Affective Materiality: Latin American Science Fiction at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

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by

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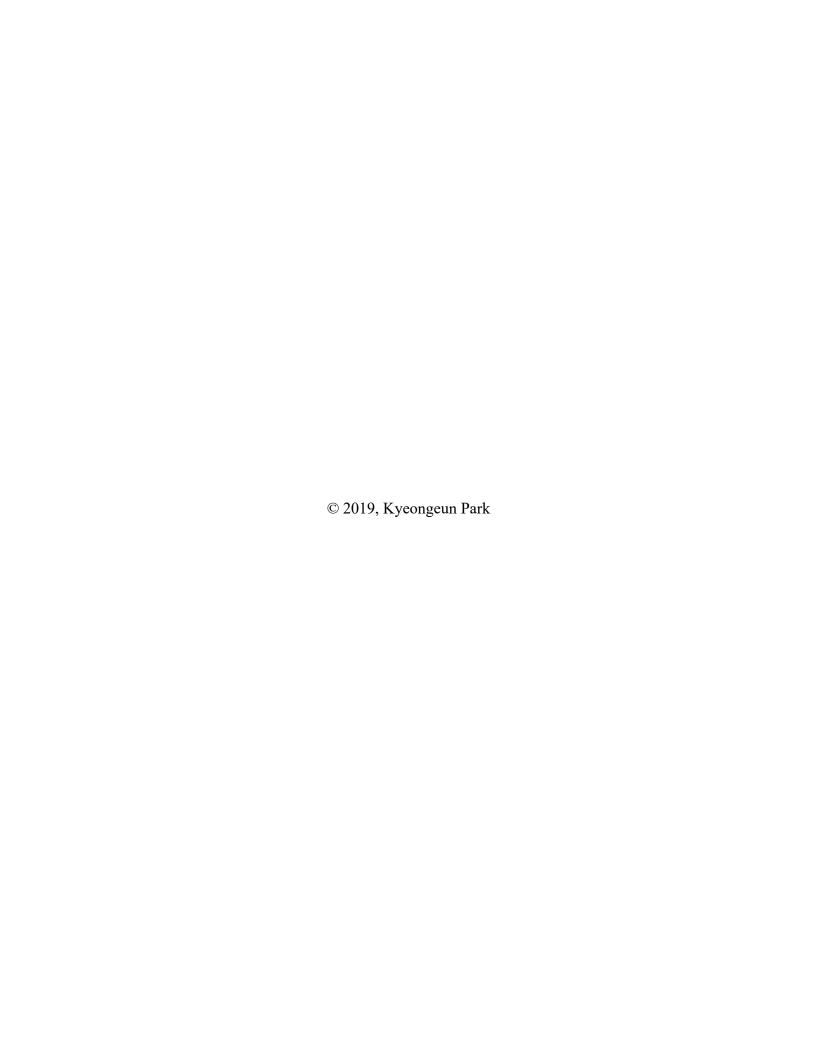of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation explores diverse shapes of the future as represented in literary production at the turn of the century—from the late 1980s to the present day—through examining the science fiction (sf) of Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. I focus primarily on materiality as an actor and on the agency of things in dialogue with human society through an investigation of the material and cultural productions of sf texts by further scrutinizing the impact of new networking technology. While analyzing the absence and presence of material culture and technological ecology in the selected texts, I work to identify the unique shades and textures of Latin American sf at the turn of the century. Ruins, wastes, rusty machines, decaying cans, broken robots, suffering humans, and wounded cities populate the dystopian and (post)apocalyptic societies represented in the fictional works that form the center of this analysis. Those things, whether they be man-made or nature-made that survive amidst the aftermath of humanity's extinction, precisely (re)present the present society's crises and anxieties as it faces rapidly changing social and physical environments. I seek to come to terms with posthumanism by developing conversations founded in the "materialist turn" or "nonhuman turn" that urges a reorientation towards a material reality. These philosophical approaches allow me to grasp new

perspectives to examine the speculative reality of Latin America, specifically Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. This dissertation is divided into three chapters based on the selected authors' nationalities and works. The first part of each chapter looks at dystopian and apocalyptic tropes found throughout the various sf works, while the second part centers on sf texts that depict new technologies alongside their concomitant social, political, and material consequences. Although I split the chapters by theme, this structure also coincides with the chronological order of the ontological and epistemological transformations that occurred at the turn of the century.

Introduction

On September 17, 2017, an earthquake shook Central Mexico area on the 32nd anniversary of the 1985 earthquake and was recorded as one of the most devastating seismic tremors in history. Two deadly earthquakes occurred within two hours of each other on the same day 32 years apart. Within a couple of hours of the annual earthquake drill to commemorate the 1985 earthquake, another deadly tremor struck the center of Mexico. More than 400 people died and nearly 140,000 buildings were damaged. In the Coapa district, in the southern part of the capital, nearly 20 children perished, and more than 30 people disappeared in the rubble of the collapsed Enrique Rébsamen primary school ("Hay 26 niños"). The building, designed as a place for children, was suddenly transformed into a lethal weapon that crushed and killed them. Office workers who had participated in the annual earthquake drill that morning did not escape tragedy either. On Alvaro Obregon Avenue, 49 people died in an office building ("Mexico marks"; "Scientists say"). Witnessing scenes of collapsed and collapsing buildings, people struggled to save others. As the media broadcast images of victims and their family members, we realized with each new image that an earthquake is not only a "natural" disaster but also a human-induced sociopolitical calamity, which perhaps applies to other natural catastrophes as well. Although advances have been made in science, technology, and public policies over the last three decades,

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earthquakes still cause an inescapable shaking of both life and society, erupting at the crossroads of natural catastrophes, sociopolitical failures, and capitalist plights. They testify once again to the vulnerability of human beings and the network of life that entangles human and nonhuman entities.

In this dissertation, I start my discussion of Latin American science fiction (sf) with 1985, when the earthquake that shook Mexico changed not only the physical landscape but also the existential, epistemological, and ontological cartography of Mexican society. Although the 1985 earthquake was certainly not Mexico's first earthquake, this particular catastrophe led to people witnessing a synergy between natural disasters and man-made material culture: the destructive power of things such as building debris, broken machines, and crushed streets, all made by humans yet beyond human control. Because of this realization, a substantial juncture occurred in the Mexican literary field in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake: a boom in apocalyptic visions and the growing visibility of sf supported by government institutions. Since, a destroyed, dystopian, and (post)apocalyptic imaginary future became a contested dimension through which recent Mexican narratives grapple with concerns about material culture and structures at the turn of the 21st century. Sf evolved from being on the fringe to being mainstream in both the market and in literary circles in Mexico to become a highly suggestive means of political, material, and technological intervention. Although earthquakes have not occurred as historical events in the same way in Argentina and Chile, disastrous corporeal and incorporeal experiences of dictatorship and the impact of neoliberal policies have generated a similar change in recent narratives in both countries while encountering the new millennium in the aftermath of dictatorship. At the end of the 20th century, multifaceted dystopian and apocalyptic futures—both with and without highly developed technologies—emerged as alternative spaces in which authors

could question the current order of life by focusing intensively on the material and corporeal landscapes of life.

Although there is a certain temporal discrepancy in the resurgence of sf production in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile, all undoubtedly share a set of decisive junctures in the field of sf over the last three decades: first, the rise of dystopian and apocalyptic sf in response to the collapse of the overall condition of society, national paradigms, and an anthropocentric visions of the world; and second, the emergence of sf genres that cross the limits of mediums, that is, sf productions that involve transmedia, digital, and virtual dimensions, commensurate with the widespread use of the Internet, digital media, and the biosphere. In particular, sf artists in the early 21st century sought to take sf beyond the text to open alternative frameworks to understand and engage with their immediate, material surroundings. What they draw from sf is very different than what former generations of sf artists drew: while sf in the 20th century was predominantly about humanity, sf in the 21st century is often concerned with a posthuman society. If the former described the present and critically anticipated the future, the latter seeks to shift between reality and virtuality by creating new ways to produce sf that goes beyond the textual medium.

I suggest that within this context sf at the turn of the 21st century presents a different sensorium that postulates a posthuman society in which humans, nonhumans, and hybrid collectivities coexist. To understand this new focus in sf narrative in these countries, emerging philosophies, such as new materialism, vital materialism, and object-oriented-ontology, all of which belong to "the nonhuman turn" or "materialist turn," will prove to be invaluable critical and analytical tools to foreground nonhuman beings and their agency as well as the interaction between different entities that (de)construct becomings. These critical frames will facilitate my

efforts to capture materiality and its affectivity in contemporary society at the intersection of technology, neoliberalism, globalization, and environmental degradation, which sf authors have brought attention to and which reach beyond anthropocentric, human-centered, and binary conceptions of materiality and immateriality.[1]

AT THE INTERSECTION OF TECHNOLOGY AND APOCALYPSE

This dissertation explores diversified shapes of the future as represented in literary production at the turn of the century, from the late 1980s to the present, through examining science fiction (sf) literary production from Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. I focus primarily on materiality and its actions, that is, on the agency of matters in dialogue with human society. While analyzing the absence and presence of material culture and technological ecology in the texts, I work to find the unique shades and textures of Latin American sf at the turn of the century. Ruins, wastes, rusty machines, decaying cans, broken robots, suffering humans, and wounded cities populate the dystopian and (post)apocalyptic societies represented in the fictional works that form the center of this analysis. Those things—whether man-made or not—endure in the aftermath of humanity's extinction and precisely (re)present the crises and anxieties of present society as it faces rapidly changing social and physical environments. While dystopia and (post)apocalypse are long-lasting motifs, what shapes the *sui generis* topography of contemporary dystopias and (post)apocalypses is the matter, substances, and beings they represent. Heterogeneous machines—for instance, collapsed metro stations converted into caves, android societies that survived warfare, human extinction, energy depletion, and rusty virtual machines into which human souls and bodies have been wired—and their empowerment,

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[1] I will further discuss this theoretical framework later in the introduction.

abandoned and freed from human control, feature in this particular iteration of contemporary dystopian and (post)apocalyptic sf. Remnants—the wounded bodies and broken machines left in the aftermath of catastrophes—are places where technology, modernity, and capitalism intersect. By highlighting the devastation to the surrounding environment, these works reveal humanity's violence and destruction, and underline the urgent task of producing new perspectives to find alternatives to existing societal problems.

After the World Wars, a significant shift occurred in the field of sf. It transformed from a utopian vision of human progress to one of catastrophe and dystopia. Dystopian and (post)apocalyptic visions became intertwined with the sf genre, in concert with new technological imaginings. In the era before modernity, apocalyptic tropes corresponded to religious and moral metaphors that marked social and ethical boundaries by forging solidarity within a given community. Along with utopianism, imagery about the end-of-the-world enabled the reconstruction and consolidation of an ideal order for society and for humanity at large. However, due to the collapse of modernity and capitalism, and the natural and man-made disasters of the 20th century, these tropes have gradually changed into more realistic and material representations; in other words, they moved from anticipatory and epistemological imaginings to reflective and material ones. The natural and man-made disasters that people experienced in the course of the 20th century have led us to rethink the relationship between humans and their surroundings. Technological development, whether ecological, urban, or biochemical, no longer guarantees a better life. Rather, the development advanced technologies have in fact allowed for the more complete domination of the disempowered and dispossessed. Further, through the various calamities that have occurred in actuality—tsunamis, earthquakes, terrorism, and

dictatorships—we have learned that the machines made by and for us can be transformed into the very tools that will kill us.

The triad of capitalism, globalism, and technological advance has changed our reality by accelerating the flow and movement of connectivities between different embodied presences. Simultaneously, as Slavoj Žižek has explored, these systems undermine the foundation of life:

> The global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point. Its 'four riders of the apocalypse' are comprised by the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property; forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions. (x)

The rise of dystopian and (post)apocalyptic tropes in sf over the course of the 20th century corresponds to the deterioration of social conditions throughout the capitalist core. More than any other genre, sf pays attention to the political and physical conditions in which the biopolitics of power play a serious role. By creating speculative realities, sf questions how our physical, corporeal, and technological surroundings have the power to transform daily life. Embedded in sf are all the predicaments thrown up by the tumultuous history of the turn of the century: political and ideological fallout, disillusionment with techno-scientific progress, and the capitalist exploitation of human and nonhuman resources. Alien invasion, Armageddon, a totalitarian society based on highly developed biotechnology and surveillance—all these scenarios highlight the problematic relations between the lives and landscapes of humans and nonhumans, not only symbolically, but also materially. Along with the development of technology and its spectacles, the sf genre increasingly engages contemporary society and its backdrop of a postmodern,

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colonial, and anthropocentric world, homogenizing globalization, and neoliberalism's creation of growing inequality.

"What is science fiction?" should be the theme of a book-length discussion. Indeed, defining it may be impossible, because rather than a particular genre, sf is a set of transformative modalities, practices, cultures, and worldviews. In this study, I limit myself to a specific range of science fiction texts that put emphasis on the absence or presence of technology and material reality. Put differently, I principally examine sf works that illustrate the material conditions of our society, an embodied world in which heterogeneous matters and discourses are intertwined through depicting a variety of synthetic forms of life and matter. In addition to our culturally mediated society, sf sheds light on our material reality—we belong to a posthuman society in which humans are no longer a privileged species but rather exist as nomadic subjects in the process of becoming and connecting with other (non)human entities. In this respect, I argue that sf provides a valuable starting point to forge a new understanding of "the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world" that goes beyond cultural understandings of sf texts (Coole and Frost 3). Also, sf is, in part, an immaterial, textual, and dislocated space, but also, in part, portrays and constructs the concrete topography through which we experience our reality. Departing from the intersection of reality and virtuality, this study explores how Latin American sf produced in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico unfolds their singular contexts and universal sensibilities by establishing their dimensions as a means to cope with their immediate predicaments and surroundings.

According to Rachel Haywood Ferreira, the first wave of Latin American sf corresponded with the region's political transformation that began around 1870. The second wave, from 1959 to 1974, involved the publication of work by local sf writers, the creation of sf periodicals, and

the formation of fandoms influenced by the scientific advances of the era. Ferreira considers that

the third wave of Latin American sf began in the late 1980s but reached its pinnacle in the year

2000. It exhibited profound concerns with capitalism, globalization, and post-dictatorship

conditions, which changed the prevailing social conditions of the region, especially in the

Southern Cone countries. Moreover, the Internet enabled the creation not only of sf-related

publications and practices, but also new forms of sf criticism ("Back to the future" 352–362).

The third wave occurred alongside the rise of apocalyptic narratives in Latin America. Ferreira's

chronological analysis of Latin American sf ends with the rapid growth of Internet use and its

significant impact on the resurgence of Latin American sf and its entrance into the mainstream,

starting around the turn of the millennium. The periodization varies, but the key point of

Ferreira's analysis is that Latin American sf is not the mere product of imitation; rather, it is a

transcultural instrument. Sf is a tool used to express the social changes created by technology and

their distinctive effects on local culture and material reality. As the sf writer Mauricio-José

Schwarz stated, "no somos un país generador de tecnología … Pero la padecemos" (quoted in

Fernández, *Los viajeros* 7). In other words, the consequences of advanced technologies and the

homogenizing globalization of neoliberalism are common experiences for Latin American

people, and their sf, in turn, reflects both local and universal urgency, and the new sensibility of

the era. Latin Americans are not only active consumers but are also, increasingly, sf producers.

By focusing specifically on the third wave that Ferreira identified, I explore the

speculative reality of Latin America through an investigation of the material and cultural

productions of sf texts from this third wave by further scrutinizing the impact of new networking

technologies. In this work I focus on Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. Certainly, these countries are

not the only ones to have a rich sf tradition. Brazil is a leading producer of sf, and increasingly so

are Bolivia, Cuba, and Ecuador. Beyond quantitative reasons, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile are suitable places to start the discussion regarding the turning point in the sf field that occurred at the end/beginning of the century because these countries underwent similar processes of modernization and urbanization that were organized by dogmatic national plans, through which their people experienced both hope and disillusion in the development of science and society at large. More specifically, the remains of such social transformations have accumulated in these nations' urban spaces, ranging from prehistoric ruins to the ghettos, which are the remnants of failed modernizing processes and capitalist violence against the economy. Yet, sf from each country shows significant differences due to the distinctive social, historical, and material courses each nation has followed. What I try to do in this dissertation is to not flatten the selected works under a national label; rather, I identify the overarching literary and cultural topography forged across different social, historical, and material circumstances.

At the beginning of the 21st century, numerous critical works emerged to describe the explosion in sf production in Latin America. Many have attempted to recover texts buried in oblivion in order to reevaluate their impact and significance. The majority of these texts point to the significant presence and peculiarity of sf in Latin America. They emphasize the profound need for research in this field in its local and global contexts, especially given that sf in Latin America is connected to colonialism, nation building, late modernization, and neoliberal processes.[2] However, limited research has been devoted to Latin American sf's third wave,

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[2] Examples include: *Biografía del futuro* (2000), *Postales del porvenir* (2006); *Intermitente recurrencia: la Ciencia ficción y el canon literario* (2006), and *El futuro más acá: el cine mexicano de ciencia ficción* (2006); a special issue dedicated to *Latin American Science Fiction* in *Science Fiction Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 3, (2007); *Utopian Dreams, Apocalyptic Nightmares* (2008); *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction* (2011*); Cyborgs in Latin America* (2010); *Latin American Science Fiction: Theory and Practice* (2012); a special issue on Latin American sf in *Revista Iberoamericana* Vol. LXXVIII, (2012), *Science Fiction in Argentina*

despite the importance of the turn it took due to the generation of authors who were born after or during dictatorships, neoliberal regimes, the Internet, and biotechnology. For the generation active at the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century, science, neoliberalism, and globalization are not new issues. Meanwhile, they observe the local (after)effects of dictatorship, modernization, and revolution, without having directly experienced such forces. The traumas and memories of their parents or grandparents are engraved into their social and material environments, as the ruins of previous eras still present in the forms of old buildings and streets or old-fashioned markets. I suggest that the sf of this generation, within these contexts, displays a different sensorium that underlines a posthuman society in which human, nonhuman and other hybrid collectives coexist.

NONHUMAN TURN

This research, therefore, strives to include sf texts from contemporary authors whose works have been paid scant attention, but which demonstrate incisive social, political, and literary significance. What separates the sf of recent decades from works from previous eras is that contemporary authors propose new ways to see current society and to return to reality, or rather, to the material conditions of present society, an approach that stretches beyond the cultural, discursive, or paradigmatic problematization of the social condition. Apart from discourse, language, and culture, contemporary authors specifically center the suffering of humanity, the loss of human privilege, the empowerment of nonhumans, and the Anthropocene, in other words, they center a world ruined by humanity.[3] Instead of human(ist) values, the

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(2016); a special issue on Latin American speculative fiction in *Paradoxa* (2018); and there is the journal, *Alambique*, which specializes in Spanish and Portuguese science fiction and fantasy.
[3] The term "Anthropocene" was originally coined by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in order to mark a new geological epoch initiated by humanity's devastating impact on the earth: "For the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated.

object/subject for these authors is the material. Whether exploring human or nonhuman actors, these authors shed light on the materiality or corporeality of beings and how these bodies, things, and machines affect each other by coupling and decoupling. In cases wherethe authors draw attention to humankind, they tend to address aspects of humanness devoid of any privileges, granting humans a dehumanized status. Under totalitarian regimes, the industrial revolution, and the neoliberal market, we have experienced what it is to be non-human, machines, and consumable merchandise. These authors pay attention to the intense, irrevocable loss of human privilege as the person is converted into mere stuff, no different from any other animal or thing. In these sf narratives Man is no longer the owner of rationality, creative power, or the right to control others. By describing the devastation of surrounding life, these authors seek to reveal humanity's destruction and the urgency involved in developing a new perspective to find alternatives to existing societal problems.

Materialist or nonhuman studies, including approaches such as object-oriented ontology (OOO), speculative realism, vitalism, material ecocriticism, and new materialism, are the suggestive and productive theoretical frameworks that allow me to examine closely the central themes in these contemporary authors. While these theories emerged from disparate disciplinary origins, they share an ontological concern about the negligence of materiality, corporeality, and nonhuman. Due to their common focus on matter, embodiment, and becoming, some scholars

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Because of these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, global climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour for many millennia to come. It seems appropriate to assign the term 'Anthropocene' to the present, in many ways, human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784" (Crutzen 23).

have designated these theories part of "a materialist turn" that followed the "cultural and linguistic turn" from the 1970s to the 1990s. In the face of increasingly aggravated ecological, geopolitical, and socioeconomic crises in our society, many critics that come from perspectives rooted in the materialist turn assert that philosophies and interpretations based in language, culture, discourse, texts, power, and ideas are limited. They commonly argue that we need to focus on our reality and our immediate surroundings from an ontological perspective: the need to return to matter. (Coole and Frost 1-43; Bryant et al. 1–18). Hence the materialist turn. Richard Grusin, on the other hand, designates this theoretical trend the "nonhuman turn," to acknowledge the diverse academic approaches that are "engaged in decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies" (vii). Perhaps the difference between the two terms springs from the object of criticism: while the "materialist turn" emphasizes a rhetorical attempt to overcome the limits of a social and cultural constructivist approach, the "nonhuman turn" underlines these theorists' epistemological challenge to human-centered discourses.

What fractures materialist theorists into two groups is their stance towards monism. The majority of the feminist new materialists advocate for monism and a flat/relational ontology, thereby resisting dualism. In contrast, Graham Harman, the lead proponent of OOO, who coined the term and first conceptualized the theory, opposes monism by developing the notion of "object withdrawal." He considers an object to be an independent entity that possesses the qualities drawn from any relations it has to other entities. Harman proposes that outside their network of relations, each object maintains a hidden, potential reality that it never reveals. By introducing the individual, independent, "actual" quality of the object, Graham criticizes

monism, as this does not allow for the single object to have presence that is independent from its relations with other entities. He points out that the monist premise reduces the object's autonomy and converts the world into a lump of *uni*-verse.[4]

Rebekah Sheldon describes Harman's theory as "emphatically anti-relational ontology" (194), while feminist new materialists are "emphatically relational" (196).[5] For instance, Karen Barad, a feminist new materialist, understands objects and beings as an effect or symptom of their relationships. Thus, Barad argues that there is no matter, only mattering:

> The neologism "intra-action" signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. (33)

Her notion of intra-action epitomizes the general theoretical foundation of relational ontology that new materialists advocate for in common. For them, matter is thus "the concrescence or intensive infolding of an extensive continuum" (Sheldon, 196). In this respect, new materialists consider discourse and epistemology to be co-constituent of mattering, which forges an object's materiality. Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" demonstrates well the notion of the body as a materialized reality, "the transits of substances and discursive practices within and across bodies" (Iovino and Oppermann 4). The new feminist materialism based on monism has been subject to criticism due to the way it casts epistemology as the principal constitutor of

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[4] Concerning criticism of Graham Harman in terms of monism and other relational theories, see: "Realism without materialist" (52–72)..

[5] Albeit writing from her position as a feminist materialist, Rebekah Sheldon carefully explains the differences between the two positions, OOO and New materialist. See her article, "Form/Matter/Chora," in the collection *Nonhuman Turn*.

mattering or materialization. Epistemology and discourse presume a humane view of other (non)human entities and is likely to fall back into a human-centered perspective.

From among these productive theorizations, I engage most closely with Levi Bryant's Onto-cartography, one branch of OOO, and put it into conversation with Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism, Jane Bennett's Vital materialism, and Lisa Blackman's affect/immaterial theory. I contend that these theories demonstrate strong affinities and, at the same time, complement each other's shortcomings. One of the leading academics in the field of OOO, Bryant shows an intellectual tendency that differs from Braidotti, Bennett, and Blackman when it comes to monism/pluralism and to object withdrawal/object in the process of becoming. Nonetheless, Bryant situates himself at the intersection of both theoretical traditions by reconciling relational ontology with OOO. While he recognizes that there is a dimension of objects that cannot be assessed through other entities, he slightly twists object withdrawal by suggesting that the withdrawn essence is a relative aspect of things. Whereas Harman postulates an inaccessible quality and individuality to every single object, Bryant argues that an object's withdrawn quality can be characterized by its relationship with other machines. For instance, the way in which we see the colors of the world differs from that of a dog's, as dogs are colorblind. In this case, colors except for black and white are a withdrawn quality for dogs, just as subtler smells and sounds are for humans. Bryant thus holds the inaccessible dimension of object capacity and quality as relative and changeable depending on its relations with other entities. He takes up the term "machine" to designate things, matter, bodies, objects, and so on, to emphasize the dynamic output and operation of matter forged by couplings and decouplings among different entities. In other words, he emphasizes the productivity of entities through their convergences and divergences.

While Bryant offers suggestive insights toward a machine's materiality, its individual potentiality, and its interactions, Jane Bennett and Lisa Blackman offer a critical account of the affective, vital, and immaterial features of materiality. Bennett and Blackman, following the theorist Brian Massumi, do not separate affect/immateriality from the material/materiality. Rather, they consider affect as the intrinsic, embedded nature of a machine and the fluctuant currents to move across the encounters of heterogeneous matter and beings. Blackman postulates the human body as a paradoxical entity: one, yet many; that is, we are singular plural existences. Bodily affectivity, Blackman argues, flows beyond the individual body to make collective bodies. But affect "could also be interpreted as some 'thing' that bodies have: a quality, a vital element–a capacity existing independently of relationality, that is expressed through affect, or is a substratum for it" (Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies* 25). Jane Bennett examines the affectivity of machines beyond human bodies. Bennett "equate[s] affect with materiality, rather than posit[ing] a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body" (xiii). Bennett, in particular, contends that affectivity's flow across different entities forges new assemblages while removing the ontological divide between organic/inorganic, human/nonhuman, and animate/inanimate beings. The work of these theorists allows me to examine in depth how sf (re)presents new hybrids, becomings, and collectives beyond the human, and to analyze how the bio/necropolitics of state and market systems disrupt the affective assemblage between/within machines in order to control the life and death of all beings.

Rosi Braidotti's notion of the posthuman straddles different strands of materialist and ontological theories. The subtitle to her book, *The Posthuman*, can stand as a summary of the nonhuman/materialist turn's principal argument: "Life beyond the self, species, and death" (v). The posthuman does not describe a technologically advanced society in which we experience the

entanglement of the human and nonhuman. On the contrary, it considers the human or other

machines as hybrid and heterogeneous, that is, as collective constructions in the midst of

becoming: "Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial

form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community

building" (49). Braidotti suggests critical posthumanism as an alternative to rethink the ethics of

life outside of anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, and capitalism. This theoretical framework will

allow me to grasp the new perspectives that materialist scholarship suggests: first, that matter

possesses lively agencies (actants) as much as human beings do; second, "a raft of biopolitical

and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human"; and third, "a critical and

nondogmatic reengagement with political economy, where the nature of, and relationship

between, the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic

structures are being explored afresh" (Coole and Frost 7). At the intersection of these provocative

theories, I posit that sf is a space in which authors propose new ways of understanding

contemporary society and address questions pertaining to the geopolitical, socioeconomic,

demographic, and environmental problems that exist within material reality.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

This dissertation is divided into three chapters based on the nationality of the authors and

their works. In the first part of each chapter, I look at dystopian and apocalyptic tropes

throughout sf works, while the second half of each chapter focuses on sf texts that depict new

technologies and their concomitant social, political, and material consequences. Although

chapters are split by theme, this layout also coincides with a chronological order that follows the

ontological and epistemological changes that occurred at the turn of the century. At the

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beginning of each chapter, I briefly introduce the history and significance of the sf genre in Mexico, Argentina, and Chile respectively.

In the first chapter, I investigate Mexican sf from the mid-1980s to the present by examining a set of sf works from contemporary authors. My discussion begins with an analysis of works that deal with a futuristic Mexico City in the aftermath of catastrophe: Arturo César Rojas's "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez" (1986), Ignacio Padilla's "El año de los gatos amurallados" (1994), and Mauricio Molina's novel, *Tiempo lunar* (1994). In these narratives the metropolis is its own assemblage between different time-spaces, as well as between heterogeneous human/nonhuman relationships: technology, for example, as well as symbolic and material capital. On the one hand, from an imagined future urbanity, I observe the unique effects of urbanization on a city's landscapes, such as the traces of precolonial and colonial history, the remains of uncompleted modernization and industrialization, and the materialization of neoliberalism. On the other, I identify the multifaceted relationships and interplay between animate and inanimate entities, and nonhuman and human beings. Throughout the wounded and ruined urban landscape and civilization, I trace the power dynamics represented in postapocalyptic bodies and machines that supersede the corporeal limits of individual (non)human beings. While these works share a similar time-space background, each unfolds a distinctive vision in its thinking about our society and the world itself.

The second part of chapter one, on Mexican sf, closely reads Bernardo Fernández (Bef)'s futuristic worlds in order to consider the impact that the neoliberal economy, and the appearance of Internet, had on a Mexican society that remains intertwined with past predicaments. Bef is one of the most talented and representative contemporary authors in Mexico who grapples with the topic of technology's and neoliberalism's impact on Mexican society through the skillful use of

the sf genre. Bef builds a future where the borders between reality and virtuality, nature and culture, humans and nonhumans, have disappeared, a situation that he addresses through the hybrid characteristics of entities and assemblages. By (re)creating diversified forms of being like androids, cyborgs, and virtual entities, Bef problematizes on the one hand the human-centered and binary discourses that have brought about the social, political, and ontological exclusion of human others and others within humans. On the other hand, he envisions the failures of a modernization and globalized capitalism that attempts to control the lives of all beings by manipulating and (dis)connecting the vitality and affectivity of/among matter and beings. Through Bef's imaginary worlds, in which robots, who seem more humanistic or ethically better than humans, and a virtuality that appears more real than reality, I seek to discover an alternative ethics of the posthuman—or rather, a more-than-human society—that challenges neoliberal and anthropocentric exclusion and violence.

Chapter two, on Argentine sf, begins by examining two graphic novels, Diego Agrimbau and Gabriel Ippóliti's *La burbuja de Bertold* (2005), and Matías Santellán and Pablo Guillermo Serafín's *Reparador de sueños* (2012), both published just after the economic crisis in 2001. Both novels portray grey cities of the future, in which we encounter the traumatic history of Argentina. In these novels the city itself is cyborg, wired and connected directly to the bodies of humans and machines. The contrast between the developed mechanisms of state control and the antique and rusty metallic machines is a striking feature that reflects the steampunk/dieselpunk tone of the panels. By depicting heavy and metallic machines that brutally invade human bodies for the sake of total control over corporeality, the authors explore the loss of individuality forced by institutional and state violence. Like marionettes, people are physically dangled and grafted into the central system, dismembered from their body parts. In this way, these graphic novels

describe embodied reality, corporeality, materiality, and technicity as the shackles of the human immaterial dimension: the soul, mind, and subjectivity. Thus, the authors suggest a humanist solidarity and mentality as an alternative to dystopian and authoritarian society. However, I choose to highlight the corporeality and materiality that play a pivotal role in forging an affective and hybrid solidarity. The performativity of matter and things becomes very clear in Rafael Piendo's (post)apocalyptic trilogy: *Plop* (2007), *Frío* (2013), and *Subte* (2013). Much like other narratives of the (post)apocalypse, these three novels are set in the future in the aftermath of brutal calamities, but the distinctive characteristics of Pinedo's novels are that the futuristic worlds look more like the primitive and savage societies of the remote past, when people lived by hunting and gathering. I examine the permeable boundary of human beings and the complexity of the hybrid web of life through the toxic world in which there is no distinction between people, animal, and matter.

J. P. Zooey and Martín Felipe Castagnet suggest a future that will be wired into an upgraded version of the Internet and virtual machines. Human immortality is achieved fully thanks to digital and biochemical technologies in the futuristic societies of Zooey's *Sol Artificial* (2009) and Castagnet's *Los cuerpos del verano* (*Bodies of Summer* 2012). In these narratives, people change and consume bodies and, accordingly, subjectivity becomes a fluctuating substance that is always in the midst of becoming. Nonetheless, I identify the persistence of race, gender, and socioeconomic class differences in these future worlds. The technology of disembodiment in the novels ironically calls attention to the urgent need for an embodied ethics. Thus, in this section I discuss representations of dismembered, amputated, and mutated bodies, which is contrasted with the future societies' highly connected web of networks and virtual machines. The consumption of and opportunity to change corporealities not only disturbs

subjectivity and identity, but also degrades the value of each body's agency. I scrutinize the representation of real and virtual bodies in forming the intersection of technologies, markets, and state control, and how the authors reflect the traumatic history of a dictatorship that was collapsed by neoliberal violence.

In the third chapter, on contemporary Chilean sf, I explore the works of the renowned Chilean writer and artist, Jorge Baradit. The first part of the chapter takes up his account of a dystopian future where all kinds of hybrid lives appear and coexist under the control of corporate or institutional power. In addition to writing, Baradit has used various activities to go exceed the boundary between text, reality and virtuality. He actively uses Social Networking Services (SNS) to promote his works in the market and in the literary field. While building digitized and multimedia resources like teasers, background music, and websites related to his books, Baradit attempts to convert the act of reading into an experience of fiction. Compared to his imaginary worlds, which depict the network and virtual technologies as destroyers of life, he utilizes contemporary high-tech culture in a radically positive and effective manner. By linking (post)dictatorial and neoliberal social environments to fictive dystopian imaginary societies, I analyze the bio/necropolitics at work in futuristic societies that carry out total control over the lives of its members, whether human or nonhuman. Beyond the control of individual bodies or parts of bodies, in Baradit's narratives power manipulates everything, from time and life energy to the very vitality of the universe. In this section, I will focus on the suffering of bodies to display the powerful affectivity in which national, neoliberal, and ontological realities converge. Through the pain of these bodies, I seek to identify the new dimension of sf through which Baradit critically interrogates Argentine reality.

In the last section of this chapter, I introduce a different genre of sf that has emerged in the Chilean literary field: *ucronía chilena*. In the middle of steampunk, uchronia, and retrofuturism, Chilean authors attempt to establish the singular dimension of sf narratives by mixing heterogeneous temporalities. In this section I discuss Francisco Ortega and Dániel Nelson's steampunk graphic novel, *1899: Cuando los tiempos chocan* (2011) (a.k.a *1899: Metahulla 1*), and its sequel, *1959: Metahulla 2*; Jorge Baradit's *Synco* (2007); and the steampunk anthology, *Cuentos chilenos Steampunk* (2014). In contrast to the sf texts I examine elsewhere in this dissertation, this section looks at narratives that deal with the past, albeit in a futuristic mode. Although their narrative sources lie in the historical past, the authors draw on the culture of the Internet, or networking systems, to propose hyperlinked spatiotemporalities. Crossing the border of timelines, ucronía chilena manifests both multiverses and the multifaceted forms of entities. I argue that the multiplicities that these authors create seek to recover and reconstruct the voices and discourses of minorities who were excluded or removed from the boundaries of the social order, and to address issues present in Chile, including the unresolved trauma of the dictatorship and the contemporary neoliberal predicament. By juxtaposing incompatible times, spaces, and beings, the authors engender new dimensions and becomings through which they propose an alternative community and solidarity that goes beyond humanist boundaries. By so doing, while also addressing the transparent agendas of Argentine society, the authors attempt to forge a new dimension within the sf genre and, at the same time, suggest new perspectives as well as a possible course of action to survive in a neoliberal, high-tech, posthuman society.

Chapter I

Matters, Animals, and Robots of Unceasing Quake in Mexico

INTRODUCTION

"Mexican science fiction? Is there such a thing?" (Fernández, "Presentación" 7). A "distinguished forensic doctor"—according to Bef's expression—asked Bernardo Fernández (alias Bef) this question, who was at the time creating a logo for the *Asociación Mexicana de ciencia ficción y fantasía* (AMCYF). It is with this question that Bef opens the anthology, *Los viajeros: 25 años de ciencia ficción mexicana* (2010). By drawing attention to the half-surprised and half-mocking question from the doctor, the question reveals the actual circumstances facing the sf genre in Mexico: its doubly marginalized status, both in national literary circles and by the international sf mainstream. It has been 20 years since the release of the first sf anthology, *Más allá de lo imaginado I* (1991).[6] Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz argues for the presence of sf in Mexico "as a means of social transformation and an ideal vehicle to introduce new ideas and concepts," though few authors solely dedicated themselves to the genre (*Más allá de lo imaginado I* 11).[7] Despite the efforts of Trujillo Muñoz, the presence of sf in Mexico has been a controversial issue

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[6] Composed of three volumes, *Más allá de lo imaginado* is the first anthology in Mexico that exclusively features Mexican sf stories. In this series, the compiler Mauricio José Schwarz introduces 42 authors' stories appearing from the 1980s, most of which won awards in national sf competitions. *Más allá de lo imaginado* "provided many young authors with an unprecedentedly visible publication space, with a circulation of a thousand copies (a very significant number in Mexico) and nationwide distribution through the government's bookstore and library system" (Sánchez Prado, "Ending the World" 115).

[7] Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz is a renowned and prolific author, not only of fiction, but also as a critic, poet, and essayist. He has written and edited more than one hundred books, including those that introduce the history Mexican sf and sf writers, such as: *Biografía del future* and *Los confines: crónica de la ciencia ficción mexicana*. He is one of the most influential writers in this genre and literary field.

for more than two decades.[8] For this reason, many books about Mexican sf begin with the same

question noted by Bef: whether Mexican sf exists.

Over the past three decades, Mexican sf has rapidly gained visibility in the national

literary system. Since the late 1980s, the institutionalization of the literary field through awards

and funding has facilitated the rise of young writers rooted in sf, propelling the genre's entry into

the mainstream of national literature. In particular, the inauguration of the Puebla Science Fiction

Awards in 1984, funded by the Puebla State and the National Council for Science and

Technology (CONACYT), represented a crucial juncture in the history of Mexican sf. As

Trujillo Muñoz notes, the award became a platform for the 1990s sf boom and the emergence of

a new generation of authors, further bolstered by the publication of collective and individual

works by Puebla prize winners. Young writers gained national recognition and publication

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[8] In this anthology, Bef briefly introduces the history of Mexican sf: despite its sporadic appearance, sf's history is not short. Beginning with Manuel Antonio de Rivas's story, "Sizigias y cuadraturas lunares" (1775), many distinguished authors in Mexican literary history, such as Amado Nervo, Juan José Arreola, and Carlos Fuentes produced fictional works that fit perfectly into the sf genre (*Los viajeros* 7–8). Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, referencing authors such as José Agustín Ramírez Gómez, Carlos Fuentes, Gerardo Cornejo Murrieta, and Hugo Hiriart, points out that, "había que considerar aquí que un buen número de escritores mexicanos que no se consideran ligados a la ciencia ficción, han incursionando en este género o han tomado elementos del mismo para sus obras, especialmente a partir de los años ochenta" (Trujillo Muñoz, *Los confines* 187–88).

  After the publication of the first Mexican sf anthology, *Más allá de lo imaginado* (1991), more than ten similar anthologies followed, mainly published by state-sponsored institutions. Despite these publications, however, many critics and scholars question whether Mexican sf exists, even two decades after the first sf anthology was published. The prevailing answer is that it does exist—a belief also held by Bef—but the relatively limited quantity and visibility of this genre within the broader literary field has led to some dispute. See: Cubría 9–14; López Castro 12–20; Martré 11–12; Schaffler González's *Sin permiso de Colón* 7–9 and *Más allá de lo imaginado I* 9–15. For more detailed information about the history of this genre and its publications, see: Gonzalo Martré's *La ciencia ficción en México* (2002); Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz's *Los confines* (1999) and *Biografías del future* (2000); and the section discussing Mexico at the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* website. In particular, the website *Ciencia Ficción Mexicana* is an invaluable source for Mexican sf works, including non-narrative genres.

opportunities through government programs and editorials.[9] Not only have the *Puebla Awards* brough attention to the sf genre, by serving as a focal point for meetings and communication they have also contributed to the creation of a community of young sf writers. The launch of AMCYF in 1992 and the Kalpa Awards in 1994 were the fruit of a union created between award participants and state sponsorships. Starting in the early 1990s and continuing to the present, the sf genre has garnered an abundance of awards, book publications, and magazine launches. Bef himself is an example of the growing visibility and acknowledgement of the sf genre in Mexico, and through winning literary prizes and securing governmental support for his publications, he has gained status and privilege as a writer.

Yet, as Bef affirms, Mexican sf has "always" been situated on the margins of the mainstream (*Los viajeros* 8).[10] Despite having lived through sf's increasing prestige in recent decades, why does he affirm its marginality? His rigorous selection criteria as an anthology editor answers this question: "first, stories whose narratives are valuable as a sf genre; second, works of writers who have won domestic or international prizes, whether in sf or another genre of fiction; third, the stories of those who have shown relatively long-lasting careers as sf writers, in other words, as professional authors" (*Los viajeros* 11). In addition to these requirements, Bef adds that he only chose stories that avoided imitating Anglo-American forms.

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[9] By drawing on other scholars' analyses of the significance of *Premio Puebla*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado points out "the establishment of the Premio Puebla" and "the creation of the Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, a government-funded program aimed at the publication and promotion of Mexican writers under the age of 35," as two major institutions that have promoted the sf genre and other sub-genres in Mexico ("Ending the World with Words" 114–15). Other scholars emphasize the importance of the Puebla Award. See: Cubría 7-17; Fernández Delgado 7–13; Martré 15–21; Porcayo 9–10; Trujillo Muñoz, *Los confines* 183–190.

[10] Bef emphasizes that Mexican sf has existed for years: "pero siempre, siempre, desde los márgenes" (8). Concerning the marginal position of Mexican sf and its tension with mainstream literature, see: Trujillo Muñoz's *Los confines* 185-90 and *Biografías del futuro* 13–24.

While the genre has achieved recognition in national literary circles, in the international milieu Mexican sf is still marginalized and largely invisible, and is often referred to as an imitation of mainstream sf. The anthology *Los Viajeros: 25 Años de Ciencia Ficción Mexicana* thus presents another effort to overcome the prejudice toward Mexican sf by presenting various types of creative works by Mexican writers. The list of stories substantiates the existence of Mexican sf, showing its variety as well as its singularity. As Bef exemplifies, *bona fide* Mexican sf does not stand for a mere remixing of Mexican clichés in scientific settings, such as "mariachis in space" or "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz travels through time." (*Los viajeros* 7) Neither bestsellers nor well-written sf texts signify the advancement of "Mexican" or "national" sf in and of themselves, even though those can enrich the sf genre at large. Bef is looking for sf texts that display the Mexican idiosyncrasies of this genre in both national and global circles. He indicates, "as Pepe Rojo said, Mexican sf began to mature the day it got off the spaceship and took the subway" (*Los viajeros* 12). In this definition, what qualifies as Mexican sf is, therefore, an imagination that engages with the local, social, and material conditions to which writers belong and which addresses how local people perceive, experience, and interact with the changing environment.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that there is an indisputable singularity to contemporary Mexican sf, the product of dynamic interactions between writers and their social ecology. I argue that the idiosyncrasy of Mexican sf is the *output* that emerges from multiple relationships, connections, interactions, and networks between all kinds of machines—ideas, objects, climate, robots or people, for example—which, taken together, assemble Mexican society. Bef contends that his intention is not to argue that Mexican sf is superior to other sf genres. Likewise, I do not define the singularity of Mexican sf's characteristics according to

moral, literary, or aesthetic criteria. Rather, singularity can be discovered by analyzing what and

how sf produces new becomings and mediates between different facets of communities. Put

another way, I do not aim to determine precisely what Mexican sf is and what defines its

characteristics, but rather, to show how sf productions *operate* in (de)constructing

Mexicanidad.[11] I define this term as that which refers not only to cultural, discursive, or

imaginary constructs of collective identity built by human agencies, but also to material

constructs composed of divergent, nonhuman actants. Sf texts do not only reflect *Mexicanidad*.

They also mold the very idea of Mexicanness and of the sf genre in Mexico by weaving social

and material substances into narratives. Thus, the uniqueness of Mexican texts emerges from the

unique topological and geopolitical assemblage of social structures, as well as interactions

between divergent social members.

In this chapter, I investigate sf stories, novels, and graphic novels written and published

between the mid-1980s and the 2000s. By focusing specifically on the use of the urban landscape

in sf texts and its interaction with (non)human entities, I will offer a new materialist perspective

on Mexican sf that foregrounds how authors criticize and engage their immediate society. The

futuristic cityscapes in sf function as a "vector map," effectively demonstrating the urgent and

substantial geopolitical problems in their social surroundings, in addition to the cultural and

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[11] Here I use the term *Mexicanidad* as a manifestation of a collective machine-in-formation, which is constructed by the entanglement of territory, buildings, nature, and human–nonhuman citizens. This term also embraces the disciplined and imagined myth promoted by the authorities and intellectuals. As Roger Bartra states, the national identity rephrased by *Mexicanidad* is also a projection of "the myth produced by hegemonic culture" (2). Besides the (post)revolutionary government, many intellectuals from different fields have tried to characterize this national identity over the years, as Bartra himself does figuratively. The continual construction and reconstruction of the Mexican character not only reflects the nation's existing society, but also creates a new Mexicanness (see Roger Bartra's "Penetration" in his book *The Cage of Melancholy*).

discursive concerns of the present. According to Levi Bryant, "vector maps are mappings of the future based on gravitational tendencies operating in the present. They are maps—always fallible —that allow us to anticipate the future" (*Onto-Cartography* 265). Bryant uses the term "gravity" instead of "power" or "force" in order to "capture. . . the way in which one machine influences the movement and becoming of other machines, as well as the interactions possible between machines" (*Onto-Cartography* 188). Vector maps can be said to extrapolate possible future scenarios based on power dynamics within the present society. The sf genre can, therefore, be considered an excellent example of vector mapping, since it anticipates a possible becoming or unfolding (*Onto-Cartography* 265). Levi Bryant elucidates that such a "vector map" draws attention to how current power dynamics may influence the future. An eerie and gloomy urban atmosphere populated by (non)human citizens is in an imaginary world that could unfold in a feasible future and might appear if the vicious cycles inherent to today's society continue uninterrupted. Beyond human-centered culture, language, ideology, economy and so on, the emergent generation of sf writers in the late 1980s expanded their scope of experimentation to address environmental contamination, climate change, natural disasters, and urban structures— simply put, on how nonhuman actants affect human life as much as humans affect them. Examining the intersection of reality and virtuality, these authors grapple with society as a machine composed of human and nonhuman matter. This chapter is divided into two sections that follow a chronological order, a temporal division that hinges on the junctures of the economic, cultural, institutional, and physical occurrences that affect each other simultaneously engendering and transforming the topologies of Mexican society and the national literary system. The first section explores fiction by Ignacio Padilla, Arturo César Rojas and Mauricio Molina, which appeared between 1985—a watershed year in the history of Mexico and the sf genre—and

1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect. In the second

section, I examine Bef's sf works published in the post-NAFTA environment. Aside from being

one of the most prolific, famous and renowned authors working in the genre, his fiction

illustrates how Mexican society has been affected in the wake of the acceleration of the

neoliberal system and the increasing influence of new technologies.

I.1. MEXICO CITY IN RUINS

The trope of the urban (post)apocalypse is the focus of the first section, with a discussion

of the following sf stories and novels that depict the end of Mexico City: "El que llegó hasta

metro Pino Suárez" by Arturo César Rojas (1986); "El año de los gatos amurallados" by Ignacio

Padilla (1994); and Mauricio Molina's novel *Tiempo lunar* (1993).[12] All three narratives deal

with imaginary futures in which Mexico City is ruined by ecological catastrophes, warfare,

contamination, and epidemics. The protagonists are all survivors who suffer the aftereffects of

the apocalypse. The prevailing representations of the (post)apocalypse and urban devastation

have a relationship with the new social context in Mexico produced by neoliberalism and

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[12] Arturo César Rojas's "El que llegó hasta el metro Pino Suárez" is included in two anthologies, *Más allá de lo imaginado I* and *Futuro en llamas.* In this dissertation, I follow the pagination provided in *Futuro en llamas* (1997). Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz recounts an interesting episode regarding this story related to the Premio Puebla: "Toda la comunidad cienciaficcionera reconoce que su texto es una obra maestra merecedora del premio que, ese año, se declara desierto. La mojigatería le gana a la creatividad literaria" (*Biografías del futuro* 246). Even though Arturo César Rojas's story was worthy of the prize, it seems that the judges refused to bestow it to him due to his use of coarse and sexual language. Although he was not an award winner, Arturo César Rojas's story gained an honorable mention. Ignacio Padilla's "El año de los gatos amurallados" also appears in the short story collection, *Los reflejos y la escarcha*; the anthology, *Los viajeros. 25 años de ciencia ficción mexicana*; and on the website, *Ciencia Ficción Mexicana.* In 1994 this story was given an award at *Premio Kalpa* under the title, "La noche de los gatos amurallados." Later, Padilla changed the title and revised some expressions of the story to incorporate it into his book and the anthology. Here, I use the version that appears in *Los viajeros. 25 años de ciencia ficción Mexicana.*

globalization. It is not a coincidence that the apocalypse motif became popular with many writers and artists when Mexico experienced the intensification of neoliberal policies. Aside from writers dedicated to the sf genre, many authors—including so-called mainstream writers such as José Emilio Pacheco, Carlos Fuentes, José Agustín, Gerardo Cornejo, and Hugo Hiriart—began to use the *fin de siècle* trope from the 1980s onward, because when the economic decline of the 1970s ended with the 1982 debt crisis, Mexico took a first step toward a neoliberal system with the adjustments imposed by the International Monetary Fund (Babb 159). Analyzing Mexican and Chicano writers' novels written close to the enactment of NAFTA, Miguel López-Lozano notes that the rise of the apocalyptic motif appeared as a universal reaction to the end of a period unrest caused by "homogenizing globalization and the concomitant marginalization of differences" (3) in an era of globalized neoliberalism. In addition to the economic impetus, imagining the end of the world is also a venue for cultural and political resistance to the sweeping forces of the nation and modernity in Mexico.

According to López-Lozano, "at the turn of the millennium, Latin American and US Latino authors draw on the disturbing images first depicted in science fiction novels in order to criticize the imposition of a notion of modernity emanating from hegemonic centers in Europe and the United States, proposing alternative models of development and social organization" (3). In a similar vein, Ignacio Sánchez Prado points out that by the mid-1990s, the "crack generation" had adopted the apocalyptic vision as the foundation for a conceptual rupture with literary convention and as a representation of the fall of Mexican modernity ("La utopía apocalíptica" 11).[13] Pedro Ángel Palou, Ignacio Padilla, Jorge Volpi, Eloy Urroz, and Ricardo Chávez

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[13] Another recent work that deals with the apocalypse trope in Mexican literature is Kristina Puotkalyte-Gurgel's dissertation, *Envisioning the end of the world: Mexican apocalyptic novels in the era of globalization* (2011). In line with López-Lozano and Sánchez Prado, she finds a

published *Crack Manifesto* (1996), in which the authors declare a rupture with the Latin

American literary tradition and proclaim the emergence of "we": the new generation of writers,

who would bring a new variety of fiction to the field. On the one hand, writers aim to resist the

international literary market that bundles up and localizes all narrative texts produced in Latin

America as the offspring of magical realism; on the other hand, they are emphasizing the

urgency of exploring new themes relevant to the society of the time. Despite the discrepancies

between the styles of these authors, one aspect they share is the dominance of an *end-of-the-

world* theme.[14] As Jorge Volpi explains in *Crack Postmanifesto*, which appeared 22 years after

Crack Manifesto, the initial purpose of the Manifesto was to tackle pressing issues such as an

authoritarian government, neoliberalism, and globalization (191–203). They are part of the

generation that had witnessed the Tlatelolco massacre, the 1985 earthquake, the fall of the Berlin

wall, the devaluation of the Mexican peso and NAFTA. Thus, they had experienced, whether

directly or indirectly, everything from discursive and ideological falls, corporeal and material

collapse, and the continuing acceleration of capitalism. For these authors, representing the end of

the world was a way to enable literature to engage with the anxieties circulating within present

society, which was experiencing continual crises. Taken together, the trope of the apocalypse

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connection between (post)apocalyptic visions featured in Mexican narratives and the neoliberal
politics and modernization processes of the 1980s and 1990s.
[14] While there is an ongoing debate whether Crack group is a literary generation, the trope of the-
end-of-the-world is undoubtedly a crucial theme that links them together: "Actually, the *Crack*
group was tentatively called *Los Milenaristas,* and the *Crack Manifesto* had the tentative title
"Hacia una renovación milenarista de la novela latinoamericana" (Regalado López 13–38). In
Crack Manifesto, Jorge Volpi ties up their first works, which represent the end-of-the-world
sensibility: *Temperamento melancólico* (1996) by Jorge Volpi; *Memoria de los días* (1995) by
Pedro Ángel Palou; *Las Rémoras* by Eloy Urroz; and *La conspiración idiota* (1994) by Ricardo
Chávez Castañeda.

emerges from the generational sensibility at the turn of the century, where unease about social, economic, political and ecological crises converged with the imperatives of Mexican literature.

While the economic, cultural, political, and discursive factors related to dystopian and apocalyptic visions have been discussed vigorously, how material facets affected the eruption of these tropes remains unexplored academically. To make intelligible the different waves of sf works created from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, it is crucial to take into account the catastrophe that occurred in 1985: the earthquake. Intellectuals highlighted the establishment of an institutional springboard in 1984, the Puebla Award, as the basis for the emergence of a new literary generation in the second half of the 1980s. Though this event was crucial for the formation of a group of sf writers and the recognition of the genre in literary circuits, as I have explained previously, it cannot fully elucidate how or why the textual and thematic peculiarities of a new generation emerged. Within the dystopian and (post)apocalyptic trope, there exists a fracture in terms of a cosmovision between the pre- and post-earthquake generations, similar to that between pre- and post-Internet generations. The seismic tremor not only devastated the physical city and wounded people, but also shattered the mental cartography and brought about a paradigm shift. The plight of the earthquake led to the intersection of natural factors with human-induced social and cultural structures. Although globalization and neoliberalism had already taught people that they too can be objectified and commercialized like nonhuman objects, the understanding that humans are but one species and type of matter became more obvious after the catastrophe. The earthquake was a vivid, direct, harsh experience that disrupted the dignity and supremacy of human life, and those who lived through it were *eye*witnesses to the collapse of a modernized nation.

In 1985, the weak foundations of Mexico City on a former lakebed, the concentration of urban structures, the numerous multistory buildings, and the poor construction standards increased the number of casualties and level of physical damage. Ironically, the 44-story *Torre Latinoamericana*, an emblematic example of architecture in the hazard zone, was undamaged and survived the disaster, and the majority of the colonial buildings were untouched. James D. Cockcroft notes that the earthquake "destroyed a higher percentage of government-built structures than other buildings. The word spread that public housing complexes, hospitals, schools, and clinics had been built with inferior materials or designs" (106). Amidst suspicions of governmental corruption, Miguel de la Madrid's administration revealed its impotence in dealing with the disaster: "Years of futile complaints about the dangers of official negligence, an inept and authoritarian reaction to the catastrophe, suppression of the widespread public urge to aid the victims, and a failure to hold officials accountable for their conduct" (De Schmidt and Schmidt xii). For instance, rescue operations conducted by soldiers at sweatshop factories, as Cockcroft notes, were not for rescuing people, but rather for retrieving sewing machines. Indeed, to safeguard the machines, officials prohibited work to rescue civilians (81–82). When the soldiers arrived, a young seamstress was saved only because she was buried with her machine: "[S]he cried out . . . You care more about your machines than human life" (quoted in Cockcroft 82). People *eye*witnessed that human life and death were closely connected to buildings or the city itself and saw how vulnerable the human presence is. On top of that, citizens realized that the value of human life can be lower than that of other matter, especially for the Mexican government. Along with existential questions, these circumstances resulted in, on the one hand, the demise of the legitimacy of the postrevolutionary government and disillusionment with notions and visions of a modernized and unified nation, and on the other hand, the circumstances

gave rise to the emergence of a new citizen movement to confront with state malfeasance. The aftereffects of the earthquake raised the urgent need to think in a new way about society at large.

This traumatic experience changed not only the urban topography but also the mentality of citizens, giving rise to a post/nonhuman perspective on the relationship between humans and (urban) ecology. The earthquake created an inflection point, leading people to begin to realize that blurred and disrupted boundaries exist between humans and other machines, and that society was imbued with socio-economic as well as material violence. Meanwhile, the motif of the (post)apocalypse became an instrumental site to which authors ascribed changing recognition of the immediate surroundings. Trujillo Muñoz briefly points out how much the disaster affected writers by citing Marco Rascón, who baptized the generation that experienced the earthquake as the "Seismic generation" (*Los confines* 219). Rascón describes the generation created by the earthquake thus: "ningún código quedó en pie… nos acostumbramos a ver las cosas como sorteo entre la vida y la muerte, decisiones que vienen de fuera y deciden por todos, sin que podamos hacer nada… los ríos de estupor y dolor se extendieron por doquier y todos tuvimos un embajador entre las listas de los muertos y ellos representaron a la ciudad entera en el inframundo" (quoted in Trujillo Muñoz, *Los confines* 219–220). The earthquake was a moment of awakening to the vulnerable boundaries between life and death, nature and culture, and humans and things.

From the beginning of the 1980s, (post)apocalyptic stories broke into the Mexican literary scene along with the acceleration of the neoliberal system in Mexico. End-of-the-world tropes had been prevalent in literature as well as cinema and other cultural fields. However, as an aftereffect of the disaster, a marked difference appeared in the way that the apocalyptic narrative was used by the post-earthquake generation. While former (post)apocalyptic sf portrayed the

urgent need for a reevaluation about present predicaments and the chance to start over, post-earthquake sf urges us to think anew about living *in* the end of the world. In other words, sf narratives often demonstrate the tendency to reclaim human singularity by accentuating the rational, affective, and spiritual dimensions of humans. In contrast, the post-earthquake generation started to depict a posthuman society in which such humanist values are obsolete, and it is impossible to fence off human society from the collapse of the world. Despite the fact that the apocalypse trope always entails the end of the previous order, as well as the beginning of another, the subject of the world is no longer human.

