in its *desiring transversal sexuality*, he echoes ideas introduced to him by Chilean feminist intellectuals like Carmen Berenguer (1946-), Nelly Richard (1948-), and Diamela Eltit (1947-)—close friends who infected his thinking with the Continental philosophy and psychoanalysis of figures like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. Guattari's thoughts on transversality evolved after he met Deleuze, and they co-published the books *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Deleuze and Guattari moved beyond the work of Freud and Lacan to articulate another unconscious—a *mechanical unconscious* as Miguel Norambuena explains, “que deja de imitar al teatro, a las representaciones y al pasado, para volcarse al *devenir* (otro concepto capital de Félix), al deseo—*maquinas deseantes*—y al paradigma de la producción” [that stops imitating the theater, representations and the past, to turn to becoming (another capital concept of Félix), to desire—desiring machines—and to the paradigm of production] (Guattari 11). The mechanical unconscious can be understood as a desiring machine producing factory that does not *rave about mommy/daddy* (Freud, Lacan), it *raves about races, tribes, and continents* (Deleuze, Guattari). The mechanical unconscious keeps history and geography under surveillance, encrusted in archaic fixations, drained of revolutionary potential, so that capitalism's desiring production (creating mass consumers) can code and decode the desire of subjects to prepare them for their roles and functions in society. Transversality can be understood, from a new materialist perspective, as a “non-categorical” and “non-judgmental” practice or approach that “defies disciplinary categories and resists hierarchies” (Palmer and

Panayotov). The transversal cuts across established order from an oblique angle, which can lead to chaos and disorder. Transversality can be an atomizing element of molecular revolution (revolutions produced through intensive micropolitics), another Guattarian concept. According to Palmer and Panayotov, Guattari first conceived of transversality in his thought, activism, and practice as a psychotherapist, philosopher, and semiologist in the 1950s and 60s, when he sought to “transform institutions, beginning with the psychiatric hospital.” According to the exiled Chilean psychotherapist Miguel Norambuena who worked extensively with Guattari in France, transversal logic allows us to discover human activity that results from the correlations of concrete forces, inscribed in specific times and territories, and not as results of divine forces that fall from the sky or are suspended in eternity (Guattari 14). In addition to transversality, Lemebel integrates Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas on difference, becoming woman, singularities, desiring machines, and micropolitics. From Foucault, who perished from AIDS related complications, he incorporates thinking around the body, sexuality, sovereign power, and subjectivity; from Derrida, thinking around phenomenology, ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, writing, and difference; from Lacan, thinking around otherness, sexuation, the names-of-the-father, the imaginary, the symbolic order, the mirror state, and the libidinal economy. It took time for him to assimilate the marrow of these abstract and complicated ideas. One wonders, why were they so important to him?

Tiene que ver con mis propias estrategias de escritura y culturales. Cuando me enfrenté por primera vez a estos textos que podríamos llamar *difíciles*, como Lacan, Foucault, para mí eran chino, japones. Pero había algo ahí, un rumor que me interesó. Y había un interés no solo por entenderlos sino por identificar su proposición de mundo. En esos textos había un sonido desafiante para mí. Así me di el trabajo de entenderlos y de practicar esas escrituras, pero desangrándolas hacia otros territorios ajenos a los de la crítica cultural.

[It has to do with my own writing and cultural strategies. When I first faced these texts that we could call difficult, like Lacan, Foucault, for me they were Chinese, Japanese. But there was something there, a rumor that interested me. And there was an interest not only in understanding them but also in identifying their purpose for the world. In those texts there was a challenging sound to me. This is how I gave

myself the job of understanding them and practicing those writings but bleeding them into other territories alien to those of cultural criticism. (León 77 emphasis original)

Lemebel is saying that after taking the time to read philosophical texts he adapted them to his purposes, using them to manifest cultural criticism in his writing and political interventions. The phrase ‘desiring transversal sexuality’ reflects a synthesis of the philosophical ideas drawn from his engagement with all the authors I mentioned above. What he means to demonstrate when he uses the phrase in the interview with Flavia Costa is that philosophical ideas, as he puts it, *contaminate* the political impulses of his affects and resentments, which he later expresses in his work. Continental philosophy has been instrumental for international feminists who have appropriated those author’s ideas to create local frameworks of knowledge to support resistance to patriarchal hegemony. Lemebel, Richard, Berenguer, Eltit and many other feminist intellectuals each in their own way have sought to influence Chile’s future. French intellectuals in the 1970s took a special interest in Chile during the Unidad Popular (UP). The military coup in 1973 earned their repudiation, since the coup stamped out the new spaces of freedom the UP had opened-up, where all Chileans oppressed by notions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and race enjoyed numerous possibilities of becoming (*devenir*).

This context is important because it helps us appreciate the intellectual current that detonates Lemebel’s impulse to name his book *Loco afán* and include a political “Manifiesto” better known as “Hablo por mi diferencia” [I Speak for my Difference] and a chronicle named “Loco afán” [Crazy Desire]. Lemebel wrote his chronicles to be read out loud. Orality is a fundamental component of Lemebel’s writing, but the manifesto and the chronicle “Loco afan” have a special significance because they directly harness the intellectual dynamite driving events in Chile in the 1980s. Director Rodrigo Sepúlveda who brought Lemebel’s novel *Tengo miedo torero* (2001) [My Tender Matador] to the big screen in 2020 perhaps explains what I am driving

at best. Sepúlveda was astonished the film generated a tremendous reaction from festival organizers in Egypt, who objected to the film's homosexual theme.

Era un temazo, y yo creo que eso es muy Lemebel. Levantar polémica, incomodar al *establishment*, y eso nos llenó de orgullo. [...] Si no hubiese existido Lemebel, no habría existido *Una Mujer Fantástica* 30 años después. Entonces, yo creo que esto es como cerrar un círculo. Esta película cierra un círculo [donde] Lemebel es la semilla de todo lo que ha pasado en nuestra sociedad.

[It was a huge theme, and I think it's very Lemebel. Raising controversy, making the establishment uncomfortable, and that filled us with pride. [...] If Lemebel had not existed, there would not have been *A Fantastic Woman* 30 years later. So, I think this is like closing a circle. This film closes a circle [where] Lemebel is the seed of everything that has happened in our society.] (Araya)

I argue that when Lemebel and his feminist friends appropriated ideas from Continental philosophy, it represented a pivotal moment, when their mutual goals of becoming authors of their own subjectivity aligned. Liberation for women and liberation for the feminized embodiment of the *loca* became “la liberación de lo femenino” [liberation of the feminine]—a new symbolic order combining three of patriarchy's most powerful myths, embodied in the figures of the sodomite, the prostitute, and the witch. These three myths are the fundamental “others” by which patriarchy constructs heterosexual masculinity, reproduction, and hygiene. All three of these figures are contagions that according to patriarchal logic must be quarantined, purified, or burned if patriarchal power is to survive. Therefore, dismantling Chile's entrenched patriarchal power required an even more radical form of feminism, one that Nelly Richard in *Abismos temporales* (2018) [Temporal Abyss] would later refer to as “mujeres sin comillas y entre comillas” [women without commas and women within commas]. Moreover, it is why he changes his last name from Mardones to Lemebel and why he repeatedly articulates his solidarity with women and feminized subjects. The new possibilities of becoming woman and atomizing the entrenched symbolic order became the secret ingredient of the Molotov cocktail Lemebel threw at the entrenched patriarchal power in both right and left Chilean politics. Since his affinity tended toward the left, his criticism

was more strongly directed at the nascent homosexual liberation movements who he saw as imposing a new homogenizing order, what today many critics call homonormativity. Lemebel wanted to explode any sort of fossilization around homosexual identities. He attempted to explain this positioning during his first on-air interview in 1994 on *Radio Tierra* with Victor Hugo Robles, known as “el Che de los gays,” who seemed to be confused about why he changed his name.

...quiero hacer una aclaración, yo antes me llamaba Pedro Mardones, que es un nombre como de trabajador, como de obrero...pero yo soy la obrerita de los pobres. En ese sentido yo retomé algo muy bonito que es que todos los nombres y todos los apellidos son masculinos, te los pone el padre, o el padre los impone, hasta al apellido materno es patriarcal, porque se lo pone el padre a la madre, ¿te fijas? Entonces yo rescaté el apellido de mi madre porque es un apellido inventado por mi abuela...cuando se fugó de su casa, no quería que la encontrarán y se puso Lemebel. [...] Hay una causa, yo todo lo que he aprendido lo he aprendido de las mujeres...

[...I want to make a clarification, my name used to be Pedro Mardones, which is a name like a worker, like a laborer... but I am the little worker of the poor. In this sense, I returned to something very nice, which is that all names and surnames are masculine, the father gives them to you, or the father imposes them, even the maternal surname is patriarchal, because the father gives it to the mother. You get me? So, I rescued my mother's last name because it's a last name my grandmother invented... when she ran away from her house, she didn't want to be found and she called herself Lemebel. [...] That is reason, everything I have learned I have learned from women...] (León 20-21)

When Lemebel explains why he chose to abandon his paternal last name and embrace the invented last name of his grandmother, he echoes Lacan's ideas about the role of the father in the symbolic order, and how desire comes into opposition with the law, the law of the father in his function as legislator of the family. Becoming Lemebel demonstrates subversion of the father's symbolic ordering of the family by rejecting male authority and embracing female authority. As the interview progresses, Robles takes a call from a woman who comments that she would prefer not to be defined by her sex because it is humiliating. Robles misinterprets her position and thinks the woman is saying that homosexuals and lesbians should not speak publicly about their sexuality. The woman clarifies in response that people should be defined by more than just their sex. Lemebel

agrees and says she makes a good point, “no es por lo cual a uno tienen que reconocerlo, pero en nuestra lucha nosotros acá en Chile estamos en una etapa primeriza, que tenemos obligatoriamente que ser reconocidos por la condición” [It is not for that reason that one has to be recognized, but in our struggle here in Chile we are in a first stage, for which we necessarily have to be recognized due to our condition] (León 21). Here Lemebel underscores the visibility of difference, not that homosexual will remain a fixed label, like a father’s last name. Being visible as a homosexual is just the beginning. Homosexuals claim the right to speak “*desde otros lugares también...tenemos derecho a hablar como homosexuales...nosotros hablamos desde la homosexualidad*” [*from other places too...we have the right to speak as homosexuals...we speak from homosexuality*] (León 21 emphasis mine). Here we can see Lemebel use the same words that Dussel and Vallega use to describe radical exteriority. These comments arouse Robles’ curiosity, especially around Lemebel’s terminology. He asks him, what do *you* mean when you say homosexual? Many Chilean thinkers use biologically determined distinctions when using terms like homosexual (male) and lesbian (female). Robles uses the word *homosexual* to mean *male* homosexuality and *lésbica* and *lesbiana* to mean *female* homosexuality. Lemebel responds to the question reflecting many of the post-structuralist philosophical and psychoanalytical scaffolding of his knowledge. Keep in mind that although complex philosophical ideas were instrumental when organizing massive anti-fascist resistance in Chile, the ideas were coded into art so the masses of people, who put their bodies on the line in the streets, could enthusiastically act via a variety of rhizomatic mediums and modes. Because Lemebel observes that the ideas are *difficult* to comprehend for most people, like reading Chinese or Japanese, he uses a didactic approach while responding to Robles’ questions. He spoon-feeds ideas to Robles and the radio audience.

A ver, la homosexualidad para mi es una construcción cultural, yo trabajo fundamentalmente la figura de la loca. Y la loca es como tú deconstruyes el patrón

formal, cultural, sociológico, antropológico que te han metido, o sea todo lo que nosotros tenemos es aprehendido, heredado, nos metieron este cuento. La loca deconstruye eso, la loca hace el quiebre, hace la fisura, recuestiona, replantea, duda, ironiza, es como la figura del cojo, el cojo cuando cojea se sale de la fila y puede ver en qué está metido. [...] Yo no creo que la homosexualidad sea una cosa meramente sexual, porque hay hombres que también tiran entre ellos y no son homosexuales, como en las cárceles, en los regimientos, en los internados.

[Let's see, homosexuality for me is a cultural construction, I fundamentally work the figure of the *loca*. And the *loca* is how you deconstruct the formal, cultural, sociological, anthropological pattern that they have put into you, that is, everything we have is apprehended, inherited, they put this story into us. The *loca* deconstructs that, the *loca* makes the break, makes the fissure, questions, rethinks, doubts, ironizes, she is like the figure of the crippled man, when the crippled man limps, he gets out of line and can see what he's gotten into. [...] I do not believe that homosexuality is a merely sexual thing, because there are men who have sex with each other and are not homosexual, as in prisons, in regiments, in boarding schools.] (León 22)

Robles is taken aback once he understands that Lemebel is talking about a “quiebre en el sistema” [breaking the system], what Guattari calls molecular revolution. It is as though Robles is starting to understand that there is a different kind of exceptionalism at work, one that positions the *loca* outside of the letters LGBTQI+, which have been used by activists and academics in the North to represent the identities of international homosexual liberation. Lemebel positions the desire of his *loca* identity from a cartography unfamiliar to Robles, when he affirms “yo postulo la homosexualidad como una subversión” [I postulate homosexuality as a subversion] (León 22). Robles asks him, “¿Y qué pasa con los homosexuales que no critican?” [What happens with homosexuals who do not criticize] and Lemebel responds, “Se aburrirían *solas* mirando televisión y videos porno” [*She* probably gets bored all alone watching television and pornographic videos] (León 22 emphasis mine). Lemebel’s response strategically reverses Robles’ gendered use of language from masculine to feminine to make a point.

Robles objects and then questions. “¿No siempre la homosexualidad es crítica?” [Homosexuality isn’t always critical] and Lemebel responds, “En ese sentido no sería

homosexualidad desde el punto del que lo estoy hablando yo, ¿te fijas? Son homosexuales adaptados al sistema. Para mí la homosexualidad tiene que ser crítica, tiene que ser subversiva como deconstrucción, como alianza con la mujer, como alianza con el discurso feminista” [In that sense it wouldn't be homosexuality from the point of view I'm talking about. You catch my drift? They are homosexuals adapted to the system. For me, homosexuality must be critical, it must be as subversive as deconstruction, as an alliance with women, as an alliance with feminist discourse.] (León 22). In Lemebel's view, the homosexuals “adaptados al sistema” [adapted to the system] are those whose difference has become commoditized—they have adapted to a subjectivity defined by mass consumerism. They are the homosexuals whose revolutionary potential has been castrated because they are focused, like a machine, on the coding and decoding of desire as a commodity. Lemebel uses the consumption of pornographic imagery as an example of what Deleuze and Guattari call the *desiring production* of integrated global capitalism. Pornography is one of the desiring machines attached to male homosexual subjectivity, whereas the cartography from which Lemebel speaks is clearly situated in solidarity with women and feminist discourse. Robles asks him, “¿Por qué hay que hacer alianza con el discurso femenino?” [Why must we align with feminist discourse?] and Lemebel responds, “Porque la homosexualidad es un devenir, un puede ser, un por ser” [Because homosexuality is becoming, a could be, a soon to be] (León 23). Here Lemebel echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of becoming woman. Lemebel wants to explode the homosexual closet, using his repertoire of philosophical dynamite and linguistic Molotov cocktails.

Me parece raro, porque siempre que se habla de homosexualidad hay una cosa como tapada, a mí gustan las palabras fuertes, las palabras que nos estigmatizan, las palabras que nos ofenden porque cuando yo las uso, las doy vuelta, las descargo de su agresividad y homofobia, ocupo mucho el maricón, el coliza, el tereso me encanta, porque hay una raíz popular que construye ese personaje y al usarlo yo, que soy homosexual, lo descargo de agresividad. ¿Te fijas que las locas siempre

nos hablamos con mamita, con niña, ¡es precioso el niña! Es como una juventud eterna.

[It seems strange to me, because whenever homosexuality is talked about there is something covered up, I like strong words, words that stigmatize us, words that offend us because when I use them, I turn them around, I unload their aggressiveness and homophobia, I use the fag a lot, the *coliza*, the *tereso* I love, because there is a popular current that builds that character and when I use it, I, who am homosexual, discharge it from aggressiveness. Do you notice that *locas* always talk to mommy, with *girl*, that *girl* is precious! She is like eternal youth.] (León 23)

With this response, through the pairing of a masculine article with a feminine noun (el niña), Lemebel demonstrates linguistically that the homosexual place from where he speaks breaks the grammatical rules of gender. He embraces the words used to stigmatize feminized bodies because when he owns and uses them, he diffuses their power to cause injury. This is a similar strategy used by gay and lesbian liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s when the word queer was reclaimed and destigmatized. However, Lemebel is working from his cartography, as a marginalized, feminized subject that has no specifically local homosexual liberation movement to uphold his pioneering work. At the same time, Lemebel reasserts his position as an outlier. Clearly, Lemebel considers himself a member of the same community that Robles inhabits, but he insists on carving out a space for a more nuanced appreciation of feminized embodiment that is not necessarily transsexual. There is no evidence that Lemebel had any intentions of transitioning. His discourse is a pushback against homonormative notions and embraces a fluid position in constant movement of becoming, what he calls “eternal youth.”

Robles at this point raises a very important concern about stereotypes. They both struggle for homosexual liberation and acceptance. Where they diverge is on the issue of visibility. One of the arguments which opponents of homosexuality have used is to suggest that homosexual males would be more accepted if their gender performance were less feminized. Lemebel agrees that such arguments are true but then pivots to raise the issue of homonormativity; and in another nod

to Deleuze and Guattari, he underscores the nomadic (zigzag) revolutionary energy of his *loca* position and the transversal (oblique) construction of *loca* knowledge.

Claro, porque es más fácil, ¿te fijas? Esa normalidad, esa norma que viene de ley, pero cuando uno mariconea se está saliendo y nadie sabe dónde va a llegar este homosexual, con la loca nadie sabe. Por ejemplo, yo te tengo que contar una cosa y te tengo que contar de mil cosas: por ejemplo que venía a la radio recién y te tenía que contar algo tan importante pero me encontré con una amiga y me contó tal cosa, es un zigzagueo, el pensamiento de la loca siempre es un zigzagueo, nunca te va a contar la verdad, la verdad tiene que ver con la cristiandad y con Dios, nosotros hacemos un zigzagueo, una oblicuidad del discurso.

[Sure, because it's easier. Catch my drift? That normality, that norm that comes from the law; but when one swishes, she is taking flight, and nobody knows where that homosexual is going to end up; with the *loca* nobody knows. For example, I have to tell you one thing but then I tell you about a thousand things: for example, that I had just come to the radio to tell you something so important but I met a friend and she told me such and such a thing, it's a zigzagging, the *loca's* thinking is always a zigzag, she will never tell you the truth, the truth has to do with Christianity and God, we zigzag, in an obliquity of discourse. (León 23).

As we can see from this brief example from a radio interview, the philosophical ideas he encountered through his reading of difficult texts in his associations with friends like Berenguer, Richard, and Eltit had a tremendous impact on his thinking as he appropriates their ideas and terminology, adapting them to his main local concern: the radical exteriority of feminized *loca* embodiment constructed from the margins of Chilean society. Lemebel claims the subjective authority of becoming a “mujer entre comillas” [woman within commas] by asserting a transversal, zigzagging, identity that speaks from “otros lados” [elsewhere]. He projects a singularly unique identity that makes “acomodados” [accommodated] (what film director Sepúlveda calls “establishment”) feel “incomodados” [uncomfortably hindered]. The eternal youth of his feminized language positions him at the vanguard of a transfeminist molecular revolution, as an outlaw of paternal symbolic ordering and in defiance of the desiring production of integrated global capitalism and its heteronormative and homonormative desiring machines operating at the

periphery of its mechanical unconscious. The “acomodados” is the establishment, the monstrous masculinity of machismo that circumvallates the phallic fortress of patriarchy in Chile.

Feminization of Chile’s History: Invented Spaces and the (Re)Conquista of the Logos

Let us not forget, the power of the imagination to narrate the past is a power which apprehends the present and projects into the future. For over 135 years, Chile’s imagination was dominated by men, that is until the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) upended the male dominated order, becoming the first Latin American author to win the Nobel Prize in 1954. According to Licia Fiol-Matta in *A Queer Mother for the Nation* (2002), Mistral became “one of the central architects of Latin American nationalism in the twentieth century” (Introduction). Fernando Alegria calls her “a walking educational mission” (Horan 58) and Diamela Eltit calls her “a uterus birthing children for the motherland” (Piña 252). Mistral’s final collection of poetry, published posthumously, is described by Diego del Pozo as “el poema épico de Chile.” It narrates the story of two orphans, an Amerindian boy and a huemul (a south Andean deer), who travel from the extreme north of the Chile to the Patagonia. Along the way, the two young friends meet and are adopted by the spirit of a woman who travels with them on their journey of self-discovery. “Van creciendo, así como sus dudas y cuestionamientos” (Mistral “Introducción”). Pozo laments that a major part of Mistral’s oeuvre has yet to be given the academic attention it deserves. This was very typical of Chile’s male dominated canon and academy well into the twentieth century. Doris Dana, who according to Fiol-Matta was Mistral’s “companion” with whom she “set up house...in Long Island” (“Introduction”). Dana compiled the first edition, which was published in 1967.

After Dana’s death in 2006, over twenty thousand unedited pages written by Gabriela Mistral were discovered, which included 54 poems from *Poema de Chile* (1967), which Dana had

overlooked. However, Pozo's 2017 edition completely reorders the cycle of poems based on Mistral's notes. Pozo invites readers to consider the question Mistral poses in *Poema de Chile*. "Tal vez no es tarde...entender la selva y entreabrirle sus araucarias" (Mistral). "Generally speaking, she [Mistral] is regarded as a defender of the disenfranchised, especially of the mestizos and the indigenous peoples" (Fiol-Matta "Introduction"). Mistral's *indigenismo*, which the women's movement seeking to overturn the male dominated order incorporated, would have a lasting impact as Chilean feminism began to form alliances with homosexual movements. Despite Mistral's success as a schoolteacher, a journalist, and a writer, women were not generally considered to be the intellectual equals to men in Chile. This is evident in the fact that women could not vote in municipal elections until 1934 and in Presidential elections until 1949, but they did not actually participate in a Presidential election until 1952, when the ambitious Carlos Ibáñez became President for the last time. However, between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, women and homosexuals, in the secrecy of inner exile, began to claim the power to narrate the nation in a variety of ways, despite the cultural blackout imposed by the deadly terror of Pinochet's dictatorship. As discussed earlier, the labors of memory emerged as the primary means to deconstruct the officialism of male dominated history and the historical lies they have used to circumvallate their entrenched power. The labors of memory hold history accountable for justifying the violation of human rights As demonstrated by the *Communist Manifesto's* success in contaminating the imaginations of people across the globe with utopian thinking, the manifesto has been used in Chile as a tool of the labors of memory to express dissidence with the forces subverting and subjugating democracy. A recent example is the *Manifiesto de Historiadores* (1999) signed by over 76 Chilean and regional university professors and institutional administrators, many who are women, argues:

La historia no es sólo el pasado, sino también, y principalmente, presente y futuro. La historia es proyección. Es la construcción social de la realidad futura. El más importante de los derechos humanos consiste en respetar la capacidad de los ciudadanos para producir por sí mismos la realidad futura que necesitan. No reconocer ese derecho, usurpar o adulterar ese derecho, es imponer, por sobre todo, no la verdad, sino la mentira histórica.

[History is not only the past, but also, and mainly, the present and the future. History is projection. It is the social construction of future reality. The most important of human rights is to respect the ability of citizens to produce for themselves the future reality they need. Not to recognize that right, to usurp or adulterate that right, is to impose, above all, not the truth, but the historical lie.] (Grez and Salazar 19)

When Pinochet used the state of exception as a mechanism of statecraft, he continued what we could call a tradition in Chilean politics, establishing dictatorial power over the nation-state to preserve male dominance of the political order. At a symbolic level, Pinochet's justification was to preserve Chile's future, by protecting the so called "nuclear family," where men were conceived as the owners of property and women as the curators of the invented space of national values. Pinochet installed a new constitution in 1980, appointed himself president, and remained the major power broker in Chile for 17 years, until the 1988 plebiscite denied him another eight-year term. Many critics contend that Pinochet's state of exception was permanent, continuing beyond the transition to democracy in 1990, since Pinochet's threats and negotiations cast a somber shadow over those seeking justice for human rights violations.

Meanwhile, AIDS continued to cast its own deadly shadow. "La peste rosa" claimed more lives as the number of cases increased in Chile due to institutional neglect. Pinochet's government had been more concerned with rooting out the clandestine social movements wrestling to restore democracy than it was about attending to the suffering of victims who were thought to be nothing more than sodomites and prostitutes who deserved to die. AIDS was a powerful new contagion, but the junta was laser focused on eradicating another one—Marxist thought—which has influenced social movements in Chile since *Communist Manifesto* infected the nation's imaginary.

In the struggle against the exceptionalism of patriarchy in Chile, women have led the way. During the dangerous military curfew and under suffocating censorship that produced a cultural blackout, courageous women, like Pia Barros, created clandestine spaces for a significant corpus of Chilean literature to be produced, especially by women. Barros is one of the many women, like Nelly Richard, Diamela Eltit, Carmen Berenguer, Soledad Bianchi, and other leftist, feminist intellectuals, who have struggled secretly to overcome a history dominated by an authoritarian patriarchal imaginary that silences feminine voices. Each of these women, in their own way, has participated in grassroots efforts to resist the violent, homicidal, and dictatorial regime. Nelly Richard in *Abismos Temporales* (2018) uses the phrase “reconquista de la palabra—una palabra doblemente confiscada por el oficialismo militar y por la dominante patriarcal” (10) to describe a gradual process that aimed to make women and the feminine, protagonists of a new literary and political national landscape.

As I posited earlier in my discussion of Lemebel’s appropriation of Continental philosophy, the exceptional conditions which produced inner exile also became the catalyst that led to productive activity which would ultimately align the concerns of women with the concerns of *locas*. After 1977 when DINA was dissolved and replaced with the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) and with the threat of the military enforced curfew, people turned to private domestic spaces to nurture the imagination. Affinity groups began sprouting in secret, many led by women. Amidst the deadly context of the censorship and curfew, and as a direct consequence to the erection of the brutal procedural body of the dictatorial system, “surgen espacios de expresión, aislados, desgajados, distantes sobre todo...aparecen, en ese momento, y claramente delimitados, un espacio cultural de exilio y, paralelo a él, un espacio cultural del interior” [spaces of expression emerge, isolated, detached, distant above all... a cultural space of exile appears at

that moment, and clearly delimited, and, parallel to it, a cultural space of the interior] (Castillo 337). This “espacio interior” [interior space] interests us most because it constitutes the first aperture—a productive bubble—within inner exile where affinity groups began to form. For example, women formed labor collectives where they shared information in secret while washing the clothes of well-to-do and well-connected families. Liberatory factions of the Chilean Catholic Church provided space for workshops where women began producing brightly colored needle stitched burlap patches called *arpilleras*. The collaborative effort of an innovative twist to needle point embroidery provided women with a space to process their feelings, receive emotional support, and claim authorship of stories they stitched into the fabric with their hands. Since many women were left in precarious economic conditions when their husbands or children “disappeared,” the *arpilleras* provided a source of income. Since their work was sold and carried off to distant lands, the art provided women a way to share their suffering with the outside world. They could graphically depict their poverty and the government repression.

Other interior cultural spaces emerged during the 1970s. Clandestine literary workshops began to function. The women leading the groups called them *talleres*—workshops where they read, wrote, and discussed strategies to transform their shared reality of inner exile. The *talleres* were places where they honed their skills as writers and intellectuals. Many women writers who participated in these groups specialized in short stories and flash fiction that could easily be published on scraps of paper, disguised as ordinary objects, and distributed anonymously during coordinated acts of resistance against censorship. The interior space allowed people to interact in clandestinity and reinvigorate their sense of community. It empowered a new generation of leftists to gain insights about the ideological beast they faced and emboldened them to create art in public

once they found the courage to resist the dictatorship with greater vigor and take to the streets in protest.

The exiled Chilean psychotherapist Miguel Norambuena, who held a close friendly and working relationship with Félix Guattari in France in the 1980s, calls these interior spaces where people gathered *invented spaces*, where creation, healing, de-stigmatization, and de-institutionalization can occur when hierarchical structures are deconstructed (Varas 377-394). Norambuena's use of the term 'invented spaces' derives from his clinical application of Guattari's psychotherapeutics and notion of *ecosophy* (ecological philosophy), an ethical-political approach to confront anthropogenic disturbances, which he elaborates in his book *The Three Ecologies* (1989). Norambuena was instrumental in bringing Guattari to Chile in May 1991, where he gave three lectures at RENACE, Instituto Chileno Frances de Cultura y Universidad Diego Portales and other locations. Prior to his visit, Guattari's book *Cartografías del deseo* (1989) was translated by Norambuena and published in Chile. Many of those who attended the lectures, including Lemebel and Richard, had already read it. At the conferences, Guattari shared his ideas about the three ecologies, antipsychiatry, psychoanalysis, institutionalism, and how integrated global capitalism produces subjectivity. The sessions were so productive that Norambuena reports that Guattari proposed that he take the lectures, along with the presentations of local intellectuals, other materials dispersed among various people and institutions, and publish the entirety in Chile (Varas 380). "The Guattarian molecular revolutions situated in Chile, coexisting with the democratic transitions process, allowed for leaks, resistances, and also empty spaces" (Varas 380). The book *El devenir de la subjetividad* (1998), published by *Dolmen Ediciones*, was the result of several years of careful archaeology by Norambuena. Guattari's lectures were translated from French to Spanish by Cristóbal Santa Cruz and Miguel Norambuena wrote the introduction.

The invented spaces created during the dictatorship provided Lemebel and his feminist interlocutors a refuge, away from the oppressive forces that sought to castrate their desires, where they could construct intensive historical and reflective memory frameworks that would allow them to scaffold local subjective and social strategies to rupture the silences imposed by the fascist regime. These ‘invented spaces’ also offered them opportunities to participate in nomadic dialogues (what Lemebel often calls “*zigzagueo*”), derive meaning from the texts they read in community, imagine future possibilities, strategize the formation of alliances, and reinvent local ways of being and becoming. As existential, experiential, and political meaning coalesced, Lemebel interpellates many philosophical ideas, reshaping them to satisfy local micropolitical necessities, and then incorporates them into his production of *loca* knowledge and radical otherness from the margins of Chilean society. The individual and group work energized the intellectual undercurrents which enabled him to evolve toward what in the twenty-first century we call transfeminism.

...los transfeminismos son movimientos en red que, ante la emergencia de violencia necropolítica contra las cis y trans-mujeres y lxs sujetxs feminizados, consideran los estados de tránsito de género, de migración, de mestizaje, de vulnerabilidad, de raza y de clase como transversales para hacer alianzas emancipatorias ante la violencia cis-hetero-patriarcal y racista. Así, los movimientos transfeministas surgen con el fin de abrir espacios y campos discursivos a todas aquellas prácticas y sujetos que quedan fuera o se deslindan energéticamente de la reconversión neoliberal de los aparatos críticos de los feminismos, reconversión que hoy conocemos como políticas de género biologicistas o políticas de cis-mujeres.

[...transfeminisms are network movements that, in the face of the emergence of necropolitical violence against cis and trans-women and feminized subjects, consider the transit states of gender, migration, miscegenation, vulnerability, race and class as transversal to make emancipatory alliances in the face of cis-hetero-patriarchal and racist violence. Thus, the transfeminist movements arise to open spaces and discursive fields to all those practices and subjects that remain outside or are energetically separated from the neoliberal reconversion of the critical apparatuses of feminism, a reconversion that we know today as biologicist or gender politics. cis-women politics.] (Valencia 27)

Certainly, Nelly Richard embraces transfeminism into her discursive praxis as a cultural and art critic in her book *Abismos Temporales* (2018) where she discusses how feminism, *travesti* aesthetics, and queer theory converged to confront the temporal abyss created by the alienation and castrating forces of the fascist ‘criollo’ neoliberal government, which had perverted the exceptional myths upon which Chilean democracy had been imagined. In a chapter she titles “Como una tiara de rubies en la cabeza de un pato malandra” [Like a Ruby Tiara on the Head of a Delinquent Duck] she interviews Lemebel and they discuss his performative and literary trajectory, to demonstrate in a later chapter “Bordar de pájaros las banderas de la patria libre” [Embroider the Flags of the Free Homeland With Birds] how his collaboration with Francisco Casas in the homosexual artist collective Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis contributed to the Escena de Avanzada and the Colectivo Acciones de Arte (CADA), a militant art movement and an art collective that were instrumental in mounting massive resistance to Pinochet in the 1980s, by helping to expand the public’s focus on necropolitical violence against women to include feminized subjects, like the *loca travesti*. Her purpose is to trace how convergences confronting the temporal abyss contributed to Chile’s unique transfeminist theorizations.

In her chapters “Transfeminismo flúor” [Fluorine Transfeminism] and “Mujeres sin comillas y entre comillas” [Women Without Commas and Within Commas] she discusses how, despite earnest efforts to promote equity and inclusivity at the academic institutional level, masculine/feminine binary oppositions have invaded critical theory like a cult. The tendency has been to create universal categories, to protect purity and integrity, “donde reina una cultura monológica” [where a monological culture, reigns] in which thinking must belong to “lo uno...o lo otro” [one... or the other] (165). She highlights how the work of thinkers like Jordi Díaz and Johan Mijail, with their campaign *No al binarismo*, “protesta fuertemente contra la superioridad

de dominio de lo masculino-occidental que subordina lo femenino como las identidades periféricas a su control centralizador” [strongly protests the superiority of dominance of the masculine-western that subordinates the feminine as peripheral identities to its centralizing control] (165). Richard criticizes the cult like logic that seeks to consecrate the proper name and fetichizes authorship, adjudicating a body of origin to support the notion of natural biological sexuality, while stereotyping identity under “rótulos de clase, raza y género que no admiten la variabilidad de los rasgos como forma mutante y provisoria de luchar contra el absolutismo de un único modo de ser” [labels of class, race and gender that do not admit the variability of traits as a mutant and provisional way of fighting against the absolutism of a single way of being] (165). It is the cult (humanist, bourgeoisie, and neoliberal) seeking to privatize the “I” which Díaz and Mijail combat, dismissing it as a tiresome moral, political, and economic domination that considers the “I” in terms of private property, something owned and not subject to appropriation (166). Richard highlights how Díaz and Mijail creatively innovate slogans like “más que uno” [more than one] and “contra la línea recta” [against the straight line] to contradict the tyranny of Christian morality, the myth of the nuclear family, and procreation. They dispute the heteronormativity that enforces a masculine/feminine classificatory system. They criticize the neocolonialism that depreciates the cartographies of the global South so that the metropolitan centers consume value to the detriment of the peripheries. They oppose the integrated global capitalism that submits bodies and minds to debt slavery and credit. They rebuke the fascism of common sense that installs the average as the only valid summary of false majorities summoned to punish the singularity of exceptions. And they oppose the conservative left that extinguishes the “becoming revolution” (Giles Deleuze) of molecular rebels who might dangerously stray into forbidden territories (Richard 166-167). Díaz and Mijail are members of the Colectivo Universitario por la Disidencia Sexual (CUDS) which

formed to create tensions and transversal micropolitics in the academy and question their rules and knowledge creation methodologies founded in a canon of masculine authority.

Richard celebrates the intensity of their transfeminist “desires for...,” without feeling the need to fill in the ellipsis with the direct compliment of actions, since they require no verification or stamp of approval (184). Transfeminism rejects the notion that identity/superiority = masculine and difference/inferiority = feminine. For a transfeminist rebellion to be revolutionary it must achieve what Donna Haraway proposes in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991). The idea of gender itself must be abolished so that the dynamic of power between men and women can be dismantled. Kate Borstein echoes Haraway’s assertion when she writes in *Gender Outlaw* (1994) that “Doing away with enforced binary gender is key to doing away with patriarchy, as well as ending the many injustices perpetrated in the name of gender equity...[like]...sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny” (225-226). As Richard seems to suggest, through her extensive analysis of the convergence of feminism, *travesti* aesthetics, and queer theory in 1980s and 90s Chile, Lemebel is an important creator and thinker—*la semilla de todo* [the seed of everything] as film director Rodrigo Sepúlveda declares—in the evolution of transfeminist thought in Chile.

When Miguel Norambuena brought Félix Guattari to Chile to give a series of talks in May 1991, Nelly Richard and Pedro Lemebel seized the opportunity to intervene. Richard interviewed him and Lemebel presented a chronicle called “Loco afán,” which he later used to name the book. At the conference, Lemebel appropriates Guattari’s philosophical ideas, and the terminology used by those seeking homosexual liberation to question where his *loca* difference fits in and in the performative enunciation materializes a transfeminist discourse that deconstructs the rainbow

acronym. Lemebel begins addressing the group of conference goers using a deterritorialized language, difficult to decode, since it frequently includes neologisms and resists syntactical order.

Vadeando los géneros binarios, escurriéndose de la postal sepia de la familia y sobre todo escamoteando la vigilancia del discurso; más bien aprovechando sus intervalos y silencios; entremedio y a medias, reciclando una oralidad del detritus como alquimia excretora que demarca en el goce esfinteral su crónica rosa. Me atengo a la perturbación de este aroma para comparecer con mi diferencia. Digo minoritariamente que un me-ollo o ranura se grafía en su micropolítica constreñida. Estética por estética, desmontable en su mariconaje strip-tea-sero, remontable en su desmariconaje oblicuo, politizante para maricomprenderse.

[Wading through binary genres, slipping away from the family's sepia postcard and, above all, eluding the surveillance of discourse; rather taking advantage of its intervals and silences; in between and halfway, recycling an orality of detritus as excretory alchemy that demarcates its rosy chronicle in sphincteral jouissance. I stick to the disturbance of this aroma to appear with my difference. I say in a minority that a core or groove is written in its constrained micropolitics. Aesthetic for aesthetics, detachable in its strip-tea-sero faggotry, remountable in its oblique unfaithfulness, politicizing to understand one's inner faggot.] (*Loco afán*163)

Lemebel compares the binary construction of patriarchal family life to a sepia toned black and white photograph. His ideas cannot be written down since the panoptic gaze of the father surveils its function; so, they must emerge from within the silent spaces of marginalization and inner exile the father's law creates. The queerness of his thoughts that will later joyfully chronicle his chimeral discourse begin as bits of rubble excreted orally from an anus-like mouth. Lemebel likens what blocks his becoming to a disturbing stench. Since he speaks from a marginalized space, the manifestation of his difference begins as a sort of queer self-deconstruction that denudes the nitty gritty of his essence. He seems to say that the deformity of his language will not prevent him from expressing the micropolitics of his message. Lemebel realizes that his *travesti* kinship is an oblique parody of civilization. Nevertheless, the *locas* shake their feathers to free themselves from the collapse of ideological flows and utopian visions.

Porque nunca participamos de esas causas liberacionistas, doblemente lejanos del Mayo 68, demasiado sumergidos en la multiplicidad de segregaciones. Porque la revolución sexual hoy reenmarcada al estatus conservador fue eyaculación precoz

en estos callejones del Tercer Mundo y la paranoia sidática echó por tierra los avances de la emancipación homosexual. Ese loco afán por reivindicarse en el movimiento político nunca fue, quedó atrapado entre las gasas de precaución y la economía de gestos dedicados a los enfermos.

[Because we never participated in those liberationist causes, doubly distant from May 68, too submerged in the multiplicity of segregations. Because the sexual revolution today reframed to the conservative status was premature ejaculation in these back alleys of the Third World and AIDS paranoia scuttled the advances of homosexual emancipation. That crazy eagerness to vindicate oneself in the political movement never happened, it remained trapped between the gauze of precaution and the economy of gestures dedicated to the sick. (*Loco afán* 164)

May 1968 was a tumultuous time in France with general strikes, student protests, and the occupation of factories and universities, including Sorbonne university in Paris. The social upheaval was directed at the mass consumption of capitalism and American imperialism. France was on the verge of revolution with demands that President Charles de Gaulle step down. Many creators in the artworld saw the protests as a catalyst leading to a reassessment of practices in representation and subjectivity. The protests were repressed by police and the urgency of the upheaval in the streets faded. Nevertheless, the collective expression of freedom inspired many groups to push forward with liberatory projects in philosophy and sexuality. The Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (FHAR) in 1970 and the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (MLF) in 1971 brought lesbian feminists and gay activists into radical visibility under the leadership of figures such as Christine Delphy and Guy Hocquenghem. These groups asserted the right to sexual freedom and abortion. They denounced sexism and the medicalization of homosexuality. Meanwhile, the Compton's Cafeteria Riot erupted in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco in 1966 and the Stonewall Riots in New York took place in 1969, marking the beginning of transgender and gay male liberation movements in the United States. When Lemebel speaks of sexual revolutions “demasiados sumergidos en la multiplicidades de segregaciones” [too many submerged in the multiplicities of segregations] he is indirectly referencing the identity politics

that both drove the revolutionary impulses of queer liberation but also led to the creation of categories that he sees as a constraint on the fluidity of *loca* embodiment. Lemebel juxtaposes the gay and lesbian movements with the poverty of Third World Latin American homosexuals whose emancipation is still in many ways a work in progress. He depreciates the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s, calling it a premature ejaculation that failed, since in his view their revolutionary potential was atomized by conservative interests when AIDS became a central concern of integrated global capitalism.

