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Distant Intimacies: Queer Literature and the Visual in the U.S. and Argentina

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**Distant Intimacies: Queer Literature and the Visual in the U.S. and
Argentina**

by

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Dedication

To my family, who walked this long, wonderfully rough road with me. And to Sebastián Vidal, my partner, next to whom I imagined, dreamt of, and wrote this dissertation.

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Distant Intimacies: Queer Literature and the Visual in the U.S. and Argentina

Cynthia Alicia Francica, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Co-Supervisors: Ann Cvetkovich and Andrea Giunta

This dissertation focuses on literary and visual works produced by queer/feminist Argentine press and art gallery ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ (1999-2007) and its encounter with ‘Belladonna*’ (1999-present), a U.S. reading series and publishing project. It seeks to describe the ways in which the precarious modes of production, circulation, and reception of the literary and visual artworks of ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ both enable and are enabled by local and hemispheric social networks grounded on embodied, affective approaches to aesthetic practices. I argue that those queer/feminist creative networks become embedded in works by authors such as Fernanda Laguna, Pablo Pérez, César Aira, and Roberto Jacoby. Bringing academic attention to the fragile materiality of the works produced by these authors, my research involves an effort to map, collect and register the ephemeral literary and visual archive of this crucial moment of Latin American queer cultural production.

This dissertation crafts the notion of ‘distant intimacies’ to account for the formal, affective, and sensorial qualities of these works as well as for the local and hemispheric modes of queer relationality on which they are grounded. It shows that, through their

investment in ‘distant intimacies,’ the literary and visual objects it studies consistently investigate experimental modes of community formation. That investigation of intimate bonds, in turn, grounds ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ chapbooks and visual artworks’ deployment of what I term ‘dystopian utopias’—queer imaginings, visuals, precarious materialities, and affectively charged performances which function to rethink radical politics at the moment of the Argentine neoliberal social crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s. This dissertation claims that these works’ dys/utopian projections give account of the multiple ways in which recent and long histories of local and global economic, social, and political violence become enmeshed with queer affects and desires in the Argentine context.

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Introduction

HEMISPHERIC ENCOUNTERS

Little by little, as the writing progressed, this dissertation acquired a life of its own. It became a breathing, living thing which continually mutated before my eyes. Rather than attempt to tame it, or contain it, I witnessed its slow unfolding. A network of connections, shared dialogues and affects began to map itself out as I carried out the research and, traveling back and forth between Argentina and the U.S., collected ephemeral materials and interviewed artists and writers. The latter often referred to their own work in terms of its inextricability with life, with everyday circumstances, feelings, and situations. Such inextricability constituted, for many of them, a model for creative exchange and production as well as a recurring artistic theme. As my research moved forward, I could see that that approach would become productively active in my writing, informing my own methodology. Rather than strictly adhere to my initial dissertation plan, I chose to heed to the materials I found, and to the connections and networks they slowly but steadily revealed. Probing the forms of queer, distant intimacies which ground these materials and networks, this dissertation focuses on literary and visual works produced by Argentine press and art gallery ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ (ByF, 1999-2007) and its encounter with ‘Belladonna*’ (BD, 1999-today), a U.S. reading series and publishing project which, like ByF, is run by women.

Argentine poet Cecilia Pavón came to the U.S. in 1997 to pursue an M.A. in Spanish at The University of Washington in Seattle. This experience gave her the opportunity to become acquainted with gender, feminism and sexuality studies, which were not generally discussed nor explored in Argentine academia at the time, through the work of authors such as Judith Butler (Pavón, interview by the author). Such initial

contact would play a crucial role in the founding of Argentine queer art gallery/literary publishing house 'Belleza y Felicidad' (ByF, 1999) by Cecilia Pavón and her close friend, writer and visual artist Fernanda Laguna.¹ In Chapter One, I examine ByF literary chapbooks that re-invent the feminist fanzine format, which had grown in popularity throughout the U.S. in the 90s, specifically in the Pacific Northwest where Pavón studied, and circulated widely in cosmopolitan cities like Buenos Aires.