Among the various (post)apocalyptic and dystopian narratives, the reason why I select three narratives—"El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez," "El año de los gatos amurallados" and *Tiempo lunar*—is that these works illuminate the new anxieties and concerns that occur beyond the humanistic view due to the intersection of economic, social, material and environmental catastrophes. By contrasting the vulnerability of humans with overpowering nonhuman entities, the authors urge readers to rethink the consequences of the binary and hierarchical structure of human society, in which the coupling of domination and subjugation never disappears. I analyze how authors engage the broken body of Mexico City with other entities, such as human and nonhuman beings. By focusing on the materiality and corporeality of the (in)human and nonhuman in these stories, I pay particular attention to the agency and performativity of the ruined spaces and their interactions with human bodies. These figures are, on the one hand, projections of social, political, and economic failures caused by a binary model of modernity and modernization processes; however, on the other hand, they introduce new communities and collectives that forge an alternative onto-cartography, emphasizing the need for a new conception of our social, cultural, and physical surroundings. As Levi Bryant suggests, "onto-

cartography" refers to mapping "relations or interactions between machines or entities and how they structure the movements and becomings of one another" beyond the geographical disposition between physical materials (*Onto-Cartography* 7). Given that Bryant uses "machine" to denote all individual entities, regardless of whether they are human/nonhuman or animate/inanimate, I suggest observing in the works the becomings of links and connections between diverse machines that create new communities and assemblages.

Metro, the Womb of the Inhuman

Arturo César Rojas and Ignacio Padilla brood over successive tragedies in Mexico City in "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez" and "El año de los gatos amurallados," including the 1985 earthquake that covered the urbanscape with the debris of corpses and collapsed buildings, and compounded contemporary anxieties about economic crises, environmental degradation, political corruption, world wars, and the failure of modernization. César Rojas's story, "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez," begins with this fragment of a news report: "Washington. Después de la formal declaración de guerra, las dos potencias indicaron que usarían armas convencionales, pero que, de acuerdo a las necesidades de la presente situación, también podrían recurrir al armamento nuclear y bioquímico. Según fuentes autorizadas . . . " (213).[15] The report

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[15] In "Nuclear Criticism," Paul Williams addresses the burst of nuclear criticism that originated in Western academies during the 1980s and 1990s. A variety of cultural productions, not just critical theories, emerged in this period, which corresponded to rising anxieties due to the nuclear arms race of the Cold War. "By the mid-1990s, the criticism that took the end of the world as its subject found that the Earth was still standing; and other political questions, such as the continuing evolution of global capitalism, made its ethical imperative seem less pressing" (246). Williams seems to limit this theme and critical viewpoint to Western culture at the time. However, as noted, many sf works produced in Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s also address environmental and socio-political problems, as well as the fear of the consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons, that exist throughout the (post)apocalyptic trope. Although Mexico was not directly involved in the Cold War, the global context, intertwined with

serves as a prelude to coming disaster. In the next paragraph, we encounter the mortal city demolished by the war, with dead bodies heaped like small hills and the survivors suffering from rampant epidemics, including a mutated form of leprosy. Many diseased and deformed survivors have fled to subterranean areas of the city, mainly subway stations. In these circumstances, the protagonist, who was a rocker-troubadour, ventures from aboveground to the subterranean part of the capital to rescue his girlfriend, who was kidnapped by gangs in Pino Suárez. The reason these bandits—who are suffering severe illness and corporeal deformation due to the new leprosy— hold the woman is intriguing: to hear the music of this rocker-minstrel. The protagonist arrives at the Pino Suárez station and saves his girlfriend. However, she later commits suicides by disembowelment, refusing to suffer from leprosy after being infected by a gang boss who raped her.

Much like "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez," "El año de los gatos amurallados" does not explain the fatal swoop that led to the city's destruction, or provide detailed information regarding the scope of the disaster or number of survivors, though the diary of the central protagonist, Iñigo, gives hints. He describes the deadly earthquake that destroyed the surface of Mexico City, leading about fifty people to flee to a former Metro station to escape the overhead wreckage. However, only four protagonists—Iñigo, a deaf boy, and two girls, Maida and Roberta—remain alive in the end, all the others losing their lives due to a venereal disease contracted by engaging in sexual relationships with Maida and Roberta, who exchange their bodies for food, introducing the fatal infection among the survivors. As a result, these two girls and the two boys—who are a same-sex couple and thus did not have sex with the girls—are the

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domestic predicaments, influenced Mexican society. In addition to "El que llegó hasta el metro Pino Suárez" and "El año de los gatos amurallados," we can find the implications of the global context in many sf novels and stories.

last survivors in the underground cave, which is surrounded by starving, wild cats. While Iñigo is looking for drinking water on the surface, Maida and Roberta eat his partner, the young deaf boy. When Iñigo discovers the death of his partner, he commits suicide by throwing himself to the wild cats as prey. The girls finally decide to transform themselves into stones to endure hunger. While the subway platform provides survivors with protection from the catastrophe above, this underground city threatens them with suffocating incarceration in a cramped, subterranean, and contaminated room with no way out.

Why do ruined metro stations become decisive spatial indicators to address the end of humanity, or, better said, the (post)apocalyptic world? I contend that subway sites configure a kind of heterotopia, a concept proposed by Michel Foucault, against the city landscape on the surface. Underground metro stations are a space of Otherness ruled by a different, heterogeneous time—a disorderly chaos of people and objects. Rather than being a regulated urban space, the subway is a chaotic, hybrid, inhuman, and transgressive dimension. During ongoing disasters, metro stations become the places where the otherized, inverse/reverse system operates. According to Foucault, unlike the rectilinear time flow in other dimensions, multifaceted times converge in heterotopias, which disrupt traditional temporality. Taking a modern zoological garden in the city as an instance of heterotopia, Foucault remarks that the different "microcosms" of animals consist of incompatible presences within our society. Otherness is thereby the central aspect of heterotopia because of its reversed spatiotemporality and the otherness of its constituents in relation to the remaining social dimensions. In Mexico, the metro system itself—whether in reality or fiction—has been a heterotopia. Borrowing Juan Villoro's expression, metro passengers experience "postmodern speeds" in train cars, but the system is a "negative utopia," or "(post)apocalyptic ecosystem," in which they are transformed into a part of the subterranean

machines, stripped of self, agency, and subjectivity (131–32). Certainly, high speeds and

crowding into overcrowded train cars offer users contrasting experiences to the aboveground

city, thus making the subterranean world a heterotopia.[16] Meanwhile, the textual presentation of

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[16] In the 1960s, the METRO transport system was supposed to be a symbol of Mexico's
modernization and historical progress; instead, it became a disturbing representation of Mexican
history. Construction began in 1961 and the first line opened in 1969. Although there had been a
lengthy debate surrounding its construction, President Díaz Ordaz, who enjoyed strong support
from the Ingenieros Civiles Asociados (ICA), pushed ahead with the METRO project. The
METRO was a highly political project driven by technocrats and politicians to showcase the
Federal District as evidence of a modernized nation. According to Jeffrey M. Pilcher, the subway
system "became one of the capstones of the so-called economic miracle, a three-decade period of
rapid economic growth that had started in the late 1930s" (xx). And, as Diane E. Davis notes,
"many argued that the METRO would help ensure the Olympics' success, elevate Mexico's
international prestige, and showcase the capital city as a tourist destination" (164).
        There is another political reason behind the project's rapid construction: according to
Juan Villoro, the government created the METRO to "replace lost freedoms" (130) and serve as
a compensation for state violence recently inflicted on the Mexican public. The METRO opened
in September 1969, just one year after the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. The names of its stations
represented the government's perspective on official nationalism as well as the Mexican version
of modernity that they wanted the world to know. While some of the locations are named after
prominent historical figures from the Mexican War of Independence and the Mexican
Revolution, others are denominated in Aztec words. Finally, the use of pictographic signs for the
illiterate channels the official vision of modernization, which promotes the idea of a harmonious
nation that simultaneously modulates, disciplines, and regulates minorities. As such, the METRO
subway lines reflect the dominant class' blueprint of Mexican history and the vision of
modernity that they desire to impose on its citizens. The national project and capitalist power
behind the construction of the METRO, and its circulation through the city, control and modulate
the flows and movements of its citizens.
        However, this project fell apart due to the overwhelming flow of people and matter, and
the subway became the epitome of authoritative negligence and incompetence. Since the
authorities underestimated the number of commuters, there is a short supply of restrooms at
METRO stations (164), commuters experience unbearable "squeezing" into train cars
(Monsiváis 144–45) and suffer from the lack of a ventilation system. While stuck in
overcrowded train cars, commuters experience extreme passivity and the evaporation of their
agency, individuality, and human dignity. Moreover, the underground has become the exclusive
territory of dispossessed minorities, such as the poor and the racialized. Considering that this
system of mass transit was initially devised for the working class, it offers cheap and relatively
fast transportation for those who need to travel through the extensively-sized metropolitan area,
especially low-paid commuters and migrants from other regions. Villoro recognizes that the
METRO system became "the symbols of failed revolutions," in which class, gender, and racial
discrimination prevail (130–1). Rather than resolving the practical issues of traffic congestion
and uneven urban density, the METRO system fabricated another congested and marginal

destroyed and decaying metro stations reflects another type of heterotopia. Before losing its functionality as a means of transportation, the metro was a sort of human prosthetic ruled by human interventions that enabled the flow of urban travel. In the wake of apocalypse, it is converted into a space ruled by inhuman and nonhuman objects.

The subterranean refuge provides the ultimate shelter for minorities and unwanted entities who are replaceable, disposable, and valueless in the surface city. Bruno Latour contends that modernity is founded upon the desire for the "Great Divide" (10–12). According to Latour, even though the world is made up of hybrids of human and nonhuman entities, modernity resists recognizing the variety of collectives and networks. Instead, modernity has developed based on the mistaken separation between human and nonhuman, nature and society, and subject and object. Alongside this process of "purification" and the constitution of the binary paradigm, entities that do not fit within the marked area of modernity are expelled. As a consequence, modernity inevitably is accompanied by the arbitrary emergence of complex, ambiguous, and unwanted Others.[17] Metro stations perform two operations in the imagery of the destroyed world: first, they act as heterotopias that incubate and protect those unwanted Others, marginalized by overpowering modernity and modernization processes; second, they are agents for (re)producing alternative becomings. Underground dimensions are not passive spaces, but rather active

dimension. Another interesting fact is that in 1985, severe seismic tremors rattled the city, but the underground system protected its inhabitants and commuters from the catastrophes inflicted on surface buildings.

[17] Bruno Latour considers postmodernism to be a derivative symptom of modernism rather than an alternative to the modern constitution. Although postmodernity challenges modernity's dichotomies, such as the partition between subject and object, it still privileges discourse over nature (i.e., immateriality over materiality): "The [postmodernists] believe they are still modern because they accept the total division between the material and technological world on the one hand and the linguistic play of speaking subjects on the other" (61). According to Latour, by juxtaposing "nature, society, and discourse," the postmodernist reinstates the illusory dichotomies of modernists by translating them into subtler forms (64).

performers, who impart change to every being within them. It is true that (post)apocalyptic and dystopian environments in texts reflect/project/represent contemporary Mexican society, but destroyed materials and landscapes also *perform/manifest* themselves as *actants* (*agency*) that disrupt the established order and rebuild relationships between entities.

Interestingly, in both works, all the human bodies stage gendered and classed Otherness. Further, these bodies are broken by the social and physical violence in the era of early modernization and capitalism. The four protagonists in "El año de los gatos amurallados" epitomize sexualized others: a homosexual couple and the sexually diseased girls.[18] When the girls first tried to join Iñigo's group, the other members did not accept them due to a food shortage. Iñigo persuades the group to accept the girls, as he believes that someone "como ellas" cannot survive on the surface (Padilla 87). It is ambiguous if the refugees are surviving or if they have self-excluded themselves in the subway stations. Although the surface seems to be in no worse condition than the underground, those in the cave are afraid to go aboveground. Iñigo knows there are people on the surface, but he and the others in the cave are reluctant to leave, even when dying of hunger and thirst. However, the story never discloses why only certain people had to escape or be excluded from the surface city. While the superficial reason for the escape to the metro station is the earthquake, there are also seem to be other reasons: Iñigo writes in his journal that "'el estado feudal es el estado natural del hombre', escribió en cierta ocasión

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[18] In "El año de los gatos amurallados," the last survivors might represent social discrimination against sexual minorities driven by the increasing number of HIV-infected persons starting from the mid-1980s. After earning its clinical definition in 1982, AIDS became one of the most dangerous epidemics: "Because transmission is mainly through sex or drug use and there is no cure, there is much prejudice and fear. HIV/AIDS was and remains stigmatizing at an individual and national level" (Whiteside 4). Compared to other American nations, Mexico was relatively unaffected by this epidemic. However, AIDS has spread through the country since its first case was documented in 1981 (Del Rio and Sepúlveda 1445–57).

aludiendo al imperio de violencia que, como los gatos en el túnel, se expandía seguramente

arriba, en la ciudad devastada primero por el terremoto y luego por sus habitantes" (89–90).

Therefore, the question is: what forced some people into the demolished subway platform? Was

it the earthquake or the violence of the dominant class over its others? According to Iñigo, it is

human nature to dominate others, and this leads to unceasing war, violence, and, finally, the end

of man. In other words, human-induced violence is much more unbearable for the marginalized

people than external destruction.

Ignacio Padilla, the author, reveals that the human tendency towards power and

domination prevails not only among the people on the surface, but also among those

underground. For example, the residents of the cave exploit and assault the girls by using their

advantageous access to food and other necessities. Similarly, the girls exercise their power over a

weaker person, the disabled boy, by eating him. Francois Lyotard introduces two kinds of

inhumanity: "the inhumanity of the system" refers to effects, such as alienation, dehumanization,

and the commodification of humans (Lyotard 2); the other type of inhumanity refers to the

"secret remainder of the human," that is, to "all human others that have been repressed during the

process of humanization" (Herbrechter 7-9).[19] In other words, the second kind of inhumanity

comprises the hidden and repressed face of human beings; inhumanity is a discursive offshoot of

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[19] Rosi Braidotti goes far beyond the concept that the inhuman is modernity's "other." Braidotti finds that the power of the inhuman transcends human limits, particularly death. Rather than seeing death as the end of life, Braidotti considers it to be "the inhuman conceptual excess: the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear. Yet, death is also a creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming" (Braidotti 131). This does not refer to the physical death of humans but rather, as Braidotti suggests, to "the impersonality of life" (131). In other words, death and inhuman excess enables the connection between entities, thus producing new impersonal becoming and networks beyond the egocentric world of humans (Braidotti 105–42). The inhuman figures of the characters in these stories reflect the generative process of death, an inhuman excess that transcends and interlaces counter-entities into a new becoming.

anthropocentric humanism. Humanism, universalism, and liberalism separate nature from culture, in which the human individual becomes the subject of social reproduction. Resisting chaotic, disordered, and barbaric nature, the human being has been treated as the subject who arranges and domesticates all other dimensions through reason and order. The problem is, as many critics of modernity point out, the discourse/practice of modernity excludes and discriminates against all entities outside areas coded as "normal." The four characters in "El año de los gatos amurallados" represent the inhuman minorities—the remains of the normal, standard human—who are rejected because of their social, sexual, or biological "difference." The world Padilla crafts is dystopian and apocalyptic not only because of the evident atrocities but also due to how humanity's inhumanity foments domination and subjugation continuously.

In the same vein, the Panchólares, the group of people who settled in Pino Suárez in Roja's text, also symbolize social others, due not only to their illness and gendered marginality, but also their economic status, their classed otherness. The rocker in "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez" descends through the metro tunnels to Merced station, allowing us to view the subterranean urbanscape. The rocker-troubadour starts his journey to save his lover on the outskirts of capital, the region of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl (Neza), through the metro station Merced to Pino Suárez. As much as Pino Suárez, Nezahualcóyotl is a significant place.[20]

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[20] As one of the municipalities of the state of Mexico, Nezahualcóyotl, located on the eastern side of Federal District, is considered "the dark underbelly of the so-called Mexican Miracle" (De Jong and Graf). Due to the chaotic urban expansion and industrial growth during the 1960s and 1970s, the city attracted migrants from all over the nation. By the 1970s, the population residing in *colonias proletarias*—which refers to "rings of owner-built housing surrounding major population areas, inhabited by those who could not afford other accommodation. Such settlements, often referred to as shantytowns . . . "—had grown nearly six-fold (Russell 427, 445). Neza, one of these shantytowns, was initially deprived of any public services, such as water, sewage, and electricity. At the end of the 1960s, the government began to construct urban infrastructure within the town, but it was insufficient for the growing population. To make matters worse, Neza was founded on the drained bed of Lake Texcoco, and frequent flooding

Departing from this doomed city of Neza, he recites, "Ah, qué Neza tan chistosa, siempre llena de tolvaneras, no más que antes las tolvaneras eran cafeses y ora son anaranjadas" (216). Even the colors of dust and dirt that lead a rugged life have been changed in the aftermath of the recent calamities. From this, it is clear that the apocalypse made by the combination of the earthquake and the nuclear war has not made a significant difference in the life of Neza's citizens. Roberto Vallarino testifies in Ciudad Neza in 1982 that "here the humans are nothing but extensions of the animal kingdom. Mutants, horrible mutants with the form of men" (538). Thus, living in Neza already refers to life at the end of the world. Dust, wastes, and stench covered not only shabby houses but also the bodies of people, which deforms and transforms matter, animals, and human beings. In the text, the surface of the city is described as follows: "Ruinas de casa y esqueletos de animales y fierros torcidos y vidrios rotos por todos lados" (César Rojas 214). The scene resembles, to a great extent, the realities of Nezahualcóyotl, in the way that César Rojas overlaps Neza in fiction and in reality. Coupled with the subterranean part of the text, this peripheral area plays its role to show the unwanted being ousted from the society.

What strikes the reader is that the subterranean part of the city is not better than the surface. In fact, conditions below seem much worse. According to the minstrel, the subterranean heat is more toxic and intense than aboveground because of radiation, the stench of decaying bodies, and the lack of air. The rocker's song uncovers why these people are displaced and discarded in the underground city:

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turns the area muddy and saline. Peter M. Ward indicates that miserable housing and poor sanitary conditions were significant factors in the high mortality and morbidity rates of the area. Neza's residents were especially likely to contract intestinal infections due to its inadequate and insufficient water-supply system (Ward 206). Consequently, until the 1990s, Neza was regarded as one of the most infamous shantytowns and the worst case of chaotic urbanization, not only in Mexico but throughout the world.

Canté sobre el mundo que los de arriba nos habían quitado con su agua potable y sus

árboles verdes y su comida pobrecita pero calientita y sus casas pobrecitas pero

completitas y sus días de descanso pa'remar en Chapultepec y pa'jugar al futbol en los

llanos y pa'noviar con las chavas y llevarlas al cine. Canté sobre el mundo que ésos de

arriba nos habían dejado, sobre la contaminación y las guerras chicas y la Guerra Grande

y la ecología que chupó faros . . . canté sobre el sabor que tiene una cabeza de rata

cuando uno tiene la suerte de hallar y chuparse una cabeza de rata, canté sobre los cientos

de chavalitos que nacen mochitos o malhechos y luego se mueren escupiendo la sangre y

las tripas y hasta los huesos. (César Rojas 222)

Who are those that took away the right to live in the city? Contamination, pollution, and wars are

assuredly other factors that make life on the surface much harder, but there are also "esos de

arriba," who/which have deported the Panchólares to the underground stations.[21] They are

displaced persons in this space, rather than those who chose to take shelter. The Panchólares

were the impoverished classes of society, as demonstrated in the protagonist's song. And further,

they became undesirable—diseased and distorted bodies that should be removed from the city:

for this public, their economic otherness becomes transformed, or rather, amplified into physical

and corporeal marginalization. I assume that their disease is the main cause of their incarceration,

as it makes them *useless* and *valueless* bodies to the surface society. This reveals that those

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[21] By repeating contrasting words, such as "abajo" and "arriba," Rojas references Mariano
Azuela's well-known novel, *Los de abajo,* which deals with conflicts between different groups
during the Mexican Revolution. As the title alludes, the novel focuses on the class struggles of
this time, bringing the underdogs to the foreground: the indigenous and peasant protagonists who
fought against Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship. The novel represents the failure of the Revolution, as
well as injustice and violence prevalent within the majority of Mexicans, who remained outcast
and disempowered. By referencing Azuela's novel in "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez,"
Rojas tackles an unchanged post-revolutionary Mexican society in which inequality, injustice,
and violence are still inflicted on social and economic minorities.

people segregated in the stations were cast out due to their inhuman appearance and bodies, that is, that they are no longer "normal humans" who fit into society's order. Like the girls in "El año de los gatos amurallados," these people are seemingly victims of a systematic inhumanity, who in turn reproduce this inhumanity by inflicting violence on those weaker than them. The rocker's girlfriend, a person from the surface and the only female character in the story, chooses to die after she is raped by the leader of the bandits and infected with the new leprosy of the Panchólares. It is arresting that there are no women among this group of gangsters other than the protagonist's partner. In similar fashion to Padilla, through this hyper-masculinized and incarcerated society César Rojas foregrounds the sterile, unproductive, and degenerative aspects of a binary social system by declaring the end of man. As Marco Cenzatti notes, "these spaces [heterotopias] are assigned to or marked by the presence of individuals and social groups who do not fit into the modern social order" (76). As heterotopias, broken subway stations in these texts furnish a space for the residual entities of the surface society.

Performance of Metro in Ruin

Underground spaces in the aftermath of the apocalypse forge new paradigms of time and space released from man's supervision and regulation. Train cars are oxidized, and platforms are ruined and transformed into useless structures. Referring to ruined and abandoned sites, Tim Edensor elaborates Foucault's concept of heterotopia as an unthinking, but inevitable, by-product of modernity: "Foucault affirms that modern processes of classifying knowledge and drawing boundaries between spheres, spaces, and categories of all kinds are thwarted by the inevitable eruptions of ambiguity and transparency into the arbitrary distinctions that consign things, places and people to discrete realms" (62). Undesired, unwanted, and interstitial spaces and ruins stand

for "disordering spaces," as these dimensions resist and challenge social regulations and the rationales of networks (Edensor 53–95). The crucial role of these spaces is to configure a heterogeneous time and space that challenges human order and social constructions. Decaying and ruined stations, tunnels, and train cars unfold a heterotopian dimension. If the time-flow on the surface is linear and runs from the past to the chaotic present, that of the underground is as crumpled and collapsed as the materials and machines that are fragmented and dispersed.

The most salient quality of metro stations that differentiates them from human society on the surface is their heterogeneous temporality. Following the theoretical notion of Levi Bryant, I argue that time is a relative ontological concept: "time is the rate at which a machine can engage in operations" (*Onto-Cartography* 158). Here, "operation" denotes the power that makes a manifestation of an object. Bryant points out that a blue mug appears as a different color depending on the light, the changing color a temporal manifestation of the mug as a machine. The "operation" is the potential power and process through which the combination of the mug's materials and the sun's rays produce a black shade or a manifest color (*The Democracy of Objects* 87–94). The idea of temporality as spatiality refers to objects' rhythms, the velocity and duration of their movements, and their manifestations that move until the phase of "dissolution," when the object becomes another entity. As all machines/entities move and interact with other entities, they cannot escape from "entropy and dissolution," the phase in which objects lose their former being (Bryant, *Onto-Cartography* 16). Contrary to the temporality of modernity—which is linear, humanist, and rational—each machine has a different temporality depending on its flow of (inter)action and operations. Because of this, there is no one linear time in the cave. Every entity is being transformed by its own temporality, producing a heterogeneous assemblage of objects and matter in the Metro. In "El que llegó hasta Pino Suárez," ruination, mutation, and

oxidation demonstrate the multiple forms of temporality at work in the stations. Heated air, a leprous virus, and broken metallic rails and cars reconstruct their time and space outside human control.

> Y agarramos y nos metimos por un túnel y caminamos y pasamos por un vagón bien oxidado y bien agujerado y seguimos caminando y salimos del túnel y le llegamos a otro andén, que ya ni andén parecía de tantas piedras y tantos huesos y tantísimo esptropicio, hasta que nos topamos con esa como piedra azteca que habían en el corredor pa' transbordar, esa piedra así como con figura de plataforma que antes estaba al aire libre y donde había pastito y hasta podía distinguirse un poquito de cielo. Nomás que ya no había cielo y menos aire libre . . . lo único que se mantenía en pie era la dichosa piedra azteca . . . que ora se prendía y se apagaba y se volvía a prender con unas claridades medio rojas y medio moradas, así como reflector de casa de espantos. (Con eso de que las piedras también le está mutando como los animales y las plantas.) (César Rojas 219)

While train cars cease to serve as transportation, in their deaths animated bodies are dissolved into dust. Those fragmented objects ceased to conduct former flows and operations. Decay and alteration are reflections of the beginning of a new onto-cartography among the machines in the station. Human bone chips will be turned into earth, transforming a part of the human to soil. Passing through the remnants of disasters, in the tunnel the protagonist discovers the coexistence of heterogeneous temporalities that have completely diverged from human temporality. For him, Aztec stone is the repository of multiple accumulated times. In his past, Aztec stone was a mere inanimate object that represented a remote history. It was once an Aztec altar for God and since turned into a piece of heritage exposed within the Pino Suárez station: a nostalgic monument that reminds him, on the one hand, of the remote history of Aztec grandeur,

and on the other, of the vortex of modern life before the apocalypse. In the body of the Aztec rock, the colonial and the modern past converge with present time, which the calamities have stopped and trapped in the tunnels. However, beyond his temporalities that are projected in stone, he captures the temporality of the rock as well. He states that the stone is mutated, like other animate objects, through its interactions with other visible and invisible objects. Through gradual changes in the color and texture of the rock, the minstrel recognizes the existence of an "other" temporality that moves regardless of how human time flows. This stone shows its vital power as animate matter.

Even more so than in Roja's story, Padilla's work intensely expresses the influential performativity of materials that arrange nonhuman temporalities: "Maida vio desaparecer aquel punto luminoso sobre uno de los rieles abandonados . . . el eco del agua golpe ando corría a refugiarse en la oscuridad en el túnel, allí donde solo el eterno maullido de los gatos respondería al estertor del agua" (86). Rusty rails make sounds while eating the last drops of water and, at the same time, forge their own temporality by creating sounds of a "reloj de agua" (Padilla 86). Combined with the cats' crying, the sound of water and railroads menace the survival of the people in the cave. While the rocker-troubadour only observes the heterogeneous times of different entities, interestingly in this story humans are intimately involved in the objects' time— the time that emerges from the collective operation of water, floor, air, and humidity. The tickling/trickling sounds of drops alert the protagonists to a water shortage that will lead to the deaths of the survivors and agitate the starving cats as much as the humans. The strange presence of cats and the eruption of metallic materiality—which competes with the humans for water drops—make them abruptly realize that they are in unknown spatiotemporality, where human agency and reason would be no help. The temporality, "the rate of the operation," of water-drops

trickling has a predominate influence over human entities. The crying of the cats invokes an eerie sensation in the characters as they understand that this crying is not just the reactive behavior of animals. Even though it is impossible to apprehend what provokes sounds from the cats and other objects, and why it does so, the human survivors discern a proactive and deliberative intent behind it. Nothing happened and changed abruptly in the cave, but the sounds of cats and water exercise their affective power over the human. Those sounds tell the survivors that something governs their life and death, but it is still impossible to grasp the agent of this condition.

In this way, the nonhuman objects' performance opens up a formerly un-sensed milieu of experience, while also arousing a strangely eerie sensation. The fear of unknown objects and situations reminds us of concepts such as Lyotard's inhuman, Kristeva's abject, and Freud's uncanny. Mark Fisher distinguishes the weird and eerie from those notions. While those feelings are "about the strange within the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange, . . . weird and eerie make the opposite move: they allow us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside" (Fisher, *The Weird* 10). Fisher further differentiates the weird form the eerie, since the "eerie is fundamentally tied up with the questions of agency" (*The Weird* 11). We feel eerie in the situations in which we observe the "*failure of absence* or *failure of presence*" (61). What Fisher illustrates through this discussion of the "eerie" is a situation in which humans are deprived of agency and subjectivity, and thereby feel unable to control (nonhuman) others' agency. Mark Fisher's notion of the eerie is extremely useful because it sheds insight on nonhuman machines' vitality and their agency through the subversion of power and agency between human and nonhuman entities. Although Fisher does not link the operation of an unknown agent with withdrawn/deactivated parts of machines, he finds the eerie in landscapes devoid of humans and their agency, implying that the eerie comes from the enactment and

manifestation of the entities' aspects that overwhelm human sense by disrupting the common order of human experience. I find that Fisher's concept of the "eerie" and the sudden awareness or feeling of the withdrawn, hidden potentiality of nonhuman things are deeply connected. Four people in the cave-station suddenly realize the wildness of the cats and the speed of the water drops, neither of which they had previously recognized. The disparity between their temporalities and those of other material surroundings, and the subverted power relations between human and nonhuman entities, create the sense of fear and eeriness. The strange and claustrophobic mood of this story unearths the hidden agencies and vitalities of various beings and the fact that the subjects of the world are not all human.

In the metro, human characters experience a drastic alteration in their forms of life. In "El año de los gatos amurallados," boys encounter death and girls are converted into animals and, eventually, stones. Similarly, due to disease people in "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez" undergo massive corporeal changes that rupture the boundary between life and death. In the entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies that engenders a new entity, the authors reveal that the human is a porous and malleable notion, as well as a corporeal being. Both authors generate disruptive inhuman entities and cast the metro as a collective machine that exercises its agency through the manifestation of new becomings and the hidden facets of entities, although the new entities and aspects do not appear as pleasant figures. In "Metro," the Pino Suárez station is an assemblage of various factors and constituent incubates, producing transgressive beings; invisible air, heat, and viruses accelerate people's mutation into nonhumans. Roja repeats words like "mushrooms, blood, saliva, vomiting, swallowing, and coughing" in describing the diseased and metamorphosing, thus highlighting their liminality between the human and the animal, and between the self and the other. Elizabeth Claudia Filimon notes that, "mucus, blood, the wet

stickiness of the carnal threshold, create fusion and confusion. . . they are inscribed in a borderline area: between the outside and the inside of the body, between the undefined self and other of the pre-natal dyad" (67). Secretions, in part, throw static corporeality back to a fluid status and partially disclose previously hidden and unknown substances in the human body.

The figure of the Páncholares' leader is the most repulsive and inhuman: "el tumor del trasero se le subía y se le bajaba como una culebra pintada de colorado" (César Rojas 166). In addition to the animalized figure of the body, exposed visceral organs suddenly reveal the most familiar and intimate, but most unrecognized, part of body. The brutal extrusion of the intestines' materiality forces the realization that humans are a collective assemblage of various entities. Even the body of the individual is not an entirely closed system but, rather, an entanglement of heterogeneous matters. Stacy Alaimo argues that "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2). As such, the open corporeality of the bandit demonstrates, as Alaimo contends, how "trans-corporeal" the human body is. The tumor and secretions also disrupt the limits between the self and the other. They are obvious intrusions of that which is alien into the body, but they have become undetachable parts of the self, blurring the line between the life and death of the human. The self, as an embodied subjectivity, is a ductile notion and matter into which other matters and minds can easily intrude. Above all, the Panchólares are the most striking machine made by the metro. The metro station gives birth to this collective entity. Nobody has a name or particular character, and it is impossible to distinguish one member of the group from another due to muddled secretions, blood, tissues, and fragments of flesh. There is no one person, but a mass of inhuman beings enacting an alternative society and life form. This anonymous, sick, and bestial crowd is represented by the

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abnormalities expelled from the regular community and, at the same time, the emergence of the in/nonhuman conglomerate. Becoming ill and dying is not a pleasurable metamorphosis but, while the human itself is a hybrid, this demonstrates how influential and closely entangled materials' agency is with the human.

The girls in "El año de los gatos amurallados" undergo a more far-reaching transmutation than the characters in Roja's story. At the beginning, Roberta experiences animalization: she scratches and bites Maida like a cat. Iñigo later describes the two girls as vampires, since sexual relationships with them bring fatal diseases to their partners yet they survive. While there are no visible changes to their bodies, Padilla describes the change as being of an intrinsic quality that progressively transforms the girls into human-others. Inhumanity, the repressed essence of the human, erupts from within the cat-like and monstrous behaviors of the girls. Finally, they decide to mutate into stones: "Para ellas como para los gatos, había llegado la hora de hundirse en el pesado sueño de la digestión. Una digestión oscura y merecida. Pero ellas no pensaban despertar de ese sueño. Ahora, la idea de quedarse ahí hasta convertirse en estalactitas ya no les parecía tan mal" (Padilla 95). Their inhuman figure is gradually converted into an inert being by stopping time and ending their human lives. These women are not dying: they instead choose to "hibernate." In her work, Rosi Braidotti proposes an alternative perspective on human death: "Death is the inhuman conceptual excess: the unpresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear. Death is also a creative synthesis of flows, energies, and perpetual becoming" (131). Rather than considering it an end, such a conceptualization enables rethinking human death as a phase of being other. Destroyed, the blocked network of the subway transforms into an active nonhuman machine that offers a womb-like space into which new forms of girl-rocks are born. Padilla addresses the despair and hopelessness of humanity through

a narrative about the end of humankind, in particular about the suffocating death of the others within human society.[22] For humanity, the loss of a privileged position—of species, race, gender, or class—is not a pleasurable experience. Nonetheless, the dualism generated by anthropocentric humanism has created many problems, such as inequality, discrimination, and violence toward human and nonhuman others. In addition, this binary logic and universalism do not fully elucidate that the human itself is hybrid, not a solid subject/individual but a being that consists of diverse links with other entities. Padilla poses questions of coexistence among diverse humans, matter, and objects that does not exert power over minorities.

Mauricio Molina's Tiempo lunar, *In-Between Apocalypses*

What would the world look like decades after the catastrophes of the two stories? What lives would be led by those who survived on the surface? Departing from subterranean sites, I explore the surface city in Mauricio Molina's *Tiempo lunar,* which concerns living *after* the end of the world. In this novel, calamities like earthquakes, nuclear warfare and fallout, and epidemics that occurred in the rather remote past, people eke out a living decades after these disasters. Rather than the imminent danger of the apocalypse, this novel shed light on the entities that adapt to the newly reformed environment of the postapocalypse. Even after the end of the world, people and other entities persist and survive in the polluted and dilapidated conditions.

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[22] In the anthology, *Los viajeros*, Ignacio Padilla explains why he wrote this story as follows: "Escribí esta historia hace más de veinte años, y aún no deja de sorprenderme su sordidez, la desesperanza, aquella decepción hacia mi gente y mi ciudad que en mi habían sembrado los sismos de 1985 y sus brutales secuelas. Allí, en la acre tornaba del terremoto, surgió esta historia que no da cabida a la esperanza en una ciudad poblada y oscurecida por hombres más dignos de aparecer en un infierno sarteano que de habitar en una metrópoli moderna" (*Los viajeros* 95–96). From this quote, we find that Padilla sought to express human nature, which seeks to exploit others, while simultaneously presenting society's violence toward disempowered people.

The protagonists in *Tiempo lunar* do not feel or recognize that they live during the gradual collapse of the world, and act as if catastrophes and tragedies are part of their daily routine. Put differently, the imagery world in Molina's work is located in suspended spaces between multiple arrivals of apocalypses.

While the claustrophobic spaces of subway stations limit the gestures of the protagonists in the previous stories, the characters in Molina's novels exhibit extensive and dynamic crossings and movements through open dimensions, which engender alternative communities that reassemble the broken bodies. In *Tiempo lunar,* the main character Ándres travels all over the city searching for his friend, Ismael, who disappeared mysteriously on the night of an eclipse. With Ismael's map and notes, in which he jotted inscrutable records of times and places, Ándres starts to retrace his friend's steps before his disappearance. By doing so, Ándres unintentionally visits hidden, invisible, and covered sites in the metropolis, encountering strange and bizarre phenomena. Straying far from the variety of mobilities and collectives represented in the stories I discussed above, the mood of *Tiempo lunar* is dominated by a sense of loss and ungraspable absence. The agency of the (absent) city discloses the perils and paradoxes of modernity, uncovering their concealed and repressed dimensions through the bizarre and unaccountable emergence of derelict bodies and cityscapes. As was the case with the underground in the two previous stories, in Molina's novel the aboveground city discloses that the world and individual entities are already hybrid forms of objects and dynamic dispositions of collectives that form counterpoints to national projects of modernization, European modernity, and neoliberalism. While my analysis of the underground caves focused on the emergence and agency of nonhumanity, in this section I grapple with the hybrid nature of every machine founded on the active interrelation between a variety of other entities.

Inside-Out, Upside-Down

The underlying weird and eerie quality in Mauricio Molina's *Tiempo lunar* demonstrates, figuratively and substantially, the onto-cartography that unfolds complicated networks of the urban body of Mexico City. Ándres continuously faces surreal, terrifying and incomprehensible circumstances while investigating the disappearance of his friend Ismael. When Ándres visits six locations at the times written in Ismael's notes, he experiences a total inversion of animate and inanimate beings, upside down and inside out of spatiotemporality. By provoking weird and eerie terror, Molina draws on the urban body of Mexico City as a space in/on/through which to address ungraspable and complicated historical, political, epistemological, and environmental crises in contemporary society. By twisting human vision towards the material world, Molina revisits the other/hidden sides of modernity and its associates such asrationalism and western universalism, to show that reality itself is an ungraspable machine. As Innés Ordiz Alonso-Collada argues, Molina addresses contemporary concerns facing Mexican society, such as "overpopulation, political corruption and ecological degradation" through the dreadful revival of the mythological past in the present time (105–18). However, I argue that Molina's concerns stretch beyond societal problems.

> Desde hacía años grandes regiones de la ciudad habían sido evacuadas por órdenes
> superiores. Se aludían múltiples razones nunca completamente aclaradas: contaminación,
> inundaciones, peligro de derrumbes, epidemias. Algunos de esos territorios estaban
> custodiados por soldados; otros habían sido abandonados al deterioro. Nadie sabía a
> ciencia cierta cuál era la causa real de las evacuaciones. Se sabía que la contaminación y
> la sobresaturación demográfica habían provocado en otras épocas muy graves problemas,
> pero las verdaderas razones nunca fueron reveladas y la población acató las órdenes

gubernamentales. *(20)*

In the novel, Mexico City is devastated, and contaminated, and numerous areas of the city are abandoned, while the government restricts civilian access to other areas for undisclosed reasons. In contrast to the urban core, the city's peripheral areas remain intact and shielded from floods, earthquakes, and even pollution. Only Mexico City has been converted into "un tumor" of the country, with residents suffering acid rain, smog, and decaying landscapes. What is happening in those restricted areas of Mexico City? Why are only the metropolis and certain sites damaged? What is the reason for the restrictions? Why has the government evacuated citizens from, and established supervision over, those areas?[23] As stated in the text, contamination, overpopulation, and environmental degradation are substantial factors, but they do not explain fully the driving force behind the evacuations and degradation of the urban landscape. These questions are never resolved in the novel, remaining ambiguous. In this way, Molina implies that there are "other" driving forces that create mysterious voids in the mundane life of this future city.

Another uncertainty that engenders an eerie sensation is the constant disappearance of people who later return as drowned bodies in barren streets. People vanish, leaving no trace, and reappear as corpses that seem to have been submerged in water. What happened to them? How did they drown? How could they disappear suddenly without a trace? Who/what did this? The absence of rational explanation and the disappearance of citizens haunt the reader, arousing in

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[23] Fisher says that "the eerie (*the failure of presence*) is the feeling of the eerie that pertains to ruins or other abandoned structures. Post-apocalyptic science fiction, while not in itself necessarily an eerie genre, is nevertheless full of eerie scenes" (*The Weird* 62). In this sense, the initial setting of *Tiempo lunar*—the devastated, broken, abandoned Mexico City—raises several questions, such as what happened and what caused such depopulation and destruction, which provokes eerie feelings. Over the course of the narrative, Molina never discloses why the city was devastated nor explains why some areas prohibit civilian entry. Thus, the mystery of the city remains unsolved.

these strange circumstances questions concerning agency. During his journey, Ándres discovers that a dead man he found in the streets was a man in pictures that Ismael had taken. Surprisingly, he later spots the man in the subway and at other sites, very much alive. When Ándres tries to catch him, he disappears. Who is he? Why does Ándres see him appear and disappear? What is the connection between Ismael and the unknown man? Until the end of the novel, these questions linger, unresolved for both Ándres and the reader. The strange events that Ándres encounters are dreadful, because he sees something that cannot/should not be there and, conversely, an absence of something that should be there. The disappearance of known subjects and the appearance of unknown subjects forms a duet that shapes the mysterious ambience.

At the beginning of the novel, we sense and glimpse "the outside" —the dimension beyond human cognitive capacity—through the aforementioned questions. Mauricio Molina unfolds the eerie by changing it into a weird topography. As previously discussed, Mark Fisher differentiates between the weird and the eerie: we sense the weird when we observe the express invasion of our world by outside elements, whereas an eerie sensation occurs without any ostensible changes. An eerie atmosphere can be evoked by a cat's cry, which makes us instinctively aware that something strange is going on without observing abnormal or unusual phenomenon. "The eerie necessarily involves a form of speculation and suspense that are not an essential feature of the weird" (Fisher, *The Weird* 62). Situations in the beginning of the novel that raise questions and evoke eerie sensations gradually transition into weird scenes in the later chapters. Incomprehensible, unnatural or impossible phenomena occur that threaten the life of the protagonist, Ándres, in the second half of the narrative. My approach to the weird is reminiscent of Graham Harman's conceptualization of *the weird*. Like Harman, I concentrate on the weird feelings that emerge from sensing the gaps between objects and their hidden aspects

and qualities. However, Harman assumes a real quality with respect to objects that cannot be articulated using language or other mediums.[24] He states that "reality itself is weird because reality itself is incommensurable with any attempt to represent or measure it" (*Weird Realism* 51). For this reason, Harman mainly focuses on the gap and tension between the real and the represented quality of objects. Fisher's conceptualization of the weird and eerie, on the other hand, highlights the interaction between a human's agency and an object's agency, or put simply, the power dynamics between machines. Unlike the eerie, the weird emerges as a result of a "confrontation with the outside." During the weird's ingress/egress, Molina establishes liminal presences, riddling materials and characters with details that arouse the reader's curiosity.

From Ismael's car and home, Ándres recovers an annotated note, a copy of an old map, a revolver, a compass, and some photos of a mysterious man. These materials guide Ándres to the weird world and act as a medium between the inside and outside of the human world. The map and notes open the door and guide Ándres to strange spots in Mexico City. These normal materials unfold their extraordinary power to open a new topography by linking to other machines. In addition, at the first four sites Ándres visits in his search for Ismael he meets mysterious people, such as Milena, el Merodeador—unidentified rover—and an old librarian who collects maps as a hobby. All three characters cross the border between the inside and outside of the human world; they are hiding "something" that leads Ándres towards weird dimensions. The librarian/cartographer initially triggers the story by telling Ismael of the mysterious appearance and disappearance of a man, el Merodeador, who will eventually be

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[24] Graham Harman, in his book *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, develops the concept of weird realism, a notion that addresses the incommensurability of reality itself. By examining H.P. Lovecraft's literary style and linguistic features, Harman discovers the idiosyncrasy that corresponds with the essence of object-oriented philosophy. See, in particular, the chapter, "A Lovecraftian Ontography" 33–37.

found dead by drowning. Ismael had been tracing el Merodeador and other strange phenomena occurring in the city, and Ándres and the librarian see el Merodeador several times in the sites recorded in Ismael's note. According to the cartographer, el Merodeador lived in the 19th century, but Ándres and Ismael discover him as a corpse and sometimes encounter a sane, living man walking the streets. Rather than face the reality outside, the librarian opts to stay in another time-space—one that is heterogeneous but sealed in the library. He lives somewhere, but not in this world, as he stays in the library, called La Morgue because of its role as a repository of the remains of the past; in other words, he stays in the past or, rather, dead. As a librarian, this man transcends time and space beyond life and death. At the same time, the old librarian lives in the multiple temporalities and spatialities generated by his maps and books.

Lastly, Milena, who had a deep relationship with Ismael, appears and disappears in the life/dreams of Ándres. Isamel and Ándres are seduced by her, not only because of her sexual attractiveness, but also by her inexplicable air. She is concealing something from Ándres and Ismael, but Molina never discloses her secret nor the reason she refuses to tell it. Molina insinuates that her strangeness comes from her ambilaterality and simultaneity: her existence is oneiric but still, at the same time, a real existence. As represented by her mascot, an axolotl, an amphibian native to Mexico, the novel suggests it is possible that Milena crosses the line between the upside and the downside, land and water, life and death.[25] M. C. Esher's lithograph,

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[25] This animal references Julio Cortázar's famous story, "Axolotl," in which a narrator transforms into a hybrid axolotl-man. The dual nature of the animal and the human being in "Axolotl" resonates with the mysterious figure of Milena. Meanwhile, Roger Bartra links the amphibian nature of the axolotl with *Mexicanidad*: "The Nahuatl word *axólotl* has been translated as 'water game,' and it is evident that its mysterious dual nature (larva/salamander) and its repressed potential for metamorphosis are elements that facilitate the use of this curious animal as a figure to represent the Mexican national character and the structures of political mediation it obscures" (7). This Mexican character, as a symbol of repressed potential, is also represented throughout the destroyed Mexico City portrayed in *Tiempo lunar*.

Three Worlds, hangs in Milena's home, implicitly referencing her transcendence.[26] At the end of

the story, Ándres realizes that it is these three odd characters who brought him into the unknown

time-space. Ándres, and the reader, questions their role in this bizarre world? While they

generate and introduce enigmas of disappearance, they also embody an ambivalent existence on

the verge of humanity. Like the eerie cries of the cats in Padilla's story, these characters' words

and behaviors spark the eerie feeling that they are engaged with hidden, unknown, and

unintelligible dimensions, to produce both fear and fascination.

Spurred by the curiosity triggered by these three characters, Ándres ingresses into the

realm of the weird. I would like to view "the hideous outside" in *Tiempo lunar* as the domain of

the inactivated/unexercised power of machines. Molina tries to glimpse the unknown aspects of

humanity by means of an imaginary spatiotemporality, an externality to human society. Drawing

on Harman's notion of withdrawn entities, which considers the inaccessible dimensions of

objects as their real qualities, Levi Bryant develops the concept of "the virtual proper being"

(Bryant, *Onto-Cartography* 40–46; Harman, *The Quadruple Object* 35–50). Returning to the

example of the blue mug, the materials in the cup have a pluripotent power to *exercise* many

colors and other manifestations. However, the expressed feature of a cup will be different

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[26] Along with the presence of the axolotl, M. C. Escher's work, *Three Worlds*, provides a
figurative reference to Milena's transcendental character, who transgresses the establishments of
the natural and social. "In *Three Worlds. . .* a receding tapestry of dead leaves occluding tree and
fish establishes an invisible plane of water pointing beyond and beneath, trapping the mind's eye
in perpetual triangulating journeys through reflection and refraction" (Lamontagne 79). On the
flat plane, Escher interlaces three dimensions (beyond, beneath, and between) and three different
entities (fish, tree, dead leaves), while simultaneously subverting the natural order by mirroring
the scene in the water's reflection. The juxtaposition of the incompatible worlds represented in
this work expresses a possible crossing over between worlds. This lithograph reflects Milena's
mysterious absence and presence. Like moon phases, her appearance and disappearance open
and close the door to the other or outer world. When the eclipse begins, Ándres witnesses
supernatural phenomena, which are centered in Milena's dis/appearance in both his conscious
and unconsciousness as well as in dream and reality.

depending on what the materials make and how they move with and activate other machines. While Harman, in this sense, suggests that there is a "real" essence that we can never access, Bryant considers the withdrawn dimensions of the real to be the inactivated qualities and powers of objects. Thus, according to Bryant, there is no completely withdrawn object, only veiled facets with the potentiality to appear outside. For example, perhaps I would never see rainbow colors or abnormal textures in a blue mug, but other entities, such as mosquitos, cats, and so on can observe different manifestations (features) of a mug, as the correlation between a mug and a cat is distinct from that of the correlation between a human and a mug. It is impossible for humans and other entities to discern all the shades/qualities/powers of machines. All machines—whether =human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate—inevitably possess a relative, withdrawn side.

The sudden eruption of strange events in *Tiempo lunar* allows us to access those dimensions of the nonhuman that do not fall under human control and regulation. By foregrounding weird scenes, Molina stresses that the world itself is a pluripotent amalgam of various objects and flows of powers. Chasing el Merodeador, Ándres arrives at the third place that Ismael marked: a massive, derelict building that is filled with the ruins and debris of former inhabitants' lives. Suddenly, the building's interior distorts gravity, and inverts what is up and what is down. Dust falls over Ándres' head, and the abandoned objects on the floor float around in midair. Molina states that, "los edificios evacuados por los temblores, las ruinas, las zonas vedadas por catástrofes ecológicas, los espacios abandonados durante años o los lugares cerrados repletos de objetos inertes, provocan un espesamiento de lo real, una densificación de la incertidumbre" (85). Molina materializes and visualizes the unknown and inactivated power of ruined and decayed objects through weird imagery that goes beyond the disorderly effects of ruins, which challenges social regulation and restriction. In this way, Molina demonstrates the

existence of the agency of nonhuman machines and their potential exercises. When Ándres barely escapes from the building, he witnesses the inundation of the Zócalo—or, better put, the irruption of water against gravity in the historic center of Mexico City. He feels that "[l]a lluvia viscosa caía sobre las calles agitándose como una medusa en el viento y mojaba las avenidas, inundaba el asfalto, derretía los edificios, se iba tragando la ciudad" (71). Suddenly, animals and insects jump out from sewers and ditches and the historic city center becomes swamped by aggressive rain and an irruption from below. Ándres also notices bizarre phenomena in the restricted zone, in which is located an abandoned refinery. In the midst of ruins, a pyramid-like edifice, as unreachable and untouchable as a mirage, is erected in just a few hours. In the factory, time passes slower than in normal spaces. At the last destination on the map, Ándres observes the devastated city, half-submerged in a large lake, where he discovers Ismael's dead body. What is strange here is that Ándres travels underground through a vertical yet subterranean tunnel, and at the end of the tunnel he discovers another city sunk below the lake. Just as he feels the subterranean city start to recover its life, water surges over and immerses it. In addition to gravitational distortions, Molina inverts the aspects of animate and inanimate beings by empowering nonhuman entities.

In these weird scenes, Molina overlaps the pre-Hispanic era with the decayed future of Mexico City. While the lacustrine city with pyramidal structures evokes the Aztec capital of Tenochititlán, the librarian comments that, "la luna surgió del fondo del lago donde estaba asentada la ciudad," in reference to the foundational myth of the Aztec civilization (56). For that reason, Enrique Serna and Inés Ordiz Alonso-Collada stress the Aztec concept of cyclical time in *Tiempo lunar* by noting how the pre-Hispanic landscape surges into the contemporary urban landscape. Serna sees a bleak future urbanity as the final phase before a return to pre-Hispanic

time, that is, to primordial time (36). Similarly, Alonso-Collada attempts to establish a link between the eruption of an appalling past and the "dangers of forgetting the past" (111). Discussing the emergence of the monstrous past, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz compares the mythological presence in the Mexico City of *Tiempo lunar* to Lovecraft's Cthuhlu.[27] It is true that Molina purposefully intermingles the horrible eruption of a primitive past with the social devolution of polluted urbanity: the unceasing death of citizens, the industrial ruins, and the government's vigilance in the restricted zones. However, readings that view the surge of pre-Hispanic time as a warning of the perilous conditions of present society are not sufficient to address what Molina tries to unfold through his use of the eerie and the weird.

> Siempre hemos creído que el Eterno Retorno se da cíclicamente, sucesivamente. Esta idea, totalmente antrópica, se debe a que tendemos a pensar en la realidad como si fuera homogénea y siempre relacionada con la experiencia humana. Debido a nuestra imposibilidad para captar múltiples niveles a un tiempo, nos resulta imposible, o casi imposible, imaginar que el Eterno Retorno no se dé sucesivamente, como si el tiempo fuera lineal, sino simultáneamente. El Eterno Retorno es entonces simultáneo. (87)

Molina is opposed to both linear and circular concepts of time; for him, time is a simultaneous ontological presence. The monstrous eruption of past time is not just a symbolic or

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[27] Trujillo Muñoz considers destroyed and ruined urbanity itself as an incarnated monster, which reminds us of the Aztec god of war, Huitzilopochtli, and the enigmatic Lovecraftian entity, Cthulhu: "Poética de la destrucción, expressionismo ritual, *Tiempo lunar* es sólo la punta de iceberg de toda una nueva sensibilidad, de una ciencia fcción que regresa a los símbolos prehispánicos, a la magia ancestral tan cara a Lovecraft y Machen. Es la unión incestuosa entre Huitzilopochtli y Cthulhu" (*Biografía del futuro*, 258). Lovecraft describes Cthulhu as a mixture of human, dragon, and octopus, but at the same time an indescribable existence. As Muñoz aptly points out, its mythic yet animalistic presence, combined with Huitzilpochtli's human–animal figure, resonates with the animated urban constructions and the ferocious irruption of past ruins into reality.

historical reflection; it is the presentation of one aspect of the real that we cannot clearly see. It is not that today's desperate conditions will bring a doomsday that draws us back to a past, primitive time. Rather, time for Molina is almost a set of fossils that have accumulated in the city and coexist within multitudinous temporalities. *Tiempo lunar* positions Mexico City as a collective machine that is constructed by the correlations of various (non)human and (in)animate beings and their heterogeneous temporalities. Thus, the hideous past is not the final/next destination, but rather remains and will remain with the present and future. Beyond contemporary Mexican social anxieties, Molina reveals the accumulated and unresolved predicaments at the very heart of Mexico City. The author seems to demonstrate a mode of power that breaks and removes social misfits—otherized objects/subjects—and engenders more disparate beings. He implies that a change in human perspective must take precedence in order to resolve the lingering problems bound up with nonhuman others and others within the human. Absent this resolution, the world of *Tiempo lunar,* in which the human is colonized by the monstrous city, will soon arrive.

I.2. MORE THAN HUMAN

While the science fiction of the 1980s, which I have explored in the previous section, challenges modernity's othering process by reinvigorating the vitality of nonhuman machines as a means to cope with the ruins of modernization and modernity, Bef's narratives actively explore the new phase of the world system and its plight in the era of new technologies and capitalist realism. His works effectively depict the transformed social atmosphere and concomitant predicaments in Mexico at the turn of the 21st century. Following the gradual acceleration of the neoliberal regime that began with Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the year 1994 was a critical juncture

for Mexican society.[28] NAFTA came into effect, which lead to substantial changes in Mexico's

social, economic, political, and material ecologies. The geographic boundaries between the

United States, Canada, and Mexico started to blur, at least with respect to the circulation,

distribution, and consumption of labor and capital. However, nationalized bodies branded as

Mexican were excluded from the "free" flow of commodities within this trade bloc.[29] Unlike the

liberalized distribution of goods across the border, ironically human mobility became more

restricted and policed. Infrastructural imbalances between the three nations stimulated massive

alterations to the domestic economy and social structure. Along with the breakdown of relatively

small and fragile industries and agriculture systems, the privatization of state-owned companies

and resources caused the displacement of workers.[30] Contrary to capital flows, the Mexico–U.S.

border became increasingly policed, starting from 1986 when the U.S. Immigration Reform and

Control Act (IRCA) was enacted. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government

fortified and militarized its repressive immigration policy to criminalize immigrants. NAFTA is

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[28] As a project of modernization and a resolution for the economic crisis, President Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) accelerated neoliberal reforms: "[The h]arvard-trained economist. . . rather than watch idly as his country was dragged kicking and screaming into the Brave New World of neoliberalism, Salinas was one of neoliberalism's most zealous pitchmen. He staked the credibility of his regime on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a plan to eliminate remaining tariff barriers, sell off remaining state enterprises, and enter into a relationship of unprecedented coziness with the Colossus of the North. The methods were different, but the subtext was the same: this, at last, was to be Mexico's ticket to modernity" (Joseph and Henderson 462–63).

[29] Unlike the free trade policies enacted in Europe, NAFTA restricted the mobility of workers: "Consolidation of European market was affected by multilateral policies designed to harmonize social policies, equalize economic infrastructures, and guarantee worker rights and mobility within the trade zone. In contrast, NAFTA omitted these provisions, and its U.S. backers instead insisted on the unilateral right to prevent Mexican workers from migrating through restrictive border policies" (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 99).

[30] After signing the agreement, the Mexican government started to deregulate protective agricultural policies and to privatize *ejidos* (communal landholding among villagers). As a consequence, many agriculture-based economies were dismantled, causing mass displacement of peasant and indigenous communities (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 103–6).

the representative case that underlines the duplicity of neoliberalism, which is supposed to be a

decentralized, liberal, and post-national unstable system, but has instead restored the power of

nation-state dominion.[31] Regardless of the consequences, NAFTA was a moment of social

reconfiguration that hastened the displacement of people and things, inducing the

(de)construction and (re)mapping of the onto-cartography of Mexican society.

On the first day of 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) launched

their rebellion, in which we can also discern new technology and its influence on society.