Lemebel blames the gay movement, which *locas* did not take part in, for spreading the “resaca contagiosa” [contagious hangover] (another metaphor for AIDS) that decimated many. He criticizes the liberatory movements in the North that led to an explosion of discourses, while pointing out that *locas* in the South were illiterate, unable to articulate emancipatory discourses, and trapped in ghettos, while “en Valparaiso los travestis eran arreados a culatazos a los barcos de la marina, para nuestra memoria la película de Ibáñez y su crucero del horror” [in Valparaiso the transvestites were herded to the ships of the navy, in our memory, like a film of Ibáñez and his horror cruise] (*Loco afán* 164). Lemebel laments that no one believed the stories and that now the bodies of *locas* have been overshadowed by the mass consumption of idealized bodies “en las revistas de moda...del gay parade internacional” [in fashion magazines...of the international gay parade] (165). While gays and lesbians enjoy the freedom to sunbathe on California beaches, *locas* live the reality of a constant threat of violence.

In a direct nod to Néstor Perlongher’s famous poem, Lemebel says, “Cadáveres sobre cadáveres tejen nuestra historia en punto cruz lacre. Un cordón de costras borda el estandarte de raso revenido en aureolas de humo que desordenaron las letras” [Corpses upon corpses weave our history in sealing wax cross stitch. A cord of scabs embroiders the tempered satin banner in halos

of smoke that disordered the letters] (*Loco afán* 165). In other words, homosexual liberation in Chile, and by extension the Southern Cone, became a pile of bodies that laid waste to the emancipatory promise of the rainbow. Lemebel tells them that *locas* were not able to assimilate their revolutionary ideas into “nuestra cabeza indígena” [our indigenous heads] even though they tried, after all “acaso estuvimos locas siempre; locas como estigmatizan a las mujeres” [perhaps we were always crazy; crazy how they stigmatize women] (*Loco afán* 165). We may be *locas* but we are not crazy is what Lemebel means to say. He distinguishes the *loca*’s way of being and the uniqueness of their knowledge when he declares that “nunca nos dejamos precolonizar por ese discurso importado. Demasiado lineal para nuestra loca geografía. Demasiada militancia rubia y musculatura dorada que sucumbió en el crisol pavoroso del VIH” [we never let ourselves be pre-colonized by that imported discourse. Too linear for our crazy geography. Too much blonde militancy and golden musculature that succumbed in the terrifying crucible of HIV] (*Loco afán* 166). The monstrous masculinity of their transcultural heritage—mestizo, feminized, homosexual—exists only as “satélites exóticos de esas agrupaciones formadas por mayorías blancas a las que les dan alegría nuestras plumas; que hacen sus macrocongresos en inglés y por lo tanto nuestra lengua indoamericana no tiene opinión influyente en el diseño de sus políticas” [exotic satellites of those groups made up of white majorities who are happy with our feathers; that they hold their macro-congresses in English and therefore our Indo-American language does not have an influential opinion in the design of their policies] (*Loco afán* 166). Lemebel denounces how *locas* are depreciated by these hegemonic LGBT identities that treat them like younger sisters who stutter indigenous babel. He tells them that *locas* will never see themselves in the piercings of phallic leather masculinities with their chains and sadomasochistic fetiches. *Locas* prefer not to renounce their “mestizaje materno con estas representaciones de fuerza que hoy se remasculinizan

en paralelismos misóginos adheridos al poder” [maternal miscegenation with these representations of force that today are remasculinized in misogynist parallels adhered to power] (*Loco afán* 166). In this way he positions the *loca* as an organic being, in contrast to what he regards as artificial and commoditized masculinities that eroticize militant male fascist embodiments.

Throughout most of his chronicles in *Loco afán*, Lemebel reserves his harshest criticism for gays (male homosexuals from the North) because he sees them as well accommodated to integrated global capitalism. His political project, from the very beginning, was to demonstrate, to advocate, and to articulate a masculinity that does not conform to embodiments that are biologically predetermined into gendered categories and that only serve to preserve the hegemonic status of patriarchal power. “Lo gay se suma al poder, no lo confronta, no lo transgrede. Propone la categoría homosexual como regresión al género. Lo gay acuña su emancipación a la sombra del ‘capitalismo victorioso’” [The gay adheres to power, does not confront it, does not transgress it. He proposes the homosexual category as a regression to gender. The gay coins its emancipation in the shadow of 'victorious capitalism'] (*Loco afán* 167). Lemebel offers an alternative masculinity, a transfeminist masculinity that embraces its Amerindian and African transculturation.

América Latina travestida de traspasos, reconquistas y parches culturales—que por superposición de injertos sepulta la luna morena de su identidad—aflore en un mariconaje guerrero que se enmascara en la cosmética tribal de su periferia. Una militancia corpórea que enfatiza desde el borde de la voz un discurso propio y fragmentado, cuyo nivel más desprotegido por su falta de retórica y orfandad política es el travestismo homosexual que se acumula lumpen en los pliegues más oscuros de las capitales latinoamericanas.

[Latin America transvestized by trespassers, reconquests, and cultural patches—which by superimposition of grafts bury the brown moon of its identity—appears in a warrior faggot that is masked in the tribal cosmetics of its periphery. A corporeal militancy that emphasizes from the edge of the voice its own and fragmented discourse, whose most unprotected level due to its lack of rhetoric and political orphanhood is the homosexual cross-dressing that accumulates lumpen in the darkest folds of Latin American capitals]. (*Loco afán* 167)

The transfeminist revolutionary vision in this writing read out loud to Félix Guattari and a group of students at the University ARCIS in May 1991 is hard to classify in generic terms since it resists narrative conventions. This chronicle is essayistic, theoretical, and expository. Moreover, its construction is like a manifesto and its tone is defiant. It reflects the *neobarrosa* aesthetic by presenting the body of a *loca* positioned in a radical exteriority that refuses to be erased.

Marginality, Clandestinity, and Community in “La noche de los visones”

For much of Pinochet’s tenure, he and his junta sought to eradicate Marxist thought as though it were a plague with the help of the United States international anti-communist Cold War crusade. No sooner had the coup consolidated its power over the state, it issued a series of edicts targeting leftist intellectuals, artists, and literary publications, producing in the process what Resha Cardone calls *un apagón cultural*, Nelly Richard calls *un abismo temporal*, and Carina Perelli calls *la perversión del mito*. These three ideas are additional ways to understand the exceptional conditions confronted in *Loco afán*. The cultural blackout began with the coup and continued until preparations for the 1988 plebiscite began in 1987, when Pinochet relaxed his iron grip. The temporal abyss refers to the dark period of political violence during which the left was not allowed to produce art. The perversion of myth began when the state of exception suspended democracy. In other words, the social imaginaries of democracy’s symbolic universe—the mythology of the state and the public and private democratic institutions that many Chileans relied upon for their reality—had been *perversed* beyond recognition. Their way of living and being in the world was redefined. The ideas of these three feminist critics are important ways of seeing how the exceptional conditions produced by Pinochet’s backward looking future vision created a tension in the perception of time and space. The disorientation and distortion of reality produced a destructive/productive exile/inner exile, which compelled labors of memory to begin inside/outside the nation. For the leftists who remained in Chile, the cultural blackout materialized

as censorship and a deadly curfew prohibited political organization; the temporal abyss materialized when they were forbidden to publish and create art; and the perversion of the national myth materialized with the suspension of democracy and the resignification of what it meant to be Chilean. These transformations affecting Chilean leftists are based on Pinochet's reimagining Chile's future as a resurrection of a glorious past rooted in religious mythology. The violent subjugation of human life, the destruction of democracy, and its (re)signification effectively silenced the Chilean left, sending it into a profound inner exile, marked by silence and paralyzing fear.

After the first seven years Pinochet held power after toppling Allende, he successfully installed a new constitution in 1980, which granted him an eight-year term. However, due to mounting pressure within Chile and from international power brokers such as Pope John Paul, who visited Chile in early 1987, Pinochet agreed to hold a plebiscite in 1988 to decide if he would serve a second eight-year term or if he would allow open and free elections. The plebiscite offered voters one question. Should Pinochet continue for another eight years? Yes, or no? This led to a relaxing of the strict military curfew and the (re)legalization of political parties and advertising. The plebiscite opened a space for activists within the marginalized social and cultural sectors to break out of the silence imposed by Pinochet's deadly fourteen-year military curfew and take their clandestine struggles to the streets and public media. The groups that had been operating in clandestinity—the women's groups and arts organizations—were finally able to operate openly, and they soon began doing everything they could to manifest their desires and influence the future of Chile, seeking justice for those who had been tortured and disappeared. There were tremendous scars on the social body, and many wanted those responsible to be held accountable. When the "No" campaign won in 1988 and Chile began its transition to democracy, silence continued to

reign over questions related to the human rights abuses of the dictatorship. During this time, as pointed out earlier, AIDS cases were increasing and Pinochet issued decrees to treat the disease as a pathology which required official notification to the community and social movements were laser focused on evicting Pinochet from power. Even though Pinochet had been defeated, he was not about to disattend the nation he had abused and ruled over for 17 terror filled years. If Pinochet was no longer going to be president, he claimed a lifetime seat in the senate, and he remained the supreme commander of the military. He also sought a constitutional referendum that would prevent the constitution he installed in 1980 from being amended. With most of these messy details sorted out through “negotiations,” the promised open and free election was set for 1990. As a hopeful people reached for justice in 1989, Pinochet once again conjured a dark cloud to kill the joy that the Concertación Democrática promised in its advertising campaign using the slogan “Ya viene la alegría.” Pinochet threatened the democratic sovereignty of the nation.

Luis Sepúlveda, who writes over a decade later for the newspaper *El País*, reflecting on Pinochet’s threat like Lemebel has done numerous times before him, criticizes both the left and the right political establishments. In an op-ed called “Pinochet: el gran travestido,” [Pinochet: the Great Crossdresser] he offers a scathing critique of those who governed Chile in February 1998. Sepúlveda accuses all those politicians of having performed “un curioso fenómeno de travestimo moral” [the curious phenomenon of moral transvestism]. He mocks them all for having merely forced the dictatorship, which began long before the coup, to undergo several acts of historical crossdressing. When Chile first became a nation, it cross-dressed into a military government, then into an authoritarian government with a constitution, and later, a government of military force. In Sepúlveda’s view, those in power performed another act of crossdressing when they allowed Pinochet to become a senator, and then again as the return to democracy was “negotiated” under

threat, as if “...la normalidad institucional democrática se conseguirá cuando el sátrapa se haya travestido de tribuno” [democratic institution normality will be achieved when the satrap has disguised himself as a tribune]. Sepúlveda reports that in 1989, Pinochet warned the opposition that the justice it had long sought would not take place as they expected. There would be no trials or arrests of those guilty for the heinous crimes committed. According to Sepúlveda, Pinochet says, “Yo no amenazo, no acostumbro a amenazar. No he amenazado en mi vida. Yo solo advierto una vez... Nadie me toca a nadie. El día que me toquen a alguno de mis hombres se acabó el Estado de derecho. Esto lo he dicho una vez y no lo repito más, pero sepan que va a ser así” [I do not threaten, I am not used to threatening. I have never threatened in my life. I only warn, once... Nobody touches anyone. The day one of my men is touched, the rule of law is over. I have said this once and I will not repeat it again but know that it will be so] (Quoted in Sepúlveda). These chilling and menacing words are why Sepúlveda characterizes Pinochet’s act of crossdressing as “el matón travestido de chantajista” [the thug cross-dressed as a blackmailer]. Although Sepúlveda uses a term that signifies bodies that perform the gendered expectations of the opposite sex, what he exposes with this strategy is a perversion of the myth of democracy.

When Sepúlveda wrote his article, the Paraguayan Archives of Terror discovered in 1992 had already become widely known, but Pinochet’s indictment in Great Britain did not occur until eight months later in October 1998. Back when Pinochet threatened the nation, saying he would terminate democracy if the new government prosecuted his “men,” no one knew exactly how many bodies had been subjected to Condor’s barbarism. Pinochet’s “blackmail” obstructed efforts inside of Chile to hold those guilty of human rights violations to account, and many people became disillusioned with the new “democratic” government which had buckled under the weight of his threat. They continued to apply the neoliberal economic model under the constitution that Pinochet

installed in 1980. Those who began to wield the power of the state took the easier, softer path forward, choosing to allow the labors of memory to continue, but not allow them to gain much legal force. The distrust toward “democracy” allowed anxieties to continue, despite the new so called “freedom” of expression. Many survivors were still afraid to go on record, make accusations, or even speak up for loved ones lost, since the *pacos*, another name for the Carabineros, continued to enforce the peace. The ongoing menace of fear persisted, distorting hopes for a future in which the disappeared bodies would be recovered and given a proper burial. The relief, joy, and closure promised by the Concertación Democrática was denied. Attacking Pinochet’s masculinity is an attack on the patriarchal forces upholding his shrouded power. My argument about Condor’s transvestized power was inspired by Sepúlveda’s bold critique.

Despite the terrible atrocities committed in Condor’s shadow, the campaign to eradicate Marxist thought from Chile was ultimately unsuccessful and the imposed silence failed. To the contrary, an explosion of memories from those dark years has been historicized in short stories, poems, chronicles, novels, self-referential writings, documentaries, and films, which detail events the governments of Condor nations tried to erase. Survivors and their families no longer must endure the repression and imposed oblivion, their strangled screams of terror now inhabit the narratives produced during their long period of inner exile and they reveal intersectional identities, which exhibit accommodation, resistance, and transgression. When Lemebel’s chronicles engage labors of memory they focalize its internal structures, portraying the inner and outer realms of Chilean bodies living precarious lives in the marginal neighborhoods at the periphery of Santiago using contagious viral metaphors. Those souls who lived and died during the dark period of the military curfew, compounded by the appearance of AIDS in Chile in 1984, are given voices in *Loco afán*.

I remind the reader that when it comes to inner exile, I am working with a few of what Paul Ilie in *Literature and Inner Exile* (1980) calls the “elusive components of the exilic paradigm [that] signal interesting areas of interpretive research...” (3) Ilie tells us that “once we acknowledge that exile is a mental condition more than a material one, that it removes people from other people and their way of life, then the nature of this separation remains to be defined not only as unilateral severance, but as something more profound” (2) Ilie urges us to broaden our perspective of exile not only to understand *what* it means but also *how* it materializes. In his discussion of inner exile, Ilie offers a formidable list of profound mental conditions, including marginality, clandestinity, and moral excision. In this section I will emphasize both the destructive and productive aspects of these three elusive components in my reading of a few chronicles in *Loco afán*. In the AIDS world Lemebel constructs in these chronicles, the *locas* who face *exceptional conditions* react by intensifying their own *exceptional positions*. These *locas* display a crazy eagerness to preserve the eternal youth of their bodies, despite the marginality of their precarious existence. They continue to satiate their bodily desires, despite living in clandestine communities. These chronicles engage the labors of memory by historicizing the narrator’s recollections and demonstrating that despite the media censorship and violent repression, *locas* remain unafraid to contaminate the national teleological narrative, even while facing death from AIDS.

The elusive components of inner exile such as moral excision, marginality, and clandestinity are found among the homosexuals, *locas*, *travesties*, and male prostitutes living extremely precarious lives in the aftermath of the Chile coup. They were already exiled from the new neoliberal mainstream, overwhelmed by the devastation and loss of family and friends due to religious intolerance toward their gender and sexuality. With AIDS emerging as a new threat to their lives, their inner exile experienced a doubling effect. Amelia Donoso and Victor Hugo Robles

in *SIDA en Chile* (2015) explain that “vivir con VIH/SIDA y ser homosexual en Chile del año 1984 era definitivamente una amenaza, no tan solo a la salud, sino a la libertad de caer en manos de la autoridad sanitaria y policial” [living with HIV/AIDS and being homosexual in Chile in 1984 was definitely a threat, not only to health, but also to the freedom from falling into the hands of the health and police authorities] (14). A decree by Pinochet’s regime placed the bodies of sexually contagious individuals within the purview of the Carabineros. The moral excisions began once the first case was publicly announced. Moral crusaders and the yellow journalism of the reactionary news sensationalized the first AIDS case in the press, framing the discourse in apocalyptic terms, such as *la peste rosa* [the rose plague], *una enfermedad rara* [the queer disease] y *el cancer gay* [the gay cancer].

As in most Latin American countries at the time, public health authorities and even male Chilean homosexuals saw HIV/AIDS as a far away, exotic problem affecting the United States, Europe, Africa, and Brazil. The Chilean Minister of Health declared, “esto es un caso aislado, somos un país decente, eso no va a llegar aquí” [this is an isolated case, we are a decent country, that is not going to get here] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 16). Chilean authorities and religious leaders believed the disease to be caused by the immorality, promiscuity, lack of hygiene, and drug abuse among male homosexuals and prostitutes, so a coordinated government response to educate the public was not thought to be necessary, since their logic dictated that “solo gente indecente que merece morir” [only indescient people who deserve to die] would get infected. These attitudes led to a dramatic uptick in the number of positive cases, despite the widespread availability of condoms. Most male homosexuals, *locas*, *travestis*, and prostitutes preferred not to use them. Gustavo Hermosilla recalls, “El condón no estaba presente en la vida sexual. La sexualidad era absolutamente libre y compulsiva. Existían muchos parques en Santiago, siendo el más visitado el

parque Forestal” [The condom was not present in sexual life. Sexuality was gratuitous and irresistible. There were many parks in Santiago, the most visited being the Parque Forestal] (Donoso and Robles 17). Jorge Pavetti, on the other hand, recalls that with the news about many people dying from the rose plague in the US and Brazil.

...entonces ahí como que se frenó el sexo, pero se frenó hasta cierto punto porque seguían existiendo los lugares donde se tenía sexo sin protección, a diestra y siniestra, como las saunas Catedral, Ñuñoa y Matte Pérez. El condón no se usaba, particularmente con el *cafiche*, a ellos les costaba excitarse con las *locas*, entonces, la *loca* no se atrevía a meterle un condón porque al *cafiche* se le iba a bajar el pico y ella no iba a perder la plata. Los *cafiches* estaban en otra, además que ellos creían que los homosexuales tenían otro gen biológico, entonces, como se decía que el SIDA solo atacaba a homosexuales, ellos como no eran homosexuales, no los iba a atacar. Ahora es para la risa, pero eso creían ellos.

[...so, then sex kind of stopped, but it stopped to a certain point because places where unprotected sex already existed, continued, left and right, like Catedral, Ñuñoa and Matte Pérez saunas. The condom was not used, particularly with the pimp, it was hard for them to get aroused by the *locas*, so the *locas* did not dare put a condom on him because the pimp was going to lose his erection and she was not going to lose the money. The pimps were something else besides, they believed that homosexuals had different biological genes so, since it was said that AIDS only attacked homosexuals and they were not homosexuals, it was not going to attack them. Today that is totally a joke, but that's what they thought.] (Donoso and Robles 18).

In this quote, Pavetti uses the word *cafiche* in a somewhat confusing way, since many use the term to signify a pimp—the person who benefits from the prostitution—but Pavetti seems to be using the word to mean both the client and the pimp, perhaps since both benefit in some way. While public officials believed the country to be morally descent, homosexuality functioned mostly in clandestinity under the dictatorship, with its expression reduced to protected private spaces, and some public venues such as discotheques and bars, where people could meet then carry on at a private residence or a no-tell hotel. Only those homosexual males and *locas* of the precariat class risked having sex in public theaters and parks or engaged in prostitution to earn a living.

In the first chronicle of *Loco afán* called “La noche de los visones,” Pedro Lemebel remembers those years when AIDS came to Chile differently. I remind the reader that Lemebel is using aesthetics that create a bulging of language, which means that what could be said with a few words is said with many words, because the *neobarrosa* art of *tremendismo* is at work. Some of the quotes are long, because chopping them up would not allow us to appreciate the beauty he constructs from the horror produced by the shadow of death. He also makes frequent use of analepsis, which is a characteristic of his nomadic and zigzagging narration. The Lemebel persona is the narrator, who performs the labors of memory when he focalizes the *loca* perspective. The chronicle begins as he gazes at an old and faded photograph of a group of *locas* who are, from his perspective in time, all dead. Nevertheless, he remembers their hopes and dreams. The found photograph triggers an avalanche of recollected memories. The first memory is one of the *locas* and the handsome, muscular, proletarian men flirting with one another as they stand in line waiting to be served government provided free lunches at the UNCTAD, a giant concrete multistory structure built through a partnership between the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Allende government. Today the building is known as the Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral.

The second memory triggered by the photograph is a New Year’s Eve bash, when 1972 transitioned to 73. The party is hosted by a *loca* named la Palma, “esa loca rota que tiene puesto de pollos en La Vega, que quiere pasar por regia e invitó a todo Santiago a su fiesta de fin de año” [that poor *loca* who has a chicken stall in La Vega and likes to pretend she’s royal, invited all of Santiago to her New Year's Eve party] (*Loco afán* 16). Here the narrator suggests that la Palma aspires to upward mobility as a middle-class business owner. The party is described as a gala event and several of the *locas* reportedly arrive dressed to the nines and sporting fur coats and mink

stoiles. Among the distinguished partygoers are the politically moderate *locas*, the narrator, the hostess la Palma, her best friend la Chumilou, and several of their *loca* friends who frequented the UNCTAD. While another group of *locas* from the upscale neighborhood of Recoleta arrive later. These snobbish *locas* are those who hate Allende and his socialist government, la Astaburuaga, la Zañartu, la Pilola Alessandri, and their entourage of “rucas estiradas que en la calle Huérfanos le hacían desprecios... derramaban chorros de perlas lagrimeras porque a la mamá los rotos le habían expropiado el fundo” [snotty girls who in Huérfanos street showed her contempt... they shed streams of tearful pearls because the broken had expropriated the farm] (*Loco afán* 18). In this quote we can appreciate the neologism in the metaphor “perlas lagrimeras” used to mean these *loca*’s tears, who were upset that some of their family’s wealth had been expropriated by the Allende government. The narrator explains that the three *locas* arrived “tan peladoras, tan conchudas, tan elegantes con sus abrigos de vison... como la Taylor, como la Dietrich, en micro” [so skinny, so bitchy, so elegant with their mink coats... like Taylor, like Dietrich, in micro] (*Loco afán* 18). In this quote we can appreciate how Lemebel makes frequent reference to the cinematographic icons of high culture the *locas* seek to imitate in their gendered performances, while the furs reference their swank and snootiness.

The snobbish *locas* arrive making a showy display of their wealth “tan sofisticadas como estrellas de cine” [as sophisticated as movie stars] expecting to find, “veinte pavos, champagña por cajas, ensaladas y helados de todos los sabores” [twenty turkeys, champagne by the box, salads and all flavors of ice cream] which la Palma had promised (*Loco afán* 18-19). Instead, they find an empty table covered in plastic, with scraps of food, and a pile of chicken bones arranged into a giant pyramid, “como una fosa común que iluminaron con velas. Nadie supo de dónde una diabla sacó una banderita chilena que puso en el vértice de la siniestra escultura” [like a common grave

that they lit with candles. No one knew where the little devil got a little Chilean flag that she placed at the top of the sinister sculpture] (*Loco afán* 20). The sculpture of bones and its comparison to a common grave foreshadow the approaching apocalypse of the deadly coup, the leftist purge, and the advent of AIDS, crowned with the national symbol: the Chilean flag. The spectacle of the sculpture and the lack of champagne become bones of contention for the snobbish *locas*.

Entonces, la Pilola Alessandri se molestó, e indignada dijo que era una falta de respeto que ofendía a los militares que tanto habían hecho por la patria. Que este país era un asco populachero con esa Unidad Popular que tenía a todos muertos de hambre. Que las locas rascas no sabían de política y no tenían respeto ni siquiera por la bandera. Y que ella no podía estar ni un minuto más allí, así que le pasaran los visones porque se retiraba.

[Then, Pilola Alessandri got upset, and indignantly said that it was a lack of respect that offended the military who had done so much for the country. That this country was a disgusting populace with that Popular Unity that had everyone starving. That the poor *locas* didn't know about politics and had no respect even for the flag. And that she couldn't be there another minute, so she asked that they pass her the minks because she was leaving.] (*Loco afán* 20)

La Pilola's diatribe exalts the fascist machinery of the military coup in her showy display of patriotism. She infantilizes the supporters of the UP with the word "populachero," while blaming Allende for the hunger produced in Chile by the economic sabotage wrought by the Nixon Administration which had vowed to "make the economy scream" ("CIA Activities in Chile"). La Pilola uses the flag as an excuse to be offended when what she wanted was to be treated as royalty and fed properly. These *locas* had arrived wearing expensive mink coats and they were not about to leave without them. Nevertheless, her slights did not stop one of the moderate *locas* from putting her in her place. "¿Qué visones niña?, le contestó la Chumilou, echándose aire con su abanico. Aquí las locas rascas no conocemos esas cosas. Además, con este calor. ¿En pleno verano? Hay que ser muy tonta para usar pieles, linda" [What minks, girl? Chumilou replied, fanning herself. We poor *locas* don't know about such things. Also, in this heat. In summer? You must be very dumb to wear fur, darling] (*Loco afán* 20). At this point, with the party interrupted, all the *locas*

began scouring the home looking for the furs, but they were nowhere to be found. Their disappearance made la Pilola Alessandri extremely mad, and she threatened to call her uncle, who was a military commander, if the fur coats did not appear. All the *locas* collectively gasped when they heard her utter those words, despite knowing that la Pilola would not dare call him, since she feared that her honorable family would find out about her secret transvestism. So, the entourage of right wing *loca* snobs left, threatening never to set foot in that slum again.

That is when the proletarian party got going, as the song “Mambo number 8” began to boom, and the *locas* put on a *travesti* show. At one moment, amidst all the dancing and festivities, someone cut the music and all the *locas* screamed in chorus: “Se te voló el visón, niña. Ataja ese visón” [Your mink flew the coop, girl. Hold on to that mink] (*Loco afán* 21). The *locas* respond with giddy laughter and merriment. This moment represented the climax of the party memory that began to fade like the tobacco smoke that continued to linger in the residence and light filtered through the morning air. The morning after signals the beginning of the end, the final party of the Unidad Popular, perhaps the last hurrah of an identity soon to be erase by an insidious zoonotic virus.

Y esa luz hueca entrando por las ventanas, esa luz de humo flotando a través de la puerta abierta de par en par. Como si la casa hubiera sido una calavera iluminada desde el exterior. Como si las locas durmieran a raja suelta en ese hotel cinco calaveras. Como si el huesario velado, erigido aun en medio de la mesa, fuera el altar de un devenir futuro, un pronóstico, un horóscopo anual que pestañeaba lágrimas negras en la cera de las velas, a punto de apagarse, a punto de extinguir la última chispa social en la banderita de papel que coronaba la escena.

[And that hollow light coming through the windows, that smoky light wafting through the wide-open door. As if the house had been a skull lit from the outside. As if the *locas* slept soundly in that hotel five skulls. As if the veiled bone sculpture, still erected in the middle of the table, were the altar of a future’s future, a prognosis, an annual horoscope that blinked black tears in the wax of the candles, about to go out, about to extinguish the last social spark in the little paper flag that crowned the scene.] (*Loco afán* 21)

The paper flag which crowns the chicken bone sculpture signals the fragility of identities anchored in national belonging, one which can be subjected to moral excision by a triumphant and resurgent archaic patriarchal vision. In comparison to Hermosilla and Pavetti's testimonies about that time in the 1980s when, despite the dangers of viral infection, male homosexuals and *locas* alike continued engaging in high-risk sexual encounters without condoms and the *cafiches* dismissed the contagion with false notions of biological immunity, Lemebel offers a different perspective as he remembers the final joyful celebration before the terror of the military coup and the onset of the AIDS plague. The historicized memory of the chronicle points to a separation and severance even among those who share identities similarly marked by gendered bodies and sexual desires, *locas* who become divided by socioeconomic class and political ideologies. Whereas for some, the fulfilment of sexual desire takes them to the streets, parks, and saunas where they risk infection and detention, those of a higher socioeconomic class frequent the bars and discotheques where they can hobnob with cosmopolitan globetrotters and neoliberal trend setters. Not only are their identities a commodity providing pleasure for curiosity seekers, but their bodies become sacrificial cadavers to the altar of integrated global capitalism and its patriarchal dictates.

In the next quote, Lemebel collapses decades of time into two paragraphs that evoke the terror of the coup, the AIDS debut, and democracy anew. Embedded in the narration is a critique of how some *locas* accommodate themselves to the new neoliberal reality and align with its fascist politics, while demonstrating how a photograph that captures an instant in time can serve as an archive of memory when accompanied by an explanatory text.

Desde ahí, los años se despeñaron como derrumbe de troncos que sepultaron la fiesta nacional. Vino el golpe y la nevazón de balas provocó la estampida de las locas que nunca más volvieron a bailar por los patios floridos de la UNCTAD. Buscaron otros lugares, se reunieron en los paseos recién inaugurados de la dictadura. Siguió las fiestas, más privadas, más silenciosas, con menos gente educada por la cripta del toque de queda. Algunas discotecas siguieron

funcionando, porque el régimen militar nunca reprimió tanto al coliseo como en Argentina o Brasil. Quizás, la homosexualidad acomodada nunca fue un problema subversivo que alterara su pulcra moral. Quizás, había demasiadas locas de derecha que apoyaban al régimen. Tal vez su hedor a cadáver era amortiguado por el perfume francés de los maricas del barrio alto. Pero, aun así, el tufo mortuorio de la dictadura fue un adelanto del sida, que hizo su estreno a comienzos de los ochenta.

[From that moment, the years rolled on like the collapse of logs that buried the national holiday. The coup came and the snowstorm of bullets caused the stampede of *locas* who never again danced through the flowery courtyards of UNCTAD. They looked for other places, they met in the recently inaugurated promenades of the dictatorship. The parties continued, more private, more silent, with fewer people educated by the crypt of the curfew. Some clubs continued to operate, because the military regime never repressed the coliseum as much as in Argentina or Brazil. Perhaps well-to-do homosexuality was never a subversive problem that altered its pristine morality. Perhaps there were too many *loca* right-wingers who supported the regime. Perhaps his corpse stench was muffled by the French perfume of the queers from the upper neighborhood. But even so, the deadly stench of the dictatorship was a preview of AIDS, which made its debut in the early eighties.]
(*Loco afán* 22)

In this paragraph, the narrator takes us from just before the coup, through the 1970s, and into the early-80s when AIDS materializes, emphasizing the coup's deadly erasure of Marxists as a precursor to the AIDS pandemic. The narrator draws the reader's attention to how the exceptional conditions produced a turn inward toward clandestine private spaces with his lament for the loss of the *locas* whose dances at the UNCTAD ceased and they migrated to other spaces. Lemebel denounces the dapper morality of the economic factors driving the complicity of homosexuals and *locas* who supported the regime.

The US journalist Tim Frasca, who arrived in 1983 to Chile to work as a news correspondent and later became a recognized leader with the Corporación Chilena de Prevención de SIDA, remembers the repressive time during the 1980s in an interview with Donoso and Robles when "gays" in Santiago carried on in "total clandestinidad...con redadas a los bares constantemente. No existía ninguna protección de la represión, excepto los pagos que hacían los dueños de esos lugares para funcionar" [total clandestinity... with constant raids on bars. There

was no protection from repression, except for the payments that the owners of those places made to function] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 28). Frasca's comment points to the neoliberal economic logic that monetized law enforcement operations, creating a climate of corruption. He also relates a quick story about a visit from one of his friends from California who he took to a bar called Fausto. When they left the establishment, they noticed "furgones de pacos" [vans loaded with Carabineros] outside and had to "circular en el barrio durante una hora para evitar problemas" [drive around the neighborhood for an hour to avoid problems] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 28). Here we have two gays from the US encountering Carabineros who were likely waiting outside in vans to see if the owner paid up before commencing their raid. Frasca reports, "Mi amigo me comentó que era como los años cincuenta, antes de Stonewall" [My friend told me that it was like the fifties, pre-Stonewall] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 28). Juan Francisco Gatica, an HIV/AIDS activist interviewed by Donoso and Robles remembers how much harder it was for leftist homosexuals who frequented the bars and discotheques in poorer neighborhoods. "Se experimentaba la vida acudiendo a lugares que nacieron en la década de los setenta" [Life was experienced by going to places that were born in the seventies] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 27). He also remembers how after the coup, new high-class establishments flourished like Fausto and Quasar where "todos los sábados se repletaba de travestis, maricones de alta alcurnia y familias heterosexuales completas, era muy divertido, como una película de Fellini" [every Saturday it was packed with transvestites, high class faggots and entire straight families, it was so much fun, like a Fellini movie] (Quoted in Donoso and Robles 27). From these comments we can see how linguistic markers signal the socio-economic hierarchy, "gays" are associated with wealth and privilege, while "homosexuales" and "locas" become vulnerable to repression for lack of money to use as bribes to protect them from raids.

In the next paragraph, Lemebel continues to compress time taking us into the democratic transition, where he uses the UNCTAD building metonymically to represent the promise of socialism usurped by the military dictatorship. The building changing from socialist, to authoritarian, to faux democratic control—a building that once served as a social center where a libidinal economy between *locas* and proletarian men once existed, to a command center for military operations, to a cultural center where a more progressive agenda advances underscores the deadly irony of a political pendulum that swings from left to right, while many people lose their lives in the process. Lemebel commemorates the *loca*'s time under Allende using the word “fiesta” [celebration], while alluding to those who inhabit the brave new world of neoliberal democracy with the phrase “risas extinguidas” [extinguished laughter].

De aquella sinopsis emancipada solo quedó la UNCTAD, el gran elefante de cemento que por muchos años albergó a los militares. Luego la democracia fue recuperando las terrazas y patios... los enormes auditorios y salas de conferencias, donde hoy se realizan foros y seminarios sobre homosexualidad, sida, utopías y tolerancias. De esa fiesta sólo existe una foto, un cartón deslavado donde reaparecen los rostros colizos lejanamente expuestos a la mirada presente. La foto no es buena, pero salta a la vista la militancia sexual del grupo que la compone. Enmarcados en la distancia, sus bocas son risas extinguidas, ecos de gestos congelados por el *flash* del último brindis.

[From that emancipated synopsis, only UNCTAD remained, the great cement elephant that for many years housed the military. Later, democracy began to recover the terraces and patios... the huge auditoriums and conference rooms, where today forums and seminars on homosexuality, AIDS, utopias, and tolerance are held. There is only one photo of that party, a faded cardboard where the faces reappear, distantly exposed to the present gaze. The photo is not good, but the sexual militancy of the group that composes it is obvious. Framed in the distance, their mouths are extinguished laughter, echoes of gestures frozen by the flash of the last toast.] (*Loco afán* 22)

The photograph is faded by time and by the shadows of discoloration. Its physical condition parallels the fuzziness of memory as one attempts to recall the events surrounding a moment captured in a flash. The memory recall produced by gazing at the photograph is mired in sentimentality and a sense of melancholy evoked in the metonymy of a party that ends with so

much death. We can appreciate that despite their political differences, *loca* embodiment gave them a sense of community solidarity.

The appearance of AIDS in 1980s Chile represented multiple crises for PWAs, depending on their socioeconomic status and political affiliation. Ironically, HIV in Chile did not begin among those in the precariat (the precarious proletariat who suffer material and psychological harm in unpredictable and insecure conditions), but rather among those with sophisticated sensibilities and the financial means to live and travel abroad. According to Chilean news correspondent Claudia Donoso, by August 1985 six cases of AIDS had officially been recognized in Chile and five of those patients had died. “En nuestro país los individuos que actualmente sufren de este mal—así como los que ya murieron—pertenecen al estrato socioeconómico alto y se contagiaron en Brasil y en Estados Unidos” [In our country, the individuals who currently suffer from this disease—as well as those who have already died—belong to the upper socioeconomic stratum and were infected in Brazil and the United States] (Donoso C. 29). This well-to-do-first-world cosmopolitan viral vector is what led many people to conclude that AIDS was an “imported” disease. The names of *la Pilola Alessandri* and *la Palma* conjure memories of former presidents. Arturo Alessandri who served as president of Chile three times was responsible for the installation of Chile’s 1925 constitution and his son Jorge Alessandri Palma served as president once. When he ran for another term as president in 1970, he earned the nickname “*la señora*” because he never married and many insinuated that he was homosexual. Clearly the names of the upper-class and middle-class *locas* are derivations from his name. The photograph also helps the narrator to tell the stories of how AIDS ended the lives of *la Pilola*, *la Palma*, and *la Chumilou*—three *locas* representing three different socioeconomic classes. Let us begin with the leader of the group of snobbish *locas*, *la Pilola Alessandri*, who Lemebel refers to as one of the “*locas acomodadas*”

[well-off *locas*]. The description of the image performs the fuzzy logic of memory constructing a narrative from fragments.

La foto es borrosa, quizás porque el tul estropeado del sida entela la doble desaparición de casi todas las *locas*. Esa sombra es una delicada venda de celofán que enlaza la cintura de la Pilola Alessandri, apoyando su cadera marícola en el costado derecho de la mesa. Ella se compró la epidemia en Nueva York, fue la primera que la trajo en exclusiva, la más auténtica, la recién estrenada moda gay para morir. La última moda fúnebre que la adelgazó como ninguna dieta lo había conseguido. La dejó tan flaca y pálida como una modelo de *Vogue*, tan estirada y chic como un suspiro de orquídea. El sida le estrujó el cuerpo y murió tan apretada, tan fruncida, tan estilizada y bella en la economía aristócrata de su mezquina muerte.

[The photo is blurred, perhaps because the damaged tulle of AIDS covers the double disappearance of almost all the *locas*. That shadow is a delicate cellophane bandage that binds Pilola Alessandri's waist, resting her whorish hip on the right side of the table. She bought the epidemic in New York, she was the first to bring it exclusively, the most authentic, the newly released gay fashion to die for. The latest funeral fad that slimmed her down like no diet had ever done. It left her as skinny and pale as a *Vogue* model, as uptight and chic as a sigh of orchid. AIDS squeezed her body and she died so tight, so puckered, so slim and beautiful in the aristocratic economy of her petty death.] (*Loco afán* 23)

In the narration of la Pilola's death, we can appreciate the irony that AIDS does not discriminate. Coming from a wealthy family is no guarantee that one will not become infected and that wealth, at least in the mid-1980s, could not help one survive the disease. Narrating la Pilola's death first aligns with the phenomenon observed by Claudia Donoso that AIDS was brought to Chile by those of its social upper crust. The description of her death, situated in the opulence of the expensive artifacts offered in the "big apple," metonymically evokes the desiring machine of integrated global capitalism and its power to create subjectivities beholden to fashion trends and the heroin chic bodies that populate the covers of high fashion magazines. In the end, la Pilola got exactly what she wanted, a *body to die for*, one that no diet could provide.

Now let us turn to the *loca* representing the business owning middle-class. While staring at the faded photograph, the narrator remembers the hostess of the party, la Palma, who also died

of AIDS. As the narrator gazes at the photograph, he describes its deterioration. The living color of the image has faded. The narrator cannot tell if it was black and white or sepia. The only thing left is its aura. The image has yellowed with age, and a water stain that cuts across it, dissecting la Palma's figure. The transversal line in the photograph could also symbolize la Palma's position in the middle of the social hierarchy, which provides the capacity to traverse between worlds, above and below, with greater ease than la Pilola or la Chumilou. La Palma as the hostess of the party is the glue that holds this fragile community of *locas* together, but Lemebel animalizes la Palma to criticize her position as one compromises to gain comfort.

La atraviesa, elevándola como a un insecto en el mariposario del sida popular. Ella se le pegó en Brasil, cuando vendió al puesto de pollos que tenía en La Vega, cuando no aguantó más a los milicos y dijo que se iba a maraquear a las arenas de Ipanema. Para eso una es loca y tiene que vivir en carnaval y sambearse la vida. Además, con el dólar a 39 pesos, la piñata de carioca estaba al alcance de la mano. La oportunidad de ser reina por una noche al costo de una vida. Y que fue –dijo en el aeropuerto imitando a las cuicas–. Una se gasta lo que tiene no más.

[It crosses her, lifting her up like an insect in the popular AIDS butterfly Garden. She caught it in Brazil, when she sold the chicken stand, she had in La Vega, once she couldn't stand the soldiers anymore and said that she was going to mara-queer the sands of Ipanema. One is a *loca* for that reason, to live in carnival and samba life away. In addition, with the dollar at 39 pesos, the carioca piñata was within her reach. The chance to be a queen for one night at the cost of a life. So what? She said at the airport, imitating the rich bitches. One spends what one has and no more.] (*Loco afán* 24)

Whereas la Pilola dies because of a trip to New York where she “bought” the disease, la Palma “gets it” in Brazil on a trip to get away from the brutality of the military crackdown. As I mentioned before, only those with the financial means could self-exile, even if it was just an exilic vacation. Narrating la Palma's death second also underscores AIDS viral vectors into Chile as signaled by Claudia Donoso.

Y fue generoso el sida que le tocó a la Palma, callejeado, revolcado con cuanto perdido hambriento le pedía sexo. Casi podría decirse que lo obtuvo en bandeja, compartido y repartido hasta la saciedad por los viaductos ardientes de Copacabana. La Palma sorbió el suero Kaposi hasta la última gota, como quien se harta de su

propio fin sin miramientos. Ardiendo en fiebre, volvía a la arena, repartiendo la serpentina contagiosa a los vagos, mendigos y leprosos que encontraba a la sombra de su Orfeo negro. Un sida ebrio de samba y partusa la fue hinchando como un globo descolorido, como un condón inflado por los resoplidos de su ano piadoso. Su ano filántropo, retumbando panderetas y timbales en el ardor de la colitis sidosa.