A second encounter between the Argentine and U.S. literary and artistic scenes I study took place in 2005, some years after Cecilia Pavón studied in the U.S. Back then, independent feminist press Belladonna* (BD) invited Fernanda Laguna to participate in one of their literary readings in NY. In commemoration of that reading, BD published the chaplet *Belleza y Felicidad*, which I examine in Chapter Three. Five years later, U.S. poet Stuart Krimko would meet Cecilia Pavón in the streets of Buenos Aires after a poetry reading and they would quickly become friends, initiating yet another series of creative exchanges which I briefly touch upon in this dissertation's Conclusion. These conversations, which also involved Fernanda Laguna, resulted in the publication of "Ceci y Fer II" (2010), a ByF anthology of work by Laguna and Pavón alongside U.S. poets Dorothea Lasky and Ariana Reines in translation. Krimko became the first U.S. poet to publish a chapbook at ByF (*A veces tenés la vida*, 2010). He also participated in poetry readings at 'Tu Rito,' the experimental art space run by Fernanda Laguna after the closing of ByF. These hemispheric dialogues and exchanges were recently expanded on U.S. soil: in 2011, Cecilia Pavón participated in a conversation and poem reading session with Stuart Krimko at the Museum for Contemporary Art in North Miami after visiting Krimko's independent Sandpaper press in Key West. Some poems by Pavón have

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I employ the term 'queer' broadly to refer to sexualities, affects, desires, and practices which resist alignment with the hetero and homonormative models that govern liberal identities, as well as to a range of anti-normative positionalities capable of systemic critique.

recently been published by FENCE magazine, and another poem will appear this year at a contemporary art event at the New Museum.

Visibilizing the complex entanglement of Argentine and U.S. queer/feminist writings, visual works, and artistic scenes, this dissertation's mapping of hemispheric encounters raises questions about what other creative exchanges are currently being activated in the Americas and beyond. In this respect, the conversation started by the writers and artists I study has been taken up and developed by a younger generation of Argentine and U.S. authors. Pavón would meet poet Jake Steinberg in Buenos Aires while he was studying abroad for a semester as part of his NYU degree. Steinberg initiated an online blog, 'Chronos <3's (loves) Kairos,' where he translates and assiduously posts poetry by Pavón and a young group of contemporary Argentine writers. He defines 'Chronos <3's (loves) Kairos,' as "a young, internet-based publishing house dedicated to the diffusion of contemporary Argentine poetry in English" and as "the daughter of the original photocopy publishing house 'Belleza y Felicidad.'"² On the other hand, the new independent Argentine press Triana, which emerged in 2010, is articulating fresh hemispheric connections and readings by editing books by U.S. poets in conversation with ByF, including Dorothea Lasky and Ariana Reines (the latter is currently being translated by Cecilia Pavón), and by a new generation of Argentine and U.S. 'alt-lit' writers in translation such as Tao Lin, Ellen Kennedy, Sam Pink, and Jacob Steinberg himself.³ Krimko, in fact, reads ByF writing, with its experimentation with

² <http://chronosloveskairos.tumblr.com/about>

³ See *Pájaro del Trueno* (Lasky, 2014), *Coeur de Lion* (Ariana Reines, 2015), *Voy a clonarme, luego matar al clon y comérmelo* (Sam Pink, 2012), *Persona* (Sam Pink, 2012), *Hikikomori* (Tao Lin and Ellen Kennedy, 2012) and *Magulladón* (Jacob Steinberg, 2012). Katherine Hayles defines 'electronic literature' as "'digital born,' a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer" (2008, 3). The related subfield of 'alternative literature,' or 'alt-lit,' is a literary community that publishes in and/or draws its motifs from the internet. It is characterized by self-publication and self-promotion as well as by its authors' sustained internet presence through social media. See Spilker, Josh (2012).

blog, chat and email formats, as “a significant and instructive precursor” of the U.S. ‘alt lit’ scene and, more generally, of contemporary literature’s investment in the internet as both forum and generating source (*Belleza y Felicidad* xvii).

The significance of the hemispheric encounters I track here is underscored by the fact that these exchanges have not only yielded, and continue to yield, creative networks but have simultaneously resulted in concrete publications. The first half of 2015, in fact, witnessed the release of two U.S. books with poetry of the Argentine queer press/art gallery ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ (ByF), which writer Cecilia Pavón established along with visual artist and author Fernanda Laguna in 1999 and whose chapbooks and visual artworks I study in Chapters One and Two. On the one hand, U.S. poet Stuart Krimko’s independent ‘Sandpaper’ press has published *Belleza y Felicidad*, the first U.S. anthology of ByF works by Laguna and Pavón in translation. On his part, U.S. poet Jacob Steinberg has translated and published Pavón’s book of poetry *A Hotel with my Name*, the first in a projected trilogy of her work, with the independent Californian press and e-zine ‘The Scrambler & Scrambler Books.’ Far from the commercial circuit of global literary markets, these underground poetry publications have emerged out of a particular history of poets’ exchanges across borders.