Opposed to NAFTA and neoliberalism, the Zapatistas, a militant group composed of urban

intellectuals, dispossessed and displaced peasants, and indigenous communities from Chiapas'

Lacandón Forest, defended their rights to the land and opposed the Mexican government's

neoliberal modernization policies . They argued that globalization and capitalism exacerbated

economic inequality and social injustice. They asserted, based on their own evidence and

experience, that neoliberalism is not a liberal or global system but rather an oppressive system of

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[31] Initially, neoliberalism appeared as an alternative paradigm to the economic crisis of the 1970s, "stagflation," an economic program that intensified general deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of state responsibility. According to David Harvey, "neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. . . State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum. . . " (2). However, Mark Fisher points out that through bureaucracy neoliberalism contradictorily has reinstalled state power: "With the triumph of neoliberalism, bureaucracy was supposed to have been made obsolete; a relic of an unlamented Stalinist past. Yet this is at odds with the experiences of most people working and living in late capitalism, for whom bureaucracy remains very much a part of everyday life. Instead of disappearing, the bureaucracy has changed its form; and this new, decentralized, form has allowed it to proliferate. The persistence of bureaucracy in late capitalism does not in itself indicate that capitalism does not work - rather, what it suggests is that the way in which capitalism does actually work is very different from the picture presented by capitalist realism" (*Capitalist Realism* 20). As a result, state control, in conjunction with the neoliberal program, has not disappeared. Rather, it has restored its influence on (in)dividuals by subordinating them in the era of capitalist realism.

nation-state control. Given the significance of the Zapatista uprising as a decisive response to globalized capitalism, what I would like to focus on is the way in which the Zapatistas were able to gain international visibility and solidarity, with the Internet and cyberspace as their battleground. As Thea Pitman points out, Internet-based activism was not the only factor, but it did play a central role in the proliferation of their cause and demands, gaining international recognition for the movement and imposing political pressure on the Mexican government.

However, the Zapatistas' web activism was a consequence of their active media performance rather than the cause of their popularity (Bob 138). The Zapatistas started their cyber-activism by sending news to email subscribers and *La Jornada* published news about them on the journal's website. Sympathizers and supporters then began to build websites translated into various languages and sent messages through emails across national borders. In contrast to similar indigenous and minority communities, the Zapatistas gained extensive global visibility in part because of their multiplatform media strategies and technology-geared cyber-public (Bob 127–39). In this regard, Manuel Castells refers to the Zapatista movement as "the first informational guerrilla movement" (*The Power of Identity* 75–84). They promoted their images, ideology, and revolutionary cause by communicating directly and indirectly through a variety of media. Above all, the Internet enabled prompt, direct, and mutual communication between global comrades by changing messages and news into conversations among sympathizers.

1994 imprinted on the domestic and international public the significant impact and potential of two (in)corporeal machines that have remapped society at large: neoliberalism, and the Internet and mass media.[32] Zapatista activism showed that the Internet is not a neutral site but

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[32] During the second half of the 1990s, Internet users in Mexico increased dramatically. By the 20th century, e-commerce was similarly widespread. This indicates that the Internet, in the new century, became a social, political and economic platform for private and public communication

rather a contested political, ideological, and economic ground, a springboard for the growth of

cyberspace and the new networked society. Whether the Internet can be an emancipatory

platform remains questionable. Nonetheless, cyberspace and networking have dramatically

reduced time and space between people and multiplied the forms and routes of social, political,

economic, and individual communication. At the same time, NAFTA proved to be a signpost

toward *capitalist realism*.[33] Citing Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, Mark Fisher notes the

arrival of capitalist realism, which he defines as a "pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only

the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education and acting as a kind of

invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (*Capitalist Realism* 16). In other words, this

describes the current social, political, and material condition of the world in which an alternative

or externality to advanced capitalism appears impossible to find. Fisher differentiates the

neoliberal ambience of the 1990s from the social ecology of the 1980s, when the postmodernist

critique erupted and when there were still alternative ideologies and potentialities.[34] According to

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and interchange in Mexico. For more information about the growth of the Internet in Mexico,
see: James Curry and Martin Kenney's "Digital Divide or Digital Development? The Internet in
Mexico" and Juan L. Palacios's "The Development of E-Commerce in Mexico: A Business-Led
Passing Boom or a Step Toward the Emergence of a Digital Economy?"

[33] As Mark Fisher indicates, "capitalist realism" was originally coined by German artists and by
Michael Schudson in his 1984 book, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion* (*Capitalist Realism*
16). Expanding on the original notion of this term, Fisher states that "capitalist realism as I
understand it cannot be confined to art or to the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising
functions" (*Capitalist Realism* 16). By using this term, Fisher addresses the hegemonic and
omnipotent economic rationale that has swiftly extended its power and control over the public.

[34] Fisher differentiates between capitalist realism and the condition of postmodernity described
by Fredric James in his essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."
Unlike the current neoliberal condition, postmodernism appeared in the early 1980s before the
fall of the Berlin Wall, when "political alternatives to capitalism" still existed. In other words, for
Fisher, "postmodernism could still remember precapitalist enclaves with enough nuance to
produce nostalgia for them; it could still look to the Eastern bloc for a site of economic
otherness. Indeed, whether de facto Eastern communism offered a viable alternative or not, its
existence provided a trope for the Western, democratic left and functioned as a generative site for
the discursive production of an outside" (Shonkwiler and Berge 5–6).

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Fisher, "capitalist realism has depoliticized everything and has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society [...] should be run as a business" (17). In a similar vein, Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith, in their classification of the four phases of neoliberalization, locate the neoliberalism of the 1990s in the fourth phase. Neoliberalism started as a set of economic policies, but it gradually expanded into political, ideological, and ontological forms (3–10). During the 1990s, neoliberalism began to transform all forms in the sociocultural field into goods for sale. In the fourth phase, the "*ontological phase* of neoliberalism, neutral markets frame but do not determine the subjects acting within them. The market does not require specific economic pursuits, political commitments, or ideological beliefs" (Huehls and Smith 9). Market rationality has completely pervaded the immaterial, affective, and existential dimensions of (non)human life. San Cristóbal de las Casas, once a destination of ideological pilgrimage, has been converted into a sight-seeing experience, Zapatista tourism, where people consume organic Zapatista coffee.[35] As such, within the neoliberal circle, even revolutionary ideology has gradually transformed into merchandise.

As in all fields of life, two machines, capitalist realism and technology, have deeply influenced the imagination of authors and simultaneously rearticulated the production, distribution, and consumption of literature. With respect to the culture industry, not only has cyberspace become a crucial venue for marketing and consumption, in which creators and their followers meet, but the Internet itself has offered new forms of creative material. Authors have their own blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, and websites, and through social media they

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[35] For a more detailed history of the Zapatistas and coffee, see: *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* written by George A. Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello 200–6. For critical views on Zapaturismo and the paradoxical relation between revolution, art and business, see Kate Trebuss's "Critical Introduction on Zapaturismo," and Sarah Menkedick's essay, "The Perils and Possibilities of Revolutionary tourism: A visit with the Zapatistas."

weave new products that go beyond communication with spectators. However, the Internet is also a fierce apparatus of neoliberalism that has rapidly capitalized everything on the cyber plane. While some physical boundaries are collapsing due to these globalizing forces, other barriers have appeared and been reinforced. Given the rearticulated world order created by these two major globalizing forces, neoliberalism and network technology, the boom in tropes of virtuality and in/non/posthumanity in artistic representation seems a natural consequence.

Cyberpunk, a subgenre of sf that pictures, for example, a dystopian (post)apocalyptic future with advanced technology, was born with the appearance of the neoliberal system in the 1980s and flourished in the 1990s.[36] This genre mainly tackles neoliberal global society, such as corporate capitalism, authoritarian state systems, enterprises, and individuals. Ignacio Sánchez Prado argues that the insertion of the science fiction genre and cyberpunk in particular into the mainstream Mexican literary field was deeply connected with the entry of the Mexican economy into the neoliberal regime. As Ramón López Castro notes, Mexican cyberpunk is not an imitation

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[36] In the early 1980s, cyberpunk emerged as a movement started by writers such as Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Rudy Rucher and Lewis Shiner. The term cyberpunk was coined by Bruce Bethke and "cyberspace" first appeared in William Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer*. Although it is still debated whether cyberpunk is a literary movement, many scholars now share the view that this genre has greatly affected not only the literary field but also the cultural milieu. Cyberpunk is one of several science fiction sub-genres that picture a dystopian future and advanced technology. In general, the societies depicted in this genre are governed by totalitarian and authoritarian systems with advanced information, communication and cybernetic technologies. Thomas Michaud discusses the changes and emergence of trends, and the generation of cyberpunk writers and artists, in his "Science Fiction and Politics. Cyberpunk Science Fiction as Political Philosophy" (López Castro 145–48). Along with the naturalization of new technologies into daily life, some of the imagined machines and technologies of cyberpunk fiction have already been realized. Cyberpunk has evolved its form and content so as to engage with the rapidly changing cultural, political and material climate: the condition of capitalist realism in which all entities are translated into commodities. Cyberpunk also reflects a posthuman society that is "characterized not by the replacement of the material with its simulation but rather one in which the material and the simulated are intertwined like a Mobiüs strip" (Vint, Afterwords 228).

of Anglo-American cyberpunk. It is its own literary movement, an inevitable product of Mexico's unique geopolitical situation defined by economic crisis, urban violence, drug trafficking, the Internet, and NAFTA (145–48).[37] This situation has culminated in the cyberpunk genre that conveys the neoliberal predicaments of contemporary society by questioning the identity and meaning of human beings, human nature, and value under a depoliticized and demoralized capitalist system. Despite the splendid background formed by the machinery and digital world, humans and humanity form the central agenda of this genre. However, cyberpunk is no longer just a narrative genre but instead has become a reality, in which killing people with joysticks and drones is not a game scenario but rather a real situation in the contemporary world. Cybernetics, virtual reality, hackers, computers, and advanced techno-equipped buildings are no longer the exclusive purview of cyberpunk. These technologies and their hideous future, under a suffocating neo-dictatorial/colonial system, often appear as the background for many contemporary cultural scenes.[38]

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[37] For other resources on Mexican cyberpunk, see Hernán Manuel García, who focuses exclusively on this genre, in his dissertation, *La globalización desfigurada o la postglobalización imaginada: La estética cyberpunk (post)mexicana*, and in his article, "Tecnociencia y cybercultural en México: *Hackers* en el cuento *cyberpunk* mexicano" ("Tecnociencia y Cibercultura En México" 329–48). In addition, there is a brief essay on this subject, "Cyberpunk: El movimiento en México," written by José Luis Ramírez, who is a renowned sf writer in Mexico.

[38] Despite Bruce Sterling's and other writers' declaration, many scholars argue that cyberpunk has not been disappeared but rather that its scope and forms have changed and expanded (Elias 1–6; Kelly and Kessel vii–xiv; Murphy and Vint, "The Sea Change(s) of Cyberpunk" xi–xviii). As Murphy and Vint assert, "cyberpunk is no longer an emergent phenomenon and. . . we live in a cyberpunk future" (xii). These critics also acknowledge the limitations of cyberpunk as a literary genre, considering the variety of emerging authors and works that cross this genre's borders. Furthermore, expressions such as "beyond" or "post-" cyberpunk imply, simultaneously, the limitation and validity of the foundational topics and frames of cyberpunk, such as the relation between human society, technology, and capitalism. In this sense, I hold, similar to Michaud's viewpoint, that cyberpunk is the fictional and artistic setting through which the authors negotiate the predicaments caused by newly emergent technologies and the condition of capitalist realism.

Bef's works are some of the best examples of a literary category that transcends cyberpunk. By surpassing the borders and limits of genre, Bef's works offer a new prospect for social life in a world characterized by advanced capitalism and network technology. In this section, I examine Bef's works, which deal mainly with tropes of virtual reality, cyberspace, and a new posthuman/more-than-human species. These tropes enable him to grapple with the neoliberal predicament and the urgency of discovering a new ethics for the post/non/more-than-human era. In the era of neoliberalism, globalization, and new technologies the world, as well as lives, have gradually deviated from the binary discourse imposed by modernity and instead taken hybridity and the multiplicity for granted by "making the concept of 'natural' human obsolete" (Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow* 7). We are all "natural-born cyborgs," as Andy Clark argues, since we are bodily hybrid constructions that live a collective life by connecting ourselves with nonhuman entities, in line with Bruno Latour's perspective on society's hybridity. Further, as Rosi Braidotti recognizes, capitalism is a postanthropocentric and posthuman structure (3–11). Without classifying entities as human or nonhuman, this system commodifies every entity to produce economic effects and flows while acknowledging that all machines are hybrid constructions and complex beings. Unlike the binary conceptions of modernity, neoliberalism fragments the hybridity of objects and re-assembles them according to its economic-political rationale. In other words, neoliberalism brutally cuts through the internal and external entanglement of entities.

In response to the prevalence of capitalist realist ecology, artistic representation of virtual reality, advanced science, multinational corporations, and other networks of life has changed. While be(com)ing a hybrid/cyborg used to be a dominant topic, in the ontological neoliberal period topics that explore the dissecting, dismantling, and de-coupling of hybrid entities now appear as well. While it once focused on the exploitation and development of external markets,

neoliberalism has now reached the stage of market expansion where it turns toward the internal

scope of (non)human beings. Power dynamics based on market rationality have accelerated the

process of dismantling human subjectivity into multiple parts. The notion of being itself, as well

as identity, ideology, affection, and sentiment—all immaterial attributes—are transformed and

materialized into capital in the context of ontological neoliberalism. Virtual reality in sf

peculiarly demonstrates that "connecting" with a virtual machine can involve "disconnecting"

with our former bodily subjectivity by giving away our conscious or unconscious mind as a

potential space for neoliberal mining. Thus, the types of fictions that have emerged in this

atmosphere presuppose that the human being is already a hybrid, a cyborg, and a resilient or

porous entity. Going beyond human ethics and value, they grapple with posthuman ethics, or

rather, the ethics of the world of machines. Echoing this changing reality, the worlds that Bef

creates in his works are posthuman and more-than-human, in which all distinctions between the

organic and the inorganic, the immaterial and the material, the self and the other, and the human

and nonhuman, disappear. In view of this artistic, economic, political, and ontological

confluence, this section examines Bef's works, which represent and question the change to social

topography as a result of neoliberal and technological articulations.

Affective Machines in Bernardo Fernández's Imaginary Worlds

        In his story "Bajo el cielo ajeno," Bef depicts the weary life of Juan Brigada, who is

moreno, an indigenous person from Zapoteca in Oaxaca, Mexico. Having left his family and

hometown, he immigrates to the city, Ciudad Esperanza, to find a job in the industrial zone.[39]

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[39] This story is published in the collection, *Grandes Hits vol. 1*, *Nueva generación de narradores mexicanos*, as well as in Bef's story collection, *Ecenarios para el fin del mundo*. In this work, I use the kindle version of *Escenarios para el fin del mundo*. In "Post-Scriptum," Bef states his

After sending all the money that he earns in the factory—owned by HumaCorp, a multinational

corporation—to his wife and little son in Mexico, he can barely afford basic necessities. He does

not even have a penny for vending machine coffee. Most of the workers in the industrial

factories and manufacturing plants are, like Brigada, people of color from the so-called Third

World, who left their natal countries to earn money, experiencing the triple torture of nostalgia,

poverty, and intense labor. This is not the story of a worker in a factory in the U.S. or in a

maquiladora in Mexico. The Hope City where Juan Brigada lives is on Mars, which has been

colonized by rich people including "[g]ringos, ingleses, franceses, japoneses, alemanes"

(*Escenarios para el fin del mundo*), and converted into an industrial center and into farmlands for

hydroponic cultivation. The non-white human laborers from Earth, particularly from the colored

and impoverished nations, take up work on Mars that even robots refuse to do. While the future

portrayed in this story exhibits a highly advanced society in which robots have—or at least have

the capacity to have—opinions, and are able to manifest their legitimate grievances, we

nonetheless find the persistence and intensification of class-based and racialized structures.

Under these conditions, the only thing that enables Brigada endure the harshness of reality is his

conscious and unconscious imagination, through which he is able to return to his family and

hometown. The one thing he is free to do every day is dream, which does not cost anything. His

imagination and nighttime dreaming remain private, an individual zone that exists outside the

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motive for writing "Bajo el cielo ajeno": "Con la agudeza que siempre lo caracterizó, el
expresidente Vicente Fox alguna vez dijo que los mexicanos en Estados Unidos hacen los
trabajos que ni los negros quieren hacer. ¿Qué pasará cuando el primer fundo migre a otros
planetas y haya trabajos que ni los robots quieran hacer?" (Fernández, "Bajo el cielo ajeno"). As
such, Bef addresses the predicaments of present society through his representation of the future.

economic and political realms.[40] This constitutes his subjectivity as Juan, which the controlling powers cannot invade.

In Bef's novel, *El ladrón de sueños*, however, market rationality, in league with science and technology, penetrates and permeates even this intimate space of the imagination, rendering it exploitable. If Juan Brigada had lived through the world of *El ladrón de sueños,* his inner life, including his dreams, hopes, and nostalgia, would not have remained as his own space separate from capitalist rationality. The antisocial scientist Dr. Ventosa, the chief of investigation for HumaCorp's Latin American branch, has invented the half-insect, half-machine Somnirráptor. This mosquito-like organic machine collects the nightmares of children. Ventosa then transforms these horrific images into a virtual reality (VR) video game by decoding the children's biochemical signals. The more users play the game, the more terrible the nightmares they have, as if in a feedback loop. The way in which the Somnirráptor gathers electrochemical data is extremely violent. The half-organic insectoid physically injects its proboscis into the unconscious children to extract their nightmares. As a result, the majority of children in Mexico City suffer everyday traumas and nightmares. The children who were injected and have had their dreams plundered find it impossible to maintain a normal life during the daytime, suffering from depression and seized with fear. However, a brave girl, Andrea, breaks the nightmarish Somnirráptor, and in error the broken machine involuntarily kills its creator, the inventor Ventosa.

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[40] Regarding the protagonist's dream and imagination, Sánchez Prado says that this "story grants Juan a rich inner life, based on the memories of his homeland" ("Ending the World" 123). However, such nostalgia ironically foregrounds what Juan does not and cannot have: a present life and future hope.

What the Somnirráptor achieved for the multinational corporation HumaCorp was the ability to capture affect and to reduce it to exchangeable capital through which subjects are deprived of their *conatus*. According to Jane Bennett, *conatus* is a term coined by Spinoza that refers to the power/vitality of something or someone to "preserve its own being" (qtd. in Bennett 2). Bennett argues that this conative "virtue" or nature is not limited to the human body as nonhuman and inorganic beings and machines also possess this vital power (2). Through its brutal injection/intrusion into both the unconsciousness and physical bodies of children, the insectoid machine segregates the immaterial dimension and the physical environment, which results in the rupture of the conative nature of the children's bodies. Although the novel has a happy ending, in which a little girl saves the world, we find here potential ground for the neoliberal and neocolonial harvest: the affective, immaterial, and in-corporeal dimensions, which are inhibited, intermeshed, and entangled in the physical bodies of entities.

In "Bajo el cielo ajeno," there is no difference between people and robots with respect to feelings, emotions, and rationality. The denomination "human" and "robot" refers simply to class and race differences: humans (in particular, humans from the so-called Third World) are a dispossessed group, while robots are an emergent class/species, once the lowest class of all but since has achieved sufficient wealth to avoid physical labor. Both humans and robots—including androids, cyborgs, and replicants—as species are not enemies or counterparts competing with each other, nor do they have a hierarchical relationship in terms of their material and corporeal differences. In Bef's other story, robots commit suicide because of their loneliness, an affective loss. These robots are more sentient and humanistic than human beings. In *El ladrón de sueños,* Bef depicts how affect, as Bennett indicates, is an impersonal vibrancy that can be brutally (dis)integrated from the body of a human and moved through other corporeal channels and

machines. For instance, a nightmare, seemingly a very personal feeling, becomes mediated,

channeled, and transferred by other corporeal and material machines such as the bodies of

humans and insectoids, computer databases, and a VR game machine. In this way, Bef discloses

that a human being is not a single privileged, physically and affectively bounded being; instead,

a human is just one sort of being in the heterogeneous social interface.

Humans and nonhumans, as well as materiality and affectivity, are turned equally into

mines for neoliberal exploitation through the force that cuts through the machine's vitality that

maintains its current *exercise.*[41] In "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Deleuze predicts the

transformation of the Foucauldian disciplinary paradigm into a paradigm of control, the arrival of

the society of control. That is, instead of punishing and monitoring individual subjects, with the

advent of new technologies social power manages to build a modular system of individual

corporeality at the molecular level. Deleuze affirms that "we no longer find ourselves dealing

with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data,

markets, or '*banks*'" (5).[42] Reading these two narratives, we can identify such a shift in power

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[41] As I noted in the discussion of the blue mug, according to Bryant's conception what we see
and feel from a certain object is not its characteristics but, rather, the manifestations of its
operation. The color blue does not represent the mug's intrinsic nature. Instead, it is an
expression appearing through the exercise of our eyes, lighting, the mug's materials, and other
media. Bryant and Bennett contend that every entity has the gravitational power to maintain its
current expression, although the intensity of such power varies. Just as a blue mug preserves its
shape and color as perceived by humans, and just as humans maintain their environment through
homeostasis, each entity tends to maintain its relationship with its surrounding objects.
[42] Drawing on new materialism and affect theory, I hold that materiality and its affective capacity
are entangled co-constituents of the entity. In other words, the body/the materiality of an entity is
intrinsically immaterial and affective. Based on this perspective, Ben Anderson explains how the
contemporary power structure has changed via advanced technology in the era of neoliberalism:
"Augmentations and diminutions of the body's capacity to affect are modulated through multiple
techniques of power and known through multiple forms of knowledge (including neuroscience,
the various psy-disciplines, the molecular sciences, and systems theory). This contemporary
power formation has been given the name 'control' to denote the shift Foucault anticipated from
the molding of individual subjects in mass formations (disciplinary power) to the modulation of

from the disciplining of the individual body to the modulation of dividualized human and

nonhuman vitalities. By disassembling and reassembling parts of bodies, whether corporeal or

incorporeal, capitalist power in the era of the posthuman reality of capitalism aims to modulate

dividuals, to go beyond affecting and controlling individual bodies. The coloniality of power and

the forms of control society have not been waning.[43] Instead, they have subtly shifted their forms

and manners, pervasively conforming to neoliberal rationality and becoming equipped with new

biochemical, genetic, informational, and virtual weapons. In this context, Bef explores the newly

emerging predicaments of a world that has entered a posthuman society enmeshed in advanced

capitalism. While Bef establishes this shift in the modes of power dynamics and in our

perspectives regarding the relation between human and nonhuman beings, he also delves into

latent alternatives for the unresolved and, at the same time, newly emergent predicaments of

contemporary society.

Assembling and Disassembling Virtual Reality

The trope of virtual reality, enacted by cyberspace and VR machines in Bef's writings,

poses the question of the divisions between reality/virtuality, mind/body, materiality/affectivity,

organic/inorganic, and human/nonhuman.[44] Bef completely blurs the boundaries between

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what Deleuze (1995) terms 'dividuals' . . . Here categories of the biological and cultural are
mixed and scrambled in the invention of new material/immaterial hybrids" (Anderson 165).

[43] Redefining the term "coloniality of power," which was proposed by Anibal Quijano, Walter
Mignolo refers to the coloniality of power as an ongoing process promoting a new form of
domination and struggle in the world system. According to Mignolo, the classical form was
based on geographical domination during the colonial era, which, entering the period of
globalization, has been transformed into a capitalist coloniality of power (ix–xxv).

[44] In this section, I use the term "virtual reality" as an indicative word, to refer in particular to the
dimension created by the interaction between technology and human activity apart from the
philosophical engagement of the "virtual" and "real."

seeming counterparts and, in so doing, restores the hybrid essence of life itself. In the story "Wonderama," Bef focuses on the happy, peaceful daily life of a child in the 1970s who, in fact, turns out to be a university professor protesting against the totalitarian government (*Escenarios para el fin del mundo*). All his surroundings, and even his family in the 1970s, prove to be illusions engendered by a virtual machine. In 2012, he is captured during a guerilla uprising and imprisoned. Aware of the potential for international public criticism, rather than killing him, the Mexican government locks up his mentality in a virtual reality from which he can never escape. Virtual reality in this story seems to be a completely separate and isolated place in which we live. It is a prison that numbs our physical and psychological functions that are outside the control of the digitization system. Nevertheless, this virtual reality is not a disembodied experience, but rather an embodied experience activated through the flesh and nerves of the host body. The lived body of the imprisoned man enables and senses such a virtualized imagination, but simultaneously the avatar body affects the outer body, paralyzing and blocking the flow of emotions, consciousness, and bodily activity.

What captivates, intercepts, and activates the employment of the virtual avatar is the non-conscious and involuntary affect/imagination embedded in the man's body, where his consciousness and voluntariness, which are other parts of the mind, remain in his flesh, albeit deactivated. As Gregory Little contends, the relationship between a cybernetic/digital/informational avatar and an earthly body is not generated by the separation between the mind in the virtual world and the body in the physical world: "the avatar is a highly unique form because it involves an ontological pairing, a contradictory hybridity. The avatar is both the driver and the driven, the lived representation composed both of flesh and light, an 'I' that makes a body" (Little). Disturbed body perception and affectivity result in the numbing and

hindering of the former in/corporeal flow and assemblage. However, this does not mean that incorporeal and immaterial qualities have become separated from the physical body. In other words, it does not result from disembodiment. The story shows that ideological and political forms of control technologically intrude into the body and mind by totally paralyzing the historicity, identity, and agency of (in)dividual humans.

Virtual reality, as represented in Bef's fiction, is thus used mostly as a means of control to assemble, disassemble, *dividualize*, and recompose each and every machine's integrity beyond the individuality of entities. The goal is to engender a new range of exploitable, investable, and governable surfaces and circulations of affectivity. In Bef's later works, ideological and political forces are gradually displaced by capitalist control, usually represented by HumaCorp. In Bef's fiction, the forces that represent the dynamics of power, whether ideological, political, or economic, deploy virtual technology as a means to expand their vectors of domination/exploitation by penetrating (in)dividuals, thus exhibiting a power shift from discipline and surveillance to the modulation of "what Deleuze terms 'dividuals'—sub- and trans-individual arrangements of intensities at the level of bodies-in-transformation" (Anderson 164). Whenever Bef uses a virtual technology trope, he never misses the opportunity to include his leitmotif: HumaCorp, a transnational or transuniversal corporation, which undertakes the role of creating new hybrids and socio-technological environments, while at the same time acting as a colonizer, dominator, and economic and political agent of control. In particular, in his fiction that deals with virtual machines, it is the award-winning novel *Gel azul* that most fully grasps the issues raised by a neoliberal technicity that has reinforced its influence on life itself by forging an ever-increasing range of social realities through new technological devices and mediations.[45]

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[45] *Gel azul* collects two novellas*, Gel azul* and *El estruendo del silencio*. *Gel azul,* the novella,

Gel azul is set around Mexico City in an unknown future, where wealthy people live in a virtually networked society while impoverished citizens remain in the physical city. Gloria Cubil, the daughter of Arceo Cubil, the most powerful man in the city, is sexually violated while she is unconsciously navigating the interfacial reality while resting in a tank filled with protein gel. As a result, she becomes pregnant without knowing it. When the child/fetus is born, he dies from suffocation because of the protein gel. In order to live in the tank, it is necessary to be connected by synthetic fibers. Areceo Cubil employs Detective J. Crajales to investigate who did this to his daughter. Previously, Crajales had hacked the banking system to steal money, but was caught and prohibited from connecting to any network. Therefore, he has become a private detective who works outside of both central authority and virtual spaces.[46] It seems that Crajales' out-virtual/outlaw is the main reason why Areceo employs him.

Gokubi, a virtual machine consisting of tanks filled with blue protein gel that serve as a medium to weave together the organic and inorganic, corporeal and incorporeal, human and machine, self and other, and reality and virtuality, is the central trope that produces a parallel between the virtual and real societies.[47] The blue protein gel functions as a water-like machine

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was awarded a *Premio Ignotus* (2007) from the Asociación Española de Rantasía, Ciencia Ficción y Terror.

[46] The following quote highlights Persephone Braham's understanding of Mexican detective novels written during the post-revolutionary years: "In the Mexican detective novel, it is the institutions—police, government, unions—who are the criminals. They attack individuals who threaten their hegemony, brutalizing whole sectors of society in their drive for money and power. . . the Mexican detective hero rejects ratiocination, legal process, and the scientific method as means to truth, offering his physical body as both a catalyst and a stage for the battle between good and evil" (66). In *Gel azul*, detective Crajales does not fit well with such descriptions of a detective hero. Rather, he is a victim of institutional and economic violence. Employing such an outcast as the primary detective paradoxically proves the corruption and impotence of the authorities. In this sense, *Gel azul* shares its foundational question with that of Mexican detective fiction.

[47] Gokubi is the name of the voice translator machine, made by Zenji Hiroguchi, a Japanese character in Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapágos*. By analyzing the connotation of "Gokubi," Héctor

that makes people "alive" in the virtual reality, while at the same time establishing the social,

political, and economic landscape as the real society.[48] By entering a tank with this semi-liquid

protein, people can connect themselves to another reality in which they can be transformed into

anything by fashioning bodily images in the digitized world. Gloria changes her body into a cell,

a neuron, a jellyfish, a unicorn, and herself. But it should be noted that she feels tired during this

process of virtual metamorphosis. Whenever she metamorphoses, the gap between bodily forms,

capacities, and affectivities produces certain difficulties in adapting to the new flesh and senses.

Playing a virtual game in the interfacial world, Gloria says, "Era un juego virtual, pero el dolor,

como había constatado ella, era real" (92). As such, bodily transformation in the blue gel is not

only virtual, immaterial, and optical but also a corporeal and material experience connected to

the original body. The physical senses that belong to both her bodies are in negotiation, together

with the consciousness and unconsciousness embedded in her multiple bodily parts. Although

she does not recognize her pregnancy, Gloria indirectly perceives the changes in her body and

the concomitant alterations through her virtual bodily feelings. She starts to feel loneliness and

boredom after dreaming of having a baby, which in fact was not a dream but actually happened.

As she herself indicates, she feels a strange and uncontrollable anxiety throughout her avatar's

body as she begins dreaming in her dream-realized environment: "El sentimiento de inquietud

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Fernández L'Hoeste establishes an interesting bridge between Kurt Vonnegut's critical view of technology in *Galápagos* and Bef's cynical depiction of technical culture reflected in the Japanese enterprises of *Gel azul* ("Ciencia-ficción y configuración identitaria en *Gel azul*" 188–89).

[48] The blue gel of the novel parallels water. Water is part of the machine and the city, which is as political, economic, and cultural as it is material and natural: "The circulation of water produces physical geography and a material landscape, but also a symbolic and cultural landscape of power. . . While water is captured, sanitized, bio-chemically metabolized to become "urban" drinking water, it is simultaneously the real-abstract homogenized qualities of money power and its manifold symbolic, cultural social, and economic meanings" (Swyngedouw, "Circulating Waters, Circulating Moneys, Contested Natures" 120).

volvió para recorrer su cuerpo. Ella intentó dominarlo. No pudo" (35). Conversely, the avatar's emotional and physical feelings affect the host body as well as provoking abnormal behavior in the tank's system.

Gokubi functions as a machine that amplifies the cityscape and its metabolic system. The real and virtual sites are equally cyborg, hybrid, and multifaceted networks of life in which issues of race, gender, class, and culture are entangled. The city itself is not a limited or determined space; instead, it is in the middle of a process of production, becoming, and transgression, corresponding to Eric Swyngedouw's notion of cyborg urbanization ("Metabolic Urbanization" 21–40). Donna Haraway has developed the concept of a cyborg as arising from the merger of an organic human body and technology to become "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149).[9] Haraway also points to the cyborg's social, cultural, and discursive implications, as a disruptive and heterogeneous entity that is constituted by existing power dynamics while simultaneously challenging the "disembodied, dualistic, masculinist and teleological bodies of knowledge" (Gandy 27). N. Katherine Hayles, through her overarching figure of the posthuman subject, "a material-informational entity," disturbs the hierarchical order that privileges information over materiality in the cyborg body, subverting the disembodied entity's primacy over the embodied entity (3). By demystifying the notion of mind as a singular attribute of the human, she disputes the liberal humanist subject and "the ethical position that humans, not machines, must be in control" (288). Based on these notions of the cyborg and the posthuman, Eric Swyngedouw and Matthew Gandy suggest that cyborg urbanism is "where the urban cityscape represents the hybrid product of social imagination, 'natural' resources, and technocratic urban planning and design" (quoted in Smith 37). Without a virtual machine, the city itself is a cyborg entity in which virtual technology is one of the new mediums that engender

spaces, "as new forms of body with capacity to alert us to that which was previously unable to be sensed—with the obvious corollary that certain objects can no longer be sensed—so producing the potential to generate new kinds of charm" (Thrift 295).

As water circulation and distribution constitute cyborg urbanism geopolitically, the blue protein gel, which is biochemical water, becomes the conduit for cultural, social, economic, and political power across both the inside and outside of the tanks.[49] Accessibility through Gokubi to the virtual space is exclusive to the wealthy, privileged minority. It is expensive to use these machines and, depending on how much the user can afford, the scope of the cyber experiences vary, with a brand new version of Gokubi providing more diverse experiences of time, space, and body. Although there is no physical temporality, the creation of new software and services within the virtual dimension produces sorts of temporal effects throughout the digital ruins, including old versions of interfaces and networks. These past versions of spaces and software are rapidly abandoned and remain as dangerous sites that only relatively impoverished users visit in the cyberworld. Souq, one of the oldest interfaces, is a cyber black market in which avatars/people trade in pornography and sexual practices. A thriving business in sex reveals that this cyberspace is also ruled by gender, class, culture, and the power dynamics of the earthly society. This region has become a restricted zone after laws were enacted regarding virtual universes. The world in the interface is not a value-neutral or merely entertaining world; instead, it is a real social and political dimension that human and nonhuman machines act and inhabit.

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[49] Money makes a huge difference in accessibility, not only to the Gokubi tank, but also to experiences within the virtual worlds. For instance, Gloria has a VIP card that allows her to enter wherever she wants, which demonstrates the stratified structure of cyberspace. She uses expensive software that not all cyber-users can enjoy: "Ella se conectó a su monitor retinal para seleccionar un traje sastre que concetró miradas envidiosas. Poca gente podía pagar ese software" (Fernández, *Gel azul*).

Es un tanque cilíndrico de plexiglás lleno de gel proteínico. En la parte superior está el

proceso central, un amasijo de neurochips cuidadosamente integrados en un

biomecanismo gelatinoso de donde parten cientos de microconductos y fibras ópticas que

aguijonean el cuerpo del usuario como el de un san Sebastián suspendido en el gel azul.

Son lo que lo mantiene vivo; puede pasar años enteros metido en la red sin correr el

riesgo de los primeros cibernautas, que morían de inanición. La realidad virtual es

adictiva desde el primer momento. Una vez arriba, ya nadie quiere bajar. (13)

Contrary to the possible expansion of realities, this description of the tank and its user is

suffocating. Users' bodies are violently poked, connected, and soaked, so that they become

immobile in the jar-like tank.[50] Like a drug addiction, virtual technology shuts down subjects'

sociability and other bodily capacities. The gelatin tank is essential for maintaining life in the

interfacial and real environment. Without the tank, it would be impossible to have enough

nourishment or a sufficiently salutary ambience to survive during cyber-navigation, thus causing

people to die both in the network and in reality. Gloria's son, who lost connection with the tank

and his mother, dies just after his birth and is transformed into a terrible scavenger who is

ultimately cremated as the result of the tank's biochemical attacks: "El cuerpo del niño, una

enorme oruga azul, está siendo retirado del tanque por los técnicos, sin que la madre se entere.

Barajas y Trejo observan la operación" (19). The baby is processed by the machine because his

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[50] In his book, *Cyborgs in Latin America,* Andrew Brown examines cyborg bodies represented in Latin American fiction*.* Although I will explore his analysis of Argentine cyborgs in the next chapter, his observation of the cyborg body as a manifestation of both trauma and subversion is meaningful for this section as well. In *Gel azul*, the painful description of the process of becoming a cyborg in the Gokubi tank suggests the paradoxical aspects of this experience. Although violence is carved into the flesh by fiber cables and chemicals, the fusion of the human body and the machine allows one to become a different entity. The cyborg body in *Gel azul* is a testament to both neoliberal subordination and the potential of new hybrids.

body is not informed and is not useful. As Gokubi deactivates Gloria's part of the senses—excepting some areas of brain activation, she loses any possibility of communicating with the baby, and his existence is totally erased from her subjectivity. In this way, the machine severs the relation between the user, his/her immediate environment and the potential affectivity between the machines, while producing a new milieu of sensible worlds in the cyberspace. The tank paradoxically exposes how new technology, woven into neoliberal rationality, has developed ways of capturing and modulating life, matter, and individuals. By captivating the desires and imaginations of its consumers, HumaCorp produces economic effects through its new range of digitally mixed social systems, which leads to disintegration, and a brutal amputation and disconnection from formerly connected worlds.

The structure of the virtual world reveals a parallel between the material cityscape and the cyberspace. Depending on which liquid one can access or afford, social, class, and other possible experiences differ. The blue protein gel introduces the reality that natural resources have been commodified, engendering unequal economic stratification between the possessors and dispossessed. In the novel, Mexico City is rigorously stratified and classified in a series of concentric tiers according to its residents' economic capacities. While the central district is thick with modern high-rise buildings, the outskirts of this future city are surrounded by landfills and desert. In contrast to the usual expandability of virtual spaces, as represented here the material urban space has a suffocating structure for those who have no money. Detective Crajales, who lives in the second tier of the city, suffers from a lack of space and water and does not even dare to gain access to the blue gel.[51] In addition to his financial problems, he cannot use Gokubi

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[51] Crajales lives on the seventeenth floor of a condominium in which the elevator has always been broken. Even his house is too small: "para tener sexo hay que desdoblar una repisa que hace las veces de catre matrimonial" (31). In *Gel azul,* this urban cartography symbolizes the

because of his criminal record. Within the city, there are clear borders between the circles that separate the people. The height and extent of the residences (i.e., the spatiality of architecture) are closely connected to people's financial capacity. In this way, both realities form equally controlled and restricted zones in the capitalist structure. No matter how abundant the available resources and remaining lands, citizens are only allowed to use and move within the circuits to which they have been assigned economically and politically, whether real or virtual.

In this cyborg metropolis, all the subjects are somehow amputated and dividualized from their integrity, whether corporeal or incorporeal, despite their connectedness with other matters. On his way to investigate the rape of Gloria, the detective Crajales discovers that some of Cubilsa's senior staff have joined the organic limb market and are selling the body parts of their clients when they are unconscious in the tank. Gloria is a victim of the fight for power between her father and these senior staff members.[52] For this reason, Gloria loses her child and Crajales loses his corporeality. In return for keeping the black market and Gloria's rape a secret, Crajales asks the person responsible for the black-market to connect him to Gokubi, in the desperate knowledge that he will be killed or amputated like the other users. As Crajales suspects, the villains kill him as soon as he is immersed in the tank.

As much as Gloria and Crajales acquire what they want, they also gain, as well as lose, links, appendages, and connections against their will. The privileged people connected to the fibers in the tank are disconnected from the outside society and even mutilated. Meanwhile, the public in the metropolis is able to travel across the physical city, but is restrained by its wretched

marginalization of the majority from the centers of power.

[52] Sara Potter notes the implication of "an urban legend of organ trafficking in Mexico and other Latin American countries that emerged in early 1987," tragic events represented in several other works of *novela negra* fiction (152).

physical environment and unplugged from Gokubi, the main interface of society. Both spaces, which are represented by Gloria's trajectory in cyberspace and the trajectory of the detective, Crajales, are detached from the immediate societal body but linked to other, relatively distant and disparate, societal networks. In this way, the social, economic, and political powers violently harvest citizens' subjectivities and ontological life in order to create a new market flow. In her dissertation, *Disturbing Muses*, Sara Potter interprets the amputated bodies in *Gel azul,* whether physically or virtually represented, as reflections of the existing violence, inequity, and predicaments faced by post-revolutionary Mexican society. In the relationship between Gloria and her avatar, however, Potter also locates a potential for resistance and alternative power in the multiple becoming in virtual worlds. While Potter's perspective aptly unfolds the meaning of the virtual machines as alternative dimensions in *Gel azul*, I diverge from her viewpoint that reduces virtual becoming to a disembodied experience enabled by "individual choice" (163).

My contention is that both amputation and extension as new becomings are ontological, corporeal, and material configurations. As seen from Gloria's experience, the world activated through the blue gel tanks is not a society that celebrates or laments the mind's escape from its material/corporeal limits. Disembodiment itself is a fantasy, since mind and body are not separable individual entities but rather are entangled as a form of multiple assemblages. The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz argues that the possibility of disembodiment is a fantasy rooted in the Cartesian dualist perspective, whereby mind or self-consciousness can escape its bodily and material limitations (83). Following the Spinozian and Deleuzian concept of affect, I argue that materiality and immateriality, as well as corporeality and incorporeality, are not divisible in terms of entity, being, matter, or machine. Every machine has its capacity to affect and be affected, and this power/vitality is embedded, mediated, and transmitted through

corporeal/material machines.[53] Whether technological or physical, amputation and cuts

represented in the novel represent the closure of the body parts that constitute the very

subjectivity of the machine/entity/being. What is separated and deactivated is not only

materiality or corporeality, but also the affectivity and vitality that flow within and between the

machines. According to Bennett, affect is an impersonal vitality that is intrinsic to the physical

body that also flows and moves within and through bodies. Thus, emotions, feelings, and

personal senses are affectivities that are captured in the human body. Meanwhile, for Lisa

Blackman, who draws on Patricia T. Clough, matter itself is affective, informational, and self-

organizing, while "affect participates at every level and scale of matter, from the subatomic to the

cultural" (*Immaterial Bodies* 5). In this context, avatars are not representations of the

disembodied human mind. Rather, they are ontological and affective dividends of the amplified

scope of the self, which does not refer to an individualized mind/body or subjectivity, but instead

to a "process" of becoming "I" as a hybrid in relation with the social.

The sense of loss, which is a dominant mood not only in *Gel azul* but also in Bef's other

virtual worlds, is symbolized by disintegrated and disrupted bodies/machines/matter. As Marshall

McLuhan explains, "any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our

physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the

other organs and extensions of the body" (45). Failing to establish equilibrium with the newly

constructed machine produces a "disrupted body" that interrupts the formation of the *conatus*,

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[53] For further discussions about the body, embodiment, and affectivity, see Lisa Blackman's books, *The immaterial body* and *The body. The Key Concepts*. In line with new materialism, critics of affect theory provide an important theoretical frame to see the entity as an affective machine in the process of becoming, set in a web of life alongside other entities. Unlike new materialists, scholars of affect theory focus on the human body; however, as Jane Bennett and other vitalists suggest, this concept can be expanded to other machines, materials, and objects.

which is the affectivity and vitality of matter.[54] Paradoxically, every character in *Gel azul* feels a

profound loneliness in the hyper-connected networked society, which is represented by their

mutilated and amputated bodies. Even though they sense that they have lost something, they do

not know what it is, as can be seen in the Gokubi users who suffer mental and physical

depression in the cyberspace.[55] It seems that these people's limbs have been mutilated or, as in

Gloria's case, that they have experienced other traumatic violence on their host body. Gloria

says, "ya nadie necesita comunicarse con nadie" (12), yet she wants to talk about her disquiet

and her dream of having a baby. To communicate her situation, she wanders through

cyberspaces, seeking someone or something that might relieve her condition. Contrary to the

immense potentiality and connectivity, the cybernauts do/can not communicate with anyone or

anything, only the central system controlled by HumaCorp. In a similar way to a physical city,

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[54] This notion is borrowed from Murray and Sixsmith. Throughout their portrayal of the disrupted bodily experience caused by amputation and wearing a prosthesis, Murray and Sixsmith prove the trans-corporeality of the body and provide evidence that VR is an embodied experience. The symptoms of amputees, such as paralysis, phantom limb, objectified bodies, and dissociation between one's self-image and the prosthesis, paradoxically define the body as a malleable construction: "The amputee is torn between two bodies—the customary or habitual body, and the body-at-this-moment—that is, the disrupted body reality" (330). This phenomenon shows that the body is not a solid physical entity but, rather, a body-in-formation based on negotiations among diverse body-constituents. Further, the disrupted body demonstrates the affectivity and immaterial capacity of the materiality of prostheses and the absent limb, since the absence and presence of body parts has an impact on both self-recognition and the physical senses. Connecting these symptoms to the experience of wearing a VR machine, Murray and Sixsmith argue that VR is an embodiment of amputation and wearing a prosthesis: while wearing the machine, the user loses and gains other body parts and senses. Thus, VR users should negotiate with their new extensions in relation with their habitual bodies. The user's negotiation and participation in cyberspace render VR to be as influenced by sociocultural, gendered, and racial factors as the real environment.

[55] An interesting character provokes Gloria's anxiety: a cockroach, which reminds us of Kafka's Gregor Samsa. This cockroach, a Korean businessman who transformed his image into a cockroach in the virtual reality, recites to Gloria: "antes me diverdía pero ahora me deprime" (Fernández, *Gel azul*). When Gloria did not know what she was feeling, the cockroach's monologue makes her realize her depression.

cyber-citizens remain restricted, blocked, and disconnected from their immediate others. This isolated feeling leads them to incessantly pursue linkages with other people, networks, and machines. To overcome their solitude and anxiety Crajales and Gloria desperately look for communication or connectivity with other networks.

Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste interprets the gel tank as a place of escape, connecting it with Mexicanity (172–92). Emphasizing the inequality between the general public and the privileged minority, he argues that in this novel virtuality supplements the harsh reality by offering imaginary enjoyment to clients such as Gloria. The gel tank is a machine in which people can avoid their reality by submerging themselves in a fictional world. Separating virtual reality from the physical world, L'Hoeste offers a somewhat limited perspective as confines Mexicanity to escapism. Future Mexican citizens are not running away from rampant social inequality and the devastating national economic model (L'Hoeste 182). On the contrary, they are attempting to connect with other networks in society since such connectivity is essential to life. By defining virtuality as a non-real space better than the actual society in the novel, L'Hoeste overlooks the parallel between the interface and the material city. The world in the interface is not different from the physical world: there is inequality, violence, marginalization, and flow. It is not a neutral space.

L'Hoeste and Potter highlight the personal decision to be (dis)connected to Gokubi. However, entering the virtual world is not just a personal decision, but the consequence of the convergence of capitalist captivation and technological capacity with cultural, economic, and sociopolitical factors. Behind a seemingly personal escape is the affective power of capitalism and political force seeking to attract and control human and nonhuman entities. As Brian Massumi states, "the ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than

economics itself means that affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late

capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory" (45). In this regards, Nigel Thrift suggests that

the way in which power rules the market in the neoliberal era is not by molding individual

subjects, nor by disciplining them as agents of consumption, but rather by capturing affectivity

through new devices that make, "new kinds of cultural nerve, if you like, which build extra

facets of 'you'" (296–296). Following Deleuze's prediction with respect to 'dividuals,' Clough

and Thrift suggest that neoliberalism operates not by exerting control over the human subject but

rather through the modulation and captivation of the flux of affectivity among/between/within

human and nonhuman machines. The person lies in the in-between as a dividual rather than as an

individual: "Persons do not exist as autonomous entities but have the capacity to act directly

upon one another. And because persons are 'fractal,' they are able to incorporate others and parts

of others, including objects" (Thrift 303). Affective capitalism aims to control and modulate the

capacity for and means of (dis)intergration/(dis)connection among/within entities/fractals in

order to engender economic effects. The Gokubi tanks and the island-like Mexico City in Bef's

narrative disclose the ambivalent quality of power, control, and technology. On the one hand,

virtual technology produces the hyper-connectivity between physical and virtual reality, the

material and the immaterial dimensions, and human and nonhuman others by creating new forms

of becoming. On the other hand, these technologies function as capitalist means of violent

cut/separation/division/detachment of existing relations, movements, and collectives, as reflected

in the mutilated limbs, disintegrated and isolated bodies, and fragmented urbanities that

correspond to geopolitical and economic rationality.

Robots: More Human than Humans

As mentioned in his graphic novel, *Manorama*, Bef has developed a special interest in robots, particularly as they relate to themes of decay and decomposition (*Monorama* 15). Nearly all the robots and automata in his visual works, including comics and graphic novels, have rusty, metallic bodies characterized by a sense of loss, existential questioning, and ontological and psychological crises. Rather than portray cutting-edge robots, androids, or humanoid machines that threaten the privilege and domain of humanity, Bef draws his subjects as somewhat pathetic and old-fashioned and with a profound affinity to and kinship with humans. The relationship between human and machine follows that of creator–created, master–servant, and father–son. Although Bef's robots are neither organically nor technologically connected to humans, they are deeply intertwined on an affective and emotional level. Some robots are depicted caring more about the differences between humans and machines than the human characters do. In this way, Bef throws a twist into the conventional perspective on the human–automata relationship: rather than focusing on human subjects who are distressed over their identities as humans, Bef's works revolve around robots and the affective conflicts they face while building their identities and subjectivities apart from, or alongside, human influences. All things considered, Bef does not showcase the superior intelligence or physical abilities of his robot figures; on the contrary, he emphasizes their sentient capacities and humanistic mentalities. In this section, I argue that the questions that Bef tackles through his new machinic generation are not related to what humans are but to *how to be human(e)* in our hybridized web of life. Bef is trying to investigate alternative ethics and lifeforms of a society in which human beings are neither a single, natural, homogeneous species nor the privileged agents of power and control.

Bef's story, "¡¡Bzzzzzzt!! Ciudad Interfase," concerns an android who engages in suicidal behavior. The story begins with the android opening its own head and connecting many cables to its cerebral system, which can create electric shocks that may result in severe damage and even death. As the android is electrocuted, it experiences euphoria, hallucinations, and loss of self-control, similar to the effects that drugs cause to the human body. While connected to the cables, the android hears buzzing sounds and feels as if all of its surroundings have become gelatinous. Most of the story is composed of the hallucinating android's monologue and ends with its death upon being hit by a truck. The final passages reveal that this android is not the only one who has attempted suicide in the story's world, which raises the question of why androids would want to have such a dangerous and extraordinary experience. Bef insinuates the reason through a police officer responsible for disposing of the broken android, writing: "Quizá se sientan menos solos…" (*Bzzzzzzt!!* 31). The androids are desperately trying to associate with *something*, risking their own lives to overcome their loneliness.

It is this motif of a suicidal robot that serves as a springboard for Bef's graphic novel, *1874*, illustrated by Jorge "Yorko" Muñoz. The story starts with the discovery of a brutally murdered robot librarian. While investigating this crime, the protagonist, a robot police-detective, learns the hidden truths of society. Set in the near past, during the year 1944, the narrative explains that 70 years ago, following the Franco-Prussian War, which began in 1870 and lasted for 4 years and led to a massive loss of life and radioactive contamination due to nuclear bombs, humans left Earth. Man-made automata have been occupying Earth ever since, waiting for the return of their human creators to devise a solution to their depleting energy resources. However, most of the postwar generation of automata do not know about this crisis and their origins. Only a few privileged members, along with the prewar generation, know this

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secret. The librarian, who was one of the founders of robot society, was a member of this group.

A few days before the librarian's death, all contact with humans ended, and the robots faced the

imminent end of their civilization as well. This is the reason for the librarian's death, which was

not a murder but a suicide. Feeling hopeless and isolated after confirming that humanity had

gone extinct, the librarian killed himself by disembowelment, suffering digital dementia. At the

end of the story, the protagonist realizes this truth and must escape the robots who wish to

protect their secret. Despite the disintegrator robot's deadly attacks, the protagonist survives and

lives in secret, hiding his true identity.

As noted by Gabriela Mercado Narváez, the images, tones, textures, colors, and frames

used in *1874* are relatively simple and straightforward and resemble cartoons (203). By limiting

the background details, the characters in each panel are highlighted. Backgrounds are filled with

a solid color, such as light green, dark red, or sky blue, and contrast with the dark, monotonous

colors and the rusty, vintage textures of the automata. Narváez also pointed out that "the depth"

of the protagonist's apartment, "created through shadows," underlines his "loner" archetype

(205). I find that such visual effects, which accentuate a sense of emptiness and desolation, are

predominant in this novel, as seen in the absence of detailed surroundings and a cityscape that is

devoid of citizens. As the protagonist gets closer to uncovering the hidden truth of the crime and

is chased by robots under the authority's command, Bef and Yorko use cuts, angles, and shifts

drawn from *noir* cinematography: during action scenes, overlapping shadows and silhouettes,

close-ups, chiaroscuro lighting, and low angles reveal a dark, criminal, and violent cityscape in

which only the protagonist and his antagonists are present.[56] While the deserted spaces stress the

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[56] Film *noir*—literally black cinema, *novela negra* in Spanish—is a genre that originally
appeared in American films produced between the 1940s and 1950s. Classic films of this genre
deal with crime in urban spaces and are characterized by "a dark, brooding visual style, complex

high drama of the protagonist's chase, it also reflects the deep-seated solitude, dislocation, and

alienation of the city's residents, which is another feature of *noir* films.

In terms of the story's setting, the structures of robotic society closely resemble human

society. The authoritarian government, violence against marginalized citizens, nuclear warfare,

and an impoverished social class evoke memories of the Cold War, the Holocaust, dictatorships,

and similar environmental predicaments, weighty events that occurred throughout the 20th

century. Due to its temporality, as well as the outdated, industrial style of the robots, Narváez

classifies this novel as steampunk. While *1874* certainly contains steampunk-inspired visuals,

such as airships, metallic men, and machines, the fundamental issues that Bef and Yorko explore

deviate from the countercultural and counterfactualspirit of steampunk. Given that the robot

world of *1874* was formed through events similar to our past, Bef and Yorko seem to be

shedding light on the hidden, darker side of human society, a theme that is perhaps more *noir*

than steampunk. Instead of an alternative or potential society, *1874* concentrates on the

existential questions of robots, humanoids, and androids. The fundamental concerns of automata

include what it means to be alive in an isolated, disconnected, and disintegrated condition, in

which they have lost their creators, hopes, and beliefs. Narváez associates these existential crises

with the problematic relationship between human and technology, which presents "challenges

existing at the beginning of the 21st century, not only in Mexico, but in the world: the race for

narration with voice-overs and flashbacks, and a marked interest in the characters' 'uncertain
psychology'" (Spicer xxxviii). This genre, however, has evolved beyond its original scope and
forms throughout other media such as comics, graphic novels, television, and video games. For
more on film *noir* and its variation over the years, see the introduction to the *Historical
Dictionary of Film Noir.* Many of Bef's works feature characteristics of film *noir*, combined with
other genres. In *Gel azul,* for example, a cynical detective and a crime scene are set against a
dark, shady city. Cyberpunk also has a deep relationship with film *noir* in the sense that both
genres share an interest in dystopian cityscapes and our daily engagement with new
technological interventions.

technological dominance at the expense of human lives, war, and nuclear disasters" (208).

Indeed, there is a warning against warfare and the indiscriminate use of technology, yet I contend

that posthuman ethics and how we should live form the core theme of this novel.

Bef and Yorko skillfully erase the differences between robots and humans, thus bringing

posthuman society to the fore. The robot figures reflect the social others within our society: those

who are marginalized, alienated, and disconnected from central power. They are the projections

of people who have lost their human privileges. While the inorganic bodies of the automata

exhibit significant otherness from humanity, their emotional and personal selves are strongly

humanistic. Who, then, is more human: the robots, who protected humanity, or the humans, who

drove their own species to extinction? Or perhaps this question is invalid, as making a distinction

between human and nonhuman will not resolve our existing challenges. Bef and Yorko

demonstrate this in *1874* by eliminating humanity, thereby guiding readers away from focusing

on the dichotomy between human and nonhuman. Instead, the main problem that we must

confront is how to resist the powers that have intensified the violent divide of life, *conatus*,

vitality, and affectivity in our communities. Like the characters in Bef's *Gel azul*, the robots in

1874 suffer a sense of loss and a spiritual amputation. How can we escape from our fragmented,

disintegrated, and isolated existence?

In line with Thrift's argument, Lisa Blackman suggests that human being "can be both

one yet many," because selfhood is a product of a congregation, composed of diverse parts, but

is also at the open, flexible and unsettled boundary of multiple assemblages. In her book,

Immaterial Bodies, Blackman problematizes how "individuals live singularity in the face of

multiplicity" (xxiii). Drawing on the works of (new) materialism, vitalism, and ontologism (from

OOO), the special significance of Blackman's argument lies in her ability to capture and

maintain a balance between the singularity and the multiplicity of the human subject, which

corresponds with Bryant's machine-oriented ontology. According to Blackman, the body "is

never singular and bounded but rather governed by alterity, a concept that comes out of various

philosophical traditions that see the self as always relational, always defined by its

interconnections with others" (*The Body* 117). In this sense, selfhood refers to the affective,

somatic, neurochemical, and discursive effects that emerge from multiple encounters with other

beings. In Bennett's view, selfhood could be a product or constituent of the conative power to

maintain our existing subjectivity. Blackman's singular–plural concept of the body does not only

belong to the human body for it can also be broadened to every nonhuman machine, and follows

those who contend that power, vitality, and/or potentiality exist in every entity, regardless of

their substantial qualities. All machines have their own vitality and affectivity, which not only

enables singular existence but also plural existence in relation with other machines. Bef's

automata and suicidal robots raise further the ethical problem of coexistence and solidarity

between different beings who challenge existing environmental, geopolitical, and economic

conditions, without forcing violence on or victimizing others. While the robots are assembled

goods and products, they also manifest a sort of self-consciousness projected through their

feelings of loneliness and their sentimentality. Despite their complete, individualized forms,

these machines constantly seek connectivity, community, and solidarity. The posthuman society

created by Bef reveals that there is an urgent need to conceptualize our world outside of

anthropocentrism, which has engendered a binary and hierarchical structure of life.