[And the AIDS that touched La Palma was generous, wandering the streets, wallowing with all the hungry lost who asked her for sex. One could almost say it was served to her on a platter, shared and distributed ad nauseam over the fiery viaducts of Copacabana. La Palma sipped the Kaposi serum to the last drop, like someone who gets fed up with their own end without regard. Burning with fever, she returned to the arena, doling out the contagious streamer to the bums, beggars, and lepers she found in the shadow of her black Orpheus. An AIDS, drunk from samba and orgy, swelled her up like a colorless balloon, like a condom inflated by the puffing of her merciful anus. The philanthropic anus, rumbling tambourines and kettledrums in the heat of AIDS colitis.] (*Loco afán* 25)

In this part of the narration of la Palma's death, Lemebel begins to intensify the language, accentuating the pornographic aspects of the *neobarrosa* aesthetic. The slang word "partusa" stands out because of its meaning as orgy. AIDS is personified using the words "generoso" and "ebrio." The adjectives and noun phrases like "callejeador," "hambriento," "ano piadoso," and "ano filántropo" serve to underscore the stigma of promiscuity that led to infection, while words and noun phrases like "leproso," "viaductos ardientes," "suero Kaposi," and "la serpentina contagiosa" operate as metaphors of contamination. La Palma is described as literally "slumming it" by having sex with "vagos, mendigos y leprosos," derogatory words generally used to refer to people who are undesirable because of their socioeconomic class.

La Palma's infection is portrayed as the product of insatiable appetite for sex. She offered her unprotected, merciful, and charitable anus to everyone she meets. It is as though she becomes a sex fiend on the beaches of Ipanema. The horror of the progression of la Palma's disease is made beautiful by allusions to music, party balloons, and musical instruments, playing up the aspect that getting AIDS is like a celebration. The phrase "la sombra de su Orfeo negro" is enigmatically positioned between a common AIDS metaphor "la sombra" and a possible reference to the 1959

Brazilian film *Orfeu Negro*, which brought the world of Rio's *carnaval* to the big screen while problematizing the precarity of the *favelas*. The film which echoes the story of Orpheus, son of Apollo, in *Metamorphoses* by Ovid from Greco-Roman mythology contains a song that lauds the morning sunrise and hints at immortality lulled by Orfeu's guitar, a fitting send-off for a generous bourgeoisie hostess such as la Palma.

La Palma regresó y murió feliz en su desrajada agonía. Se despidió escuchando la música de Ney Matogrosso, susurrando el *saudade* de la partida. En otra fiesta nos vemos, dijo triste, mirando la foto clavada en las tablas de su miseria. Y antes de cerrar los ojos pudo verse tan joven, casi una doncella sonrojada empinando la copa y un puñado de huesos en aquel verano del '73. Se vio tan bella en el espejo de la foto, arrebozada por el visón blanco de la Pilola, se veía tan regia en la albina aureola de los pelos que detuvo la mano huesuda de la muerte para contemplarse. Le dijo a la pálida espérate un poco, y se agarró un momento más de la vida para saciar su narciso empielado. Luego relajó los parpados y se dejó ir, flotando en la seda de ese recuerdo.

[La Palma returned and happily died in its ragged agony. She said goodbye listening to the music of Ney Matogrosso, whispering the nostalgia of departure. See you at another party, she said sadly, looking at the photo pinned to the tableau of her misery. And before closing her eyes she could see herself so young, almost a blushing maiden tipping her glass and a handful of bones that summer of '73. She saw herself so beautiful in the mirror of the photo, wrapped in La Pilola's white mink, she saw herself so regal in the albino halo of her hair that she stopped the bony hand of death to contemplate herself. She told the pale one to wait a bit, and she clung to a moment more of life to satiate her daffodil hair. Her eyelids relaxed then, and she let go, floating away on the silk of that memory.] (*Loco afán* 25)

In la Palma's final moments, she retains her eternal youth and beauty through the power of her imagination and her crazy eagerness to be noticed, to be admired, and to be adored. Music is tremendously important to Lemebel. His chronicles contain frequent allusions to the lyrics of songs. During the expository film *Lemebel* (2019) by Johanna Reposi, he tells the director he cannot even have a conversation without music playing. Also, he always played music as he read his chronicles on his radio show "Cancionero" on *Radio Tierra*, or when he gave live theatrical readings of his chronicles at venues in Santiago. Ney Matogrosso is a famous Brazilian stage actor who after joining the rock group *Secos y Molhados* became known for his gender-bending

androgyny. His countertenor voice, hyper sensuous gestures, makeup, and costumes in the 1970s transgressed the male dominated genre, positioning himself at the vanguard of a countercultural movement destabilizing sexual codes and gender norms during Brazil's military dictatorship and participation in Condor. One of his most famous songs is called "Flores Astrais." During a live performance of the song in 1974, he appears practically naked with a black metallic head piece, a G-string, and metal gloves with exaggeratedly long metallic fingernails as he sinuously gyrates on stage flanked by band members who are also displaying feminized bodies. In la Palma's final moments, she gazes at the photograph, which began the narrator's trip down memory lane, and we realize as she remembers the party and her friends that the photograph belonged to her and they did hide the missing mink coats. As la Palma floats off towards eternity wrapped in the memory of youth and the party she hosted, we are left with the memory of the pile of bones on the table, as Lemebel juxtaposes horror and beauty once again.

Now we turn, finally, to the narration of Chumilou's death. she is the *loca* from the precariat who makes a living as a prostitute to survive. The narration of her death circles back to the photograph. The narrator observes the shot was hurried, the image blurred, indicating the unreliability of memory to recall all the details. Some details must be embellished. The narrator tells us that the photograph is a memory of a time when many *locas* looked to the future with tremendous hope. We can only assume that the *locas* feel this way because Allende's socialist government might eventually be persuaded to embrace *loca* sexuality and gender embodiment. La Chumi is described as occupying a space in the photograph like Christ at the last supper before the passion of his *via crucis*, which alludes to la Chumi's procession towards AIDS. Describing la Chumi this way situates her among the saints, rather than the sinners.

La foto no es buena, la toma es apresurada por el revoltijo de locas que rodean la mesa, casi todas nubladas por la pose rápida y el loco afán por saltar al futuro.

Pareciera una última cena de apóstoles colizas, donde lo único nítido es la pirámide de huesos en el centro de la mesa. Pareciera un friso bíblico, una acuarela del Jueves Santo atrapada en los vapores de la garrafa de vino que sujeta la Chumilou como cáliz chileno. Ella se puso al centro, ocupó el lugar de Cristo a falta de luminarias. Empinada en los veinte centímetros de sus zuecos, la Chumilou destaca su *glamour* travesti.

[The photo is not good, the shot is rushed by the jumble of *locas* surrounding the table, almost all of them clouded by the quick pose and the crazy eagerness to jump into the future. It looks like a last supper for street hustler apostles, where the only clear thing is the pyramid of bones in the center of the table. It looks like a biblical frieze, a watercolor of Holy Thursday trapped in the vapors of the wine decanter that Chumilou holds like a Chilean chalice. She put herself in the center, took the place of Christ in the absence of luminaries. Steeped in her eight-inch clogs, Chumilou highlights her transvestite glamour.] (*Loco afán* 26)

By situating la Chumilou in beatific terms, as a glamorous Christlike apostolic figure, we think of Magdalen. In the paragraphs that follow, the narrator tells us that la Chumilou is wearing one of la Pilola's furs "el visón negro" [the black mink]. The narrator describes her standing in the photograph, wearing gloves, and appearing like a rose bud in the center of the fur's embrace. We learn that la Chumilou's skin is white as snow, her heart is fragile, and she speaks with the delicate whispers of a virgin. she is the stunning vision of beauty like a movie star blowing a kiss into the camera, which is the mirror reflecting the memories.

The narrator tell us this mirror reflects a lie because behind that virginal glamour lay "su falsa imagen de diva proletaria apechugando con el kilo de pan y los tomates para el desayuno de su familia. Jugándose las todas en la esquina del maraqueo sodomita, peleando a navajazos su territorio prostibular" [her false image of a proletarian diva earning a kilo of bread and tomatoes for her family's breakfast. Playing it all in the corner of the sodomite marketplace, defending her sex trade territory with knives] (*Loco afán* 26). La Chumilou works as a prostitute to help support her family and must engage in violence to protect her domain. The narrator tells us that according to the other *travesties*, she battled other prostitutes who tried to steal her clients. Because of her glamorous, youthful, and saintly qualities, she is a hot commodity.

Ella era la preferida, la más buscada, el único consuelo de los maridos aburridos que se empotaban con su olor de maricón ardiente. Por eso, el aguijón sidoso la eligió como carnada de su pesca milagrosa. Por tragártelas todas, por comenunca, por incansable cachera de la luna monetaria. Por golosa, no se fijó que en la cartera ya no le quedaban condones. Y eran tantos billetes, tanta plata, tantos dólares que paga ese gringo.

[She was the favourite, the most sought after, the only consolation for the bored husbands who got suffocated by her burning faggot smell. That's why the AIDS stinger chose her as bait for her miraculous catch. For swallowing them all, for always fasting, for tirelessly chasing the monetary moon. Due to her sweet tooth, she didn't notice that she was out of condoms in her bag. And there were so many bills, so much money, so many dollars that gringo pays.] (*Loco afán* 27)

Here we learn that la Chumilou is a magnet who attracts heterosexual men who are displeased with their family life, perhaps bored with the sex they have with their wives and seek to indulge in the excitement and glamour la Chumi offers. The narrator tells us, with a hint of sarcasm, that she “earned” her AID\$ having sex with “gringos,” another allusion to the idea that the disease was imported and slowly made its way from top to bottom like some sort of neoliberal economic trickledown theory. La Chumilou’s tragedy is that the economic precarity of her marginal position forces her to make a deadly mistake, since the wad of cash flashing in her face is too powerful to resist; and in her clamor to obtain more and more clients, she forgets to restock her condom supply. The narrator tells us that la Chumi’s mind is on the money because of the hungry mouths of younger siblings she must feed, all the things she needs to buy, all the debts she must pay, all the family necessities that need to be satisfied, like cavities and school tuition. “Ella no era ambiciosa, como decían los otros colas” [She was not ambitious, like the other street hustlers claimed] (*Loco afán* 27). We are told that la Chumilou’s mother helped to get her ready for work, “cosía por aquí, entraba por acá, pegándole encajes y brillos, acicalando el uniforme laboral de la Chumi” [she sewed here, stitched there, gluing on lace and glitter, sprucing up Chumi's work uniform] (*Loco afán* 27). Every time that la Chumi went out to work the streets, her mother would say be careful.

Pero esa noche no le quedaba ninguno, y el gringo impaciente, urgido por montarla, ofreciendo el abanico verde de sus dólares. Entonces la Chumi cerró los ojos y estirando la mano agarró el fajo de billetes. No podía ser tanta su mala suerte que, por una vez, una sola vez en muchos años que lo hacía en carne viva, se iba a pegar la sombra. Y así la Chumi, sin quererlo, cruzó el pórtico entelado de la plaga, se sumergió lentamente en las viscosas aguas y sacó pasaje de ida en la siniestra barca.

[But that night she had none left, and the impatient gringo, urged to mount her, offering the green fan of his dollars. Then the Chumi closed her eyes and reaching out her hand grabbed her wad of bills. It couldn't be such bad luck for her that, for once, just once in many years that she did it raw, she was going to stick her shadow. And so the Chumi, without wanting to, crossed the portico covered with plague, slowly submerged into the viscous waters and got a one-way ticket in the sinister boat.] (*Loco afán* 28)

The economic pressures produced by the dictatorship, the lure of easy money, the threat of AIDS, and the deadly mistake of not using condoms conspired to bring la Chumilou's life to an end. The shadow of AIDS engulfed her in darkness. Before la Chumilou died, the narrator tells us, she asked to be buried as a woman dressed for her work as a prostitute. This indicates that she did not want to die in shame because of her profession, her sexuality, or her gendered embodiment.

She decided to be magnanimous and pragmatic in the face of death, with the spirit of determination her crazy eagerness provided. La Chumilou began reciting her bequeaths, leaving various objects she possessed to friends, but her gold and jewels to her mother, so she could fix her teeth. To dispel the gloom surrounding her death, she offered the other "colas travestis la mansion de cincuenta habitaciones que me regaló el Sheik. Para que hagan una casa de reposo para la más viejas" [transvestite hustlers the fifty-room mansion that the Sheikh gave me. To make a nursing home for the older ones] (*Loco afán* 28). Being humorous under such circumstances takes great courage. La Chumilou's final request was that she be laid to rest in the coffin in a way that everyone would say:

Si parece que la Chumi está durmiendo, como la bella durmiente, como una virgen serena e intacta que el milagro de la muerte le borró las cicatrices. Ni rastros de la enfermedad; ni hematomas, ni pústulas, ni ojeras. Quiero un maquillaje níveo,

aunque tengan que rehacerme la cara. Como la Ingrid Bergman en *Anastasia*, como la Bette Davis en *Jezebel*, casi una chiquilla que se durmió esperando.

[If it seems that Chumi is sleeping, like sleeping beauty, like a serene and intact virgin whose scars have been erased by the miracle of death. No trace of the disease; No bruises, no pustules, no dark circles. I want flawless makeup, even if they must redo my face. Like Ingrid Bergman in *Anastasia*, like Bette Davis in *Jezebel*, almost like a little girl who fell asleep waiting.] (*Loco afán* 29)

Lemebel tells us in interviews that the *loca travesti's* performances often strive to imitate international cinematic icons and famous singers of Hispanic music. Here the narrator references Bergman and Davis, but what is most interesting is the reference to the film *Jezebel* (1938), which features a highly contagious and deadly epidemic.

In the sentences that follow, the narrator tells us that la Chumi goes on to say that she did not want any religious sermons at the funeral, no pity, no tears, no fainting, nor tragic farewells. She said goodbye without regrets, no tears for lost kisses or lost love. “Siento la seda empapada de la muerte amordazando mis ojos, y digo que fui feliz este último minuto” [I feel the silk soaked in death gagging my eyes and can say I was happy this final minute] (*Loco afán* 30). La Chumilou's final moments are narrated in such a way as to underscore the tragic beauty of her death and to uphold her value as a human being, despite working as a prostitute. She is cast as the hero of the story because she lost her life while trying to subsist within the exceptional conditions she faced, while la Pilola and la Palma's deaths, well-off *locas*, are not as noble. Lemebel, perhaps, implies that they were not so self-sacrificing with their wealth.

La Chumi's death is also tied to the return to democracy, 15 years after the first case of AIDS was reported in Chile. This underscores the fact that the disease was not a top priority as the nation struggled to terminate Pinochet's power. “La Chumilou murió el mismo día que llegó la democracia, el pobre cortejo se cruzó con las marchas que festejaban el triunfo del NO en la Alameda. Fue difícil atravesar esa multitud de jóvenes pintados, flameando las banderas del arco

iris, gritando, cantando eufóricos, abrazando a las locas que acompañaban el funeral de la Chumi” [Chumilou died the same day that democracy arrived, the poor procession of her funeral crossed paths with the marches that celebrated the triumph of the NO in the Alameda. It was difficult to get through that crowd of painted youths, waving rainbow flags, shouting, singing euphorically, hugging the *locas* who accompanied the Chumi's casket] (*Loco afán* 30). The clash of elements, the funeral procession with the triumphant political parade, suggests the possibility that *locas* can be reconciled with the future of the nation. The youth with their rainbow flags suggests a new generation that embraces the ideas of spectrum and fluidity, refusing to reproduce the exclusionary exceptionalism of the Chile's history. The rainbow flags suggest a queer future for the nation. The narrator tells us that in the last instant before death, Chumilou learned of the results of the vote and told those around her to say hello to democracy.

“Y parecía que la democracia en persona le devolvía el saludo en los cientos de jóvenes descamisados que se encaramaron a la carroza, brincando sobre el techo, colgándose de las ventanas, sacando pintura *spray* y rayando todo el vehículo con grafitis que decían: ADIOS, TIRANO, HASTA NUNCA, PINOCHO, MUERTE AL CHACAL.”

[And it seemed that democracy in person returned the greeting, in the hundreds of shirtless youths who climbed onto the float, jumping on the roof, hanging from the windows, spray painting and scratching the entire vehicle with graffiti that read: GOODBYE, TYRANT, NEVERMORE, PINOCCHIO, DEATH TO THE JACKAL] (*Loco afán* 30-31).

Farewell to the blackmailer turned tribune, the deadly crossdresser, who pretended to be human, Pinochet.

As we can see from this reading, the narration of “La noche de los visones” [The Night of the Minks] contains many metaphors that convey multiple significations expressing contamination and contagion that reflect the *neobarrosa* aesthetic sensibilities of *tremendismo*. It captures both the terror unleashed by the transvestized mechanism of expediency and social control unleashed by Operation Condor in Chile, as well as the insularity, stigma, and death of bodies produced by

the *peste rosa*, which urges homosexual men from a variety of social classes who exhibit a spectrum of gendered embodiments into precarious ways of living and dying. As part of the ongoing labor of memory which strives to create a history, the chronicle remembers the *loca* community that disappeared, faded into the shadows of the Condor and the rose plague.

Antes que el barco del milenio atraque en el dos mil, antes incluso de la legalidad del homosexualismo chileno, antes de la militancia gay que en los noventa reunió a los homosexuales, antes que esa moda masculina se impusiera como uniforme del ejército de salvación, antes que el neoliberalismo en democracia diera permiso para aparearse. Mucho antes de estas regalías, la foto de las locas en ese año nuevo se registra como algo que brilla en un mundo sumergido. Todavía es subversivo el cristal obsceno de sus carcajadas desordenando el supuesto de los géneros.

[Before the ship of the millennium docked in 2000, even before the legality of Chilean homosexuality, before the gay militancy that brought together homosexuals in the 1990s, before that masculine fashion was imposed as the uniform of the Salvation Army, before that neoliberalism in democracy gave permission to form civil unions. Long before these royalties, the photo of the *locas* in that new year registers as something that shines in a submerged world. The obscene crystal of their laughter is still subversive, disordering the assumption of genders.] (*Loco afán* 32)

In the end, the photograph is the evidence that the furs, which serve as a device to construct the AIDS discourse and drive the stories of the *locas*, were there at the party but the narrator tells us that “nunca se supo dónde fueron a para las regias pieles de la Pilola” [It was never known where Pilola’s royal skins went] (*Loco afán* 34). Their disappearance is a metaphor for the evanescence of the *locas*. The photograph serves as a nostalgic artifact of a time before the coup, before the advent of AIDS, and before the *loca* body is displaced by the gay male body, imposing its exceptional model of (homo)normal embodiment, which has been chiseled to perfection by the desiring production of integrated global capitalism. Unlike the “drag queens” from the North whose embodiment requires considerable monetary investment, the Chilean *loca* was able to capture the desiring imaginations of onlookers, transforming the hand-me-downs of the First

World into dream weaving adornments at the margins of a market driven, mass consumerist, society.

In the concluding paragraphs of this chronicle, Lemebel uses this hybrid genre to intervene in transnational discourses and concerns, offering analysis and critique, using the photograph to read the past, present, and future. In the faded aura of the photograph, he sees how the fashionable and penetrating gay identity transforms homosexuality everywhere like AIDS erases the *loca* identity at the end of the century, constituting “el poder de la nova masculinidad homosexual” [the power of nouveau homosexual masculinity] (*Loco afán* 32). In the brilliant light of gay history, the photograph of the *locas* looks like an archaic fresco “donde la intromisión del patrón gay, todavía no había puesto su marca. Donde el territorio nativo aún no recibía el contagio de la plaga, como recolonización a través de los fluidos corporales” [where the intrusión of the gay mold had not yet made its mark. Where the native territory has not yet received the contagion of the plague, such a recolonization through bodily fluids] (*Loco afán* 32). Lemebel’s narration describes a photograph that serves as an anthropological or archaeological window into the world of *locas* whose smiling faces and tribal rituals speak of a people filled with the hope of remaking the world into a place they can shine. The image captures a time when *locas* enriched homosexuality with a uniquely Latin American Baroque discourse and sensibility that attempted to weave a *marica* future, while dreaming of their emancipation alongside those of other Chileans in the UP. Lemebel shows us that the gay male homosexual is an idealized social construction of narcissistic potency “que no cabía en el espejo desnutrido de nuestras locas” [that did not fit into the malnourished mirror of our *locas*] (*Loco afán* 33). Who can live up to the models transmitted through magazines, videos, and social media where men are presented as hygienically white First World Olympians or comic book heroes like Superman? Lemebel holds such idealizations accountable for spreading

unachievable Apollonian embodiments. He tells us that the deaths of la Palma, la Pilola Alessandri, and la Chumilou show us that AIDS is a clandestine agent of death that does not socially discriminate and generously offers its apocalyptic tribulation to anyone who seeks it. He shows us a transversal cartography of a minority unable to remain unscathed by the nefarious adaptations of neoliberal politics that uncontrollably takes advantage of any social fissure to patch it with the cement of cadavers and dreams. “La noche de los visones” [The Night of the Minks] serves as a testament to what was and what could be in a future that is still in the process of becoming.

“Manifiesto: hablo por mi diferencia”—The Seed of a Transfeminist Revolution

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that Lemebel invokes the Biblical metaphor of apocalypse as he begins his collaboration with Francisco Casas and together, they created the homosexual artist collective Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis to wage a militant struggle using extremely confrontational aesthetics to claim citizenship for *locas* who have been excluded by the exceptional logic of Chilean authoritarianism. The apocalypse metaphor is complex because it collapses several exceptional conditions that have reduced the lives of *locas* to disposable bodies with a viral disease: historical marginalization, moral excision, denial of human rights, AIDS. In Lemebel’s comments during an interview that occurred not long after *Loco afán* was published in 1996, Lemebel stressed several factors that the Yeguas sought to confront: complacency, complicity, hypocrisy, and accommodation related to the dictatorship. Unlike other Chilean artists working in exile like Juan Dávila before the so called “restoration” of democracy, the Yeguas were the only homosexuals who said what others could not or dared not say. They spoke with their bodies, as much as words, during interviews related to their corporeally based artistic performances. Lemebel declares that the name itself was their most successful intervention. I argue that the apocalypse metaphor is the battering ram which the duo used to break through the

entrenched clutter of exceptional conditions that have stood in the way of *locas* enjoying all the benefits that full recognition as Chilean citizens could afford them. The liberatory aesthetics and philosophical contaminations began to coalesce before the transfeminist molecular revolution began.

In this section, we will examine the *antes*, the “just before” the Yeguas began. “Manifiesto” marks the beginning of Lemebel’s viral intervention of Chilean history utilizing the labors of memory. I remind the reader that at the end of the opening section of this chapter I concluded that a *militant visibility that goes viral* is at the heart of Lemebel’s political project, situated in the tension between history and memory. Lemebel’s application of knowledge created from the margin of what has been posited as the center, is the key that unlocks a more nuanced understanding of the breadth of his work. Also, it is important to keep in mind that when the first AIDS death occurred in Chile in 1984, the antifascist struggle overshadowed the growing health crisis, since many Chileans were beginning to mobilize massive resistance against Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorial regime (1973-1990). Although there were some efforts to deal with the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, meaningful and substantive action to deal with the crisis in a comprehensive, community-based manner was delayed until the larger shadow cast by Pinochet’s dictatorship was diminished. However, Lemebel realized that the Marxists revolution he felt affinity towards had no space in their imagination for someone like him, so he decided to do something about it. He would have to start a revolution within the revolution.

To begin the process, Lemebel wrote a political manifesto in the form of a poem better known as “Hablo por mi diferencia” [I Speak for my Difference], which he recited in 1986 at a secret meeting of communists and socialists who met at Mapocho station in Santiago. Lemebel, who was still going by Mardones, was dressed in drag and had the symbol of international

communism—hammer and sickle—painted on his face. Lemebel's *loca* embodiment with the emblem painted on his face represented a monstrous masculinity that operated as a frontal assault on Marxism itself because it subverted the sacred notion of the new man for the twenty first century and beyond. One of the first questions that comes to mind is: Why does Lemebel include this manifesto in *Loco afán*? The answer has everything to do with how Lemebel approaches the issue of AIDS in relation to his labors of memory within Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis. The public reading of the manifesto marks the beginning of his radical exteriority, when he uses his own body as an effigy in the spirit of the *libro objeto* [book object] (signature format of the clandestine taller *Ergo Sum* led by Pia Barros), to represent those disappeared by the dictatorship as well as the disease. According to Barros, when she met Lemebel toward the end of 1977 at another *taller* before she coaxed him over to hers, he primarily wrote poetry. In my interview with Barros in 2019, she shared many fond memories about Lemebel who she considers to be a dear friend. Barros told me that she had several of his poems in her possession but would never show them to anyone since she did not think they were good or relevant to the political project of militant visibility and liberatory aesthetics that eventually became his life's work.

El transformar el margen en el centro fue su trabajo y lo hizo muy bien. Lo hizo con el cuerpo, con la escritura, con su intelectualidad, con todo. Pero sobre todo él nunca fue inocente políticamente. Mira, él fue echado de todos los partidos, cada que intentaba, le decían que no, que la izquierda no tiene maricas. Pero el Pedro siempre fue un ayudista de la extrema izquierda. Y se jugó el pellejo en eso y me consta porque yo le salvé de un par de cosas graves. El Pedro fue alguien intrínsecamente comunista, pero nunca fue aceptado por el comunismo. Finalmente, la Gladys Martin, la gran dirigente, fue como recuperar a la madre para él, pero con su rollo y su cosa, él no podía ser comunista porque no soportaba las restricciones en sus libertades. Pero en términos ideológicos de su postulado de vida decías, este tipo era comunista. Un tipo muy especial, muy jodido y difícil, no era fácil vivir con él, pero todo el mundo ahora le hacen la mística, le hacen la estrella.

[Transforming the margin into the center was his job and he did it very well. He did it with his body, with writing, with his intellectuality, with everything. But above all he was never politically innocent. Look, he was kicked out of all the parties, every time he tried, they told him no, that the left doesn't have fags. But Pedro was

always a helper of the extreme left. And he risked his neck in that, and I know, because I saved him from a couple of serious things. Pedro was someone intrinsically communist, but he was never accepted by communism. Finally, Gladys Martin, the great leader, was like getting his mother back for him, but with his stuff and her thing, he couldn't be a communist because he couldn't stand the restrictions on his freedoms. But in ideological terms of the postulate of life you said about him, this guy was a communist. A very special guy, very fucked up and difficult, it was not easy to live with him, but now everyone makes him the mystic, they make him the star.] (Jaramillo)

As we can see from Barros' memory, Lemebel had always considered himself a leftist ally and he put his neck on the line trying to join the political parties that worked in secret to remove Pinochet. Arguably the most controversial of these groups was the Marxist and Leninist organization Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), whose declared mission 1965 was "derrocamiento del sistema capitalista y su reemplazo por un gobierno de obreros y campesinos" [overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a government of workers and peasants]. Many of MIR's members are among those recorded in Chile's official history as disappeared. When Pinochet justifies the coup during a speech in October 1973, he defends his actions stating that communists had planned to push Chile into civil war and that his coup saved the lives of millions of civilians. Parts of Pinochet's speech will serve as a counterpoint in my reading of Lemebel's manifesto. If we are to assume that the "I" in Lemebel's writing, one way or another, is self-referential or even confessional, then we can infer many conclusions from his only novel *Tengo miedo torero* (2001), published after Pinochet was indicted for human rights violations. The novel tells the story about a *loca de Frente*, [a *loca* on the front lines] who falls in love with a Guevara like Cuban militant connected to the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR) that attempted to assassinate Pinochet in 1986. The novel was turned into a film with the same name by director Rodrigo Sepúlveda and released in 2020. When Lemebel began attending Barros' taller, she encouraged him to switch from poetry to narrative, where she emphasized the aesthetic *tremendismo*, which she describes as writing that obligates you to feel and react by creating a crash

of elements that opens a third place in which to look. Her workshops specialized in the development of short stories and flash fiction which, under the exceptional conditions of the dictatorship, had a better chance of being distributed through the underground resistance. Over the years Lemebel wrote several short stories, which Barros published with the name *Incontables* (1986) through her clandestine press; the same year he read the manifesto; the same year Pinochet was nearly assassinated. I will read the manifesto like it were a poem but refer to the voice as Lemebel. Let us begin by noting the anaphora “no soy” in the opening lines. Lemebel begins by clarifying what he is not by using Pasolini and Ginsberg to distinguish differences but also to highlight similarities.

No soy Pasolini pidiendo explicaciones / No soy Ginsberg expulsado de Cuba / No soy un marica disfrazado de poeta / No necesito disfraz / Aquí está mi cara / Hablo por mi diferencia / Defiendo lo que soy / Y no soy tan raro / Me apesta la injusticia / Y sospecho de esta cueca democrática...

[I am not Pasolini asking for explanations / I am not Ginsberg expelled from Cuba / I am not a faggot disguised as a poet / I do not need a disguise / Here is my face / I speak for my difference / I defend what I am / And I am not so weird / I stink of injustice / And I suspect this democratic dance...] (121)

Pier Paolo Pasolini was an Italian intellectual, writer, and film director who distinguished himself as an actor and philosopher, unafraid to deal with sexual subjects considered taboo in the Fascist political milieu of his country. He is known for being a part of the Neorealist literary and cinematographic movement that emerged in post-World-War-Two Italy. During the 1940s when he began publishing poetry, Pasolini was a closeted twenty-something homosexual man who had a complicated relationship with both fascism and communism, and his asking for explanations surely relates to the extensive body of poetic works in which he questions the future. Pasolini’s extremely gruesome assassination in 1975 at the age of 53 remains controversially connected to his film *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975) in which he crudely and pornographically depicts the sadistic carnal pleasures of a group of aristocratic and elite power brokers in the Republic of

Salò, a German puppet state led by the infamous Fascist dictator Duce Benito Mussolini under Nazi occupation. The film is based on the book *120 Days of Sodom* by Marquis de Sade. A young man named Pino Pelosi confessed to murdering Pasolini and was sentenced to serve nine years but, under conditional release in 2005, offered a different version of events during a television interview (Cataldi).

In contrast to Pasolini, Lemebel was 34 in 1986 when he read the manifesto and published his first book, defying the laws against unauthorized publication. He intrepidly addressed Marxists while manifesting a radical exteriority that subverts their sacred symbol and ideals. His presence was blasphemous and, under most circumstances, would provoke disgust, anger, possibly violence as well. Lemebel was a self-fashioned poet and writer who did not have academic training in literature, politics, or science. His intellectuality was organic. His knowledge arose from his experience as a feminized homosexual man coming of age in the marginalized communities of Chilean society under an authoritarian regime not unlike Fascist Italy. Although instead of Mussolini as the master puppet of a German Nazi occupied state, Chile was ruled by Pinochet who took power with the secret assistance of neoliberal political and economic interests within the United States. In comparison to Pasolini's expository fiction in *Salò*, Lemebel was about to publicly unleash a militant visibility of *loca* embodiment using what Perlongher calls an *entrenched plebian Baroque* that situates bodies politically in an excess of representation, using grotesque and challenging imagery that simultaneously fascinates and disgusts the senses of onlookers. His interventions were perceived as blasphemous, scandalous, and pornographic, adjectives we could also use to describe United States poet Allen Ginsberg's poetic production.

Ginsberg was a famous member of the so called "Beat Generation" and known for his epic poem "Howl" (1954, 1955), an experimental work that represents a hidden counter-cultural

underground, while graphically detailing drug use and homosexuality, and criticizing US consumerist culture. The poem contains Biblical allusions that Judeo-Christians would likely find offensive, involving the figure of Christ embodied as a lamb and a demonic god Moloch to whom the Canaanites sacrificed children. Ginsberg's blasphemy was to suggest that those who society considered scum were holy. Lemebel does the same with Chumilou. The poem was published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the founder of *City Lights Booksellers and Publishers*, who was arrested in San Francisco and prosecuted for obscenity. Ferlinghetti eventually was found not guilty when a California Superior Court Judge named Clayton Horn, a hardline Christian zealot, ruled that the poem was "not obscene" because it had "redeeming social importance" and would not likely "deprave or corrupt readers by exciting lascivious thoughts or arousing lustful desires" (Quoted in Kaplan). In 1964, Ginsberg was invited to Cuba, as a correspondent for the *Evergreen Review*, to participate as a judge at a writer's conference at La Casa de las Americas in Havana.

In comparison to Ginsberg, Lemebel was an unknown writer reading a political manifesto in 1986. He was just at the beginning of producing what would become a large body of work, not as a poet but as a chronicler. In his first book called *La esquina es mi corazón* (1995), Lemebel reveals aspects of a seedy Chilean underground, graphically detailing drug use and pedophilic sexual perversions. Lemebel used Biblical allusions to blaspheme the mythological and symbolic patriarchal constructions of the nation by appropriating the obscene jargon used to stigmatize the feminized embodiment he represented in the figure of the *loca*. In contrast, Lemebel's work was never subjected to official legal proceedings but was lambasted in the court of public opinion. Whereas Ginsberg belonged to the "Beat generation," Lemebel belongs to a generation Pia Barros calls NN, a designation used to refer to unknown cadavers at a morgue or on a tombstone.

Ginsberg traveled to Havana via Mexico City in January 1965 after making extensive travel arrangements and obtaining special permission from the US Department of State. Soon after arriving, he became acquainted with a group of young people who participated in a counter-cultural writer's group known as *El Puente*, which had been publishing the work of young writers who wanted to create art not beholden to Cuba's revolutionary ideals. "A poco de llegar, José Mario Rodríguez y Manuel Ballagas (hijo del poeta Emilio Ballagas, también gay) abordaron a Ginsberg en un bar. Se cayeron muy bien y Ginsberg no tardó en enamorarse de José Mario, que le correspondió" [Shortly after arriving, José Mario Rodríguez and Manuel Ballagas (son of the poet Emilio Ballagas, also gay) approached Ginsberg in a bar. They hit it off very well and Ginsberg soon fell in love with José Mario, who reciprocated] (Sheridan et al). Rodríguez and Ballagas told Ginsberg about how the Cuban government had been rounding up homosexuals in raids and taking them to labor camps known as UMAPs (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción). Fidel Castro used the UMAPs to internally exile artists, intellectuals, and homosexual dissidents considered bourgeoisie and counter revolutionary. The mistreatment of homosexuals at the camps is the subject of the documentary film *Conducta impropia* (1983) by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal. Exiled Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas, who was diagnosed with AIDS, was interviewed for the film, which denounces the UMAPs as concentration camps for homosexuals. After criticizing the Cuban government for its mistreatment of homosexuals and publicly eroticizing Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Ginsberg was promptly deported from Cuba.

In contrast to Ginsberg, when Lemebel initiated his public trajectory, he had only traveled outside of Chile with the power of his imagination, engaging with ideas about popular culture imported into the country through music, films, literature, and television. Like the young men of the writer's group *El Puente*, Lemebel participated in literary workshops that operated in total

secrecy. He had not been arrested, sent to a work camp, or exiled from Chile because of his public speech, art, or writing. However, according to Barros, she and Lemebel did flee from Carabineros a few times after distributing unauthorized publications, including in 1986 when they had been distributing copies of his book of short stories. Barros explains:

Cuando presentamos el primer libro de Pedro, hicimos una feria en un parque donde había unas monjitas paulinas. Y resulta que, con todo este circuito de vigilancia presentamos el libro y llamaron a los pacos, las monjas se alejaron, fue un escándalo, pero muy divertido porque tuvimos que huirnos usando tacos, corriendo por el parque.

[When we presented Pedro's first book, we had a book fair in a park where there were some little Pauline nuns. And it turns out that, with all these circuits of surveillance, we presented the book, and they called the cops, the nuns walked away, it was a scandal, but very funny because we had to run away while in heels, running through the park.] (Jaramillo).

According to Barros, Lemebel thrived on scandal, craved attention, and wanted to challenge everyone.

With the anaphora “no soy” in the first three lines of the manifesto, Lemebel repeatedly marks a difference. Through a negation of being, Lemebel juxtaposes his third world *marica* identity with Pasolini and Ginsberg’s first world *gay* identities, while situating himself intellectually in the company of voices whose queer politics have put them in confrontational positions with authoritarian governments. The anaphora is a clever ruse in that it constitutes authority despite the negation of “no soy.” When the “yo” denies its poetic disguise, it becomes the proxy of a silent “nosotros” that claims *marica* subjectivity to speak on behalf of its difference, while his feminized embodiment in the moment of enunciation negates the heteronormative disguise of a masculine “yo.” Lemebel’s gendered performance, which places body and voice at the scene of the manifesto’s enunciation, materializes feminine authority, while the “no” is used to repudiate (homo)normalization: the obligation to remain silent and stuffed in a homosexual closet represented by the word *disfraz*; or the necessity of hiding the strangeness of the *loca* body’s

face (painted with the hammer and sickle) represented by the word *raro*. Recalling the manifesto over two decades later, he says, “Esta cara aindiada es mi venganza” [This Indian girl face was my revenge] (Better).

The visibility of the feminized *cara aindiada*, marked by the communist emblem and the voice claiming subjectivity on its own terms, evokes the ultimatum issued by Hélène Cixous in “*Le Rire de la Meduse*,” urging women not to remain trapped in their own bodies, using a language that does not allow them to express themselves, but rather to use their body to communicate and claim authorship. Cixous’s imperative is echoed by Nelly Richard, Carmen Berenguer, Diamela Eltit, and the other women who met in 1987 at the first Congreso Internacional de Literatura Femenina Latinoamericana in Santiago, when they met to strategize how best to (re)conquer the logos held captive by male authority. According to Richard in *Abismos temporales* (2019), the goal of the congress was to claim the subjectivity of women doubly silenced by a male dominated academy and the officialism of military censorship. However, the women at the congress questioned whether writing itself had a sex or gender. Is there even such a thing as women’s writing? Does attributing authorship to a woman make the writing feminine? What about men who write women? After much pondering, the women concluded that it was possible to reconfigure writing as transgression and disobedience, without excluding women or men, while affirming identities as mutable entities in continual transformation, detached from biological determinism. In the manifesto, the *marica* voice and the *loca* body become one—transfeminist (transversal and intersectional) embodiment (mestizo, homosexual, feminized, and poor)—united in the “yo,” which manifests radical exteriority and declares desire for justice and suspicion toward the nation’s democratic ambitions. Lemebel explains how the manifesto’s performance of body and voice connects with the chronicles and a double manifestation of absence in the work of the Yeguas.

Había algo de performance con la hoz y el martillo pintados en la cara, quizás como una mueca, como una risa exagerada. [...] ...pusimos el cuerpo en escena manifestando estas confusas formas de rebelión. Confusas en términos de que ahí estaban los desaparecidos, y ahí estábamos nosotros también desaparecidos legalmente como homosexuales, manifestando esa desaparición, quizás ahí se pudieron juntar esas dos ausencias en una.

[There was some performance with the hammer and sickle painted on the face, perhaps as a grimace, as an exaggerated laugh. [...] ...we put the body on stage manifesting these confused forms of rebellion. Confused in terms of the fact that the disappeared were there, and that we were also legally disappeared as homosexuals, manifesting that disappearance, perhaps those two absences could be combined into one.] (León 69)

To further underscore the transversal intersectionality of a *loca* embodiment that asserts citizenship, the poetic voice utters the word “cueca,” which is a variation of a Spanish dance called fandango, but with indigenous influences. The *indigenismo* of the *cueca* evokes Gabriela Mistral’s epic “Poema de Chile” where she reimagines the nation through a child and a deer’s journey of self-discovery. In the poem the children are led by a female totem spirit, who takes them on a tour from the north of the nation’s lengthy geography to the Araucanía in the south to meet their spirit ancestors among the Mapuche people. The journey of the children in the epic poem could symbolize how the *cueca*, which originated as the *zamacueca* in Peru, later migrated to Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, where variations have become integral to local national imaginings. The dance’s popular zoomorphic interpretation is the reenactment of the courting ritual between rooster and hen. In Chile, the dance continued to evolve during the nineteenth century until it became extremely popular in bars and taverns throughout the country. The dancers twirl white handkerchiefs above their heads in a dance of seduction that ends with the man on one knee and the woman triumphantly placing her foot on it. As the dance migrated to other Latin American countries, it became known as *la chilena*, cementing its association with Chilean nationality.

During the twentieth century, the dance became associated with the image of the “roto chileno,” a powerful national symbol with a colonial heritage but representing someone urban and

poor. The symbol of national pride was transformed in 1978, when the *cueca sola* was first presented by the folklore group Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos. In this reinterpretation a woman dances alone with the picture of the loved one who has disappeared after being detained. On November 6, 1979, six years after the military coup, the Junta named the *cueca* the national dance of Chile. In 1989, the Yeguas performed the *cueca sola* at the Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos in Santiago in a performance called “La Conquista de America,” but they danced it on broken shards of glass with their feet bleeding on a map of Latin America to symbolically unify and memorialize the *desaparecidos* in all the countries under dictatorship in the Southern Cone with the bodies disappeared by AIDS. Therefore, when the voice of the *marica* poet manifests its suspicion, casting a shadow of doubt over the “cueca democrática” [democratic dance], it manifests a subversion at the national, symbolic level using an ironic pairing of words that seems to suggest a deadly proletarian democracy. This interpretation is evoked in the following lines of the manifesto.