Reframing current critical understandings of U.S. and Argentine literatures, my project shows that despite a history of limited academic dialogue, the authors I examine have been developing their writing in dialogue rather than in isolation. This is the first comparative study that accounts for how those creative and affective exchanges – exchanges which speak of the complex circulation of textual objects and ideas across the Americas – are contributing to challenge and blur the borders of national literary traditions. In other words, it is fundamental to take stock of the much talked about but seldom investigated hemispheric webs of dialogue activated by contemporary writers,

translators, and artists in order to account for how new generations are currently communicating, and creating, across borders. Moving beyond, and showing the insufficiency of, national and transnational explanatory frameworks, the generation of authors I study accelerate these connections through personal travels and internet-based communication to map new trajectories, fresh modes of togetherness, ephemeral and lasting encounters, distant intimacies and collaborations. In this sense, my investment in the hemispheric is rooted in Diana Taylor's call for an urgent, and long overdue, remapping of the Americas. Such remapping entails "decentering a U.S. *America* for a hemispheric *Americas*" so that histories and trajectories omitted from previous maps are visibilized (277). Drawing the Argentine and U.S. works and scenes I study together, this dissertation mobilizes them to understand and shed light on each other.

At the same time, tracing the shapes of these networks of objects, affects, and meanings, bearing with the literary/visual works as they mutate from a format, language, and media to another, is key to understand the parallel emergence of connected disciplinary debates in the U.S. and Argentina. This is not to imply that the hemispheric dialogue of writers and artists unequivocally leads to the simultaneous emergence of critical conversations and aesthetic investments. It is rather the artists' shared creative interests which have prompted them to enter into dialogue in the first place, and it is in and through that dialogue that they have productivized their synchronous explorations at an accelerated rate dictated by new communication technologies. It is thus important to track these exchanges not so much to identify an underlying common program but rather to make sense of how these hemispheric creative practices – and related academic debates – have developed and evolved over time.

An example of this is the current interest in new modes of reading and writing in both sites and, contextual specificities notwithstanding, the related exploration of notions

of surface, sincerity, childishness, stupidity, the visual within the literary, and literary methodology.⁴ While the goal of this dissertation is not to theorize these parallel conversations – a task extensive enough to warrant a separate investigation – I am interested in signaling the value of comparative work which remains attentive to the questions the texts themselves raise as well as to the dialogues they establish across borders. Aimed at achieving a respectful balance between scholarship and creative works produced in South America and the U.S., and thus mirroring the horizontal modes of dialogue which the writers and artists it studies have attempted to create, my research points to the blind spots inherent in keeping literary debates contained within national boundaries in a period shaped by global exchanges, as well as to the problematic division of the academic world in center and periphery which, still today, continues to underlie those debates.

I explore the affective, productive, and interpretive communities the Argentine and U.S. writers and artists I study have built both locally and hemispherically through a focus on specific literary and visual works: it is, precisely, through their materiality, format, and alternative strategies of production, circulation, and reception that these objects crystallize and reveal the specific iterations of economic and political neoliberal

⁴ In Chapter One I outline the contemporary exploration of stupidity and notions of literary ‘surface’ in Argentine criticism and offer a reading of the deployment of childishness and naïveté at ByF. For an analysis of the intersection of queerness and childishness in Fernanda Laguna’s work, see Francica, Cynthia (2015). In the U.S., meanwhile, the notions of ‘new childishness’ and ‘new sincerity’ are currently being deployed to describe the work of Dorothea Lasky, Ariana Reines, and alt-lit writers such as Tao Lin (see Jennifer Moore (2011), Jennifer Ashton (2009), Koo (2011, 2013)). Laura Glenum and Arielle Greenberg, on their part, identify both Reines and Lasky as practicing what they term a ‘gurlesque’ poetics which exploits cuteness, girly kitsch, camp, artifice, female pleasure, parody, and the use of a poetic ‘I’ “that does not confess a self, but rather a raucously messy nest of desires and proclivities” (2010). Interestingly, they point to the feminist Riot Grrrl movement as a precursor of these writings. In this dissertation, I am interested in suggesting that the feminist investments of U.S. poets such as Dorothea Lasky and Ariana Reines might contribute to make sense of literary styles grouped under concepts such as ‘new childishness’ and ‘new sincerity’ beyond the realm of purely formal experimentation and in the light of third wave feminist and girl culture. Throughout this dissertation, I explore the current disciplinary and methodological shift in literary studies through the lens of the interpenetration of the visual and the literary in Argentina and the U.S.

regimes in Argentina and the U.S. as well as the experimental artistic networks which gather around them. Through the building of the hemispheric encounters I track here, those communities expand their situated explorations in a common search for modes of literary and artistic production which, revolving around affective bonds, offer themselves as archives of communal events and experiences. In the process of reaching towards each other, these Argentine and U.S. scenes engage in a joint re-imagining of the literary which involves the introduction of new, experimental forms, the investigation of literature's entanglement with the material, the visual, and performance, and unorthodox strategies of canon formation that entail opening space for queer and women's aesthetic production.