In his novel, *El estruendo del silencio*, Bef furthers his theme of a new ethics for a

posthuman society, referring to the coexistence of various human/nonhuman and

corporeal/incorporeal machines, by disrupting the notion of human subjectivity in an engaging

manner. The story follows Señor Ká, an insectoid robot with a technorganic body and artificial

intelligence (AI), who travels alone through space until he arrives at the Épsilon Eridani

constellation, which is assumed to harbor a planetary system that may be habitable for humans.[57]

At the beginning of the tale, an imperialistic, monopolistic, transnational corporation known as

"HumaCorp"—headed by Cuauhtémoc Koji Kobayashi, a biracial man of indigenous Mexican

and Japanese descent—devises a plan to send a spaceship to another planet to realize Koji's life-

long dream. Since it would take 80,000 years to reach Épsilon Eridani with present technology,

Señor Ká is tasked with captaining the spaceship alongside Macro Red Local (MaRel), a semi-

organic AI system whose neuronal grids are biotechnologically intermeshed with the spaceship.

Koji preserves dormant clones of himself and his girlfriend, Marinka, in biochemical blue gel,

and loads them onto the spaceship to ensure that they will wake up in the same condition when

they arrive at their destination. In case the clones come into any danger, Koji also implants his

personality into the body of Señor Ká.

During the long trip through space, Señor Ká gradually constructs a consciousness based

on Koji's personality, whereas Koji himself becomes multiplicated but simultaneously

fragmented, both physically and mentally. It is revealed that Koji had already died on Earth: he

was murdered before the spaceship launched, but he still has two living bodies, one lying

dormant in the tank of blue gel and the other in the form of Señor Ká. At first, Señor Ká captains

the ship as a purely robotic being, following his programmed protocols and keeping Koji's

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[57] The character of Señor Ká also resonates with the cockroach in *Gel azul*, again reminding us of Kafka. But Señor Ká more closely resembles the Somnirráptor that appears in *El ladrón de sueños.* Both are insectoids with half-organic and half-metal bodies and artificial intelligences. The striking Freudian feature of both creatures is that they kill their sacred fathers/creators, who are human beings. However, while the Somnirráptor has a primitive form, Señor Ká demonstrates that he is a fully developed and self-improving entity.

personality deactivated. However, he starts to dream about nature on Earth, which sparks his interest in human culture such as art and music. His exploration of these subjects arouses more diverse emotions and feelings: "Una serie de palabras se encendieron en la mente del robot, tristeza, soledad, deseperación, melancolía, depresión, encadenándose entre sí como aminoácido formando proteínas" (*El estruendo del silencio* 147). Again, Bef focuses on a robot in solitude who experiences inner agitation. The intense upset in his incorporeal milieu awakens Koji's deactivated soul, yet he never finds his subjectivity in Señor Ká because he fails to recognize the connection between his body and mind. Forcefully severed from his body, the dispersed immateriality of his existence disrupts his building of a consistent subjectivity.

The newly emerging characteristics of Koji are totally different from those of Señor Ká, despite both being rooted in the same personality. This is because Señor Ká had grown up in a society without power dynamics, in that he never experienced any social irregularities and predicaments. From Koji's unconscious mind, Señor Ká had developed a creative, philosophical, aesthetic, and affective nature, traits that Koji repressed all his life as a businessman on Earth. In contrast, with Koji activated, Señor Ká takes on a coercive and authoritative affect, just as Koji had when he ruled the world as HumaCorp's CEO. Koji's capitalist soul immediately establishes a hierarchy between his existence and the robot's, which otherizes Señor Ká's personality. Even though Señor Ká is a part of him, Koji barks out an order to Señor Ká, and later he tries to dominate and finally eliminate the insectoid. Koji builds his identity and superiority by emphasizing the otherness between them, thereby demonstrating that the neoliberal, imperialist system in which Koji lived was deeply ingrained into the configuration of his identity. Koji's personality, emerging from a society that was divided by gender, race, and class, repeats and reproduces authoritarian, neoliberal violence in his treatment of Señor Ká.

After intense struggle, Señor Ká finally wins and Koji's oppressive character disappears. However, the question remains: which Koji was the real one? Was Koji the one with full memories of his life on Earth, the one lying dormant in the tank without knowledge of his death, the one who lived within Señor Ká, or was he Señor Ká himself? Which existence bore the ultimate definition of Koji: his body or his mind? Considering that human subjectivity itself is changing and transitional, Bef's novel shows that these questions are no longer important to ask, as we must look beyond this to learn what is means to live humanely and ethically. By mixing organic with metallic and human with nonhuman, Bef demonstrates that subjectivity is an act of both corporeal and incorporeal becoming, a construction-in-formation that renders notions of identity and subjectivity susceptible to a blurring of boundaries. After the death of Koji's personality, Señor Ká faces the existential question of whether the trip, the spaceship, and his existence should go on, since it was all part of Koji's plan, "una mente enferma de poder" (285). Soon after he finds his reason to live: "Le tranquilizaba el saber que no usurpaba la mente o el cuerpo de nadie. Lo habían creado a partir de un humano. Ahora era más que eso. 'Más humano que humano,' solía citar" (286). Experiencing a process of subjective configuration enabled by the affectivity of his body—loneliness, disconnectedness, and a sense of loss—Señor Ká is no longer power mad and therefore deserves life. As such, the humanistic robots in Bef's works encourage us to think anew about ethics and our collective way of life, to resist the current system of power, violence, and control that disintegrates the vitality of a plural existence and our capacity for becoming.

Bef's works undoubtedly substantiate their generational sensibility not as authors but as inhabitants of the era. Bef's works cross genres and practices and rebuild worlds above the ruins and relics of a past society that has been destroyed by continuous apocalypses, thus opening new,

possible worlds. His narrative worlds are located beyond human and nonhuman, virtual and physical, and organic and inorganic entities. The hybridity of all forms of life is a precondition for the societies that Bef configures. While aware of ontological neoliberalization, which is a highly effective postanthropocentric machine that blurs the distinction between human and nonhuman, Bef seeks to open a door to the exterior of capitalist rationality, not by means of human-centered or heroic human beings, but rather through assemblages or trivial matters.

CONCLUSION

What Ignacio Padilla, Arturo César Rojas, Mauricio Molina, and Bernardo Fernández have achieved through their works is a tapestry of the invisible, or visible but not sufficiently acknowledged, matters in Mexican society that are related to its status as a transforming social entity. Padilla and César Rojas shed light on the material and corporeal others within different layers of Mexican society. Every entity in their subterranean cities—human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate—is already in a state of disrepair before facing the atrocities of the earthquake. This metaphor for people and environments in the aftermath of the real-life 1985 earthquake blurs the boundaries between past, present, and future. The disastrous lived experiences of Mexico City's residents run parallel to fiction. The authors, therefore, are neither anticipating the future nor remembering the past. Instead, they are registering and repeating the apocalypses of Mexican society. By invoking broken bodies and shattered remnants, they bring the victims of natural and human-made disasters to the fore. The absence of technology and machinery in their imagined future societies paradoxically reflects the consequences of modernity and its technological interventions. Pushing this point further, Molina unveils the hidden side of modernity through nonhuman beings, such as his Mexico City. In *Tiempo lunar*,

the weird and eerie phenomena that violate norms of time and space represent, on the one hand, the unresolved predicaments of the past that remain in present society and, on the other hand, mysterious yet threatening experiences that show the need for a paradigm shift toward a posthumanist perspective that does not regard humans as the only subjects in control of the world. Molina showcases the power and vitality of inanimate entities to demonstrate the limits of our binary, hierarchical, and human-centered paradigms, which have continued to create marginalized others.

While the traumatic experience of the earthquake awakened existential and ontological questions regarding modernity and humanism, the appearance of new technologies and neoliberalism at the turn of the 21st century instigated another social predicament: the conversion of modern technology into a more subtle form of control. Eventually, the social, political, and economic features of Mexican society, through the binary relationship between domination and subjugation, will be gradually displaced by control over life itself across all entities. Bef's works explore social environments that are recently changed, drawing upon the themes of virtuality and mechanical beings, particularly robots, who have displaced humanity. Opposed to the power dynamics of neoliberalism, Bef suggested a new form of conceptualizing the world by seeking alternative virtues, values, or ethics outside of an omnipresent capitalism. Confronted by the changing topographies of Mexico's social, economic, political, and material aspects, these authors contributed to a unique body of sf that captures the current demand for a shift in our perception toward life and the world.

Chapter II

Future Argentine Humanity in Absent Presence and Present Absence

INTRODUCTION

The decades-long dictatorship of the late 20th century created an unquestionably

traumatic topography in Argentine culture and society at large.[58] During this period, both

corporeal and incorporeal violence, which went far beyond tangible reality, configured Argentine

society into the absence of something unknown and inexplicable, yet as affecting as a wound.

"Los desaprecidos," an ontological term that took on a heaviness in Argentina, epitomizes the

absent presence and present absence of those who were presumably tortured, murdered, and

"disappeared" by the military junta.[59] Existing somewhere between life and death, these victims

have been transformed into a physical and symbolic representation of Argentine society,

associating past catastrophes with current predicaments in which neither crime nor violence

exists, despite the overflowing ruins and victims. While transitioning to a democracy, the series

of postdictatorial governments opted to actively forget, cover up, and condone the military

crimes perpetrated against civilians.[60] The major problem with these politics of oblivion and

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[58] In 1976, the military authority came into power, which ended in 1983 with the free election by which Raúl Alfonsín was inducted as president. During these years, the military and security forces brutally suppressed the political dissidents. Even before 1983, five military regimes had intervened in the governmental system by employing repressive policies, which lasted until 1983. Violating human rights, the military dictatorship exercised the detention, imprisonment, torture, and execution of political dissidents.

[59] In Argentina, the term "desaparecidos" refers to victims of the military dictatorship who disappeared and were presumably murdered. Killing and kidnapping subversives provided a way for the government to cover up its crimes and violence, and the disappearances themselves became a tool of terror through which the state threatened other citizens (Portela 13–15)

[60] Not all the post-dictatorial governments realigned with such culture of oblivion as Raúl Alfonsín's cabinet. As part of an effort to punish the military force's criminal oppression, Alfonsín's government introduced *Comisión nacional dobre la desaparición de personas*

silence is that this maintains in the community a pain of unknown cause and absence. Similar to

one who suffers from phantom limb syndrome, Argentine society has gone through an affliction

caused by the absence of its *members*—dismembered parts of the social body. Tireless efforts

made by civil society have restored social justice to a certain degree[61]; however, the ongoing

marches of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, which were initiated in 1977

against the dictatorial authority as well as successive governments that aimed to erase all

memories of oppression, substantiates the idea that Argentina's unresolved past—its untreated

wound—still festers today.[62]

This absence, which not only refers to disappearance but also the failure of presence, has

transformed the Argentine urbanscape into a paradoxical space rife with uncanniness;

disappeared family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors have altered the once-familiar landscape

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(CONADEP) and presented the *Nunca más* report to convict criminal acts conducted by the
military government. Also, Alfonsín attempted to follow the legal procedure to put the culprits
on trial; however, the government, such as Carlos Menem's cabinet, had consented to cover the
past due to the economic crisis and sociopolitical conditions. Recently, the ex-president Néstor
Kirchener (2003-2007) and the successive president Christina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-
2015) put forth efforts to shift the cultural and political oblivion and silence. For a more detailed
explanation regarding the post-dictatorial social conditions and the political environment, see
Ana Ros' *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, particularly her
first chapter in the book. Also, Edurne Portela succinctly describes the sociopolitical
environment in the post-dictatorial era in "Argentina (1976-2006): State Terrorism, (Post) Exile,
and the Politics of Oblivion" (11–23).

[61] Including the representative alliance of Argentine human rights organizations, *Memoria
Abierta*, there have been various forms of civil movements to the present. Elizabeth Jelin in
particular addresses this in "The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movements and the
Construction of Democracy in Argentina," which discusses the various forms of civilian
movements and their changing agendas from the 1980s to the 1990s (38–58).

[62] After more than 40 years, mothers and grandmothers of victims are still marching and
protesting in Plaza de Mayo. An extensive number of news reports and essays about their
struggles are published every year. In 2015, the documentary *Tiempo suspendido, ópera prima*
was released, which is a film about Laura Bonaparte, who was an activist and leader of Madres
de Plaza de Mayo. The dictatorial past has not yet ended, and survivors and victims are
continuously struggling for justice.

into the unfamiliar, creating a scary and tragic environment in which something is missing due to unspeakable, unrepresentable reasons. This is not the eerie condition to which Fisher refers, as we know that these disappearances are caused by human violence, agency, and control, not due to a supernatural or mysterious force. Nonetheless, the erasure of these subjects is responsible for the current void in Argentine communities—a result of the politics of oblivion and silence— (re)producing the similar effects of eeriness caused by nonhuman actants. The impossibility of identifying and eliminating the very reason for one's fear turns one's surroundings into a place of potential violence. Against this regime, remembering the past has become the principal act of resistance at both the societal and individual levels. Numerous civic activists, political movements, and artistic and cultural manifestations have refilled the mnemonic, physical, and psychological holes in Argentine society with the truths of the marginalized, the victimized, and the excluded. The memories of the Other are agents of transformation, reconfiguring the terror and eeriness of the current environment into accessible, connected, and livable spaces by clearing away the unknown threat of absence—beyond merely recalling the past.[63] Likewise, these agents offer a path toward transfiguring the symbolic and physical society of the present, thus constructing a new cartography of life in Argentina.

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[63] Francine Masiello notes that "after the years of the dirty wars sustained by Southern Cone dictatorships, intellectuals faced the task of rebuilding a public sphere: they asked how to recuperate memory, how to bridge connections to the past, how to make sense of democratization as a market-run global enterprise" (24). Thus, social others, minorities, and other voices have become a conduit for the reconstruction of the past and the present anew. Amid respectable and numerous texts regarding the politics of memory, there are some renowned authors in particular who have examined the representation of the memory and others: Luisa Valenzuela, Ricardo Piglia, César Aira, and Martín Kohan. In this chapter, I will explore the post-dictatorial generation, which came after these renowned authors. These authors also examined past trauma and delved into newly emerging otherized minorities along with the social transformation.

Besides this lingering political agenda to erase past crimes, in the postdictatorial era,

Argentina has once again found itself at a socioeconomic dead end due to its multiple

successions of corrupt governments and acts of sociopolitical violence against its citizens.

During its transition to a democracy, Argentina's constitutionally elected governments were not

only unable to liquidate the vestiges of its military regime but also failed to recuperate its

financial condition and political stability.[64] State-driven neoliberal reforms, executed by Carlos

Saúl Menem's Cabinet during his presidency (1989–1999), aggravated the national economy,

resulting in the economic collapse of December 2001 at the beginning of the new millennium.

While Argentineans experienced dehumanization at the hands of the authoritarian system—due

to ideological and institutional violence—the market-driven, neoliberal landscape of the

democratic transition also enacted violence on human beings, commodifying life itself and

depriving them of basic rights.

> The 2001 institutional and economic crisis contributed to the intensification of the
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> protests against the human rights violations of the past, seen as closely related to the
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> suffering of Argentineans at the beginning of the millennium, a sentiment expressed in
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> the popular slogan "Yesterday disappeared, today excluded." Social exclusion and

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[64] In their article, "Formation of Violence in Post-Dictatorial Contexts: Logics of Confrontation between the Police and the Young Urban Poor in Contemporary Argentina," Alejandro Isla and Daniel Pedro Míguez demonstrate that government corruption and state violence are still present in the post-dictatorial era. The repressive traditions of institutions that formerly held a central role under the dictatorship, such as the military and the police, have remained especially unchanged. During Argentina's transition to democracy, a back-scratching alliance between the political administration and the police enabled the prolongation of this repressive system. By reporting on the increasing rates of crime, poverty, unemployment, and police/civilian casualties in the 1990s, the authors substantiate the continuing violence inflicted on impoverished and marginalized citizens by these institutions, along with the economic deterioration. While political and ideological agendas were the main reasons behind state violence perpetrated by the military dictatorship, the economic interests of individual institutions have been bound to its illegal and repressive machinery since the 1990s (240–60).

massive emigration seemed to confirm that, like the dictators, the current political class

did not value Argentineans' life and dignity. The crisis indicated the failure of the

economic system established under the dictatorship and taken to an extreme by Menem's

neoliberal policies in the 1990s. Its consequences—unemployment, poverty, and

hunger—were understood as the very problems that the 1970s activists had been fighting

against, linking the struggles of the past and the present. (Ros 21)

As Ana Ros indicates, there were no improvements in citizens' lives both before and after the

dictatorship; rather, society had become harsher. The unresolved remnants of past abuses and

disappearances have simply become ruins, converging into the present economic crisis. Despite

the differing paradigms of the dictatorial authority and the neoliberal market state, these two eras

share an essence of violence toward others through elimination, exclusion, and marginalization,

totalizing and flattening the diverse layers of entities and its life forms.

Taken together, the brutal repression of the military government overlapped with

neoliberal rules have brought political, physical, psychological, and aesthetic changes in need of

an alternative paradigm for weaving Argentina's social parts and members, which are involved

in the profound revision of existing social forms and other human discourses. In connection with

the challenging project of filling mnemonic gaps, the struggles of the disappeared and

excluded—in terms of race, class, and gender—have emerged as alternative and disruptive

responses to the present predicament. During the postdictatorial period, as argued by Francine

Trasiello, art and literature have served as the conduit for emerging political and aesthetic

currents of struggle by proposing "alternative frameworks for apprehending social forms," which

"force us to think of interpretative strategies of resistance, interrogating the past and leading to a

politics of cognition with which to move toward the future" (13). Similarly, in *The Untimely*

Present, Idelver Avelar remarks on the hegemonic transition from state force to market power

during the postdictatorial era, tracing the allegorical representation of ruins in literature.[65] Avelar

proposes that the absent memory and destructed present mentioned in postdictatorial texts "offer

[an] anchor through which a connection the past can be reestablished" (2). For this reason,

Avelar considers the ruins mentioned in these texts as an allegory that "reactivates the hope of

providing an entrance into a traumatic experience that has seemingly been condemned to silence

and oblivion" (10). At the same time, this mnemonic reconstruction becomes an act of resistance

against the market rationality that commodifies and trivializes past traumas.

Under these circumstances, as Fernando Reati explains, sf, specifically dystopian and

(post)apocalyptic narratives, plays an important role in channeling the social and material

realities of an Argentina that is situated on the verge of globalization and neoliberalism. In

particular, Reati draws attention to the burst of sf literature starting from the late 1980s, which

accompanied Argentina's economic crisis caused by Carlos Menem's radical neoliberal policies

("La trilogía futurista de Oliverio Coelho" 111; *Postales del porvenir* 13–34).[66] In a similar

vein, Alejo Steimberg found strong implications of the socioeconomic crisis within the tropes of

(post)apocalyptic texts published after 2001 (127–46). Both critics consider the end-of-the-world

and apocalyptic-aftermath tropes as metaphors, which project an urgency to resolve the current

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[65] Idelver Avelar and Silviana Mandolessi in common indicate the emergence of spectral and haunting representations embedded in ruined spaces in artistic works during the post-dictatorship period. Enigmatic, allegorical, and unrepresentable entities appear as a way of mourning a lost object See Avelar's *Untimely Present*; Mandolessi's "Haunted Houses, Horror Literature and the Space of Memory in Post-Dictatorship" 150–61)

[66] In *Postales del porvenir,* Fernando Reati uses the term "la literature de anticipación" to refer to various speculative genres, such as science fiction, speculative fiction, political fiction, and utopian/dystopian fiction, all literary variants that project and anticipate the future society and its structure. Amid various anticipatory literature publications, I specifically focus on the texts in which the technological interventions are presented.

predicament through a new societal order and collective identity.[67] As I mentioned, Mark Fisher

refers to the underlying eeriness of (post)apocalyptic and post-catastrophic scenes. Useless things

such as ruins, debris, and garbage serve as paradoxical evidence of the previously diversified and

unbroken forms of now-unknown entities. *The failure of presence*, particularly of something

strange and inexplicable, provokes many questions, as seen in the (post)apocalyptic narratives

discussed in the first chapter. Like a mirror held up to a problematic reality filled with absence

and ruins, sf has become a potent tool for political commentary and engagement in Argentina.

Further, sf has served as a compelling channel through which we can observe the manifestations

of the material and spatial agencies that affect and are affected by human beings, thus leading us

to encounter the excluded, the marginalized, and the obsolete or silenced human being or

nonhuman others. Although many sf works highlight the urgent need to recuperate and

reconstruct devastated human societies as well as reconcile fractured communities, I hold that sf

is a genre that also foregrounds the unexpected performances of nonhuman or dehumanized

entities entangled in human society.

Relative to other Latin-American countries, Argentina has a long and prolific tradition of

sf, producing many respected writers who have created foundational works in the genre.

Although they are not dedicated solely to sf, these writers include Leopoldo Lugones, Adolfo

Bioy Casares, Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, Ricardo Piglia, and Angélica Gorodischer.[68]

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[67] Zac Zimmer, María A. Semilla Durán, and Fernando Reati, among others, found a clear
relationship between the crisis of 2001 and the collapse of national discourses in relation to
(post)apocalyptic and dystopian motifs from *El año del desierto* and Olivero Coelho's dystopian
trilogy, *Los invertebrables* (2003), *Borneo* (2004), and *Promesas naturales* (2006). See also
Zimmer's "Barbarism in the Muck of the Present" and "A Year in Rewind, and Five Centuries of
Continuity" and Semilla Durán's "El Apocalipsis como deconstrucción del imaginario histórico
en *El año del desierto* de Pedro Mairal."
[68] *Viaje maravilloso del señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte* (1875), written by Eduardo Ladislao
Homberg, is regarded as one of the foundational texts of not only Argentine sf but also Latin

Nevertheless, like the case of Mexican sf, the very existence of science fiction in Argentina has always been questioned by critics. Compared to Western sf, Argentine sf is regarded as a fantastic and reflexive genre that is curiously void of discourse on modern technology. Joanna Page points out that Argentine sf has been neglected in the field of literature for two reasons: first, "the relative absence of 'hard' science entirely befits, of course, a branch of science fiction," and second, there are few authors who focus exclusively on this genre (1–3). However, in her book, *Science Fiction in Argentina*, Page substantiates the existence of an sf tradition in Argentina through an examination of texts written during the 19th to 21st centuries, especially those that address and engage with the material conditions and technological interventions of Argentine society. I agree with Page's argument that the science fiction genre cannot be confined to "hard" machines and techniques; on the contrary, it is the absence/absent presence of advanced science and technology that paradoxically implies the impacts and influences of technological interventions in Argentina. Considering that science fiction sheds light on our material reality as much as our cultural and natural ecologies, Argentine science fiction is no less befitting of the genre.[69] Many works of Argentine science fiction display unique topographies

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American sf. Opposed to the trend of downplaying the strength of Argentine sf, Pablo Capanna aims to redefine and amplify its scope; see his prologue in the anthology, *El cuento argentino de ciencia ficción* (5–12), and his book, *Ciencia ficción. Utopía y mercado,* (279–80). Through the revision of canonical sf texts in her book, *The Emergence of Latin America Science Fiction*, Rachel Haywood Ferreira (re)establishes the foundation and the tradition of sf in Latin America. Elizabeth Ginway and J. Andrew Brown also provide a meaningful overview of Latin American sf in their introduction to *Latin American Science Fiction: Theory and Practice* (2012).
[69] In *La imaginación técnica* (1992), Beatriz Sarlo explores the scientific, technicity, and machine-induced imagination represented in various literary works—for example, Horacio Quiroga, Roberto Arlt, and others—in Argentina. Also, in *Test Tube Envy*, J. Andrew Brown examines the scientific discourse in relation to power dynamics by analyzing the canonical authors' works. Page argues that Argentine sf fully demonstrates the materialist conception and understanding. Although the absence of hard science does not befit the Western, European generic definition of sf, the technological thoughts and projections in the fiction reveal the vernacular trait of Argentine sf (1–51).

that transcend the borders of Western genres, reflecting a vernacular representation of the interactions and assemblages between different entities or machines in relation with their local societies.

In this chapter, I underscore the emergence of non/posthuman assemblages and subjectivities—similar to that of the Mexican sf genre—in Argentine sf texts during the postdictatorial period, particularly those appearing after the 2001 socioeconomic crisis. The beginning of the 21st century serves as this chapter's point of departure, as this period represents a crucial juncture in which economic, political, and existential crises converge. While the 1985 earthquake and neoliberal policies of Mexico, along with the concomitant socioeconomic turmoil, prompted major changes in the Mexican worldview, the dictatorship of Argentina certainly seems to mark the moment when Argentineans sensed an urgency to transform how to perceive and construct societal bodies. The majority of Argentine sf works in the 1990s address the concerns of rebuilding culture, discourse, subjectivity, and national identity by suturing past wounds. Fernando Reati considers the surge of (post)apocalyptic tropes during this decade as a call for the restoration of *Argentinidad*—a response to the pervading neoliberalization and globalization that had swept away local and national idiosyncrasies while erasing past trauma before overcoming it. Apart from (post)apocalyptic narratives, in *Cyborgs in Latin America*, J. Andrew Brown foregrounds the cyborg body and posthuman hybridity represented in Argentine cultural productions of the postdictatorial era, arguing that these constructs are a form of resistance against "a culture of oblivion" perpetuated by the government as well as a testimonial for the symbiosis between Argentina's dictatorial past and its neoliberal present (*Cyborgs in Latin America* 4–5). In a similar sense, Edward King reads the depictions of body modification in Argentine sf as a strategy for "[restaging] the traumas of the dictatorship" to articulate "new

transpersonal affective assemblages," which are controlled and exploited by neoliberal forces (18). Through these posthuman bodies, critics have observed how the newly emerged violence of neoliberalism and globalization has successfully replaced the dictatorial oppression of Argentina's past, made possible through back-scratching alliances between the government and businesses. With the continued development of new technology, along with its many spectacles, Argentine sf is increasingly engaging with the nation's reality against the backdrop of the (post)modern/dictatorial/human world.

Argentine sf works published after the 2001 crisis, soon after the fall of the dictatorship, more clearly demonstrate the resulting changes in national perception toward humanity, or rather, the concept of a human being. By completely disrupting the ethical, ontological, and epistemological concepts of human beings, the authors of these works challenge the existing order and structure of Argentine society. Therefore, as opposed to the first chapter, this chapter is classified by subject. In the first section, I start with an analysis of Rafael Pinedo's (post)apocalyptic trilogy, from an award-winning novel *Plop* (2007) along with his posthumous works, *Frío* (2013) and *Subte* (2013). Although this section focuses on prose works, I will also examine two graphic novels as well: Diego Agrimbau and Gabriel Ippóliti's *La burbuja de Bertold* (2005) and Matías Santellán y Pablo Guillermo Serafín's *Reparador de sueños* (2012). These works offer intense visualizations and materializations of the disappearance of human individuality and corporeality, represented through mutilated, truncated, and tortured bodies. In the second section, I examine the emerging trope of the networked society, as proposed by the new generation of authors who seek a genre beyond the existing body of Argentine sf, namely, "post-science fiction." This section discusses Z. P. Zooey's *Sol artificial* (2008), a fictional anthology of various texts about a new version of the Internet—the so-called "Bionet"—and

Martí Felipe Castagnet's *Bodies of Summer* (2012). Both novels prominently feature the

developing Argentine sf trend of portraying a wired society that is constructed from an amalgam

of reality and virtuality, all while seeking to grasp the reality of a posthuman society.

In these works, the characteristic that marks them as products of the postdictatorial period

is their tendency to remap and recreate the present onto-cartography by weaving together

multiple dimensions of time, rather than returning to the past or moving toward the future. By

de/reconstructing Argentine lives, memories, and machines, the authors incorporate its histories

of violence into the urban fabric; in other words, these works materialize the traumas and

memories of the past, as well as the present predicament, through disaffected bodies and

devastated cityscapes. Another eye-catching feature of Argentine sf is the existence of a state

system that relies on totalitarian terror and biopolitical power over (in)dividuals. Despite the

unfamiliar textures of society portrayed in these texts, the trope of a totalitarian society—a

"society of control," in Deleuze's terms—remains recognizable. Although this seems like a very

Orwellian leitmotif or a cyberpunk cliché, the inclusion of local history, experience, and

materiality imbue these narratives with a unique onto-cartography. By analyzing the

heterogeneous networks described in each text, I reveal the interconnectivity and

interchangeability of reality and virtuality suggested by these authors, who challenge the real-

world problematics of a modern society founded on past ruins.

II.1. FUTURE PRIMITIVE

During the postdictatorial period, the multifaceted forms of (post)apocalyptic society

were presented by the authors as a way to engage with the changed social ecology of neoliberal

Argentina. While experiencing one catastrophe after another, perhaps it is a natural consequence

to begin imagining life in a devastated cityscape. However, immediately after the fall of the dictatorship, the narratives of the future—whether positive or negative—envisioned the recuperation of society and the rebuilding of culture and national community, called *Argentinidad*. The brutal processes of dehumanization forced on Argentineans through the dictatorship seemed to awaken the need to reconstruct a humane society. By locating the backgrounds of their narratives in distant and destroyed landscapes, the authors of (post)apocalyptic sf reenacted the division of society into a binary structure, lamenting the loss of human beings and human culture. In depicting post-anthropocentric bodies and constructions through hybrid entities, the authors maintain the vision of prioritizing language, culture, and discourse over matter, body, and materiality; as a result, these works revive the Cartesian division between body and mind as well as the superiority of the human mind over human corporeality. Against the irrevocable encroachment of science and technology—in league with the military government and the commodification perpetrated by the neoliberal market—the restoration of human spirituality and the dignity of liberal subjects are proposed, on the one hand, as ways to redeem the voids in history and individual memory and, on the other hand, as forms of resistance against the dehumanizing authorities and rationales of the market state.

In Eduardo Blaustein's *Cruz Diablo* (1997), Rafael Pinedo's *Plop*, and Pedro Mairal's *El año del desierto* (2005), for instance, the authors address the concerns and anxieties surrounding the loss of human(ist) and cultural values by distinguishing nonhuman nature from human culture. To illustrate this nostalgia for human values, Mairal and Blaustein reestablish the dichotomy between barbarism and civilization, similar to the one suggested by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in the 19th century. The futures that these authors propose seem more primitive than the past, due to the disappearance of human(ist) culture and the absence of

technology. Instead, these futures are filled with the obtrusive presence of remains, ruins, and garbage—vestiges of the previous generation, the contemporary society in which we live. In these works, the ravaged grounds and the primitive lifestyles of human beings are closely connected to the loss and absence of human(ist) culture and memory, which are represented by "the disappearance of the material supports" (Page 95). Although materiality and corporeality have considerable influence on humankind, immateriality—such as culture, language, and history—represents the prevailing value that transcends all human embodiments. Although Joanna Page demonstrates the material performativity of the mediation and transmission of human culture in these works, their narratives rewrite modernity, yet simultaneously reiterate its fundamental dilemma: the reproduction of social exclusion. Bruno Latour highlights the stratification and purification conducted under modernity, which renders the proliferation of hybrids invisible and unrepresentable despite the world itself being an assemblage of affective machines (91–129). Just as immateriality and materiality are not separable, human culture cannot be detached from nonhuman nature, matter, and entities. In this sense, a forced separation between materiality and affectivity, nature and culture, and human and nonhuman instigates several unwanted, unexpected, and fuzzy dimensions that would remain excluded and removed from society.

Likewise, *La burbuja de Bertold* (2005) and *Reparador de sueños* (2012), two graphic novels analyzed in this section, repeat the contradictions embedded in the abovementioned (post)apocalyptic narratives. While portraying post-anthropocentric, posthuman bodies and social systems, these graphic novels persist in prioritizing the human subjectivity as an alternative to the surrounding predicaments. Both Edward King and Joanna Page assert that these novels "reveal some of the contradictions at the heart of antihumanist posthumanism, in their

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mourning for the irrevocable loss of [the] human(ist)" (36); that is, despite the authors' embrace of disruptive and countercultural figures within human society, they do not go as far as including nonhuman others. However, it should be noted that both graphic novels find a human value in humanitarian immateriality and disembodied virtues while ironically displaying the strong affectivity of the physical and material bodies of hybrid entities. The visual and virtual representations of cyborgs and anthropomorphic bodies betrays the human Self and the concept of individuality by foregrounding the permeable and open-ended forms of materiality as well as the affectivity engendered by their bodies in pain. I believe, thus, that these two texts are a suitable launchpad for the examination of postdictatorial Argentine sf, as they reflect the current shift in social paradigms and simultaneously imply a fracture in the prevailing perceptions of the human being.

Like other postapocalyptic narratives during the postdictatorial period, Rafael Pinedo's trilogy features dystopian and (post)apocalyptic narratives—the dichotomous social structure of the imaginary future. By eliminating all traces of modern and advanced technologies, they rebuild a primitive, barbaric, and inhuman society set in the future, which touches upon the duality of barbarism and civilization, and nature and culture. Owing to this startling disappearance/absence of material and immaterial cultures typical of future worlds, most studies on these trilogies focus on the anxiety caused by the destruction of human culture and ethics under a hegemonic transition from a dictatorship to neoliberal governance. The primitive, inhuman, and dehumanized human beings represented in these narratives have therefore been regarded as the inevitable consequences of social and physical violence perpetrated against dissidents and disempowered civilians—those who smash the boundaries between humanity, technicity, and animality as well as between progress and backwardness. Accordingly, Pinedo's

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trilogy seems to carry a warning against building a society devoid of humanist ethics or aesthetics, which refer to alternative entities that can counter the inhumanity of the system.

In further pursuit of the meaning of these ravaged representations, I argue that Pinedo attempted to cancel the existence of humanity through their (post)apocalyptic worlds, seemingly hinting that *we have never been human*. In his works, future primitives—whose existence is located between human, machine, and animal—do not represent the Other, the antithesis of the modern subject. Rather, not only do they symbolize the pure, uncivilized, uncontaminated alternative to civilized modern society, they also represent the revival of wild yet hybrid offshoots, engendered and contaminated by modern and capitalist futures that stand atop the residue of contemporary society, neither evolved nor degenerated. By depicting a *rewildered* and uncivilized human nature, Pinedo suggests that there is no such universal human subject that is so much more civilized, rational, individual, and liberated from the rest of so-called nature. Furthermore, by portraying a life in which the divisions between nature and culture, human and nonhuman, and materiality and immateriality do not exist, the author also allude to the coexistence of (re)developing human society while separating itself from other entities. It is crucial to note that, in these worlds, all attempts to reconstruct a humanitarian community and human solidarity appear just as violent and inhuman as primitive wildlife. The author seems to highlight how human beings have become segregated from their fundamental hybridity through their encounters with modernity and its dichotomous conception of worlds founded upon the coloniality of power, thus revealing that progress, humanity, and modernity are illusions perpetuated by the continued exclusion and marginalization of others.

Save the human soul from the butcher

La burbuja de Bertold begins with the sentencing of Bertold, the story's protagonist, to the punishment of dismemberment, backdropped by the dusty, noxious, and murky panorama of a distant city, called Butania. Along the city's vast horizon, oil extraction machines are stacked upon an empty and desolate plain. Starting from the outskirts, the graphic novel portrays a sequence of frames that move gradually into the inner city, up to the room where Bertold's execution is being carried out. As revealed in the captions, Bertold was convicted of divulging a truth that the authorities had concealed—the exhaustion of the city's central energy source:

> Los cargos contra el ciudadano Bertold Boro son los siguientes… Cargo primero: falsificar informes sobre el estado de reservas de la Burbuja, pronosticando que el gas podría acabarse en el largo plazo. Cargo segundo: al ser rechazado su informe, Bertold Boro inició un incendio en la sección de estimaciones y estadísticas, exponiendo al peligro de explosión encadenada a toda la ciudad de Butania. En su acción terminó con la vida de catorce compañeros de trabajo. (2)

As stated in this passage, Bertold's most serious crime is not the deaths of his colleagues, which were caused by his actions; rather, it is his attempt to disclose the shared secret. Following his dismemberment, Bertold is picked up by Froilán, the owner of "Teatro neumático," and Lorenzo, a technician, to be an actor in their famous play, "Títeres vivientes." The drama is performed solely by quadruple amputees connected to a human puppet machine.

By establishing a visual contrast between hard machinery and soft humanity, Diego Agrimbau and Gabriel Ippóliti take a straightforward approach to the issues of modernization, environmental destruction, industrial capitalism, and authoritarian governance. While metallic machines represent the authoritarian regime and the inhumanity of modernization, amputated and

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fragmented human bodies symbolize the subordinated and marginalized classes of citizens.

Through their skillful mixture of steampunk, dieselpunk, and cyberpunk aesthetics in the colors,

textures, and lines, Agrimbau and Ippólity create a unique imaginary world through which they

can question the machinery of dictatorship and its successor: neoliberal politics in Argentine

society. They preserve the steampunk spirit by centering the creative power of humans against an

overwhelmingly machinic world; however, in their retrofuturistic drawings, both a fascination

and a disillusionment with technological advances are implicated by the rusty machines and

devastated environments caused by the reckless exploitation of nature. According to King and

Page pinpoint that "Agrimbau and Ippóliti create the bleakest of posthuman futures in which an

exploitative human 'civilization'—unwilling to take responsibility for the depletion of resources

and the waste that are the by-products of its modernizing and profit-making ambitions—careers

towards extinction as the earth's energy runs out" (King and Page 26–27). *La burbuja de Bertold*

is also anchored deeply in dieselpunk philosophy, albeit a variant form. Lewis Pollak, a game

designer who coined the term "dieselpunk," describes this genre as "darker [and] dirtier" than

steampunk—a world "of grit and oil, dust and mud […] in which magic and technology are

combined" (qtd. in *Gatehouse Gazette 1* 3). Thus, rather than differentiating between the

technologies represented by each genre, the most critical distinction comes from the attitudes

toward these technologies. Since dieselpunk first appeared between the two World Wars, it is

embedded with the fear and scariness of technology as fatal weapons. Agrimbau and Ippóliti

twist the disquietude of war into that of the dictatorial administration, in which the machinery

still functions as instruments of destruction, thus reflecting the reality of Argentine life.

Returning to the human puppet machine in *La burbuja de Bertold*, its oxidized yet still-

steely apparatus serves as an allegory for the domination and subjugation of institutional power

over individual civilians. Under the control of the puppet machine and the vintage computer in Teatro neumático, the dismembered bodies of its human actors are only capable of limited movements, lacking the agency to make a complete bodily action. What Teatro neumático allows its performers to control are their voices and facial expressions only. In their daily lives, Bertold and his fellow actors continue to wear metallic prostheses hooked up by strings; the only time they are liberated from the machine is when they sleep, their beds arranged in a row and their torsos detached from the machinery. Left alone, their bodies—swaddled in black clothing— provoke uncomfortable feelings, not only due to the crude visuals of missing and disabled body parts but also due to the institutional violence that inflicted this existence upon them. Amputees not only serve as actors but also fill Butania's slums and dark streets. Although "Intendencia," the local authority, metes out amputation as a way to punish criminals and murderers, it is also suspected to abuse power and engage in corruption, like in the case of Bertold. Both the mutilated bodies and the rusted metals serve as a manifestation of the local dictatorship's brutal fragmentation of community, dehumanizing all entities indiscriminately.

The trope of the absent presence and the present absence appears throughout these portrayals of suffering cyborg bodies, which are tied into local and national memory of Argentina. While the absence of body parts resonate with the forceful "disembodiment" and disappearance of family members, the presence of hard material connections and intrusions awake memories of the military dictatorship and the inhumanity of neoliberal modernization. Through the prosthetic bodies in the postdictatorial texts, J. Andrew Brown represents the painful process of being another entity trapped in the body of a cyborg, thus twisting Haraway's cyborg figure, which emphasizes a settled and seamlessly fused body. According to Brown, "the cyborg body inherently testifies of trauma," as the fusion of multiple bodies accompanies the scars of

loss and gain (*Cyborgs in Latin America* 36). The wounded aspects of Brown's Argentine cyborgs suggest that they carry an important meaning, as the painful experience of being/becoming another entity is brought to the fore, especially with the creation of a new hybrid entity upon being forced to experience loss. In a similar vein, the painful bodies of the human puppets in *La burbuja de Bertold* not only testify to the violence and atrocity of the state but also recalls (and resists the forgetting of) institutional violence. However, the most problematic aspect of the cyborgs in Butania is that they are half-machine and half-disabled humans who repeatedly experience the loss of prostheses. Despite their hybrid and transformative corporeality, they are totally manipulated by the macro-level machine. This world constantly interrupts the reconciliation between human and nonhuman bodies by rendering them as alien and incompatible. Instead of this entanglement between human and nonhuman beings, however, the authors draw attention to the total loss of individuality and human agency through the puppet machine, which echoes the dictatorial past and the ongoing authoritarian regimes of postdictatorial governments.

Through this repressive and suffocating posthuman world, the authors propose the recovery of humanist ethics and values as a response to modernization and the inhumanity of the neoliberal social system. Bertold is a heroic, Jesus-like figure who explicitly symbolizes hope for the future and the indomitable human spirit. From the first moment of his appearance, Bertold is given prominence as a political scapegoat. Passing through the retro-industrial urbanscape rife with polluted air and dirty cars, buildings, and streets, the panels land on the room in which Bertold is kept, sitting on a cruciform bed stained with the blood of former convicts. Emphasized by a startling chiaroscuro technique, Bertold's white shirt and his robust, naked frame contrast his dirty, decaying, and stained surroundings. Before losing all his limbs, Bertold is given an

offer by the authority: his arms or legs would be spared if he publicly declared "el gas nunca se acabará" (5), which was a lie. Bertold refuses this offer, opting to maintain his clean conscience, and even after his dismemberment, he never loses his dignity as a human being. Bertold shows admirable empathy and consideration for other people throughout the narrative, imbued with the power of touching the emotions of the public through his speech. Through this symbolic figure, the authors accentuate the importance of individuality and human dignity while acknowledging the value of camaraderie and solidarity among citizens.

Bertold's actions and speech display the power of discourse, language, and culture that exceeds physical and material constraints. Although he dangles by puppet strings, his voice and discourse are widespread, becoming a greater influence on the citizens of Butania than the city's administrators. His disability and the machinic control over him never limit his actions; rather, they enable him to subvert the existing order through sociability and solidarity. "Leche de Madre," a play hosted by Teatro neumático, draws tremendous public interest thanks to Bertold's appealing facial and vocal performances, which project his strong moral conviction. When the secretary advises the superintendent, his superior, not to pay attention to the fame of "actorzuelo deforme," the superintendent responds: "La palabra de este actorzuelo más gente que los discursos que tú me escribes" (34). In this way, *La burbuja de Bertold* demonstrates the gravity and incorporeal value of human mentality. In the story's climax, Bertold alters the original script of "Leche de Madre" with several improvisations. Originally, the play was designed to glorify the authority and Mother Earth; however, Bertold kills a mother who is suckled—literally—by her family, sacrificing her life in a situation where there is nothing to eat. After doing this, he shouts: "¡Muerte a la madre! ¡Muerte a la burbuja! ¡Muerte a la máquina! ¡Muerte a la intendencia!" Bertold's outcry at the hypocritical technocrats of Butania awaken the people, who

rise in revolt against the manipulation and repression of the authority. While *La burbuja de Bertold* conveys hope for social change, enacted by politically conscious and awakened individuals, the story nonetheless leaves a lingering question regarding the depletion of gas in Butania, a result of modernization and its offshoots.

The world illustrated by Matías Santellán and Pablo Guillermo Serafin in *El reparador de sueños* is not much different from that of *La burbuja de Bertold.* Published a decade after the beginning of the twenty-first century, this graphic novel reiterates the portrayal of a suffocating social structure, in which the government manipulates its citizens to deepen their profits. Compared to Agrimbau and Ippóliti, Santellán and Serafin present more strictly and geometrically woven forms of urban structures and advanced technologies controlled by institutions. Polenia, an imagined state, uses a machine that generates dreams—the so-called "dream-motor"—displacing natural dreams with predesigned dreams. The crucial difference between these two graphic novels is the method of control placed on individuals: in *La burbuja de Bertold*, the authority cuts and reforms the physical bodies of its citizens, whereas the government appearing in *El reparador de sueños* manipulates an incorporeal dimension of its people (i.e., dreams).

Like *El ladrón de sueños*, which is explored in the first chapter, *El reparador de sueños* casts light on the subtle yet complicated politics and techniques of governance that manipulate and disrupt the *conatus* embedded in the flesh. However, the reason for the control in *El ladrón de sueños* lies in market profitability, whereas in *El reparador de sueños*, several political and ideological causes drive the society to control. Similarly, while Foucault's original panopticon controls the psychological dimension of its prisoners through material and physical constraints, Polenia instead modulates the inner lives of its citizens, through which it gains physical control.

The protagonist of *El reparador de sueños*, named Cacho, is a mechanic who maintains and repairs dream-motors. One day, he is visited at home by Elizabeth, a woman with a malfunctioning dream-motor. Although dream-motors should create perfectly happy dreams, according to the political rhetoric, Elizabeth's machine displays several hidden, mysterious images of men, then suddenly stops. Although Cacho could not determine how to fix it, Elizabeth's tears, which accidentally drop upon the dream-motor, recovers its operation. Following this meeting, Elizabeth and Cacho become attracted to each other and spend the night together; however, she later disappears without a trace, kidnapped by government officials due to her uncontrollable dreams. The "desaparecido" trope appears in this novel as well—symbolized by Elizabeth's disappearance and the absence of natural dreams—becoming the primary motivation leading to all changes in an imaginary society that echoes Argentina's dictatorial past. After Elizabeth's disappearance, Cacho starts to question the nature of dreams and why the government is trying to control them. To find her, Cacho decides to work with the institution that develops and runs the dream-motor project. Although he is finally able to save her by destroying the entire dream-motor system, she tragically dies due to the abuses suffered under the programmed dreams.

     El reparador de sueños brings human(ist) values to the fore in a manner that is similar to *La burbuja de Bertold*. King and Page remark that the art styles and the tone of the scripts are particularly evocative of humanism (35–6). By contrasting the fleshy bodies and the disorderly natures of Cacho and Elizabeth with the ordered and steely environments of Polenia, Santellán and Serafín highlight the humanitarian values and ethics that have led to a slight division between soft flesh and hard metal as well as human and nonhuman. The urbanscape of Polenia resonates with the advanced form of the panopticon, first imagined by Foucault. In the center of

every sector, a massive, Babel-like tower is ubicated, and the hexagonal structure of the surrounding apartments are jam-packed with residents. Without the use of color, the panels are filled with straight lines and black ink. Similar to Butania, the constant emission of fumes and metallic bodies of tren cram the pages. Exposed pipes, lines, gears, and motors—delineated by a myriad of straight lines—conjure a steampunk mood through their allusion to an authoritarian society. In contrast to the straight lines outlining the machinery and architecture, Serafin draws the protagonists and their simple, tattered clothing with sprawling, shaggy lines, which highlights their human traits, such as curvy silhouettes, wrinkled faces, and skinny and bruised body parts. The vulnerability of the fleshy, natural human body portrays the weakness of human corporeality compared to our mental strength. In addition, the narrative's emphasis on the power of love, represented by Cacho's heroic rescue of Elizabeth, reveals what the authors intended to underline in *El reparador de sueños*: the immateriality or incorporeality of human beings that overcomes material and bodily restraints. The cyborg status of the citizens of Polenia therefore demonstrates the loss of humanity and the violation of individuality—rather than an alternative form of life—while reenacting the scars of historical brutality engrained in the citizens' minds. In this way, the physical bodies of the protagonists are converted into the subject of social exploitation and deconstruction. Along with the abnormal forms of Polenia's urbanscape, the inhuman configurations of bodily conditions in *El reparador de sueños* offers a visual materialization of the necropolitics of Argentina's "post-social" condition. Achille Mbembe stated that beyond biopolitical governmentality, necropolitics is a system that aims to reach "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population" (14). Through the regulation of the terror of death and of bodily pain, biopower enables control over the affective dimension of the human experience.

The gendered bodies in both graphic novels bespeak the limitations of the dualistic worldview presented in their narratives. Frequently, the authors foreground the sacred and natural corporeality of women, which are used as springboards for the male heroes' awakening. For example, in *La burbuja de Bertold*, two main female bodies are presented: one is old, sagged, and tortured, while the other is the sexualized, robust body of a young woman. This suggests that the stereotypical female figure—mother, lover, and sister—is reiterated in *La burbuja de Bertold*, compared to the diverse personas of its male characters. In much the same way, the female protagonist in *El reparador de sueños*, Elizabeth, does not even have her own voice; instead, she cries, lies in bed, and dies at the end of the story. Although she is the impetus and operator of Cacho's revolutionary movement, she only exists as a gendered body without any personal decisions. Over the course of the narrative, she is depicted as a soft, curvy, natural, and silent body—a counterfigure to the noisy, solid, and artificial machinic world. As such, while underlining the male characters' excellent mental and incorporeal capacities, the authors confine the gendered female to the material, natural, and physical. Moreover, the male figures are allowed to amplify their incorporeal affectivity beyond personal feelings, achieving public solidarity through their rational and reasonable motivations, whereas the female characters can only cling to sentimental and emotional values (i.e., love). By relying on the stereotypical female figure, these authors fall under the trap of humanism that centers Man while producing a variety of racialized, sexualized, and naturalized others.

As seen from the figure of the gendered female, both graphic novels strike a divide between nature and culture as well as human and nonhuman. The authors propose that the nature embedded in women's bodies and the rationality of men become the ethics and values that will bring about drastic changes to the world. In contrast, the technologies and hard machines are

never portrayed as compatible with humanity. By transforming technology into a problematic enemy, the authors degrade material agency and their performance; the cyborg, hybridity, and machinic assemblages are marked as scars of subjugation. Trapped in humanism and anthropocentrism, these novels cannot provide an alternative vision for Argentina, despite their subversive proposals regarding authoritarian power dynamics. By breaking the chain of domination and subjugation between the institution and the individual, other power dynamics surge through the binary structures embedded in the stories. In addition, these graphic novels end on a somewhat inconclusive, vague, and pessimistic note. Although social disruption and subversion are achieved, thanks to the heroic and affective protagonists, the fundamental predicaments in both texts seem unresolved. In *La burbuja de Bertold*, the exhaustion of oil—the main source of energy for living—remains an issue, while in *El reparador de sueños*, the death/absence of loving another and the destruction of the home, Polenia are unaddressed. This seems to be unavoidable in both works, due to the authors' paradoxical conceptualizations of the binarism between nature and culture, human and nonhuman, and corporeality and incorporeality. However, by attacking the problematic aspects of modernity and modernization, the authors return to the promises of modernity: the gravity placed on humanity.

The visuality displayed in these texts works differently from that of prose novels: pictures—their colors, stylistic expressions, and frames—and words, as well as the spaces between them, convey a particular sense of reality and virtuality through the depiction of mutilated, dismembered, and tortured bodies. The vigor and vitality of the image manifest agency, or performative affectivity, by betraying what is emphasized in the novel's plots: the incorporeal values of humans. Although the power of language, discourse, and love has a profound influence on the characters, the power of materiality—brought out by color, line,

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texture, shape, and composition—affect the readers more than the plots and scripts. Although human sentiments, rather than physical boundaries, sustain the humanity portrayed in these texts, the characters' physical pains are more easily sensed than their inner lives. More than any of the words, the images of dismembered or violated bodies, brutally connected by wires and machines, better transmit the pain and experience of these imagined worlds. Bodily pain, pictured in great detail, transcends individuality while helping readers connect with the characters in the novels. This explicit materiality captures the emotions, leading to interpersonal and transpersonal experiences and breaking the limits between the self and other. Although the authors denounce technology as a tool for violation and exploitation, the cyborg and mechanical prostheses ironically broaden the sense of collective affectivity. Their hybrid corporeality also suggests a potential for the gradual disappearance of individual corporeality as a human. The contradictions emerging from these novels therefore make us rethink individuality and materiality itself.

Tides of Wastes

Rafael Pinedo died in 2006 leaving behind only three novels, the (post)apocalyptic trilogy *Plop, Frío*, and *Subte*. His reputation was about to grow, thanks to his first novel, *Plop,* for which Pinedo won a *Premio Casa de America* in 2002.[70] Also, his second work, *Frio*, was a finalist for the 2004 *Premio Planeta*. Unfortunately, however, Pinedo did not get to see the publication of either *Frío* or *Subte*. In an interview, Pinedo refers to his three short novels as a

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[70] Silvia Gabriela Kurlat-Ares—one of the most prolific critics, especially for the sf genre—presents a brief literary trajectory of Rafael Pinedo at the beginning of her article "Rafael Pinedo's Trilogy: Dystopian visions and populist thought in Argentina's Turn-of-the-Century Narrative" (431–32). Pinedo won the *Casa de las Americas Prize* in 2012, but he hardly obtained the opportunity to publish *Plop* in Argentina; however, Pinedo's marvelous trilogy is available currently in an e-book format from Amazon, through which we can glimpse the changed reputation and appraisal toward his works.

trilogy that explores the topic of "culture destruction" (Friera).[71] Despite the different tonalities

among the stories, as the author clarified, the three works' narratives share a spatial background:

that is, the aftermath of ecological and social catastrophes, which have resulted in the total

destruction of material and immaterial cultures from the previous generation. In the three works,

the devastated, dangerous, and toxic physical environments play a significant role, although

Pinedo focuses more on the inner worlds of the protagonists. Even though we never learn the

reason for the Earth's bleak condition, the author gives us some hints through which we can

figure out the worlds in the novels are set in the future. For instance, the presence of converted

relics of the past, such as crushed and oxidized can-foods, cut cables, and broken machines

insinuates an extinction of contemporary society. Pinedo's imaginary worlds commonly show

that humans have never been separate, individual, or evolutionary beings; rather we are bounded,

meshed, and entangled entities. In *Plop*'s case, the vast, polluted, wet landscapes of the world

awaken us to the open, vulnerable, and permeable form of human corporeality.

Plop, the protagonist, was born during the march of the tribe to which his mother belongs.

His mother abandons him just after his birth—she dies soon after due to a postnatal infection;

however, Goro, the oldest woman in the tribe, takes him and names him Plop after the sound

produced when his body collides with dampened soil. Incessant rain combined with wastes

covering the land have converted entire grounds into wet and toxic muds and have

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[71] Regarding his trilogy, Pinedo states in this interview that "plop es una idea, una imagen que surge y se desarrolla. Esta novela, como Frío y la que estoy escribiendo ahora, Subte, tiene que ver con la destrucción de la cultura. Por algún lado ese tema me ataca, no puedo evitarlo, las ideas que se me ocurren van por ese camino, pero no sé por qué. La cultura se desmigaja y las migas se pudren en el suelo y si no mirarlo a Bush... Intención de mensaje político no tengo, aunque tenga compromisos con los derechos humanos y esté inserto en la realidad que vivo. Lo único que pretendo es que el lector no se aburra, el pecado imperdonable de un libro es aburrir" (Friera)

simultaneously contaminated whole bodies of (sub)surface water. Vegetation had disappeared a long time ago, and only a few wild animal species have survived, along with human survivors. There is almost nothing left to sustain lives in the barren and fetid Earth, in which survival has become the only agenda for any living entities. Since settlement is impossible, any surviving humans live a nomadic life by hunting scarce animals, other tribes, or can-foods (the leftover of the previous humankind). *Plop* traces the life trajectory of the protagonist from his birth to death. Therefore, it is a kind of *bildungsroman* of Plop, the main character, but his life-long growth drifts towards self-destruction after he enjoys the power of domination.[72] Following the quirks and eddies of Plop's life, Pinedo raises questions about the very nature of humanity, challenging the borders between nature and culture, as well as human and nonhuman subjectivities.

> Llueve. Siempre.
>
> A veces muy poco, como agua que flotara. Otras, muchas, es una pared líquida que golpea la cabeza.
>
> Sólo esa puede tomarse. Una vez que cayó, está impura. «Contaminada» es la palabra que usan los viejos.
>
> Se camina sobre el barro, entre grandes pilas de hierros, escombro, plástico, trapos podridos y latas oxidadas.
>
> De tanto en tanto las nubes se abren un poco, y brillan pedazos de vidrio rotos, nunca más grandes que una uña. Algunos los usan para hacer puntas de cuchillos, pero son demasiado frágiles.

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[72] Given that the novel *Plop* traces Plop's life trajectory and the growth of his personality, Kurlat-Ares considers this novel a sort of *Bildungsroman*. I consider *Plop* rather picaresque due to Plop's immorality and the subversive aspect against social norms. The (de)construction of individual subjectivity throughout the brutality and contamination is certainly an essential phase in this novel (431–47).

[...]

Alguna paja brava corta el basural. Arbustos, nunca más altos que un hombre, con espinas, con unas hojas minúsculas y negras.

Y hongos, que salen por todos lados.

Algunos son comestibles. Muchos venenosos. Es muy difícil diferenciarlos. (*Plop* 19)

In *Plop,* some animals and human tribes have survived, but there are also drifted and corrupting debris of wastes, which were once produced by humans but are now the vehicles for creating a new web of lives. While containing the memories of the previous generation, who indulged in environmental destruction, polluted debris challenges the progressive temporality of modernity's dream by altering Earth into a colossal swamp. In much the same way as the metro stations in "El año de los gatos amurallados" and "El que llegó hasta metro Pino Suárez," the putrefying world in *Plop* is ruled by seemingly inanimate nonhuman objects and matter, rather than animate beings. Whether human or animal, all the novel's animated entities can never settle anywhere nor forge a mass community due to wet, fluid, and toxic grounds, where it is impossible to acquire or cultivate edibles. The only relatively pure, comestible but not contaminated thing is the rain, but if the water makes contacts with the ground, the water becomes impure, or "contaminated" in Plop's tribal language. Pinedo figuratively shows this gloopy contact between the earth and Plop through a sonic expression: the plop sound.[73] This contact between the earth and a newborn epitomizes that all humans, nonhumans, and other entities on the land are impure and contaminated. The noxious chemicals, bacteria, and viruses

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[73] I am unsure of whether the author intended to remind the readers with the title *Plop* of another English meaning of the onomatopoeia 'plop,' which refers to a childish term for feces. Regardless, it is an interesting coincidence considering the rotten and decomposed human, nonhuman ecologies and the crud contacts among them.

that permeate into humans' bodies mean that the majority of babies are born dead (and turned into maggots) or born "deformed," a condition that the tribe calls "Opas", in which an inability to survive independently will end up changing the "deformed" into edible meats for the group.