Pero no me hable del proletariado / Porque ser pobre y maricón es peor / Hay que ser ácido para soportarlo / Es darles un rodeo a los machitos de la esquina / Es un padre que te odia / Porque el hijo se le dobla la patita / Es tener una madre de manos tajeadas por el cloro / Envejecidas de limpieza / Acunándote de enfermo / Por malas costumbre / Por mala suerte / Como la dictadura / Porque la dictadura pasa / Y viene la democracia / Y detrasito el socialismo. //

[But don't talk to me about the proletariat / Because being poor and a fag is worse / You have to be sour to bear it / It's giving the machos on the corner a detour / It's a father who hates you / Because the son's little leg bends / It's having a mother with hands fissured by chlorine / Aged from cleaning / Cradling you sick / Due to bad habits / Due to bad luck / Like the dictatorship / Because the dictatorship passes / And democracy comes / And socialism right behind it. //] (*Loco afán* 121-122)

After denouncing the hollowness of the nation’s democratic imagination, Lemebel’s manifesto turns its attention to the hypocrisy of proletarian patriarchy. If the *cueca* once symbolized the *roto chileno*, source of pride for the urban and poor Chilean, Lemebel queers the historical imprint, transforming it into a source of pride of the *pobre maricón* [poor homosexual]. Lemebel explains

that the abject status of homosexuality, compounded by poverty, requires an assiduousness to endure the deadly dance with the *machismo* used to circumvallate the authority of the father who hates his child because “se le dobla la patita” [his wrist limps] an idiomatic expression that marks the child as effeminate and likely homosexual. By focusing attention on the circling movement of the little men on the corner, who we imagine harass the *marica* child because of his femininity, one is reminded of the seductive aspect of the cueca dance and its mimesis of animal courtship. In line seventeen, Lemebel turns his attention to the figure of a mother, who is arguably the most important person in his life. In the expository film *Lemebel* (2019) by Johanna Reposi, we can see Lemebel lovingly memorialize his mother as he and the director look at slides of her image projected on the wall of his living room, when he repeatedly says “mi mami.” As stated earlier in the chapter, Lemebel assumed his maternal last name to demonstrate his solidarity with women and the feminine. In the manifesto he is not referring to his mother specifically, but to mothers in general.

Earlier in the chapter, when I discussed how affinity groups sprung up under the exceptional conditions of the dictatorship, I mentioned how women formed labor collectives. In the line about the mother whose hands are raw from overexposure to Clorox and aged from being overworked, Lemebel reminds his listeners of the extremely difficult work the women in the collectives have been doing as they wash the clothing of the well-to-do. He elegizes the subservient figure of the mother, who despite the roughness of her hands, is always there to offer comfort, to cradle the sick, since a mother’s love and dedication to her family is limitless. She loves her *marica* child, despite his femininity, despite his bad habits or bad luck. The Clorox could also be a subtle reference to AIDS in how bleach is used as a disinfectant. Could one of the reasons the hands are that way was because the bleach was used to disinfect? Is it to wash away the sin or to wash away

the threat of contagion? Unlike the selfless abnegation of a mother, the fatherliness of the dictatorship, the “negotiated” democracy that followed, and the ongoing proletarian struggle to revive Marxist thought in the nation have no love for *marica* children. In the law of the father, their value is diminished by notions of bad health, habits, and embodiment that make them social pariahs and a source of disgrace and shame for its idealized nuclear family. Lemebel denounces them all as unforgiving patriarchal institutions. These lines are also demonstrative of how Lemebel transforms bleak conditions into hope, as *marica* subjectivity and maternal instincts are exalted through shared suffering.

¿Y entonces? / ¿Qué harán con nosotros, compañeros? / ¿Nos amarrarán de las trenzas en fardos con destino a un sidario cubano? / Nos meterán en algún tren de ninguna parte / Como en el barco del general Ibáñez / Donde aprendimos a nadar / Pero ninguno llegó a la costa / Por eso Valparaíso apagó sus luces rojas / Por eso las casas de caramba / Les brindaron una lagrima negra / A los colizas comidos por las jaibas / Ese año que la Comisión de Derechos Humanos no recuerda / Por eso, compañero, le pregunto / ¿Existe aún el tren siberiano de la propaganda reaccionaria? / Ese tren que pasa por sus pupilas / Cuando mi voz se pone demasiado dulce / ¿Y usted? / ¿Qué hará con esos recuerdo de niños pajeándonos y otras cosas en las vacaciones de Cartagena? / ¿El futuro será en blanco y negro? / ¿El tiempo en noche y día laboral sin ambigüedades? / ¿No habrá un maricón en alguna esquina desequilibrando el futuro de su hombre nuevo? / ¿Van a dejarnos bordar de pájaros las banderas de la patria libre? //

[And so? / What will you do with us, comrades? / Will you tie us by the braids in bundles destined for a Cuban AIDS sanatorium? / Will you put us on a train to nowhere / Like on General Ibáñez's ship / Where we learned to swim / But none reached the coast / That's why Valparaíso turned off its red lights / That's why the houses of ill repute / They gave them a black tear / To the street hustlers eaten by the crabs / That year that the Human Rights Commission does not remember / That is why, comrade, I ask you / Does the Siberian train of reactionary propaganda still exist? / That train that passes through your pupils / When my voice becomes too sweet / And you? / What will you do with those memories of children jerking off and other things on vacation in Cartagena? / Will the future be in black and white? / The time working day and night without ambiguities? / Isn't there a faggot in some corner unbalancing the future of your new man? / Are you going to let us embroider the flags of the free homeland with birds? //] (*Loco afán* 122-123)

In the preceding lines, Lemebel completely drops the pretense of the “yo” and begins to use “nosotros.” This switch from “I” to “we” seems to communicate a body, double deformed from

being subjected to the hate of the father and the AIDS apocalypse. Lemebel also begins using rhetorical questions, intently looking towards the future, as he begins to raise the deadly specter of Marxist *machismo* and its hypocrisy. The “nosotros” positions the body politically and oriented toward an uncertain future. “Is there an imaginable future in which we are not erased?” it demands.

The question of queer futurity is one that Lee Edelman examines in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2005). Edelman argues that future oriented discourses that seek to effect political change or address social issues inevitably rest upon “one-sided” arguments that frame debates around the primacy of heterosexual reproduction, in “terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2). Edelman identifies a formidable obstacle for homosexual liberation seeking a queer future.

I argue that Lemebel’s “Manifiesto: Hablo por mi diferencia” not only interrogates the ideological limitation Edelman argues, but it also challenges the absolute privilege of Chilean heteronormativity, by subverting the unquestionable notion that the “child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (3). Lemebel looks to the historical past for clues about what shape the future will take. What will these Marxists do with us *maricas* in the here and now? He directly addresses the question of *marica* children later in the manifesto. In this manifesto I read the term *marica* as queer. Victor Hugo Robles in *Bandera hueca* (2008) provides a clue when he recalls that, “[En] pleno Gobierno socialista de la Unidad Popular, los homosexuales eran vistos como escoria, sus demandas no existían, ni siquiera estaban contempladas en los cambios políticos, sociales y culturales que ambicionó implementar el presidente Salvador Allende” [(During) the Socialist

Government of Popular Unity, homosexuals were seen as scum, their demands did not exist, they were not even contemplated in the political, social and cultural changes that President Salvador Allende aspired to implement] (13). If the mother represented earlier is the *mestiza*, *la madre aindiada*, then the father represents the *criollo*, the patriarchal nation that wants its *marica* children to disappear.

The question raised about what is to be done with *marica* bodies and their cultural association with AIDS is a question Leo Bersani contemplates in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* (2010). Bersani looks at how the disease “has been treated like an unprecedented sexual threat” (4). Bersani uses the idea of aversion, both a benign and malignant form, to underscore how the malignant kind could compel people to consider “the mechanisms by which a spectacle of suffering and death has unleashed and even appeared to legitimize the impulse to murder” (4). This is precisely how I read Lemebel’s line about “being stuck in a train to nowhere.” It alludes to the impulse to terminate male homosexuality because it represents a dead end for heterosexual reproduction. In the imagination of patriarchal Chilean identity, male homosexuality is a monstrous masculinity that cannot be allowed to reproduce. The deadly reality of how international Marxism has treated homosexuals all over the world weighs heavily on the present moment of the manifesto’s enunciation. Nevertheless, the history of Marxist repression of homosexuality is being reclaimed through the labors of memory. In these lines, Lemebel references several examples. The first is what he calls the “sidario Cubano” [Cuban AIDS sanatorium].

Sarah Hoffman, a specialist in Political Science and Community Health, questions if HIV/AIDS in Cuba was a model for care or an ethical dilemma. Her interest in the subject of Cuban AIDS sanatoriums derives from the “surprising results” of the country’s unique approach to dealing with “one of the most pressing health issues of our time” (208). According to Hoffman,

even before the first case of AIDS was detected in Cuba, the government took “drastic action in public health” (208). Decree Law 54 of April 1982 authorized “isolation of individuals suspected of suffering from communicable disease” and Decree Law 41 of July 1983, article 20, authorized the Ministry of Public Health to “determine which diseases pose a risk for the community, . . . adopt diagnostic and preventative measures . . . , and [sic] establish methods and procedure for *mandatory treatment*” (208 emphasis mine). The Cuban government created a “National AIDS Commission in 1983 and destroyed all foreign-derived blood products” (208). Hoffman explains that these actions prevented Cuba’s hemophiliacs and others receiving transfusions from becoming infected. Under the leadership of the commission, the national strategy to prevent the spread of the disease was based on existing health regulation mechanisms that permitted the government to quarantine people with highly contagious infections. (Alpízar). In other words, prior to the first case being detected, the Cuban government created a legal framework that would allow them to exercise panoptic control over HIV positive bodies. When the first case was detected in 1986, the Ministry created the Las Vegas AIDS Sanatorium in Havana and once the patient was diagnosed with the virus, institutionalization at the sanatorium was mandatory. Several such centers were created after 1989 when the number of cases increased beyond the first sanatorium’s capacity to carry out the mandates of the Ministry of Health. Critics of the strategy have centered on perceived violations of human rights (Anderson). The mandatory requirement was later relaxed in 1994. Reinaldo Arenas, in *Before Night Falls*, regarded the camps as a form of super-Stalinization. In the manifesto, Lemebel expresses distrust toward Cuba’s approach, because as Barros noted earlier, “no soportaba las restricciones en sus libertades” [he did not support restrictions on his liberties] (Jaramillo). He indirectly compares Cuba’s policies with those of the Soviet Union (USSR) when he speaks of “el tren siberiano” [the Siberian train], which references the train used to take political

dissidents and revolutionaries to Gulags (Siberian work camps), where they were forced to labor in exile. Under Stalin after the Bolshevik Revolution, the practice became a commonplace way to rid the populace of troublesome intellectuals and social dissidents.

In the next several lines Lemebel turns to a controversial figure in Chilean history. Before Pinochet, the most notable dictator was Carlos Ibáñez del Campo. Many parallels could be drawn between the two military men. The political ambitions of both led to them to seek dictatorial rule, but each saw Chile's future somewhat differently. During Ibáñez's second presidency, rumors began to manifest that he demonstrated great disdain for the growing presence of degenerates (drug addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals) in Santiago and Valparaiso. His reputation as a leader of hope turned into a reputation of homophobia in the memories of homosexual activists, as Ibáñez reportedly began to manifest a malignant aversion to homosexuality. The organization Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (MOVILH) references a news report titled "Los delitos de ser homosexual" [The crimes of being homosexual] published in *Los Tiempos* in 1993 that states, "Ibáñez del Campo barría del mapa a los homosexuales utilizando un barco donde a estas personas se les colocaba una soga al cuello y una enorme piedra" [Ibáñez del Campo swept homosexuals off the map using a boat where these people were placed a noose around their necks and a huge stone] (34). Homosexuals in the red-light districts were reportedly rounded up by Carabineros and taken to Valparaiso harbor, where they were boarded on boats, taken out to sea, had stones tied to their bodies, and were thrown overboard. MOVILH reports that despite the story seeming like a reality from some long ago and far away time when such intolerance could be explained as a morality of the past, the urge to murder homosexual bodies remains a very real threat in the patriarchal cultural imagination of Chile.

[Lo] cierto es que seis años atrás un grupo denominado 'Carlos Ibáñez del Campo' se adjudicó el atentado contra la discoteque 'Divine' de Valparaíso, en donde

murieron 25 personas homosexuales a raíz de un incendio que destruyó por completo el recinto. Las investigaciones policiales sobre esta tragedia nunca fueron emprendidas seriamente y los organismos judiciales tampoco se esforzaron por hacer justicia. Así este caso, como muchos otros donde los afectados son homosexuales, se archivó, determinándose que la causa del incendio fue un cortocircuito.

[[The] truth is that six years ago a group called 'Carlos Ibáñez del Campo' claimed responsibility for the attack against the 'Divine' nightclub in Valparaíso, where 25 homosexual people died because of a fire that destroyed the premises. Police investigations into this tragedy were never seriously undertaken, nor did the judicial bodies try to bring justice. Thus, this case, like many others where those affected are homosexuals, was archived, determining that the cause of the fire was a short circuit.] (“Homosexualidad y derecho”)

MOVILH makes clear that groups inside Chile were operating in 1993 to terrorize and eliminate homosexuals, such as the group that used the famous homophobic general’s name.

Lemebel remembers this horrific incident, using his signature style, in a chronicle called “La música y las luces nunca se apagaron” published in *La esquina es mi corazón*. In the chronicle he describes the scene, *locas* dancing to Grace Jones’s “La vie en rose” and wearing Calvin Klein jeans unaware of “la bomba incendiaria que un fascista arrojó recién en la entrada” [the firebomb that some fascist flung at the entrance] (*La esquina* 61). Lemebel says (remember his chronicles were first read out loud on his radio show before being published in newspapers and books) that the *locas* were so enraptured by the lights, the glamour, and the music that they failed to notice “ese resplandor amarillo que trepa los peldaños como un reguero de pólvora, que alcanza las plumas lacias de los travestis inflamando la silicona en chispazos púrpura y todos aplauden como si fuera parte del show” [that yellow glow that climbs the steps like a wildfire, that reaches the limp feathers of the transvestites, igniting the silicone in purple sparks and everyone applauds as if it were part of the show] (*La esquina* 61). In Lemebel’s account, after all the *locas* perish in the flames, and the onlookers indifferently stare at the spectacle’s aftermath, the police announce that the tragedy was caused by a short circuit. In both MOVILH and Lemebel’s accounts of the tragedy

at the discotheque, we can see both forms of aversion—malignant and benign—discussed by Leo Bersani: the malignant form of aversion in the violence of neofascist groups who use medieval means (*la hoguera*) to dispose of homosexual bodies and the benign form in the ambivalence of the government officials who did not take the investigation of the deadly fire at the discotheque seriously, nor were they interested in justice.

Like in the so-called myth of Ibáñez's homosexual purge in Valparaíso harbor, the erasure of feminized male homosexual bodies in Chile has been silenced and dismissed by official historiographers, or the Comisión de Derechos Humanos as Lemebel points out, who regard such stories as unworthy of being remembered. They dismiss the claims as fantastic. I suspect Ibáñez's purge really happened, given how historical patterns repeated during Pinochet's time, when bodies of the disappeared were found floating in Valparaíso harbor after the metal plates used to anchor them down became detached. Even Pia Barros told me a similar story about Ibáñez when we discussed my visit to the city of Valparaíso in 2019. Although I cannot prove it, I believe that the retired military men and Carabineros known as La Línea Recta, who urged Ibáñez to become a dictator once again, had something to do with the unprovable purge.

What is considered a myth in official history becomes a memory in the hands of Lemebel's manifesto as he directs his words at Marxists who carry a historical blood guilt of homosexual erasure. Therefore, as Lemebel continues to read the manifesto, after recalling Marxism's deadly past, he continues to use rhetorical questions to poke and prod them, taunting their murderous *machismo* which becomes aroused at the sweet tone of his voice as he recalls the metaphor of the Siberian train to nowhere. Lemebel denounces the hypocrisy of their masculine hygiene, accusing them of participating in homosexual activities as children during summer vacations. Through the rhetorical questioning, Lemebel seems to conjure Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or one of Franz Kafka's

novels when he speaks about a black and white future, robbed of desire, living a machine or animal like existence, where humans become worker ants or drones doing dull, meaningless, and unambiguous labor. The time of the worker moves forward day and night without stopping. The rhetorical questioning destabilizes the narrative of manhood promoted by the Cuban Revolution and its paradigmatic construction of a “new man” by proposing an even more radical “new man” than they even dared to imagine. In a reference to women’s work in the *arpilleras* he asks: Will you let us, *maricas*, stitch birds in the flags of liberty? The word *pájaros* is a double entendre that evokes the male phallus of the macho as well as the feminized body of the *marica*.

In the lines that follow, Lemebel turns to the topic of *hombria*, a word much like *machismo*. Put simply, *hombria* is another word for heterosexual masculinity or manhood and is tied to how Chile was conceived as a fatherland with *honorable* men of arms and letters leading the way. When Lemebel talks about the *fusil* used in *sangre fría*, he attacks this romantic foundational notion by insinuating that it is an excuse to use violence to accomplish political goals. Lemebel attacks the hypocrisy of the circumvallation of patriarchal masculinity by asserting that his *marica* *hombria* is just as brave, strong, and valuable, since he did not learn it in the barracks, but in the sexual undergrounds he traversed, where he had to defend his life with a knife. He is not afraid to look them in the eye, dressed in drag, face painted, and appropriating the symbol of their revolution. It is they who are fearful because they resort to violence to defend their hypocritical notion of honor or to get what they want. They are the ones who are afraid that life will become homosexual. They are the ones who fear that if one is homosexual, they will not be able to withstand torture and will become a traitor. Lemebel asserts that being *marica* is not a treason of the natural order, nor a treason of the proletarian revolution.

One month after the 1973 coup, Pinochet gave a speech to justify the violent overthrow of Allende's government, accusing Marxists of smuggling weapons, preparing to begin a civil war. Pinochet claims that he saved millions of lives by acting as the fatherly hand of God to protect the nation, its women, and its children. As Edelman argues in *No Future* regarding authoritarian discourse, Pinochet uses what Edelman calls the "fascism of the baby's face" to justify the limits he imposed on the nation. In his lengthy public address, Pinochet frames Chile's future in terms consistent with the far-right, authoritarian ultranationalism expressed by figures such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, using the phrases "destino de progreso" [destiny of progress], "metas comunes" [common goals], "unidad de destino" [unity of destiny], and "auténtica noción de Patria [que] obliga a cada generación a ser fiel con los valores históricos que han heredado de sus antepasados y han dado forma a la nacionalidad" [authentic notion of Homeland [that] obliges each generation to be faithful to the historical values that they have inherited from their ancestors and shaped the nationality] ("A un mes"). As if to repeatedly underscore the military junta's alignment with fascist ideology, like someone might pound a fist on a lectern, Pinochet uses the anaphora of the word "progreso" seven times and "patria" eleven times. Although the speech is long, it is important we examine its rhetoric, because it reveals a history of *exceptional imagination and thinking* that undergirds his claims. Understanding the exclusion that exceptional imaginings produce will help us understand why Lemebel creates trenches of ideas in his discourse, framed in apocalyptic terms, using language that operates as a form of guerrilla warfare with dynamite and Molotov cocktails in this manifesto addressed to Marxists.

In the speech, Pinochet frames his discourse in seemingly contradictory terms. The future of Chilean democracy can only be saved by a "temporary" dissolution of democracy. Peace and progress can only be achieved through preemptive violence. Since the citizens must be protected

from the mortal menace of international Marxism, the nation must join the heroic struggle against Marxist dictatorships, by becoming dictatorial. He condemns Marxist thinkers who promise social empowerment to proletarians, asserting that their utopian messianism only spreads hate and resentment. Yet, he hypocritically frames the coup in messianic terms claiming to be the hand of God that manifested to save the day. He proudly takes responsibility for the deadly violence because it is their (he and the military) constitutional mission to be vigilant forces of internal security to guard the nation's highest values; and it is their moral obligation to restore order, prevent the destruction of the nation, and offer hope of peace and restoration, since these are crucial steps to ensure the continuity of Christianity and ensure liberty and progress for women and children. Pinochet justifies the autocratic intervention by reaffirming Diego Portales' oligarchic vision—a vision so *exceptional* that Pinochet invokes his spirit, declaring that they [the junta] were “inspirados en el *espíritu portaliano* que alumbra hoy esta sala, en la cual el pueblo todo se ha fundido, en anhelos de paz y progreso”[inspired by the Portalian spirit that illuminates this room today, in which the people have all merged, in yearning for peace and progress] (“A un mes” emphasis mine). With such rhetorical allusions, Pinochet communicates his commitment to patriarchal notions of power and authority conferred by a teleological hermeneutic of history. In basing his effort to construct a future on faithfulness to historical values of family, church, education, and nation, Pinochet reveals its limits. Progress and peace for the nation will be based on a mythological past when men of arms carried the divine responsibility of governing as fathers of the fatherland.

What Lemebel seeks to assert, as he addressed Marxists, is that their vision for the future of the nation is no different than Pinochet's, since both imagine it in heterosexual terms. Lemebel is saying that it does not matter if the left or the right control the future of nation, because their

utopias become dystopias for those they exclude. Both the left and the right use monstrous masculinity to circumvallate their imagination of the nation since their notions are built upon binary mythological constructions that will only end in an apocalypse for both. I argue that when Lemebel does this, he asserts a transfeminist notion of masculinity that embraces ambiguity in its manifestation and embodiment. Lemebel proposes a transfeminist “new man.” When he asserts his revolutionary position, he asks them: What is wrong with a man showing tenderness and comfort to another man? What is wrong with a man loving another man? Lemebel’s transfeminist articulation of masculinity, in contrast to Pinochet’s use of *patria* and *progreso*, is accomplished by using the anaphora of *hombría* to emphasize difference and similarity. “Mi hombría me la enseñó la noche” [My manhood was taught to me by the night]; “Mi hombría no la recibí del partido” [My manhood was not given to me by the party], “Mi hombría la aprendí participando” [My manhood was learned by doing], “Mi hombría fue la mordaza” [My manhood was the gag], “Mi hombría fue morderme las burlas” [My manhood was biting back the teasing], “Mi hombría es aceptarme diferente” [My manhood was to accept myself as different], “Mi hombría espera paciente” [My manhood waits patiently], “Mi hombría fue difícil” [My manhood was difficult] (*Loco afán* 124-125). Pinochet’s patria and progress pail before Lemebel’s manhood. “¿Se da cuenta?” [Do you realize?] he asks. Lemebel’s transfeminist *hombría* is the ultimate revolution because it is “más subversivo que usted” [more revolutionary than you] (*Loco afán* 125). Lemebel declares that he is not going to change for Marxism—Marxism must change for him, and not only for him, but for all those like him and for all those yet to be born.

Que la revolución no se pudra del todo / A usted le doy este mensaje / Y no es por mí / Yo estoy viejo / Y su utopía es para las generaciones futuras / Hay tantos niños que van a nacer / Con una alita rota / Y yo quiero que vuelen compañero / Que su revolución / Les dé un pedazo de cielo rojo / Para que puedan volar. //

[That the revolution does not rot completely / I give you this message / And it is not for me / I am old / And your utopia is for future generations / There are so many

children who are going to be born / With a broken wing / And I want them to fly
comrade / May their revolution / Give them a piece of red sky / So they can fly. //]
(*Loco afán* 125-126).

In conclusion, nearly 150 years after the publishing of the *Communist Manifesto*, Lemebel writes what I call a *loca* transfeminist manifesto, which confronts the proletarian imaginary that had rejected him and laughed at him for not being man enough to be accepted. He reverses the laughter, like the Medusa, to grin in the faces of those who excluded him. Both Marxist and neofascist Chilean imaginaries socially ostracize homosexual embodiments. The radical exteriority of the manifesto, whose performance is scandalous and provocative, stakes a claim to a transfeminist subjectivity. It is transversal because the subjectivity it claims is not for himself, but for all the generations of peripheral and marginal Chilean bodies yet to be born. He performs a body that doubles as both a textual message and an accompanying illustration. The homosexual body, wounded by the pejorative use of metaphors such as *loca*, *yegua*, *coliza*, are reversed to undo the oppression, to generate a tremendous viral load of intensity that ruptures the heterosexual complacency of the male dominated space. Lemebel revendicates the body of the sodomite, a body considered a sinful abomination of the patriarchal imagination. It is a body fractured by sexuality, gender, class, and race. In Deleuze and Guattarian terms, Lemebel's political intervention is a strategically planned precision strike, a molecular revolution that infects the visual and auditory pathways of the Chilean Marxist desiring machine, a revolutionary discourse of queer manifestation that attaches a new desiring machine to Marxist desiring machine's flow. As Lemebel delivers his manifesto, every gesture, assemblage of vestry artifacts, and accessories such as high heel shoes, makeup, hair, and pose inscribes the sodomite, the homosexual, the *marica* into the materiality of Chilean history.

Conclusions

Since Lemebel's death in 2015, the persona he created has become a transcultural palimpsest, a psychopomp transvestite Stella Maris, a shamanic warrior, and a hero goddess who leads a vanguard of "niños con alitas rotas" into a utopian Chilean future, with the complicity of various radical feminist and transfeminist allies. For example, on the cover of Soledad Bianchi's book *Lemebel* (2018), which features chronicles about her memories of time spent with Lemebel, a photograph of him taken by Paz Errázuriz adorns the cover book. Lemebel appears as the Virgen del Carmen, looking like a queer motherly figure, gesturing with extended and inviting arms.

In 2019, when I traveled to Santiago to interview Pia Barros, I happened to arrive when the expository film *Lemebel* (2019) by Johanna Reposi was just being released in Santiago. Two different posters featuring iconic images of Lemebel appeared around the city promoting the film. One image, softened by a slight blur, is what we might call a Hollywood glamour shot—a close-up of Lemebel's face, wearing luscious pink lipstick, blue-gray eyeshadow, black eyebrow and eyeliner and his face framed by a red feather boa. I saw this image in almost every subway station and bookstore I visited during my stay. This image is also used in the documentary, where it appears projected onto the concrete surfaces of various buildings, such as multi-story housing projects constructed by the Allende administration some of which are now abandoned, on the wall outside Lemebel's apartment by the front door, and on the rough surface of a mannequin-like human form as the voices of director and performer discuss the location's historical context and significance.

Another image, which appears on the film's theatrical release poster, features a close-up of Lemebel's face painted in such a way that many would regard it as a clown. Nevertheless, there are many metaphorical allusions transmitted in the image. Looking at the image, one cannot be certain if the face was painted and photographed as it appears, or if the colorful imagery was added

using a digital tool. I will attempt a reverse Petrarchan blazon to describe the face. The chin is a pink semi-circle with harvest gold and tomato colored coronal flames emanating up toward ruby red lips, framed by a mustache above and a down-pointing triangular soul patch directly below, both are turquoise blue. It gives the impression of a queer pink sun rising above the horizon to greet the red lips, which seem as though they are about to take flight. Just above the mustache, extruding from the earlobes towards the nose, are two blue colored, curvilinear thorny branches, evoking the crown of thorns associated with the religious iconography of Jesus. Tiny drops of blood drip from where the thorns pierce the skin. The impression is that the branches attempt to silence the mouth and prevent it from reaching for the heavens. As we face the image, we see what appears to be a miniature Moai statue made of alabaster or ivory hanging from a triangular earring connected to the right earlobe. Above the thorny branches are three geometrical shapes: two red circles, one over each cheek, and an upward-pointing blue triangle over the nose. All three geometrical shapes have etched details: the red circles have dense, stylized rose bushes and the blue triangle has a human heart amid leaves or flames. The heart gives the impression that it is either being ripped apart or rather that it is two Chile peppers in a passionate embrace. The right nostril has a single drop of blood dripping down toward the mouth. The eyes are contoured with black mascara, evoking the classic Hollywood silent film era. The eyes convey a sense of both deep wisdom and profound sadness, well beyond the tears of bloodshot eyes. Above the eyes, beginning at the bridge of the nose, is a hummingbird unibrow, evocative of the visage of Frida Kalho. The hummingbird's black wings extend in semi-circles over the eyes, while the eyebrow hairs are painted to resemble iridescent turquoise blue feathers. The hummingbird's long red beak points up toward the hairline. Above the hummingbird's wings are more coronal flames echoing those above the chin. Just below the hairline are more blue thorny branches like a crown of thorns,

and additional blood drops emanate from points where thorns perforate the skin, or as though the forehead was sweating blood. Below the title of the film is a subtitle which reads, “Una revolución marica” (A queer revolution). I argue that the composition of this painted face intersects Chilean societal fractures over race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity, and religion by both provoking and evoking symbolic and metaphorical meanings. It merges patriarchal Christian, popular Hollywood, and queer iconography, while stirring the dormant memories of the Araucanian Mapuche and the aboriginal Rapa Nui. This face collapses the primitive, exotic and distinct faces of tribal warrior, shaman, and transvestite, to represent a transfeminist masculinity.

In this chapter, I have argued that the singularity known as “Lemebel” is going *viral*. Since before the release of his AIDS chronicle, his carefully crafted and publicly-promoted political persona—the embodiment of the *loca travesti*—became the epicenter of tremendous attention within Chile and beyond. Given both the popular and scholarly interest that has surrounded him ever since, his notoriety continues to spread like a virus, through the micro circuitry of the extractivist academic structure, the transnational technological interconnectedness of the new social media ecology and the explosion of user-generated content. The numerous political gestures of his persona have proliferated widely, including the documented performances of the artist collective Las yeguas del apocalipsis, cofounded with Francisco Casas; the short stories, chronicles, and novel he authored, which are circulated in print and now available in digital formats; and the numerous print and video interviews he has given along with countless photographs of his likeness, which are accessible on the Internet. His life’s work has led to an outbreak of concern with a global reach, as academics, creators, journalists, and activists have become curators and gatekeepers of his persona and his *viral bodies*.

CHAPTER 4 –DRUG COCKTAILS AND THE JOUISSANCE OF SEX MAGIC

Pablo Pérez in Quotations

In this chapter, I examine the life narrative of an HIV positive hero named Pablo Pérez, who appears in a series of three novels: *Un año sin amor* (1998), *El mendigo chupapijas* (2005), and *Querido Nicolás* (2016). Each text is a standalone self-referential novel. I use the term self-referential because it is a term the author uses to describe his work and because the novels belong to a typology scholars call “life writing.” Pablo Pérez is the author, the narrator, and the hero of the story in each of the novels. Since readers consider that this coincidence in nomenclature invokes what Phillipe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* (1989) theorizes as the autobiographical pact, I argue that the most productive way of reading Pérez’s novels is through the lens of autofiction, or what some scholars refer to as autobiographical fiction. Rather than consider the author an autobiographical narrator, I read him as “Pablo Pérez,” a version of himself loosely based on real-life events. I also argue that Pérez intellectually registers the *Zeitgeist* of a specific historical moment in Argentina when the HIV positive hero and his radical sexuality, known as *gay leathersexuality* to insiders of the Gay Leather style of sadomasochism within the subculture of the wider BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) community, confronts the existential angst and inner exile provoked by HIV/AIDS. In *Querido Nicolás*, HIV is something unexpected that carries tremendous responsibility, tempered by a sense of hope. In *Un año sin amor*, HIV is chomping at the bit and AIDS threatens to erase our hero from existence, until a reprieve comes in the form of a “drug cocktail.” In *El mendigo chupapijas*, HIV/AIDS is no longer the death sentence it once was. The hero can imagine a new relationship between literature and everyday life. He now has time enough for love, euphoria, and a bliss that can only be experienced in homelessness.

This confrontation represents a major predicament for the protagonist. Ambiguously situated between life instincts and the death drive, Pérez experiences *jouissance*—enjoyment in the margins—such as the pleasure of painful orgasm, erotic negativity, arousals, and stimuli that take the body beyond the threshold of pleasure to an excessive and transgressive rush that runs counter to societal norms. The term *jouissance* has been used in psychoanalysis by practitioners and scholars such as Sigmund Freud in his works *On Psychopathology* (1993), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1990), and *Civilization, Society and Religion* (1991); Jacques Lacan in *Formations of the Unconscious* (2020) and *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (2007); and Slavoj Žižek in *Religion between Knowledge and Jouissance* (2007), where he discusses the concept through a Marxist lens to explain what he sees as “the drive to pure autistic *jouissance* (through drugs or other trance-inducing means)” in the aftermath of the May 1968 protests in France. Based on my reading of this fundamental concept in study of sadomasochistic pleasure, *jouissance* can be understood as surplus enjoyment, a crossing of the line into a carnivalized, ritual event which is somewhat obscene in the sense that getting off is not something you want your family to see you doing. And yet *jouissance* can also materialize in the brutality of the sociopolitical sphere, where every day predatory and nonconsensual acts of dominance and submission occur. In Pérez’s case, there is a sense of displacement in the secret pleasures he seeks, an enjoyment coupled with a spiritual ecstasy born out of intense existential anxiety and a sexual drive that finds satisfaction in the erotic fantasies of leathermen sadomasochism. As he searches for a love that will ultimately bring comfort and meaning to his life, he is caught between Eros and Thanatos, life and death, love and oblivion. The *jouissance* of his predicament motivates the compulsion of both the author and hero to write and tell the story about a life and commuted death sentence in the self-referential novels *Un año sin amor* and *El mendigo chupapijas*.

Viral bodies operate at various levels in and around these texts. First, the story itself is viral because the HIV positive hero engages in sadomasochistic sexual encounters while approaching an AIDS diagnosis, activating notions of danger, contamination, and disgust. Second, the publisher of the first edition of *Un año sin amor* sheathed the physical body of the novel in shrink-wrap like a condom and presented it to the reading public as a contagious object. Third, the film adaptation capitalizes Pérez's sadomasochism to portray a salacious and gratuitous on-screen persona. Not only is the body of the hero in bondage to a virus that causes emotional pain, existential anxiety, and inner exile, but it is also bound to the endorphin induced euphoria produced by the physical pain of the simulated torture his leather masters inflict.

Transtextuality, Pornology, and Sade's Erotic Capital in the Semantic Design

In 2005, director Anahí Berneri released a cinematic adaptation of the first two novels with the title *Un año sin amor*, the same year that *Mansalva* published *El mendigo chupapijas*, nearly ten years after the first. Pérez shares a screenplay writing credit with the director. Since the film adapts the first two novels to tell its story, I decided it would be more interesting to read the life narrative of the hero across all three novels, since such a reading would allow me to trace the arc of the character's development and transformation through two decades. Although dated entries help us situate major events, some cannot be chronologically situated as they live in the fuzzy space time of memory, what Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel calls "zizagueo" (Lemebel 23). Like many of Lemebel's chronicles, all Pérez's novels begin in *media res* and contain various flashbacks, by the ways, and not to mention in their semantic design, reflecting oblique, transversal, and nomadic forms of tracing back through time. This wandering way of narrating, that moves from place to another, is what J. Hillis Miller had in mind when he defines Derrida's term "destinerrance" as naming "a fatal possibility of erring by not reading a predefined temporal

goal in terms of wandering away from a predefined spatial goal” (893). It is also like “a loose thread in a tangled skein that turns out to lead to the whole ball of yarn. It could therefore generate a potential for endless commentary” (Miller 893-894). The semantic design, therefore, seems like an invitation to the reader to deconstruct the text, to take it apart and put it back together again and again, to create meaning. Pérez wants his readers to read his stories numerous times and each time they engage with them, different semiotic clues and connections become salient. In this sense, the semantic design is evocative of the 1981 play called *Tamara* by John Krizanc, produced as an immersive and interactive theatrical experience intended to drop the fourth wall between performers and spectators. After the opening scene, one must choose a character to follow through the labyrinth of the venue, where different scenes occur simultaneously in different rooms. To get the full story, a spectator must return numerous times. Each time the spectator returns, they experience a different story. In a similar manner, the reader will find it exceedingly complicated to create a linear temporal sequence of the complete story of Pablo Pérez’s life or reduce it to a few simple paragraphs because there are so many threads to connect.

Although there are moments of dialogical exchange with other characters expressed in quotations in all three novels, Pérez incorporates what Gérard Genette in *The Architext* (1992) calls “transtextuality,” the transcendence of the text, “everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” (81). Genette’s proposal subsumes Julia Kristeva’s concept of “intertextuality,” which refers to the shaping of the meaning of a text through semantic design and includes quotation, allusion, plagiarism, translation, pastiche, and parody. But is also includes metatextual connections with other works of literature, either through direct citation of other novels, or connections perceived by the reader who has prior knowledge of specific referents. Besides obvious ones such as gay leathersexuality and the global AIDS pandemic, Pérez includes

intertextual referents, such as Kafka's diary, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Ginsberg's poetry, and Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Along with such citations, he also includes lyrics from popular music, among other translated global (transglobal) sources, to represent ideas he cannot, or feelings that are better expressed through the words of other authors and creators. Transtextuality provides us with different angular perspectives from which to apprehend the personality and self the author constructs in the life narratives.

Before I expand my discussion of transtextuality and move onto my discussion about how Pérez subverts the autobiographical pact by staging the novelistic "I" of self-referential autofiction in the next section, I need to mention two exceedingly important transtextual referents that are like silent elephants in the room that is the story of "Pablo Pérez." I am referring to the haunting presence of two literary figures whose names comprise the term sadomasochism: Donatien-Alphonse de Sade, aka the Marquis de Sade and Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch. Sacher-Masoch's best known work was *Venus in Furs* published in 1870, while Sade's most notorious work, *The 120 Days of Sodom* written in 1785, was not published until 1904. It was banned by many governments because they considered its content to be obscene. It was not until after the mid-twentieth century when it became widely available and translated to several other languages. The terms sadism and masochism are derived from the last names of these two men. The supremely influential German psychiatrist Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing coined both terms in his foundational work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), a forensic reference work destined for psychiatrists, physicians, and judges. The book is a compendium of psychiatric theories that served as the leading medico-legal textual authority on sexual pathology. Krafft-Ebing is who proposed the notion that homosexuality was the result of a biological anomaly in the embryonic and fetal stages of gestation which led to a sexual inversion in the brain. Since the renowned psychiatrist

considered any form of recreational sex an aberration of the natural sex drive, which should be oriented toward procreation, Krafft-Ebing considered homosexuality, sadism, and masochism as cerebral neuroses, perversions, and psychosexual disorders.

Sade and Masoch's works remained obscure for a long time, but they were part of a discursive explosion identified by Michel Foucault in his archaeological work *The History of Sexuality* (1978), which examines how the homosexual became a subject of law and power. According to Foucault, censorship of sexuality through subjugation "at the level of the language" beginning in the seventeenth century sought to erase the vocabulary and speech about sex "that rendered it too visibly present" (17). Despite the endeavor to silence, Foucault recognizes how a discursive explosion took place over the next three centuries that may well have led to the codification of metaphor and allusion as a new means to signify sex and erotic desire. I contend that the seventeenth century discursive explosion identified by Foucault is like the twentieth century phenomenon of virality but without the lightning speed of the internet. Sade and Masoch's virality was due in large part to the prurient interests of readers who regarded any literature that dealt with frank discussions about sex as salacious, or what Foucault calls "scandalous." What exactly made them scandalous? It was the highly detailed, non-euphemistic, matter of fact, way that highly charged sexual situations and violence were narrated. Foucault identifies this form of narration in the injunction issued by Alfonso de' Liguori in 1835 to "tell everything...not only consummated acts, but sensual touchings, all impure gazes, all obscene remarks...all consenting thoughts" (de' Liguori 5) as having been inspired by Sade. Discourse about sex in Sade's hands became, as Georges Bataille theorizes in *L'Erotisme* (1957), spiritual in its confession, in its bulging of language. It is evident that Sade's literary contributions had a tremendous impact on the discursive explosion, as his ideas slowly became viral over the next two centuries. His

contagious metaphors increasingly spread into many domains, including philosophy, law, science, literature, art, cinema, and pornography. Although Sade was not the only one to write scandalous literature, his ideas about narration arguably have had the greatest traction and residual effects as his erotic capital continues to grow in value. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Sade writes:

Your narrations must be decorated with the most numerous and searching details, the precise way and extent to which we may judge how the passion you describe relates to human manners and man's character is determined by your willingness to disguise no circumstance; and what is more, the least circumstance is apt to have an immense influence upon the procuring of that kind of sensory irritation we expect from your stories." (271)

Of all three of Pérez's novels, *El mendigo chupapijas* is the most exemplary in answering Sade's admonishment about what he expected from a narration. When I turn to my close reading of *El mendigo chupapijas* in the sections ahead we shall see how Pérez decorates his narrations, disguises no circumstance, includes numerous and searching details about his wide variety of sexual exploits, including his BDSM play sessions with his two Buenos Aires leather masters.

Gilles Deleuze in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1989) focuses on the concepts of symptomatology and pornology. Deleuze helps his readers to understand the link between violent language and eroticism and what the meeting of violence and sexuality in excessive and abundant language means. Deleuze sees Sade and Masoch as clinicians, anthropologists, and artists. Not that they are clinicians on the level of those who describe plague, leprosy, or Parkinson's disease, but rather, they "present unparalleled configurations of symptoms and signs" (*Masochism* 16). Deleuze regards the two anthropologists as men "whose work succeeds in embracing a whole conception of man, culture and nature" (*Masochism* 16), and who, as artists, "discovered new forms of expression, new ways of thinking and feeling and an entirely new language" (*Masochism* 16). Rather than regard their work as pornographic, Deleuze believes that "it merits the more exalted title of 'pornology' because its erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary

functions of ordering and describing” (*Masochism* 18). I argue that Pablo Pérez’s first two novels are what Deleuze calls “pornological literature.” Besides offering numerous matter-of-fact details in creative ways, the writing aims to confront language with its own limits. Descriptions of Pérez’s BDSM play sessions and orgiastic encounters incorporate what Deleuze calls “nonlanguage” that captures “violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken” (*Masochism* 22). In other words, Pérez emulates the clinical, anthropological, and artistic work of Sade and Masoch in his writing by transcending the imperative and descriptive function of language toward a higher function. For example, in *El mendigo chupapijas* nonlanguage is present in the masochism of mendicant spiritual blissfulness. Pérez turns the personal elements, his interactions with the leather masters and a homeless cocksucker, toward the impersonal by avoiding the use of euphemisms. In this way Pérez produces what Foucault calls “subjugated” knowledge that ruptures the link to the operations of power that pathologize, regulate, and discipline his body. The “nonlanguage” places his body out of power’s reach. Pablo Pérez’s initiation into the gay leathersexuality allows his body to become invested with meaning that produces both pleasure, resistance, and erotic capital. As we shall see, Pérez novels make use of extensive transtextuality in their semantic design.