AN ARGENTINE VERSION OF QUEERNESS

A crucial aspect sustaining the hemispheric conversations I track here are the ways in which, based on feminist and queer modes of collaboration and community formation, the female-run projects of ByF and BD visibilized and made space for queer and women's voices. In order to make sense of the ByF project and aesthetic works, however, it is important to account for the specificities of the Argentine iteration of queerness which drives them. ByF, founded by close friends Cecilia Pavón and Fernanda Laguna, was the first queer press in Argentina. It played a crucial role in the distribution of sexually radical writings in Buenos Aires in the late 90s and early 2000s, facilitating the emergence of queer publics around them. The sexually ambiguous friendship between its founders, Cecilia and Fernanda, was frequently thematized in ByF writings and is paradigmatic of the project's investment in the queer modes of relationality which, I argue, ground its aesthetic works and the artistic networks they register. In particular, the ByF chapbooks I study in Chapter One deploy sexually radical plots and queer affects to

investigate alternative reception modes, calling for readers capable of performing or acting out the works and of becoming, on a par with the stories' protagonists, queerly vulnerable. In Roberto Jacoby's visual artwork *Darkroom*, which I read alongside his chapbook *Orgy* in Chapter Two, the viewer similarly operates as producer of the work and participates in the modes of physical and affective intimacy which characterize queer darkrooms.

I am interested in thinking through how these ByF works resonate not only with their U.S. counterparts but, crucially, how they build on and re-configure local articulations of queerness. Literary critic Cecilia Palmeiro's understanding of the ByF project as grounded on the queer legacy of Argentine writer and activist Néstor Perlongher (2009)⁵ is useful to think through some of the ways in which queerness becomes articulated through the materiality of literature in the works I examine. The very term 'queer' was, in fact, imported to Argentina in the 1990s "as a theoretical and critical perspective as well as an activist platform, in a local reformulation" by the Queer Studies Area of the University of Buenos Aires, which set out to "continue the tradition interrupted by the dictatorship, and devised by [Néstor] Perlongher at the beginning of the 70s, of articulating class struggles with gender and sexuality struggles as part of a countercultural movement which would oppose all forms of exploitation, exclusion, repression and discrimination" (Palmeiro: 194, my translation).⁶

⁵ Argentina's Homosexual Liberation Front (FLH) in the 1970s', led by Nestor Perlonguer, would initiate a tradition of espousing anti-identity politics within gay and lesbian movements and aesthetics parallel to that of the political group it was inspired by, the U.S.-based Gay Liberation Front (1969). Néstor Perlongher "rejects essentializing definitions of identity and argues for a gendered reading of cultural conflict instead." He embraces the subversive ethos of 'becoming woman' as a practice of reading "from the margins, from the borders of formally constituted discourses" (Masiello 39).

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Spanish into English are mine. This understanding of queerness resonates with some U.S. theorists' foundational understandings of this notion, and with U.S. queer theory of color, which equate the term with diverse forms of sexual and gender anti-normativity that cannot be conceived if not in relation to race, class and ethnic origin (see Eng, Anzaldúa, Moraga, Soto, among many others). Foundational queer theorist Eve Sedgwick understands 'queer' as representing an

In the Argentine context, the anti-identitarian impulse behind the ethos of queerness has thus been understood and defined as part of a radical political platform, and the deployment of queerness as a material articulation of class struggle.⁷ In this sense, it is important to note that Perlongher conceived the status of the feminine (that is, the deviant, marginal, or ‘other’ in opposition to the masculine, authoritarian state) as providing a way of insertion into, and disruption of, the logic of neoliberal regimes. This local configuration of queerness as a key element in the articulation of structural or systemic modes of critique becomes central to think through the materiality of the chapbooks I study in Chapter One, which blatantly bear on their surface the histories of their marginal conditions of production, circulation, and reception. The plots of the works I focus on in that chapter, Dalia Rosetti’s *Tatuada para siempre* (*Tattooed forever*, 1999) and Pablo Pérez’s *El mendigo chupapijas* (*The Cock-sucking Beggar*, 1999), similarly investigate the impact of the material precarity of the crisis on queer lives while disrupting neoliberal logics of success and productivity as well as the normative life narratives on which the latter are grounded.

There is, however, yet another important and understudied dimension of these ByF chapbooks and the visual scene and artworks I examine in Chapter Two: their consistent interpenetration of literary and visual media. As in the case of Belladonna* chapbooks, such interpenetration results in modalities which, simultaneously material and ephemeral, work performatively. These complex works thus produce a wide range of

“immemorial current [that is] anti-separatist as it is anti-assimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange” (1993, xii).