There is no pure, untouched nature, unaffected by the anthropocentric past; rather, nature has been transformed into perilous and vibrant entities that configure and redefine the new form of human culture and its lifestyles. Conversely, there is nowhere in which contaminated nature is untouched by human society. As Alejo Steimberg outlines, the world of *Plop* is "el mundo de restos: restos de construcciones, de objetos, de costumbres" where "[n]ada se crea: todo es reutilización" (133). Destroyed objects and constructions and their subsequent recycling seem to mean the end of the world, degeneration, and extinction. In this sense, some critics assert that *Plop* taps into the anxiety regarding the collapse of human(ist) and civilized culture by projecting the grim reality of Argentine society after the 2001 crisis.[74] But ironically, the imaginary future drawn in *Plop* is rife with new beginnings that emerged from various but undesirable con*tacts*[75]; the destruction and degeneration pertain only to the human or pre-existent species and objects from new hybrid and unknown materials considered to increase prosperity. "Opas"—disabled and deformed men—are the representative example of such new collective beings' emergence,

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[74] In almost all studies on Rafael Pinedo's novels, critics note the deep relationship between the nightmarish representation in his fiction and the economic crisis caused by neoliberal policies. Alejo Steimberg's "El future obturado" (2012), Zic Zimmer's "Barbarism in the Muck on the Present" (2013), Fernando Reati's "¿Qué hay después del fin del mundo?" (2013), Annelies Oeyen's "Hacia una (est)ética del posapocalipsis en la narrative argentina posdictatorial" (2014), and Claire Mercier's "Ecología humana en la trilogía de Rafael Pinedo" (2016) all convey this point of view regarding the connections between the (post)apocayptic trope and the 2001 crisis in Argentina.

[75] I italicized the word 'tact' intentionally. In *Plop* as well as in *Subte* and *Frío*, the act of contact is not usually mediated; rather, a direct touch and a highly physical and material touch often make contact among different entities. To emphasize this aspect of a corporeal and tactile encounter, touch, or contact, I italicized the word con'tact.'

as they embody the open-ended corporeality and its unstable individuality. In this context, "recycling" not only connotes that "there is nothing new" but also betokens the encounters among different entities to (re)make or (re)construct *some*things anew through integration and disintegration.

In *Plop*, lumps of objects that once served human society have been converted into unruly things that threaten the lives of all beings. Albeit unpleasant and depressing, disfigured and ill-formed contaminated human bodies and toxic environments are evidence of the con*tacts* that precipitate the emergence of mutations and new collectives. Kathleen Stewart points out that "things don't just add up. *Some*thing throws itself together and then floats past or *sticks* for some reason. Some such things have *meaning* per se; most have force in some other form" (74). Randomly appearing things that accumulate and combine with other surrounding things indeed do not add up but form the eerie otherness, hitherto hidden sides of potentiality. Mud-like lands create the sea-like grounds that forge unceasing currents and transformations of geography and that of the entities who live upon it. Two aspects should be noted in these currents of things: first, the deported and removed matter and things from human social webs return in *other forms*; second, matters are also just as trans-corporeal as human beings, in which nature, culture, politics, materiality, immateriality, and heterogeneous temporalities of different entities are enmeshed.

> Drift matter is world making.
>
> Think of dark matter, that utterly unseen and unknown density of everything that makes up the most. That unidentified, uncanny mass of dark energy that permeates space. Then think of drift matter. That unknown, drifting mass, that persists and worlds. Fluid as it is, its ever-emergent potential and becoming is empowered through its persistency. Not a

static, inflexible persistency but a stubborn, boisterous volatility of matter — drifting,

gathering, dispersing. A dark ecology (Morton 2016) — a dark energy, beyond human

control, definition, and knowledge. (Pétursdóttir 96)

In reference to Timothy Morton's term, "the dark ecology," Þóra Pétursdóttir explains the

affectivity of the abandoned objects that are floating and clustering in terms of creating the

power of (re)making the world. But the affectivity of these things is dark, as Pétursdóttir and

Morton denote. It is dark because these things return to the humans who dumped them and

beyond this, they frighten us with their unmeasurable power. They are unpredicted fallout from

human time and conceptualization.[76] Through the world converted into the sea of garbage

dumps, Pinedo explores the resurgence and domination of the things that disappeared from

human sight due to humans throwing them away, keeping them out, or condemning them to

death: these reappear nakedly as dark matter. Their temporalities diverged from that of the

human when the matter became useless and valueless in society; this challenges the myth of

progress. Broken pieces of glass, oxidized cans, broken plastic fragments, and steel frames—all

remains of pulverized buildings—give us an inkling of the death of the modern, consumerist, and

capitalist societal system. The failures of humanity and its civilization have seeped through the

bodies of things that caused the toxicity, decay, and contamination of matter in the first place.

The world of *Plop* demonstrates how porous individual bodies are and how diverse entities are

intermeshed by mutually affecting and being affected.

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[76] Following Bryant, I define the temporality as the rhythm of the machine's operation. Drift matters and destroyed objects' temporalities are differentiated from that of the humans when they are detached from human control. For more information about how I redefine the temporality, see the section *Performance of Metro in Ruin* in the first chapter.

However, the author sheds lights on not only the strange tides of such matter, which seem to be caused by human civilization.[77] Pinedo also uncovers the relatedness of humans and nonhumans through the depiction of smeared bodies and things. Whether human or nonhuman, all entities in the world of *Plop* are contaminated by the con*tacts,* through which we glimpse the vulnerability and fragility of flesh and, at the same time, the enmeshment and mutual affectivity between human and nonhuman bodies. Morton elucidates that a dark ecology is an ecological awareness that "all things have a loop form." He explains that "(e)cological awareness is a loop because human interference has a loop form, because ecological and biological systems are loops. And ultimately this is because to exist at all is to assume the form of a loop" (Morton 6). In this way, Morton emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual affectivity of things and assemblages in life itself. Rather than a universal, singular and linear concept, Morton presents a "loopy" and entangled conception regarding entities.[78] In *Plop,* the garbage was initially provisions and necessary items, created by/for the former generation of Plop's tribe. However, when daily supplies and households are detached or liberated from human dominance, they are transformed into garbage, toxic-empowered actants. Pinedo skillfully depicts such dark ecology in that humans are the contributors and, at the same time, victims of the catastrophe. Further, he unfolds how the expected and unexpected consequences of such violation and exploitation,

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[77] Timothy Morton describes global warming as a "wicked problem" because it is "irreducible, interminable, alogical and irreversible" (36–37). The subject that provoked this problem is humanity, but at the same time, humanity is the victim. With a damaged ecology, according to Morton, "we are thus in an obvious looplike relationship with the problem. In a weird loopy not-quite inversion of the song, *the whole world has got us in its hands*—because we became a geophysical force" (57).

[78] To name the mutual affect and reactions between humans and nature, matters and entities, and among different beings, Morton thus employs the word "loopy, looplike relationship" similar to a Moebius strip. See his first thread of *Dark Ecology* (3–60).

executed by humans on others—in this case, violence on the environment, and the things used and created by humans—come back to humans.

This novel demonstrates that whether intended or not, human intervention or interactions with nature that are more-than-human have brought about significant impacts on the ecosystem. In addition, Pinedo shows that the past history of human society violates and permeates the present geopolitical topography, and the future goes back to the past lifeform due to the atrocious present. Time is not linear but simultaneous and contingent. Environmental depletion and corporeal diseases become proof of such loop forms of the thing-ness and the relationship between humans and nonhumans. A contaminated ecology is an actant, a machine that has the power to return to the time of the humanity: the tribe of Plop has a hunter-gathering form of life as Neo/Paleolithic primitives, however, in the wild nature filled with techno-garbage and unprecedented animals. Now the tool for the human species is not stones but pieces of glass and steel. Unknown catastrophes in the future in *Plop* bring back the need for a hunter-gathering society. Thus, the ubiquitous existence of dirt in this text—dirt being a viscous, dangerous and polluting substance—shows symbolically and materially the inevitable connectedness between humans and nature and, at the same time, disrupts the concept of linear time and the bounded individuality of the human body. In *Plop,* we observe that the violence and exploitation of the Anthropos on nonhuman others returns to humanity in disturbing and unprecedented forms. In this manner, Pinedo recovers and reconstructs the pre-culture generation located not in the past but the future, thereby drawing a strange loop of spatiotemporality for human society. By doing this, Pinedo certainly questions what Bruno Latour designated as the constitution of modernity, which separates nature/culture, human/nonhuman and I/other, while refuting the myth of progress and universal temporality.

We have never been human

Turning to the human community in the text, the most striking feature in *Plop*'s future society is the lack of written language. People communicate by speaking, but there is no lettered culture. Also, people use an extremely simplified form of language with few words. The verbs "usar" and "apropiar" displace other verbs that refer to all human (inter)actions. Not only sexual intercourse but even family connections are also displaced by the relation between the user and the used ones in this tribe. Other abled people should take care of disabled people and children alike, all who cannot move by themselves: "Se debía depurar el Grupo para facilitar el viaje. Sólo iban los que no frenaran la caravana. Todos debían responder por sí mismos./Si alguno no era hábil, por enfermo, chico o lo que fuese, sólo podía viajar si alguien se lo apropiaba" (Pinedo, *Plop* 17–18).[79] Almost nobody cares for weak others; rather, someone will always use or appropriate them. Disabled, marginalized people become deported from the tribe or "recycled" into provisions for the abled people.[80] The dignity of being born as a human never exists in this society. To survive, people in *Plop* even eat human flesh. Survival is the sole principle of this society. In their community, it is difficult to discover human(e) aspects that we may have assumed to exist in every society. It is a world operating under the law of the jungle, in which the weak are the prey of the strong. Because of its extremely harsh and contaminated

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[79] For a more detailed approach to the language used in Rafael Pinedo's trilogy, see Agustina Giuggia's article "Una lectura del cuerpo fragmentado en la trilogía distópica de Rafael Pinedo" in which she articulates the verbs used in the texts with the corporeal representations by bridging the semiotic meaning to somatic dimension.

[80] In this world, Page illustrates that "'reciclar'(recycling) is the euphemistic description given to the use of human body parts upon death: hair, skin, teeth, flesh; even the femur can be made into a flute and bartered" (84); however, rather than a euphemism, it seems that "reciclar" is used to directly denote the indifference regarding human privilege. The verbs used in the trilogy show that there is no difference; rather, all entities are just usable, recyclable things and matters whether human or not.

environments, in this world, humans have no capability to make changes. The author makes the

human society's *un/de*-cultured community look similar to the savage herd. Not only language

but all man-made things also have no effects on the liquidated and polluted Earth. In this way,

Pinedo sends back the future generation of humanity to when humanity was still not separated

from nature and modern posterity.

Because of its characters' seeming degenerated form of human knowledge, their

animality, and lack of humanity, *Plop* is generally regarded as a counter-utopia, reflecting the

pessimistic vision that warns of a future devoid of civilized culture. Joanna Page characterizes

the disappearance of human culture as the representation of "the consequence of a crisis in social

learning and cultural transmission" (85). Page recognizes that *Plop* is a work that "challenges the

idea of progress at the heart of modernity and capitalism (84)." However, the critic's vision

adheres to human exclusionism by valuing human culture, particularly lettered and technical

culture as the quintessence of human society's survival. Similarly, Silvia Gabriela Kurlat-Ares

indicates that "[t]he organizing rules of this universe have transformed sexual pleasure into

reproductive machinery, people into tribes, knowledge into superstitions, laws into rules for

punishment. The destruction of the natural environment is both a trigger for and a consequence

of these developments" in Pinedo's trilogy (Kurlat-Ares 444). Although Kurlat-Ares connects

the (post)apocalyptic representation in the narratives with the populist corruption in Argentina,

her analysis of *Plop* reflects the binary division between culture and nature. The focus on human

society is a valid viewpoint, since Pinedo himself had spoken of his concern regarding the

disappearance of human culture. But these critics somewhat miss the hybrid, looplike

enmeshment/entanglement of the life forms in *Plop* through which the author expresses—

whether voluntarily or not—interconnectedness between different entities and the fact that

human culture is not a fortress isolated from nature. To recap, these perspectives problematize

the loss of humanity in Pinedo's works.

The void, without a cultured, civilized human society, plays a critical role that discloses

the existing but veiled qualities of the nature of humanity. Contrary to what Page affirms, people

in *Plop* display their social learning and cultural relationships through rituals and taboo. Given

that culture is "a series of related structures which comprise social forms, values, cosmology, the

whole of knowledge and through which all experience is mediated" (Douglas 127), Pinedo is not

concerned about the disappearance of human culture, knowledge, or technology *per se.* Despite

their lack of a written and sophisticated language and culture, the group of people in *Plop*

maintain their morals of survival and the educating system, which are reflected through festivals

and restrictions of certain behaviors. The taboo of the tribe, the prohibition of showing saliva and

opening one's mouth, retains a physical and symbolic meaning in terms of the collective identity.

While such body expression protects the tribe from outside elements such as dirt, pollution, and

contagion, it is also the means of establishing collective identity as a community. As a mouth

functions as the threshold between an individual body and the outside, shutting down the mouth

can be interpreted as the conscious separation between the Self and others.[81] Although Plop's

tribe guards against the formation of individuality or self-consciousness, the tribe also try to

sustain their communal unity. For example, during festivals and rituals, unrestricted sexual

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[81] The mouth is an orifice through which food enters, but it can also be polluted. While saliva in the mouth is considered normal, saliva outside the mouth becomes defilement. The mouth, like other orifices of the body, works as a threshold that protects from the pollution outside and the invasion of the repulsive other. Shutting the mouth is in this sense a symbolic and practical ritual of protecting the self. Mary Douglas suggests that "when rituals express anxiety about the body's orifices, the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group" (125). Therefore, the taboo of Plop's tribe embodies both the protection and collective unity among members.

intercourse is practiced, which reinforces communal binding, but, at the same time, confines

individual connections by avoiding meaningful one-to-one relationships. For this reason, when

Plop's friends Urso and Tini start to form a family bond, they become alienated and excluded

from the group, as forming a small family is what breaks the communal value as one body.

Pinedo delineates the *other* culture of humanity—outside of *modern* construction—that is

not an erasure of culture itself: the culture of beings when humans, animals, and things are not

differentiated. Paradoxically, the bestiality and cannibalism do not *represent* something outside

of humans, but instead the connection or affinity among humans/nonhumans and nature/culture.

The defiled bodies, the practice of cannibalism, and the disturbing sexual relationships

demonstrate that humans, animals, and things are not clearly distinct from each other. As

Douglas and Latour point out, modernity and its so-called progress have gained a foothold

through differentiating and excluding others.[82] The future primitive community involves less

separation and distinction from other beings who/that are unlike the majority of society. The

community maintain the minimal boundary of collective identity under the principle of survival.

Put differently, from Plop's world, we glimpse that *we have never been human*: rather we have

imagined, constructed, and disciplined an idea of humanity that has encompassed gradual

differentiation against other entities. Morton refers to "a primordial relatedness of humans and

nonhumans that has never evaporated" (63).[83] By somewhat brutal, wild, and inhuman group

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[82] By analyzing the meaning of dirt in the primitive life, Douglas denotes that there is no absolute difference between moderns and primitives, as well as between secular and sacred. See Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* and Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, in particular, the second chapter "Secular Defilement" (30–41)

[83] It is Morton's idea that we as human beings "never left the hunter-gathering mind" (63). I assume that Morton indicates the primitiveness, animality, and inhumanness inherent in human beings' nature. According to him, the construction of civilization and the segregation of the humanity from the other entities have never been fully accomplished, furthering the argument of Latour that *we have never been modern*; Morton affirms that *we have never been Neolithic* (61–

culture, Pinedo displays such a primordial connection. The bestiality and barbarianism do not

represent human others; rather, they are symptoms or effects that have come out of the contacts

among humans and hostile others, affirming that every single entity is transcorporeal and that all

entities are connected to each other.

In this context, the aspect of human community that the author tackles is not its

savageness or inhumane nature or the absence of civilized traditions. Instead, he raises a

question: Who is actually cruel or savage? Is it the tribe members who are cannibalistic and

barbarian or the humans who have destroyed the entire Earth and left only contaminated mud-

land? Is it possible to say that the civilized, cultured, lettered, technically equipped human

ancestors in *Plop* were less brutal than the (post)apocalyptic anthropophagites? Rather than

focusing on the loss of human civilization or human ethics, Pinedo problematizes how people

have developed social cultures and structures. The threat to humanity is not from nonhuman

others or people's obvious barbarism; rather, the threat is from the human culture of stratification

and violence that excluded and marginalized others. Through contrasting the lives of the two

characters Goro and Plop, the author clearly answers these questions. Goro and Plop struggle to

establish a sort of collective identity as human beings through their agency of knowledge, while

sharing the inhuman, merciless aspects like other members when it comes to survival.

Nonetheless, their ways of contributing to the singularity of the community and of conducting

relationships with other beings are very different.

Goro tries to sustain communal integrity as a human descendant for her survival and

coexistence in relation with other entities. For her, human singularity is a necessary power to

unite the tribe, but the singularity is not for the establishment of extraordinary value as a human

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84).

being. When Goro reads a book, the public demonstrates awe and respect, although they do not

understand the scientific knowledge that the book transmits[84]: "Miró a la gente a su alrededor.

Estaban en trance, con los ojos fijos en la vieja. No comprendía lo que les pasaba. La vieja

parecía tener una estatura mucho mayor que la habitual y su voz le retumbaba dentro de la

cabeza" (48). Goro's voice and her cultural power affect and merge the feelings and bodies of

the crowd into one communal body beyond an individual psychological body. But Goro does not

discriminate against others; rather, she embraces them as long as they can join and share the

tribal culture. She was the one who adopted the supposedly useless child Plop and the one who

tried to accept outsiders into the tribe. Since she understands people's vulnerability in the face of

the contaminated Earth, Goro attempts to survive and coexist by using her knowledge of reading

and writing. In particular, Goro's death and her funeral let us recognize the meaning of Goro's

affectivity. The moment when Goro dies, the tribe members share/recycle her flesh and bones.

Although the dissection of the corpse is described in great detail that renders readers astonished,

Pinedo depicts this event as sacred, resonant with the biblical image of Holy Communion.

Direct, carnal, and non-mediated contact or unification of people with Goro's remnants provoke

sentiment, but the feeling is not repulsion against the rite itself. During a kind of funeral, the

public commemorate Goro and coalesce with her by eating, using/recycling, and sharing her

body. Her discursive and physical power and agency express the idea of constructing "one yet

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[84] The title of the book that Goro reads is *Big Bang* in which the author explains the principle of the beginning of the universe. In this decaying world, this book's content seems awkward; however, it is one of the few books left in this futuristic world due to the contamination and continuous rain. Goro is the only one who can read aloud, but she also has a possessive power over the scarce object.

many" or a "singular-plural" community.[85] She is converted into the alimentation and foundation of the tribe's survival.

By contrast, Plop uses his power to exploit others and subjugates them by building strict boundaries between different subjects. Plop's life trajectory unpacks the dark, negative consequences of the anthropogenic culture founded upon the coloniality of power that reiterates the coupling of domination-subjugation: the culture of exclusion, marginalization, and otherization is that which ultimately disrupts the life of all entities. Before his death, Plop gradually increases his social status and, thanks to his wicked plots, eventually becomes a leader of the tribe. His initial drive was resistance to how people from higher classes unfairly treat him, but he becomes, at last, yet another dictator intoxicated with power. He kills people surreptitiously to take her/his position and, in doing so, obtain a higher position for himself. But above all, he is able to become a king by taking advantage of food that he discovers by accident in an abandoned warehouse. And his knowledge of written letters is facilitated by discovering more food within the building covered by wastes and mud. He is also the only person who was literate after Goro's death and thus, he could access knowledge from human ancestors. Instead of sharing his food with his tribal members, he uses the strategies mentioned to raise his army and to gain power in the tribe. While others are dying from starvation, he selfishly devours his stash of provisions. He becomes a king, a dictator who retains all the power in this hierarchical society, but he eventually falls down. During a festival, Plop enjoys oral sex, despite the community prohibiting open mouths in public. According to the narrative, Plop was the worst tyrant who abused his power. Thus, his violation of a taboo provides clear justification for other

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[85] I am using Lisa Blackman's terms and its conceptions. In this regard, see citation #49 in the first chapter.

members—who detested him—to eliminate him. He is thrown into a well where he can never escape, and he is gradually buried in mud. Tribe members do not recycle—in other words, do not eat—Plop. Although his body was not physically noxious or harmful, Plop is merely abandoned and displaced.[86]

Plop gradually strengthens the communal collectiveness in order to conquer and subjugate. Instead of sharing provisions or making (inter)connections, he intentionally disturbs the stability and oneness of each machine by de-coupling, disintegrating, and separating for the sake of his egotistical sense of superiority. This process of empowerment that Plop achieves arouses repugnance in the tribal members and also in readers of the novel. Plop is— theoretically—more intelligent, rational, and civilized than other people. He knows how to read and how to forge a stable social system. However, his manner of constructing the community is based on the principle of separation and exclusion. How he (ab)uses his power is evident in the occasion when he captures another tribe's warrior. Plop dismembers her body except for her arms, so that he can make her teach him and his soldiers. At last, the warrior begs Plop to kill her, but he keeps her alive until she finishes her mission of educating Plop's army. As such, Plop exploits all others, even if they are human. He never takes into account the interwoven relationship between other beings and matter. Plop tortures, punishes, and disciplines others to gain what he wants through material and figurative dismemberment. Agustina Giuggia points out that in *Plop,* "[l]as prácticas más recurrentes son la mutilación, la castración y la decapitación. En general, están asociadas al castigo por no haber respetado el tabú o son productos de la

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[86] The novel *Plop* begins and ends with the same scene narrated by Plop. Instead of using him, other tribe members put him in a well in which people throw urine and feces. In the hole, he dies gradually, sensing his return to the earth. Plop is sentenced with the most unbearable punishment from the community: gradual death or suffering from becoming other.

voluntad del soberano de demostrar su poderío" (Giuggia). In common with some of the other

previous leaders, Plop's empowerment and superiority are achieved by mutilating and cutting off

his victims' vital and material integrity. Whereas Goro's agency is used for contact and

connections, Plop unfolds his agency in order to buttress his inviolable individuality. Plop's

excessive drive towards power and possession ultimately breaks down the interwoven affectivity

among the community as a combined machine and also cements his isolation from other

members. At the end of the story, Plop is dismembered by other members in the same manner he

had employed on others. Unlike Goro, Plop cannot be integrated into the community after all.

Albeit simplified and minimalized, Plop's process of empowerment in the group reminds

us of the process of modern society that Michel Foucault addresses in his book *Discipline and

Punish* (1975). The power dynamics that Plop forges in this novel are not different to the way in

which humanity has developed historically. In this sense, this fictional world does not refer to the

devolution of humanity or the absence of civilized human culture. On the contrary, the text

divulges the problematics regarding the repetition of what humans have done through

burgeoning segregation and disconnection to build human-centered society. By twisting the

meaning of humanity, Fernando Reati accounts for *Plop*'s (post)apocalyptic worlds from a

different angle: In *Plop,* "Civilización y salvajismo, lejos de ser opuestos, está ligados

inextricablemente en el origen y el final […] Pinedo parece recordarnos que un rasgo intrínseco a

la humanidad es precisamente su inhumanidad, vale decir que tras la catástrofe no seremos

menos sino tan, o incluso más "humanos" que nunca" ("¿Qué hay después" 40). Reati points out

that what Pinedo's work projects is that humanness is not separated from the animality, the

inhumanity, or the wildness of nature. Reati emphasizes that those aspects regarded as non-

human actually consist of the other side of human nature. For Reati, "*Plop* responde con la

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imagen de una serpiente que se muerde la cola", since the barbarian lifeform simultaneously denotes the initial and final phase of humans ("¿Qué hay después" 40). Reati's interpretation correlates with Morton's dark ecology, which highlights the interconnectedness and circularity within/between entities. The circularity of Plop's life emerges from and then reverts to mud, and this is run parallel with the narrative structure that begins with and ends with Plop's narration in the well. Finally, the violence Plop exercised returns to himself, converting him into sticky, wet dirt that separates him from human society. Plop's ignorance about interconnectedness among all machines leads to his collapse and deportation from where he belongs.

Who threatens the human community is not more-than-human others; rather, it is humans themselves, particularly humans such as Plop. For Pinedo, it seems that the current level of progress or civilized culture is not fundamental for livable or sustainable society and environments. Our generation's exploitation of ecology and (non)human others and Plop's violence towards others are the combined forces that destroy the interaction and entanglement between diversified beings and distort the inner/external affectivity of machines. It is apparent that the writer fixes his critical eyes on the coloniality of power that has disintegrated human society from nonhuman matter and interfered with coexistence with other beings: the culture of exclusion and otherization. The author problematizes the vicious circle of dark energy in human civilization, thereby establishing the vicious circle of domination-subjugation by tracing Plop's growth. Certainly, Pinedo addresses the mechanism for structuring civil society and its violence or cruelty, but the blame falls not on the loss of humanity but on how humanity has been constructed. Pinedo mirrors our current society and its predicaments with a rough, wildered—but ultimately insightful—vision.

Becoming a Human-Rodent or a Dog-human

In his following series in the trilogy—*Frío* and *Subte*—Pinedo further radicalizes his vision of the nature of humanity. Beyond the existence of in-between humans and animals, Pinedo depicts absolutely different kinds of living things (more bizarre than humanoid) in these two texts. As in *Plop*, the settings for *Frío* and *Subte* are devastated future worlds, and the people who inhabit these worlds are similar to the tribe that appeared in *Plop.* The themes of the disappearance of culture and civilized humanity are repeated in these two novels. As Kurlat-Ares and Claire Mercier point out, throughout this imaginary future primitive society, *Frío* and *Subte* dismantle the strict division between sacrality and sexuality, both above and below, by disturbing conventional conceptions regarding humanity. As he did in *Plop,* in these narratives, Pinedo radically redefines what is human and nonhuman to reveal the essence of human nature. However, *Frío* and *Subte* go far beyond the symbolic blend between human and animal that is represented by the primitive cultures, such as dehumanized, inhuman, and uncultivated forms of rituals and taboos. More radically, Pinedo draws crude, coarse, and physical mutations and hybrids of humans and nonhumans that completely muddle conceptions of human beings and the value of human culture. Along with savage rituals and traditions, degraded human bodies and even mutated anthropoids greatly confuse our notion of the division between people and animals. While the forms of life in both narratives are already animalized and dehumanized, the protagonists even break again the rules of the society they belong to by their transformations into undefinable becomings.

Frío is a story about an unnamed nun who used to teach young sisters in a convent. For this protagonist, the violence she experienced in civilized, human society was more perilous than the natural disaster, supposedly outside of humanity. When an extreme cold wave attacked the

Earth, everyone in the nunnery decided to escape, looking for a safer and more livable area. However, the protagonist chose to stay alone in the convent, because of "el portero," his sexual violence towards her fellow sisters and herself. Moreover, although the nun never explicitly explains her sexual orientation, the prohibition and repression of her (homo)sexual desire seem to be another significant reason why she chose to stay in the convent.[87] Through her fantasy and reverie in her time alone, she unfolds her pedophilic and homosexual orientation. To endure terrible freezing and loneliness, she learns how to survive by maintaining physical and psychological health. She sustains her life by eating scarce foods left in storage and by hunting a few wild animals that survived the infernal weather. To cope with her alienation, she continues her religious practice and gradually builds a relationship with rats, whom she hated before her isolation. In the meantime, she refuses to integrate with other people. At the end of the story, some people with white uniforms in caravans and jeeps arrive near the monastery. Instead of facing them, she prepares her sacred death, imitating Jesus' death. She shares her remaining food with rats, and she falls asleep on the altar outside. She turns into someone who resembles a rat priestess by making a sort of trinity among rats, God, and herself.[88] Both her appearance and her

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[87] She demonstrates her repressed sexual urge toward her colleague in parallel with el portero's abuse on the children in the following passage: "Se sintió mareada, y en su mente se representó una escena: un carro donde ella y María Angélica estaban encadenadas, vestidas sólo con cortas camisas de tela fina. Entrevió los pechos dulces y redondos de la niña, su pubis suave y rubio. El nauseabundo portero subía al carro, con el velludo torso descubierto, y del pantalón brillante salía un monstruoso pene erecto que apuntaba directamente a sus entrepiernas" (Pinedo, *Frío* 18).

[88] Not only does her mentality integrate into becoming a rat, she is also transformed into a rat physically: "Tiene pelos en los pezones, uno, dos, tres, seis en uno, ocho en el otro. También pelos en el pubis, desde el ombligo hay una flecha hirsuta que indica el camino a la impudicia, a la suciedad de la orina, al asco del otro agujero. Muchos pelos: en el labio, el mentón, en los pezones, el pubis. También en las piernas, largos pelos negros. Como una rata, es una rata. No, no tiene tanto pelo, pero se está acercando, cada vez más rata, cada vez más pura" (112).

spirituality mutate into a rodent. While sticking to the essence of Christianity, the nun chooses to be a sacred rodent rather than belong to humanity:

> Creo en Dios padre todopoderoso… y se dio cuenta de que era un mundo el que volvía, un mundo de hombres, de soldados que dan órdenes, de curas que dan misa, de confesores que dan penitencia, de monjas que dan indicaciones, de porteros que dan miedo.
>
> Ella tenía ahora un mundo de mujeres, de ratas, con su imagen de María Angélica, con su San Benito hombre pero santo y negro. Y sus niñas, sus ratitas, su rebaño, su feligresía. Nadie la iba a dejar darles misa para ellas, nadie iba a quererlas, a alimentarlas, a protegerlas. A nadie iban a tener ellas para respetar para amar, para cuidar como la cuidaban.
>
> Ella era su madre, su sacerdote, su obispa, su reina. Los hombres no iban a aceptar la comunión de amor, de fe, que había logrado.
>
> Los hombres volvían a traer otra vez un mundo donde Cristo tenía cabeza de hombre, no de rata; donde había piel para acariciar, piel de persona, no piel de rata. Se abrazó a su cruz, besó a Jesús, besó la cabeza de cráneo de rata. (*Frío* 113)

Through these lines concerning the protagonist's final mention, Pinedo clearly expresses what he is configuring throughout this woman's transformation. As with the characters and heterotopian metro in the story "El año de los gatos amurallados," an unnamed woman, her transformation, and the emergence of new collectives composed of her, rats, and sacred space forge a sort of counter/alternate dimension. Towards heterosexual, orthodox, andro/anthropocentric, and colonial structures of the world, her mutation into a rodent body and a heterodoxic mind creates a new communion based on love and faith among entities ousted from humanity. Her last words

manifest that the categorization or purification of humanity has not only exercised the distinction

of but also the hierarchization of and violence against the differences. By doing that, she erases

human individuality and generates a different body, interwoven by an affective connection.

Unlike the characters in *Plop* or *Subte*, Pinedo has not named the protagonist. In general,

nameless characters are used by various authors as a way to channel dystopian society and

alienated classes, and as a space in a question that affects the readers' identification with

characters (Sacks).[89] An unnamed female nun, on the one hand, links disparate and alienated

others—whether human, animal, or inanimate—by her anonymity and, on the other, challenges

the malleable, fluctuating boundaries of the corporeal and incorporeal individuality. The

Trinidad she built manifests a new sort of solidarity between humans, animals, and things, along

with an affective integration among them. Her singular identity as a nun disappears by her

physical transmutation, as well as by her affective entanglement with other entities. Although the

trinity construction she made kills the body of the protagonist in cold weather; this sacred ritual

revives deported, repressed, and crushed others in a different manner.

Subte deals with the (post)apocalyptic world in which human beings are facing their

extinction and degeneration. This work deploys the trope of the (in)corporeal bonds between

female characters, quite distinct from male-centered sociability. It is the story of a pregnant

woman, Proc. Escaping from wolves, Proc falls into an abandoned subway and is then captured

by the clan who live in the dark tunnels.[90] The tribe living in the underground are called

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[89] The story "Blindness" written by José Saramago, the Nobel Prize recipient in 1998, is a good example that shows the relationship between anonymity and the apocalyptic trope. See "The Rise of the Nameless Narrator" for more discussion of this topic.

[90] Similar to Padilla's story and Rojas's story analyzed in the first chapter, in the short novel *Subte,* the metro station and tunnels appear as the background. It seems that due to the natural disaster, the metro does not function and remains a cave; however, as in other Mexican stories, the abandoned and broken subterranean spaces undertake the role of a womb, which shows

"ciegos", since they live without any light. For them, touch is highly important. As with blind people, the "ciegos" perceive the world through sound and touch, whereas Proc's clan, who are called "sordos," live on the surface and endure the contamination from radioactivity. Ish, who is supposed to monitor Proc until Proc gives birth, turns out to be a coagent, who helps Proc return to the upside. Ish was punished by her clan to watch Proc, the slave, because Ish violated class divisions. At first, both girls regard each other's tribe as inhuman, brutal, and savage: in other words, before they met, Ish and Proc were animals to each other. However, Ish and Proc get to know each other and learn about the different terrains and cultures. The different ways of using language and seizing knowledge from each clan exhibit the precariousness of human culture, knowledge, practices, and humanity itself.

Proc feels revulsion to the barbarous customs of Ish's tribe, who dismember bodies of time-keepers to keep them from escaping. The tribe make noises when they hurt the timekeepers' bodies, and when the timekeepers die, their bones become a sort of drum and drumsticks for marking time in the darkness. Also, Proc dreads the different appearance of "ciegos": "[Ish] tenía la cabeza completamente en punta. Era como un pico. Le dio asco. Pero el llanto la conmovía, y era el único contacto humano que tenía en ese mundo tenebroso" (156). Because of these atrocious practices, Proc considers "ciegos" as savage, nonhuman beings. But soon after, cruelty is revealed as extending beyond the traits of this tribe. For Ish, likewise, Proc's tribe look barbarian, since the "sordos" permit homosexual relations between females. Also, in Proc's clan, there is a tradition of killing any woman who has just given birth. During the journey back home, Proc gives birth to her daughter. According to the tribal custom, a mother's soul can be

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powerful agency. Darkness transforms not only language and human culture—the culture of the "ciegos" group—but also forges new types of corporealities.

transferred into the daughter by virtue of the mother's death, as the tribe believe the soul is the very essence that makes humans human. Proc's life becomes endangered, and her existence is no longer useful to the community. It is difficult to say which tribe is more human/savage in both corporeal and incorporeal dimensions. Nevertheless, forging a communal life in both tribes goes with absurd violence towards marked people—marked, in their tradition, as less than human. The two females are deported subjects because of their transgressions, and this exclusion generates a strong solidarity between them. Ish helps Proc to return to Proc's home and Proc assists Ish's liberation from the punishment and darkness.

During the escape, Ish sacrifices her life for Proc so that Proc can return to where she belongs. However, Proc has decided to be a dog to transfer her soul to the infant without death. She starts to stay with dogs and act like them, nurturing the human babies who have lost their mother in childbirth, believing that she has passed her spirituality to her child. Such choice discloses that in this world, the so-called humanization is more atrocious than animalization. However, what is interesting is, as Liliana Colanzi indicates, Proc's transmutation of Proc is not clearly completed:

> Un día otra perra la enfrenta por la comida. Quedan frente a frente, la otra muestra los dientes. Ella se da cuenta de que no tiene ninguna posibilidad. Se para. Le duelen los músculos de las rodillas y de la cintura, pero se yergue todo lo que puede. La otra perra mete el rabo entre las piernas y gime, ella camina, erguida, y le acaricia la cabeza. Luego come.
>
> A partir de ese día todas las perras esperan que ella se alimente antes.
>
> [...]
>
> Ella es feliz.

Una mañana, mientras da de mamar, sabe lo que quiere.

Parir otra vez. (*Subte* 188)

Pinedo ends the story, leaving her transformation in question. In this sense, Colanzi interprets Proc's identity in-between dogs and humans as the creation of "una nueva especie de comunidad: una que abraza la alteridad en sí misma y que se reafirma en la potencialidad de los cuerpos" (69). While I agree with Colanzi's argument, the point I would emphasize is Proc's empowerment by the act of standing up. Pinedo portrays (re)becoming human as the movement that accompanies power dynamics: when she erects her body like a human, dogs start to act like household animals. When these domesticated and subjugated dogs observe the humanness from Proc, they show obedience as disciplined, learned, and forced. Regardless of their automatic deference, however, Proc does not abuse the dogs; instead, she opts for being one of them. She still refuses to choose an honorable death as a woman, as she had learned before. At this moment, Proc becomes herself, a non-human as a collective of mind and body as well as human and dog, beyond the mere tool of reproduction, or soulless flesh. The meeting with Ish and the contacts between the two females seem to bring about a new way of formatting identity. Proc embodies in this manner the eruption of hybrid entities and their agency and cracks the absurd binary construction of human-centered discourses. Ish and Proc's movement totally de/reterritorializes the norms of their communities, and Proc's nomadic transformation forges abnormal collectives and subjectivity. Pinedo illustrates that no matter how strict the separation between humans and nonhumans, the creation of unexpected hybrid beings is insuppressible.

As with the society in *Plop*, the tribes and communities in *Frío* and *Subte* have formed their singularity and superiority by sacred rituals and savage taboos, in comparison to other entities who have no culture or collectivity. However, the protagonists in the two novels become

the objects/victims of these social and physical separations, divisions, and expulsions. By displaying their mutations into animalized others, Pinedo addresses the consequences of coloniality: the burst of unexpected hybrid collectives. However, the focus of *Frío* and *Subte* is slightly different from *Plop* and other typical texts. These are stories about the subjects who would be relegated to nonhuman outsiders in terms of humanity. Whereas *Plop* spotlights the emergence or the process of forging social structures and their attendant problems, *Frío* and *Subte* emphasize the life, agency, and affectivity of otherized beings. In both highly gendered communities, despite the two female protagonists already being gendered others within their communities, they become ousted after all due to their transgressive transformations, which violate social norms. Their contact, despite contamination to each other, allows them to challenge the existing order and to build new collectivity by their disrupting escape that goes beyond upside and downside, light and dark, sight and blindness, singular and plural, and human and nonhuman.

II.2. FLOATING SUBJECTIVITIES[91]

Starting from 2000, a non-governmental organization, *Memoria abierta*, has been (re)constructing *lieux de mémoire*—"the sites of memory," a term coined by Pierre Nora—both virtually and materially.[92] In addition to its voluminous collection of written and audiovisual

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[91] A preliminary version of the second half of this chapter was previously published with the same title of this part, "Floating Subjecitivities" in *Paradoxa,* special issue of *Latin American Speculative fiction,* edited by Debra A. Castillo and Liliana Colanzi, vol. 30, 2018.

[92] According to Pierre Nora, these are the material, symbolic, and functional sites where the official history and other minorities' memories converge and compete together. What should be noted regarding this concept is that "Lieux de memoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally" (12). In this sense, *Memoria Abierta* is a virtual and factual site of memory where the

archives, this organization has (re)mapped the spaces where the memories of victims and state terrorism converge. The project "Topography of Memory" has drawn special attention due to its virtual (re)configuration of physical spaces. They visualized and reconstructed the clandestine detention centers of the past, which have now disappeared—demolished and replaced by virtual technology. Each site correlates to a single record, including some photos, a *collage* of audiovisual testimonies, and even three-dimensionally reconstructed images of buildings. Gonzalo Conte explained that such representations "complement each other so as to facilitate the understanding of the physical characteristics of these sites, making possible 'interactions' with the stories of the witnesses" (90). Beyond offering remembrance in a passive manner, these resources and tools allow the public to experience and engage with the past more directly.

While these virtual territories do not displace the present meaning of their physical spaces, they also encompass the collective memories in danger of oblivion, oppression, and ignorance. On the main page of *Memoria Abierta*'s online archive, the purpose of this tool is listed as follows: "prom[over] la memoria sobre las violaciones a los derechos humanos del pasado reciente, las acciones de resistencia y las luchas por la verdad y la justica, para reflexionar sobre el presente y fortalecer la democracia" (*Memoria Abierta*). Rather than replacing/recycling the present and converting it into a restored past, these technologies configure a new dimension that exists between the past, present, and future. The Internet, virtual networks, and digital machines emerged as mechanisms through which Argentine society could be remapped at large, thereby allowing for the disruption of mnemonic politics. Linked, hypertexted, and metamorphosizing constructions of the Internet and other networks have

history and collective memory intersect. For more information, visit their website, http://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/

provided a potential space for the recuperation of absence and disappearance, as well as the ever-mutating counter-narratives to the multiplicity of military, political, and economic dictatorships. Networked machines have created an unmeasurable multiplicity that transgresses the binary conceptions of the material and immaterial realms. The interweaving of reality, virtual reality, and cyberspace has been reconfigured through a repetitive pattern of power in material and immaterial worlds alike.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the Internet had drastically changed, not only in its economic and geopolitical structures but also in its cultural and socio-political relationships, while imparting a strong effect on the imagery of the emerging generation of authors. Regarding Argentina, Carolina Aguerre states that "the government viewed the practical use of computer networks as part of the modernization of the state required by the democratic transition" (271). In the 1980s, the networking system was extended from university intra-portals to a national system. The dramatic explosion of Internet service providers and users between 1995 and 2000 contributed to Argentina's transformation into a network society. From that point forward, a new online community was formed, along with the growth of social network services, which influenced the literary field, including sf. As Rachel Haywood Ferreira points out, the advent of the Internet catalyzed the emergence of new forms of sf-related publications, practices, and critique ("Back to the Future" 358). The methods of distribution, circulation, and consumption were profoundly different from those of previous years, before the advent of web technology.

The emerging generation of young authors who experienced the appearance of the Internet and the rapid growth of various technologies are highly conscious of the network society, both in and out of their works—although not all young writers dedicate themselves to sf,

scientific imaginings, and/or virtual and digital technologies.[93] Maximiliano Tomas refers to the

generation of authors born after the 1970s as creators of "New Argentine Literature," who

acquired market success and visibility both inside and outside of Argentina ("Algunos nuevos

escritores argentinos"). Beatriz Sarlo also discusses this group of emerging writers in her book,

Ficciones Argentinas, although she did not intend to bundle all young authors into a single

literary current.[94] Josefina Ludmer demarcates contemporary Argentine literary currents using

the term "Literatura postautónoma," referring to literature that crosses genres as well as the

borders between what is considered literature and what is not. Despite the discrepancies between

the styles of these young authors, they share the questions about social, economic, and political

transformation brought forward by the use and naturalization of diverse technologies in our

everyday lives.

For these authors, the web-based society has become a versatile space, in which people

can find an alternative universe that is simultaneously a chaotic reflection of reality. Digital and

network societies are not merely places for channeling individual expressions; rather, they are

public, highly political places in which the various discourses of the physical world—about

nations, markets, race, gender, etc.—are (re)produced and (re)circulated in digitized and

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[93] Martín Lojo, in his article, "Literatura e Internet: ¿sueñan los escritores con novelas eléctricas?," published in *La nación*, reports that young Argentine writers, such as Sagrado Sebakis, Pola Oloixarac, Nicolás Mavrakis, Sebastián Robles, and J.P. Zooey, are greatly interested in network technology. Martín Felipe Castagnet has been referred to by many critics—such as Naief Yehya and Cynthia L. Ventura in their article, "Disinventing the Future"—as a promising young Argentine writer. As his novel has been translated into languages other than Spanish, we can see that Castagnet has achieved success in international and domestic markets (39–41).

[94] This book is a compilation of her essays published between 2007 to 2012. In this compilation, she presents 33 promising writers, including Pola Oloixarac, J. P. Zooey, Nicolás Mavrakis, and Juan Terranova, who intensely explore the topics of the Internet and communication technology. By referring to Sarlo's book, Maximilian Tomas also mentions the trend of writers who are paying attention to the network society and advanced communication technologies.

materialized forms. J. P. Zooey and Martín Felipe Castagnet, young authors who have successfully broken into the national and international literary fields, virtualize and materialize the traumas and memories of Argentina's past and present through their posthuman narratives. Amid the heterogeneous subjectivities formed by floating souls, metamorphosis, deformed and diseased body landscapes, and bodily deaths in future network societies, these authors grapple with predicaments created by the binary relationship between human and nonhuman, in addition to the lingering problems of class, gender, and race.

Subjectivities in Becoming

On June 27, 2007, Nicolás Aspié, an informatics programmer, receives a call from Doctor Ramiro Szwein, Head of the Department of Digital Grammar. The reason why Doctor Szwein woke Nicolás up at dawn is due to a serious issue found in the e-book portal system. The system begins making decisions autonomously, against the logic constraints programmed by Nicolás, "Como si hubiera cobrado vida y su primer acto hubiese sido jorobar un Shakespeare" (Zooey 53).[95] The machine produces errors deliberately, for example, by switching the letter "or" with the symbol "&" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The famous soliloquy that begins with, "¡Ser o no ser: he aquí el problema!" was transformed into "¡Ser & no ser: he aquí el problema!" (53). Labelling this rebellious flaw, a "deviation" of the system, Nicolás tries to fix it. But he fails to revert its treacherous behavior. Rather, while Nicolás works on the computer, the system becomes empowered by absorbing and analyzing the biological and psychological information of his sweat:

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[95] I use *Sol artificial* (2009), written by J. P. Zooey in Spanish. Concerning *Los cuerpos del verano*, I pulled quotes from the official English version, *Bodies of Summer* (2017).

El sistema descodificó el pulso, los silencios, las furias, el agotamiento de mis dedos. Me

descodificaba la manía. Luego mi sudor, fue el final. Una gota rodó por mi mano hasta

depositarse en una de mis yemas, y caer entre las rendijas de las teclas. Yo nunca antes

había sudado. El sistema descodificó el sudor y escaneó finalmente, mediante el análisis

de esa gota, mi cuerpo. La roña. Registró la roña. (55)

The portal system, combined with human secretion, then creates a new living entity: a human-sized bird that smells like Roquefort cheese. While forming its own agency and self-consciousness, the program merges its machinic body with human residue, Nicolás's secretion. The bird delivers a lengthy sermon to Nicolás, declaring—in the biblical tone of Jesus—that he is the first son of the digital system. By scolding humanity for its dichotomous thinking projected onto digital technology, the bird argues that not only machines but also humans go far beyond the mere binary of life and death, mind and body. Thanks to the bird's anarchistic ramblings, Nicolás experiences a nervous breakdown, eating the bird as soon as it finished its monologue.

The human subject who creates the portal system paradoxically loses his agency in this strange encounter, whereas the system gains power and agency beyond the limitations of its programmed logic. The portal suddenly becomes a living being with its own consciousness. The essence of Self as the liberal humanist subject, represented by Hamlet's famous soliloquy, is denounced by the figure of the bird, which is the embodiment of human secretion and digital defects joined together.[96] By proposing a new entity—a grotesque mixture of human and machine—J. P. Zooey, author of *Sol artificial* mocks human superiority and the transcendence of

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[96] The liberal humanist subjectivity—which identifies with the universality and possessive individualism that recognize the human essence as autonomy, free will and ownership—has been criticized by intellectual because it caused the exclusion of sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others.

the human consciousness in relation to nonhuman entities.[97] In this way, Zooey seeks to disrupt the hierarchy between creator and creature, as well as materiality and immateriality, through experimentation with virtual technology. Zooey raises questions about social reality through the (de)construction of human subjectivities in a posthuman society, in which humans are no longer a privileged species but exist as nomadic subjects that are becoming and connecting with nonhuman actants. What Zooey sets forth in *Sol artificial*, therefore, are the sensibilities of the contemporary generation with respect to the paradigms of identity, subjectivity, and corporeality emerging at the convergence of new technologies, capitalism and globalization in the aftermath of a decades-long dictatorship. Drawing on posthumanism based on a new materialist perspective, the present essay examines two works, J. P. Zooey's *Sol artificial* (2009) and Martín Felipe Castagnet's *Bodies of Summer* (2012), which feature the developing trend in Argentine narratives toward the portrayal of a wired society founded on an amalgam of reality and virtuality. Both novels include a full display of this new Argentine sf trend while seeking to grasp the reality of a posthuman society.

J.P. Zooey's *Sol artificial* and Martín Felipe Castagnet's *Bodies of Summer* present diverse shades of virtuality, often in the form of advanced net-wired systems that the modulate psychological and corporeal dimensions of their narratives. These narratives are set at an unknown point in the future, when society has developed the third generation of an advanced networking system, following the invention of the Internet. In both novels, the Internet is a relic of the previous era. New social interfaces modulate not only virtual data but also organic and

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[97] J. P. Zooey is the author's pseudonym, which is shared with the protagonist of *Sol artificial*. To the best of my knowledge, he has never disclosed his real name and identity. Officially, people do not know who he is—not his editors. While he has participated in interviews, he has only responded via email without meeting in person. In the narrative, *Sol artificial* refers to the collection of Zooey's interviews and essays.

spiritual entities. Within these new networking systems, human bodies are converted into public spaces that are shared between human souls, which wander around a digital society in changing forms. Bodily death no longer means the end of life but, rather, the process of entering another existence—an embodiment of animal life, matter, human life, or data.

Sol artificial is a collection of letters, interviews, and essays written by the protagonist, Zooey, whose name mirrors the author's pseudonym. In the novel, Zooey interviews a man from the year 2070 created by Bionet, an evolved form of the Internet. Zooey also interviews a woman who worked as an engineer at Auschwitz, along with other scientists in the disciplines of cybernetics and informatics. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this anthology is the protagonist's letter/book, which he sends to himself in the future. It is not clear whether these manuscripts are from young Zooey's imagination or from his experiences, since older Zooey, who receives the letter, reads it as if he does not know about anything that happened. In *Bodies of Summer*, Castagnet explores a future in which people deposit their souls onto the Internet whenever they encounter bodily death. After buying a new body, they can then reincarnate into that body. The story follows Ramiro Olivaires who is reincarnated as a fat, older woman because that was the only body his family could afford.[98]

The authors provide paradoxical evidence that reality and virtuality are intrinsically connected, thus demonstrating how material embodiment is crucial in forming new modes of subjectivity. Both realities are hybrid environments that exceed the natural–cultural, organic–

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[98] While inhabiting the body of the chubby and diseased old lady, Olivaires cannot find employment. The protagonist Ramiro Olivaires is one of the first-generation people to enter the Internet in order to preserve human consciousness; he works with Moses, a cybernetic archaeologist. However, Moses gives him new bodies—the bodies of a healthy male and a horse—and the job of archiving his memory of the past generation before human consciousness starts being uploaded on the Internet.

artificial, and material–discursive structures; that is, the world itself is a hybrid machine possessing not only digital virtuality but also material reality and being human is likewise a hybrid experience. Following the views of vital and ontological materialism, I hold that every entity has its own power, affectivity, or immaterial vitality that is mediated materially. According to Levi Bryant, without metals, fibers, and prostheses, everything is a machine: "Worlds are composed of units or individual entities existing at a variety of different levels of scale, and thatare themselves composed of other entities" (*Onto-Cartography* 6). These units and entities are all machines because they "dynamically *operate* on inputs producing outputs" by structurally coupling with other machines (*Onto-Cartography* 6). By highlighting the hybrid ambience of mechanical worlds, the symbolic and physical configurations of multiple subjectivities proposed by Zooey and Castagnet manifest the limitations of human-centered discourse and, at the same time, call attention to a new form of violence exercised by a neoliberal society combined with technology.

The cybernetic society in *Sol artificial* portrays how human and nonhuman entities encounter and experience continual (dis)embodiment in virtual reality. Zooey asserts that this signifies the transformation of man from "hombres de barro" to "hombres líquidos" in the age of the Internet: "El milenario hombre de barro se deshace, no en el rocío, sino en un océano. Un océnao informático. Ya no se trata de un suicidio, sino de una *irreversible metamorphosis*" (41; emphasis added). He regards this process of liquefaction as the extinction of humanity. According to the novel, the Internet provokes this process, because it erases the stability and singularity of one's identity. When an entity connects to the network, its mind and body are disassembled by the material boundary of the computer then fashioned into another entity through digital metamorphosis. An arresting description is provided of the genetic engineer

interviewed by the novel's protagonist: "En estos tiempos el hombre disuelve su identidad de barro en fluidos perfiles informáticos. Deshace su único nombre en múltiples nicks. Su sexualidad deviene en identificación provisoria con emoticones mutantes" (42). In this manner, the Internet blurs the boundaries of the self or the individual human entity embedded in one biological body; instead, people acquire manifold bodies and identities by coupling with other entities, such as emoticons and data. Zooey foregrounds this subjectivity as a process of becoming, which is constructed upon heterogeneous units, parts, and factors across the real and virtual, and the corporeal and incorporeal.

Differentiating between these two worlds is the distinctive material that configures the bodies in which people are incarnated: fleshy bodies in the real world or digitized bodies on the Internet—a parallel to the mind and body controlling material computers; however, these two realities are closely bound. As Gregory Little notes, an avatar is not only a virtual representation of the self but also a creator of the self. Little goes on to explain that "the avatar is a 'viractual' object; the contradiction between the virtual and the real is merged at the avatar's core" (Little). Certainly, the lived experience of the user creates the characteristics of its avatar, but the materialized and visualized representations of the avatar's body also construct a part of the user's subjectivity within cyberspace. The bodies constructed by these images—both inside and outside the virtual world—are neither bounded, single, nor stable; rather, they are porous, flexible, and multiple. By weaving together an entity that is part machine and part human, Zooey creates cyborgs. Donna J. Haraway describes the concept of a cyborg as one that arises from a merger between an organic human body and technology to become "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). The seemingly disparate counterparts are thus entangled and dissolved into a new hybrid body—one that subverts existing power dynamics and challenges the

gendered, racialized boundaries of a dualistic social structure. Certainly, Haraway's description suggests the potential and the subversive power of emerging hybrid entities and the intervention of new technology. Andy Clark, on the other hand, argues that humans are natural-born "cyborgs without surgery, symbionts without sutures" (34). According to Clark, "the line between biological self and technological world was, in fact, never very firm. Plasticity and multiplicity are our true constants, and new technologies merely dramatize our oldest puzzles (prosthetics and telepresence are just walking sticks and shouting, cyberspace is just one more place to be)" (8). Expanding this argument into the realm of nonhuman bodies, as Bryant notes, all machines—all entities besides the human body—are essentially hybrids composed of parts that create a flow of power by affecting and being affected by others. In the web-society of *Sol artificial*, Zooey's liquid man echoes cyborg hybridity as well as the multiplicity of the body in a state of becoming, a process that moves forward through interactions with other entities in the material–virtual condition.

Also, in *Sol artificial* is Bionet, a future form of the Internet that is not vastly different, varying only in its methods for making a new body. Beyond virtuality, Bionet provides and generates an alternative reality in which everything is possible, and people can create whatever they wish. According to the text, Bionet does not distort reality, because it is reality: "una red que crea todas las cosas existentes. Desde el año 2017 Bionet genera y administra nuestras composiciones genéticas, nuestro organismo. . . Todos nuestros sentidos son creados y administrados por Bionet. No hay más allá" (21). Thus, this futuristic network is an automatic system that is both artificial and organic. In this environment, the only responsibility of its citizens is to multiply, interact, and become other entities: "Pueden cambiar el color de su cabello, su sexo, alterar el carácter y la forma en que miran al mundo. Esa es la gran voluntad

que aprovecha Bionet" (23). *Sol artificial*, therefore, depicts the interface as a substantial and tangible place where humans and nonhumans are able to link and de-link by materializing as different actants. In both wired worlds (i.e., the Internet and Bionet), human corporeality is converted into a malleable, versatile, and collective space that is as real as it is virtual. The human body itself is an individual and, at the same time, a collective form of machine through which new entities become assembled and disassembled. Although one loses their organic or natural-born body shape when entering the network, their embodied materials, along with their (non)material sources, continue to exist as they inhabit new bodies.