Un año sin amor is formatted as a diary which Pérez narrates in first-person through entries spanning a temporal period of ten months, from February through December of 1996, which was a pivotal year in the AIDS pandemic because it is when the 11th International AIDS Conference in Vancouver highlighted the effectiveness of the “drug cocktail,” technically known as Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) but also known as “combination therapy.” In Spanish the treatment is known as “triterapias.” When the “cocktail” became the standard of care, those who could avail themselves of the treatment ceased facing HIV as a death sentence. The Argentine scholar Alberto Giordano recognizes 1996 as marking “dos formas históricas, fechables, de

representarse los alcances del SIDA, como enfermedad mortal o como una enfermedad que podría volverse crónica y, en consecuencia, a dos modos de representación y autorrepresentación de los enfermos, como condenados a muerte o como portadores de un virus que les impone un cuidado continuo de sí mismos pero que no les fija, necesariamente, un término a sus existencias” [two historical, dateable ways of representing the scope of AIDS, as a fatal disease or as a disease that could become chronic and, consequently, two modes of representation and self-representation of the sick, as sentenced to death or as carriers of a virus that imposes a continuous self-care but that does not necessarily set an end to their existences] (Giordano 42). Pérez, who is HIV positive, explained to me during our interview in Buenos Aires that he decided to produce a literary project—a novel in the form of a diary—that could serve as a document of a specific time in the life of Argentine homosexual men who faced the possibility of death from an incurable virus and a medical system that was demanding in its discursive registers of medical treatments, orders, and tests. He also wanted to show how in this context PWAs sought out alternative therapies such as homeopathy, fitness, and spiritual health. With these goals in mind, Pérez created a unique work in Argentine literature, one that reveals “la actividad sexual sin eufemismos, llamando las cosas por su nombre, y me parecía que allí había una historia que no estaba abordada por lo menos en la literatura argentina. Pero, además, era muy física la sensación de ponerme a escribir, era como un salvataje” [sexual activity without euphemisms, calling things by their name, and it seemed to me that there was a story that was not addressed at least in Argentine literature. But, in addition, the sensation of starting to write was very physical, it was like a rescue] (Jaramillo 256). In other words, he wanted to put some personal skin in the game by using his own life as a reflective muse, using the mirror of an anthropological, ethnographic, and diaristic lens, to document an individual with determined characteristics living in a specific time and with certain ideas. The novel thus

represents a movement in time over the span of a year that coincides with technological changes that coincided with medical and cultural transformations.

The first edition of Pablo Pérez's self-referential novel *Un año sin amor: diario del sida* [A Year Without Love: AIDS Diary], released by the Argentine publisher *Editorial Perfil* in 1998, sought to capitalize on the book's AIDS theme by presenting it to the public as a contagious viral body. The cover design was shockingly simple. A cutout of an androgynous naked body sitting on a mattress with legs semi-crossed in a contemplative pose and wearing a lion's mane looks off to the right, while a standup oscillating room ventilator looms just to the left, suggesting that the body and its environment need a refreshing breeze. The body and fan are positioned towards the top right of the cover. Below are the title and subtitle in black text, with author's name in blood red letters positioned below, all centered horizontally. The visual and textual elements are superimposed over a solid bright green that evokes the color often used as a background (chroma key) for cinematic special effects. Encircling the book like a golden colored waistband, situated at the midriff, is the phrase "HIV Positivo," strikingly visible. The book is also shrink wrapped, suggesting it is sheathed for the protection of the reader. Presenting the book in this manner plays on both the fears and salacious fascination that popular public attention sustained toward HIV/AIDS by both attracting and repulsing the buyer.

When I met with Pérez on Avenida Corrientes in a Buenos Aires apartment in the spring of September 2019, I asked him about that cover, which I had only seen in photographs on the internet. He said to me, "Era rara la portada original... me indignó. Después lo entendí porque una amiga me dijo que parece marketing, como una publicidad de Benetton" [The original cover was weird... it outraged me. Later I understood it because a friend told me that it looks like marketing, like a Benetton ad] (Jaramillo 263). The novel begins in Buenos Aires, "cuando no había internet,

los contactos se daban de otra manera, la noche gay tenía una circulación que ahora no tiene” [when there was no internet, contacts were made in a different way, gay nights had a circulation that they don't have now] (Jaramillo 262) and finishes when circumstances irreversibly changed the way homosexual men connected and regarded their continuing presence in a community facing AIDS but still seeking to experience pleasure. The gambit proved successful, as the novel is now in its third edition 20 years after it was first published. When Pérez moved on from *Editorial Perfil* and their controversial first edition cover which had upset him because of its viral presentation, his new editors, *Blatt & Rios*, have allowed the body of the book to evolve, as new insights and perceptual milestones gave way to the optimism that was introduced with the “drug cocktail.” Giordano recognizes this metamorphosis as signaling the subjectivity of “el sobreviviente” [the survivor] “cuando por el dolor puede ir más allá del dolor, al sobreviviente le es dada—terrible privilegio—la posibilidad de experimentar la enfermedad como aprendizaje de la vida, de lo que el vivir tiene de tránsito incierto, siempre recomenzando, siempre abierto a su interrupción” [when because of pain one can go beyond pain, the survivor is given—terrible privilege—the possibility of experiencing the disease as learning about life, about what living has of uncertain transit, always starting over, always open to interruption] (Giordano 42). Pérez’ diaristic novel was fortuitous in that several historical circumstances aligned, which continue to be of interest to the public, because of its thematic concerns and the semantic design of its enunciation. In the publishing industry, a novel that has generated a lot of interest and produced several editions is called a long seller.

The semantic design of *El mendigo chupapijas* is a transversal continuation of the first novel. It reflects hybridity in its refusal to settle into a single narrative mode, oscillating between first- and third-person narration, while including diary entries, emails, notes, and poems. Pérez describes transcendental spiritual experiences and visions of supernatural beings as he narrates

surrealist dream sequences, or hallucinations. *Querido Nicolás* operates as a flashback of the hero's life told through letters of correspondence written in the years before returning to Buenos Aires from Europe, where he became HIV positive. It subverts the epistolary tradition by presenting only one side of the conversation. We do not have the response letters from Nicolás, although our hero references them in his correspondence. The letters convey a sense of authenticity and immediacy. By including poetry, translations of local French idioms, lists, and sections of letters entirely in French, one could derive meaningful comparisons between *Querido Nicolás* and Severo Sarduy's *Cobra* (1972), which refuses to surrender meaningful narrative sequences to the reader.

The reader will probably become motivated to read *Un año sin amor* after reading the publishers note printed on the back cover of *El mendigo chupapijas*, which mentions and characterizes the author's writing as "testimonial," conveying the sense that what they encounter is based on truth or actual events. These claims heighten a sense of immediacy and realism. Pablo Pérez compares this kind of reception to the way spectators relate to reality TV—they know that the reality is a simulation and yet they derive voyeuristic pleasure from witnessing intimate events and the protagonists' secret confessions. We also learn that *El mendigo chupapijas*, which is published by *Mansalva*, is a rewriting into a novel of what were initially a series of five *folletines* [pamphlets, chap books] produced between 1998 and 2000 and published by the artist collective, gallery, and press *Belleza y Felicidad*, founded by Cecilia Pavón and Fernanda Laguna in Argentina's neoliberal social and economic crisis "to show that these texts imagine reading as a performance which entails doing, touching, and being touched back" (Francica 1). The idea was to imagine a new relationship between literature, everyday life, and practices, partly based on Roland Barthes' notion in *La preparación de la novela* (2005) [*The Preparation of the Novel* (2010)] of a certain "sentimiento de que la *literatura*, como Fuerza Activa, Mito Vivo, está, no en

crisis (formula demasiado fácil), sino quizá *muriendo* = algunos signos, entre otros, de obsolencia (o de agotamiento)” [feeling that literature, like Active Force, Live Myth, is not in crisis (too easy formula), but perhaps dying = some signs, among others, of obsolescence (or exhaustion)] (Barthes 351); and also partly based on Reinaldo Laddaga’s notion in *Estética de la emergencia* (2006) of an avant-garde “que se orientaría en la dirección de una cierta idea utópica de la literatura, o de la escritura, de una escritura feliz” [that would be oriented in the direction of a certain utopian idea of literature, or of writing, of a happy writing] (Laddaga 228). These two notions, according to Marina Yuszczuk in “Son o se hacen: performance poética y performance de género en *Belleza y Felicidad*” [They are or are Made: Poetic Performance and Gender Performance in *Belleza y Felicidad*] (2014), conspire and inspire a vanguard to ignore “la clasificación genérica preestablecida entre novelas, poemas y demás, anular la distinción entre productores y receptores de los textos y salirse de los canales de circulación provistos por el mercado” [the pre-established generic classification between novels, poems and others, annul the distinction between producers and receivers of texts and get out of the circulation channels provided by the market] (224). His participation with *Belleza y Felicidad*, which operated in what was once a local neighborhood pharmacy, stimulated Pablo Pérez’s creative process. In this space, writers, artists, and the public engaged with an arts cabaret which included *talleres* [workshops], *lecturas* [readings], and sold *chucherías* [trinkets, odds and ends, and sweets] drawings, paintings, and writings by avant-garde Argentine creators at the end of the twentieth century.

Another aspect of its transtextuality is the appropriation of personalities from French arts and letters. For example, in *Querido Nicolás*, we learn that one of Pérez’s greatest ambitions is to collaborate with Severo Sarduy, who died from AIDS-related complications in 1993. Sarduy eventually meets with Pérez, several times after many failed communications. One of Pérez’s prose

poems impressed Sarduy, who recommended Pérez turn it into a novel and offered to be the editor. The idea delighted Pérez until the project reached a dead end, when Sarduy no longer took his calls after traveling abroad with his partner, who sought treatment for cancer. Another important person in *Querido Nicolás* is the radical queer film- and video-maker Lionel Soukaz, mentioned as a close friend from France who visits Pérez in Buenos Aires in *Un año sin amor*. In *El mendigo chuupapijas*, Lionel is transformed in the writing to Dr. Soukaze, a BDSM dungeon master. Soukaz collaborated on projects with Michel Foucault, Guy Hocquenghem, and Hervé Guibert, who were all BDSM fetishists and died from AIDS-related complications. The letters to Nicolás also include references to Roland Barthes, Copi, someone named Gilles (perhaps a nod to Deleuze), and many other people identified only by first names that echo other known thinkers. Including these referents, in his correspondence, stresses the sense that Pérez is among kindred spirits, those who share his passions, including the suffering and pain produced in the confrontation with HIV/AIDS.

In the letter dated Paris, September 30, 1990, in *Querido Nicolás*, we learn several things. The positive test for HIV does not surprise Pérez. In Argentina, someone with his status is called “seropositivo, o portador” [seropositive, or carrier] (*Nicolás* 100). At that point in time, he hoped the progression of his HIV infection would last various years, manifesting no symptoms. He reassures himself and his friend that... “Se puede vivir hasta los ochenta y morir de viejo siendo seropositivo” [You can live to be eighty and die of old age while being HIV positive] (*Nicolás* 100). Pérez recognizes he is like a carrier of death. His life forever transformed when the shock of the news makes him realize that he also carries a tremendous responsibility because his body is like a dangerous bomb that could damage others or himself. He must practice safer sex and use a condom. In *Un año sin amor*, the cautious optimism turns into exasperation in the diary entry dated

February 19, 1996, when the hope for a long incubation period and survival into old age gives way to discussion about a race against time, if he could just hold on. The virus is a pharmakon, a deadly poison his body distills. The reality of death becomes palpable. “Estamos en carrera y hay que aguantar, estamos en carrera y hay que aguantar...” [Estamos en carrera y hay que aguantar, estamos en carrera y hay que aguantar...] he repeats to himself, “pero este veneno que fabrica mi cuerpo día a día me está colmando hasta que tal vez, un día, estalle. Vivo en un mundo en el que cada vez más, los padres entierran a los hijos. Bela, Paula, Bernard, Vladimir, Hervé, por citar solamente a los que más quise y por orden de desaparición” [but this poison that my body manufactures day by day is filling me up until maybe, one day, it will explode. I live in a world where more and more parents bury their children. Bela, Paula, Bernard, Vladimir, Hervé, to mention only the ones I loved the most and in order of disappearance] (*Amor* 13). In the Argentine context, the use of the word *disappearance* to describe the deaths is a salient choice, given the history of the military dictatorship and its collaboration with Operation Condor, the United States led Cold War operation in Latin America.

Pérez went to France to master the language and hoped to launch his career as a writer and poet. He lived a bohemian lifestyle and became involved with a man named Hervé, who was HIV positive. Pérez was devastated when Hervé was diagnosed with AIDS, decided to end all treatment, and allowed himself to die. In the early 1990s, there were only two drugs available for treating HIV: AZT approved in 1987 and DDI approved in 1991. Both drugs were toxic and had major side effects for patients. The drugs only became available to PWAs after LGBT activist groups from ACT-UP, the AIDS coalition to unleash power in New York and Paris, applied an unprecedented amount of pressure on the United States and France to do something in the face of so much death. When Pérez returned to Buenos Aires in the mid-1990s, with the country in a

neoliberal economic crisis, he tried to earn a living teaching French. He also began translating Hervé's diaries into Spanish.

In the same diary entry of February 19th in *Un año sin amor*, Pérez writes, “Leí hace algunos días un diario de Hervé, en el que dice que se sienta a escribir para dejar de dar vueltas por su casa como un león enjaulado. Eso mismo acabo de sentir, me di cuenta de que estaba dando vueltas en bolas por toda la casa, [...] desnudo para que mi ingle reciba aire, tengo una micosis de segundo grado...” [A few days ago, I read a diary by Hervé, in which he says that he sits down to write to stop pacing around his house like a caged lion. I just felt the same thing, I realized that I was running around naked all over the house, [...] naked so my groin could get air, I have a second-degree mycosis...] (*Amor* 14). Naming his ex-lover Hervé in the novel creates a transtextual connection with the diary of Hervé Guibert published in 1990 with the title *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*. Guibert's novel scandalized French society with the revelation that Michel Foucault, who appears as a character named Muzil, was a leather master and died from AIDS related complications. In a nod to Guibert, Pérez introduces what I call a contagious metaphor, *leon enjaulado* [caged lion], to signify several things that exert influence on his life. The most powerful meaning is manifest whenever he feels like the effects of his HIV infection are closing in on him like a cage.

The protagonist realizes his radical sexuality has a beastly nature like that of a lion. When his animal nature becomes too much to contain, he ventures out in search of prey. The pleasure he derives from rapacious and insatiable sexual encounters with other men is life affirming. “... el orgasmo me remite a una sensación de vida. [...] Siempre me sentí medio muerto, y cada orgasmo es para mí como un golpe eléctrico que me revive un poco, aunque sea por unos minutos; como un rayo que me trae de la muerte a la vida” [...orgasm brings me back to a sensation of life. [...]

I always felt half dead, and each orgasm is for me like an electric shock that revives me a little, even for a few minutes; like lightning that brings me from death to life] (*Amor* 54). The life producing lightning strike is evocative of the reanimated promethean creature brought to life in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. If Pérez cannot connect with men through classified ads in a local LGBTQ magazine, he encounters them in pornographic movie theaters, bars, restrooms, and transit stations, on the streets and alleyways of Buenos Aires, to derive visceral satisfaction for his animalistic urges, or as Pérez puts it, "llevado a la acción por el puro salvajismo que me caracteriza" [driven into action by the sheer savagery that characterizes me] (*Amor* 29). Every time he leaves the safety of his home, also a sort of cage, he risks being arrested, or entrapped by police or gay bashers, for his homosexual behavior. Pérez complains on numerous occasions that his HIV infection increasingly takes his breath away. The difficulty of breathing turns his body into yet another cage that chokes his existence. "Hace dos semanas que me siento muy débil y que respiro mal. [...] No sé si aguantaré mucho más sintiéndome así, preso de mi cuerpo" [I have been feeling very weak for two weeks and breathing badly. (...) I don't know if I can take feeling like this much longer, a prisoner of my body (*Amor* 91). Throughout much of the first novel, our hero lives with the constant feeling that he will die before the end of the year. The HIV infection, along with the medications he takes, are even more cages that enclose him in an inner exile.

Creo que tomar al AZT y DDI hace que el SIDA esté más presente en todo momento, que no pueda olvidarme de mi enfermedad, me siento feo y enfermo, encerrado en mí mismo, siempre con la idea de que voy a morir pronto, casi un deseo de morir, preferiblemente sin una intervención mía, aunque empiece a aparecer más seguido la idea de un suicidio.

[I think that taking AZT and DDI makes AIDS more present at every moment, that I cannot forget about my illness, I feel ugly and sick, closed in on myself, always with the idea that I am going to die soon, almost a desire to die, preferably without my intervention, although the idea of suicide begins to appear more often.] (*Amor* 106)

Suicide is not a real option for Pérez because, despite the sensation of imminent death, our hero loves life. His compelling desire to write and tell stories motivate him to hold on, to not let go. They provide a reason to live. Also, he relentlessly seeks orgasmic encounters to continue feeling alive. As we can see, the “caged lion” metaphor is versatile and carries with it a multiplicity of meanings that branch out from the notions that the lion represents the power and fierceness of his desire and survival instinct—freedom, while the cage represents the pent of energy, emotions, and all the things that paralyze and contain him, or threaten his survival—inner exile. We can surmise referentially from the diary entries that our hero’s inner exile began after his return to Buenos Aires.

While Pérez was in Europe, he met various people who exposed him to a spectrum of homosexual embodiments, but what most interested him were masculine bodies that donned blue jeans and black leather jackets and boots. This style of dress is fundamental to gay leather sadomasochism, or leathersexuality, which began in the 1950s, when leather Masters of the Old Guard ritually trained and initiated slaves and prepared them to be masters. The landmark and often-cited dissertation “The Development of Sadomasochism as a Cultural Style in Twentieth Century United States” (1998) by Robert Bienvenu discusses in detail the historical antecedents that preceded the emergence of this homosexual subculture. Bienvenu offers a tantalizing discussion that illuminates the vectors by which contemporary BDSM leathersexuality came into fruition. Bienvenu points to the 1953 film *The Wild One* starring a leather clad Marlon Brando as “Johnny,” an outlaw biker, as the prototype, hypermasculine, icon of the gay leather underground. The leather accouterment included a leather motor-cycle jacket, boots, chaps, belt, cap, and most importantly a “butch” attitude. Bienvenu explains on the West Coast of the United States, a “diverse leather-biker subculture was the organizational context in which ‘leather’ emerged as a

cultural style. In contrast, in New York and Chicago the California biker style was first appropriated by gay men in the narrower organizational context of gay SM networks and bars” (Bienvenu 221). The vector of transmission of this style moves from California in 1954 to New York, Chicago, and San Francisco by 1958, although distinct leather organization began to organize in the 1960s. In 1970s, the Old Guard of leathersexuality were holding conferences and conventions, bringing together aficionados from across North America and Europe. Highly specialized Masters of the Old Guard ritually trained and initiated new slaves and Masters, following codes of conduct developed in the 1950s. By the 1990s, most of the Old Guard leathermen had been lost to HIV, and with their passing went the longstanding tradition of ritualized ethical training. A new brand of gay leather BDSM began to emerge, one that embraced what the few surviving Old Guard Masters derided as “style over substance” and “*play* instead of *work*” (Magister).

As we see from the correspondence in *Querido Nicolás* set in the 1990s, Pérez gradually drifted toward leathersexuality as he released the lion within, embracing the radical sexuality he encountered in Belgium, Spain, and France. His exposure to the subculture he encountered fueled fantasies about leather clad superheroes and uniformed law enforcement officers which began in childhood. As mentioned earlier, Pérez embraced the “safe sex” responsibility that came with his HIV positive test result. Nevertheless, he engaged in high voltage sexual encounters at a place called the MecZone, a gay leather bar in Paris, close to Gare du Nord train station, known for having a basement play zone with private cabins and a sling commonly used for fisting, where he indulged in sadomasochistic sex and became fascinated with the contagiously metaphorical objects, artifacts, and fetish practices of the gay leather underground. During his time abroad, he maintained a close relationship through correspondence with Nicolás, who we can consider his

best friend. Pérez reports all the details of his sexual exploits to him in the letters. Back in Buenos Aires, however, we discover in *Un año sin amor* that Pérez did not have an intercontinental network of politically empowered organizations, nor clubs dedicated to mutual protection, like those the leatherfolk he met in the Global North had. His local Argentine network consisted of two gay leather BDSM masters he met with regularly to engage in rules based consensual play—the ability to give a signal that ceases the play if the activity exceeds the pain-pleasure limit. The play sessions with the leather masters were like an exhilarating escape from the reality of his HIV infection, but conflicts that arose between them threatened the harmony of their *petit ménage à trois*. Although he learned a lot about himself and his limitations, the way things were going did not entirely satisfy him. Pablo would have liked nothing better than a committed relationship with his BDSM masters, but the corresponding love he longed to experience with them proved elusive. Since he could not access his masters as frequently as he wanted, he began to long for something more regular and fulfilling. He mustered up the courage to place an ad in a local LGBTQ magazine to find a leather master with whom he could live “una historia de amor” [a story of love]. However, doubts plague his mind because, as mentioned before, he is not sure he will reach the end of 1996 alive.

Pérez imagines the leather Master, which he seeks in the ad, from his fantasies. I contend that the one Pérez idealizes is based on his reading about Old Guard Masters. He does not specifically mention specific referents in *Un año sin amor* or in *El mendigo chupapijas*. My assertion is drawn from the semiotic clues in the text and the prior knowledge my research uncovered. The placement of the ad is like a double coming out of the closet, both as an HIV-positive gay man and as a leather slave. Before placing the ad, he carefully ponders his existence and writes several drafts, until he redacts a nuanced representation of himself. Once fully satisfied,

he publishes his first ad in *NX* magazine. “30, 1, 73, 60, tipo latino, buen cuerpo, tendencia *slave*, a veces muy obediente. Busco *master* o amigo varonil, activo, protector, bien dotado, para relación estable con sexo seguro” [30, 1, 73, 60, Latino type, good body, slave tendency, sometimes very obedient. I am looking for a teacher or manly friend, active, protective, well endowed, for a stable relationship with safe sex] (*Amor* 46). One of his major concerns while drafting the ad is that he does not want someone inexperienced to harm him. “Porque una vez atado quedaría totalmente indefenso: podrían tenerme secuestrado todo el tiempo que quisieran, podrían perforarme, quemarme, tatuarme, afeitarme la cabeza y al final matarme” [Because once tied up I would be totally defenseless: they could keep me kidnapped for as long as they wanted, they could pierce me, burn me, tattoo me, shave my head and in the end kill me] (*Amor* 48). The reader may wonder: Why is the hero concerned that someone would do the very things he fantasizes about? Is this just a moment of irony in the writing? It is not. The Old Guard built ethical leathersexuality upon the motto: *safe, sane, and consensual practice*. They built the power dynamics of the play upon a foundation of mutual trust. Those who are truly sadistic, uninitiated, inexperienced, or curious could cause real physical harm if not properly trained in the art of pain-pleasure stimulation. Despite progress in the late-1990s toward destigmatizing leathersexuality in the Global North, Pérez faces the dangerous reality of 1996 Buenos Aires. What is that reality? The answer is complex, especially when we consider he is HIV positive and seeks a type of Master that in 1996 is nearly impossible to find.

Before the AIDS pandemic, gay leathersexuality enjoyed several decades of uninhibited erotic encounters. Very few worried about the exchange of bodily fluids since the advent of penicillin and other antibiotics led to effective cures for bacterial STDs. The public perception was that the illnesses resulting from STD infections like syphilis and gonorrhea were not the threats

they used to be so, men who had sex with men frequently engaged in raw unprotected penetration of the anus and mouth, discharging their semen into either orifice. Most gay sadomasochists and fetishists who practiced flogging or fisting that resulted in bloodletting never considered using latex gloves, splash shields, or dental dams. Skin on skin was always the preferred mode of contact. In 1972, leather Master Larry Townsend published *The Leatherman's Handbook* which offered an inside look into the Old Guard leathermen culture, initial scenes, basic equipment, fetish fantasies, and the variety of specialties a devotee can master. The first cases of what would later be labeled AIDS began to appear in the early 1980s. Once HIV was identified, it quickly became clear to scientists investigating the disease that bodily fluids were the primary vector of transmission. Activist in the politically empowered LGBT community quickly responded to the knowledge with safe sex advertising campaigns, but the information did not spread as quickly as it should have. Ignorance around HIV/AIDS was widespread, and fear governed the behavior of acolytes and initiates. When Townsend's first edition sold out, he offered an update in the preface of the second edition in 1983 that referred to the AIDS crisis as GRID, which stands for Gay Related Immunodeficiency Disease, with a discussion about KS, which was the most common manifestation of the mysterious new disease. Since the condition was so new, he did not know how to advise devotees on protective measures. The 1988 edition contains modifications to the ritual practices that incorporate advice based on the new restrictions of "safe sex." According to Townsend "safe sex" was better than "no sex at all." Townsend believes that fantasies require, as we have seen with the case of Sade's admonishments, lots of details that "permit the reader a full range of mental images, even (or especially) if these images exceed the limits of the practices that are considered safe from the standpoint of minimizing one's chances of contracting the AIDS virus" (Townsend vii). Not everyone can go home with someone who looks like a Tom of Finland

leatherman. Therefore, when Townsend performs a safer sex AIDS update to the book, he retains the stories and vignettes, but adds comments before and after, wherever they seemed appropriate to him and his publisher *Carlyle Communications* in Canada. The preface to the 1988 edition contains a list of six general rules for devotees to follow that are meant to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. The application of safe sex guidelines to what Townsend originally published in 1972 are like another cage that constrains the animal instincts of the beasts in the jungle that used to roam free, unfettered by concerns over bodily fluids. At the outset of *Un año sin amor*, Pérez is aware of the safe sex guidelines as we can see signaled in the phrase “sexo seguro” in his *NX* magazine ad we saw above. Being HIV positive and a practitioner of BDSM is doubly stigmatic. Advertising safe sex in his ad communicates that he is an ethical and conscientious practitioner of radical sexuality.

Mark Thompson, who was once senior editor of *Advocate* magazine and editor of the anthology *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice* (1991), explains in his introduction that early in the HIV/AIDS crisis “moral revisionists propagated the belief that men into leather were in some way responsible for AIDS; the perceived excesses of radical sexuality, in this case, were seen to equal death.” There is no denying that leathersexuality both attracts and repels those who do not understand it. Perhaps the reproach of BDSM stems from a lack of understanding about its nuances, power dynamics, and ritual practices. Or, perhaps for some it is the other related fetishes involving bodily fluids, which make the interaction of viral bodies and the dangers of contagion seem like a terrible accident from which they cannot tear their attention away, making it is simultaneously revolting and intriguing. Those who look upon BDSM with disgust often feel the impulse to stigmatize, marginalize, and even act with hostility toward its devotees. Martha Nussbaum in *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (2004) argues

that “disgust embodies a shrinking from contamination that is associated with the human desire to be nonanimal, it is frequently hooked up with various forms of shady social practice, in which the discomfort people feel over the fact of having an animal body is projected onto vulnerable people and groups” (72). When Pérez first meets the two men who become his leather masters in Buenos Aires, he proceeds with caution, in part because of the perception that radical sexuality will lead to violent harm or death, but also because of historical antecedents in the Global South related to homosexuality. Not only is his present in late-1990s Argentina haunted by the viral specter of AIDS, but it was also haunted by the real and deadly specter of the biopolitical power that has had homosexuality in its crosshairs for centuries.

The Argentine sociologist, activist, and poet Néstor Perlongher described what Argentine homosexuals faced during a 1984 presentation called “El sexo de las locas” at a conference at the Centro de Estudios y Asistencia Sexual (CEAS) in Argentina. The presentation was first published in *Porteño* magazine, later republished in *Prosa plebeya* (1996), and then translated to English and published in *Plebian Prose* (2019). Perlongher states:

To talk about homosexuality in Argentina is to talk not only about pleasure but also about terror. The kidnappings, torture, robberies, incarceration, public ridicule, and disgrace that subjects considered to be ‘homosexuals’ have traditionally suffered in Argentina—*where harassing fags is a popular sport*—predates, and perhaps helps explain, the last dictatorship’s genocide (21 emphasis mine).

The apprehension Pérez expresses about what could happen if he were to submit his body to a man in Argentina that he does not know, in the same way he does to his BDSM masters who he has learned to trust, echoes almost word for word what Perlongher said twelve years earlier. Coming out as a submissive BDSM slave in 1996 Argentina, *where harassing fags is still a sport*, is a radical step in his leathersexuality, and our hero must proceed with caution.

Mark Thompson further states in his introduction that when a person admits to their interest in BDSM, they experience the world in a new light. They see that their safe, sane, and consensual

practices, which the outside world deems savage, animalistic, and perverse are not a plague that facilitates the transmission of AIDS, but as Thompson explains, “Leatherfolk looking at the brutal acts of dominance and submission that are carried out in America every day, know that in such rapacious and *nonconsensual acts* lay the real sadomasochism that plagues our time.” Whether through exclusion by others or through self-exile, Thompson sees practitioners of leathersexuality as *deported* to a place of existence where what happens is unspoken, where silent actions speak louder than words. As the world seeks to contain human sexuality in some faraway place, out of sight and out of mind, erotic discovery and experimentation has become the most salient aspect of gay life. Gays are adept explorers and innovators of sexuality. Thompson asserts, “Leatherfolk are the most expert investigators of eros of all.” Although Pérez references neither writer directly in his novels, the narration reflects a keen awareness of the conundrums that Perlongher and Thompson discuss. Pérez’s instincts, sharpened through his initiation into leathersexuality, with specialized knowledge from that faraway place that Thompson refers to, and the commitment to practice safe sex, are why he takes a long time to craft his first ad. The other reason is that the hardness of leathersexuality is not the entirety of who he is. He also has a softer side, one that dreams in poetry and longs for a spiritual dimension to his existence. So, as we trace the arc of our hero’s character in the following sections of this chapter, we find various things change in Pablo Pérez’s life. The love that eludes him materializes in unexpected ways after he meets *el mendigo chupapijas*.

Self-referential Autofiction and the Novelistic “I” in the Life Writing of “Pablo Pérez”

Pérez’s novels are “self-referential.” Not only does the author refer to his work using this adjective, but the term is defined in several dictionaries as *making a reference to itself or oneself*, such as an author or creator might do in a work of art, like a self-portrait or literature. It can refer

to a variety of genres and media that narrate a self in first-person and either reference or are based on the lived experiences of the authors or creators who narrate them. These works of art mimetically reproduce the lives of their creators using carefully crafted narrative representations. As I am focused on the narratives of Pablo Pérez in this chapter, I assert they are situated ambiguously between the autobiographical and the fictional. His writing presents objective facts within fictionalized situations to reveal the fragility of existential subjectivity in the murky waters of the symbolic relationship between language and subject. When we consider self-referential first-person life narratives, we include autobiography, diary, and memoirs, but also other experimental first-person fictional narratives. No matter how authentic and truthful their authors desire to make them, they are incapable of transmitting the unvarnished reality of the author as the protagonist of the story. We access reality not through a mirror, but through a filter. Writing for the *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction* (2019), Claudia Gronemann explains, “The referential self conceives of itself—in the fabric of the text—as part of a fiction, because no author can claim to know the real meaning of his or her [and their] own story” (245). All writing fashions a self, using a myriad of narrative technologies. This chapter began with a brief discussion addressing the use of first-person in Pérez’s works and the questions of authority and subjectivity in the narrative. Should we consider them autobiographical texts? What kind of subjectivity is being embodied in the narrative? This section delves deeper into the following questions, because as I have argued above, autofiction is the best lens through which to apprehend these narratives.

If we (I and my reader) consider an autobiography, we understand the “I” to be the author/narrator, and the “you” the “we” of those who read it. Now, if we consider a third-person fictional novel, the narrator rarely uses the “I,” but rather places it in the service of the speech acts of the character being quoted in the text. In a novel, there is no “I-you” coupling of author and

reader to speak of—or so it may seem. Explanations about the communication that occurs between the author, work, and reader often hinge on whether the discourse in the text is referential or fictional. But what if the work is both at the same time? Can it be both at the same time? In the postmodern era, the “autobiographical I” and the so called “third-person, omniscient, external narrator” have become hybridized, as authors purposefully resist and subvert the carefully established boundaries articulated by academics who quarantine the speech-genres they study. Pablo Pérez is an author who contaminates those imagined borders.

According to the French linguist Emmanuelle Prak-Derrington in her 2022 study “L’hybridité du Je romanesque” published in *Cahiers de praxématique*, “La notion de dialogisme a été créée et pensée, à l’origine, pour le roman” [the notion of dialogism was originally created and thought out for the novel] (1). Since the works of Bakhtin have been translated to French and English, many scholars have embraced his theories which sustain the novel to be plurilingual, multivocal, polyphonic, and the syncretic expression of heteroglossia. In the postmodern era, we have witnessed a surge of narratives that use the first-person as a pretense, what Prak-Derrington regards as “une forme particulière de fiction” [a particular form of fiction] (5); narratives that deploy what she calls a “feigned I” in novels and in autobiographies and related works. Her affinity for personal narratives motivates her study since she observes a gap in knowledge in both narratological and linguistic approaches to the reciprocal relationship of author and reader.

Le je de feintise se définit par sa bi-dimensionnalité, son «hybridité» constitutive. Cette hybridité (la feintise n’est ni réelle, ni fictive, mais les deux en même temps) est aujourd’hui largement exploitée au cinéma et à la télévision, où elle se décline en «docufiction», en «biopic», en «téléréalité», ou encore en séries sur les faits divers, etc. Mais bien avant ces formes, le roman avait donné à l’hybridité du «Je» de multiples avatars. À ses origines, sa prétention à «faire vrai» coïncide avec l’essor du roman, genre roturier qu’il s’efforce de légitimer en y important des formes non fictionnelles: journaux, lettres, mémoires, etc. (Prak-Derrington, 1997).

[The feigned I is defined by its two-dimensionality, its constitutive “hybridity”. This hybridity (the pretense is neither real nor fictitious, but both at the same time) is widely exploited today in cinema and television, where it is declined in “docufiction,” “biopic,” and “reality TV”, or even in series on news items, etc. But long before these forms, the novel had given the hybridity of the “I” multiple avatars. At its origins, its claim to “make it true” coincides with the rise of the novel, a common genre that it strives to legitimize by importing nonfictional forms into it: diaries, letters, memoirs, etc.] (Prak-Derrington, 1997)

Prak-Derrington argues for what she calls the “novelistic I,” to contest classic designations such as “homodiegetic narrator,” “first-person narrator,” and so on. She uses the adjective “novelistic” not only for its generic value, “mais il doit évoquer ici aussi, sans aucune péjoration, la faculté d’imagination mise en branle par l’acte d’écriture et l’acte de lecture d’un roman” [but it must also evoke here, with no pejoration, the faculty of imagination set in motion by the act of writing and the act of reading a novel] (4-5) The “novelistic I” overcomes the contradiction between autobiography and fiction “parce qu’il met en scène un Je-Origine caractérisé comme authentique, référentiel, non fictionnel, autobiographique, témoin, etc., brouille constitutivement les frontières entre réalité et imagination. Les modalités varient, la porosité des frontières autorisée par l’ambiguïté du déictique n’est jamais abolie” [because it stages an I-Origin characterized as authentic, referential, non-fictional, autobiographical, witness, etc., constitutively blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination. The modalities vary. They do not abolish the porosity of the borders allowed by the ambiguity of the deictic] (5). Deictic refers to how words or expressions denote contextually dependent meaning, such as here, you, me, that one, there, or next week—words or phrases that refer to a specific time, place, or person in context.

According to Prak-Derrington, the “novelistic I” is at work when narrators break the fourth wall, so to speak, and directly address the reader in what we often refer to as an “author’s intrusion” into the narrative.

Mais il n'est nullement besoin de dire «Tu» ou «Vous» pour brouiller la frontière entre fiction et réalité, et se transporter de plain-pied de l'autre côté de la vie. Il suffit de dire «Je» et que ce «Je» soit imaginé... La vie devient roman! Auteur et lecteur quittent, en toute discrétion, les rangs des spectateurs pour rejoindre la scène et y accomplir leur métamorphose.

[But there is no need to say "You" or "You" to blur the line between fiction and reality, and to move straight to the other side of life. Just say "I" and let this "I" be imagined... Life becomes a novel! Author and reader discreetly leave the ranks of the spectators to join the stage and accomplish their metamorphosis there.] (Prak-Derrington 8)

The “feigned I,” or “novelistic I,” promotes the reader to the position of main addressee in the dialogue with the author.

Readers access Pablo Pérez's life through the novelistic “I”. The “I” in first-person narrative gives the reader the sense that the narrator is the author of the writing and the main character in the story. The first-person narrative voice creates a profound intimacy between writer/narrator and reader. Readers also access him in interviews published in newspapers and magazines. Pérez divulged during our interview some of the questions he struggled with as the writing progressed. He could not decide if he wanted to include his name in the text or not, if he wanted to draw attention to himself in such a direct way, to reveal his sexuality, his economic precarity, and his HIV status in his first novel. When he set himself the task of writing using a self-referential mode and including several intimate details from his life, he had no idea what the fall out of such a move would be. Nearly a decade later, the release of his second novel and the film adaptation *Un año sin amor* made his life even more notorious. As his readers and viewers saw themselves reflected in the life experiences he narrated, their promotion to the “you” of the main addressee gradually allowed his “I” to become a “we.” His readers and spectators imagined themselves a part of that “we.” During my interview, Pablo Pérez was very clear about his intentions at the start when he sat down to write the first book. He wanted to create a novel that was self-referential. The decision to format the novel as a diary, to use his real name for the

protagonist of the story, and to include many details about his life that some would consider salacious were conscious choices he made because he wanted the work to serve as an anthropological document about a person living with HIV and practicing sadomasochism at a specific time in Buenos Aires. The story in *Un año sin amor* reflects a time in Argentine history just before the internet and the so-called “AIDS drug cocktail” transformed the way homosexual men interacted, going from *NX* magazine to cellphones with internet, WhatsApp, Facebook, Grindr, and ManHunt. Nevertheless, when Pérez’s writing was released, publishers, critics, readers, interviewers, and publicists all considered his work to be autobiographical, or at the very least, testimonial.

Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* (1989) recognizes that autobiography is an irritatingly difficult genre to grasp tightly since the complex definitions put forth by scholars often rely on nuances to distinguish one generic classification from another. While seeking to establish a distinctive definition and defending a genre which many scholars have considered autobiography between 1770 to 1970, Lejeune offers the following definition: “Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual *life*, in particular the story of his personality” (4, emphasis mine). When autobiography began being discussed in the nineteenth century, it was regarded as a sort of ‘authentic’ historiography, wherein the author who wrote the work reports and describes events that really happened in their life. Despite all the effort in literary criticism to kill off the author, we now know that it is naïve to assume that an autobiography is ‘true’ or ‘truthful’ and, by the same token, it is impossible to deny that any text, fictional or otherwise, has absolutely nothing to do with the author. Memory is fallible. Humans are narcissists. Neutrality and pure objectivity in the fashioning of a veridically authentic self in literature is at best a myth. These concepts have been discussed extensively since

the 1960s. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf in the *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction* (2019) explains that our understanding of autobiography is “closely connected with the core features of literature itself” (1). “The ways in which a literary text refers to ‘reality’ represents one of the most discussed problems in the study of literature and refers back to Aristotle’s notion of μίμησις [mimesis] and his discussion about imitation and representation” (Wagner-Egelhaaf 1). Therefore, any discussion of autobiography, or literature in general, deals with the concept of “referentiality,” and when that literature represents a self that signals the autobiographical pact, it becomes a self-referential act.

When considering Pérez’s writing, it is easy for the reader to assume that, because the name of the protagonist is the same as the author who writes the text, the writing represents an authentic account of the author’s life. As I mentioned earlier, the first novel *Un año sin amor* presented as a diary, creates the perception of intimacy. The same is true in the case of the third novel *Querido Nicolás*, presented in the form of personal correspondence—letters written by the author in Paris and Madrid to his friend Nicolás in Buenos Aires. The second novel *El mendigo chupapijas* is more complex because of its refusal to settle into any one single mode of writing. Of the three it contains all the generic elements I listed in the previous paragraph and alternates between the novelistic “I” and third-person omniscient narrative voices. All three novels are written from a retrospective point of view so, in this sense, reflect Lejeune’s autobiographical pact. Even so, Pérez both leverages and subverts this pact to produce writing that blurs the lines between generic boundaries. I argue that Pérez’s novels are simulations of such genres and therefore should be read as autofiction, understood as fictionalized autobiography—containing nuggets of truth alongside carefully constructed verisimilar fiction. The author uses a variety of genres to create a unique

experience for readers. Therefore, autobiography is an inadequate term to use when discussing Pérez's writing.