⁷ In the 1990s Silvia Delfino, a literary theorist and one of the founding members of the Queer Studies research area of the University of Buenos Aires (1997), offers a crucial local theorization on the location of sexual difference among other identity categories: “[these cultural studies texts] conceive antagonism as material: it can assume, at a specific historical moment, the form of a cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, generational or sexual difference as concrete experiences of inequality. In this way, race, religion, ethnic origin, gender or sexual orientation can constitute a material experience of class struggles to the extent that they historicize and articulate those struggles in concrete conditions” (55).

queer affective and sensorial effects which call for embodied modes of viewing/reading. I propose that, in these contexts, in order to understand the literary it becomes imperative to simultaneously examine the visual. For this reason, my second chapter focuses on *Darkroom* (2002), a performance carried out by Argentine artist Roberto Jacoby at ByF, alongside his chapbook *Orgy* (2000), and my conclusion analyzes Dorothea Lasky's literary reading tour/video-performance *The Tiny Tour* (2007).

If ByF chapbooks involve an understanding of the literary as visual, embodied, and material, and Jacoby's *Darkroom* becomes inevitably enmeshed with the verbal, it is in part because these works emerge out of an interdisciplinary network whose multiple investments in literature, art, performance, and music enabled creative collaborations and experimental crossings. Locating ByF as part of an Argentine queer visual lineage which mines the political potentialities of anti-normative affects, I would like to draw attention to the foundational filiations of the art gallery/press beyond the specifically literary ones signaled by critics, who have thus far examined its written production as an isolated phenomenon. These concrete, historical links between key artistic and literary figures illuminate the complex ways in which an Argentine queer aesthetics and politics would emerge not only within the specific realms of literature or the visual arts but rather at their intersection. These creative networks, which I will now briefly outline, inform my choice to focus on Fernanda Laguna's chapbooks and Roberto Jacoby's artistic works as I set out to track and recuperate the critical intervention of underground queer aesthetic practices in the Argentina of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In terms of its interdisciplinary drive, its investment in queer and feminist aesthetics, and the biographical connections of its protagonists with previous artistic scenes, the ByF project evinces lines of continuity with the Argentine underground cultural scene of the 1980s and the gay art of the 1990s Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas,

offering a queer, affective mapping of the art of these decades.⁸ Roberto Jacoby, whose visual and literary works I examine in Chapter Two, actively participated in the 1980s underground scene by, for instance, organizing the paradigmatically queer *Body Art* fashion show at Palladium disco in Buenos Aires. In the 1990s, he was close to the gay art scene of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, where he formed part of a 1993 collective exhibit. Fernanda Laguna, on her part, also showcased her work at the ‘Rojas,’ some of whose key figures, in turn, would be among the first to exhibit visual artworks at ByF. These included gay artist, activist, and ‘Rojas’ curator Jorge Gumier Maier, also active in the 1980s queer cultural scene. Rafael Bueno, a key participant of the 1980s underground scene, would in fact facilitate the 2005 hemispheric encounter between ByF and BD by putting Laguna in contact with BD poet Lila Zemborain.

Far from assuming common formal or artistic programs where these were limited or non-existent,⁹ mapping these connections enables the identification of specific queer aesthetic and political lineages within these broader, heterogeneous scenes, as well as the discernment of the relational strategies deployed to re/construct creative and social bonds within the art world in periods of political and social turmoil. In the 1980s cultural underground, the role of queerness was crucial to the social exploration and reconfiguration of what bodies could be, do, and how they could relate after years of

⁸ Jacoby deploys the notion of ‘filiation’ instead of the more traditional term ‘influence’ to characterize the links between the the avant-garde art movement of the 1960s, the queer cultural manifestations of the 1980s return to democratic rule (such as the influential rock band ‘Virus’), the 1990s queer artists of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, and ByF. The notion of ‘filiation,’ which for Jacoby brings together a group of artists interested in creating publics rather than satisfying the needs of pre-existing markets (Jacoby, interview by the author), serves as a productive point of departure to make sense of the continuities among these scenes while proposing an alternative mapping of the art of these decades – a mapping which pays sustained attention to the shared spaces and the material and affective exchanges among artists of different generations.

⁹ See, for instance, Valeria González for a thorough critique of the discursive construction of a homogenous ‘Rojas aesthetics.’

strict biopolitical physical and moral disciplining and repression.¹⁰ In this line, in the years immediately preceding and following the 2001 Argentine neoliberal crisis, queer bodies and affects, along with the experimental modes of relationality they inaugurate, would be deployed in ByF works to re-imagine the social, the communal, and the political. Critically conversing with and intervening in the everyday realities of the crisis, ByF chapbooks and artworks such as Jacoby's *Darkroom* propose alternative queer imaginings and dys/utopian modes of collectivity.