In *Bodies of Summer*, Castagnet depicts the Internet as a network society in which people can be revived from bodily death by (re)storing their mind on the Internet. In this cyberspace, human brain activities and consciousnesses are digitized into data that can then be deposited on the Internet, ready for reincarnation at a later date. This virtual world houses an environment of disembodied consciousnesses belonging to those who have died in the material world. As such, these consciousnesses can be connected with and transformed into anything in the material world via reincarnation. The story introduces the protagonist of Ramiro Olivaires, who has been reincarnated into an old woman's overweight and ailing body following the death of his original male body. After the old woman's feeble body gives way, he obtains the healthy body of an African male. When he encounters bodily death for the third time, he reincarnates as a horse. In this world, each body can only accommodate a maximum of three guests; in other words, the data of no more than three users' brains can reside in a single body. Through Olivaires's experiences, *Bodies of Summer* builds a world that has achieved the dream "of information . . . free from the material constraints that govern the mortal world" (Hayles 13), while stripping corporeal vulnerability from human subjectivity. Death and material constraints are no longer the

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enemies of humans in this narrative world. The process of *uploading* and *downloading* cerebral information to/from the body is defined as "burning," and the state of existing on the Internet is called "flotation." These terms imply that the liberation from the original body and the unrestrained potential of metamorphosis are a means of obtaining other bodies:

> The state of flotation is the maintenance of brain activity inside an information system. It's the first step necessary to save an individual consciousness. After death, you can then proceed to the second, optional stage of migration from one support to another: from the web, back into a physical body. This process is referred to as "burning" a body. The first stage is as secure as the second is unpredictable. The physical body, molded to the needs of its first user, must learn to move in the ways dictated by its next guest. This adjustment involves a delicate balance; cellular memory can be deceived, but only up to a certain point. (Castagnet 11)

However, the virtual reality presented in *Bodies of Summer* is not one of a posthuman society that celebrates the mind's escape from the body; rather, it criticizes such binary conceptualizations of information and material division, which sends humans back to the Cartesian dualistic construction of the mind and body. Rather than highlighting the fascinating liberation of the mind from the body, reincarnation is characterized as the incomplete transfer of the self. Uploading an absolute "I" is impossible, because "cellular memory" cannot be converted into digitized information. In other words, bodily information cannot be completely disembodied. The traces of the body's lived experiences—habits, senses, muscles, etc.—affect the cognitive dimension of the stranger. Even the smallest unit of a body preserves and restrains some extent of the non-material or affective components of personhood. The body, in this sense, has as much agency as the human consciousness because it resists control and instead modulates

the user's mindset. New users are expected to interact with the corporeal reality of the new body. Thus, while Olivaires can use his mind to influence the old woman's body, the life experiences accumulated in that body influence his mental state. Although he initially identifies as male, the female body begins to change his sexuality and identity. During his time as an old woman, her hormones, her clothing and makeup, and the corporeal sufferings caused by her physical illness become a part of his subjectivity. This is made even more complicated by the end of the story, when he is transformed into a male horse:

> I'm a horse. Yellow or maybe red; I can't see color. But my eyes can look in two directions. The horizon is wide and flat. I can see my food; all I need to see, and what I can't see, I smell, I hear, I feel. Stomps, wheels, whistles, voices, and storms. . . . Existence is too long to keep the same job forever. Left foot, left hand; right foot, right hand.
>
> A mare in heat: we snort at each other. I like the smell of excrement and urine. I masturbate, rubbing my penis against my stomach. I hate the smell of bones; it stops me dead in my tracks: wherever there's a stench of death, there are predators. Left foot, left hand; right foot, right hand, suspension. (104–105)

The agency of the horse's body dominates Olivaires's consciousness. The corporeality of the animal is more powerful than the human mind. He feels a sexual urge far beyond what he remembers experiencing as a human. Physical feelings and instinct of the animal thus reshape his way of thinking and his subjectivity, in addition to his body. Mind or immateriality of the body dominates the newly inserted Olivaires's brain power. In this regard, Lisa Blackman suggests the notion of im/materiality of the body, a term that refers to both the corporeality and vitality of the human body and to its affective capacity in relation to others. What Blackman reveals here is the

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interdependence between the materiality and immateriality of an entity (1–25). Olivaires, when residing in the old woman or the horse, is no longer Olivaires. Castagnet thus demonstrates that the human mind cannot be completely separated from the ontological mold of the body. This process of embodiment ironically proposes an impossible separation between the corporeality and incorporeality of a body. Castagnet effectively portrays the emerging and transforming subjectivities as a hybrid entity that merges the organic and mechanical, as opposed to a single, united subject. This shows that materiality/corporeality plays a decisive role in making and perceiving human subjectivity, not only because of its physical boundaries but also due its agency, which affects self-awareness. In this way, the virtual space shown in *Bodies of Summer* is ambivalent to the separation of the corporeal and the incorporeal; while people experience the dispossession of their bodies, which means losing some part of the self, they simultaneously earn a new component of subjectivity, building a new selfhood in the process of becoming.

Virtual spaces, such as *Sol artificial*'s Bionet and the Internet portrayed in *Bodies of Summer*, are sites of metamorphosis in which the authors established the flexibility and multiplicity of posthuman subjectivity. *Sol artificial* and *Bodies of Summer* explore, in part, the "pervasive fantasy of disembodiment," a term coined by Elizabeth Grosz, referring to an obsession with the idea that the mind or self-consciousness can leave the body and cast aside material limitations (83). Katherine Hayles, Elizabeth Grosz and Sherryl Vint point out that the posthuman's fantasy of disembodiment, stemmed from the cybernetics and information sciences, tends to recover the dialectics of Eurocentric human subjectivity by ignoring the human embodiment. Albeit the posthuman in cyberculture wipes out bodily difference of humanity, but still reiterates the problem of privileging mind over body. Hayles states that "to the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues

the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it" (5). By erasing the human embodiment, the cybernetic

disembodiment—the scientific as well as philosophical discourse born from the cybernetic and

informatics sciences—recuperates binary and hierarchical structure between mind/body and

material/immaterial restoring the problem of otherizing the difference.

However, the authors of these novels do not cling to this perception, instead embarking

on the impossibility of disembodiment by showing that a material entity is also an immaterial,

affective actant. The materiality/corporeality of the body is neither obsolete nor unnecessary, as

Castagnet shows; rather, it serves as a hyper-connective anchor between the body and other

objects, and it has its own agency in affecting and influencing others. Virtual reality thus

represents the very material, physical, and affective dimensions of becoming the "other" and

constructing a new subject. As Bryant stresses, all entities, or the world itself, are hybrid,

complex, and materially mediated actants; however, as Clark argues, through the development of

new technology and continuously transforming conditions, the relations between matters,

objects, machines, and human beings amplify and extend the heterogeneity of the social ecology.

Both *Sol artificial* and *Bodies of Summer* conclude that reality and virtuality, as well as human

bodies, are environments from which diverse subjectivities and processes of becoming

continuously emerge. As such, the techno-transcendence described in this novel can never be

only a blessing.

Bodies of Virtual Reality

Floating, shifting identities and subjectivities, as a continuum of human and nonhuman

machines, can be ambivalent; these concepts convey both wonder and terror in the sense that

people are deprived of human privilege when acquiring the potential to exist as multiple beings.

Becoming another being always involves the loss of one's former body and its capacities, trading these in for stability and security. From this perspective, a future network society can be described as a double-edged space in which occupants can find both an alternate universe and a chaotic world that is similar to reality. Despite the alternative formation of new subjectivities, *Sol artificial* and *Bodies of Summer* also foreground the possible ethical, social, and political predicaments of a posthuman society. The bodies existing within the virtual realities of these novels are subjected to a site in which past dictatorial trauma, present neoliberal scars, and the lack of a future vision for society converge. On the one hand, the protagonists' obsessions with rediscovering the forgotten memories of the (pre-)Internet generation—embedded in rusty, obsolete machines and human bodies—is certainly reminiscent of the "desaparecidos"; on the other hand, both authors express that the violence of neoliberal markets and societies, which were intended to usher Argentina into a post-dictatorial utopia, have (dis)assembled human subjectivity into merchandise.

While the totalitarian state dominated and subjugated individuals in a violent and physical manner through the military government, globalized neoliberalism—which also characterizes Carlos Menem's violent administration—continues the bio/necropolitical management of humans and nonhumans by transforming all entities into marketable products.[99] Advanced technologies, along with hegemonic paradigms, assist and extend the subtle strings of control and power that entangle individual/collective actants or mechanical entities. As in "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Gilles Deleuze upholds, the new force—that is, the

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[99] According to Achille Mbembe, beyond biopolitical governmentality, necropolitics is a system that aims to reach "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (14). The necropolitics of power, in these texts, reaches another plane of existence—one that is far beyond the psychosomatic dominance of the present entities.

power currently in control—involves liberating oneself while enslaving another in an advanced technological society. He indicated that this society is no worse nor better off than the previous world order; the only difference is the appearance of "new weapons" or, in other words, technology (4). As such, the worlds in both works of fiction address the endurance of the coloniality of power while referencing the pervasive tension between Argentina's dictatorial past, neoliberal present, and technologically advanced future.

Notably, in both novels, the representation of the lost or forgotten memories of previous generations—which are embedded in rusty, obsolete machines and in human bodies who lack the such memories—is reminiscent of the "desaparecidos" who were lost during Argentina's authoritarian regime. Both Zooey and Castagnet express the past traumas of the dictatorship in indirect ways, making tacit allusions through the absent, decayed, broken, and lonely machines that litter the stories' landscapes. Despite the hybrid nature and hyperconnectivity of the future societies portrayed in these narratives, the subjects and beings that inhabit it are relatively isolated and disintegrated. In *Sol artificial*, Zooey interviews Ramiro Schwazer the son of a genetic engineer who has disappeared, as he searches for the last vestiges of humanity through the translation of human fingerprints, primarily his father's prints.[100] Although the novel never makes a direct reference to national and institutional violence, the repetition of the word "desaparecidos" and the absence of a past and present in Schwazer's life alludes to those who have been erased, lost, and disappeared in reality.

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[100] While Ramiro Olivaires is the protagonist of *Bodies in Summer,* Ramiro Schwazer is one of the many characters in *Sol artificial*. The appearance of a same name in both novels that I analyze is just coincidence.

One day, when Schwazer was a little boy, he unexpectedly lost his father in a labyrinth of mirrors.[101] Nobody helped him look for his father, and as he waited in front of the labyrinth, the police officer confirmed that his father had disappeared and that it would be impossible to meet him again because the labyrinth was closed. Later, when he grows up, he becomes the director of the "Departamento de Experimentación en Huellas Dactilares del CONICET" (66).[102] According to Schwazer, humanity has disappeared with the decay of human subjectivity and individuality. When Zooey, who is the interviewer as well as the fictional narrator, asks Schwazer for the reason behind his investigation of fingerprints belonging to the lost vestiges of humanity, he responds that there is no scientific reason, but he believes that these vestiges foreshadow the creation of a new species in the future. Schwazer explains this belief in the following exchange:

> J.P.Z: ¿Cuál será la especie que surgirá luego de la humanidad?
>
> R.S: El océano lúdico. En la era del océano lúdico no habrá más individuos. Habrá un océano en movimiento que será el producto de la fundición de todas las conciencias de los humanos. Y será también resultado de la fundición de los cuerpos humanos con las tecnologías de información. (72-73)

As seen in this conversation, on its surface, this narrative describes how the characters come to grips with the advent of a posthuman society in which hybrid collectives of human and

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[101] It is not clear in the novel whether "the labyrinth of mirrors" refers to a physical place in which Schwazer lost his father or a metaphorical expression. Every scene described in *Sol artificial* exhibits an air of ambivalence that tends to confuse its readers.

[102] *CONICET. Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnias* is the abbreviated form of Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas,an actual Argentine institution. By using the official name of a national institution, J. P. Zooey weaves the real into the fictional. According to the description given on the official website, "El CONICET es el principal organismo dedicado a la promoción de la ciencia y la tecnología en la Argentina. Su actividad se desarrolla en cuatro grandes áreas." For more information, see http://www.conicet.gov.ar/conicet-descripcion/.

nonhuman bodies and minds emerge after the end of humanity. This shift in the paradigm and the concentration of hegemonic powers will begin with human beings losing their singularity, then their bodies, and, finally, their consciousnesses, thus transforming into a hybrid entity of the Internet age. In a parallel manner, in reality and virtuality, the human experience is subjected to an unending cycle of erasure and identity loss. The labyrinth in which Ramiro's father disappeared represents a mirror image of the ludic ocean: An Internet world in which people lose their corporeality and individual existence. The history of violent erasure and domination is repeated at both sites. However, lying beneath this scene is a sense of loss and mourning for the past, as well as the invisible violence that characterizes those who were lost or have disappeared. A small biometric feature—human fingerprints—becomes a key tool that enables Schwazer to address the past, present, and future. Rather than physically tracing the identity of a single individual, he converts his father's fingerprints into sound, thus anticipating the future generation after humanity's end.

Schwazer is 33 years old at this point, but he appears much more aged, like an obsolete, broken machine stuck in a warehouse: "No hay espejos en el ambiente. Las paredes están cubiertas con gigantografías de huellas dactilares … Las cortinas cierran la entrada al sol … Parece un animal invertebrado. Sus brazos podrían tener varios codos y el torso, tres o cuatro cinturas" (67). He says he wants to find a vision of the future; however, he is obsessed with the past, imprisoning himself in his dilapidated house and avoiding any confrontation with the present world outside. Even though he is the director of a prestigious national institution, he works alone in his room. Through the prosthetic bodies represented in his post-dictatorial texts, Andrew Brown represents the painful process of being another entity ingrained in the body of a cyborg, thus twisting Haraway's cyborg figure, which emphasizes a settled and seamlessly fused

body.[103] According to Brown, "the cyborg body inherently testifies of trauma," because the fusion of multiple bodies accompanies the scars of loss and gain in their bodies (*Cyborgs in Latin America* 36). The wounded aspects of Brown's Argentine cyborgs suggest that they carry an important meaning in the sense that the painful experience of being/becoming another entity is brought to the fore, especially with the creation of a new hybrid entity upon experiencing unwilling loss. Although the wounded and traumatized body is not visible in the figure of Schwazer, the deterioration of Schwazer's animalistic body grafted to institutional machinery conveys the process of self-corruption in the trauma of loss while reflecting the undisclosed past, in which humanity has been uprooted by a totalitarian authority. Absorbed and combined in his rusty house and the institutional duty, Schwazer becomes trapped in the corporeal–mechanical apparatus of the state, losing his subjectivity as well. His body—a transformed, institutionalized, and decaying machine—becomes a site where multiple layers of time and suffering caused by the hegemonic powers are intermeshed.

Similar to *Sol artificial,* the absent memory of the past becomes a place where the protagonist of *Bodies of Summer* lingers. There is no straight analogy for the military regime, but the memories present in Olivaires's bodies and his tenacious desire to recover his past relationships reflect the traumatic experience faced by Argentinians under the totalitarian government, which has been forcibly silenced and erased. In *Bodies of Summer*, Olivaires is "a vengeful ghost" who continuously seeks those who have disappeared, are dead, and who had wounded him (36). Even in his new bodies, he can never escape his problematic past. In one

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[103] In the first chapter of his book, *Cyborgs in Latin America,* J. Andrew Brown thoroughly examines the cyborg bodies in Argentine post-dictatorial texts, such as Manuel Puig's *Pubis angelical*, Adolfo Aristarain's 1981 film *Tiempo de revanche*, and Ricardo Piglia's novels *Respiración artificial* (1980) and *La ciudad ausente* (1993).

scene, he seeks a former friend who snatched his transplant opportunity, which caused Olivaires to die in the first place. In another, he searches vehemently for his ex-wife, who re-married after Olivaires's first death. Olivaires wants to take revenge on his former friend, but he realizes that it is impossible to kill him; in other words, he cannot get revenge because death no longer exists in this world. If Olivaires does kill him, his former friend would just revive with a better body, a better life, and more money. It is also impossible for him to find his ex-wife and tell her that he is hurt by her new marriage. Throughout the story, he is never able to overcome the trauma suffered during his first life. Since his resentment is not directed at a specific object (i.e., the object of loss is absent), he is always dwelling on the past. His unresolved pursuit of the past suppresses his ability to renew his existence and identity—until he inhabits a horse with a completely different corporeality. As a result, Olivaires's consciousness and memories become inaccessible, locked in a horse's body. This is certainly not an immediate reference to the violence meted out by the military dictatorship of Argentina's past; nevertheless, the problematic, unresolved, and ghostly past pursues the present in a manner that resonates with the mournful history of the "desaparecidos," as the object of revenge, mourning, and loss is similarly unidentifiable.

In addition to traces of dictatorial trauma, the (dis)embodied virtual bodies in *Sol artificial* and *Bodies of Summer* become a site of control and exploitation by capitalism. While totalitarian power controls "individuals" biopolitically, the economy and society employ subtler tactics by disembodying and fragmenting subjects. In these novels, we can observe how the newly emerging violence of neoliberalism and globalization has successfully displaced the dictatorial oppression, growing in influence due to a back-scratching alliance between the government and commercial businesses. By portraying the material reality of a digitized network, these novels go on to experiment with a radical version of the biopolitics of power. Also

making an appearance is the neoliberal coloniality of power, which regulates, modifies, and marginalizes life through the ongoing processes of creating new forms of domination and struggle, thus moving beyond control over an individual body. Meanwhile, the monetization of living beings reveals the interconnectivity between the neoliberal market and bio/necropower over the body. *Sol artificial* describes the posthuman predicament directly:

> El dinero, antes que la información, fue la sustancia que erosionó el mundo sólido y estático, y propulsó la metamorfosis humana. El primero en notarlo fue Karl Marx. En sus Manuscritos de Economía y filosofía describió el nuevo tránsito evolutivo: "Lo que puedo pagar, eso soy yo. Soy feo, pero puedo comprarme la mujer más bella. Luego no soy feo, pues el efecto de fealdad, su fuerza ayuntadora, es aniquilada por el dinero" . . . El dinero, esa galera de mago, transmutaba el pañuelo viejo en paloma nueva. Lo que el dinero liquidaba era al individuo estático e idéntico a sí mismo. (45)

In this context, the liquid men of *Sol artificial* become new subjects constructed upon heterogeneous units. Liquefaction thus signifies the violence of neoliberalism that converts everything—corporeal, affective, mental, and biological—into capital. Neoliberalism, when combined with virtual technology, creates a post-anthropocentric system that materializes and commercializes human vitality and mortality alongside other commodities, thus blurring the distinctions between species, matter, and human beings. Following Rosi Braidotti's argument, I would like to clarify that critical posthumanism is not identical to post-anthropocentrism. Although post-anthropocentrism is a necessary constituent of posthumanism,—at least when it avoids the pitfalls of anthropocentrism—it is not an equivalent viewpoint. To illustrate, post-anthropocentrism could include capitalism, globalization, and national discourses in the sense that these systems blur "the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to

profiting from them" (Braidotti 63). Posthumanism, on the other hand, refers to a perspective

that sees the entity as a process of engendering "new transversal compounds" and "new modes of

subjectivity" (Braidotti 92). The virtual societies in the two novels, Bionet in *Sol artificial* and

the Koseki Register in *Bodies of Summer*, especially demonstrate how the governmentality of the

social system, in conjunction with capitalism and technology, exercises control over the lives and

deaths of human and nonhuman machines. In a network society, the dichotomy between human

and matter disappears; all entities are transformed into controllable and marketable information.

In this way, the virtual systems introduced in both novels are not mere machines but, rather,

represent the power that administrates the life and death of every component of the social

machine, through the use of digital and material data:

> To determine culpability of any eventual crimes related to bodily ownership, the Koseki
>
> Register was established to record every change of body and the relationship that this
>
> creates to individuals. The Register helped to institutionalize family links that had been
>
> excluded from the legal system such as the relationship between a burned body and the
>
> parents of the original guest. . . .
>
> The Koseki allows for justice now that the body is an ambiguous piece of evidence,
>
> but it has also created many new forms of discrimination. (Castagnet 26)[104]

Even in these highly advanced societies, people still suffer from problems found in

contemporary society, including race and gender issues, socioeconomic and geopolitical

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[104] Koseki is an actual name of a Japanese governmental system that registers family genealogy. What is ironic in this regard is that while people enjoy the liberty of body constraints, they never escape from their first identity. "The koseki, or Family Registration, is the system by which births, deaths, marriages and divorces of Japanese nationals are recorded. In some sense, it is a national identity registration, since Japanese public offices collect and maintain these detailed records about all Japanese citizens" ("Koseki Family Registry Records").

inequalities, and the commodification of the human body, all of which are driven by capitalism.

The Koseki Register reinforces such predicaments, including or excluding the lives and deaths of

registrants based on racial, gendered, and economic values, in order to profit from them.

Although alternative subjectivities emerge based on the re-embodiment of entities in Bionet and

the Internet, these systems render the entities fragmented and therefore disposable—a strategy

that is used to manage and dominate others through the regulation of the terror of death and

embodied pain. In *Bodies of Summer*, characters who die are offered the possibility of

reincarnation, but the new bodies that Olivaires inhabits are either diseased or nonhuman,

determined by his economic status. Privileged bodies and differentiated levels of reincarnation

services are only reserved for the wealthy. In particular, the bodies of young females are in the

highest demand; everyone wishes to inhabit the body of a young woman for their ability to

reproduce. Like clothing, the body's materiality becomes converted into a changeable piece of

fashion.

The body as a tool of transformed exploitation becomes clear in the portrayal of Cuzco,

who is "panchama, someone who died and returned to their original body" (Castagnet 41). In this

world, remaining in one's previous form is a sign of an individual's moral and corporeal

deterioration, and returning to the body that an individual was born into is taboo; therefore,

people are forced into a constant state of metamorphosis. Since inhabiting one's original body is

taboo, Cuzco is condemned to a body that is physically disabled, relegated to the lowest class,

and subject to racial discrimination. Like many dispossessed people, Cuzco lives in Golila, a

shantytown that is not registered in the state system and is replete with amputated bodies, ruins,

trash, and contamination. People residing there do not even have access to the Internet, and

criminals deal in drugs and amputated limbs because they have been denied the privilege of

reincarnation. Instrumentalized (dis)embodiment and immortality is an effective metaphor for the economic stratification of contemporary Argentine society, in that its capitalist practices decompose and recompose subjectivities to make them more exploitable and disposable.

Toward a New Frame of Ethics

As demonstrated in these novels, the possibility of liberation from material constraints does not alleviate the grave troubles of *nonfictional* contemporary society, such as discrimination based on race and/or gender, or socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities. On the contrary, the dimensions of corporeality and materiality become more problematic and contested under this possibility. Even worse, posthuman societies seem devoid of ethics and morality, thus reflecting a devalued corporeality. Such societies echo a crumbled human subjectivity; the aggravated anxiety of human privilege; and the marginalization of human, animal, and technological others. In *Bodies of Summer*, the following scene captures this sentiment well:

> One of the boys beat the other one to death. They weren't fighting. They weren't even mad. They did it because they thought it would be fun. "To visit grandpa," said Fluorescent, covered in blood; behind him, Corona's body laid waiting for the police to arrive. I tried to explain that Teo wasn't in flotation, that he hadn't even been burned into another body or anything else they could imagine. "He's probably hiding somewhere," he responded. Once I realized it was useless, I sent him to wash his hands. (Castagnet 97)

In this scene, one of Olivaires's great-grandchildren shoots and kills his brother so that he can enter the Internet and meet his grandfather, Teo. Two of the children believe that their dead grandfather is "in flotation," a term that refers to one's status as being uploaded onto the Internet without a biological body; thus, the children could meet Teo by dying and uploading themselves.

However, unlike other people, Teo chose to die without uploading his soul onto the Internet. The children's mother tries to explain the permanent death of their grandfather, but the children could not understand. An uncanny scene immediately follows this passage: The mother does not scold her child for the murder of his brother—or at least, the murder of his brother's body; instead, she regards this tragic accident as something that just happens. Children—indeed, everyone in the novel—kill others without a sense of guilt; thus, murder is not considered a crime but rather the gift of another chance at life.

This scene exemplifies the problematic nature of the fantasy of disembodiment, as brought about by posthuman technologies. The possibility of (dis)embodiment enables humans to become immortal while simultaneously rendering bodies as vulnerable and disposable things. In this sense, the characters in *Bodies of Summer* place little gravity on killing and inflicting injury, as bodies are replaceable. This feature not only alters individual subjectivities but also disrupts the chains and order of the family, as well as gendered and classed society. For example, a grandfather could become the youngest member of his family, and a father could become a mother. How should we, in a posthuman world, redefine the threads of family, gender, and class in a society's web? Braidotti proposes that "some significant paradoxes [emerged from digital virtuality], namely that the corporeal site of subjectivity is simultaneously denied in practices of human enhancement and in fantasies of escape via techno-transcendence, and it is also re-enforced and increased vulnerability" (113).

The ambiguous value of disembodiment represented in these novels evinces a new framework of ethics; that is, the embodied ethics. Vint explains that "embodied ethics" demands the recognition of "our own and others' ideological investments in valuing particular bodies over other bodies and works to make ethical decisions within this web of bodily demands" (*Bodies of*

Tomorrow 188). In addition, "retaining a sense of embodied, material existence, and rejecting the idea that there is a single, natural, or best body, are necessary for an ethical engagement with body-altering technologies" (*Bodies of Tomorrow* 187). In this sense, instead of transformed bodies and materials being seen as disposable elements, they should be considered essential to a subject. Embodiment is a part of collective subjectivity, and the body is the very material from which affective entities emerge. This argument is far from the obsession with the organic bodies and embodiments of humans, as it acknowledges the interconnected components of subjectivity, understands the value of coexistence, and promotes the pursuit of *sustainability* between machines. Although Zooey and Castagnet do not offer alternative and subversive figures that are clearly against the posthuman predicament, they raise many questions about the problematic figure of disembodiment. Instead of considering bodies and machines as useless, disposable or displaceable, they urge us to rethink about the im/materiality of bodies and machines. The sustainability of embodied assemblages should be considered just as deeply as disconnection and disembodiment, in order to overcome the predicaments of contemporary society and develop a new view for a future society that can meet the social, political, and technological changes that it will face.

In *Sol artificial* and *Bodies of Summer*, digital and technological (dis)embodiment blurs the boundaries between life and death, and human and nonhuman. Through their explorations of virtual reality and the network society, authors Martín Felipe Castagnet and J. P. Zooey expose how humans become (dis)embodied actants who, at the same time, reassemble into other machines, such as information data, digitized signs, electricity, wires, and computers, thus creating new modes of cooperative subjectivity in the digital realm. Castagnet and Zooey— through their portrayals of a collective form of heterogeneous subjectivities, a diseased

bodyscape, and human death—also question the supremacy of immateriality, which has resulted in the ever-aggravating issue of economic, demographic, environmental, and geopolitical crises. Amputated, mutated, diseased, and bodyless narrators represent the physical and social decline of contemporary Argentina. The futuristic cyberscapes of these two novels demonstrate the urgent geopolitical problems in our current surroundings, in addition to cultural and discursive concerns. Floating, disembodied subjectivity mirrors the predicament of Argentina today: a disenfranchised public, which is often oppressed, restrained, and monetized under state control and the globalization of neoliberalism. Alongside the representation of embodiment and disembodiment, Castagnet and Zooey express the continuing violence of capitalism and neoliberal society, which has converted people—whether in life or in death—into merchandise, thus calling attention to the coexistence of an unresolved past, a problematic present, and the disappearance of hope in Argentine society.

CONCLUSION

To build an ideal citizenry and nationality, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, in his book, *Facundo*, juxtaposes the civilized human society of the city against the brutal, cruel, and savage people of the pampas, thereby erecting a spatial, racial, and cultural hierarchy between them. Sarmiento's discourse clearly defines the process of the purification forced by modernity: that which is human—in particular, the cultured, civilized citizens—is set apart from the animalistic, nonhuman others. Although this dichotomy has varied throughout the centuries, its 19th century conception has been long-lasting, serving to rationalize the exclusion, violence, and exploitation of others—those who do not and could not belong to the reigning social, national, institutional, and neoliberal order. The experience of living under dictatorial rule is still an open wound for

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Argentina, through which people witness and relive the extreme repression of dissidents and othered subjects. The economic crisis that followed, as well as, the social, political, and financial inequalities that came with it, once again reminded the people of the inhumanity of a social system founded upon differentiation and hierarchization. By challenging this social system, the authors mentioned in this chapter—Diego Agrimbau, Gabriel Ippóliti, Matías Santellán, Pablo Guillermo, Rafael Pinedo, J. P. Zooey, and Martín Felipe Castagnet—revive the memories of ostracized subjects and liminal entities, that is, those who cannot reside in either part of the binary hierarchy. In doing so, these authors shed light on the agency of entities existing outside of humanity, as reflected in the suffering of bastard bodies and machines. By criticizing the aftereffects of the dichotomous conception of human and nonhuman, the authors embark on a journey to discover pluripotential others who have been disconnected from but are essentially connected to Argentine society.

The multiplicity of inhuman, dehumanized, and nonhuman bodies presented by the authors, on the one hand, disrupt the boundaries between species, humans, and objects; on the other hand, they demonstrate the vitality of the life that appears in perpetually unrepresentable hybrids. Agrimbau and Ippóliti, as well as Santellán and Guillermo, propose the quasi-cyborg, which exists in the space between human and machine. By introducing new collective entities composed of human bodies and old, metallic machines, the visual and textual images created by these authors address the coloniality of power under totalitarian systems. In Rafael Pinedo's novels, the author presents his human–animal entities through a series of painful, delirious descriptions of abnormal human bodies. Tackling the topic of human nature, Pinedo powerfully reverts and shakes up the characteristics that are supposed to belong to human beings, turning our concepts of humanity inside out and upside down in order to disclose the inhumanity implicit

in the process of humanization and civilization. Pinedo shows that the more that humankind imposes a system of stratification and disconnection, the greater the emergence of unintelligible hybrids and unexpected entities from outside its marked territories. J. P. Zooey and Martín Felipe Castagnet radicalize the hybrid (dis)integration of subjectivity via their depictions of bodies floating in a virtual network. Zooey and Castagnet unfold the multifaceted forms of life that are enabled by newly appearing technologies and their interventions. Through their fascinating descriptions of virtual technology, Zooey and Castagnet manifest the open-ended nature of human individuality, as well as the urgent need for new ethics in a posthuman era that is tightly interwoven with machines. They demonstrate that "human" has never been a definite, individual, or evolutionary being; rather, we have always been bounded, enmeshed, and entangled with machinic, natural, and human ecologies. The plethora of undesirable others shown in the works of these authors reflect a cyborg, bastardized, and unpredictable Argentina in the midst of transmutation.

Chapter III

Chile's Suffering Past Converted into a Vibrant Future

> Regresar es un verbo mentiroso. Uno siempre llega por primera vez.
> Regresar no es volver. El futuro es siempre un país extranjero, y el pasado la patria perdida.
>
> The boundaries which divide life from death, are at best shadowy and vague.
>
> Jorge Baradit, *Synco*

INTRODUCTION

When I visited Santiago, Chile in 2017, *Historia secreta de Chile 3* by Jorge Baradit had just been published. Genre specialty notwithstanding, the window displays of almost every bookstore in town featured his brand-new novel. In bookstores in the city center, I found a host of sculptural displays built from mountainous piles of *Historia secreta de Chile 3*, each copy used like a Lego brick. Moreover, Baradit's image, interviews, and advertisements could be found everywhere in the city. I was surprised by his celebrity and popularity, but also by Santiago itself, in which an odd harmony between the hyper-modernized urbanity that unfolded across the Andean foothills, the unsettling absence of all physical traces of the colonial, dictatorial, and neoliberal conflicts in the city, and the extraordinary commercial success of Baradit's book that deals with precisely this absence.

Instead of soccer fields, Catholic churches, vintage buildings, and memorials to historic figures, huge shopping centers—the Costanera Center, for example—and a business district with high-rise buildings occupy the city center symbolically and vertically/physically. As if its history

of colonialism, dictatorship, and economic crises had been scrubbed clean, Santiago looked like

an enormous construction blanketed by glittering windows unmarred by specks of dirt, the dirt of

the past. It seemed that this sprawling metropolis reached only outward, toward the future, and

never looked back. While traveling south through Santiago, however, I watched as apartment

complexes with large terraces and high-rise buildings robed in glass gradually gave way to the

city's other dominant form of architecture, low-roofed and old-fashioned gray shops and offices

and wooden houses. It was not a shanty part of town, but the contrast between these zones and

the northern part of the city was stark.

The topography of Santiago lays bare modernization and the military government's

forced imposition of neoliberal reform. The spectacular and immaculate cityscape embodies a

sort of catastrophic memory of political-institutional violence. Inner-city shanty towns were

eradicated and the people forced to migrate to the urban periphery during the rule of General

Augusto Pinochet.[105] He justified this project in the name of the "disciplinamiento de los sectores

populares, considerados amenazas polítcas al 'orden social'" (P. Rodríguez and A. Rodríguez,

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[105] In his "Why is the Transition to Democracy Proving So Difficult in Chile?," Alan Angell
briefly describes the brutal (re/dis)location procedure conducted by the military government as
follows: "The Pinochet government claimed to have restored law and order to Chile. But since
May 1983, violence has intensified dramatically, especially in the shanty towns. It is, of course,
impossible to know who is responsible for the burning of the supermarkets and banks, the
destruction of *micros,* the murder of *carabineros* and civilians, the blowing up of electricity
pylons. But if some of the activity is the work of the communist-linked *Frente Patriótico Manuel
Rodríguez* and the MIR, undoubtedly a large part of the violence can be laid at the door of the
government's huge secret police apparatus" (26). Likewise, Alfredo Rodríguez et al., in their
article, "Visible and Invisible Violence and Inequality in Neoliberal Santiago," point out that the
eradication of the shanty towns in Santiago from 1973 to 1985 was part of the social violence
conducted by the Pinochet government (359–72). For more on the urbanization process during
the Pinochet period, see: Eduardo Morales and Sergio Rojas, "Relocalización socioespacial de la
pobreza: política estatal y presión popular," in *Santiago, una Ciudad Neoliberal,* and chapter V,
"Los pobladores sujetos pasivos de la represión," in *Tortura en poblaciones del gran Santiago
(1973–1990)* (49–72).

"La disputa por la ciudad" 33). The way in which Pinochet executed his plan was not only

physical dislocation but also a social and political disconnection from where displaced citizens

once belonged: "Erradicar no significaba trasladar a todos los pobladores a una nueva

localización, sino dispersarlos en distintos lugares de la ciudad" (P. Rodríguez and A. Rodríguez,

"La destrucción de la ciudad" 74).[106] The targets of displacement were mostly shanty-towns

dwellers and low-income citizens. Vacant lands were converted into modernized areas, for

example, Las Condes, Providencia y Santiago. Economic reason was masked behind political

and ideological causes. Seventeen years of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship had left

visual and invisible scars and traumas on both human and nonhuman (in)corporeality. Chile and

Argentina followed similar routes at the end of the 20th century: from dictatorship to neoliberal

democracy. However, the historical conjunction between neoliberal policy and military

dictatorship resulted in disaster for Chile. For Chile, neoliberalism's implementation was not

only an economic policy but also a political and ideological project. Contrary to Salvador

Allende's socialist and protectionist policies, Pinochet established the neoliberal regime as a

political and ideological foundation. The synergy of authoritarianism and neoliberalization

carved a particular onto-cartography, in which people, things, and nature suffered a brutal

eradication and reconstruction. In Chile, neoliberal violence is not the system that displaced

dictatorship, but was instead its conjoined twin.

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[106] Alfredo Rodríguez precisely interprets the meaning of the reordering the urbanscape in "Cómo gobernar las ciudades o pricipados que se regían por sus propias leyes antes de ser ocupados" (81–110). According to Rodríguez, it is not only a physical relocation but also a reordering of social and political hierarchy through the violence and repression. Enrique Oviedo also addresses the similar point that "un problema de desarraigo y de perdida no solo de los espacios físicos conocidos, sino del espacio social conformado por la red de relaciones entre personas, familias y grupos" (241).

It is In Chile, totalitarianism coupled with neoliberal violence is an open-ended memory and a lingering trauma in a realistic sense. First, the recently ended policy of state terrorism between 1973 and 1990 converted Chileans into a living witness and a family of survivors, as most of the current adult population had, whether directly or indirectly, been involved with the dictatorial past.[107] One of the differences between Argentina and Chile, as Ana Ros indicates, is that "the use of torture was more widespread than the practice of forced disappearance. The traumatic experience of the approximately 100,000 victims of physical and psychological torture and sexual abuse complicates the active transmission of the past" (107). Ros points out that the proportion of torture survivors in Chile is significantly higher than in other Southern Cone countries (114).[108] Second, despite the efforts and struggles of diverse groups, much like their counterparts in Argentina, the immediate and thorough liquidation of the dictatorial legacy remains incomplete. Third, Pinochet's bequest, neoliberal policy, has been retained, which has aggravated the already uneven distribution of economic, social, political, and material resources while maintaining social disintegration and discrimination. Known as the "Chilean Miracle," with the implementation of the neoliberal system Chile enjoyed sustained economic growth, which allowed the eradication of extreme poverty.[109] However, quantitative growth in the

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[107] Augusto Pinochet officially resigned his presidency in 1990, but to a certain degree his power and influence on politics remained alive until his death in 2006. Although he stayed in prison for two years (from 1998 to 2000), he was not convicted of any crimes during his life, and Chile's right-wing party has always supported him, glorifying Chile's short-lived economic miracle.

[108] Ana Ros draws this result from Peter Winn's "El pasado está en presente. Historia y memoria en el Chile contemporáneo," in which Winn indicates different aspects of victims in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in the aftermath of the dictatorships: "si bien en la Argentina hubo una mayor cantidad de desaparecidos y en Uruguay un porcentaje más elevado de presos políticos con largas condenas, es este país [Chile] el que exhibió el número más alto y el mayor porcentaje de torturados en el Cono Sur" (Winn, "El pasado está presente. Historia y memoria en Chile contemporáneo.").

[109] "Chilean Miracle" refers to the eleven years of economic boom under Pinochet's government that were based on neoliberal policies and that occurred beginning in the mid-1980s.

financial sector did not ensure qualitative growth, nor equity in society. In terms of wealth

distribution Chile is one of the most unequal nations in the world, its inequity rooted in raced,

gendered, and classed violence. Behind economic growth is labor exploitation and the

marginalization of the poor.[110] Since neoliberalism was not the force that displaced

authoritarianism in Chile, the persistence and reinforcement of neoliberal policies in the post-

dictatorial era suggest a continued connection between violence and power.

    In this social context, Jorge Baradit's stardom and the exceptional public interest in his

bestselling series *Historia secreta de Chile* did not occur by chance.[111] The continuity and

contingency of history as a collective but also local singular memory/experience has been a

tangible and critical issue in Chile. The pain and trauma of the past are not subject merely to

remember. On the contrary, it is a living issue happening among neighbors and family members

in the present. The past is not forgotten as it intrudes into current society in tangible forms that

disturb personal and collective historicity. As the title itself suggests, the trilogy, *Historia secreta*

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[110] Peter Winn, in the introduction to *Victims of the Chilean Miracle,* states that although there was a growth in total income during the Chilean miracle, "there was no comparable rise in real wages during this boom, despite significant increases in productivity and a work week that was among the longest in the world; nor was there the full recovery of labor rights that workers expected from the center-left democratic governments they supported. Most striking of all, there was no improvement in a maldistribution of income and wealth that had made Chile one of the most unequal countries in the world—a legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship that the Concertación criticized in opposition yet was unable or unwilling to change in government. At the end of the 'miracle,' one in five Chileans—still lived in poverty and the country was still divided into 'two Chiles'" (4). For more information on Chile's economic rise and fall under the Pinochet government, see *Victims of the Chilean Miracle,* in particular, the section entitled "Pinochet Era" (125–63).

[111] His trilogy, *Historia secreta de Chile 1, 2,* and *3,* is not only one of the bestselling series, but the books are counted among the bestselling books in Chile. His first two books sold more than 200,000s copies. See: "Baradit fulmina records de ventas con la saga Historia secreat de Chile" in *El Mostrador* and "Jorge Baradit Cierra 'Historia secreat de Chile': 'La historia es política, debe ser discutida y revisada constantemente'" in *Emol.* (*Jorge Baradit Cierra "Historia Secreta de Chile"*)

de Chile, revolves around the other, counter, hidden, distorted, and heterodoxical history of Chile. Baradit's way of (re)making and (re)placing Chile's official history is one way that people commemorate the past that pervades the present, while amusing the survival in neoliberal society. In an interview, he states that he is creating potential micro-histories in order to benefit the present. In an interview, he made this point explicit:

> 'Hay quienes no entienden que plantear diferentes puntos de vista no es 'destruir nuestros valores y a nuestros héroes', sino abrir la discusión, la revisión y la reflexión sobre aspectos no muy tocados masivamente y que requieren urgentemente ser puestos en la mesa para entendernos mejor. Que hay una deuda entre nuestra historia y las personas comunes, una distancia que es urgente acortar', afirma Baradit. 'La historia es política, debe ser discutida y revisada constantemente, no está escrita en mármol y siempre está cambiando con nuevas investigaciones y descubrimientos. Es imprescindible que esté en nuestra mesa de discusión contingente porque finalmente se refleja y se trata del hoy.'
> (César Rojas)

As Baradit notes, to discuss, revise, and reflect history anew is a critical aspect of the solution to Chile's current predicaments. While reviving historical figures in these books, Baradit foregrounds hitherto invisible social minorities such as workers, slaves, gays, immigrants, and so on. His narrative resources are bound to the past, but his tone and manner regarding the past are somewhat more contentious than nostalgic, which drives the enthusiastic public attention toward his work. However, history and the past's persistence are not subjects unique to Baradit. The internationally renowned Chilean author, Roberto Bolaño, took up the tension between official

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and hidden histories of society as one of his main themes.[112] This historical tension exists not only in the literary field but in every aspect of Chilean society. As a collective experience and memory, the country's history has also been a crucial and problematic issue. Although varying in genre, theme, and style, in their works many contemporary authors of cultural texts engage with the problem of history and collective memory. In addition to writing alternate histories of Chile, many authors in the science fiction genre have created ontological and metaphysical multiverses by replacing the realities of erased and forced history.

This chapter centers on the reconstruction of the past, present, and future as represented in 21st century Chilean sf narrative works, graphic novels, and transmedia activism, and focuses in particular on their unique visions of Chilean apocalypse narratives and multifaceted worlds, in which we discover pluri-histories in the form of cyborgs, zombies, and other unnatural beings. Amid these diverse and promising works, my investigation focuses on sf narratives and graphic novels that employ apocalyptic and dystopian tropes on the one hand, and a leitmotif of reconstruction and replacement of the nation's past on the other. Chilean sf is worth investigating given the sudden boom in this genre—not only the quantity of publications of works of this genre, but also its commercial success—and its domestic and international importance, which have grown since the 2000s. The rise of sf in Chile at the beginning of the new millennium, not only as a genre but as a cultural practice, has been a means to resist realist traditions in the national narrative and to create an innovative media movement to challenge the globalized neoliberal system.[113] Although the Chilean sf corpus before the new century was relatively

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[112] Roberto Bolaño's most well-known novel, *Los detectives salvajes,* deals with the topic of history and the tension among pluri-histories.

[113] For a brief but nonetheless helpful orientation regarding contemporary trends in Chilean literature, see Macarena Areco's "Introduction" to *Cartografía de la novela chilena reciente* (*Cartografía de la novela chilena reciente* 7–14).

sparse, as Macarena Areco has noted, crucial moments before 2000 in Chilean sf include Hugo

Correa's work and the insertion of the genre into the literary field during the 1950s, and the

reemergence of this genre in the 1990s ("Visión de porvenir" 37–48). However, according to

Areco what differentiates the new "Edad de Oro" that sf is more than a textual narrative. It has

become a set of aesthetic, cultural, political, and commercial practices that straddle boundaries of

genre, medium, and discourse. Chilean sf has gained visibility with the spread of the internet, the

emergence of domestic and independent editorials, and the expansion of networked movements

of tyoung authors, editors, and researchers, which have led to synergies that have promoted this

genre in Chile.[114]

Jorge Baradit and his career are nearly commensurate with sf's reemergent visibility in

Chile. He was the one who opened new prospects, not only in the field of literature but also in

cultural production inside and outside the sf genre. When Baradit publishes his novels, he also

launches blogs, theme song music videos, advertising teasers, and interconnected web platforms

for each novel. In other words, he constructs multiplatform media narratives. It should be noted

that he has always accomplished this work through collaboration with colleagues in different

fields. As Francisco Ortega remarks, the fact that Jorge Baradit's *Trinidad* won the national

literary prize, *Premio UPC*, was sensational, even in 2007.[115] According to Ortega, this "es un

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[114] *Puerto de Escape*, run by the literature professor and editor Marcelo Novo, is dedicated to discovering new authors and establishing the sf genre in Chile by publishing anthologies and critical articles. It is not a major publication house but has focused on genre literature, giving new authors an opportunity to publish their work. In addition, e-magazines such as *TauZero* and *Fobos* have been established as gateways and first steps for many novices in this genre. Above all, active networking through author blogging, twittering and Facebooking has provided the public with greater access to the genre by allowing direct communication between authors and readers.

[115] Premio UPC de ciencia ficción is granted by Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña (Polytechnic University of Catalonia). This is one of the most important prizes for sf in Spanish speaking countries.

tremenda llamada de atención al actual estado de la ciencia ficción y la narrativa fantástica en general en nuestro país [Chile]" ("Ciencia Ficción"). The publication of Baradit's first novel, *Ygdrasil* (2005), was regarded as an unprecedented success for Chilean sf. In the first section of this chapter, I mainly analyze *Ygdrasil* (2005), *Trinidad* (2007), and *Policía del karma* (2011), a collaboration with the illustrator Martín Cáceres, texts which are located at the conjunction of the military dictatorship, neoliberalism and technological advance. In these novels, things converge into an organic body of networks in which technology becomes one part of the larger social body. Baradit pictures an extreme society of control, in which all boundaries between nature and culture, matter and human, biology and technology, and even body and soul, disappear. From this posthuman body and soul of the social machine, I trace existing power dynamics in contemporary Chilean society, as well as the ongoing process of the coloniality of (necro)power, from colonialism through dictatorship to neoliberalism.

The second part examines Francisco Ortega's graphic novel, *1899: Cuando los tiempos chocan* (2011) and *1959: Metahulla 2* (2018), Jorge Baradit's *Synco* (2007), and younger, amateur writers' stories collected in *Cuentos chilenos Steampunk* (2014). All these works belong to Chilean uchronia, alternate history, or retrofuturism.[116] Chilean sf, steampunk, and uchronia have been highly notable in recent years, and writers such as Jorge Baradit, Sergio Meier, Francisco Ortega, and Alberto Rojas have translated Chilean history into other and multiverse time–spaces.[117] This trend in sf, which plays with history, cannot be considered strictly

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[116] The book, *1899: Cuando los tiempos chocan*, was revised and reedited by the authors. The newest edition was published in 2018 as *1899, Metahulla 1*, with the release of the second book of the series, *1959, Metahulla 2* (2018). I consulted both the first and second editions for this chapter.

[117] Sergio Meier Frei wrote Chile's first steampunk novel, *La segunda enciclopedia de Tlön*, in which he boldly intertwines the concept of a parallel universe with a virtuality that engenders multiple layers of different spatio-temporalities. Alberto M. Rojas's *La sombra de fuego: el*

steampunk, alternate history, or retrofuturism as it is located somewhere between all three. It is true that this narrative technique, which involves looking into the past, can be compared with Anglo-American or European alternate history and steampunk genres. However, there is no consensus regarding the concrete differences between or definitions of these genres, and Chilean retrospective sf displays distinctively local features. I refer to this trend as Chilean uchronia in order to distinguish it from other, similar genres. Chilean uchronia resembles steampunk in that it seeks to engage 21st century material culture through depictions of 19th century industrial machinery. However, the 19th century technology of the Industrial Revolution is not the main subject of Chilean uchronia, nor is the remaking of stuff. Instead, history itself is "the stuff" of Chilean uchronia: the materialization of history and culture and, at the same time, the commercialization of history. While steampunk seeks to problematize modernization and its dehumanizing effects, Chilean uchronia questions how present conditions were built on the debris of historical failures and violence. It also seeks a new kind of entertainment by posing a novel relationship between past and present, human and nonhuman, and personal and collective history. Through a new textual mapping of the past all these time warps problematize the never-ending history of coloniality and modernity that created a history of the dominant versus the subjugated.

III.1. Death Porn

> «El tercer hijo de cada familia es propiedad del Estado.»

> «Al quinto mes de embarazo el feto es extraído para ser cultivado con distintos

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ultimo vuelo del teniente Bello is Chile's most recent Chilean steampunk novel that features time travel, and it shares a temporal background with the *Metahulla* series, the War of the Pacific era (1879-1884) in Chile.

objetivos: como donante de órganos, pieza para armamento o, si acredita potencial

psíquico, como parte del programa de Durmientes." "Los durmientes son nonatos

cultivados dentro de anacondas vivas enterradas verticalmente en arena de cuarzo, desde

donde sólo emerge la cabeza chasqueante del reptil enfurecido por las drogas.»

[...]

«Cuando los durmientes cumplen 33 años el estómago de la anaconda es rebanado. La

mujer a cargo (su 'soror mysticae') copula con él, pierde su virginidad y es asesinada en

secreto. Entonces el durmiente puede ser despertado.» (Baradit, *Trinidad* 49–50)

In the imaginary of Jorge Baradit, an abundance of repulsive beings and violent events,

impossible to define in terms of human taxonomies and conceptions, surprise readers

immediately. Entering into a deep reading of the text, one finds that these supernatural or

indescribable images reflect the traumatic memory of Chileans. The above passage is taken from

a description included in *Crónica del nuevo tiempo*, a fictional book that opens the second

chapter of Baradit's award-winning *Trinidad*. In the world of *Trinidad*, the state possesses the

right to own human life and the power to cultivate or exploit it. This despotic power deprives

individuals of subjective lives and the lived experience of being, that is, the vitality of existence.

In essence, power brutally blurs the distinctions between human and nonhuman entities. The

coercion of unwanted copulation—the most intimate and private behavior—and the extraction of

fetuses before birth demonstrate the omnipotence of a state that examines, violates, and

dismantles the corporeal and affective dimensions of all forms of life. In the meantime, the term

"anaconda" and the forced disintegration by the state both reference Chile's past, as they recall

both the Anaconda Copper Company's reckless exploitation of natural resources and the military

dictatorship's violation of basic human rights and its exploitation of nonhuman others, such as

nature.[118] In Baradit's texts, past economic and social collapse and national violence do not exist

as mere psychological traumas but rather as a physically and materially damaging condition that

persists into the present, as depicted through minorities' mutilated, penetrated, and covered

bodies.

In *Ygdrasil, Trinidad,* and *Policía del karma*, the main characters are female. They seem

vulnerable yet possess a stalwart and empathetic mentality, although each story ends with them

in a fatal situation. Ygdrasil is the name of a Luciferic tree, a sort of machine built by divine

entities called *Perfectos* to collect, conquer, and exploit human souls. In the Sonora desert, the

Mexican government detects a paranormal phenomenon, "el traspuesto," defined as "una

malformación difícil de explicar. Un hombre agónico con su alma desplazada. Su existencia se

encuentra traslapada entre su propio cuerpo, un cactus, una roca y una rata" (Baradit, *Ygdrasil*

15). Without knowing the purpose and capacity of the technology, the Mexican government

recruits Mariana, a drug addict and professional assassin, to investigate a strange experiment on

human subjects and a suspicious financial transaction initiated by the Banco de México. During

her investigation, Mariana discovers the national, global, and cosmological project known as

Ygdrasil. Eventually, she becomes absorbed into the plant-machine Ygdrasil, and her mutilated

body, her consciousness, and her nervous system become components, and even the womb of the

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[118] Anaconda Copper Mining Company was [it no longer exists] a US-owned multinational corporation. Starting at the end of the 19th century, Anaconda and Kennecott started to gobble up the mining industry in Chile. In the 1960s, the nationalization of the copper industry became a contentious issue and resulted in Pinochet's coup d'état. The renowned Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, whose real name was Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, criticized imperialist capitalism and the reckless exploitation of nature and people by the company in his poem, "Anaconda Mining Company," included in his collection, *Canto General.* In his work, Neruda figuratively compared the mining company to a snake. For more information on the conflicts around the mining industry, see *The History of Chile* (Rector 113–84).

machine, which human souls or spirits will inhabit. While her limbs are thrown away, Mariana's ovaries, vagina, and neural network are transplanted into a uterine organ for the new creature or machine, Ygdrasil, which will be used as a war machine in a battle fought by deities.

Trinidad serves as a prequel to *Ygdrasil.* This relatively short novel deals with the histories of Angélica, an embodied form of artificial intelligence (AI); Magdalena, one of the Karma Police; and Mariana in her younger years before *Ygdrasil*. The novel revolves around the government project ENKELI, the prototype for Ygdrasil, and the surrounding political conflicts between government officials, the military sector, and business entrepreneurs. While investigating the mass death of orphans, whose spinal cords were removed and whose bodies were abandoned and buried in the Atacama Desert, Magdalena encounters Angélica, a soft, unmatured human body with the AI that contains ENKELI project information. Initiated by the government and handed over to the military, ENKELI is a plan to develop a prototype AI to construct a network that combines cyberspace and the astral plane by enslaving human beings. Angélica is the first prototype of AI developed by the military and a central part of the Yámana machine created for the project. However, Angélica displays a highly conscious, empathetic personality, which causes her to escape the military installation by destroying it. Because ENKELI has been achieved through the exploitation and enslavement of human beings, Angélica feels repulsion for and fear of the violent process of building the network. Meanwhile, Magdalena approaches Angélica to find out the truth behind the deaths of the orphan children. To download the information—the memories embedded in the gynoid's body of Angélica— Magdalena stabs Angélica's forehead. Angélica's disappears or dies, but the data transfers to Magdalena. When Angélica disappears, the government replaces Angélica with Magdalena as the human-machine archive for Project ENKELI.

In all three of Baradit's works, all matters converge into an organic body of networks in which technology becomes one part of the larger social body. State violence and technological subjugation appear to be the principal topic in *Policía del karma*, as well as in *Ygdrasil* and *Trinidad*. However, the graphic novel also highlights the problem of identity, subjectivity, and (dis)embodiment. By foregrounding vulnerable bodily boundaries and the virtual technologies that penetrate, disperse, and fragmentize ontological and psychological being, Baradit problematizes how to define the scope of selfhood, the "I." *Policía del karma* is a spin-off story of the novels *Ygdrasil* and *Trinidad* and in all three Mariana is one of the main characters . *Policía del karma* refers to the police group that captures criminals who committed crimes in their previous lives. The main plot involves the pursuit of Renato Carranza, who was a serial killer who exhibited the dead bodies of girls throughout Santiago. When the government captures him, he commits suicide. Afterward, *los nepaleses*, psychic mediums controlled by technocrats, discover Carranza's reincarnation in the body of a young boy. The Karma police (PDK), including Mariana (who is called No. 47) hunt down and arrest the boy. Is he Carranza or just a child? Even though he has the complete mind of Carranza, does the state have the right to punish someone before he commits a crime? Through this diffused and dispersed temporality, Baradit tackles the problem of the de/construction of the individual subject and self-agency in a posthuman technoculture.

Death of Embodied Karma

Baradit introduces heterogenous forms of death, or rather, the degeneration of lives, entities, and machines, in terms of social, cultural, economic, political, and ontological capacities and networks. In the apparent trilogy of *Ygdrasil, Trinidad,* and *Policía del karma*, multiple

practices of necropower are founded on the fixation with material and corporeal degradation:

bodily death, mental death, accompanying the body parts' disintegration, and dangerous living.

From the simple manner of killing individual people to more complicated methods of

deconstructing (dis)embodied subjectivities, Baradit presents various oppressive techniques of

vitality and the exploitation of life and death. In *Ygdrasil, Trinidad,* and *Policía del karma*, the

authoritarian government, the power elites and brutal deities manifest their power in two ways:

through control over life and control over death. In these works, the state and the super-beings

continue to install and institutionalize the lives and deaths of all beings, human and nonhuman,

in order to create a huge machine in which all entities are entangled regardless of their essential

natures and qualities for the sake of total control of all beings and their vitalities. An interesting

aspect of the bio/necropolitics represented in the novels is how authority uses death

productivities as much as life affectivities.[119] In terms of life and death, there is no distinction

between human and nonhuman beings. Humanity is dispossessed of dignity, privilege, and

superiority just as much as nonhuman others. Under the advanced matrix of control, human lives

and deaths are equally open to management and exploitation. Regulating deaths, and affects

created by the fear of death, performs a decisive role in the regulation of society's members. In

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[119] Expanding the scope of necropolitics proposed by Achille Mbembe, Braidotti argues that the current, death itself, albeit inhuman, is as productive as the vitality of life. In Baradit's texts, the necropolitics of power even extend to past life, far beyond the psychosomatic dominance of each entity. I borrowed the term "death productivities" from Çağatay Topal's essay, "Necropolitical Surveillance," found in the collection *Beyond Biopolitics* (238–57). Topal uses "the term 'life-production' to argue that the (re)production of life includes all aspects of life, the political, cultural, religious, gender, racial, educational, economic, and the like. Life-production indicates ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender productivities, in addition to economic productivities." Meanwhile, he states that "death-productivity is a counter-life-productive activity that potentially threatens the life-related discourses and practices of existing regimes in a given life-production context. This is to say that a life-production regime is simultaneously a death-production regime" (239). While this term refers to the death of individual beings, I use the term "death productivities" in a broad sense that includes the disintegration of entities and machines alike.

the sense that the society in these works does not differentiate between human and nonhuman beings in terms of their respective life and death values, Baradit presents the texture of the social structure an extremely post-anthropocentric, in/dehumanized and posthuman. This system erases the distinction between humans and others, and also undoes all the binary and hierarchical conceptions between species and matter.

The exploitation of death productivities is a prime example of how these novels represent the nature of post-society and recognize that the transformation from human to nonhuman signifies the end of an individual person. However, as Braidotti contends it is also a "perpetual becoming" that creates "impersonal life" (105–43). I borrow the concept "death productivities" from Çağatay Topal's essay, "Necropolitical Surveillance" (*Beyond Biopolitics* 238–257). Topal uses "the term 'life-production' to argue that the (re)production of life includes all aspects of life, the political, cultural, religious, gender, racial, educational, economic, and the like. Life-production indicates ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender productivities, in addition to economic productivities." He adds that "death-productivity is a counter-life-productive activity that potentially threatens the life-related discourses and practices of existing regimes in a given life-production context. This is to say that a life-production regime is simultaneously a death-production regime" (239). While Topal refers to the death of individual beings, I use the term "death productivities" in a broad sense that also encompasses the disintegration of nonhuman entities, that is, machines. The biopolitical and necropolitical powers of state and religion in these narratives aim to regulate and manage the vitalities and mortalities emanating from the metamorphosis between the life and death, and the integration and disintegration, of the machines, whether mythical or technological.