Another appropriate term to use when discussing it is "life writing," promoted by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2000). They see it as an alternative way of approaching and interpreting autobiography. Their theorization is based, in part, on the work of Lejeune, but emphasize that his work expands upon British poet Stephen Spender's dictionary definition which states that autobiography is "the story of one's life written by himself" (quoted in Smith and Watson 115). They claim that "autobiography" is an inadequate term for postmodern and postcolonial theorists who study other lesser kinds of life narratives which have been unrecognized or refused canonization (Smith and Watson 4). They affirm that writing a life narrative is not simply the recording of personal experience; rather, it represents *the practice of self-referential writing*, thus it is important to make a distinction "between autobiographical writing and closely related kinds of life writing," because "the writer *becomes*, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation" (Smith and Watson 1, emphasis mine). The term "life narratives," thus, is more expansive since it includes all the modes and genres through which writers write about their lives. It also accounts for the *coming into being of the self* in the narrative progression, while capturing the complexity that arises from the fact that while autobiography claims to be factual and seeks to tell the story of a veridical person, the writing is ultimately a form of textual self-fashioning. Critics increasingly consider autobiography to be practically synonymous with life writing since both blur generic borders. When authors knowingly subvert the expectations of the autobiographical pact, readers and critics experience epistemological anxiety and grasp for new terms to explain the phenomena so as not to muddy established

terminological definitions. Terms like self-referential, and the neologism “autofiction,” help us to assuage the anxiety created when mediating between what is perceived as both fact and fiction in life writing. Now let us look at one example from *Un año sin amor* so we can see how Pérez both leverages and subverts the autobiographical pact to produce autofiction.

In *Un año sin amor*, Pérez introduces his aunt using the name Nefertiti, which he shortens to Nefritis, when the manic movements of her presence in the apartment, owned by his father, which they share, annoy him. The nickname is a bit of sarcasm that refers to a joke about a kidney infection often contracted sexually. The aunt’s real name is nowhere to be found. Pérez eschews her identity, not to avoid a lawsuit per se, but to use the fictionalized name of his aunt to introduce the self-referentiality of his last name in the text. He thus simulates the autobiographical pact that leads readers to expect authenticity. Even though the text is in first-person, with the narrator Pablo Pérez writing to his diary and pouring his heart out, on the surface the text may seem monologic, reflecting his singular point of view. Through his singular narrative voice, he ventriloquizes a plurality of different voices with unique realities—in the diary entry I examine below, his aunt’s perspective stands out the most, but we can also observe those of other members of his family. Notice how he masterfully blurs fact (his last name Pérez) and fiction (the animalized rantings of his aunt who suffers hair loss) in the first diary entry of *Un año sin amor* marked Saturday, February 17th. I quote the entry in its entirety to underscore several points of analysis that will follow. Also, we can appreciate the bulging of discourse in the long sentences given the *neobarrosa* aesthetic at work. Notice how, from the first sentence, writing becomes the existential imperative establishing the subjectivity of the self in the “I” of the text.

Tengo que escribir. Hace tiempo que nadie me llama, hace tiempo que no escribo y cuando me siento a escribir siempre interrumpe algún inoportuno. Pero eso es una simple trampa, me siento en un simulador de escritura para estimular a la campanilla del teléfono. Digo bien, campanilla: tengo un viejo teléfono que no me

permite acceder a muchos de los nuevos servicios de Telefónica porque no tiene teclas, un viejo teléfono a disco. Lo que sí tengo es un contestador automático, que en realidad no es mío, es de mi tía Nefertiti, a la que en la intimidad de mis escritos me atrevo a llamar Nefritis, según me sienta o no molesto con su presencia. Tiene la manía de pasar entre la tele y yo (la caprichosa TV blanco y negro también es de ella), saltarina como una cabra muda a veces, otras como una cabra charlatana, siempre sacando de su memoria genética algunos pasitos de ballet, ya que dice que no es hija de mi abuelo, ordenanza en una compañía de seguros, sino de un vecino de la pensión donde vivía cuando era chica, director de orquesta. Según Nefritis la abuela le ponía los cuernos a Pérez (así lo llama ella), lo que me extrañaría, pero en fin, dejémosla sonar con una familia más "real". No me cabe ninguna duda de que "Pérez" si es mi abuelo, mi padre es su vivo retrato y es más: cuando era chico me los confundía en las fotos, videnciando la creciente calvicie de mi padre que más tarde trataría de revertir recomendándole tisanas alopécicas que termine usando yo, por temor a que fuera hereditaria. Ahora que lo pienso, el hipotético padre director de orquesta de mi tía también debió ser calvo, ya que Nefritis pierde pelos por toda la casa y yo los encuentro en mi cepillo de dientes, enroscados en los tenedores como espaguetis o adentro de la mayonesa.

[I must write. It's been a long time since anyone's called me, I haven't written in a long time and when I sit down to write something inopportune always interrupts. But that's just a simple trap, I feel as though I am in a writing simulator to stimulate the phone's ringtone. Better said, bell: I have an old telephone that does not allow me to access many of the new services of modern telephony because it does not have keys, it's an old rotary telephone. What I do have is an answering machine, which is not really mine, it belongs to my aunt Nefertiti, who in the privacy of my writings I dare to call Nephritis, depending on whether I feel annoyed by her presence or not. She has a habit of passing between me and the TV (the whimsical black and white TV is also hers), jumping like a mute goat at times, other times like a talkative goat, always drawing from her genetic memory some little ballet steps, since she says that she is not the daughter of my grandfather, an orderly in an insurance company, but of a neighbor from the boarding house where she lived when she was a girl, an orchestra director. According to Nephritis, my grandmother cheated on Pérez (that's what she calls him), which would surprise me about her, but anyway, let's let her dream of a more "real" family. I have no doubt that "Pérez" is my grandfather, my father is his spitting image and what's more: when I was a boy I confused them in the photos, seeing my father's growing baldness that she would later try to reverse by recommending alopecic herbal teas that I ended up using, for fear that it was hereditary. Come to think of it, my aunt's hypothetical bandleader father must have been bald as well, since Nephritis loses hair all over the house and I find it on my toothbrush, curled around my forks like spaghetti, or inside my mayonnaise.] (*Amor* 11-12)

Pablo Pérez's name appears on the cover of the novel as the author, his name also appears in the text and he is the narrator, three elements that seem to conform to the requirements of Lejeune's

autobiographical pact. The intentional blurring of the referential and fictional occurs when the diary entry reveals that the narrator's grandfather's last name is Pérez through the aunt's fantastical claim that her mother had an affair with a neighbor who is her "real" father. Using the grandfather to anchor the last name in the past recalls Lacan's ideas about the symbolic ordering of the father and reveals the aunt's subversion of his patriarchal legislative authority. The autobiographical pact is activated when the reader realizes that the first-person narrator's last name is the same as the author. The diary entry also reveals some uncomfortable things about the Pérez family, intimate details (matrimonial infidelity, hereditary baldness, and mental illness) that could trigger an angry backlash (an angry backlash occurs for Pablo Pérez in the second novel when his aunt reads the published diary novel) cleverly camouflaged in the rantings of an aunt who very well may suffer from a kind of bipolar disorder. We surmise her condition based on the narrator's description of his aunt as a frenetic ballet dancing goat, mute at one moment and babbling the next. Naming her as Nefertiti and Nefritis creates the fictional distance the author needs to bear his soul while the forces interfering with his ability to write foreshadow the inner exile and fragility of a self that can only be constructed within the literariness of a fictionally constructed world. The fragility of the self is underscored by the claim that the narrator feels as though he is trapped in a writing simulation mediated by technology. The narrator's affirmation that he has no doubt whatsoever he is a "Pérez," the singular name his aunt uses to refer to her "fake" father, ironically lends weight to his claim of authenticity. Who else but an authentic grandson would worry about inheriting generational baldness? Granted this is a diary entry which, as discussed earlier, we are reading as a novel. However, it does seem as though we may have a case of a so called "author intrusion" in the sentence about the aunt dreaming of a "real" family through the verb "dejémosla" [let us allow her]. Who is this "us"? Is it the diary? Is he speaking to himself? Is it the invoked reader or the

real, flesh and blood, reader who purchases his novel? No matter how we choose to answer this mystery, here we have a clear example of how the “novelistic I” expressed through the deictic “us” opens the text to a dialogic reading and an encounter with the polyphony of consciousnesses coactively constructing meaning while the reader participates with the author in the communication.

The fact that his father is his grandfather’s spitting image (a likeness the narrator often confuses in photographs) and the description of his aunt’s hair loss (casting doubt on her version reality by claiming that her presumed father must have been bald as well) represent perhaps an excessive embellishment of an already established but tenuous identity. The narrator is somewhat obsessively constructing the self in the text. This excess of discursive representation is characteristic of the Argentine *neobarrosa* aesthetic theorized by Néstor Perlongher in *Prosa plebeya* (1996), which he claims deploys a bulging of language and a veering into grotesque rhetoric. We see this occur with the discussion of spaghetti and the mention his aunt’s hair spooling around the tines of the fork. Many words are used to describe something that could be stated simply. We not only see the bulging effect in his recourse to claim the name of his grandfather, but also in the lengthy run-on, stream of consciousness, sentences, as well. Pérez’s existential imperative “I must write,” coupled with the telephone interruptions and the sensation that his writing is a simulation underscore what I would like to call a paradox in his subjectivity. He is caught in a trap, the predicament I referred to above in the introduction of this chapter. Besides experiencing orgasms, writing gives him life, but his life is interrupted by events that keep him from writing, that keep him from living. Between these opposing forces his agency seems paralyzed, a paralysis underscored by a lack of access to the technologies that offer a connection to the modern world where the self longs to be presented as real and authentic. The camouflaged

claim to authentic subjectivity replicates the schism between the illusion of truthfulness in the autobiographical pact and its symbolic representation in the autobiographical performance that is autofiction. This masterful manipulation of the autobiographical pact renders a so-called version of the self, “Pablo Pérez.” Now let me turn to the question of subjectivity, and how the novel is an homage to another French writer who suffered with AIDS, but lost his battle, unlike Pérez, who survives.

The self that Pérez presents in the diary entry of February 19th is living with a tremendous interruption in his life that according to him is a poison that keeps him from writing and will eventually make him disappear. It is in this diary entry that we get the earliest glimpse of the inner exile he suffers because of the lack of familial love and nurturing in his life. The inner exile is just as deadly as the poison since one disappears his mind while the other disappears his body. The two together will lead to annihilation and oblivion, so writing the diary became the way for the self to survive. In this second diary entry, he expresses hope that by revealing himself in the writing and confessing the wreckage of a family “que parece no darse cuenta de nada de lo que me pasa” [that doesn’t seem to notice what is happening to me] (*Amor* 13), he will someday experience a renaissance—a new Golden Age where he can be happy and transmit optimism. We infer that the disease ravaging his body is AIDS, and that Pérez is HIV positive, based on several things he reveals. “No me interesa tomar AZT para llegar vivo” [I’m not interested in taking AZT to stay alive] (*Amor* 13). AZT was the first pharmaceutical drug offered to those suffering from the viral infection. “Vivo en un mundo en el que cada vez más, los padres entierran a los hijos” [I live in a world that each day more parents bury their children] (*Amor* 13). Many of those who perished in the first two decades of the pandemic were young. “Tenía 360 CD4 y según los médicos de Infectología de este hospital tenía que tomarlo” [I had a CD4 of 360 and according to the infectious

disease specialists at the hospital, I had to take it] (*Amor* 15). The CD4 counts the white blood cells, the so called “generals” of the immune system. Counts between 600 and 2000 are considered normal. A count of 360 signals a body that is hovering just above the clinical definition of AIDS (250 or less). Defining AIDS for many in the medical establishment is a numbers game, but for those who have the virus, the numbers are a matter of life and death. The precarious presentation of the self, still alive yet facing an imminent death, is the autobiographical space with which the Argentine scholar Alberto Giordano clearly wrestled while analyzing Pablo Pérez’s first novel. Giordano, one of the first scholars to critically consider Pérez’s work, identifies a new form of subjectivity—a subjectivity that interests me the most as we regard Pérez’s novel as a uniquely Latin American form of French autofiction.

In an essay published in 2005, shortly after the release of the novel’s film adaptation, Giordano compares *Un año sin amor* with two autofictional novels by the French author, photographer, and cinematographer Hervé Guibert *À l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie* (1990) and *Le protocole compassionnel* (1991). Perhaps unwilling to consider the term autofiction, Giordano locates their hybridity within “un género de narraciones autobiográficas del SIDA de la década de 1990” [a genre of autobiographical narrations about AIDS in the decade of the 1990s] (41). Both authors tell stories about HIV positive protagonists facing death through diary entries, but Giordano recognizes two important historical moments during the decade, one fatal and the other new, when the disease becomes a manageable, chronic condition. Although Giordano sees nothing radical about both authors representing themselves as infirmed, given that illness writing had already been a thematic concern for a while, he argues that a new type of subjectivity emerges within the texts—that of “el sobreviviente” or survivor. After more profound reflection, he sees two types of survivors: one who cannot deny that death is imminent and one who knows that he

must maintain continuous medical treatment of uncertain duration, but with death remaining a real possibility. Giordano also sees AIDS as a liberating experience for both types of survivors, “porque los condena a recordar la proximidad de la muerte, a una nueva realidad existencial en la que podrían revelarse formas de vivir inexploradas” [because it condemns them to remember the proximity of death, to a new existential reality in which unexplored ways of living could be revealed] (Giordano 42). The autofictional novels by Guibert and Pérez reveal numerous details about the previously unexplored ways of living unique to Paris and Buenos Aires. The two types of survivors are historically situated, one before and the other after the announcement in 1996 Vancouver, Canada, of HAART (Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy) also known as the “drug cocktail”—a truly revolutionary therapy which has restored hope of survival to millions of people around the world. To mark the before and after in terms of subjectivity, Giordano refers to two modes of representation: the first as “representación” [representation] to signal those “condenados a muerte” [condemned to death] and the second as “autorrepresentación” [self-representation] to signal those who are “portadores de un virus que les impone un cuidado continuo de sí mismos pero que no les fija, necesariamente, un término a sus existencias” [carriers of a virus that imposes continuous self-care but does not necessarily set an end to their existence] (Giordano 42). The two terms Giordano proposes to distinguish the two subjectivities are not labels that directly reflect how Lejeune describes autobiography, but they seem to acknowledge self-representational modes, which Smith and Watson include in their term life writing.

Guibert’s novels are squarely in Giordano’s mode of “representación,” and they also align with Lejeune’s definition of autobiography, since Guibert is the author, narrator, and protagonist who tells the story of the irreversible deterioration of his body and the inevitable end of his life. Giordano notes that the certainty of the fatal outcome is what leads Guibert to exclaim “*condamné*,

en route vers tomb, inéluctablement” [condemned, unavoidably, on the way to the tomb] (*Le protocole* 19). As Giordano puts it, Guibert is the walking cadaver that haunts the streets of Paris; the certainty of his proximity to his disappearance governs his entire story in every sense (Giordano 42). Moreover, Guibert’s outcome proves fatal when he passes away in December of 1991, not long after the publication of *Le protocole compassionnel*, Guibert’s second novel about AIDS. Pablo Pérez in *Un año sin amor*, on the other hand, does not die, not in the diary nor in the aftermath of its publication. He continues to live, since he begins treatment with the “drug cocktail.” According to Giordano’s survivor subjectivity theorization, Pérez’s diary is in the mode of “autorepresentación” because it registers two specific moments in the diary entries—one toward the beginning where he writes, “no pasaré de este año” [I will not survive the year] (*Amor* 40) and the other toward the end where he writes, “a fin de año más vivo que nunca” [at year’s end I live more than ever] (*Amor* 130). To be clear, Giordano utilizes the modes of self-representation to signal two different forms of existence—those consigned to die and those consigned to live under threat of death. Consignation is the main thematic concern of Giordano’s essay. The second mode, “autorrepresentación,” refers to someone whose death sentence has been somewhat commuted. I do not think it necessary to quibble about the subtle differences between self-referential and self-representation except to say that both are modes of constructing a self in the text. Perhaps one of the two is more liberated from adherence to the expectations of the autobiographical pact. We shall see in the next few paragraphs why I continue to insist that these novels be regarded as autofiction.

Guibert tested positive for HIV in 1988 and died from AIDS related complications in December 1991 shortly after his 36th birthday. Both books have been translated to English, *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (1993) by Linda Cloverdale and *The Compassion Protocol* (1994) by James Kirkup. A new edition of *To the Friend* was released in 2020 by *Semiotext(e)*, an

independent press well known for introducing French theory to American readers. The new edition of the diary became the occasion for literary critics to weigh in on Guibert's contribution to illness writing and AIDS literature. Aside from revealing intimate details about his struggle with the debilitating effects of the virus, through the fictionalized portrayal of a character named Muzil in the first novel, Guibert reveals that the French philosopher and close friend Michel Foucault did not die in 1984 from cancer, as reported in the French press, but from AIDS related complications. Guibert also "outs" Michel Foucault as a sadomasochist. The revelation sent shock waves around the world. Back in 1984, death from AIDS was shrouded in silence and ignorance. Guibert ripped the shroud to shreds by divulging and circulating closely guarded secrets. Some critics look back on the revelation as a betrayal. However, the painful truth proved revolutionary for those living in the precarious shadow of the epidemic.

Julian Lucas reports in a September 2020 article for *New Yorker Magazine* that Guibert was "notorious for betraying secrets" and that he "justified the trespass as a prerogative of their shared destiny." Andrew Durbin in a June 2020 article for the *New York Review of Books* explains that after Guibert appeared on the French TV show *Apostrophe*, "Posters of his handsome face went up around Paris, transforming him into a symbol of the intense suffering of seropositive men and women at the time." Charles Teyssou in an October 2020 article for the Italian magazine *Mousse* explains that after presenting the "intimate portrait of Michel Foucault," Guibert "played a significant role in changing public attitudes in France toward HIV and AIDS." Guibert's writing and the impact he had on the invisible global community of seropositive bodies seems to have resonated with Pablo Pérez as well. Perhaps this resonance is a major motivation behind the extensive transtextuality of the text.

In *Un año sin amor*, a fictionalized Guibert appears as Pérez's close friend and former lover whose diary he is translating from French to Spanish in collaboration with a friend known as Arturo. An answering machine message quoted in the diary entry from February 22nd suggests that if Pablo needs something to write about, he should keep a diary of his work on the translation which includes details about his personal experiences while translating. As I highlighted above in my introduction to this chapter, in the diary entry from the 19th of February, we can see that Pérez identifies strongly with Guibert. The use of Guibert's first name establishes the transtextual connection, one in which he conjures the contagious metaphor "caged lion" to reference a multiplicity of meanings. The metaphor is presented as a simile "*como un león enjaulado*" [like a caged lion] and underscores the existential angst of both survivors as they face the death sentence of HIV. The movement of the lion not only echoes those which Pérez attributes to his aunt Nefertiti who he compares to a goat, it is the contagious metaphor that motivates him to write about his life. By virtue of his experiences while studying in France, where he presumably contracted HIV, and his deteriorating health upon returning to Buenos Aires, the contagious metaphor disguised as a simile "like a caged lion" eschews the motivation to produce the diaristic novel. Not only was his body infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, but his mind was also infected with the animus to craft a transatlantic homage to Guibert's French autofiction by writing a similar novel of his own. Moreover, the diary entries in Pérez's novel achieve similar objectives in the Argentine context as Guibert's diary entries do in the French. They reveal in clinical detail how the disease affects the body and the mind. They humanize the suffering of the seropositive viral body and the effects of inner exile on the mind. The diary, the only one of its kind in Argentina, initially shocked the literary public. Before long, Pérez started receiving letters from readers throughout Latin America, who began thanking him for telling a story they could identify with.

Fantasy, Eroticism, Initiation, and Training – Leather Master Dreams Come True

Fantasy is a big part of sadomasochistic eroticism. It becomes even more important after the advent of HIV/AIDS, as we have seen from the changes in Larry Townsend's *The Leatherman's Handbook*, discussed earlier. Pablo Pérez expresses how he imagines an ideal dominant leather Master, who is like a daddy, in the diary entry of September 21st. The man of Pérez's dreams is like the ones he encountered outside Argentina, while he was in Paris.

En mi fantasía me encuentro con un hombre en moto, vestido de cuero, que me hace subir y me lleva abrazado a él por una ruta desértica hasta que llegamos a una casa abandonada. Me hace un *piercing* en la tetilla. Usa mi cuerpo como objeto de placer y a su vez me cuida como a un pequeño tesoro. Hace unos días vi un video que me calentó a tope en que el *master*, vestido con uniforme de cuero, mete dulcemente bolas de billar en el culo de su esclavo desnudo; a su vez lo besa y lo acaricia como si fuera un bebé. Después que el esclavo escupe las bolas de billar por su culo como una ballesta humana, el *master* lo premia cogiéndolo con su magnífica pija.

[In my fantasy I meet a man on a motorcycle, dressed in leather, who makes me get on and takes me with my arms wrapped around him along a desert road until we reach an abandoned house. He gives me a nipple piercing. He uses my body as an object of pleasure and in turn takes care of me like a little treasure. A few days ago, I saw a video that turned me on to the max, in which the master, dressed in a leather uniform, sweetly puts billiard balls in the ass of his naked slave; he in turn kisses him and caresses him as if he were a baby. After the slave spits the billiard balls out of his ass like a human crossbow, the master rewards him by fucking him with his magnificent cock.] (*Amor* 100)

In Pérez's description above, we can observe several of the stylistic elements of the Gay Leather style Bienvenu identifies. The leatherman on a motorcycle evokes Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. The film and the actor are the subjects of erotic fantasy for many gay men who long to be seduced by a dark and handsome prince in leather who whisks them away to a private location on their motorcycle—something like an erotic kidnapping fantasy where the dreamer is held hostage at an abandoned location. Pérez's fantasy also describes the pain-pleasure stimulation of the nipple through a piercing, not unlike the practices of the Kavadi Attam, a ceremonial sacrifice where

devotees undergo ritual preparation to bear various types of burdens (kavadi) such as skewers piercing the skin, tongue, or cheeks; or they carry a cross-like structure (vel kavadi), often decorated with flowers and peacock feathers, balanced on their shoulders. Pérez also expresses a submission fantasy that imagines the body as a precious object to be used for the sexual gratification of his male captor. The idealized man is elevated to the status of master through the fantastic recollection of a pornographic video. Pérez desires to be the slave whose rectum is being loaded up like a pool table. There is even a bit of paraphilic infantilization as the master coddles his love object like an adult baby. The mention of the crossbow underscores the status of the love object as prey—the hunter’s prize.

As I mentioned in the chapter's introduction, Pérez is searching for love. The idealized man of his dreams is the type of man who will fulfil his erotic desires, stimulate the pain-pleasure responses of his nervous system, and provide him with the euphoria he seeks. As the symptoms of his HIV infection worsen and he becomes trapped in the labyrinthian medical establishment, his confrontation with what he perceives as certain death leads him to pursue alternative healing techniques, along with spiritual pursuits. His quest for love and erotic stimulation proceeds on two fronts. I call the first front organic and the second technologically mediated. The organic front is spontaneous happenstance. As I mentioned before, he meets men on the street, on a bus or train, in a park, in public bathrooms, at bars, and pornographic movie theaters. The motivation here is reactionary, visceral, action—what Pérez calls “puro salvajismo que me caracteriza” [pure savagery that characterizes me] (*Amor* 29). On the other front, because of the technological limitation of the time, he places cryptic ads in a local gay magazine *NX* (which stands for NEXO) and connects with men via a rotary dial telephone. The personal ads were a source of funding for a magazine that served a local cultural function in the larger LGBT community, and it provided a

safer place to connect with sexual partners. The ads allowed seekers to be more selective. Since the magazine limited an ad to 30 words, creating them required codification, allusion, and metaphor to zero in on the ideal partner. For those who fantasized about specific fetishes or were simply men who wanted to have sex with other men without investing in a homosexual identity, this was the least dangerous way at the time to meet and have a better chance of finding someone with more desirable physical and psychological characteristics.

Members of the local LGBT community founded *NX* magazine in Buenos Aires in 1993 with the slogan “Periodismo Gay Para Todos” [Gay Journalism for Everyone]. The magazine served as a space to build community and communicate information in the struggle for civil rights. Although the magazine is no longer published, the Biblioteca LGTBI Oscar Hermes Villordo (#ArchivoPIETRO) founded by Pietro Salemmé Silvert in 2009 in Hurlingham, Buenos Aires, preserves an archive of over forty thousand cultural artifacts, including over twelve thousand books, as well as VHS tapes, DVDs, cassettes, vinyl records, CDs. The library stores back issues of the magazine and makes them available for research. The name of the archive honors Oscar Hermes Villordo, an HIV positive novelist born in Machagai, Chaco, in 1928, who died from AIDS-related complications in 1994. Villordo’s stories featured various heroes and villains and addressed themes of homosexuality and marginalization. Alfredo Serra published an illuminating interview with Villordo, months before he died titled “Mientras Hermes se muere” (2017) in *Infobae*. In the interview, Villordo reveals how for the body with AIDS “se nos muere el sexo” [our sex dies]. Villordo does not mean erections but something more profound. “Es como si un telón negro y pesado cayera sobre el sexo, sus órganos, sus recuerdos, sus fantasías. Es... tabula rasa sobre la parte debajo de nuestro cuerpo” [It’s as if a black and heavy curtain descends upon our sex, our organs, our memories, our fantasies. It’s... tabula rasa above that lower part of our

body] (Quoted in Serra). The certainty of death in his case left the jouissance and materiality of his eroticism in darkness, no longer to give or receive pleasure, because society regards the body with AIDS as if it were guilty of having done something to cause it. “Algo habrá hecho” [You must have done something] (Quoted in Serra).

Although Villordo felt emptied of his sexual life at the end of his battle with AIDS, the library that bears his name preserves the materiality of gay Argentine history, desires, tastes, and passions. “Mundo indomito” by Antonio Capurro, a February 2017 *Revista Diversa* article states, “Aquí encontrarás tesoros insospechados en un tiempo de la historia gay argentina cuando la diversidad se mostraba pese a que el discurso oficial era otro” [Here you will find unsuspected treasures at a time in Argentine gay history when diversity was shown even though the official discourse was different]. A visit to the archive’s library and museum “es una seductora invitación a ver una vez más los cuerpos, las performances, las transgresiones, las disidencias, el erotismo y porno de una época, un tiempo, un momento con todas esas letras, imágenes y audiovisuales que no se fueron nunca y que están ahí para mostrarse” [is a seductive invitation to see once again the bodies, the performances, the transgressions, the dissidences, the eroticism and porn of an era, a time, a moment with all those letters, images and audiovisuals that never left and that are there to show] (Salemme). The article features a photograph of many cultural artifacts at the archive that includes action figures of superheroes, books, a piggy bank, lubricant, beef cake magazines, sex toys, poppers, photographs, tarot cards, and even a pictorial book by Tom of Finland, known for his drawing of hypermasculine archetypes of gay leathersexuality. From the cultural artifacts curated at this Argentine archive and Capurro’s interview with Salemme, we can appreciate how the Gay Leather style and a variety of popular cultural media influences from the Global North converge in the fantasies of Argentine homosexuals. The influences are also reflected in the

narration of Pérez's fantasies as a child, his sexual encounters with the men he meets through the magazine, and his efforts towards finding a leather Master. Pérez wants someone who could initiate and train him in the arts of the gay leathersexuality he first encounters in Europe, through his friends Lionel, Hervé (aka RV), Gilles and other men he meets at a gay leather club in Paris called MecZone.

Pérez meets two leather masters through *NX* magazine who help make his dreams come true, but after a while he discovers that something is terribly wrong with one of them. We need to keep in mind that by the mid-1990s, LGBT activists exerted tremendous pressure on the community to practice safe sex. We first learn of their existence in *Un año sin amor*, but in this novel Pérez does not offer an origin story about the men he characterizes as superheroes who nurture his erotic fantasies. The origin story of one of the men comes later in *El mendigo chupapijas*, where Pérez describes the developing relationship with the two leather masters, Pablo (also known as Comisario Báez) and José María (also known as the astrologer) in more exuberant detail. We also learn in the second novel that their sadomasochistic trio begins in March of 1995 after Pérez answers their ad in *NX*: “Pareja leather SM busca tercero interesado” [SM leather couple seeks interested third] (*Amor* 39). Pérez does not jump into a relationship with the same savage intensity he says characterizes him when he gets down to business with the strangers he meets, rather he takes his time over several months, asking Pablo and José María many questions, learning what he can about their gay leather SM practices. It is my contention and argument that Pérez underwent what I call a disidentified initiation, one carried out by Comisario Báez, a gay leather sadomasochist clone, practicing a rough trade detached from Old Guard traditions. I will come back to Comisario Báez in a section ahead, but first let me explain what I mean by rough trade, disidentification, and cloning.

Rough trade is a concept theorized by Hiram Pérez in *A Taste for Brown Bodies* (2015) as he examines how gay modernity became proliferated with cosmopolitan desire, by and for the bodies of men from what he calls a “trade class,” agents of “colonial deployments of vision,” predecessors “to the gay neoliberal citizen-subject” (3). He uses the word “trade” as defined by linguist Paul Baker who uses it to signify working class heterosexual men who have sex with other men but do not consider themselves to be gay or homosexual. Hiram Pérez focuses mainly on three archetypes of iconic masculinity—the soldier, sailor, and cowboy—because they “share a predisposition for nostalgia, as both subjects and objects of nostalgic desire” (7). Nostalgic desire is a component of erotic desire that looks to the past for stimulation to inspire the present and shape future body configurations. He points out that “queer scholarship has focused on these...personalities desired and ‘cloned’ through a complex of (dis)identifications” (7).

Disidentifications (1999) is a concept developed by José Esteban Muñoz to explain how sexual and racial outsiders (of the Global North) deal with dominant ideologies and cultural representations, transforming them for their own cultural purposes. He writes, “Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (Muñoz Introduction). Among the (dis)identified and “cloned” archetypes emerge the viral bodies of what Geoff Mains calls *Urban Aborigines* (1984) and Mark Thompson calls *Leatherfolk* (1991), leathermen who practice and celebrate leathersexuality, a subculture of homosexual BDSM.

Geoff Mains, who died from AIDS related complications, obtained a PhD in Biochemistry and in his essay “The Molecular Anatomy of Leather” promotes the idea of endorphins, opium-like chemicals in the central nervous system, as an important element in sadomasochistic sexuality.

Mark Thompson contends that BDSM, which once caused revulsion and cautious curiosity, has become appropriated by mass media and fashion. Leathermen and leatherwomen of the “Old Guard,” like Michel Foucault who died from AIDS related complication and was himself a sadomasochism constituent, were a niche within the emerging gay leather scene of the 1950s. The Old Guard was an avant-garde of the 1960s sexual revolutions in the United States and France. The practitioners of the Old Guard, who were still around in the 1990s and continued living into the twenty-first century, question the authenticity of style over substance. They are critical of how capitalism commodified the erotic capital of BDSM, turning the private practice of a few into an expansive lifestyle choice adopted by many. As Thompson put it, “the outer limits of yesterday transmogrified into the insider chic of tomorrow” (“Introduction”). The proletarian sexual nomad leather masters with whom our hero interacts are the urban aboriginal leatherfolk dressed for power, equipped with specialized knowledge and techniques, who initiated him into sadomasochistic ritual fetishes and practices of a Global North subculture they disidentify, clone, and transport to Buenos Aires.

Since the semantic design of both novels does not follow a linear temporal sequence, we must piece together our understanding of the relationship Pérez develops with these two men from the memory fragments expressed through flashbacks. For now, I am focusing on how the leather masters fulfill his fantasies and train him in their understanding of leathersexuality. The first fantasy fulfillment is narrated in the diary entry of October 20th, 1996, after Pérez recounts a high voltage session with Comisario Báez, which triggers the memory.

La primera fantasía mía que concreté con Pablo y Jose SM, fue la de tener un collar de perro: ellos me ponen a veces una cadena gruesa, otras un collar de cuero. [...] todavía quedan más fantasías por realizar sobre las que hablamos en nuestro primer encuentro: un *fist-fucking*, un *piercing*, que me metan el negrito en el culo, etcétera.

[The first fantasy of mine that I realized with Pablo and Jose SM was to have a dog collar: sometimes they put a thick chain on me, other times a leather collar. [...]]

there are still more fantasies to be carried out, the ones we talked about in our first meeting: a fist-fucking, a piercing, getting the black butt plug in my ass, and so on.] (*Amor* 111)

El negrito refers to an enormous black *godemiché*, a French word that denominates an artificial phallus which Pérez says fails to convey the semantic meaning of “comforter” in Spanish sense of the word that derives from the Latin *gaude mihi*, or *gaudere*, which means “gozar.” In modern leathersexuality, the godemiche is known as a giant dildo or “butt plug.” The first narrated fantasy demonstrates how Pérez begins to enjoy the use of BDSM fetish fashion accessories.

Another fantasy fulfilment is narrated in the diary entry of May 30th. We need to remember that May in Argentina is the fall season and cold temperatures return. On this day, gas service had temporarily become unavailable. He decided not to go to the Lenguas Vivas school, where he was studying to receive certification as a French teacher, since the night before he had an explosive session with his SM friends when they got together to celebrate Comisario Báez’s birthday. Pérez was relieved to see them since they had not met for months due to a conflict, which I will discuss in the next section. The night before began with champagne and... “José y Pablo vestidos de cuero y yo en sus brazos en medio de los dos era la realización de una de mis fantasías. No sé por qué me excita el cuero. Cuando RV me pedía un collar de perro yo no lo entendía y ahora que tengo mi collar propio siento realizado su sueño” [José and Pablo dressed in leather and me in their arms in the middle of the two was the realization of one of my fantasies. I don't know why leather turns me on. When RV asked me for a dog collar, I didn't understand it and now that I have my own collar, I feel his dream come true] (*Amor* 70). In this citation we appreciate a connection between the tenderness expressed in the primal fantasy he describes above, the feeling of satisfaction, being sandwiched between two masters in the afterglow of pain induced euphoria. We also appreciate how the training in wearing a dog collar, a popular accoutrement of submission play, connects with the memory of his relationship with Hervé, whose name he shortens to the letters RV.

In the next sentence, Pérez narrates additional training with the pair, how they helped him develop his pain-pleasure stimulation and assuage his fears. “Lo que me gusta de nuestros encuentros es que aprendí a resistir los golpes y que ya no tengo más el miedo a las peleas que tenía cuando era chico. José y Pablo me golpean con la intensidad justa, no me causan daño ni me dejan marcas” [What I like about our encounters is that I learned to resist blows and that I no longer have the fear of fights that I had when I was a child. José and Pablo hit me with the right intensity, they don't hurt me or leave marks] (*Amor* 70). Despite questioning why, he loves leather so much, as he did in the previous sentence, in this sentence, he opens the door to childhood antecedents. He overcame the fear of being bullied as a child in the present of his punishments the leather masters inflicted. Wearing leather and living its sexuality endowed him with a sense of power he did not previously have. We already know he first encountered SM in Paris. We also know from *Bienvenu* that the vector of transmission of the Gay Leather style is from Los Angeles and San Francisco, California. Moving to the subject of memories from childhood in this context provides insight into the antecedents of his developing sexuality as a child, growing up in 1960s and 70s Buenos Aires, when the political pendulum swung toward the radical right-wing ideologies of Peronism, then to the neoliberal world order implanted through the military dictatorship that began in 1976, known as the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*. Compared to the blows and damage caused by the nonconsensual imposition of the neoliberal agenda, the violence of the leather masters is liberating. One of the leading reasons that young boys are bullied as a child is because their peers do not regard them as masculine enough. Engaging in leathersexuality and enduring the punishments of the masters is an affirmation of maleness and masculinity.

While homosexual liberation in Argentina began in the 1970s, amid tremendous political upheaval and violence, it was also a time when gay liberation in North America had made great

strides in dispelling the myth that all homosexual men were effeminate. The politically active Mattachine Society began in 1948 based on Marxist minded Harry Hay's idea of creating a support group for gay men that served a similar function and purpose as Alcoholics Anonymous. Hay wanted to create a fraternal organization loosely structured on aspects of both the Communist Party and Freemasonry. Many of the founding members were communists and their publication *The Mattachine Review* promoted the goals of homosexual unification, pedagogy, political leadership, and community advocacy. On three additional fronts, as identified by Bienvenu, the Gay Leather style penetrated gay imaginations in the Global North with leather or uniform fetishism and hirsute masculinity. The post-World War II California biker subcultures and their adoption of what Bienvenu calls the "leather biker uniform" embodied by Marlon Brando in the film *the Wild One* is a big part of Pérez's fantasy. The "butch" element of the gay subcultures in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, with their strict dress codes that banished attire and materials with feminine connotations is as well.

Now let us look at another example from Pérez's fantasies in *Un año sin amor* in which we can see the gay leather influence in media products, promoting brawny, rugged, and muscular male physiques that increasingly embraced attire fashioned out of leather, denim, and metals. Bienvenu explains that throughout the 1960s innovators in popular culture appropriated representations from the American Fetish and Gay Leather styles, transforming them from the realm of the "serious," belonging to subcultural SM devotees, to a "playful" realm within popular culture, accessible to all. Valerie Steele in *Fetish* (1996) recalls how in the mid-1960s, fetishistic imagery and hard to obtain fetish fashion, and objects came out of the closet and into the mainstream (33). Technological innovations in the manufacturing process of leather, fetish clothing, and accessories, especially after the proliferation of polyvinylchlorides (PVCs), vulcanized rubber,

vinyl, and latex, made mass production commercially viable. Appropriated and transmogrified fetish fashions began to appear in popular shops and boutiques. Fetish fashion gained couture allure. Eventually, comic books, television series like *Avengers* and *Batman* in the 1960s, and blockbuster motion pictures in the 1970s contaminated the imaginations of viewers around the world with appropriated fetish styles. Consumers became eager to consume and embody them. The trend among producers and consumers of media and fashion continues at an increasingly viral pace. We see the virality of these transformations in the following citation.

Además, desde chico me calentaron los superhéroes de la televisión, sus cuerpos musculosos tensando los ajustados trajes, sus rostros enmascarados. También me gustaban los malos, muchas veces vestidos de cuero. Esto, unido al ideal de hombre fuerte y protector, fue el coctel que embriago mi deseo durante todas las horas de la infancia que pase frente a la TV. Incluso hoy sigo soñando con el Schwarzenegger vestido de cuero en *Terminator* o con el último Batman en su armadura de látex o con cualquiera de los motorizados en uniforme de cuero de la policía.

[Also, ever since I was a kid, the superheroes on television excited me, their muscular bodies tensing the tight suits, their masked faces. I also liked the bad guys, often dressed in leather. This, together with the ideal of a strong and protective man, was the cocktail that intoxicated my desire during all the hours of childhood that I spent in front of the TV. Even today I still dream of leather-clad Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator* or the latest *Batman* in his latex armor or any of the leather police uniforms worn by motorcycle cops.] (*Amor* 70-71)

In this memory flashback we can see how the fetish styles, appropriated by popular culture, colonized the imaginations of children. Here we have Pérez in Argentina as a young boy, watching 1970s fantasy and science fiction television series. Then later, as a young adult in the 1980s, when blockbuster Hollywood films stressing the “butch” leather embodiment of fetish dress continue to inhabit his fantasies. Finally, we appreciate how all these mediated fantasies lead to eroticizing the leather clad bodies of law enforcement officers. These fantasies clearly exemplify the acquisition of a desire for leather since childhood. Leather for Pérez has become a cause to celebrate. Connecting with the two leather masters in Buenos Aires is a dream come true... at least for a

while. Let us now look at how the SM training and the fulfilment of erotic fantasies increase the jouissance of the narration in the opening scenes of *El mendigo chupapijas* when he describes an encounter with the homeless cocksucker and his first solo session with José María.

The Jouissance of the Lion Cubs—Initiates at Play

As stated before, the story in *Un año sin amor* begins in February 1996 *in medias res*: the autobiographic narrator is in the middle of a predicament. He lives with the effects of an advanced stage of HIV disease. He discovered he was positive while living abroad in Europe, trying to begin a literary career, and carry on a bohemian lifestyle. The disease has already taken a great toll on his physical health, and he faces an uncertain future due to its deadly effects. Besides receiving a meager disability pension, he teaches French to earn a living, while studying to obtain a teaching credential in the Lenguas Vivas program—all the while besieged by an inner exile marked by depression and an incessant foreboding feeling “de que voy a morir este año” [that I will die this year] (*Amor* 36). Working for him becomes an exercise in futility, as he lingers in the ambiguity between life and death and works on a translation project while keeping a diary. Even writing for him has become an agonizing process because his body suffers from a variety of infections. He cannot sleep because difficulty breathing makes him feel as though he is drowning. He also paces around his apartment like a “*lion en cage*” (*Amor* 36). Although his outward symptoms are noticeable—a chronic cough, a pale gaunt figure, frequent trips to see medical practitioners—his family has no knowledge of his disease.