WITHIN AND BEYOND NEO/LIBERALISM: QUEERNESS AND 'DYSTOPIAN UTOPIAS'

Tracking the politicity of aesthetic practices, I am interested in visibilizing the affective, aesthetic worlds which, heavily grounded in the specifically Argentine iteration of queerness I discuss above, emerged outside the purview of the State at a time in which the latter was in crisis and largely absent from the realms of public and everyday life. This dissertation argues that, in the context of the increasing financial and social liberalization of 1990s and the related economic crisis of the early 2000s in Argentina, ByF literary and visual works articulate alternative narratives of queerness which, rather than revolve around gay liberalism and identity-based vindications, become enmeshed with the traces of anti-normative affects and desires alongside those of the social, economic, and political violence at the core of both recent and long-standing national histories.

¹⁰ Roberto Jacoby reflects that during the 1980s, a period marked by Argentina's political transition from a dictatorial to a democratic regime, two complementary political and aesthetic strategies involving the body became active: on the one hand, the open denunciation and visibilization of the absent bodies of the disappeared, epitomized by the weekly public demonstrations of The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and, on the other, what he terms 'the strategy of happiness,' articulated in the cultural underground. The latter involved a festive, queer mood which at the time played a key role in the much-needed rebuilding of the social fabric (2011).

The importance of registering those radical queer narratives is underscored by the fact that, in recent years, both Argentina and the U.S. have witnessed the increasing advance of liberal gay rights politics in the public agenda.¹¹ In the name of prioritizing the political gains inherent to assimilation, this has often translated into a relinquishing of radical iterations of queer politics aimed at structural transformation. As I outline in Chapter Two, while on the one hand the end of the brutally repressive Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983) resulted in a much needed, larger degree of freedom of action and expression for gays and lesbians, on the other hand queerness became a market niche—ever since that period the urban landscape of Buenos Aires begun to be populated by commercial spaces for queer life, encounters, and public sex.¹²

If, on the one hand, liberal gay rights movements have shaped the recent political landscape in both Argentina and the U.S., the dialogues and synchronicities between these hemispheric scenes have simultaneously been nurtured by the impact of neoliberal financial regimes on literary publishing and artistic communities in both sites.¹³ Rather than present a simplified account of this process, however, this dissertation's emphasis on

¹¹ As I conclude the writing and editing of this dissertation, gay marriage, one of the main issues driving gay activist organizations in the U.S., has been declared legal nationwide (June 2015). In Argentina, same-sex marriage was legalized in 2010 and the gender identity law, which allows trans individuals to access State-funded sex reassignment surgery and adopt the gender of their preference in government and identity documents, was passed in 2012. Carried forward by the left-wing government of the current president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, these are but the last in a series of legal and social transformations which have affected queer lives and experiences in the country since its 1983 return to democratic rule.

¹² Meanwhile, U.S. critics have voiced parallel concerns about the relentless advance of what they term 'queer liberalism' – a new mode of liberalism that reaffirms the institution of marriage, rendering the couple bond even more inexorable and problematically assimilating the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' to the liberal discourse of the nation and its institutions. Critic Jasbir Puar argues that, if granting gay and lesbian couples rights they had been previously denied gives them access to the sacred realm of national (white, able-bodied) privilege, it comes at the cost of further abjecting and disenfranchising other sexual, racialized, and religious others (2007).

¹³ My use of the notion of 'synchronicity' to describe the simultaneous, though specific and distinct, emergence of parallel literary and artistic developments finds roots in Andrea Giunta's concept of 'simultaneous avant-gardes,' which shows the inefficacy of the scheme of center and periphery for the study of contemporary art (see Giunta 2014).

small presses showcases the complex and multi-faceted relations which bind together neo/liberal cultural markets and institutions and independent projects such as ByF and BD.

In the U.S., the contemporary underground poetry movement is, in the face of the advance of the mainstream literary market, tied to a growing circuit of independent presses and cultural spaces. The particular case of feminist media production is telling: there has been a steep decline of this type of publishing initiatives since the 1990s (Murray 9). In the face of the relentless advance of neoliberalism in the 90s, and the increasingly limited space it allowed for “imagining feminist alternatives to profit driven endeavors” (Eichhorn 14), the chapbook format deployed by feminist projects such as Belladonna* embraces the anti-economic mandate of both second wave feminist presses and third wave feminist zines.