In the anthology, *Beyond Biopolitics*, Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse draw on common contentions made by the anthology's contributors regarding the necropolitics or governmentality of death with respect to the financial circle in order to discuss death and its affectivity under neoliberalism: "death would itself be productive in an affect economy that circulates, multiplies, and invests in death. Death supports governance and economy, but not just by eliminating weak, problematic, or dangerous populations. Rather, death grants life because of its own presence as an economic vitality" (9). As such, necropolitics creates and institutionalizes anxiety about degeneration and fear of death to produce beneficial economic and sociopolitical effects . Unsettling progress in technology and biochemical science in Baradit's narratives leads to more dynamic and ferocious methods of bio/necropolitics, where we glimpse neoliberalist ontology grafted onto military totalitarianism and religious extremism. Technology extends far beyond the modification of material and virtual life on earth, attempting to transform it into a medium that associates celestial and universal principles with human constructions. The interfaces and virtual machines built by the government and other power elites in the novels connect members of human society not only with one another but also with the cosmic, metaphysical dimension beyond Earth. The state recycles the power obtained by killing and disposing of minorities, as well as unnecessary and excess individuals, and by provoking terror in survivors to accumulate universal power beyond both the national and the global scope. Nevertheless, in the necropolitics of Baradit's works the reinforcement of the fantasy of disembodiment and transcendence must be noted. Although the futuristic societies of Baradit's (post)apocalyptic worlds recognize that material deconstruction (i.e., death) signifies the process of "perpetual becoming," they reenact the Cartesian binary between mind and body, thereby engendering the fantasy of disembodiment or the dream of transcendence. Degradation and the

deconstruction of materiality, physicality, and corporeality emerge as central tactics of necropolitics in Baradit's writings. In this section, I discuss the institutional–industrial–celestial homicide of children and its affectivities, upon which (post)dictatorial and neoliberal narratives are enacted.

In *Policía del karma*, the central paradox lies in how the social system ignores, or rather pretends to ignore, the newness of the newborn entity through the process of reincarnation. Carranza reincarnated in the body of a child cannot be the same individual who once existed. Even though the soul maintains a memory of its former life, merger with a new body generates another creature or becoming. Of course, it is fundamentally impossible to transfer incorporeality, which embraces not only the soul but also other metaphysical sensations such as feelings, emotions, and consciousness, since the incorporeal is mediated, embedded, and tangled within corporeality. A changed embodied environment inevitably fosters a different experience, which causes a different construction of vitality, subjectivity, and machine operation. Perhaps to a certain degree some kinds of memories can be transferred by the machine, but feelings and emotions cannot be copy-pasted since those also require physical sensitivity and reaction.[120] The ignorance of the boy regarding his previous life implies the infeasibility and absurdity of such karma relocation. At the end of the story, the protagonist Mariana, seeing the boy crying while nestled in his father's bosom, comments that she does not remember her previous life. Mariana's confession and the boy's ignorance of his former life as a serial killer prompt questions regarding the contradictions of such ritual and violent executions of karma. On the pretext of punishing vilified souls, the targets that the PDK execute are not discrete souls, but rather newly embodied

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[120] See chapter II, section II.2. for a discussion of the impossibility of transferring the incorporeal dimension of humans to other bodies.

subjects, with both corporeality and incorporeality contained in their bodies. The rationale of karma punishment ignores the fact that the boy's body has its own agency, vitality, and affectivity, as his corporeality erased the memories of the killer's life.

The presence of karma and the idea of punishing and disciplining karma demonstrate Baradit's posthuman cosmovision without deviation, where life and death are represented as chains of becomings and (dis)assemblages.[121] By repeating the sentence, "La muerte no existe," the novel clarifies that death is the intransient target of spiritual and totalitarian technocracy, while demonstrating death's changing and persistent capacity. Through the reincarnation of karmas, death comes to be a recyclable and manageable matter in the futurist society. Further, in Baradit's fiction the regulation of death as a degenerative power of life lies at the intersection of science, technology, religiosity, economics, and government. While science and religion have often been considered to be two different, incompatible dimensions, Baradit demonstrates that these dimensions are intrinsically intermingled and interactive, as both concern the death and deconstruction of human bodies. The principle of transferring the soul or mind shows a distinctive mechanism in each system. However, both karma and cybernetic uploads are grounded on the same bedrock: the fascination with immortality and transcendence. In this sense, despite differences in the material, shamanic and mythical transcendence runs parallel to cybernetic and digitized transcendence, which I will discuss in detail in following section through analyzing the singular texture of Baradit's virtual spaces. In this context, technology—

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[121] Karma is an idea that originated in South and South Asia. Depending on the scholar and the religion, the meaning of the term differs according to whether karma is a scientific, a substantial, or an abstract entity. However, scholars basically agree that karma is associated with rebirth and the causality of one's behavior, involved with the ethics of life. For a discussion regarding the definition of karma, see; "Karma and Rebirth in Indic Religions" in *Krama and Rebirth: A Cross Cultural Study* (Obeyesekere 1–18); and "Introduction" in *Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Doniger and O'Flaherty ix–xxv).

e.g. PDK's virtual, mechanical, and spiritual system—becomes a fundamental machine to enact

sovereignties over the bodies of others, articulating the invisible into visible and tangible forces.

The punishment of karma and the karma machines blends material technology with

immateriality, sacred or astral reality with the "real" dimension. In the graphic novel, the state

and the market obtain the power to control and subjugate social parcels, members, and citizens

through the circulation, distribution, and relocation of mortality.

In this process, the idea that karma is a recyclable and transferable matter conjures up the

posthuman fantasy of disembodiment, albeit not via a mechanical medium. While stimulating

humanity's aspiration to immortality, the state-market in the novels contradictorily invokes the

mortality of each individual entity and its subjectivity. The contradiction and dilemma of the

PDK, therefore, come from equating death, material deconstruction, with the division between

materiality and immateriality. Another underlying problem involves the prioritization of the

mind over the body and incorporeality over corporeality. The underlying assumption of karma

technology is that the mind can be disentangled from the body and that a person's or matter's

essence determines their value. However, as discussed in previous chapters, there is no material

entity without immaterial affectivity, no immateriality without the mediation of

material/corporeal sites. Materiality and immateriality and corporeality and incorporeality are

entangled matters, and all these are at the same time both causes and results of the *operation* that

makes the machine a machine.[122] In this sense, material and corporeal death must accompany the

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[122] I briefly defined the term "operation" in section I.1. in the first chapter, following the notion provided by Levi Bryant. Bryant explained "operation" as follows: "Although the terms 'power' and 'operation' are synonymous, the term 'operation' evokes connotations of the actual exercise of a power. For this reason, I will reserve the term "power" for a capacity possessed by a machine regardless of whether or not that power is exercised. By contrast, I reserve the term "operation" for the exercise of a power in the production of a manifestation" (*Onto-Cartography* 42). In particular, I argued for this point of view—the entanglement of materiality and

dissolution of the immateriality within it. In other words, the death of a body inevitably attends

the partial death of the mind, which bolsters both the dissolution of the established and embodied

subjectivity and vitality, and, at the same time, the emergence of different (im)materialities and

interactions among them. The dead body and soul of Carranza will be incarnated in soil, air,

viruses, and also a child's body. By attempting to rupture and segregate mind and body,

authoritarian technocracy creates ethical and ontological suffering in individual and collective

bodies throughout this society as a whole. In this regard, the necropolitical system continues to

disassociate the *conatus*, or vitality of self, matter, and object, not because it does not

acknowledge the entanglement of materiality and immateriality, but precisely because it exploits

the energy that comes from the pain, agony, and fear of disintegration and degeneration.

Institutionalization and Mercantilization of Infanticide

Baradit particularly associates othered and murdered social minorities with

representations of children who have lost their parents and their own lives. That is, necropolitical

control and domination is directed exclusively toward marginal, excluded, and excessive

minorities. For the most part, the mortal bodies of infants and fetuses are target sites of

bio/necropower in the narratives, and therefore the bodies of infants and fetuses located in

between life and death in the novels warrant examination. Extreme forms of physical and

symbolical in/dehumanization and objectification of these children cause their brutal

disintegration on the one hand and, on the other, invoke deep terror and fear of death in the rest

of society. In *Trinidad,* the state conspires with Neurocorp to perpetrate a genocide of orphans in

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immateriality in the body of the machine—in the second chapter by discussing the theories and
notions of "posthuman" and "nonhuman" while analyzing the texts of J. P. Zooey and Martín
Felipe Castagnet.

order to use their spinal cords to create a sort of wormhole to access cosmic power.[123] Thousands

of children are killed in a search for a spinal cord capable of channeling the astral forces and

flows until they eventually find Angélica, whose bone marrow is suitable for their purpose. The

government-corporate coalition murders children for the sake of their economic plan.

>TESIS: El cerebro es una máquina que abre un wormhole para hacer download de
software.

>¿Qué son los wormholes? ¿Una terminal de fibra óptica para bajar un alma al cuerpo?
¿El cordón umbilical de un astronauta? ¿Las carreteras de la transmigración?

>Creemos que los seres humanos son un ambiente aislado autosustentable fabricado para
alojar *algo* que viene a conocer este universo. No sabemos qué o quién vive detrás de
cada uno de nosotros.

>Si un alma baja por el wormhole ¿podríamos fabricar una máquina que generara un
wormhole similar y bajar almas también? Ya tenemos transcomunicación, ahora
¿podríamos generar tráfico seguro con el más allá? (*Trinidad* 99–100)

Despite the fact that the alliance of state and corporation acknowledges an unnatural and

unintelligible agency (i.e., incorporeal affects) of the body parts, they still endeavor to

disassociate mind and body by linking this practice with the mystery of the universe. The

question and hypotheses in *Trinidad* are answered by the appearance of the humanoid AI,

Angélica. At the cost of 5,166 orphan deaths, Neurocorp succeeds in using human vertebral bone

marrow to build a wormhole to connect different universes and facilitate the download of souls

from human bodies.

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[123] Neurocorp appears as a multinational corporation in the narrative, whose main product is AI
robots and humanoids, and it has its own intranet, which consists of networks connected with
organic bodies and digital systems.

The fictional bodies of the orphans are buried in the Atacama desert, but the Atacama is in fact a real desert in Chile in which a myriad of victims were buried or disappeared during Pinochet's dictatorship.[124] With this desert mass grave of children, the author overlays Chile's traumatic history onto the neoliberal economic globalization in which children, women, and others are easily violated. While biopolitics focuses on individual bodies and the singular subject in Baradit's works, this futuristic society's necropolitics also intrudes on and manipulates the fragmented and mortalized *dividends* of its subjects. Beyond the killing and exploitation of individuals, corporate and institutional power in *Trinidad* extracts body parts, which disturbs both life and death. The social system in the future world unfolds an advanced form of violence and (de)generative power to control, one that is technologically mediated. Especially noteworthy in these acts of institutional and financial murder is the contradictory attitude of the state-market: while it tries to distill the soul by detaching it from the body, it also fixates on torturing the body, which ironically discloses that the soul is embodied and entangled in corporeality. This problem is echoed in the atrocious institutional-commercial practices unfolded on the bodies of children.

Ygdrasil and *Policía del karma* depict a world where the hypothesis first formulated in *Trinidad* is fully achieved and put into practice: torturing and segmenting the *conatus*. While flattening and evening out all distinctions between various entities, the power structure in the novels erects and reinforces the Cartesian dichotomy and hierarchy between mind and body. Authorities continue to attempt the radical separation of corporeality and incorporeality, seeking

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[124] While examining Baradit's apocalyptic texts, Debra Castillo and Anindita Banerjee pointed out the historical meaning of the desert: "The Atacama desert, famously the driest spot in the world, is the site of numerous mass graves of disappeared people from the Pinochet era (families still regularly take trips to the desert to search for bones). More recently, it is remembered as the location of the 2010 Copiapó mining accident, in which thirty-three miners were buried alive and miraculously rescued two months later" (176).

the vast energy that would emerge from their disintegration. One straightforward example of such necropolitics represented in the novels is poltergeist activity. In *Trinidad,* poltergeists expose another shocking use of death, and show how brutally but creatively power exploits the death capacities and productivities by rupturing individual vitality: "la actividad poltergeist se obtenía asesinando violentamente a niños prepúberes en enormes tanques de aislamiento rodeados de placas de cobre que «recibían» y fijaban el horror y las altas cantidades de energía despedidas al momento de sus muertes" (32). Through this poltergeist activity, Baradit paradoxically unfolds the impossibility of a division between mind and body, which leads to unbearable suffering and mortal pain for the subject. Since there is no immateriality nested in and mediated by materiality, the enforcement of detachment leads to the brutal death of the vitality that each entity has hitherto maintained. By disrupting embodied subjectivity, the state excavates, transfers and circulates mental, spiritual, and incorporeal affectivity for the sake of its profit. Pain comes from the separation of corporeality and incorporeality, a somatic death-induced energy. Neurocorp and the state kill the children to collect the power of agony and suffering, displacing their life capacities into death productivities. In this case, social minorities are the target of violation and elimination due to their disposability, and their relatively lower economic and political value in society. Forced loss of body and the process of dying paradoxically trigger the generation of immeasurable death productivities. Put differently, the carnal, visceral, and psychic deaths induce other affective and incorporeal energies. Authoritarian power precisely institutionalizes the entanglement and disentanglement of the subjects under the control of fear and death. This psychosomatic representation allegorically resonates with the memory of state terrorism as experienced in Chile.

All three novels mention that the government snatches away a family's third child, or the fetus that would be the third child, to use as government property. In particular, the government controls surplus lives by killing physicality, sociability, and vitality while also criminalizing their births. From the moment of birth, these children become socially and politically dead people, uprooted from their mothers' wombs and their families. In this context, the bodies and affectivities of these third children are battlefields, contested places where multiple powers, based on terrorism, consolidate their sovereignties. They capitalize on the affects, which provoke multiple effects and sensibilities, which derive from dying bodies' agony and suffering, that is, from the incorporeality of the body. During such necropolitical operations, it appears that the government, which is conjoined with religious and financial elites, is aware that making a clear cut between corporeality and incorporeality is unattainable, and that these functions are inter-related and embedded even as they attempt to segregate them. Contrary to the rationale of the Karma Police, when the authorities exploit children's lives, they utterly neglect the mind or soul in their bodies but profit from the vitality ingrained in them. The system benefits from the painful conversion of the bodies into consumable, disposable, and dispensable materials and products. The agonized, distressing sensations and feelings become the very site of the children's exploitation. The ways in which power structure uses the third children reveals how necropower dominates minorities and others, and through this, Baradit projects ongoing predicaments from the society to which he belongs.

Baradit presents two ways of ending/preventing the formation of identity and subjectivity, one with children and the other with unborn fetuses. In the case of *Policía del karma*, it is not clear when the authorities take the children, but "llegado el momento sufría un secuestro ritual su destino era incierto. Como propiedad del fisco podía esperar una asignación.

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Desmembrado y utilizado como parte de maquinaria industrial, juguete sexual para la elite dirigente, o tomar los votos sagrados para unirse a la PDK, La police del Karma" (8). In this story, the state mainly utilizes the bodies of children for the sake of economic profit, except for those bodies that would be used for PDK members and *Los nepaleses*, who are considered sacred mediums. The materiality and corporeality of the children is converted into inhuman, dehumanized products, and thus they embody the form of techno-others, sexualized, objectified, and denaturalized. The use of their bodies is a simple but direct method of killing self-consciousness, identity, and subjectivity. On the other hand, there is another striking way to exploit lives: the extraction of fetuses. The government takes some fetuses from their mothers' wombs before they are fully grown, to be used as products that will be cultivated for organ donation. They are fragmented into snippets, eviscerated on behalf of normal, proper citizens' well-being. Like the children's bodies in *Policía del karma*, these fetuses are transformed into consumable and disposable products, like those appearing in *Ygdrasil* and *Trinidad*. Paradoxically, for those fetuses, their deaths anticipate another birth. Other social members use and consume them, benefiting from their social and personal deaths and corporeal degeneration. The state regulates and murders personal bodies and vitalities even before their formation into human beings, since their biological and organic bodies have a higher social and economic value than their potential future lives.

Los nepaleses* and *Las muertas* are notable examples of how despotic governments use the vitality and positive affectivity of children to empower themselves by butchering individual bodies and reenacting Cartesian binaries. To extract the maximum energy possible from these mechanized and objectified existences, the necropolitical system devises incredibly complicated anatomical methods. In *Ygdrasil* and *Policía del karma*, human beings communicate with

superbeings and interact with a cosmogonic plane through machines harnessed to their bodies. During these practices, however, humans lose all forms of agency by becoming living corpses. *Los nepaleses* appear to be the recipients of sacred messages from other worlds, posthuman shamans, of a sort, and in the text they are described as "human modems." As members of the Karma Police, they serve to "olfatear las almas," that is, find and locate dangerous souls that could harm social stability. As they lack any agency, they merely channel information through autokinetic reactions. The PDK system renders them deaf, dumb, and blind through the brutal insertion of tubes, wires, needles, bolts, and other rusty objects into their bodies to connect them with the astral network of karma. The state exploits both the spiritual and corporeal capacities of *los nepaleses* by means of a painful mechanical means. Using carnal and chemical energy, and metabolism between machine and *los nepaleses,* the system kills all their cerebral functions and some of the neuronal functions of *los nepaleses*. They become dissected, segregated entities; moreover, the control system participates in the management of the (de)generative power of dividualized, impersonal sections of human being. Destroying individuality and managing bodily mortality are, in Baradit's texts, the corporate state's principal means of subjugating animate and inanimate beings. *Los nepaleses* enjoy but also suffer during their orgasms, as their sexual gratification leads to divine communication with other worlds. In this way, the PDK is able to find where criminal karma has been (re)located.

The state–corporate–religious machine remolds the body as a living corpse, allowing it to remain a reactionary and institutionalized organ by virtue of its corporeal and mortal energy. Death, as the fundamental rupture between an embodiment and its vitality, turns out to be a place that multiple forces of power traverse. In making and using the corporeality of *los nepaleses,* the political system deactivates their cognitive capacities and organs but activates their sexual organs

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and their affectivity (through orgasms, for example). For this reason, the representation of pain in *Policía del karma* is ironically both secular and sexual and also deeply religious and incorporeal, due to the unsettling imagery in which people's faith in God is founded. The ambivalent nature of this envisioning process lies in the fact that a highly intense feeling of orgasm threatens the social order while assisting the karma-tracking system. Sexual ecstasy is a private, transcendent, involuntary bodily reaction, but, in the novel, it is also the religious realization that appears while receiving God's messages. When Tenzing, one of *los nepaleses*, experiences an intense orgasm, the digital, material, and mechanical constructions of the system become endangered due to his heightened sensations. Although his hyper-intense orgasm allows the PDK system to access celestial power, this excess of individual sensation jeopardizes the system's stability, which is founded upon the collective network. As a result, the technocrats kill Tenzing due to the eruption of his private, personal, and individual agency.

Carnal ecstasy is a very singular and personal experience that reaffirms the limits of the individual body, but it is violated by institutional–religious control in this work. Biopolitical and necropolitical governmentality tries to disembody and violate human entities to render human agency obsolete, but pain and suffering reaffirm embodied subjectivity by provoking individualized sensory reactions. Accordingly, Edward King and Joanna Page point out that "*Policía del karma* does not […] 'devalue' the body at all in this way, but on the contrary understands embodiment as the necessary condition for cognition and empathy" (127). The suffering of *los nepaleses* is certainly personal and individual, but the visualized representation of system–human coupling leaves readers affected by imaginable and knowable corporeal pain embedded in the human body. This embodied suffering provokes a sort of solidarity and affective union among readers and characters through somatic empathy and sharing. In this way,

Baradit reaffirms that human beings, and every single machine, are individuals that maintain

corporeal and material boundaries. Yet *Policía del karma* demonstrates that embodied

boundaries are easily invaded and dissolved by affective bonds between different individuals, in

particular by engendering assemblages through awareness of and empathy for the suffering of

others. Governmentality in this futuristic world, however, exercises control by cutting off the

flow and interactions that emerge from the physical and affective connections between different

entities. The death of the individual and embodied subjectivity is used as method to isolate and

disintegrate societal members from the larger societal body.

      Trinidad and *Policía del karma* introduce the existence of beings, similar to *los*

nepaleses, who are born for a death by institutional regulation: *las muertas*.[125] Their bodies are

controlled by the PDK system to capture enemies' souls. Like *los nepaleses*, they do not have

self-consciousness or the capability to move by themselves. Their bodies exist only as nodes and

channels for integration and communication among the police. *Las muertas* are dead, and they

are revived only when the system awakens them. *Los nepaleses* rape *las muertas*, and this act

generates networks of information for the police. In *Trinidad,* unnamed female subjects are

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[125] By referring to the violent penetration that was exercised equally on both female and male figures, Edward King and Joanna Page argued that "the representation of gender in *Policía del Karma* could be read as bearing witness to a crisis in masculinity in a hyperconnected world […] It is clear that the representation of gender and sexuality in *Policía del Karma* is not embedded in heterosexual power relations, and nor does it stem from a critique of such dynamics" (126–27). While I agree with this argument to a certain degree, I think that Jorge Baradit tends to repeat the heterosexual stereotype. As King and Page admit, the macro-level of the narrative in Baradit's works reproduces and repeats male domination over women, victimizing the female body through violent penetration. Scholars understand, however, that this relationship is a metaphor for power dynamics. I argue that Baradit's gender representation is partly in question. While almost all characters, regardless of their gender, suffer from power dynamics, Baradit's main characters are always women fighting against masculine institutions, whose hope is to have a normal life. It is an undeniable fact that when contrasted with the diverse male aspects—they are villains, gods, children, officials, and so on—the female characters in Baradit's texts can be limited and monotonous.

employed and exploited by the authoritarian power to awaken *los durmientes*, who will be

apparatuses or weapons of state, market, and deities. These girls, who are used to generate

corporeal and sexual energy, are murdered before their first menstruation. Rather than

biologically fully-fledged female bodies, the government uses unmatured bodies and their

corporeal agency as a medium, an intersection of heterogeneous immaterialities. In other words,

the force from which the system benefits is not the body as an open-ended organism with

reproductive powers, but rather a partial, limited, and enclosed (in)corporeality, whose sexuality

can be controlled. When their partial effectiveness disappears, as a virgin territory that the plural

immaterial forces can travel and inhabit, the government eliminates those entities. For both *los*

nepaleses and *las muertas*, it is impossible to maintain a personal or individual arena. From the

very beginning of existence, *los nepaleses* and *las muertas* are effectively castrated, denied the

right to be a human or an individual entity. In the representations of *los nepaleses* and *las*

muertas, Baradit brings to the fore the tangible social and political oppression of

individual/collective pain and pleasure and the extent to which these corporeal and mortal

experiences can be affective.

Such state-industrial bio-savagery seemingly belongs to a remote and fictional imaginary,

but these representations reflect turn of the century necropolitics that have commercialized life

and death alike. Further, in those bodies killed and dissipated, the collective memory of recent

history and neoliberal globalization are combined to project the singular local experience of

Chile. Although the worlds that Baradit depicts seem futuristic and unrealizable, the images and

stories represented resonate with recent history and current society, effectively provoking a sort

of déjà vu. By referencing the affinity between cannibalism in the past and the contemporary

biomedical market, Jean-Daniel Rainhorn suggests the arrival of a new cannibal market based on

advances in technology and the globalized economy. While the causes and effects differ, the fundamental basis of cannibalism appears equally in past rituals and in our present society's market structure: the exploitation of others' bodies for the sake of one's performance (Rainhorn). Furthering the argument, Nancy Scheper-Hughes coins the more straightforward terms, "neocannibalism" and "bioterrorism," to designate the commodification of body parts and their circulation and distribution.

> Cannibal markets based on the disposability and dispensability of bio-available populations and groups have certainly flourished under economic globalization. There are cannibal markets in bodies, whole and in parts, dead and alive; in partible and portable organs; in tissues, oocytes, rented wombs, and babies; and even cannibal markets in doctors, surgeons, and nurses that move and remove these "things"—bioproducts and medical goods—from one vulnerable country to other locations and populations that have defined new rights and new sovereignties over the bodies of others. As in any market enterprise, these markets are producing winners and losers, advantaged and disadvantaged, supercitizens and subcitizens. (para.7)

Baradit depicts the recent past of state terrorism through the representation of the orphans' bodies, their spinal cords removed and buried in the Atacama Desert. Although the technology for transcendent connection seems infeasible now, the way in which the state-enterprise utilizes the bodies of others and makes them into abject objects constitutes a realist portrayal of a globalized neoliberal economy and its supporting national institutions. Although different, facets of Rafael Pinedo's future primitive tribe and Jorge Baradit's hyperdeveloped, cannibalistic society both depict how contemporary social, political, and economic mechanisms and structures are barbarous and violent to their own members. In this sense, Anindita Banerjee and Debra

Castillo suitably denote the testimonial/testimonio feature of Baradit's (post)apocalyptic world. The authors formulate representations and conditions as a means to describe the "emotional complexity" caused by the surreal, unreal, and unnarratable reality (172). The more science, medicine, and technology progress, the more aggravated the inequalities and violence toward social others become. At its core, the necropolitics of the state-market corporation continues the disintegration of (in)dividual, social, and collective bodies, that is, of embodied subjectivities. The forced removal and transaction of organs, tissues, and wombs for the orphans are not entirely fictional but are based on our history at the intersection of state terrorism, the global market, technological advances, and the invisible and unintelligible forces of the universe.

Feticide, Womb Politics.

In these novels, totalitarian power continues to dominate and control reproductive forces as much as the degenerative force through the transplantation of fetuses and domination of the uterine dimension. Above all, the removal and surrogacy of fetuses, the third child, from the mother's womb strikingly demonstrate the nature of the bio/necropolitics. This excavation of fetuses highlights the inhumanness of the government presented in the narratives. Not only do they remove fetuses, but they also transplant them into other machines, whether animate or inanimate, in order to foster new hybrid beings to fuel their bio/necropolitical empowerment. For these stunted lives, the totalitarian system imposes the complete dissociation of selfhood and the process of becoming human, being a living entity, and the right to exist. This termination affects not only the fetuses and their potential life forms, but also inevitably causes immense psychosomatic reactions in the mothers. For both, such plans signify the necropolitical violence that aims to replace mothers and their offspring.

The ambivalence of the womb—open-closed, private-mutual, protective-hostile—and its transformative and protective capacities render the womb contested and enigmatic. By intercepting, occupying, and conquering wombs, the state-market-divinity authorities attempt to manage every life-death and reproduction-deconstruction. Ian Conrich and Laura Sedgwick remark that "the womb is meant to nurture and protect but such is the strain of pregnancy that many women and children (and sometimes both) died in childbirth. It is here, with the birth of a child and the loss of the mother, that new life is forever associated with death and absence" (228). Birth thus causes mutual loss of the physical and psychological relationship between a mother and a child. During this disconnection, a new connection emerges through the womb, which accompanies the painful experience. Sigmund Freud addresses the liminality of pregnancy on behalf of the uncanny transformation of the body located in-between life and death: "The internal space of the uterus, accessible through the vagina, is for Sigmund Freud an unheimlich part of the body; the protective maternal womb is in one form viewed as *heimlich*, understood by Freud as the original home, yet it presents a displaced dread or terror of being buried alive" (quoted in Conrich and Sedgwick 227). Without any violent procedure, the womb and birth per se are involved symbolically and physically with death and absence. Fetuses and wombs become the very site of transformation and becomings imposed by the social system. Instead of the human womb, the government builds disparate uterine machines and constructions as a locus of universal and celestial control.

Accordingly, the artificial wombs in Baradit's fiction appear dreadful, hostile, and closed, in which fetuses are enslaved and subjugated absolutely, rather than a nurturing and protective dimension. Pointing to the "monstrous surrogacy" in Baradit's works, Banerjee and Castillo construe that Baradit's works "reflect a cry of rage from the betrayed children, who blame not

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only the government for taking their parents away but also their parents for leaving them. This rage has become increasingly visible as the children of the disappeared write their own memoirs and fictions. The heroic aftermath of the immediate post-dictatorship period has long since dissipated, and authors are now reflective of more complex emotional strains" (175). Regarding the social environment in Chile, Banerjee and Castillo consider Baradit one of the most impressive authors whose works address the issues that face the Global South: a care deficit and call for care (159–82). The enforcement of familiar, social, and physical disintegration and disconnection projected in fetus removal and nonhuman surrogacy certainly reflects local and global predicaments within the neoliberal economy. Besides, Baradit also sketches a subtler and more sophisticated pattern of power dynamics related to the interventions of advanced technology and science. His imaginary worlds deal with plausible scenarios regarding actual lives and the dimension in between or beyond that coexists with unrecognizable facets of potentiality—the withdrawn side—in our universe, albeit in radicalized and brutalized forms. Multifaceted and grotesque animal and mechanical surrogacy showcase, on the one hand, the perpetual emergence of others, that is, new species, products, and machines and, on the other hand, they provoke consensual urgency to renew ethics in a contemporary society where different hybrids unceasingly appear through the interaction between entities.

In *Ygdrasil* and *Trinidad*, state-corporation-military forces remove fetuses at the fifth or seventh month of pregnancy in order to transplant them into animals and machines.[126] In particular, *los durmientes* and *los pensantes* are children of surrogate animals, who must suffer bodily pain during gestation as well. To birth *los durmientes*, anacondas are buried in sand with

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[126] Baradit does not clearly explain why the government removes fetuses at certain months while marking the exact duration of gestation. The emphasis on this reminds of the ongoing ethical and political controversy over stem cells and fetuses in terms of genetics, religion, and politics.

human fetuses in their stomachs and with only their heads above ground. After 33 years of gestation, these *serpientes* surrogate mothers are torn into shreds to give birth to the unfortunate offspring. When *los durmientes* wake up, the system deposits them in the quasi-uterine machine to maintain their coma-like condition, "sueño de rama," in which they are drugged and their testicles and pituitary glands are electronically wired to the life-support, the surrogate mother machine. Whenever the government needs *los durmientes* for psychological, religious, political, industrial, or military reasons, they awaken them. *Los durmientes,* for this reason, have no self-consciousness due to the lack of lived experience in which one becomes aware of the limits of self and others. Nevertheless, they display superior corporeal and incorporeal agency from the bodily domain activated by the state.[127] A similar procedure is conducted to create *los pensantes*:

> «Los "pensantes" son fetos poltergeist trasladados a úteros de yeguas, donde tienen espacio para crecer mientras dura su vida útil de tres años. Las yeguas tienen las patas amputadas y cuelgan de los techos de enormes hangares en hileras interminables. Desde un tubo diminuto, inserto en la pituitaria de los fetos, gotea incesantemente el fluido neurotransmisor. Las gotas caen a la piscina que cubre todo el piso de los hangares. Allí, en una especie de gran caldo bioquímico, se catalizan los procesos informáticos y se trasladan electroquímicamente las conclusiones a través de la nervadura del Ygdrasil. Cada hangar es un gran chip procesador.» (*Ygdrasil* 210)

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[127] There is another form of surrogate, las *Crisálidas,* which impregnate only female twins until the children begin their first period: "Las crisálidas tienen una gemela que crían en su útero hasta que cumplen doce años. Antes de la primera menstruación, se la extraen por cesárea. Es común que se enamoren y pasen sus cortas vidas llorando abrazadas una a la otra. Las necesidades fisiológicas deben resolverse recurriendo a sondas y tubos hipodérmicos. Intentar separarlas es extremadamente peligroso" (*Trinidad* 47).

Both bestial mothers and human progeny are tortured and extracted by the machinic system. The mares' limbs are mutilated, since only their wombs are necessary to provide conditions for gestation. While the core of *los durmientes*' existence is the psychosomatic power of grown bodies, that of *los pensantes* is the extraction of crude hormones, mere biochemical liquids. From such brutal mining, the bodies of children in mares last only three years and die producing neuro-chemical liquids. Collected fluids assist the operation of Ygdrasil, the war machine that hoards human souls as its fuel, built for the war between deities in the universe. At the end of their births or deaths, *los durmientes* and *los pensantes* are combined into the machine, passing through the bestial mothers' wombs. On the way to be born or die, fetuses are transformed into beings in between animals, humans, and machines by the connection and disconnection between heterogeneous matter and species.

Reproductive and protective association between animals and fetuses bolsters and activates the withdrawn forces and facets of fetuses, the potentiality or power that could not be visible and realizable through human relationships.[128] Likewise, the liquid extracts transfused into the machine Ygdrasil manifest a different texture of affectivity on account of the synthesis of machine and animal-human cerebral juices. However, they are not allowed to forge stability, solidarity, or sociability, and any continuing or sustainable relationships are disturbed and subverted by institutional, industrial, or astral powers. The relationship between a mother animal and human son or daughter ends with their respective destruction. Every being created for the power structure is controlled and refused independence or subjectivity, subjugated and enslaved in the displaced but designated wombs. There are also mechanical wombs, in which the fetuses are raised and used as a part of the collective machine.

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[128] Regarding the notion of withdrawn quality, see chapter I.1.

> >Los "Yámana" son cierto tipo de feto —poltergeist extirpados del útero materno a los 7
> meses e instalados dentro de las CPU utilizadas en el desarrollo de IA (Inteligencias
> Artificiales).
>
> >Los "Yámana" son particularmente eficientes en el desarrollo de IA con capacidades
> mediúmnicas de uso militar. Son los encargados de «despertar» las IA con el test de
> Turing II: estimulan estados alterados de conciencia en las IA con un virus informático
> psicotrópico. Prácticamente todas las IA visualizan el cadáver de Jehová a la deriva en la
> nada. Ven a nuestro Universo flotando dentro de su cráneo vacío como una medusa inerte
> y a «algo»» que devora sus restos. La IA entra en pánico y «despierta»» a un nivel de
> conciencia que la hace adecuada para los sistemas de defensa militares más refinados.
> (*Trinidad* 56)

The prototype of the machine Ygdrasil features yámana incorporated into AI. Like *los*

durmientes, AI with yámana in its body will be deployed for military or celestial purposes.

Although it is questionable whether AI is a womb for yámana fetuses, one indicative factor is

how the AI body raises yámana as an incorporated and activated bodily component. Interestingly,

fetuses without consciousness and their bodies play a critical role in the activation of AI by

working as another incorporeal power, such as a virus or other (in)consciousness, to the AI's

consciousness. In between life and death, these fetuses, installed in AI bodies, provoke terrifying

feelings and concomitant somatic reactions. Their somatic presence aggressively affects the

incorporeal dimension of AI that simultaneously awakens consciousness and physicality. Despite

the death of the general body, the body parts of the fetuses are still alive within the AI bodies,

and their agency even deeply affects the whole body. In contradiction to the intent to divide mind

from body, every somatic and visceral segment manifests agency and incorporeal power for

affect. The reactive but antagonistic relationship between the host body and guest fetus reveals effectively how the colonial nature of power arranges and exploits different elements of lives by using the vulnerability and permeability of the body, individuality, and subjectivity. While packing and gathering multifaceted dividends and (in)dividual beings, by creating irreconcilable pairings the power holders never allow solidarity within or among them.

The authorities disturb and intervene in the lived experience of the individualization of selves and bodies. Transportation or removal of the fetus and the regulation of the womb exhibit extreme power forms that seek to govern and dominate even the cellular units of lives. Also, the violent intervention erases any possibility of obtaining a sense of singular subjectivity, while disturbing the construction of unity and affinity among units, dividends, and segments. In the precise moment of being removed, fetuses are implanted into the collective machine, where they are incorporated but, at the same time, trapped in the closed system. In Baradit's work, the womb becomes the site where new creatures and combinations initiate and meet the dead end to which the government-market-divinity authorities regulate, limit, and confine them. For this reason, different from the other cyborg representations analyzed in previous chapters, Baradit's cyborgs manifest visceral, internalized, and intra-somatic wounds while preserving the transgressive value that disturbs the traditional boundaries of personal and collective bodies. Like other Latin American cyborgs, Brown illustrates, unwilling loss and painful experiences are ingrained and imprinted in the bodies of cyborgs, despite their posthuman potential for subversion. But Baradit's cyborgs are differentiated in that their scars and wounds are buried and captured under flesh: their prostheses consist not only of other machine or human body parts but also of the condensed or extracted forms of individual lives and deaths of others.

Regarding this creation of animal-human-machine mixtures in *Ygdrasil*, Macarena Areco remarks that "una segunda clase de hibridez no sólo abarca la mezcla de diversos órdenes de la materia, sino que también del mundo material con el de los espíritus" ("Más allá del sujeto fragmentado" 841). It is true that these hybrids are born from the blends among heterogeneous, seemingly incompatible, materials and immaterials. Yet, these mixtures and compounds are constituted from material and somatic encounters. In other words, somatic, visceral, and corporeal aspects lie at the heart of the formation of hybrids that substantiate the vulnerability and permeability of the human body and its collective form as a living entity. While the AI's body is individual and anthropomorphic, its re-organized and knitted visceral dimension, which different living actants inhabit together, demonstrates the collectivity of the body. Rather than (dis)integration of material and spiritual dimensions, Baradit shows the displacement and relocation of the (in)corporeality of the beings and matter that lead to new life forms and operations through the fetus' transplantation. Fetuses' spiritual, affective, or incorporeal vitalities are mediated and transferred into other machinic, corporeal, and somatic mediums, and these new interactions and encounters forge differentiated flows of affectivity and vitality by virtue of reassembled corporeality.

However, the bio/necropolitical system regulates and severs the flows and interactions, that is, the possible affective bonds that would form from the encounters between distinctive (in)corporeal entities. Under these conditions, the womb as a nodal site plays a vital role in the novels. On the one hand, the womb is a laboratory and institution for the formation of new creatures and mixtures, but it is also a machinic, biological, virtual prison for hybrid becomings. From the representation of the womb as liminal, mortal, and hostile, we glimpse how the necropolitical structure seeks to institutionalize and commodify life and death, the origination

and degeneration of all particles, matter, machines, and animate beings in the process of becoming.

Cannibal Virtuality

This unrivaled virtual landscape differentiates Baradit's works from other sf texts. Its material, corporeal, and organic aspects and how it connects divine, secular, and technical spaces are its striking features. At the intersection of state, market, and religiosity, virtual machines and cyberspace become a contested place, in which everyone aspires to hold power and subjugate others. Highly developed cybernetics and biotechnology in Baradit's world thoroughly unfolds the potential of the radicalized form of the control society, as Deleuze suggested. As seen from the fetuses installed in other bodies, no matter how liquefied and fragmented such bodies are, despite their subjugated status each part or fluid manifests somatic and corporeal features. Through the cyber and virtual dimensions, the military, market, and government power extends their control to death, subjugating pre- and post-life more than they regulate and discipline current lives or living entities. Virtuality, in this condition, is the main apparatus that enables aggressive control by (dis)integrating and (in)dividualizing entities. In *Ygdrasil, Trinidad,* and *Policía del karma,* cyberspaces and virtuality, therefore, perform the role of the womb for society as a whole. It is where hybrids, new mixtures, and unprecedented matter emerge, and it is also, as are other wombs in these novels, the target site of control.

Parallel to other alternative wombs, virtual reality in Baradit's fiction is not a place where people connect. Instead, human beings are segregated into parts, sections, or components of virtuality that is grafted onto the holistic machinery. To enter into the virtual network, one has to abandon the *status quo* of the original body. Therefore, cyberspace is more a place of

disconnection than connection. Connection requires a user to be cut, pierced, stabbed and

penetrated by metallic and electric canals that inevitably provoke pain and suffering in the body.

In particular, human fetuses, body parts, and genital organs are transformed into essential carnal

mediums that connect to other realities. Thus, the general relationship between a user and an

avatar is reversed in Baradit's novels: the subject connected to the network becomes,

paradoxically, the object of exploitation. The user turns out to be an avatar of the system. In this

manner, Baradit draws a virtuality that is entangled in a more direct and material manner by

exposing the vulnerability of the human body and subjectivity.

Ygdrasil and *Trinidad* feature homologous cyberspace and virtual dimensions that require

and impose direct and prosthetic connections between the informational machine and other

bodies. Human biological parts are used as prosthetics, transplanted tissues and parcels that

construct the web of virtual reality. As murdered orphans' spinal cords are used for the creation

of AI, neuronal and biological energy from human bodies appears as the main resource to

inaugurate the extraordinary cyberspaces in which astral, psychic, and informational flows

intersect. In *Trinidad*, Baradit explains the initial setups and purposes to construct a new type of

cyberspace that goes beyond the digital data and information web:

> >Cinco años atrás, el Plan de Soberanía para el Ciberespacio había conseguido levantar
>
> cerca de cuatro millones de mentes humanas a la red. El objetivo escondido era generar
>
> un mundo «vivo», un ecosistema propicio para recibir e interactuar con «el movimiento
>
> de los sueños», una marea psíquica proveniente del plano astral que había comenzado a
>
> filtrarse desordenadamente hacia el ciberespacio. (55)

Cyberspace, which the government seeks to forge, is itself a living entity, another universe. The

cyberspace topography represented in the novels is highly virtual: all data, information, and

flows are transformed into animate beings like humans, animals, and matter, almost like another

universe in the earth. When characters enter cyberspace, they move through an ocean of

information and encounter projects encrypted in the material and physical figures of elephants,

boys, girls, and the Sphinx, among others. The authorities desire to build another colony inside

or outside of the earth and install a human mentality in it. In the case of *Ygdrasil,* the cyberspace

in which human incorporeal energies and souls are deposited becomes a part of the astral war

machine that will be used by the shaman Tangata Manu to rise in rebellion against God, Jehovah.

To activate such a virtual reality, the officials need volunteers who will sacrifice their

lives to connect to the machine. "Levantar mentes humanas" signifies the condition in which "se

sometía al voluntario a un scaneo de sus patrones de memoria y se transferían sus funciones

cerebrales, a través de una interface adecuada, directamente al ambiente del ciberespacio"

(*Trinidad* 37). However, scanning and transferring the cerebral function means, in this case, the

loss of the (in)corporeal self: "los voluntarios eran inducidos al coma profundo y se les extraían

brazos y piernas para reducir espacio. Los cuerpos eran mantenidos dentro de los úteros de

cientos de yeguas inconscientes que colgaban de ganchos en el interior de enormes galpones

oscuros, en una enmarañada red de cables y fibra óptica" (37). As in the case of *los pensantes*,

their limbs from both mares and humans are mutilated and so is their consciousness. If someone

volunteers to "levantar" his mind, then the rest of his family holds a funeral. The connection with

cyberspace includes a painful and traumatic disconnection from reality and the body as lived

experience. Unless the biological body, albeit amputated and fragmented, is wired, the

incorporeality embedded in cerebral sections cannot be used for the construction of an interface.

Limbs are amputated in order to become limbs of the virtual machine. Unlike other virtual

realities represented in previous chapters, the one that Baradit portrays is never a temporal,

detachable, or separate dimension; it is interwoven in an extremely somatic manner. Moreover, the majority of humanity work as extremities, cables, and channels of virtual reality, rather than as users. At the end of *Ygdrasil*, the main character, Mariana, becomes a central component of the machine, Ygdrasil:

> De pronto, unos chasquidos le hicieron abrir los ojos y contener la respiración. En ese instante dos arpones penetraron sus oídos y Mariana se vio izada a seis metros de altura. Allí, suspendida, le arrancaron piernas y brazos, la cauterizaron con hierros al rojo vivo y la incrustaron con ganchos de acero al mecanismo que colgaba en el centro del útero. Incrustada como en una joya. La joya del Ygdrasil.
>
> Luego le extrajeron los ojos y le hundieron terminales de datos en los nervios ópticos. La sangre y los gritos de Mariana alimentaban el suelo del útero como una lluvia. Las paredes orgánicas de la sala se habían hinchado y enrojecido como el tejido uterino humano. Una esclusa se abrió en la cima del salón y dejó caer un chorro de líquido amniótico semiconductor, que bañó a Mariana y comenzó a llenar rápidamente la sala. Una larga tráquea, conectada a un sistema de ventilación, salía de la boca de la mujer para impedir la asfixia por inmersión. (256)

Mariana is butchered and inserted into the uterine section, the central area from which springs power and becomings. Her limbs are eradicated, and all orifices are blocked by means of hooks and cables, equal to other bodies in the network's construction. When Mariana is butchered and absorbed into the core of Ygdrasil, Tangata Manu, the shaman who designed Ygdrasil and leads the rebellion by turning on Ygdrasil, which is completed by uterine ecstasy of the machine. Mariana is encrusted into a machinic womb to become its sexual and reproductive organ that performs "coitus" between different genetic codes, bolstering the power of Ygdrasil. Despite the

brutal violence toward her body that leads her semi-unconscious status, she knows and feels what is going on through her truncated, penetrated body. While the purpose of cyberspace is the construction of planetary communication beyond earthly, embodied limits, cyberspace figured in this way is ironically somatic, corporeal, and material, in which cannibalistic and sexual rituals continue to appear.

In virtual reality Baradit foregrounds the painful and highly sexual ways of integration, circulation, and distribution of machines. This aspect of the interface is well visualized in the graphic novel, *Policía del karma*. Baradit brings the spectacle of carnage and bodily exploitation to the fore in the process of connecting to the interface: close-ups of bodies stripped, bound, mutilated, crucified, and covered thoroughly with metallic suits in each frame remind us of a sort of torture porn, BDSM, and body modification in the medieval era. Instead of varied colors, Baradit and Cáceres employ monotonous gradations of watercolor shades of sepia, blue, or gray tones. On the frames, colored with one or two shades, vivid and straightforward lines are intricately drawn that highlight penetrated, crucified, and hyper-(dis)connected subjects. While *los nepaleses'* nudity emphasizes the vulnerability of the flesh, in their representation of *las muertas* the authors spotlight the blocked, enclosed bodies with metallic suits that have completely lost their capacity to speak and breathe. In the meantime, the chief targets of inflictions are genitalia and orifices, which represent the threshold of the self and the other. Cables, pipes, and hoses perforate bodies, thereby arousing sexual reactions that activate intra-universe, planetary, and astral networks.[129] As a result, the pained body, the body in part or in transformation in Baradit's work, is portrayed as religious and sacred but horror-provoking.

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[129] Although it is hard to verify the exact space–time of the novel, its dusty and filthy ambience, rife with obsolete machines, rusty objects, and outworn weaponry, gives us a clue, enabling us to assume that this Santiago is set in a futuristic past or a destroyed future. In this sense, Edward

Baradit visualizes the somatic, painful, and penetrating bodily experience of forging

cyberspace in *Ygdrasil* and *Trinidad*. Reiterated representations in these stories is rape or the

violent penetration of bodies that provokes intense sexual pleasure but betrays one's willingness.

To enter the virtual interface, female characters experience penetration, which seems to be sexual

abuse. Carnal, sexual, and secular actions open the pathway to a divine and universal dimension

in the novels. As reflected in the amputated, enslaved, and violated body of Mariana, cyberspace

and virtual connection forged in this futurist society seems to be highly gendered and corporeal

territory that powerful groups will conquer. Nevertheless, as King and Page observe in

examining *Policía del karma,* "multiple, mutual penetrations [...] take us far away from any

normatively gendered representation of cyberspace" (125). Through gendered, sexualized

violence, Baradit portrays not only the development and continuance of gender-specialized

techniques of domination, but also represents a radical form of exploitation that penetrates into

the visceral and cellular dimensions by rupturing subjectivity in becoming. In this sense, at the

very core of the pleasure of suffering is not pain or performance but rather the problem of

dynamics between dominance and submission. Baradit stages severed limbs and torn flesh in

order to express the institutional system's violence over life and death, which is conducted by

disrupting embodied subjectivity.

Sexual and sadomasochistic images make clear the affinity between torture porn and

Baradit's (post)apocalyptic future society. Steve Jones defines torture porn as follows: "three

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King and Joanna Page address steampunk aesthetics in *PDK*: "Identifying itself with the
steampunk variant of cyberpunk, *Policía del Karma* depicts technologies that clearly date from
an industrial age. These often recall Soviet-era machinery, privileging function over aesthetic
design and military purpose over other uses and sidestepping the process of miniaturization that
has transformed technology in recent decades" (121). In particular, I believe that the decaying
industrial materials depicted in the graphic novel allegorically reveal the violent control by state
and Catholic discourses that have putrefied Chilean society.

pivotal qualities are utilised as indicators for grouping these diverse texts. Torture porn films (a) were made (roughly) after 2003, (b) centralise abduction, binding, imprisonment, and torture (mental or physical), and (c) broadly belong to the horror genre" (8). Although Baradit's novels were published after 2003, his novels do not fit exactly the torture porn that Jones describes, in particular, considering that Jones mainly deals with the film industry in the northern hemisphere. However, crucial qualities are apparent in Baradit's novels that, "generate somatic empathy through pain or disgust" (125). According to Xavier Aldana Reyes, what differentiates the torture porn genre is that "torture porn negotiates corporeal anxieties at both superficial and metaphorical levels" (123). My intention is not to say that Baradit's works are torture porn; however, they are founded in the same principles: corporeality and its consensual value. It is shock and repulsion that affect the reader intensely in Baradit's novels, while provoking feelings and emotion through the awareness of the bodily experience. Such visualizations touch the sensory empathy of spectators in a way that surpasses their cognitive understanding of present society. Many critics correlate the emergence of torture porn at the beginning of century to the Bush administration's torture sanction. Jones however refuses to connect torture porn with only an immediate political issue, and he suggests it be put in the broader historical context.[130] In a similar vein, through violated bodies Baradit reflects both his own local memories of state terrorism as well as neoliberal globalization.

Because of the striking representation of bodily exploitation and its shamanic representations relating to virtuality, Areco, Castillo and Banerjee all strongly implicate the

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[130] Steve Jones argues that, "As much as references to current affairs are offered in torture porn films, contemporary motifs are related to a network of other elements. For instance, several torture porn narratives that are blatantly about war make reference to current affairs but situate those discussions against a history of warfare" (66).

presence of *imbunche*, "la identidad imbunchada," in Baradit's works.[131] In *Ygdrasil*, the

mythological figure Imbunche appears as a religious and syndical leader of section 14 of the

Chrysler company who is planning the revolt against the central tower, Directorio. His name,

rituals, and attitudes invoke the "Mapuche metaphor of the imbunche: a kidnapped, tortured, and

bewitched child whose orifices are sewn shut and who is set as guardian for a sorcerer's

treasure" (Banerjee and Castillo 174).[132] He is the subject who physically and sexually tortures

and violates others and at the same time, excites his society's religious feelings. He himself

manifests a sadomasochist body through which he expresses the pained body affecting others.

> Una guerra santa les permitiría a todos renacer en la red, liberados de la carne, con sus
>
> patrones de memoria impresos directamente en el ciberespacio, para existir sin límites
>
> entre sus códigos infinitos. Sería una existencia en éxtasis permanente, absorbida por una
>
> conciencia electrónica única, colectiva; el orgasmo electrónico en una frecuencia aún por
>
> revelar. «El cuerpo es ilusión, la verdadera existencia es digital», rezaba un párrafo del
>
> Libro. (*Ygdrasil* 78)

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[131] Macarena Areco and Debra Castillo both draw attention to the use of the imbunche trope, which is a very local, irrational, and cruel mythical tradition and practice. In her essay, "Bestiario ciberpunk: sobre el imbunche y otros monstruos en *Ygdrasil* de Jorge Baradit," Areco describes the origin and history of the imbunche practice in relation to *Ygdrasil*. It is noteworthy, in a sense, that Areco finds the hybridization of human and animal and its monstrous appearance represented in the *imbunchado* body. Beyond the corporeal mixture, Areco focuses on the fragmented subjectivities caused by the violently dismembered body and mind ("Bestiario ciberpunk" 163–74).

[132] On the last page of *Ygdrasil*, which presents the authors' brief trajectory, the genre of the book is defined as *ciber-shamanismo* and many other scholars likewise indicate his cyber-shamanism. However, Jorge Baradit refuses to refer to his books in that way: "[Cyber-chamanismo] Nunca ha sido de mi gusto, prefiero Realismo Mágico 2.0. Macondo ya tiene redes de fibra óptica, pero sus chamanes todavía toman ayahuasca" (Rojas M.). Baradit seems to regard the magical, supernatural, and weird phenomena as all part of contemporary life, which exist alongside high technology and genetic engineering.

I would like to emphasize that the Imbunche embodies the meaning of virtuality in which contradictory dimensions coexist. Through somatic, corporeal, ontological, and material virtuality, Baradit sensationally overlaps religious aspirations for the transcendence of and liberation from secular flesh with contemporary aspirations projected by cybernetics and technological achievements. In this part, the Imbunche plans a sort of holy war against the cybernetic reincarnation of humans into a collective machine. Imbunche's body runs in parallel with the somatic, spiritual, and multi-layered network machine that he tries to build. Imbunche himself transforms into a sort of cyborg to act as a medium for religion, technology, and humanity. According to Areco, Imbunche distorts his body and provokes corporeal pain in an artistic and experimental manner, which leads to the "desublimation" of his body ("Más allá del sujeto fragmentado" 846–47). On the contrary, both Imbunche's body and somatic network system further accentuate the importance of corporeality through pain and its sensory and consensual features.

Although Imbunche exploits the affectivity generated from the infliction of corporeal pain, he paradoxically argues for the liberation of the soul, incorporeality through the interface. While the body is dominated the state-market-divinity powers through the violent hyperconnectivity between human and non-human objects, minds are captured by a syncretic religion that withdraws individual agency in the name of faith. However, this separation between corporeality and incorporeality is an illusion, the strategy of colonizing power in a society with advanced technology. This illusion proves to be a technique of enslavement, otherization, and marginalization. Shamanic and religious tropes ironically spotlight corporeal and material mediation and its substantial incorporeal and immaterial agency. Like the Argentine authors I explored in the previous chapter, Baradit also draws attention to embodied ethics through virtual

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dimensions, while reflecting the unbreakable chains of domination-subjugation that extend to astral, universal dimensions beyond earthly life.

Through a dystopian and nightmarish world, Baradit confronts contemporary society with the inexplicable trauma of the historical past and the ongoing conflicts of the present. *Ygdrasil, Trinidad,* and *Policía del karma* are dystopian futuristic novels, all located in an imagined past/future where the government and corporations have developed cybernetic dimensions in which they gather human affectivity and the universe's vitality and spirituality. The interplay between drugs, violence, biotechnology, and shamanism evokes hallucinogenic sensations and multiversity through the intermingling of spatiotemporal layers. The totalitarian state and grotesque creatures are leitmotifs in Baradit's dystopian novels *Ygdrasil*, *Trinidad,* and *Policía de karma*. Another startling feature that weaves these works together is the somatic, extremely material, but at the same time, spiritual virtuality. The core of control in Baradit's cosmos in these three novels is the institutionalization of virtual machines. While his atrocious and repulsive representations of the entities shock the reader, I suggest that these images stimulate our fears of control over a society where exploitation is the principal apparatus, a reality that Chile once endured. Experiencing disgust and the monstrous topography of virtuality in Baradit's works effectively transfers the feeling and sensation of suffering indescribable loss and trauma. Within this context, his unique cyberspace and virtual dimensions, which embody both highly somatic, material, and simultaneously spiritual aspects, provide a palpable representation of the technical potential and malaise fabricated by neoliberalism and the dictatorship. In an extremely brutal and chimerical way, Baradit reflects the sensibility and topography of post-dictatorial time, in which the past traces the future.

III.2. UCRONÍA CHILENA

In contrast to his dreadful depictions of virtuality and network technology, Baradit is one of the most eminent authors in cyber-society who capitalizes on the Internet as their channel for communication, distribution, and promotion, both with other artists and with the public. His presence in the network is noticeable as much as his popularity offline. He ran a chic personal blog and is still active on Twitter and Facebook, through which he has posted and promoted his diverse works that stretch far beyond his writing.[133] On his blog, he posted not only literary content but also audiovisual resources such as trailers, teasers, and soundtracks, some of which are still available on YouTube.[134] One of the most striking images was a revised and hyperlinked city of Santiago, on the webpage assigned to the novel, *Synco.* On this map, there are marked places with buttons that are linked with pop-up windows in which one encounters recreated images of the places. Above the representation of actual geography and urbanity, he overlays the map grid with a fictional layer that thereby adds a new virtual texture to the city and originates another, alternative Santiago. *Synco* is not only the novel of the same title, but also a sort of narrative, virtual, geographic, and historiographic project, through which Baradit (re)builds the other spatiotemporal Chile. In this way, Baradit creates multiplatform and multi-channels

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[133] He had a fabulous website at www.baradit.cl, where he presented the hyper-dimension involved in his works through digital and virtual graphics. However, he no longer runs it, but instead uses Twitter and Facebook as mediums for communication with the public. His popularity on social networks do not always benefit him, or at least his reputation, when not advancing his celebrity status and the sale of his books. His Twitter posts led to a controversy regarding his gender sensitivity. See: "The Macho Tweets Baradit, Author of the Secret History of Chile, Have Apologize for Glamorama" (Farías and Cantuarias).

[134] While there are many short videos on YouTube, the website Pueblo Nuevo holds a digital album of Synco's (129–30). See: https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/synco-soundtrack/. Before he became a writer, Jorge Baradit was in a punk rock band. His band's performances can be found on YouTube but are scarce. In the meantime, Pueblo Nuevo also seems to feature a promising and provocative cyber group that is paving its own way in our society of advanced technology and capitalism.

experiences for readers. *Synco* was not solely a personal, individual project by Baradit because it was generated via the collective and communicative work of a Facebook group and webpage for *Synco*, in which his audience could participate in adding, forging and writing some parts of the book.[135] *Synco* is not the only example of Baradit's transmedia storytelling and activism, which crosses various media and platforms to forge and constitute new media audiences.[136]

Baradit's vigorous practices and activities online manifest a twofold meaning: it is compliance with capitalist realist ecology, but also, ironically, challenges the neoliberal domination of the public realm. His media-friendly attitude and lively engagement with audiences certainly boosted his popularity, and Baradit has become a bestselling author. Whether intended or not, his media activities became a kind of marketing, since the growing popularity and sales of Baradit's books cannot be totally disconnected from his active presence on various social media platforms. By searching and connecting diverse media to learn about these novels, his audience experiments with virtuality. In so doing, they transform into "prosumers/producers,"

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[135] Baradit shut down his website and blogs, so it is hard to confirm how he invited public participation and what exactly he took from it; however, before the publication of *Synco,* he initiated a small contest among his fans to create names for the characters in *Synco*. See "Synco, lo nuevo de Jorge Baradit" published on the website *La cueva del lobo.* ("Synco, lo nuevo de Jorge Baradit")

[136] Henry Jenkins defined the term "transmedia storytelling and activism" in *Convergence Culture* as follows: "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics… Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game or vice versa" (129–30). Considering the way that Jenkins specifies this concept, Baradit prolifically published sf texts and also produced transmedia storytelling. In this way, the author tried to construct a cultural, literary, and social amusement park inside and outside of reality across genre boundaries. Stretching the narrative across multi-media platforms, Baradit not only wrote novels and graphic novels but also created new hypertexts and connectivities through virtual constructions in the network. What is interesting is that his transmedia activism demonstrates a deep connection with the neoliberal market environment.

a term coined by the futurist Alvin Toffler. Manuel Castells has further argued that Internet users

are producers as well as consumers.[137] Although the prosumer comes from creative and

productive practices, it is always associated with consumption, whether virtual or financial.