On one hand, he does not tell his family because he is afraid of their reaction, afraid of how the news might make his life worse. On the other hand, his family is too fractured and self-absorbed to notice... “la indignación que siento por mi familia que parece no darse cuenta de nada de lo que me pasa, no la puedo expresar” [the indignation that I feel because of my family that seems to be unaware of anything that happens to me, I cannot express it] (*Amor* 13). They are haunted by the

specter of Peronism and Juan Peron's Janus-faced embrace of dichotomously opposed ideologies which clashed during what historians call the Massacre at Ezeiza in 1973, when Pérez would have been nine years old. Although details are sketchy as to who shot at whom, one thing remained quite clear. Extreme-right-wing Peronism prevailed. Left wing Peronism, its movements, and guerrilla groups were systematically atomized in the aftermath of the brutal neoliberal implantation during the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. Pablo Pérez grew up in the aftermath of that massacre. The two faces of Peronism may help to explain why he says his family tree is diseased... "describir ese árbol calloso, enfermo desde la raíz de un mal siniestro que mata primero a los retoños mientras el tronco y las ramas grandes duermen" [describe that calloused tree, sick from the roots of a sinister disease that first kills the shoots while the trunk and large branches sleep] (*Amor* 13-14). He says this in the context of his family, but he could just as easily refer to the nation. Pérez is leery of a world in which several friends Bela, Paula, Bernard, Vladimir, Hervé have disappeared from his life, some due to AIDS others to suicide. The diseased family tree metaphor signifies not only family and country, but also a global community, traumatized by so many deaths and the onslaught of crises: political, economic, environmental, and HIV/AIDS.

Pérez lives in an apartment owned by his father with an aunt that in the privacy of his diary he calls Nefertiti, or Nefritis when he becomes annoyed by her conspiracy theories and frenetic movements. The nicknames trivialize her in a derogatory way as if to imply that she suffers from some sort of mummified necrotic neurosis. They also reveal an acidic and sarcastic humor as *nefritis*, which in Spanish refers to a painful inflammation of the kidneys, due to a urinary tract infection, which some people believe the victim acquires through sexual activity. Pérez's father is a workaholic and likely divorced from his mother. She has a son named Diego with another man.

Pérez is estranged from his mother because, among other things, she lied to him about his sister Paula's death. She told him while he was in France that his sister was hit by a car and died instantly when, really, she died after jumping off the terrace of another aunt's balcony two days after their father's birthday. When his half-brother Diego goes to see Pérez and they talk about her death, "...le conté que Paula y yo consumíamos drogas y tratando de darle una explicación coherente le dije que para mí el suicidio de Paula tenía que ver con esto. Omití decirle que tenemos una familia de mierda, para darle a entender que la droga era peligrosa" [...I told him that Paula and I used to take drugs and, trying to give him a coherent explanation, I told him that for me Paula's suicide had to do with this. I omitted telling him that we have a shitty family, to make him understand that drugs were dangerous] (*Amor* 43). The drugs, in a way, treat the symptoms of a sinister evil that haunts the social milieu. His sister Paula's death by suicide had a tremendous impact on Pérez's psyche. In *Querido Nicolás* we learn that his drug consumption is also tied to his attempts at leading a bohemian life in Europe.

As mentioned earlier, the metaphor *lion en cage* in Pérez's first novel not only signifies the existential angst that leads Pérez to pace frenetically in his apartment, but it also signifies the situation of being trapped by a deadly disease whose effects immobilize him. The metaphor in both novels reads as the insatiable libido of a savage beast that he must constrain to survive. However, when the beast escapes, the compulsion to hunt for prey overcomes him. Only fresh meat will satisfy his animal hunger. The metaphor is also an important clue to his process of becoming HIV positive, how his will became subject to the influences of others, perhaps even his disposition to masochism. If a sense of foreboding is the defining tone of the diary entries in *Un año sin amor*, the transgressive excess of surplus enjoyment and picaresque carnivalized ritual is the tone of the narration in *El mendigo chupapijas*. Both texts are pornological in the Deleuzian

sense of the word. Their narrations contain many instances of non-language, enjoyment that can scarcely be put into words. As I pointed out earlier, *Belleza y Felicidad* produced the second novel in installments as part of its mission to produce exuberant literature. The sexual encounters and SM rituals that Pérez narrates express an enjoyment that goes well beyond simple pleasure, into the domain of *jouissance*. With the increasingly debilitating effects of the disease, his precarious financial situation, and a death that every day seems more palpable, his search for love, orgasms, and the sadomasochistic sessions with his leather masters Pablo and José María are the only things that keep him going—that give his life meaning—until he meets someone who leaves him dumbfounded and sends a thunderbolt arcing through his neurocircuitry. As Pérez narrates how he met his leather masters and a homeless cocksucker, we can appreciate Sade’s admonition in his *120 Days of Sodom*, to decorate narrations “with the most numerous and searching details” that show the writer’s “willingness to disguise no circumstance,” so that “the least circumstance is apt to have an immense influence upon the procuring of that kind of sensory irritation we expect from your stories” (271). We can also appreciate Bataille’s theorization about eroticism in *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (1986) as pertaining to “the domain of violence, of violation” (16). Where the whole business of eroticism, according to Bataille, is destroying “the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives,” where “bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity... the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with possession of a recognized and stable individuality” (17). In sum, we can appreciate how Sade’s erotic capital contaminates the narration with its disidentified contagion.

One place Pérez frequents to release the *lion en cage* is dark movie theaters that show pornographic films. In *El mendigo chupapijas*, Pérez begins the book similarly as he does *Un año*

sin amor, in *medias res*. The theater is a place where men who have sex with men can bask in the anonymity of darkness. They are not there to watch the films. They are there to enjoy the action off screen, where only non-language can express what occurs. The Box is one such theater that Pérez frequents. It is here that he meets “un hombre que, oculto en la oscuridad, le chupa la pija a cualquiera que se pare frente a él” [a man who, hidden in the dark, sucks the dick of anyone who stands in front of him] (*Mendigo* 9). This hidden figure kneels so that his face is waste high, and he can easily service any man that presents his member to the man’s insatiable mouth. Pérez says that the man’s “garganta no tiene fondo” [throat has no bottom] (*Mendigo* 9). We know it is not the first time that Pérez encounters the man since he signals us with the phrase “cada vez” [every time]. Despite the dimly lit surroundings, Pérez knows it is the same man because he can feel the familiar heat and moisture of “el agujero infinito” [the infinite hole] (*Mendigo* 9); the mouth, lips, and tongue that caress the base of his penis, while *el mendigo chupapijas* [the homeless cocksucker] obediently, passionately, and voraciously swallows his entire member without using teeth. Perhaps the man does not have any teeth? We speculate he must when Pérez animalizes the man, equating him with a dog that consumes as though he were “comiéndose el mejor cuarto kilo de carne de su vida o protegiendo con celo un hueso entre sus peligrosos colmillos” [eating the best quarter kilo of meat of his life or jealously protecting a bone between his dangerous fangs] (*Mendigo* 9). Another clue that alerts Pérez to the man’s identity, despite the darkness, is his black overcoat, the stubble of an unshaven face, and greasy, shortly cropped, hair, which Pérez appreciates as he caresses the man’s head in the darkness while being serviced. For this man, sucking cock is an art that must be completed silently, diligently. “Insulta a gritos al que lo moleste y es capaz de morder al que se atreva a interrumpir su chupada ritual” [He shouts insults to anyone

who bothers him and is capable of biting anyone who dares to interrupt his ritual sucking] (*Mendigo* 9). The only time he reacts menacingly is when his silent pleasure is interrupted.

As Pérez cruises by a church on a Saturday after the sexual encounter he describes above, he sees a mendicant begging for money outside the entrance, and realizes it is the same man from the theater with whom he has blissfully orgasmed on numerous occasions, when something unexpected happens. “Y sentí la resonancia de una vida anterior” [And felt the resonance of a former life] (*Mendigo* 10). The shocking realization is a transcendent experience that moves Pérez to seek guidance from Jose María, his leatherman master who is also an astrologer, to see if there is something in the stars related to the mendicant. In this opening episode, narrated in first-person and which reads like a chronicle, we can appreciate *jouissance* at several levels. First, in surplus enjoyment of two bodies that can only be experienced in the nonlanguage of a blowjob and expressed in terms of viral and contagious metaphors that attempt to convey the subjugated knowledge that lay beyond the meaning of the words used to describe the ritual event. We also appreciate the *jouissance* in the internal commotion Pérez feels at the spectacular realization that the man who stimulated his fantasies, while silently sucking his cock in a dark movie theater, is really someone he perceived as homeless.

In the second chapter of *El mendigo chupapijas*, also narrated in first-person, Pérez visits his astrologer friend José, one of his leather masters, who becomes visibly excited while listening to the story of the homeless cocksucker. When Pérez finishes the narration, José signals for him to kneel at his feet and begin licking the bulge in his crotch “que se le marcaba perfecto a través del pantalón de cuero y se agrandaba bajo cada lamida” [that was marked perfectly through the leather pants and engorged with each lick] (*Mendigo* 11). In what follows we appreciate various BDSM obedience rituals of gay leather dominance and submission. José orders Pérez to strip naked and

pose as a dog on all fours, on his hands and knees with his forehead touching the ground. Meanwhile, as Pérez breathes excitedly awaiting what is to come, José prepares the instruments of his ritual practice. Although Pérez cannot see what José is doing, he can feel the vibrations as drawers open and close, and the sound of heavy boots announce his master's approach, until... "me sorprendió el frío metálico de la cadena que me echó al cuello y cerró con un candado. Si él no me lo indicaba, no tenía permiso para levantar la vista. Solamente podía mirar sus botas mientras les pasaba la lengua feliz como un perro que se rencuentra con su dueño después de varios días sin haberlo visto" [I was surprised by the metallic cold of the chain that he put around my neck and closed with a padlock. If he didn't tell me, I wasn't allowed to look up. I could only look at his boots while I licked them happily like a dog that meets his owner after several days without seeing him] (*Mendigo* 11). Pérez is securely in the submissive position, in bondage, obedient. Once the boots where spit shined to perfection, José lifts Pérez's head to contemplate his leather uniform and gloved hands as he caresses him in loving appreciation for his submission.

Up until this point, the narration describes what occurs in the nonlanguage of the transaction of erotic capital as value is transferred between the two men using physical gestures, postures, touching, and very few words. Obedience and submission are the coins exchanged in anticipation of dominance and punishment. When language is added to the spectacle, it becomes part of the ritual performance. José taunts Pérez about the homeless cocksucker. He tells Pérez that he is the *only* cocksucker, then issues the anticipated threat. "¿Así que el mendigo chupapijas? Vamos a ver acá quien es el mendigo chupapijas. Te voy a dejar el culo rojo hasta que no puedas más del dolor" [The homeless cocksucker, huh? Let's see here who the homeless cocksucker is. I'm going to leave your ass red until you can't take any more pain" (*Mendigo* 12). José then traps Pérez's head between his legs and spansks him very hard with his gloved hand, which is tattered

like Pérez's ass that burns. "Me comí los gritos y soporté la paliza como un buen esclavo" [I swallowed the screams and endured the beating like a good slave] (*Mendigo* 12). At this point, in the safe, sane, and consensual exchange of erotic capital between the two men, the slave asks the master to stop, but this plea is only part of the dominance ritual. The master must vocalize the threat that punishment will not end until he says so. After all, he is the master! Then José leads Pérez by the chain, makes him stand in the corner of the room, and punches Pérez's abdomen until he falls to his knees. Pérez screams, "Basta, por favor. ¡Señor! ¡Ya no puedo más! ¡Piedad!" [Stop, please. Sir! I can't take anymore! Mercy!] (*Mendigo* 12). In the power dynamics of this play scenario, the word "mercy" is the "safe word" that ceases all punishment. The word indicates that the slave has reached the limits of endurance and the ethical master must stop. José immediately complies. The enunciation of the word flips the power back to the slave. At this point, José becomes attentive, serves Pérez a whisky, and affectionately hugs him. José's close physical proximity to Pérez activates his olfactory fetish as he deeply breathes in the aroma of José's leather and sweat. "Al fin se me estaba dando lo que tanto había deseado, poder estar a solas con él" [At last I was getting what I had wanted so much, to be able to be alone with him.] (*Mendigo* 12). Normally, the sessions include another leather master named Pablo in *Un año sin amor*, also known as Comisario Baez in *El mendigo chupapijas*. However, Pérez has a crush on José, even though José has met someone new and is most likely in love. José's romance with someone named Ferdi (short for Ferdinand) leads to conflict between the two masters. Meanwhile, the whisky and hug were only a short break, the play session continues. The *jouissance* now moves beyond pleasure, into carnivalized ritual.

As the two men sit relaxing, Pérez butt naked and José in his leather uniform, José lights a cigarette and begins to wave it close to Pérez's nipples. "Acercaba la brasa a mis tetillas y yo lo

dejaba hacer con confianza, sabía que disfrutaba teniéndome así entregado. Bajó el cigarro hasta la ingle y empezó a quemarme los pendejos que se chamuscaban crepitando y provocándome puntos de ardor” [He brought the burning ember closer to my nipples and I let him do it with confidence, I knew he enjoyed having me submissive like that. He lowered the cigarette to my groin and began burning the hairs on my balls that crackled and scorched and causing me points of burning pain] (*Mendigo* 13). The burning ritual evokes the self-disciplined spirituality of the fire walkers who move barefoot through embers in other cultures of the Global South, the submission of ritual devotion while experiencing pain. José then leads Pérez on all fours, like a dog, and instructs him to get up onto the table, where he immobilizes him with handcuffs, posed in front of a mirror. I will quote the next part at length so, the reader can appreciate the pornological detail of the *neobarrosa* prose, the excess that borders on the grotesque, the temporal suspense, the spectrality of the torture, and the release of opioids from the transgressive activation of pain-pleasure in the consummation of the BDSM ritual play.

Yo estaba al palo, y los segundos se dilataban como mi culo que deseaba la enorme pija de José. Los pasos severos, el sonido grave de las botas contra el piso de madera, sonaban como las pisadas de un gigante. Cada paso prolongaba en el tiempo y mi deseo crecía. Vi entre sus dedos un par de pinzas para las tetillas que me colocó enseguida. Acercó la brasa del cigarro a la pinza que apretaba mi tetilla izquierda y a través del metal plateado me llegó el calor de ese fuego hasta el corazón que se me aceleraba. Después de pasarle un poco de saliva a la tetilla acercó decididamente el cigarro. No pude contener los fuertes gritos. José retiró el cigarro y escupió sobre la quemadura para aliviarme, me sacó las pinzas y me liberó de las esposas. Me lubricó el culo y sentí el bastón de policía con el que me premiaba al final de cada sesión, cuando nos encontrábamos con el Comisario. Podía ver todo reflejado en el espejo, el uniforme, la gorra de cuero y los anteojos negros que ocultaban su mirada. También podía ver el bastón entraba y salía de mi culo más de veinte centímetros y como él se masturbaba con los guantes negros puestos. Veía su pija enorme y tan dura como el palo que me estaba metiendo. Me ordenó que se la chupara, me obligó a tragármela hasta el fondo. Yo me ahogaba y tosía, se me llenaban los ojos de lágrimas, me sentía horrible. “¡Ya vas a chuparla bien, puto, mendigo chupapijas!” Entonces me sacó la pija de la boca, el bastón del culo y me cogió desenfrenado, poseído fuera de sí. Sentí un destello. José empezó a gritar

como un salvaje, estaba acabando, y a mí me saltó la leche hasta por detrás de la cabeza.

[I was rock hard, and the seconds stretched out like my ass longing for José's enormous dick. The stern footsteps, the deep thud of boots against the wooden floor, sounded like the footsteps of a giant. Each step extended in time and my desire grew. I saw between his fingers a pair of nipple clamps that he immediately placed on me. He brought the ember of the cigarette closer to the clamp that was squeezing my left nipple and through the silver metal the heat of that fire reached my heart, which was racing. After rubbing a little saliva on the nipple, he decisively brought the cigarette closer. I couldn't contain the loud screams. José withdrew the cigarette and spat on the burn to soothe me, unclipped me and freed me from the handcuffs. He lubricated my ass, and I felt the police baton with which he rewarded me at the end of each session, when we met the Commissioner. I could see everything reflected in the mirror, the uniform, the leather cap and the black glasses that hid his gaze. I could also see the cane go in and out of my ass more than eight inches and how he masturbated with his black gloves on. I could see his huge cock which was as hard as the stick he was shoving me into. He ordered me to suck it, he forced me to swallow it to the bottom. I choked and coughed, my eyes filled with tears, I felt horrible. "You're going to suck it good, whorish, cocksucking beggar!" Then he took his dick out of my mouth, the cane out of my ass and fucked me wildly, possessed, out of his mind. I felt a flash. José began to scream like a savage, he was cumming, and his cum squirted up behind my head.] (*Mendigo* 13-14)

The citation here, I believe, clearly shows many of the symptomatology, in the sense that Deleuze meant when he discussed Sade and Masoch, of what we can call *jouissance*. Pérez attempts to narrate an encounter in which the erotic capital of leathersexuality is traded in the non-language of the ritual encounter, which is at once performance and reenactment of fantasies that began contaminating the imagination since childhood as fetish commodities penetrated mainstream popular culture. The enjoyment of the two men is also exceedingly analogous to notions discussed earlier in this chapter about connections between eroticism, violence, death, endorphins, fantasy, fetish style, and leathersexuality identified by thinkers such as Sade, Bataille, Deleuze, Bienvenu, and Mains. Now let us look at how the *lion en cage* metaphor takes on new meaning as Pérez narrates the *jouissance* of Comisario Baez's origin story.

The Disidentified Leatherman Initiation of a *Lion en Cage*—Comisario Báez

Pérez became involved with a well-equipped leather master named Comisario Pablo Báez sometime between the end of *Querido Nicolás* and the beginning of *Un año sin amor*. It is my contention and argument that Pérez underwent what I call a disidentified initiation, one carried out by Comisario Báez, a gay leather sadomasochist clone, practicing a rough trade detached from Old Guard traditions. Comisario Pablo Báez is the most experienced of the two leather masters, but José María has his own erotic capital, as we have seen in the previous section.

El Comisario Báez, además de ser un excelente anfitrión, es el mejor y más equipado leather Máster de Buenos Aires. Viaja al menos una vez al año a San Francisco, Amsterdam, o Berlín, donde la vida leather es prolífica y divertida. Durante estos viajes, Báez adquiere gran parte de la experiencia en control de respiración, spanking, latigazos, lluvias, ataduras, juego con cigarros y cuchillos, entre otras prácticas del sexo leather SM de las que es muy conocedor y que realiza con excelente actitud.

[Commissioner Báez, besides being an excellent host, is the best and most equipped leather Master in Buenos Aires. He travels at least once a year to San Francisco, Amsterdam, or Berlin, where the leather life is prolific and fun. During these trips, Báez acquires much of his experience in breath control, spanking, whipping, golden showers, bondage, playing with cigarettes, and knives, among the other practices of leather SM sex that he is very knowledgeable about and that he performs with an excellent attitude.] (*Mendigo* 31)

In the quote above, we can appreciate Baez's considerable investment in the techniques of BDSM and the trappings of gay leathersexuality, to increase the value of his erotic capital. He travels to the places in North America and Europe where devotees practice leathersexuality without the socio-cultural constrictions present in 1990s Argentina. Pérez further explains that Báez initiated most of the leathermen in Buenos Aires. In this sense, he is like the father of an emerging, but somewhat secret, imagined community. Pérez reports that the leathermen who were not initiated by him have participated at least once in the elaborate sessions Báez organizes in his apartment. Anahí Berneri in her film adaptation attempts to capture the nuances of these elements in her

salacious portrayal of these men. “Para estos encuentros, prepara la escena y dispone sobre una mesa los diversos elementos que las sesiones requieren: máscaras de cuero y antigases, pinzas para las tetillas, broches, una fusta y otros tipos de látigo, dildos, popper, habanos, marihuana, hachís, etc., etc.” [For these meetings, he prepares the scene and arranges the various elements that the sessions require on a table: leather and gas masks, nipple clamps, breastpins, a riding crop and other types of whips, dildos, poppers, cigars, marijuana, hashish, etc. etc.] (*Mendigo* 31). From the details Pérez offers about Báez, we may conclude that Báez regards himself as a bourgeois leather sadomasochistic prince.

Thom Magister’s explains in his essay “One Among Many: The Seduction and Training of a Leatherman” in *Leatherfolk* (1991) that in the genesis of the leather scene in the 1950s, “Masters were trained by other Masters in all the rituals and sadistic rites.” The “Old Guard” were mostly ex-military men who, after World War II, had returned damaged with no place to call home. Magister explains that these men had been “tortured and tormented often beyond anyone’s comprehension, they drifted together in a mutual loss of innocence.” Many of these men living in California purchased motorcycles and became the core of what later would be called “outlaw bikers.” As the leather scene in California evolved, the men who practiced SM lived by a code. They did not tolerate anyone who did not take the practice seriously. Magister explains, “If they had a language, it was the language of their bodies. They searched out and studied one another like mutual prey.” Since Báez was initiated decades after the glory days of the Old Guard, he did not have the luxury of being trained by all the specialized masters that Magister had at his disposal: “bondage Master, a whip Master, a shaving Master, a cutting Master, and so on down the line of necessary skills.” The masters of the Old Guard had ethics and their practice was not called *play*, it was called *work*. Magister considers all the new masters (with a lowercase “m”) minted in the

1990s as children, or worse, “phonies.” Magister writes, “Back in those early days of leather, there were so many Masters and so few slaves that the bottommen came to be in charge. Masters (or topmen) vied for the attention of popular slaves. Everyone felt compelled to perfect their skills and, as a result, it was a time of *excellence*.” By the 1990s, when Magister writes his essay, many of the Old Guard Masters had died, either from cancer or from AIDS. The new generation, with their current style of SM, have become something entirely different. Work became play and the hallmark courtship and seduction became what Magister calls “carefree youth on a spree.” As we will see ahead, Báez tries to master the mysteries but ultimately proves to be unworthy, what Magister calls a “Master of Attitudes and Ideas” rather than a Master with a “system of ethics.” Whereas Magister is a leatherman from the Old Guard who *awakens* as a Master, Báez *becomes* a master leathermen in the 1990s.

Báez gains tremendous experience in the ritual tradition but, because of disidentifications in cultural appropriation, is disconnected from the seriousness and responsibility that once dominated the scene. Báez and José María initiate Pérez, but Pérez’s fantasy is not to become a master but a slave. I briefly touched on this while analyzing some of Pérez’s fantasies earlier. However, it is not until Báez begins to act in unethical ways and threatens José María that the triangle fractures. It is why José María, Pérez, and others eventually grow to fear and avoid Báez, who is like a superhero who drifts to the dark side. Pérez begins to look elsewhere to continue learning and experiencing leathersexuality. He places ads in *NX* magazine, looking for a new leather master. Since Pérez receives a meager disability pension from the state and his income from teaching French fails to produce the income necessary to purchase medicine not covered by insurance, he decides to supplement his income by working as an escort. Pérez in many ways is

naïve when it comes to the contemporary world of BDSM play. His fantasy for the Master he pursues seem to be nurtured by Old Guard ideals and aesthetics that he sincerely seeks to embrace.

Despite José María's advice to the contrary, emphasizing Báez's shortcomings, Báez takes advantage of Pérez's need for income, and leverages his considerable erotic capital and inherited wealth to seduce Pérez to be his slave again and even advertises their services in a joint venture. I argue that Báez is what Magister calls a phony. Báez is an outsider who seeks to buy his way into becoming an insider, rather than go through the traditional ritual process to earn his status. Whereas Pérez expresses same-sex attraction in his early childhood fantasies about superheroes, Báez is a married heterosexual man until he goes to prison, where he learns to have sex with other men by force. Pérez awakens to his homosexuality in childhood while Báez becomes homosexual as an adult. For Pérez, leathersexuality is a way of life and an art. For Báez it is a rough trade. Even though *El mendigo chupapijas* is not a comic book that tells the backstory of the story's villain, Báez's origin story is illuminating, not only because we see how he begins a homosexual practice in prison, but also because my contextualized reading will help us understand how contemporary leather masters are made. We will see how some of the traditions of yesterday are passed on despite the monetary interests that commodify the leather scene's proliferation into the twenty-first century.

As Pérez recalls Báez's past in a flashback, we can appreciate another meaning of the metaphor *lion en cage*, the release of a beast from captivity. We realize that to become the experienced BDSM master he is reputed to be, Báez has undergone three different rites of passage, three initiations. Arnold van Gennep in *Les rites de passage* (1909) describes initiation rites, also called puberty rites, with a ritual structure that many devotees of SM could easily identify. The rites Gennep identifies mark the moment of passage from younger male into full manhood within

a community or a tribe. Genep distinguishes three phases in the ritual process. In his essay for *Leatherfolk*, Robert Hopcke in “S/M and the Psychology of Gay Male Initiation: An Archetypal Perspective” offers a succinct summary of Genep’s phases: (1) *separation*, in which the initiate is taken out of his current social milieu, stripped of external identifying attributes, and kept confined to a special location outside of normal community, followed by (2) *transition*, in which the initiate undergoes various procedures, trials, or rituals to end his previous social identification and endow him with new peers and privileges: followed finally by (3) *incorporation*, in which the initiate is brought back into the larger community and presented ceremonially to the tribe as a new person occupying a new social status. Hopcke is a Jungian trained psychotherapist, who emphasizes the spiritual symbolism and archetypal meanings of SM in his analysis. “...it became clear to me,” writes Hopcke, “that the form of sexuality being enacted here was not simply a sexuality carried out for the purpose of pleasure or gratification, though this aspect was certainly present, but that such enactments had a distinctly ritualistic tone and content, whether or not the participants were aware of this ritualistic quality.” Whether we agree or not with the harsh critiques of an Old Guard Master like Magister, we will be able to discern the ritualistic quality, tone, and content of Genep’s three phases in Báez’s becoming a BDSM leather master in *El mendigo chupapijas*.

In the flashback, Pérez explains that a prison guard named Castro was the first to initiate Báez into BDSM ten years earlier, while he served time at Cárcel de Caseros. The Argentine government modeled this prison after the institutional building and system of control designed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century called the panopticon. In this design, a single guard can observe all the inmates without them knowing they are being watched. In such an institutional setting, the inmates must behave as though they are being watched, even

though it is impossible for a single guard to observe them all simultaneously. Caseros was the brainchild of radical politician Arturo Frondizi in 1960, who served as president of Argentina between 1958 and 1962. A coup d'état deposed him. Báez became an inmate after being convicted of battering his wife, who accused him of domestic violence, alcoholism, and drug addiction to cocaine. During the six months Báez was in the prison, he was coerced into having sex with other men for the first time. Pérez explains that despite being raped in prison, the time Baez served could not “apaciar su espíritu agresivo y violento, aunque los músculos de gimnasio le sirvieron a la hora de defenderse de los compañeros de celda” [pacify his aggressive and violent spirit, although the gym muscles served him well when it came to defending himself from his cellmates] (*Mendigo* 32). Báez’s implacably aggressive and violent spirit is a strong clue about his core identity and career prior to becoming a leather master. Pérez never gives us that part of his background or tells us why he is called “Commissioner.” Although from the semiotic clues of the narration we can surmise that he was likely a law enforcement officer or perhaps even connected to the previous government and the atrocities of the dictatorship.

According to Pérez, Báez was thirty-five years old at the time he entered Caseros prison in 1989 but looked much younger. Báez’s first initiation, which was not into leathersexuality but into homosexual practices, was to serve as fresh meat for the sexual gratification of the inmates who had been there a while. “Todos querían ser dueños de ese culo blanco y perfecto... Casi todos se lo cogieron y disfrutaron de su voluptuoso cuerpo de porno star” [Everyone wanted to be the owner of that perfect white ass... Almost everyone fucked it and enjoyed his voluptuous porn star body] (*Mendigo* 32). It was not long before Báez learned how to navigate the terrain and began initiating the new arrivals into the “games” the men played in prison. This is when Castro, the prison guard, became interested in him and Báez undergoes his second initiation. One cannot miss the allusion

here to the leader of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, but with a body presented in fantastical and epic proportions.

Pérez describes Castro as a bearded and hairy red head nearly two meters tall but does not offer any details about how his sadomasochistic scene started or how his fantasies first became stimulated. Since Castro was so tall, there were no uniforms his size, and the ones he wore fit tightly about his body, accentuating his “robusto y torneado cuerpo” [robust and chiseled body] (*Mendigo* 32). Báez was stunned the first time he saw Castro naked. “Tenía la pija de veinticuatro por siete, le faltaba un huevo, y como una fruta pendía del grueso tronco el que le quedaba” [His penis was twenty-four by seven, he was missing a testicle, and the one that was left dangled like a fruit from a thick trunk] (*Mendigo* 32). What Pérez narrates next is the ritual, the practice that gets repeated, what becomes a routine for Báez. This initiation provided Báez with specialized knowledge that only could be acquired in the ritual. Pérez describes the ritualistic scene: Castro retrieves Báez from his cell and takes him to an empty cell where he strips naked and then Báez dresses in Castro’s uniform. The switching of places in the power dynamics made Báez’s penis become “al palo” [rock hard] (*Mendigo* 32). What turned Báez on? The idea that Castro was defenseless. Báez not only wore Castro’s uniform but also packed his gun. Báez could have escaped if he wanted to, “pero el poder que tenía durante esos momentos en que hubiera podido matar al hombre que se le entregaba por completo, lo excitaba más que nada” [but the power he had during those moments when he could have killed the man who gave himself over completely to him excited him more than anything else] (*Mendigo* 32). Here we cannot miss the allusion back to Sade and the connection he makes between eroticism and murder in his writing, when he asserts that the greatest erotic pleasure the libertine experiences derives from the art of ending a life.

Magister explains that in the power dynamics of SM, there is a strange irony... “Power, it is said, rests with the *desired object*. To want something or someone imparts power to that thing or person. The desired object is empowered by the one who desires and so is *in charge*” (emphasis original). Once Castro had Báez where he wanted him, in the dominant position, he would begin licking the boots, then “pedía de rodillas al debutante uniformado que lo pateara y lo pisoteara y le hiciera todo lo que quisiera” [he asked the uniformed debutante on his knees to kick and stomp on him and do whatever he wanted to him] (*Mendigo* 33). After many repetitions of this play scenario, Báez learned to deliver the precise blows and the most humiliating orders. “Pero también tuvo que aprender a aguantarse por la boca y por el culo la enorme pija de Castro cuando al fin de cada sesión éste lo ataba a las rejas de aquella celda. Nunca en su vida volvió a gozar tanto” [But he also had to learn to put up with Castro's huge cock in his mouth and ass when at the end of each session Castro tied him to the bars of that cell. Never again in his life did he enjoy so much] (*Mendigo* 33). Here we can appreciate how Baez learned to “aguantarse” [endure] being penetrated by a huge penis in both orifices, and how that endurance gave way to the maximum pleasure. Pérez speculates that perhaps what really got Báez excited was the realness of the scene, a real guard with a real gun and the proximity to death.

It is important to note that Pérez does not include any discussion of safe sex practices as he narrates Báez's origin story. The danger of infection with STDs is a salient factor in the jouissance of the excitement between the men in the prison. In the jouissance of BDSM sex in prison, the concern about AIDS seems to fade into oblivion. It seems that in Báez's origin story, visceral pleasure trumps the HIV/AIDS crisis. After playing out this scene so many times, Báez seems to develop a sort of Stockholm Syndrome. Pérez explains that when Báez is released from prison, he realizes while saying goodbye to Castro that he has fallen in love with the man who trained him to

be a dominant master. As a parting gift, Castro gifts Báez a military uniform and a pair of tactical calf-high leather boots called “borceguíes.” Despite the sentimental farewell, Báez decides to travel the world to learn more.

While Báez is abroad he undergoes his third initiation. Pérez describes the scene at a San Francisco gay leather bar, most likely in the Castro district, after Báez spent a boring time in New York. Pérez places the action in 1990, although the scene he describes for some readers will seem more like what would have taken place in the 1970s and 80s, prior to the AIDS pandemic. When the results of transmission studies became widely available, it became clear that the sexual partner in the dominant position was far less likely than the partner in the submissive position to become infected with HIV. Four bodily fluids transmit the virus: blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. If the dominant sexual partner uses a condom, the risk of becoming infected is practically zero. Transmission occurs with an exchange of these four bodily fluids, which must enter the blood stream to seroconvert and the infected body to test positive. Urine, feces, tears, sweat, and saliva cannot transmit the virus. Whether the scene ahead is merely a fantasy or arguably enacted with the safe sex protocols taken for granted, the important point here is Báez’s experiences at the bar. They are what ultimately influences him to invest his inheritance in the erotic capital of BDSM.

Pérez explains that after Báez arrives in San Francisco, he agonizes about assuming his homosexual side, but nevertheless acquires lodging at a hotel that sported a small rainbow flag. Báez “no quería perder el tiempo, estaba desesperado por coger” [didn't want to waste time, he was desperate to fuck] (*Mendigo* 33). His desperation to penetrate reveals the savage beast within, the released *lion en cage* who must quickly go on the hunt for prey. I contend that Báez is not a gay man invested in the politics of his identity, but a pleasure seeker who has learned to derive satisfaction from homosexual acts. He does not have an organic homosexual identity in the sense

that he nurtured desires that emerged in early childhood like the fantasies Pérez experienced but rather, Báez was forced to have sex with other men due to non-consensual conditioning and necessity, to survive his time in prison. His homosexuality is a convenience, a means to satisfy his animal urges. Baez is likely a sadist in the sense meant by Kraft-Ebbing in the *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

One night, as Báez walks the streets of the Castro district of San Francisco, he comes upon a uniformed leatherman who insistingly looks at him, penetrating him with his eyes. Mesmerized by the encounter Báez follows the man to a bar that sported the rainbow flag, but he also notices another flag, one he had never seen before... “otra de rayas negras, blancas y azules, con un corazón rojo en un ángulo” [another with black, white, and blue stripes, with a red heart in one corner] (*Mendigo* 34). This flag is the symbol of authenticity within the Gay Leather scene, the leather pride flag designed by Tony DeBlase, International Mister Leather in 1989. The flag was meant to symbolize the leather subculture started by the Old Guard. Since the 1990s, the flag has been embraced by the larger BDSM community. We should recall that Magister refers to these so-called posers of the next generation as “phonies and onlookers.” The original prototype of the leather pride flag is currently held at the Leather Archives & Museum located in Chicago. Well, as Báez vacillates about whether to enter the bar, he notices other men dressed in leather gear entering. Once he summons the courage and approaches the door, he is detained by a bouncer... “le señalaron un cartel que indicaba el código de vestimenta del lugar” [they pointed out a sign that indicated the place’s dress code] (*Mendigo* 34). The dress-code required that any man entering must be dressed in leather, uniforms, rubber, worker attire (denim or canvas), or enter completely nude. No-Perfume or fragrances were allowed. Báez quickly assessed the situation, realized he

could not enter the way he was dressed, and he was not willing to enter naked so, he returned the next evening wearing the military uniform and boots he received from Castro the prison guard.

Pérez explains that dressed this way Báez immediately gained entrance to the club and ordered a gin and tonic to calm his apprehension. Nevertheless, he could not help but gawk at all the uniformed leathermen. He quickly downed a second drink and then made his way to a more familiar section of the club adorned like a jail, with bars. “Un mascarado que estaba arrodillado en el piso, esposado, le lamió los borceguíes. El hombre, desnudo, tenía la espalda y el culo rojos por los latigazos que estaba recibiendo de un leather Máster con botas de caña alta, uniforme y gorra de cuero” [A masked man who was kneeling on the floor, handcuffed, licked his boots. The man, naked, had a red back and ass from the whipping he was receiving from a Leather Master in knee-high boots, a uniform, and a leather cap] (*Mendigo* 34). Upon witnessing the sadomasochistic spectacle, Báez felt inadequate with his vestments, and began to covet a leather uniform... “Se imaginó vestido así y se excitó” [He imagined himself dressed like that and got excited] (*Mendigo* 34). Báez continued exploring the club and happened upon a dark bathroom. He entered and witnessed another scene... “Metido en un mingitorio de aluminio del tamaño de una persona, un hombre vestido de látex estaba siendo meado por otros tres” [Tucked into a person-sized aluminum urinal, a latex-clad man was being pissed on by three others] (*Mendigo* 34). Golden showers are one of the practices that fetishists find erotically stimulating. Together with enjoying all the other excretions of the body, the fetish is called “pig-play.”

All the disturbing things Báez witnessed in the club shook him to the core of his being. He quickly sought out a third gin and tonic to calm himself down. But after feeling that he was being observed, he left the establishment thinking... “que había estado a punto de caer en un mundo infernal del que nunca hubiera podido regresar” [that he had been about to fall into a hellish world

from which he could never have returned] (*Mendigo* 34). Pérez explains that despite the disconcerting experience, Báez remained in San Francisco for a year and from that moment forward did not miss a single leather encounter at the bar. He soon had his own complete leather uniform and with the help of friends discovered his potential as a master (with a lower case “m”). Once the flashback ends, we find ourselves in the present of Pérez’s writing, with Báez consulting “su libreta de instrucciones” [his book of instructions] (*Mendigo* 35). This last bit may be an allusion to Larry Townsend’s *The Leatherman’s Handbook* (1972), considered by many insiders to be the original work which emphasized the rituals and practices of the Old Guard, or several other handbooks that were published decades later such as *Leathersex: A guide for the Curious Outsider and the Serious Player* (1994) by Joseph W. Bean, *Ties that Bind: SM / Leather / Fetish / Erotic Style: Issues, Commentaries and Advice* (1993) by Guy Baldwin, or *SM 101: A Realistic Introduction* (1996) by Jay Wiseman. If the book of instructions had been one tied to Old Guard tradition, Báez would have been exposed to the ethical emphasis in the ritual practices he describes. The ethics of Old Guard tradition might have left an imprint on his psyche. I will now discuss the application of Gennep’s phases related to the various initiations recounted in Báez’s origin story, which Pérez narrated as a flashback.

Let me first address the phase of separation. The prison guard Castro did indeed isolate Báez from the rest of the prison population so they could engage in a specific scene. Pérez describes a repetition of a process we read as a ritual practice, but there is no community of specialists, such as the specialized Old Guard Masters that Magister identifies, to support his new identity. The separation was incomplete, because Báez returns to the regular population to continue initiating new inmates in the prison *games* that involved non-consensual sex. The second phase of transition is also incomplete. Since there is no community, only Castro to guide him. Báez has no

additional peers to mediate his behavior. The procedures he learns are extremely limited, always the same routine that Castro orchestrates. Báez does not undergo any trials that would have earned privileges. Castro hands everything to him. Baez earns nothing. When he emerges from the prison milieu and ends up in San Francisco, his encounter with the leathermen and the practices he witnesses in the club lack the historical context, the discipline, and the responsibilities that are gained through ritual repetition in a community of peers. Therefore, his incorporation phase is incomplete as well. His basic instinct upon arriving to the city is to copulate, not out of a genuine desire for homosexual bonding, but based on the learned behavior that leverages his bodily physique. He struggles with the assumed homosexual identity and needs alcohol to reduce his trepidation so he can occupy a space within the larger community of leathermen, dressed in the military regalia Castro gave him. He lacks the confidence and self-assurance he would have possessed, had he ritually passed through the first two phases in the rites of initiation managed by “authentic” Masters (with a capital “M”). There is no ceremony or presentation. After seeing the leathermen dressed in their regalia in their social milieu, his first desire is to clone them, to possess the uniform that to him seems like the price of admission to the inner circle. His approach to the whole enterprise is top down instead of bottom up. Báez’s disidentification with the cultural tradition is more about performance and style than embodying a substance. With the large amount of money from his inherited wealth, he purchases the vast array of accoutrements Pérez describes. Báez *buys* the social status he occupies rather than *earn* it through what would have otherwise been a complete and proper rite of passage. Instead of his gay leather SM sexuality achieving the status of *art*, his bourgeois acquired BDSM practice reduces to a *rough trade*.

One final note, the scene Pérez narrates after Báez’s flashback origin story underscores my claim that naming the prison guard Castro is an allusion to the supreme leader of the Cuban

Revolution of 1959. Cigar smoking Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara, with their project of the new man of the twenty-first century, have indelibly etched a place in Argentine imaginations and the struggle for homosexual liberation throughout Latin America. The Massacre at Ezeiza is one example of the revolutionary ideology's violent consequences. Another violent consequence is their gendered and heteronormative ideology of machismo, based on a rouged, almost toxic, masculinity, which has influenced proletarian men to treat homosexuals, whom they perceive as irredeemably effeminate, as non-persons—non-citizens. Horacio Verbitsky in *Ezeiza* (1985) explains all the sordid details in his comprehensive history. As Carlos Franqui, who was one of Castro's right-hand men, points out in his memoir, *Family Portrait with Fidel* (1981), "this was gang warfare disguised as revolutionary politics" (150). This statement, together with Franqui's description of Operation P (mass arrests that included homosexuals, intellectuals, artists, etc. who were made to undress and put on a striped uniform with a huge P across the backside signifying pederast, prostitute, and pimp), is precisely why Néstor Perlongher's reading of Franqui's memoir led him to declare in *Plebian Prose* "that in Castro's Cuba the bloodiest battle was not revolutionary versus counterrevolutionaries, but machos versus homos" (21). Even though Báez is a disidentified BDSM master clone who has sex with other men, his sadomasochism is a continuation of the machismo he embodied before going to prison, when he was a misogynist wife beating abuser.

Machismo creates its own way of life, one in which everything negative is feminine. As our Mexican friends Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes point out, the feminine is screwed beforehand. Latin-American machismo derives from its amalgam of Indian, Spanish, and black cultures. Its negative hero is the dictator..., and its positive hero is the rebel. They are at odds in politics, but they both love power. And both despise homosexuality, as if every macho had his hidden gay side. (Franqui 150)

Based on Franqui's description of machismo, Comisario Báez seems to me like one of those descendants from a middle to upper class family, with a long tradition of machismo, who became

corrupted by bureaucratic bourgeois influences and inherited wealth. I imagine Báez as one of those interrogators or secret police from Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) who tortured Valentin and obligated Molina to befriend him, and then later ends up doing time for domestic violence. What excites Báez is the power of being in control, the negative hero, a topman, the macho who instills terror. These qualities seem most evident in the scene that Pérez narrates following the flashback.