In the case of Argentina, the proliferation of independent literary presses throughout the 90s vis a vis the advance of global literary publishing markets was accelerated by the precarious context of the 2001 social and economic neoliberal crisis. Even if, as in many other places, the failed political revolutionary promises of the 1960s left behind a climate of political disillusionment in Argentina, during the 2001 crisis quotidian, small-scale modes of communal organizing invested in utopian gestures would emerge in the fields of literature and art. In the face of limited material and institutional resources for publication, independent presses such as ‘ByF’ published experimental literary works in the form of chapbooks which, sold at a very low price, traveled from hand to hand, articulating queer publics. Such alternative modes of producing and reading texts would redefine the literary, granting visibility to unpublished, young female and queer writers within a local literary tradition that has tended to privilege ‘serious,’ political literature concerned with national topics and representations.

In these neoliberal contexts, the social relations and networks thriving in the margins of the regimes of liberalism and the market have become privileged spaces for the political. However, this dissertation's focus on independent small presses, far from romanticizing marginality, contributes to map the complex modes of engagement of queer and feminist literary and visual scenes with neoliberal economies and institutions. If through the ephemeral, precarious materiality of their literary and visual works as well as through their queer/feminist practices of production, circulation, reception, and experimental community formation, these aesthetic projects articulate a relentless critique of neo/liberal regimes, they simultaneously and strategically engage with the spaces of opportunity and potentiality that those very regimes afford.¹⁴ Moving beyond dichotomous understandings of (queer and feminist) politics, these projects attempt a different approach: strategically inserting themselves within literary and artistic markets and institutions, they purposefully take advantage of the legitimation offered by the latter. In this sense, they respond to the material conditions of neoliberal regimes working not only from the margins but also from within those systems.

At the same time, such dual positioning, which speaks of these projects' simultaneous entanglement with and distance from neo/liberal presents, serves to describe the ByF chapbooks and visual work I examine in Chapters One and Two. I argue that these works mobilize imaginaries of structural change which, rather than rest on the idealized projections of utopia as traditionally conceived, become muddled in everyday

¹⁴ After their initial chapbook publication, many of the ByF and BD literary works, as well as those produced by underground poetry presses by U.S. poets Dorothea Lasky and Ariana Reines, have subsequently been published in book format in more established literary presses, thus entering more commercial literary circuits and markets. In a similar way, a second (and much less radical) iteration of Roberto Jacoby's visual artwork *Darkroom* was presented at MALBA (Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires) after having initially been shown at ByF. On the other hand, while BD literary works are regularly incorporated into university libraries and archival institutions, as a result of this research and of an exhibit I recently put up at The University of Texas at Austin's Poetry Center, ByF chapbooks have been acquired by the Perry-Castañeda library, thus for the first time entering an official archival institution as a collection.

struggles and precarious presents. These oxymoronically grounded modes of utopia imagine other avenues for radical politics by simultaneously visibilizing and working with the dystopian. I propose that, accounting for both the utopian-laden social gestures towards new modes of collectivity which characterized the crisis period in Argentina and the systemic economic and political precarities and inequalities which continue to haunt the nation, both ByF chapbooks and Jacoby's *Darkroom* revisit, work through, and re-invent imaginaries of structural change by resorting to queer dys/utopias. These include public sex imaginaries: while in Rosetti's *Tatuada para siempre* the narrator is initially threatened with rape and then decides to willingly participate in an orgy while in prison, in Pérez's *El mendigo chupapijas* the protagonist finds love by becoming a homeless beggar. In a similar line, Jacoby's visual artwork *Darkroom* and his chapbook *Orgy* materialize a queer darkroom and an orgy respectively. As Chapter Two discusses, *Darkroom* prompts the viewer/reader to sensorially and affectively experience both the liberating and repressive aspects of queer public sex.¹⁵ While its viewers often refer to the piece as inciting fear, repression, and anxiety, and some have read it as recreating the blind world of political prisoners during the last dictatorship, as I discuss in Chapter One Rosetti's *Tatuada* and Pérez's *El mendigo* similarly recuperate recent national histories of violence through their reference to torture, oppression, and economic inequalities. These works further exploit queer dys/utopias by the blurring of social class and financial distinctions through queer intimacy, as in the case of Rosetti's *Tatuada para siempre* and Pérez's *El mendigo chupapijas*, whose middle class protagonists become part of, respectively, the queer communities of prison inmates and homeless men. Finally, these chapbooks' narrators explore and embody radical, dys/utopian iterations of queerness

¹⁵ In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Muñoz refers to the ways in which queer utopian memory "reenacts a culture of sexual possibility...a force field of affect and political desire" that he calls 'utopian longing' and which I explore throughout this dissertation (37).

such as queer childishness, stupidity or ‘boludez,’ queer friendships among women, and queer modes of failure. If the primary function of utopia is to exercise a critique of the status quo by signaling society’s lacks, in these works dys/utopia is mobilized as a tool and a strategy for thinking through the current status of (Left) transformational politics by crafting not perfect and pristine but rather failed, flawed, and radically different universes. In other words, I propose that the dys/utopian glimpses and flashes in ByF works function as a location from where to imagine alternative worlds, as well as other ways of inhabiting this world, in our liberal presents.