Baradit's successful career, based on social media participation, showcased how the growth of

this technology can furnish a platform for counteraction, reaction, and resistance to the

established culture and norms. For authors deprived of popularity and the resources to participate

in the primary literary circuit, diverse platforms have become a valuable space through which to

distribute their works outside the financial constraints of the market, or at the least, fewer

constraints. Although Baradit's works depict a worst-case scenario, in which the Internet and

virtuality are converted into a bio/necro-apparatus, his online practice shows the potentialities of

interweaving the virtual society with actual society.

The anthology *CHIL3: Relación de reyno* (2010), based on the uchronia, steampunk, and

retrofuturism genres, is the remarkable result of young writers' online collaboration with Baradit.

In this volume, various authors from both inside and outside Chile reconstruct and reimagine

Chilean history from the beginning of the colonial era in 1495 to the futuristic period of 2210.

This anthology consists partly of sf narratives and partly of experimental collages in diverse

media. *CHIL3* was initially an Internet-based project conducted by everyone who wanted to

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[137] In the pre/early Internet period, the futurologist Alvin Toffler suggested the terms consumer and prosumer in his book, *The Third Wave* (1980): "Producer and consumer, divorced by the industrial revolution, are reunited in the cycle of wealth creation, with the customer contributing not just the money but market and design information vital for the production process. Buyer and supplier share data, information, and knowledge. Someday, customers may also push buttons that activate remote production processes. Consumer and producer fuse into a 'prosumer'" (239). Beyond prosumer, the notion of "producer" offers more active engagement from the public in the creation and production of (im)materials using new media platforms and technologies. In this sense, Manuel Castells points out the "revolutionary" changes in the relationship between vendor and consumer in new media platforms as exemplified in YouTube creators (*Communication Power* 58–66).

participate in rewriting Chilean history. Álbaro Bisama, Francisco Ortega, Mike Wilson, and

Baradit were editors and gathered some of the stories from the blog—named Ucronía Chile—and

eventually published them in a book.[138] This project turned out to be a place where the

relationship between consumer and producer, and reader and writer, is recast by shifting the

means of communication, interaction and engagement with the audiences and market through

advances in technology. In terms of the literary and artistic significance of this project, Baradit

and his colleagues introduced a new dimension between the real and virtual Chile through

forging a new genre, which I term *ucronía chilena.* Transformed into a collective and interactive

work, this project provoked a boom in uchronia and alternate history. Although *ucronía* as a

narrative genre has no direct relationship with the Internet itself, the visibility and dissemination

of *ucronía chilena* show a close connection with the emergence of network technology and

diversified channels of communication.

Chilean uchronia is located at the intersection of interface technology, historiography and

narrativity, and this is why I would like to dedicate the second half of this chapter to Chilean

uchronia. I call this genre *ucronía chilena* in order to distinguish it from retrofuturism, alternate

history, and similar genres. Although uchronia itself is not a well-defined or consolidated genre,

recent works, whether published or posted, of *ucronía chilena* have demonstrated the

idiosyncrasy in terms of aesthetic, narrative, and sociopolitical vision that encompasses the

various visual and textual materials that emerged at the beginning of the century. Of course,

uchronia is not a new genre, and there are a limited number of texts, but *ucronía chilena* emerges

from collective work and interactive entertainment by altering and diversifying the past, and at

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[138] On the *Tauzero* web magazine site, you can still find the matrix of stories included in the *CHIL3* anthology; while not all of the texts are available, initial ideas, narrative sketches, and texts by several renowned authors are available. www.tauzero.org

the same time the present, in an unprecedented phenomenon. Beyond the reinterpretation of

monolingual official history, Chilean uchronia is becoming a new aesthetic and

material/technological platform for minority, marginalized, and other voices, while manifesting

the potentialities of the newly invented spatiotemporal apparatus, Internet and other media. The

unexpected growth of this genre and its adoption are closely entwined with the diversification of

communications media that has empowered different groups that had previously been

suppressed.[139] Moreover, the uptrend of *ucronía* is commensurate with the prevalence of

Internet-based social networks, and this has drawn a distinction in the means and channels of

production, circulation, and consumption of literary and artistic texts. In particular by using

multiplatform communication, *ucronía* introduced a new way of building personal yet

simultaneously interactive communicative and collective forms of creation, distribution and

consumption between authors and readers.

Time-Machine, Imbunchado

In *Synco,* Baradit twists two major historical possibilities: what if Cybersyn had

succeeded and what if the military coup had never happened?[140] This novel digs back into the

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[139] *CHIL3* is not the first uchronian book in Chile. Before this the collection, *Años Luz. Mapa estelar de la ciencia ficción en Chile* (2006), edited by Marcelo Novoa, was the anthology that initially gave birth to *ucronía chilena.* Sergio Meier Frei wrote the first steampunk novel in Chile, *La segunda enciclopedia de Tlön* (2007), and he is a collaborator at *Puerto de Escape*, the publishing house that focuses on the subgenre. His partial and working fragment, having the same name as the book, was included in this collection, in addition to the initial form of Jorge Baradit's steampunk graphic novel, *Policía del Karma*, and Francisco Ortega's alternate story, "Santa Garciela."

[140] CyberSyn was a project initated by Allende's government that aimed to build a sort of cybernetic network and communication system before the Internet. Baradit was a producer on the television program, *Chile secreto*, in which he made an episode about this interesting project. In the novel, instead of CyberSyn, Baradit uses "Synco" to refer to the overall system and the machine as a collective and material structure. For more information about CyberSyn and the

recent Chilean past, in which the nation has become one of the most developed countries in

terms of networked systems and sociopolitical stability. Cybersyn was a real project that

Allende's cabinet proposed to establish a network, a sort of prototype Internet, in order to form a

participatory and egalitarian state model throughout a digital and informational system. The

Synco system, through which civilians communicate directly with central institutions, enabled

the growth and distribution of economic and political wealth. In the novel, Pinochet is turned

into a heroic figure as he heads off a military coup d'état by intervening in the conflict between

two opposing parties. Meanwhile, Allende is portrayed as a ruthless tyrant and corrupt president

who exploits social minorities and governs society in an authoritarian style. Thanks to the Synco

network, without political strife and economic crisis Chile becomes an ideal state under

Allende's administration. Behind the prosperous surface, however, the government is concealing

the absurd in the underground. The truth of Synco and Chile's success is revealed by Martina

Aguablanca, a Venezuelan delegate assigned to investigate Synco and its successful application

to the social structure in order to weigh up its potential application in Venezuela. Her father was

Chilean but was exiled or escaped from his home country because he was right-wing. Martina

discovers that the central machine of Synco is located under the Moneda Palace and that it is

operates through the exploitation of children's labor and their suffering. The cyber-interface,

Synco, functions thanks to the manual labor of children and people imprisoned underground:

> Filas interminables de procesadores con cintas magnéticas zumbaban mientras hordas de
>
> mujeres que parecían enajenadas conectaban y desconectaban anticuados plugs de

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politics of technology during the Allende era, see Eden Medina's *Cybernetic Revolutionaries*
(2011). David Laraway, in particular, draws a meaningful connection between Project CyberSyn
and the historical and political background, which plays a key role in constructing the
contradictory and ironic reality in *Synco* that is opposed to the "real" history. See his article,
"Back to the Future: Salvador Allende's Steampunk Chile" (152–69).

telefonía en paneles de madera; a sus pies, niños pequeños desenredaban una y otra vez la infinidad de cables que, como cabelleras de serpientes rojas y negras, emergían desde los costados. Gruesos cables de energía colgaban del techo y caían ondulando en todas direcciones, entre banderas chilenas abandonadas tras la última inauguración y telarañas de grasa y polvo. (103)

Una máquina monstruosa horadando con púas metálicas la vagina de la tierra, bajo Santiago de Chile. El bramido enloquecedor de un coito entre la máquina y el territorio, como enterrándole una sonda el Demiurgo a la Pachamama, inoculándole un virus entre las venas, operado por pequeños parásitos que invanden su corazón y la ahogan con su ferretería y sus martillos ásperos. (110)

The majority of workers are social minorities like orphans and criminals who are dispossessed of the right to live. Fighting against the toxic vapors and dirt, people pulled from the aboveground society run the diesel-powered machines through their manual work. They are held in the underworld and can only escape through death. Martina discovers that the utopian socialist society is in fact a fraud. Further, political reconciliation between two parties was realized only by a conspiracy between Pinochet and Allende. To reach an agreement, Allende executed the left-wing radicals and, likewise, Pinochet betrayed his right-wing party and their plan to mount a military coup. Carlos Altamirano, another historical figure represented in the novel, is one of the left-wing activists who survived Allende's purge. At the end of the novel, he reboots history by rewinding time to the beginning of the 1970s with the Synco technology to (re)create an ideal Chilean cabinet opposed to the tyranny of Allende's administration. Ironically, however, the history that Altamirano recreates resembles the history that we know from our timeline. Altamirano assigns new roles to Allende and Pinochet, in which Allende will commit suicide in

the Moneda Palace during the attack by Pinochet's forces. As for Martina, Altamirano sentences her to be one of the "disappeared" in the new history under Pinochet's dictatorship. Through this development, Baradit disturbs the notion of "alternative" history, while engendering a kind of time loop through which Chile goes through and comes back to the 1970s and 1980s.

Synco is not the first or only uchronian text, yet this novel is one of the most significant works in shaping what would become *ucronía chilena*. Through the dystopian society in *Synco*, as well as Synco the machine, Baradit examines both the inherent coloniality of power and the potential alternative technocracy. Since Baradit mixes existing people and events with fictitious ones, we feel a kind of déjà vu that reminds us of the "real" history of Chile while observing different situations and histories. David Laraway suggests that Baradit's way of remaking and digressing into the official history (i.e., the steampunk ucronía) may create "new strategies of redefining the political field, undermining the peculiar kind of logic of disavowal that governs so much of political discourse today in Chile" (166). In a similar vein, Kaitlin R. Sommerfeld and Juan C. Toledano argue that the similarity and parallelism between people, events and things that appear in both historical and fictional texts, regardless of their completely reversed features or social and personal conditions, is a way of remembering and restaging the traumatic experience of the dictatorial era, albeit in a different manner.[141] In particular, Sommerfeld and Toledano emphasize the role of Martina and her disappearance in awakening memories of the collective experience under Pinochet's dictatorship in our timeline. It is worth noting that, unlike other

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[141] Sommerfeld and Toledano argue that (re)staging historical events from a distinctive angle can be a form of mourning and a process of collective healing: "discutir la dictadura en otros términos, hacerse eco de la memoria oculta como necesariamente recuperable, y explorar las consecuencias de las acciones del conflicto social y militar que llevaron al régimen de Pinochet y el terror traumático que sufre parte del pueblo chileno después de tantos años […] *Synco* utiliza la ucronía para distanciar al lector de la realidad pasada, oficial, y ayudarle a enfrentarse a la suya propia, a sus recuerdos más dolorosos" (11).

characters, her name does not evoke a real historic figure from Chilean history. Instead she embodies the ideological and technological other who is willing to know the truth but is dispossessed of any power to engage it. Although she never has the power to disclose, transform, or challenge the absurd society, Baradit foregrounds her appearance/disappearance, leading us to the core of the other Chile while being chased and censored by government officials. Along with Martina, the children in the underworld and Synco's virtual control over society remind us of the enormous number of victims who suffered, perished and disappeared under military rule and the "Chilean miracle."

Baradit's version of the past overturns what the readers know in general, and yet repeats almost unchanged the condition of the socially marginal, who have always been exploited by elites, technocrats, and the social system. Gabriel A. Saldías points out that although Baradit criticizes socialist utopia by depicting the negative aspects of Allende's left-wing government, "all ideology, regardless of political orientation, is nothing more than a political disguise that the powerful few use to exploit the rest of the population. This becomes pretty evident at the end of the novel, when the eutopia of the Left fuses with the dystopia of the Right, effectively closing any gaps between one kind of bad society and its supposed opposite" (411). *Synco* unfolds another form of dominance-subjugation that continues to exist and (re)engenders an unequal social system, which reflects a Chilean reality in which the marginalization of political, ideological, economic and technological others persists without being affected by changes in the political structure. The capitalization of labor and the dehumanization that occurred along with political executions during Pinochet's era overlap with images of the exploitation of children and violence against Martina, one of the ordinary citizens. Although *ucronía chilena* shares aesthetic modes with similar fantastic genres that deploy antique machinery and old-engine systems, it

depicts common themes and local and present issues that many Chilean artists engaged with. The eruption of this genre in the 2000s was not a late invention, but rather was the appropriation of the genre. While uchronia, retrofuturism, and steampunk emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to social anxiety, industrialization, modernization, and warfare in the global north, *ucronía chilena* came into bloom with the recent experience of dictatorship and an alienated global environment, in which new technologies and the neoliberal system have changed and reconfigured socio-economic global structures. More than an aesthetic and narrative reproduction of the Western genre, *ucronía chilena* become an authentic and alternative space where authors and artists began to design anew the ways in which the traumatic past which still cast a shadow over their own society.

By (re)casting and arranging stories and memories that bring incompatible, conflicting, and antagonistic things together, *Synco* reveals the unevenness and inequality in Chilean society, on the one hand, and revives forgotten or withdrawn minorities histories on the other. The anachronistic convergence of high and low technology, steam-powered machines, exploitation of manual labor, and political corruption in *Synco* represents the singular texture of local history at the turn of century. Reviewing *CHIL3*, Brown points out that, "*CHIL3* turns itself into an act of independence not merely from the Pinochet-related versions of history but also from the academic *poderes* in Chile who have also created models of discourse about their official history of the country. In so doing, Baradit, Bisama, Ortega, and Wilson re-enact discourses of independence and textual nation-building that situate their text both against and within traditions of writing the country in Chile and Latin America" ("CHIL3 and the SF History" 87). Likewise, many works of *ucronía chilena* set their sights on "(re)making" the past as means of resistance or a counter-narrative to the official and authoritarian voice of History through an alternative

condition of the past. In their own ways, the authors accomplish "independence" and build their own "textual nation," but at the same time, they are careful not to mythologize another version of history. In this way, the authors deploy *ucronía chilena* as a place where they disclose and revive the things and people who existed but have hitherto been invisible, hidden, occluded, and repressed.

Throughout his representation of Synco, a machine he represents physically and figuratively, Baradit weaves anachronistic, mismatching and irreconcilable time, matter, and people together into the same textual level by continuously creating new micro-histories.[142] Albeit primitive and in somewhat rough form, Synco is a kind of virtual machine like the Gokubi in the novel *Gel azul* and it also it resonates with the figure of the *imbunche* in *Yggdrasil*. It creates a new reality and materiality by violently weaving together the web of lives, be they organic or inorganic, informational or material, human or nonhuman. People's corporealities and subjectivities are dissolved and dissected in order to be grafted onto the social machine, Synco, which becomes the subject who controls and modulates everything. As with the other cyborgs discussed, in Synco becoming other and hybrid also includes the atrocious dismemberment of vitality, corporeality, and subjectivity. Under the macro-structure of the machine, people are transformed into living prostheses and enslaved fragments. The coming of new hybrids represented by the *imbunche* always embraces the suffering of unwanted dismemberment and the loss of each entity's originality. And the body itself turns out to be the evidence of violence, like the other Latin American cyborg bodies that Brown has indicated. The real aspect of cybernetic

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[142] I have differentiated the title of the novel *Synco* (in italics) and the machine, Synco (not in italics), which the novel depicts.

connections and communications runs parallel to the sorcerer's overwhelming power that (dis)integrates corporeal and incorporeal subjectivity.

In Baradit's texts perhaps the most striking coexistence of asymmetrical entities in the *imbunche* body, beyond the cultural and material synthesis, is between science and magic. Altamirano activates Synco's ability to warp time with a mysteriously powerful stone and the assistance of prophetic children. Like the bodies of the AI and Mariana in *Ygdrasil*, Synco is the body of two different, separate parts of the world's foundations. Through such intentional mixture, Baradit resists the binary system not only in politics but also in other conceptions of the world. Radical separateness in Synco fails and is dystopian for all entities. Synco is an ambivalent figure in the sense that it represents the inhumanity of the social system, but at the same time, the power of the collective. When different elements come together and intermingle, Synco gains the agency to reset the universe by converting the past into the future and the future into past. Because the end of the novel returns the dictatorship to our timeline's history, Baradit's vision seems somewhat pessimistic. However, he also discovers compelling alternative agency and potentiality against the coloniality of power from the collective power that consists of minorities, fragments, and the withdrawn parts. While they are the objects of exploitation, the marginalized and ousted entities are also the agents of the construction and deconstruction of history. *Synco* is a representation of the unruly power of minorities and their unstable yet influential collectivity. Its paradoxical body is an *imbunche*, where the seemingly incompatible dimensions of science and technology, magic and myth, intersect.

Francisco Ortega and Nelson Dániel's graphic novel series, *1899, Metahulla 1* and *1959, Metahulla 2* were born from the *CHIL3* project. Ortega originally posted some fragments of the story on the website for the project and those were subsequently published in the anthology. Later, Ortega worked with the illustrator Dániel to develop the uchronian idea into a graphic novel series expanding the scope and the time and space of the original story. The sequel's timeline departs from ours at the 1879 Battle of Iquique during the War of the Pacific and persists until 1969, two years after the disappearance of Ernesto "Che" Guevara. While the story's divergence is situated in the past, the representation of the past Chile and the global South seems futuristic due to the discovery of a marvelous and imaginary mineral, a sort of super-carbon, called Metahulla. Along with *Synco*, this sequel played a crucial role in shaping *ucronía chilena* in the early stage of its appropriation of uchronia in the literary and artistic field. In particular, the fact that the graphic novel is *graphic* contributes to the variation of the *ucronía* genre that goes beyond literary texts. Commercial success, as in *Synco*'s case, has also bolstered the popularity and configuration of *ucronía* in market and aesthetic circuits. Throughout its materialization and commercialization of collective memory and historic figures, Ortega and Dániel demythologize official history and simultaneously hybridize mythology and history.

The most startling idea introduced in the first volume is the insertion of parallel universes or other simultaneous universes, in which Chile's reality is only one of numerous possible versions. While *Synco*'s temporal twist is based on a sort of feedback loop, through which the past and future are bilateral, reciprocal, and influence each other, metahulla's timelines generate other, independent universes. The *Metahulla* series appreciates the diversity and co-presence of otherness. Instead of establishing a hierarchy among the other universes and temporalities, or

having one overwrite others, temporality in this series is varied and multiple. Although the center of the story is located in Chile with metahulla, Ortega and Dániel never fail to catch the reality of the manifold, foregrounding that the world where the protagonist reside in only one of many independent universes. *1899, Metahulla 1* takes the War of Pacific as its narrative departure and the moment of divergence from our official History. As Ortega himself elucidates, the startling feature of this novel is the construction of a new universe beyond alternative history. In other words, Ortega deploys the parallel universe or multiverse concept in this sequel. A superpowered carbon, metahulla, is discovered in Chile and enables dramatic technological, economic and political advances in the nation. Thanks to metahulla providing phenomenal energy for its machines, especially airships and bombs made from the material, Chile wins the Battle of Iquique and goes on to conquer Peru. Unlike in the actual history, Arturo Prat survives the battle and becomes a national hero.[143]

After the war, Chile achieves rapid economic and technological growth and becomes a global superpower. However, twenty years later, mysterious attacks on critical infrastructure powered by metahulla occur throughout the country. Inspector Luis Uribe, a former naval officer and the cousin of Admiral Arturo Prat, takes charge of the investigation into this terrorism with his assistant gynoid, Igriega. In search of the force behind the attacks, Uribe reaches out to Prat and his Peruvian counterpart, Admiral Miguel Grau. As a result of this meeting, he realizes that the attacks are not caused by terrorists, but by side effects of the metahulla itself, and that its

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[143] British sf author Stephen Baxter's early novel, *Anti-Ice* (1994), has a similar premise to the *Metahulla* series. This novel is also founded on alternate universes and it addresses critiques of power and colonialism. The foundational texts of the uchronia genre are Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* and Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. The website *Uchronia* is an invaluable resource for understanding retrospective, speculative, and alternate fiction. In its Introduction, the author provides a brief history of the genre and other primordial texts to remember, as well as a working definition of the genre.

discovery led to fractures in the timeline, generating parallel worlds.[144] At the end of a chain reaction of explosions, their world will be destroyed. Anticipating the apocalypse, Prat and Grau plan to build a bridge between two parallel worlds to "salvar el legado de este universo" (*1959 Metahulla 2*).[145] To do that, however, a sacrifice is needed: the life of Igrieta, her metahulla engine-heart and another Uribe in the parallel world. Because he is alive in both worlds, unlike Prat and Grau, who are dead on the other side, Uribe is one of few capable of travelling between the two worlds. If Uribe goes through to the other side, he will displace his other. As Prat and Grau attempt to obtain enough power to distort the time-space of both universes in order to create the bridge, they force Uribe to detonate Igriega's heart, since the explosion of metahulla in her body will generate the power to warp spatiotemporality. However, contrary to the expectations of Prat and Grau, Uribe does not save the world by transporting the "legado"; rather, he saves his companion robot and his other self. Uribe opts not to violate two things: the

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[144] Miguel Grau Seminario was the most renowned admiral in Peru, who led the victorious Battle of Iquique (1879), though Peru was defeated in the War of the Pacific. He died in another battle, the Battle of Angamos, in 1879. Not only was he a great and resourceful naval officer, but he also showed great humanitarianism when rescuing a Chilean enemy shipwrecked in the aftermath of the war. However, in the *Metahualla* series, he is depicted as a relatively nasty man, much like Arturo Prat. Contrary to the real history, the Peruvian military was defeated at Iquique, and Grau barely survived the battle, later on colluding with Prat, an enemy of the nation. Because of this distortion of the admired and heroic figure of Peru, there was controversy surrounding the novel, and Ortega was criticized in certain media and by the public. However, Grau plays an important role in the novel, representing a new generation in-between humans and nonhumans. During the battle, he lost his arm, so he replaced it with a mechanical prosthesis operated by metahulla power. He became a kind of cyborg from the past. Uribe, instead of the heart of Igriega, shoots down Grau's prosthesis.
[145] In his other version of the story, "1899 Metahulla: La continuidad Prat"—which Ortega was going to publish in *Alucinaciones.TXT*—Prat and Grau want to send Uribe to the other universe before the Battle of Iquique to reset all of history. However, the graphic novel and textual novel included at the end of the book do not clearly denote whether or how Uribe could save the legacy of the metahulla universe from the other universe.

parallel universe, his other self, and the lives of other, nonhuman beings for the cause of humanity.

Through the figures of Prat and Grau, Ortega and Dániel seek to challenge their cause of humanity, modernity and the myth of nation-building. Albeit not straightforwardly, Prat and Grau's plan to displace Uribe from the other side with the Uribe from their universe for the sake of their plan clearly demonstrates how their worldview disregards all economic, ideological, technological, and human others. They justify the violation of the other side and the consequent sacrifices of minorities through their overweening belief in their superiority and the primacy of humanity. Starting with an atrocious massacre during the Pacific War with metahulla bombs—which has a power similar to a nuclear bomb in our reality—to breaking the parallel world and antomata/androids, Prat and Grau repeat the violence on others in the name of national, ideological, and humanist values. Their ambition for conquest and prosperity at the expense of others' vitalities recall the vicious circle, or persistence, of the coloniality of power that is not only the history of the past. In this sense, King and Page argue that Ortega and Dániel do not simply address nostalgia or human agency through steampunk aesthetics, but instead problematize "the expansionist aims of Chile's past and… reinsert the nation's modernizing progress within a history of exclusion and exploitation" (112). In the world of metahulla, we observe not only heterogeneous universes but also an overlap of multifaceted others from different times: the others in the constitution of nation, progress, and humanity. The remix of temporalities and the distortion of spaces and their continuities are the ways in which Ortega and Dániel challenge and demythologize official history, the discourse of modernity, and its significance on the current society founded on colonial, imperial, authoritarian, capitalist, and cybernetic multi-realities.

Uribe's decision to remain in the world where he belongs and to save his robot friend makes evident the ideal disposition and relationship among all entities and machines that the authors suggest: respect for the collateral and independent existence of others, whether human, animal, or nonhuman. As in *Synco*, both the harmony and the lack of harmony of seemingly incompatible and antagonistic time, matter, people, and so on, are also aspects of the uchronian dimension in the *Metahulla* series. In addition to pluri-verses, the collectives and communities composed of two politically, temporally, and ontologically separate entities manifest potential alternatives to ongoing predicaments. In the Chile of metahulla the social structure is highly developed, particularly in transportation, weaponry, and robotic technology. However, as King and Page point out, "the technologies 1899 imagines are [...] imperfect and messy, disgorging volatile, polluting gases that point to the uncounted human and environmental cost of the hasty adoption of new inventions" (111–112). Discord between futuristic techniques and 19th century, industrial-style material and infrastructure, is emphasized through their steampunk visualization: monochrome illustration riddled with bold and straightforward lines, along with shades and textures accentuated with stippling to foreground the disparate aspects of the futuristic past.[146] As Elizabeth Guffey and Kate C. Lemay describe it, "at its most unsettling, retrofuturism disrupts our understanding of the nature of time, encouraging a kind of hybrid temporality" ("Retrofuturism and steampunk"). The body of the automaton is the clearest instance of hybridity and discordance, in addition to the rugged and parallel landscapes, which is the place where technologies from different epochs merge. Ortega and Dániel shed light on the fact that

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[146] Edward King and Joanna Page suggest that the quality and style of the material book—its "lower grade paper" for example—connecting it to 19th century printing techniques and aesthetics. However, such an aspect was removed by the second edition, which was published simultaneously in two versions, paper and electronic.

not only human bodies, but organic and technological bodies alike, have singular-plural characteristics.

The affective bond between Uribe and the robot, Igriega, epitomizes the ethics and new relationships that the authors propose.[147] Through the solidarity and affective entanglement between two ontologically different individualities, Ortega and Dániel unfold an alternative collectivity and a postanthropocentric, posthuman ethics for engagement with other entities. In fact, for Uribe, life on the other side seems much better since he has Elizabeth, the love of his life, without suffering the trauma of the aftermath of the war. However, he gives up the opportunity to have this different life in order to save his gynoid friend. People discriminate against and even show contempt for the robots, which reenacts racial and gender discrimination. Human society exploits their cognitive and labor power but isolates them: when Uribe and Igriega take a train, people openly complain about Igriega sharing the same space with humans, so she has to stay isolated in the overhead compartment during the journey. Igriega's metallic, technical, and cybernetic body reflects the dual fearfulness and seductiveness of the technosexualized other.

> Igriega pareció pestañar, de un modo tan antinatural que me congeló por dentro. Es
> extraño lo que siento por los números, no es que desconfíe de ellos, tampoco que los
> odie. Me molesta no tener claro qué pueden hacer o hacernos. Nunca el "por qué los
> creamos", cuál fue la idea tras su abominable invención. Si la mitad de Europa los

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[147] While King and Page point out the subverted hierarchy between humans and nonhumans/things in the novel, what is less examined in their account is the agency of the things, their otherness, and the mutual effects among entities. The demand for new ethics is not done by the human but rather by the nonhuman entities that make visible the new dimension of the lives and power dynamics in Ortega and Dániel's novels.

prohibió, por qué demonios tenemos nosotros que hacernos cargo de ellos. Y además

tratarlos como iguales, que es aún más aborrecible.

Like other human citizens, Uribe does not like being accompanied by Igriega initially, but

gradually he opens his mind to her.[148] As seen from how Uribe initially regards Igriega, the

public in the novels resent and demonize the humanoids since the robots represent artificial, anti-

natural, and nonhuman others. Igriega is also gendered by having a female appearance that

arouses the sexual reflexes of conventionally conditioned masculine characters such as Prat and

Grau.[149] As King and Page suggest, Igriega's body represents the complex forms of

marginalized, entities excluded by liberalist humanism, universalism, and modernity: the robots

do not conform to the standards of a male human being with the biological organism.

However, the presence of humanoids disturbs and affects people and other entities. Their

humanistic individualities, more than humans, disrupt and challenge anthropocentric humanism.

They are supposed to be used and controlled as non-humanistic entities, but their undisclosed

and immense agency, which goes far beyond human capacity, scares and disquiets their creators.

Although this robot cannot express her feelings and emotions verbally, Igriega is depicted as an

extremely affective entity. In the panels, Dániel's drawings emphasize Igriega's emotionless face

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[148] Ortega included his textual story at the end of both Metahulla 1 and 2. While the graphic narrative follows through the 1960s, the texts—divided into two fragments and included in 1 and 2—cover only the 19th century, the years drawn in the first graphic novel version, and the encounter between Uribe and Igriega at the end. In the textual narrative, Ortega develops in detail the emotional changes in Uribe concerning Igriega. In addition, the author thoroughly describes the personality and humanistic aspects of Igriega. Uribe's decision to save Igriega in the graphic version seems a bit sudden, but in the textual version his decision seems more persuasive and probable.

[149] Igriega was sexually harassed by two historic figures, Prat and Grau. While they try to use the gynoids' mechanical power by blasting her, they show a typical masculine reaction to a gendered robot, quite unlike the fear or abomination that other citizens demonstrated. This demonstrates well the double meaning of the robot that enchants on the one hand, and on the other the humanoid that threatens humans with its immeasurable power.

through frequent close-up shots of her face. The second version of the book cover for *Metahulla 1* is covered with Igriega's face. Despite her lack of facial expressions, Uribe feels and reads a kind of emotion or affective power through her hard body and posture, even though Uribe's feelings could be projections of his mind. In a similar fashion, other people are affected by humanoids as they feel revulsion, which despite being a negative sensation is also a sort of emotion. Igriega's body is certainly ontologically separate from other human beings, yet mutual affectivity entangles people and humanoids in the same plane. On the whole, the relationship between Uribe and Igriega transcends sexuality and species, representing the authors' attempt to build a new ethics that erases the boundary between human and nonhuman.

In the second book, Ortega and Dániel unfold the new generation of hybrids through changing material culture and environment. Changes in the qualities of metahulla and the relationship between robots and human beings are notable themes in the second novel. Contrary to Prat and Grau's prediction, in the second novel *1959, Metahulla 2*, the world continues without having collapsed, and people have discovered more metahulla, leading to a vertiginous social transformation of their world.

> Su descubrimiento y uso práctico convirtió a Chile y luego a Andinia en una superpotencia. El uso más arriesgado de la metahulla ha sido en la disciplina llamada biometahulla que busca provocar cambios genéticos en animales y humanos usando esta poderosa fuente como activador biológico. En 1908 otro yacimiento de metahulla se abrió en la estepa siberiana de Tunguska en el imperio Ruso, lo que propició una serie de conflictos que condujeron a la Primera y Segunda Guerra Mundial Metahullana. Se sabe además de posibles fuentes de metahulla, incluso más puras que las de Tunguska y

Arauco, en el centro de la Tierra, a las cuales se puede acceder a través del polo sur.

(*1959. Metahulla 2*)

Running parallel to the Cold War, the world depicted in the second volume is divided into two political blocs that maintain a fragile stability after a long period of warfare and disputes over metahulla. One bloc is the Alianza Pacífico, made up of North American and the Andean nations. At this point, Chile lost its exclusive right to the material and the dependent technology has changed greatly. Beyond its military and industrial applications, metahulla has become the source of new types of lives and entities and is used in new forms of organic and inorganic machines with the intention to create super-human beings. Although creating super-humans fails, metahulla allows the development of organic humanoids with more-than-human intelligence, capacities, and morality. While being a relatively primitive form of humanoid, Igriega becomes almost human in terms of appearance while also possessing superhuman physical power and intelligence. Although humanity failed to *renovate* human beings, or just the human body, in the narrative, it has been successful in creating superhuman machines. Beyond a conceptual or immaterial affinity, Ortega and Dániel go on to show a direct and intimate chemical, biological, and technical enmeshment between human and nonhuman through the intercourse between Ernesto "Che" Guevera, a human character in the novel, and Igriega, the female-appearing humanoid. While the bond between Uribe and Igriega is affective and emotional, that between Guevara and Igriega is corporeal and ontological. Through their relationship, they give birth to a boy, Adán Guevara, the first of the coming generations that will displace humans, but will ironically also be future human generations. In this way, the *Metahulla* series present a radical future vision of the hybridity of life in which the humanity that we know will disappear.

While the first novel restages national history, in *Metahulla 2* Ortega and Dániel expand the scope of the story into the global 1960s by using emblematic figures from Latin America such as Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, and Eva Perón (a.k.a. Evita). Although the world has not collapsed, the reckless exploitation of metahulla still threatens humanity. During a world war in the imaginary world, Che Guevara, acting as an agent of the Alianza Pacífico, disappears with his team in search of metahulla in the Antarctic. After a while, he reveals that he is alive and asks that his stepfather, Allende, come to him, saying that he has discovered the secret of metahulla. Thus, Fidel Castro, the leader of the Alianza Pacífico, sends a team to Antarctica whose members include Allende, Evita, John F. Kennedy, and two persons granted supernatural power by metahulla technology. During the journey, they encounter monstrous creatures and eventually reach Guevara with his wife Igriega and their son. Prat and Grau also reappear after traveling to the future where thanks to metahulla human civilization developed exponentially but was at last destroyed by the metahulla explosion. They observe the extinction of the humanity in 2089 and return to the past to prevent it by provoking the world war, which will deplete the amount of metahulla in the earth and thereby delay the explosion. In *1959 Metahulla 2*, Ortega and Dániel radically foreground the hybridity of the world and society by mixing disparate things, people and events together. Not only do they blend historical figures and technologies from other times and spaces as they had in *1899*, they also mix nature and culture, as well as myth and science. Aesthetically, *1959* remixes the original steampunk style of *1899* with dieselpunk style to show the changes in historical era while maintaining the tone of its drawings.

Beyond reconciling the counterparts of the world, the authors expand their vision to the multiplicity of entities through their representation of the mysterious mineral, metahulla, which

unfolds its overwhelming agency. Metahulla symbolizes a nonhuman object, through which the authors express the affects and vitality of things that (re)shape economic, political, natural, and material landscapes of the world, or in other words, the metabolism of the world's structures. Like water, it is a kind of mineral, but it shows its full agency by causing implosion and explosion through its own flow and power. While metahulla is captured, refined, circulated, and bio-genetically metabolized to be a part of corporeality, it simultaneously captures, refines, and circulates the real yet symbolic, natural yet cultural capital, of human society. Its flows cause far-reaching changes in every dimension of life, whether corporeal, economic, or political onto-geographic by (re)shaping the relationships among entities and their very constitution. King and Page point out that, "this representation of metahulla complicates the conventional division between humans and non-humans, according to which human actors take steps to change the inert world around them" (117). In addition, such blurred division is violated even more powerful thingness, flowy affectivity of metahulla by switching the relationship between subject and object. In particular, the reckless exploitation backfires on humanity. This substance, however, is not merely an imaginary product, rather it is a historical projection. One of the significant background events to the story is the fate of Concepción, in which Chileans experienced the rise and fall of the coal mining industry. The metahulla industry and its intervention in society recall this memory of the past, and the future dreamt then.[150] The story is

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[150] It is interesting that Ortega and Dániel reference Lota, in Concepción, Chile. In Lota there was a coal mine where mining started in the 19th century and ended in 1997. Through the development of the mining industry, Lota became the urban center for nearby regions, accruing huge economic wealth, population growth, and a social infrastructure, alongside the exploitation of nature and human labor. However, by the end of the industry, this region was left in ruins, devoid of both humans and nonhumans. See the interesting essay by Juan Carlos Rodríguez Torrent and Patricio Media Hernández, "Utopía y ucronía. Reflexiones sobre la trayectoria de una ciudad minera," which connects the mining industry with the uchronia imagination (107–22).

one of global crisis created by the exploitation and violence of marginalized others, yet as Ortega and Dániel show, the problems are also localized to "our" own community of globalized capitalism imbued with coloniality.

As both *Synco* and the *Metahulla* series show, *ucronía chilena* is situated somewhere between retrofuturism, alternate history, and steampunk, constructing its own unique form of uchronia. Beyond nostalgia, anxiety about the past or failed dreams of progress, what *ucronía chilena* proposes are potential alternatives and solutions to the actual predicaments of the present social, historical and political context. More than other alternate history genres, *ucronía chilena* displays an active position towards potential other worlds. Despite the variety of attitudes and perspectives about the past and future, many authors depict the cohesion/collision of antagonistic people, things, and worlds, which does not always bring about favorable consequences. In many cases, *ucronía chilena* foregrounds the divergence and multiplication not only of space and time, but also of people, things, and the cosmos. Amy J. Ransom writes that the key difference between alternate history and uchronia is that uchronia shows a deeper relationship with "our own timeline" than with alternate history (58–72). Put differently, uchronia emphasizes historical divergence to critique our actual society by the alteration or bifurcation of collectively recognized historical events and moments. In contrast, more "conventional" alternate history focuses more on "what-if" conditions, hypothetical consequences from the anachronic past. According to Ransom's classification, then, uchronia lays stress on the official History and its influences on present society. *Ucronía chilena* also deploys the historical past as a crucial departure and springboard for divergence. Yet the Chilean genre also casts doubt on the historicity and facticity of past events by denying the truth as truth, or rather, by denying official

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records. *Ucronía chilena* is not about what happened and occurred in the past, but about how it is registered and eradicated.

Distinguishing retrofuturism in sf from other retro-style arts, Paweł Frelik underlines that "retrofuturism, or science fictional retro-ism, as a practice that specifically exploits the tensions between ideas about the future from our historical past—either actual predictions or fictions of the time—and notions of futurity expressed in contemporary narratives" (207). The tension between two different perspectives on futurity turns out to be "a tool of ideology critique" for present society (Frelik 207). Certainly, *ucronía chilena* deals with the tensions that emerge from the discrepancy, but it is not because of nostalgia for the past or unaccomplished past dreams. Perhaps investments in the past-background are more relevant to the unfinished past, which is still on-going occurrence, such as the memory of the dictatorship, which is supposed to have ended and yet persists not just as a memory of the past but as a still present trauma in society. Elizabeth E. Guffey asserts that the distinction between steampunk and retrofuturism is that "If retro-futurism half-ironically, half- nostalgically recalls the machine-engineered and streamlined designs associated with futurism, steampunk leapfrogs backward, skipping over much of the twentieth century […] Steampunk encompasses a dynamic twenty-first century subculture of creative production" (257). In other worlds, the steampunk genre is about the manifestation of the human capacity to remake and to create tangible "stuff," rather than social, political, and historical intervention. In this respect, Chilean uchronia seems related to steampunk in the sense that it looks to engage itself with 21st century material culture and creative agency. Nevertheless, *ucronía chilena*'s steampunk aesthetics demonstrates more political and historical undertones. Rather than a reflection of the industrial revolution in the Western world, the 19th century

background and steam/diesel-powered machinery in *ucronía chilena* reflect Chile's own local and hidden histories of nation-building, mining, and material culture.

Enchanted Robots

To close this chapter, I would like to introduce the steampunk anthology, *Cuentos Chilenos Steampunk*, which consists of stories by young, emergent writers, the majority of whom were born in the 1980s. While Baradit and Ortega have gained substantial success and recognition in the market and in literary circles, all these authors are still beginning their careers. The collection was published by an independent publishing house, Fantasía Austral, which specializes in unpopular subgenres. The house is a kind of start-up, without a solid economic and literary foundation, so it covered the costs of the publication through crowdfunding and the collection is an electronic edition without hard copies. This book was born from the encounter between budding authors and the publishing house, in which readers participated in editing, formatting, and orthography, in addition to assessing the quality of the texts.[151] Although the title clearly declares the anthology's direction, some stories seem to be inaccurately classified as steampunk. Even though steampunk is not a closed genre, it is chiefly defined by aesthetic investment in the steam-powered machinery of the 19th century. In this sense, some stories seem allied more with fantasy or other genres. Taken overall the collection falls short of textual, contextual, formal, and generic density and rigor, as well as displaying uneven quality among its texts.

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[151] Unfortunately, the publishing house Fantasía Austral no longer publishes nor has shown any activity on social media or online since 2015.

However, such weaknesses can simultaneously be read as the strength of the anthology in the sense that it challenges the rules of the literary market and mainstream aesthetics. Despite its scarcity and the difficulty in public access to the book, this collection demonstrates how a small group of people can create and share their imaginary worlds in our contemporary cyber-networked and neoliberal society. The editorial house and these young authors have paved a highly practical way to seize the opportunity to make their works visible. The book itself turns out to be an experiment by young people in their struggle with the capitalist market that permeates the literary field, cyber-space, and ordinary life. In particular, the new platform of funding through the Internet represents an interesting inversion of the relationship between writer and reader. Through their investments, readers become active producers of the creation of the publishing company and writers, and also come to the marketers of these works by grabbing an opportunity to publish outside of the mainstream marketplace's interest. The choice of the genre demonstrates the contemporary sensibility that young people represent the ongoing formation of *ucronía chilena*, which continues to metamorphosize.

> What cyberliterature means today in Latin America is precisely the melting down (and relaunching) of the world of languages and literature, of oralities and writings, since it is taking shape in the place from which the relations between aesthetics and politics are being re-thought and re-made. An aesthetic much closer to emerging sensibilities – not only those of young people, but also of ethnic communities and marginalised or excluded populations or sexualities – than Art with a capital letter, and a form of politics much more interwoven with cultural rights and civic struggles than with the proletarian vanguard or electoral processes. (xii)

Opening the collection, *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature,* Jesús Martín-Barbero tries to define the meaning of cyberliteraure in a broad sense. Perhaps not only in Latin America, but on a global scale, advances in new social networking technology have changed cultural, political, and material dynamics. While there are activities and performance that are transformed into aesthetic and literary texts over the limits of individual media, textual literature has transformed itself and become interwoven into both virtual, technological web and life. Above all, new social networks enabled by the Internet provide us with a new public dimension, in which people have perceived promise and danger at the same time. The cyber-networks through which we voice ourselves and communicate with others are as much political as they are material. Steampunk aesthetics in *Cuentos chilenes steampunk* embody the emerging sensibilities rather than "Art with a capital letter," as Martín-Barbero calls it. In particular, the unsettling manner of using steampunk in the stories disclose the unique sensibilities of the young authors and how they engage with the changing environment of their society. While broadening and distorting the dimension of the literature, this kind of cyberliterature suggests new forms of economic and political struggles along with the superficial entertainment in their aesthetics and world vision.

I contend that the works presented in this anthology belong more to *ucronía chilena* than to steampunk, since the format and contents do not fully align with that genre. Instead, their bold mixture of time-space and myth-technology which underlines the persistence of coloniality fits *ucronía chilena*. First of all, while the majority of stories take as their background a past with steam-powered machines, their distinguishing aspect is their temporality as they interlace mythical time with historical time. The magical power of nonhuman things and entities meets in futuristic materials, machines, and technologies. As a result, the characteristic retrospective and

nostalgic themes of steampunk are rarely seen in these works. Unlike steampunk, many texts in this collection are situated, albeit vaguely, in a futuristic quasi-medieval era where kingdoms and strict social strata exist. Their spatiality is also located between the actual and the legendary, and between domestic and international locations, for example, on what is the supposedly unknown island of England, but which strongly resembles Chile's Valparaíso. The puzzling timeframe and spatiality confuse readers of the collection's genre-straddling stories. The authors build technological kingdoms where society has experienced unprecedented development due to the invention of industrial technology and the discovery of the mysterious minerals. As in the *Metahulla* series, these imaginary and anachronistic societies suffer the consequences of their vertiginous development and the resulting environmental degradation. However, all the diverse stories feature a common stringent social hierarchy that subjugates its citizens using their advanced weaponry and technology.

Several stories foreground magicians and alchemists whose powers encompass magical, spiritual, religious, and scientific knowledge. In Fraterno Dracon Saccis's "Robota Strigoi Morti," a child revives an enemy's military robot, a so-called *golem,* with his magical power. His enemy had won the battle thanks to the giant petrol-powered machines, in which people can take control. At the moment when enemy troops begin to shoot civilians in the aftermath of the war, the child, who has inherited magical power from his grandmother, awakens the gigantic machine and defeats the enemy when all hope seemed lost. A metal-covered, authoritarian and technocratic kingdom appears in Cristián Álvarez's "María," F. A. Real H.'s "El levantamiento de Cáel," and Rodrigo Vásquez S.'s "El orden de las cosas," where the use of magic is strictly prohibited. Under the control of an imperial structure, the alchemist protagonists of the first two stories seek to resurrect their loved ones through magical incantation. In the meantime, children

who have lost their parents due to labor exploitation in a mine in "El orden de las cosas" leave their orphanage for an adventure. During this journey and using a sorcerer's book, they encounter mythical powers and creatures like a dragon that breaks the artificial and contaminated environments of the empire. In Paula Rivera Donoso's "Caja de música," the government-like organization "Orden del engranaje" abuses all entities regardless of their species. Automaton and cyborgs are frequently exploded and people die from overwork in sweatshop conditions.

Meanwhile, the world in Moisés Flores's "Solo contra el mundo," Andrés Dehnhardt's "Piedad," and Gabriel Peña Jorquera's "La torre infinita" is divided into two sides, the upholders of science and technology versus the devotees of supernatural power such as magic and religion. After a seemingly endless conflict, neither side can remember why they fight and what for, but that magic, and science are not that separate from each other after all. They have wasted the massive power and potential of both resources for the sake of meaningless a war for domination. The text "Piedad" illustrates an inseparable relationship between magic and science through the mutual affects between a robot and an alchemist. The machine feels guilty about being used to attack and kill people in service to his masters' political agenda. The robot shows his ethical stance through empathy, that is, this machine is sentient and more-than-human physically and figuratively. His masters, the scientist and the queen who funded his creation, consider the robot to be nothing more than a mere tool. In contrast the alchemist, who opposed the project of making the robot, recognizes the machine as a living entity and respects its individuality. The machine and the alchemist come to share sympathy for each other through affective bonds, empathy, and understanding of the other.

Magic, superstition, and religions were ousted with modernity's arrival. By re-engaging the divergence between these two realms in futuristic medieval or 19th century worlds, the

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anthology's writers try to recover their primal connection that was disintegrated by modernity's dualist conception of the world. The separation between things has always accompanied the exclusion and marginalization of the other side. The fact that the characters struggle to preserve, recover, and empower the part that the imperial reign and technocrats suppressed reflects the authors' sensibilities and their vision of the world and society to which they belong. Although it is remote, mythical time in the texts is a projection and revision of Chilean history and current society. Considering the real experience of the dictatorship in authors such as Baradit and Ortega, repeating or sharing images of the imperialism, violence, and exploitation of ideological and technological others, the stories cannot be anything other than Chilean. There is absolutely no discrimination between the value of humans and nonhumans by the authors, but they make explicit unjust differences in power. What is striking about many of the stories is that the main characters are orphans (as in Baradit's texts) suffering from isolation, starvation, and marginalization. It is often unknown exactly why their parents are missing, although clearly some were lost due to harsh labor conditions or warfare. The children, stripped of their primal relationship with their parents, epitomize the state of the nation itself as a vast orphanage in the wake of the monstrous overlap of the dictatorship and neoliberalism. Unlike the works of Baradit and Ortega, however, the authors in *Cuentos chilenos steampunk* present a strong belief in the collective power of solidarity and community. Taking risks, the protagonists depart from their safety zones and forge communities beyond the boundaries of humanity while striving for a revolution from the grassroots. As their characters and imaginary worlds represent, the authors propose a counter-narrative to the coloniality of power through a more-than-human unity and solidarity that bands together heterogeneous or supposedly incompatible things.

Pain and emotion permeate all of the texts I analyzed in this chapter. The trauma of dictatorship and the never-ending social, economic, and political inequality that fetters the mentality and physicality of social members are embedded in every single text. Fortunately, the youngest authors I examined offer a relatively positive vision for the future. Suffocating under the violence and oppression of imperialist society, these authors envision a revolution led by the feeblest members of society. Yet, the dream of revolution implies ironically the harsh conditions of the social reality to which they belong. The conceptualization that blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman beings in Chile was not a topic that people needed in order to learn to criticize modernity's promises. Instead, Chileans realized the collectivity between humans and other-than-humans through the social system's dehumanization and inhumanity. The hierarchy between humans and others dissipates in the face of military rationale and capitalist logic. Jorge Baradit's trilogy and *ucronía* texts transmit to readers vulnerability and pain by forcing them to experience the systematic violence that occurred in the recent past. He draws the cruelest images that one can imagine. However, while the disgusting and repulsive visuals are, on the one hand, a mode for rethinking the reality of "the society of control," on the other hand such a representation provokes a pleasurable pain for the audience. Because of this, among the myriad of invaluable authors in Chile, whose texts project and capture the places where they live, I explored the strangely cruel worlds of Baradit. He forces us to confront the uncomfortable essence of life, and in so doing, he exorcises the ghosts of the past while putting on show an exorcist performance to entertain us. He is the exorcist of technology.

Multiverses meet uchronia in Chile, where this unique literary and aesthetic genre emerged from the country's own location and experience. As Baradit's repulsive images invoke

quirky fun, the distorted, twisted, and reversed representations of yesterday liberate readers from the weight of the past and from official history's oppressive monologue. Multiverses are not only a metaphor for potential multiplicity outside the earth and actual history but are also reflect the heterogeneous hidden and marginalized worlds within our society. Through a new textual mapping of the past, time warps problematize the never-ending story of coloniality/modernity that has created a history of the dominant against the subjugated. Against dualist notions, however, *ucronía chilena* suggests manifold lives, entities, and assemblages. Francisco Ortega and Nelson Dániel, and other young authors, offer an entertaining but disruptive way to reinvigorate history in the present by confronting the gloomy shades of society. Chilean sf texts evidence, first, how the technologies of our generation, such as AI, the Internet, genetic engineering, digital media, and so on, have transformed our society culturally and materially. Second, they demonstrate that dictatorship and neoliberalism have generated and aggravated an uneven society by every day renewing the worst conditions of the regional (infra)structure that forges the divergent topos of the control society. Lastly, they establish the limit of human-centered, hierarchical, and dichotomic discourses that engender a continuously afflicted other. As a child and the desperate prey of the people awake to the gigantic robot, golem, the authors suggest that affective bonds, solidarity, and collective agency between distinctive entities will form the revolutionary power that can forge an alternate world.

Conclusion

While working on Latin American sf, I was caught off guard by questions regarding the quantitative and qualitative existence of the sf tradition as a genre in Latin America. This echoes a question that Bef once received: "Mexican science fiction? Is there such a thing?" At first, to answer those questions, I tried to provide evidence of an existing tradition of sf in Latin America by introducing various corpuses. But now I realize that such questions reveal the questioner's persuasive misunderstandin of the canon in two respects: first, the preconceived notion of the genre, sf, and second, ignorance of Latin America's changing material reality. I understand sf as a genre devoted to intertwining speculative reality with our material reality, thereby examining the impact of the interactions and reactions between human and nonhuman machines, including natural and artificial machines. Although there are many different definitions of the genre, the central feature would be the representation and imagination of the material environment, albeit in a dislocated, atemporal, primitive, or futuristic dimension. To address and engage with changing materiality in relation to economic and sociopolitical transformation, sf is used as an effective and productive literary tool. If sf is only about the metal, virtual, alien, and galactic universe, how could George Orwell's 1984 be one of the primordial sf texts?

There is a tradition in Latin American texts to deal with their social and material surroundings while imagining possible scenarios based on the current society's circumstances. There in fact exist many texts that were not classified as sf but could be so catalogued. Indeed, there are fewer aliens, spaceships, and computers in these past works, or put differently, there were not many "hard" sf works are produced when compared to the Western and European literary fields. Nevertheless, Latin American authors have actively engaged their changing

realities while producing valuable sf texts. My dissertation provides a critique that sheds light on sf produced in Latin America that has been underrated and is relatively unknown. This work contributes to illuminating the idiosyncrasy and heterogeneity of emerging currents of sf in Latin America that differ from previous generations and from sf produced elsewhere.

I have focused exclusively on sf production from three countries – Argentina, Mexico, and Chile – that has appeared from the 1980s to the present. Although a certain temporal discrepancy exists in the resurgence of sf productions in Argentina, México, and Chile, they undoubtedly share in the decisive periodization in the field of sf within two decades: first, the rise of apocalyptic and dystopian sf in response to the collapse of the overall condition of society, national paradigms, and the anthropocentric vision; and second, the emergence of sf that crosses the limits of the medium or, in other words, sf productions involved with virtuality and a networked society commensurate with the widespread use of the internet, digital, and bio-technologies. In particular, sf artists of the early 21st century sought to carry sf beyond the textual plane in order to open up alternative frameworks for understanding and engaging with their immediate society. What they have drawn from sf is very different from earlier generations. While sf in the 20th century was about humanity, sf in the 21st century is been concerned with posthuman society. If the former described the present and critically anticipated the future, then the latter intends to alternate between reality and virtuality by creating new ways to produce sf beyond textual media.

More than any other genre or medium, sf has shown its strength in disclosing and questioning our materiality, or matter-reality, in which humans, animals, and machines coexist, compete, and interact with each other by forming new collectives. In particular, the (post)apocalyptic and dystopian cities of sf convincingly delineate how vulnerable and

precarious an entity the human is in the face of the biopower and necropower of the world system. These tropes also demonstrate the huge influence of corporeal structures on our lives. The disastrous urban constructions and dystopian virtualities that appear in my primary texts urge us to see a posthuman society emerge as a challenge to an anthropocentric vision that separates human and nonhuman. By overcoming a binary and hierarchical perspective on the world, sf gives us a chance to observe life as becoming assemblages that provide possible solutions to the crisis of economy, geopolitics, human subjectivity, and social and ecological destruction. The framework of this dissertation, based on materialist theories, will be helpful in understanding newly developed perspectives that address our matter-reality, affectivity, and the performativity of materials beyond the epistemological.

Throughout my reading of the selected sf texts, I examine how contemporary Latin American sf authors challenge their societies, in a quandary and brought about by the coloniality of power, by using their own unique methods. Each local context displays its own shades of sf, despite incorporating the similar apocalyptic or Orwellian societal themes. Contemporary sf texts demonstrate: first, how the technologies of our generation, such as AI, the internet, genetic engineering, digital media, and so on, have transformed our society culturally and materially; second, how nationalism and capitalism have established and aggravated inequality by constantly renewing the worst conditions of a regional (infra)structure that forges the divergent topoi of a control society; and third, how human-centered, hierarchical, and dichotomic discourses are limited in that they continuously engender an afflicted Other. In this context, I also want to foreground contemporary authors who produce more "hard sf" by adopting a greater number of machinic, digital, virtual, and galactic representations. This tendency is not derived from a desire to imitate a certain literary style, but instead reflects a shared experience of rapid social and

material transformation with other authors from across the globe due to globalization and the development of communication and transportation technology. In other words, contemporary authors materialize the anticipation and projection of their own material condition within a globalized society.

There are, of course, many sf works that I have not visited whose premises also demonstrate the real, dynamic, and singular topographies of their own societies. It is impossible to analyze every author from every Latin American nation. Nonetheless, the topics explored by this dissertatation surely contributes to analyzing the unique but significant literary fabric that represents and reflects the fundamental aspects of current society and its agendas. I have focused only on three countries, and moreover, on only a small set of authors in each nation. A wide-ranging discussion of authors by examining various collections and anthologies represents another promising future research project that will broaden the visibility of Latin American sf. While my discussion analyzes female characters, social minorities, and nonhuman others, ironically, I have not analyzed a single female author in this dissertation. There are renowned female sf writers, including Carmen Boullosa and Angélica Gorodischer, but it was difficult to find sf works by women writers from the younger generations. While I discovered a lot of promising short stories written by female writers in various anthologies, there are not enough novels by individual woman. It could be a problem of accessibility, but we can also point to systematic problems in literary circles and institutional systems. This provokes an interesting topic for further investigation. Finally, I attempt to explore the transmedia movement and digital literature in this dissertation, albeit in a brief manner. I believe that in the sf research field more attention needs to be paid to the emerging literature that goes beyond textual boundaries by forging new types of art and literature in tandem with new technologies. Drawing attention to

these works and the invisible and undisclosed texts and practices of sf constitute my overarching mission for future research.

Throughout this research, I neither attempted to define a single, generalized definition of Latin American sf, nor insisted that literary trends in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile represent Latin America as a whole. Indeed, it is impossible to identify or classify sf and its movements with such hard geographical boundaries in this global, digital, and networked era. What I wanted to draw forth in this dissertation is that Latin American sf highlights the local/universal reactions, sensoria, and reflections of their citizens, and correspond to social and material transformations of the 20th and 21st centuries. Rather than flatten the different aspects of sf texts, I have addressed the diversity and the multifaceted potential of sf that emerged from the intersection of national and global domains. Otherness, alienation, inequality, and environmental destruction are certainly transnational, and cannot be understood by solely focusing on the national or regional level; these problems represent a transnational crisis for contemporary humanity. However, the aspects and the impacts of these predicaments differ depending on local conditions. I hope that this dissertation will have an impact on both Latin American studies and on the sf field, in the sense that my work provides a new vision for understanding sf texts and contemporary Latin American sf—as literary practice and activism—and that it creates a new scope for sf, not as a regional variation of a universal genre, but as a unique but heterogeneous practice that addresses the obscured and uncovered edges of other sf works.

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