As Comisario Báez consults his little book of instructions, he drinks a cold beer, sits down at the computer, and looks at the pictures of someone identified as *Cara Bravo* and some information provided in a message... "Es un negro corpulento y con gruesos bigotes negros. Le gustan los uniformes látex, los cigarros... No se ve quien lo fotografía. Parece estar solo frente al espejo, chupando un enorme habano, agarrándose la pija con cara de hijo de puta" [He is a stout black with thick black facial hair. He likes latex uniforms, cigars... You can't see who's photographing him. He seems to be alone in front of the mirror, sucking on a huge cigar, clutching his dick with the face of a son of a bitch] (*Mendigo* 35). The fact that Baez looks at pictures on the computer and reads an electronic message reflects the technological innovation of the Internet and the World Wide Web that changed the way men met other men for sex. In Argentina, this began in the late 1990s. We also take note of the Spanish word *habano* which translates simply as cigar, but it also translates as Havana cigar and carries with it all the connotations of Cuban culture through its adjectival semantic relationship with capital city. Something from the city of la Havana is expressed using the gendered masculine *habano*. Cuban cigars are world renown for being hand rolled. The Cuban cigar is often called "El Habano." The tobacco company that manufactures, and exports premium Cuban cigars worldwide is called Habanos S.A. Pérez's use of this specific word

to refer to Báez's cigar as he contemplates a black man named Cara Bravo draws our thoughts to Cuba and its machismo.

The point I have been arguing is that there is something not right about Comisario Báez. He has a sadistic and unethical tendency that exceeds the limits of the ritual tradition. After reading his messages on the computer and as the Comisario masturbates, Pérez reports that Báez fantasizes about him. Using a knife that a friend from Berlin gave him on his last visit there, Báez brushes the tip of the blade against his nipples and becomes aroused, thinking...

“Pablo, ya lo voy a agarrar, ya va a caer”, piensa. Pablo siempre se anima a todo... Pablo desnudo, boca arriba sobre la mesa, atado con sogas de los pies y de las manos a las patas. El Comisario busca un cuchillo, se acerca a la mesa, lentamente acaricia el cuerpo de Pablo con el filo hasta que llega a la pija y los huevos. Pablo empieza a gritar con desesperación. “No tengas miedo, ya está..., ya está... Tranquilo”, le dice Báez, pero Pablo sigue temblando de miedo. Báez guarda el cuchillo y lo desata. “¡Muy bien, chico! Eso estuvo muy bien.”

"Pablo, I'm going to get him, he's going to fall," he thinks. Pablo is always willing to do anything... Pablo naked, face up on the table, tied with ropes from his feet and from his hands to his legs. The Commissioner looks for a knife, approaches the table, slowly caresses Pablo's body with the edge until he reaches the dick and the balls. Pablo begins to scream desperately. “Don't be afraid, it's over..., it's over... Calm down,” Báez tells him, but Pablo continues to tremble with fear. Baez puts the knife away and unties it. "Very good boy! That was very good." (*Mendigo* 36-37)

The scene just described is an abduction, domination, and castration fantasy, but with a sadistically menacing bent. Castration is perhaps the most primordial, unconscious fear, shared by human males. Despite what Freud might have to say on the matter, most men know that the odds of losing their penis and testicles is remote. So, the fear is not conscious, but rather symbolic. In SM ritual practice gay men enact symbolic castrations in a variety of ways, for example they might use a harness with weights, or a Master might stretch the scrotum and balls as a symbolic threat of castration. Nevertheless, since the ritual is meant to be safe, sane, and consensual, then why would Pablo scream in fear as the Comisario holds the knife to his penis and testicles, unless the threat

implicit in the gesture is not consensual and the symbolic terror becomes conscious? Báez's fantasy, then, is not to bring pleasure to Pérez's body through consensual symbolic play but to cause psychological terror. Comisario Báez's imagination is haunted by an ideological specter that lingers in his subconscious, surfaces in his fantasy, and threatens to materialize in the real world.

After several years of happy togetherness, Báez's trio with José María and Pérez disintegrates. The sublimated real-world violence that began surfacing in Báez is why they lose trust in him as a master. Pérez explains that once José began to inexplicably leave in the middle of their sessions, "el Comisario se transformó en un verdadero monstruo" [the Commissioner transformed into a real monster] (*Mendigo* 40). His monstrous masculinity became too much to bear. Báez began to issue general threats about being very crazy, then began stalking José, and finally threatened to kill him. José wanted to call the police but decided not to because Báez had photographs of their BDSM sessions that he would not be able to explain. Apparently Báez was not only a poser but a blackmailer, too. The trouble in their scalene triangle prompts Pérez to write a letter about exiting the relationship but he was too terrified to deliver it. As a result of the situation and their general avoidance of Báez, José and Pérez grow closer as friends. They commiserated about Báez, who eventually stopped bothering them after he left Buenos Aires for a time.

Conclusions—Sex Magic, Spirituality, and Historical Anthropology through Autofiction

The arc of the protagonist's development traced in the film *Un año sin amor* ends when Pérez's aunt Nefertiti finds his published diary and, upon reading it, takes offense at his characterization of her. Repulsed and disgusted with his descriptions of sadomasochism and his numerous hedonistic sexual encounters. She goes to see Pérez's father. Meanwhile, Pérez meets a man at a nightclub and brings him to the apartment. When he arrives, he finds his father is there waiting for him in the kitchen. Pérez asks the man to wait for him in the living room and then goes

to the kitchen to speak with his father. Pérez asks the father what he is doing there and if something had happened to his aunt. He looks down toward the table surprised, then looks back up at his father, who tells him that the aunt is at his home, she is very angry, that he is extremely disappointed. Pérez's father stairs out the kitchen window. After a long pause, he turns to look at his son straight in the eyes and asks, "Why? Don't you know? I can't believe you would do something like this. Why do you have to talk about family matters?" Pérez replies, "What family? This is my story. It's my life. Nobody's name appears in the novel. Besides all of you..." The father interrupts, "We... We helped you as much as we could." Another long pause ensues as Pérez looks down toward the floor, dejected, thoughtful. Pérez's father looks out the kitchen window, and after another long pause, disapprovingly shakes his head and says, "Pablo. With everything we've gone through together." He cannot even look at his son, who looks up at his father, imploring with his eyes. The father turns toward him, with tears welling up in his eyes, and says, "You're needed." The man who came home with Pérez is standing at the kitchen door. He announces that he is leaving, and Pérez shows him to the door. As Pérez returns to the kitchen, the father begins to leave, and they cross paths in the doorway. The father tells him, "I don't want to see you here when I come back this evening." On the kitchen table is the first edition of Pérez's book, the one with the green cover and the yellow band that says "HIV positivo." Moments later, Pérez calls Nicolás, who does not answer. He calls another friend Juan, who is not at home. Then he calls a student to tell her that the next day's class is canceled, he is moving, and they will be in touch. Then he grabs a small backpack, a satchel, his leather jacket, and leaves the apartment.

In the closing scene of the film, we see Pérez, carrying the few things he could gather before leaving and arriving at a nightclub that appears in the film, but does not appear in either of the first two novels. The film gives the impression that the nightclub is not only a discotheque, but

also a space where BDSM play occurs on a regular basis. The nightclub serves as an Argentine analogue for the Paris BDSM nightclub, MecZone, mentioned in *Un año sin amor* and *Querido Nicolás*. After Pérez enters the club and descends the stairs to the basement, where all the action occurs, the viewer is left with the feeling that Pérez faces an uncertain future, despite the hope that taking drug cocktail provides, and despite his first novel being published. Pérez's descent into the darkness of the nightclub basement feels to me like what he said about Báez when he left the BDSM club in San Francisco, "que había estado a punto de caer en un mundo infernal del que nunca hubiera podido regresar" [that he had been about to fall into a hellish world from which he could never have returned] (*Mendigo* 34). Pérez descent down the stairs communicates a movement past the point of no return.

As mentioned earlier, the film is an adaptation of the first two novels, but the ending of the film greatly differs from the ending in *El mendigo chupapijas*. In the film ending, the director seems to emphasize the unspoken history of the family in the final scene between father and son, the history to which I have alluded to in my analysis: Juan Peron's betrayal of leftist Peronism, the Ezeiza Massacre, the aftermath of the military dictatorship, the diseased family tree that Pérez mentions in *Un año sin amor*, which I have read as referring also to the nation of Argentina and the neoliberal turn. At the end of *El mendigo chupapijas*, Pérez becomes disillusioned with Comisario Báez's dark side and José María goes to live in another city. Like in the film, Pérez is forced to leave the apartment he shares with his aunt after she finds the diary. After all the effort to locate the man of his dreams with whom he can share story of love, Pérez was unable to secure the love of the Master he longed for. Instead of going to the BDSM club, like he does in the film, Pérez walks the streets and happens upon a trio of mendicants at an abandoned home in Buenos Aires. None of these men are the one who gave him a blowjob in the theater, but one of them, the

one who invited Pérez into the house, takes an interest in him. As the silent man caresses Pérez's nipples and presses his semi erect penis against Pérez's neck, Pérez asks the three men if he can take a sip from the carton of wine they had been sharing.

The youngest of the three with dense black hair and beard tells Pérez to come close and asks him his name. After Pérez replies that his first name is Pablo, the young man speaks to Pérez using language that feminizes him, saying... "Tenés un culito muy lindo, mamita. Vení sentate acá conmigo que papi te va a cuidar de ese degenerado. ¿Y nombre de mujer no tenés?" [You have a very cute ass, honey. Come sit here with me, daddy is going to protect you from that degenerate. Don't you have a woman's name?] (*Mendigo* 76). Pérez does not know how to respond and so he tells the young man to give him a name, then then he lays down and leans against the body of the young man, who holds the carton of wine up to Pérez's lips with his big and dirty hand. Pérez is disconcerted at first but in the young man's gentle caresses he begins to feel an extraordinary sense of peace and let's go of his fear. "¿Estás bien Paulita?" [Are you ok, Paulita?] (*Mendigo* 76) the young man inquires. Meanwhile, Pérez takes in the scene.

The young man kisses his neck and gives him sips of wine. The other two men tend to some meat on a makeshift grill. Pérez feels the young man's erect penis against his back. And suddenly, he experiences a thunderbolt of luminous and vibrant energy arise from his sacral plexus through his spine. The light radiates out of the top of his head, like it had done several times before.

La luz me inundaba cuando volví a ver ángeles. Es la noche más luminosa de mi vida. Ahora los demás duermen y yo siento libertad que nunca antes había sentido. Me protege en sus brazos el Chino, que me trata como a una mujer, me protegen los ángeles y la noche, un viento tibio y el cielo estrellado.

[Light flooded me when I saw angels again. It is the brightest night of my life. Now the others are sleeping, and I feel a freedom I have never felt before. The Asian-featured-man protects me in his arms, he treats me like a woman, the angels and the night protect me, a warm wind, and the starry sky.] (*Mendigo* 77)

The first time Pérez had a similar experience had been over ten years before, when he went to see a spiritual healer in Paris named Mademoiselle Bonont. She laid hands on him and unblocked the flow of Universal Love. She never once charged for her services. Mme. Bonont showed him a spiritual exercise that she called “Raising Vibrational Elevation” that produces an effect like astral projection. She prophesied that he had the gift of automatic writing and that he would be invited to various cities around the world. Pérez often put the prophecy to the test, putting pen to paper, but nothing occurred. Nevertheless, from that point forward he frequently had experiences of radiant energy and the sensation that supernatural beings were near. He never gave up believing in her prophecies and that his life had a special purpose.

The writer Ganymede in “Sacred Passages and Sex Magic” in the anthology *Leatherfolk* explains that those who devote their lives to the radical sexuality of SM, which for them means “sex magic,” they take control by learning to think ritualistically, building a ritual mind set. They reclaim the power and divinity to create their own rituals of meaning and identity. To liberate themselves from self-perpetuating repression, they must renew both their sexual and spiritual rites. The raising of vibrational energy that Mme. Bonont taught Pérez is from Ganymede’s perspective...

Kundalini power...the most potent tool for transformation we have available. Sensual, deliberate arousal of the Serpent-Fire quickens the chakric centers; the passion of the loins can be stoked to inflame the entire body-consciousness, whether alone or with partners. This passion-power raises the stake from mere orgasmic release to ecstasy and spiritual enlightenment.

In other words, BDSM practices in its contemporary understanding has evolved from the days of the Old Guard, who are regarded by many practitioners of contemporary leathersexuality as tantric explorations that unlock closed doors, allowing the body’s “journey through the paradoxical land of extremes to restore inner balance.” Ultimately, sex magic (SM) leads to altered states of

consciousness and the transcendence of the limitations that the material world, with all its trappings, manifests as ego, pride, and attachments.

Pérez narrates three earlier experiences like the one at the end of *El mendigo chupapijas*, two where spiritual entities materialize in his out of body vision. Different variations of Kundalini experiences appear in *Un año sin amor* and *El mendigo chupapijas*. The first experience I would like to highlight appears in *Un año sin amor* but does not appear in the second novel, per se. It occurs in the diary entry of May 24th when he highlights a passage from *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* and tries to conjure a spiritual guide. The passage is a poem that serves as a prayer, or mantra.

Del loto floreciente de la devoción, / álzate en el centro de mi corazón, / ¡oh, maestro, compasivo, mi único refugio! / Estoy asociado por acciones pasadas y emociones / turbulentas: / para protegerme en mi desgracia, quédate / sobre mi coronilla como una diadema, el mandala / de gran dicha, / que aviva toda mi atención y mi conciencia ¡te lo ruego!

From the blossoming lotus of devotion, / rise in the center of my heart, / oh, compassionate master, my only refuge! / I am associated by past actions and turbulent / emotions: / to protect me in my misfortune, stay / on my crown like a diadem, the mandala / of great happiness, / that enlivens all my attention and my conscience, I beg you! (*Amor* 63-64)

As he highlights the passage in the book, a drop of his sweat falls upon the page, highlighting the ink, and the splash causes a violaceous flower to appear above the word lotus. Then a few days later as his friend Luis, a man he met for sex that became a regular sex buddy, reads a few phrases from a book of white magic he brings to share with him, Pérez feels as though he is receiving a response through its words. “Permíteme presentarme, hermana o hermano que has logrado llegar hasta aquí. Yo soy el Guía que te conducirá por las puertas y pasadizos secretos de este gran Templo que ves ante ti, aunque ni él ni yo estamos en el plano material” [Allow me to introduce myself, sister or brother who have made it this far. I am the Guide who will lead you through the doors and secret passages of this great Temple that you see before you, although neither he nor I

are on the material plane] (*Amor* 64). Pérez believes the words are meant for him. From that point forward, Pérez has the unmistakable feeling that angels are near him, communicating with him, and that despite feeling as though he is losing his mind, he commits himself to remaining open to their messages from beyond. He sleeps with a crystal under his pillow.

The second experience occurs at a nature retreat while meditating under a tree in a wondrous place, narrated in *El mendigo chupapijas*. The Kundalini energy radiates, and he sees the bodies of two luminous beings looming over him, he describes as gnomes. The third experience occurs after smoking marijuana while feeling miserably close to death. After dancing around his room and contemplating a medallion of the Holy Spirit he stuck to the crystal under his pillow, the Kundalini energy radiates as before. Dizziness made him lay down on his bed when the light flooded around him, and he saw blue celestial beings surrounding his bed. When he shares the experiences with José María the astrologer, chalking it up to the marijuana, the leather master tells him that smoking the plant alone could not produce such an effect unless he was already in an altered state of consciousness. Pérez cannot shake the feeling that his future is connected to the homeless man he met but who refuses to have a conversation with him.

The story of Pablo Pérez and his character's transformation begins with the spiritual awakening that he experiences at the hands of the healer who teaches him the release of Kundalini energy which marks the starting point of his journey through the land of extremes—the life and death confrontation with HIV/AIDS and the sex magic of pain and euphoria—which ultimately ends in mendicant spiritual bliss. Sade's erotic capital is in bankruptcy. Everything in his life had been building up to the moment of spiritual fulfilment that becoming part of the mendicant trio unleashes. The Kundalini Serpent-Fire has burned away the psychic dead wood of the diseased family tree that Pérez described when the story began.

During my interview with Pérez in 2019, he explained that he wanted *Un año sin amor* to accomplish several things. First, he wanted it to register a specific historical moment when the gaze of the medical establishment was on the emerging viral bodies, inventing new terminology, medical procedures, and discourses. The medical establishment became extremely detailed in its approach to medication, laboratory testing, and what the results meant. He wanted to leave a record of his experience of such things. Second, he wanted to register how those living with the virus sought out alternative therapies such as the use of medicinal herbs, homeopathy, and even spiritual approaches to death and dying. We see this in his references to *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*—a book which brings together Tibetan Buddhist and modern scientific traditions. Third, Pérez wanted to include frank discussion of sexual activity devoid of euphemisms, calling things by their name, which to his knowledge had not yet been done in Argentine literature, especially regarding BDSM. In seeking these three objectives, Pérez captures a critical historical turning point in the progression of the pandemic, as mentioned earlier, when in 1996 the HIV/AIDS medical establishment announces the “drug cocktail,” which eventually turns the viral infection into a manageable and lifelong disease. It also captures a time when a growing number of men in Argentina became interested in leathersexuality and began to establish a local community. The threefold focus of Pérez’s writing fortuitously became a multisensorial life reaffirming process as the experiences of the protagonist parallels the life of the author in many ways. The resulting literature is an anthropological document about an individual with a certain set of characteristics living in a determined epoch and intellectually reflecting its Zeitgeist.

Pérez’s novels are unique within the Latin American HIV positive corpus. The first novel *Un año sin amor* through a series of entries at first conveys a sensation of desperation and imminent death but ends with the hope of ongoing life. The second novel *El mendigo chupapijas*,

which refuses to settle into one narrative mode, reflects the *jouissance* of the Gay Leather style and leathersexuality, however disidentified it may be, transported from the Global North to Argentina. Another unique aspect is that while the fabula of the novels are centered on the existential angst and insatiable sexual appetite of an HIV positive protagonist who searches for a reciprocal love relationship with an experienced leather Master, he exuberantly describes the dark and foreboding sexual situations he encounters in matter-of-fact terms. The effect of this form of storytelling, when we take all three novels into account, is that the narrative produces humor that is acidic and blasphemous in its resistance to and criticism of popular capitalist culture while the protagonist comes to realize that what he ultimately seeks is an organic universal divine love much like what the author imagines was the life of Francis of Assisi.

When Pérez conceived the work, he reports that he was inspired in part by the Harvard University Press multivolume, multiauthor, work *The History of Private Life* (1987) by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, not because he read the series, but because he was intrigued by the title. “Siempre me resultó interesante porque es un libro de esos que algún día voy a leer, pero me llamó la atención el título porque me parece que está bueno, porque a mí me encanta saber los detalles de la vida de la gente” [I always found it interesting because it's one of those books that I'm going to read one day, but the title caught my attention because I think it's good, because I love knowing the details of people's lives] (Jaramillo 261-2). In other words, as the consummate voyeur that he confesses he is, Pérez enjoys spying through people's windows to see how they live, how they keep their home, where they place their televisions, and what they eat. The eagerness to behold and report is reflected in his writing where he indulges in a realism that is salacious and shocking, much like way one of Pérez's favorite authors Émile Zola does in *L'Assommoir*. Zola's title is an adaptation of the French verb *assommer* which means to stun, knock out, or sandbag. The noun

does not have an equivalent English counterpart and thus has been rendered by translators of Zola's writing in a variety of ways. In colloquial terms, the French neologism could be likened to being "hammered" or "plastered." Pérez was extremely passionate about Zola's novel when he read it in his youth while studying French. After participating in writing workshops with Susana Silvestre, he decided he wanted his approach to his novels to be French naturalism, like literary realism, "en el sentido de que el documento fuera yo mismo. O sea, yo soy mi propio documento" [in the sense that the document was me. In other words, I am my own document] (Jaramillo 262). To put it yet another way, the documentary subject of his pseudo anthropological experimental self-referential diaristic autofictional novel was himself, "Pablo Pérez," someone about whom he had privileged knowledge and access.

In the Deleuzian sense, the ideas derived from the subjective and objective experience of the concrete individual, in this case the author, give rise to the behavior patterns of the character body's metastable materialization in the pornological writing. The echo in nomenclature between author, narrative subject, cinematic protagonist, and screen writer become a transformational matrix for the material system of the various bodies he represents in their repetitive incarnations in the novels, and later in the film adaptation of the first two novels. They are like a parasitic cipher waiting to be decoded in the sense that the bodies habitually rely on the author's past to embody a future. Pérez embodies a rhizomatic convergence of a diversity of subjective experiences, a transtextuality of postmodern themes if you will, which include: language, pedagogy, literary translation, transnationalism, politics, neoliberal capitalism, philosophy, poetry, diaries, epistles, autobiography, journalism, media, computers, recreational drugs, drug cocktails, prostitution, homosexuality, suicide, urophagia, coprophagia, sadomasochism, pyrophilia, denim, leather, homelessness, precarity, hypermasculinity, homeopathy, spirituality, divination, astrology,

mysticism, violence, death, and eroticism, etc. These themes appear throughout the series of novels. They directly relate to the *jouissance* of Pablo Pérez's experiences with HIV/AIDS in Argentina as well as the time he studies abroad in Europe learning French and living a bohemian existence. These themes reverberate and triangulate like waves moving back and forth across the Atlantic and the Caribbean, connecting Buenos Aires, Paris, New York, Berlin, and San Francisco as bodies and ideas become viral, leaping from continent to continent through the microcircuitry and networks of queer cosmopolitan desires. Through the primary methodology of Derridean deconstruction, with special nods to the works of Sévero Sarduy and Néstor Perlongher, we have explored the paradoxes of subjectivity that emerge from using the body as a medium—an intervening substance through which impressions are conveyed to the senses and upon which contagious metaphors are written, and like radio communication, becoming a force which acts on objects at a distance. The hero named "Pablo Pérez" is such an object.

CONCLUSIONS

Queer folk in cities throughout the world increasingly experienced hope about their future during the 1970s, after uprisings occurred in the late-1960s in San Francisco, New York, and Paris, which led to the birth of what is known as the “gay liberation movement.” Violent confrontations with police successfully drew a metaphorical line in the sand, which motivated gay women and men elsewhere to begin engaging collectively in radical direct action to transform the social and political spheres where power held influence over their lives and bodies. The gay and lesbian liberation movement emphasized a demand for civil rights that aligned with a larger counterculture movement, which focused on questions of rights for women and people of color. Ethnic movements sought recognition for Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Thinkers at the vanguard of these movements not only sought an end to racial segregation and questioned the authority of traditional power structures, they advanced knowledge about the body, sexuality, race, and gender. Experimentation with psychoactive drugs became fashionable and a way to express antiestablishment sensibilities that transformations in music, art, literature, and cinema supported. The yearning for freedom spread across the globe as communities in the Global South sought to replicate strategies and partake in perceived triumphs. At the heart of movements in Latin America was what Pedro Lemebel describes as “loco afán” [crazy eagerness] to demand redress for centuries of oppression, discrimination, violence, and death under the rule of authoritarian governments. The appearance of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s complicated and disrupted everything. The mysterious viral threat forced everyone to reassess their reality and long-term goals when those in power sought to quarantine its spread. As discussed in the introduction, the rising body count coupled with the criminal neglect of governments urged queer people and their non-queer allies to take matters into their own hands, to provide care to the victims and to educate those in their communities who were at risk of becoming infected.

Gay and lesbian liberation may have begun as a movement by and for white, middle class, homosexuals in the Global North, as many thinkers in and from the Global South have since pointed out, along with their apprehension and suspicion, but more and more people are beginning to understand that liberation from oppression of their niche in the spectrum depends on freedom for everyone. Regardless of a person's race, sexuality, gendered embodiment, or any other intersectional identity category, we must regard the capacity to explore and experience pleasure derived from sexuality and eroticism as a human right, as fundamentally important as shelter, food, and water. As thinkers have pointed out, ethical theorizations about queerness must seek to acknowledge and accommodate local and regional identity categories existing in the Global South. Our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, must theorize identity using discourses and rhetorical strategies to enjoin identities that manifest displeasure, to overcome their isolation. One striking example of how activists in the Global North tried to become more inclusive of other identities was when the familiar LGBT acronym expanded to LGBTQIA+. The acronym representing a variety of identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, and more) expanded over the decades, as diverse groups demanded equity and inclusion within the expanding LGBT liberation movement.

Even so, not everyone saw themselves reflected in the colors of the rainbow, which came to symbolize the diversity of sexualities and genders. Simply adding more letters or a plus sign at the end proved to be insufficient validation. Knowledge and consciousness about such matters continues to evolve. As part of a global community of scholars, I continually wrestle with the terminology at our disposal. I struggle to articulate my concerns without dismissing or devaluing anyone's experiences, criticisms, political positions, or truths. This dissertation has considered a small sample of creators who through their writing confronted the crisis. Although all three authors

made HIV/AIDS a central concern, bearing witness to the global health crisis was not their only aim. Among other local issues they confront, they each in their own way grasp at the politics of sexuality. Within the politics of sexuality lays the struggle for identity. Therefore, each chapter of the dissertation brings forward terminology the authors have used to categorize the identities they represent and critique.

For example, Roberto Jacoby, who wrote the prologue for the first edition of *Un año sin amor* (reprinted in the *Blatt & Rios* 2018 edition as an appendix), like Alberto Giordano, who wrote the first scholarly study in 2005 about the novel, concurs that the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s forced everyone to reassess their survival strategies, and those of their imagined communities. They both see a transformation of subjectivity in 1996 with the introduction of the drug cocktail, but in contrast with Giordano, Jacoby sees a crisis of identity playing out in Pérez's novel *Un año sin amor* when he questions "Quién soy?" [Who am I?] (*Amor* 137). Jacoby asserts that Pérez leaves the question unresolved except to tacitly claim in response to be the person who writes the text. This observation goes along with my reading of the protagonist as the author in quotes, a version of himself based on lived experiences. Jacoby points out that telling the story he does through a diary, which he considers a minority genre among the other autobiographical narrative modes, puts the very notion of minority in crisis. Jacoby sees Pérez's novel as unique, a minority of one, which calls the very notion of a minority into question. He regards categorization as a strategic tool of power relations among minorities, out of which one percent of the population has extended its image to become a universal social model. Pérez imports the word "gay" three times into his novel. The first to describe a visit to a gay bar in Paris. The second to talk about a Buenos Aires Gay Pride March on July 6th. The third to refer to the inauguration of a new fast-food restaurant that played pre- and post-gay-disco. We discover in another appendix of the 2018

Blatt & Rios edition of Pérez's novel that editor Mariano Blatt prefers the term "puto," which he uses to identify himself as well as the protagonist of the novel. When he presents the eBook version of the novel, Blatt self-identifies as "puto" and celebrates the novel "a testimonial novel that allows us to reconstruct the customs of *putos porteños* at the end of the nineties" (*Amor* 139). The word "puto" in Spanish, considered a violent insult, translates as the masculine for whore, but it also carries several other meanings in the local Buenos Aires slang, such as faggot, gay, homosexual, male prostitute. Using the term "puto," which in the local slang refers to a male prostitute, seems to grasp at yet another male homosexual identity that resists the categorization of gay liberation identities in the Global North.

Both Reinaldo Arenas and Pedro Lemebel expressed dissatisfaction with gay and lesbian liberation in the Global North, which I discussed in more detail in their respective chapters. But I want to briefly return to a few examples from *Antes que anochezca* and *Loco afán* to underscore the crisis of identity Jacoby signals in Pérez's novel. In the original Spanish, Arenas does not use the word "gay" in *Antes que anochezca* at all. He consistently uses the word "homosexual" to refer to himself and several men with whom he has sex. Translator Dolores Koch, on the other hand, who rendered the English translation *Before Night Falls*, uses the word "gay" for both "homosexual" and "loca," which erases the nuance in meaning between the two words. Sometimes she keeps the word "homosexual," so it makes it challenging to exclusively analyze the English version in relation to the politics of sexuality. My best guess is that Koch was under pressure from the publisher *Penguin Books* to not only produce an accessible translation for speakers of English in the West, but also to economize on the page count to reduce publishing cost. Whereas chapters in the Spanish version have page breaks, Koch's translation does not. I wonder how Arenas would have reacted to such an imposition of nomenclature had he been alive when Koch translated the

book. When Arenas talks about gay liberation in the North, he uses the phrase “militancia homosexual,” which Koch translates as “homosexual militancy,” but notice how she translates the entire sentence. “La militancia homosexual ha dado otros derechos que son formidables para los homosexuales del mundo libre” (*Antes* 133). “Homosexual militancy has gained considerable rights for *free-world gays*” (*Before* 108 emphasis mine). Shockingly, the only other place in the entire book where Arenas uses the word “militancy” is in reference to communism, a striking connection, given how the Cold War in Latin America led to the persecution of both homosexuals and communists.

Another important point we must consider is how Arenas frames the geopolitical landscape using the phrase “mundo libre,” which Koch translates as “free-world.” Arenas uses this term three times in *Antes que anochezca*: in this sentence, in another when he talks about a man who betrayed him named Samuel Echerre, and the other while discussing those who escaped in the Mariel Boatlift, who desired to live in a free world and work to recuperate their lost humanity. I would argue that his use of the phrase is strategic and intended to communicate a sense of irony, sarcasm, and criticism. In the sentence cited above, Arenas creates a juxtaposition between those who live inside and outside of spaces he considered “free.” Before he escaped, he lived in an authoritarian regime where he was not free, since was not allowed to write, publish, or represent the eroticism of same sex desire as inherently Cuban. After he escaped, his utopian imagination of freedom may have created expectations much larger than the reality he encountered in the United States. The freedom was not as sweet as he had hoped. We see this when he expresses his feelings about the failures of gay liberation. The implied meaning of the “free-world gays” metaphor is that outside of Cuba homosexuals are free, while inside Cuba, they are not. Obviously, interpreting the juxtaposition this way is problematic given that in many other so-called liberal democracies,

sodomy at the time was against the law, even in many parts of the United States as observed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).

The Cuban revolution may have begun with democratic intentions, but Castro declared that he was a Marxist-Leninist in a televised address to the nation on December 2, 1961 and that “scientific socialism” had become the “revolutionary movement of the working class.” In a chapter titled “El superstalinismo” [Super-Stalinism], Arenas denounces Castro’s regime as Stalinist even though Stalin died in 1953. He uses the metaphor of the chapter to explain how he and many of his fellow Cubans lost hope that Cuba would turn toward democracy after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. According to Arenas, many people thought that since *Granma*, a newspaper which operated as the official voice of the revolution, had published information about the invasion that did not express a position, Castro would address the public and break ties with the Soviets. Instead, Castro “congratulated the Soviet Union and its ‘heroes’... he asked the Soviet Union invade Cuba should the United States threaten his regime” (*Before* 125). This congratulatory turn in 1968 “convinced” Arenas that “there was nothing left for me [him] to do under the Castro regime” (*Before* 124). In the chapter, Arenas determined that Castro was “a dictator much worse than Batista,” that for many people their only choice “was to live under a despotic regime, in a despotic colony... more despotic than the metropolis from which all our orders emanated” (*Before* 125-26). According to Arenas, the Super-Stalinism started when the already “forced ‘voluntary’ work was intensified” (*Before* 126). Because Castro had boasted that Cuba would produce a “ten-million-ton sugarcane harvest,” everyone was obligated to give up what little freedoms they had to “participate, without reprieve, in agricultural work” (*Before* 126). So, Castro expanded the concentration camp technology to the point that the entire “Island became

an enormous sugarcane plantation” (*Before* 126). I conclude that the “Super-Stalinization” and “free-world” metaphors are juxtaposed to highlight several points.

The first is that Castro’s praise for the Soviet Union and his country-wide forced labor policy, coupled with the internment of many men with long hair full of “creativity, eroticism, intelligence, and beauty” in what Arenas calls “concentration camps,” underscores the hegemony of Cuban history in Piñera’s poetics of *insilio*. Arenas wants his reader to see Castro’s decision, actions, and speeches as a reenactment of the colonial past, when the indigenous Amerindians and African slaves were forced to labor in the hot sun. The second is that Arenas wanted to underscore a parallel between Castro’s regime and the Soviet Union under Lenin, and later, Stalin. Both regimes used forced exile and labor as punishments. Both persecuted and proscribed of homosexuals and their contribution to cultural production. While Arenas refers to Castro’s forced labor camps as “concentration camps,” Lenin, and later Stalin’s forced labor camp system was called “gulag.” Estimates of the number of people who passed through the Soviet system under Stalin are in the millions. I conclude that Arenas wanted to communicate that Castro was just as capable as Stalin in turning people into “enslaved ghosts,” a term he uses to describe how the creative, erotic, intelligent, and beautiful men became because of the inner exile and entrapment of *insilio*. An enslaved ghost well describes what Ilie, Pintos, and other scholars like myself see as the bodily manifestation of inner exile and *insilio* under an authoritarian regime, which I have asserted in this dissertation is a similar effect produced by HIV/AIDS in its advanced stages. An enslaved ghost is a figure stripped of all external markings of identity, one step below a zombie.

Pedro Lemebel sharply criticizes gay liberation in two chronicles in *Loco afán*, “Crónicas de Nueva York” [Chronicles of New York] and “Loco afán” [Crazy eagerness]. In the chapter about Lemebel, I closely read both chronicles to underscore his position. But as mentioned in the

introduction, his visit to New York was also the opportunity to create his own public spectacle when he marched in the Christopher Street Gay Pride Parade wearing the crown of syringes and carrying the sign saying, “Chile return AIDS.” To recap, the two chronicles remind the reader that he juxtaposes the poverty of his Third World Latin American homosexual embodiment with the well-fed, muscular, embodiment of First World North American gays. The embodiment of the Gay Leather Style of BDSM reminds him of the fascistic militarized police and gangs of young men who routinely targeted *locas* and *travestis* in Santiago and Valparaiso. He exalts the indigenous inheritance of the identities he champions as if to recall the tremendous diversity of male embodiments that the Spanish conquerors deemed sodomites, shocked at their same-sex behaviors. In the conclusion to Chapter three, I closely read the viralization of Lemebel’s face to underscore how his allies continue the work toward a vindication of the Araucanian Mapuche peoples, the only Indigenous tribe to have successfully resisted colonial domination until 1862, when the Chilean government forcibly occupied their ancestral territory via sustained military action.

Although we can see Pedro Lemebel, and to a lesser extent Reinaldo Arenas, replicate the confrontational strategies and direct action against authority, all three authors struggle with how to define their identity. They communicate the notion, in diverse ways, that the only acceptable remedy moving forward is full equality and global citizenship for all sexualities and gendered embodiments regardless of their intersectional identifications of race, ethnicity, social class, ability, and more. Arenas and Lemebel focalized the figure of the *loca* to represent the most despised homosexual embodiment due to the stigma attached to being and becoming woman while not becoming transexual. Pablo Pérez on the other hand, represents not only the emergency of HIV/AIDS, but of identity itself, when he tacitly refuses to identify himself with either word, gay or homosexual. The only time in the whole novel that the word homosexual appears in *Un año sin*

amor is in the diary entry of June 7th, when he discusses conversations with his mother and his half-brother Diego. “El mismo día en que hablé con Diego, ella le contó que yo era homosexual y que tenía sida” [The same day I spoke with Diego, she told him that I was homosexual and had AIDS] (*Amor* 72). It seems quite clear that Pérez is more resistant than Arenas and Lemebel in his writing to use the terminology created in the Global North to categorize men who have sex with other men.

I conclude that all three authors advocate and argue that anyone who seeks and gives pleasure are “knowers,” those who possess special knowledge and who, through the trial and error of new experiences, create more knowledge. I am certainly not the first to say that the struggle for universal freedom must include a politic that takes all identity categories into consideration and seeks to forge alliances across imagined borders. The trouble we all keep facing is one of terminology. Is it possible to articulate difference without reifying stigma?

This is precisely what Reinaldo Arenas did in *The Color of Summer*. He reached back in time and intervened in Judeo-Christian-Muslim patriarchal creation mythology to claim that intolerance for same sex desire cast humanity out of paradise. Arenas claims that the authority of those who ascribe to and perpetuate the notion of original sin because two men or two women broke the celestial rule and dared to imagine a heaven of their own punish and ban all forms of erotic pleasure. Arenas boldly declares, “there is no heaven, my friends, but the heaven of pleasure” (*The Color* 400). Theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas considered sexual pleasure something wicked and dangerous based on the logic of the creation mythology they interpreted, grasping at the reasons for mankind’s expulsion from paradise. In the process of theorizing Christian dogma, they established a male centric logos where they cast all women and male bodies that behave in womanly ways as villains. The logic of their logos punishes the woman for causing

man's expulsion from paradise, but it also grants her a reprieve, because they interpreted the woman's vagina as a sacred baby making machine, a sacred chalice into which the man's phallus deposits the holy seed of life. These theologians purposed sex exclusively for procreation and men should tolerate the pleasure derived from obedience to the celestial mandate as an inconvenience when performing one's sacred duty. They considered anyone who sought pleasure for pleasure's sake an aberration, reduced to the figure of the Sodomite, and cursed for all eternity.

To undo the curse, Arenas proposed that the sodomite, transformed for his purposes into the *loca* [queen], must regard pleasure as holy and the giving of pleasure as a "divine mission," which for him is the true mandate of heaven. According to Arenas, *locas*, both male and female, can reconstitute Paradise when they come together "to create the army of pleasure...to continue as soldiers in that army, its eternal reinforcements" (*The Color* 400). Arenas does not merely advocate for a restoration of the pleasure derived from same sex desire. The ultimate purpose of his proposal is "to create (or, if you prefer, preserve) a mythology and metaphysics of pleasure" (*The Color* 400). Although the mission is undoubtedly dangerous, difficult, and disinterested, "what we want is for everybody to have a little fun!" (*The Color* 400 underline original). Arenas is playful in the presentation of these ideas, but the context is deadly serious. We can see how public discourses that identify the other as Black, Indigenous, a woman, transsexual, gay person, and/or nonbinary in 2023 make their lives and bodies targets of those who seek to erase their diversity and difference. Violence directed at these people is a daily occurrence.

As I began to think about and craft my conclusions, I realized that Giordano's proposal about AIDS subjectivity before and after 1996 allowed me to think in terms of a before, a during, and an after, but also what I call a meanwhile. Reinaldo Arenas represents the point of view of a PWA before 1996, when AIDS was a death sentence, while Pablo Pérez represents the point of

view of a PWA during 1996, and after, when the “drug cocktail” transforms him into a survivor. Pedro Lemebel, on the other hand, represents the point of view of a witness, a concerned ally and deeply committed outsider who testifies about the lives of PWAs in the meanwhile of HIV/AIDS’ becoming a chronic condition. Since AIDS had ravaged his body and left him without the ability to derive pleasure in life, Arenas chose to end it in a suicide. But his message to *locas* and AIDS survivors and homosexuals everywhere is not to allow fear to keep them from living, but to fill the earth with feathers, continue fighting to recuperate the paradise lost. Lemebel projects a similar queer future in his manifesto when he urges *locas* to embroider the flags of freedom with birds, which in Spanish is *pájaros*, another word used to signify a penis but also a homosexual person. To leave an enduring trace of his existence and sow the seeds of a future transfeminist revolution, Lemebel carefully curated and nurtured a persona that has acquired mythical dimensions as his discourses feminized Chilean history. Finally, in the life narrative of Pablo Pérez transformed into an AIDS survivor thanks to the drug cocktail, the pleasures of leather S/M, which for many of its adherents stimulates the production of endorphins through the pain/pleasure responses of the body, he demonstrates how he achieves states of euphoria that psychoanalysts refer to as *jouissance* and practitioners refer to as *sex magic*. These altered states of consciousness lead him to transcend the limitations of the material world, along with ego and pride. It allows him to open his mind and body to spiritual experiences, communication with angelic beings, and an acceptance of a homeless existence.

The works of these authors considered together, using the rubrics I have proposed through the viral body metaphor, demonstrate that queer subjects attain liberation and redemption by embracing the aberrant as truth. As Lee Edelman asserts, queer subjects find their “value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of

a general good” (6). In other words, embracing the negative needs no justification, “if justification requires it [truth] to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself” (6). The viral bodies of queer subjects, therefore, reject notions of general good. They require no justification. They intervene in the reproduction of oppressive realities by giving shape to fantasies that assure the stability and coherence of atypical identities. Once identity achieves stability, queer subjects forge communities and kinship based on the pleasure derived from being together, struggling together, crying, laughing, and playing together, like children.

This dissertation has emphasized the metaphorical strategies the authors in the corpus have used to contaminate the discourses of fascist forces which have conflated religious, legal, and political ideologies. The dissertation has argued that Arenas, Lemebel, and Pérez, in diverse ways, used their bodies, their minds, and a variety of enunciative acts to produce viral bodies, metaphors with the potential to jump across imagined borders. Their contagious metaphors act like viruses of the mind with sufficient deconstructive force to bring disorder to communication, to bring dissonance into its coding and decoding, and to disrupt destination, which includes all forms of oral, textual, and/or visual inscription. Their metaphors also project onto a queer future and offer strategies for survival based on eliminating the stigma associated with seeking pleasure. They encourage those like them, who resist the imposition of identity categories created in the Global North, to take pride in local terminology used to dehumanize them. They demonstrate that when they own the injurious metaphors of power, they can laugh wholeheartedly as they fashion the radical exteriority of gendered embodiments using their imaginations as weapons against tyranny.

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