The work of Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, which José Muñoz recuperates in his *Cruising Utopia* (2009), offers a useful critical distinction between ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ utopias that can help us understand, in part, the ways in which ByF works mine utopian imaginaries in the midst of urgent presents. While Bloch values abstract utopias’ critical function, capable of fueling a “potentially transformative political imagination,” he reads them as faltering in the sense that they are unattached to any forms of historical consciousness. Concrete utopias, on the other hand, are “relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential” (Muñoz 2009, 4). Similarly arguing for the productive enmeshment of utopian imaginaries with everyday realities, in the context of the Argentine 2001 social crisis Roberto Jacoby aligns his work with the concept of ‘dis-utopia,’ which suggests the possibility of “unraveling utopia, turning it on its head, or rendering it concrete and – resorting to the oxymoron – turning it in some way accessible, real” (*Jornadas Fourier* 194).¹⁶

Muñoz, in fact, reads queerness itself as a utopian formation “based on an economy of desire...directed at a thing that is not there yet” but vibrates “with

¹⁶ In particular, Jacoby’s ‘Proyecto Venus’ defines itself as a dis-utopia “in the sense that it looks to create a space that is not ‘outside society’ but rather entangled with it as part of the desire of rendering the immediacy of utopia as well as its problems concrete” (Jacoby and Longoni 419).

anticipation and promise” (2009, 26), proposing a different perspective to that of critics who conceive queerness as an inherently and necessarily antisocial, anti-relational, narcissistic, future and reproduction-negating impulse linked to jouissance, irony, and the death drive. However, and in line with the ways in which queerness can be described as simultaneously relational and anti-relational¹⁷, in the ByF works I study queerness, rather than inherently aligned with the utopian, becomes materialized through sensorial, affective, and visual glimpses of what I term ‘dystopian utopias.’ Unlike the explicit, utopian-leaning, programmatic ethos and practice of feminist publication modes espoused by BD, the ByF project does not define itself in terms of a guiding aesthetic and/or political program. Instead, it can be best described as articulating a set of organic, intuitive imaginaries, worlds, and desires which emerge out of the lived experiences and material conditions of the urgent crisis period. In an Argentine context of social and economic precarity in which the rethinking of alternative forms of being together became an urgent task, ByF works activate ‘dystopian utopian’ imaginaries less to conceive ideal futures than as a tool to rethink the political by enacting concrete, material presents. In other words, messing with utopia’s pristine status of abstract impossibility, they subversively activate it in the material, economic, and social conditions of specific presents in order to re-imagine the political at a time when structural modes of transformation seem to have entered the realm of the un-imaginable.

Far from shunning from the dystopian potential of the aesthetic, then, the ByF chapbooks and artworks I study queerly embrace it, raising the question of what

¹⁷ Queer bonds have been alternatively qualified as irremediably anti-social and intensely social. Leo Bersani first theorized queer anti-relationality in *Homos* (1995). Lee Edelman, a key figure in this debate, aligns the value and efficacy of queerness precisely with its willingness to reject the political and social order (2004). Muñoz, on his part, forwards a conception of queerness as collectivity that is nonetheless attentive to difference and specificity (2009, 10-11). In that line, Weiner and Young remind us that queer bonds, simultaneously marking ‘the social’ and “a space of sociability outside, to the side of, or in the interstices of ‘the social’,” occur “not in spite of but because of some force of negation...it is precisely negativity that organizes scenes of togetherness” (236).

inhabiting ‘dystopian utopias’ might entail. While utopian imaginaries have been charged as totalitarian, exclusive, authoritarian, and coercive due to their enforcement of a specific vision, ByF chapbooks and Jacoby’s *Darkroom* articulate an alternative version of dys/utopia that, rather than aligned with the political optimism of Argentine radical queer politics of the 1970s, grounds itself on the exploration of alternative, simultaneously backward and forward-looking, temporalities. Problematizing and de-accelerating the predictable, progress-oriented, forward-moving teleology which drives the current advances in gay/lesbian rights and socio-economic liberal agendas, these literary and visual pieces explore temporal/spatial dislocations and queer modes of relationality to visibilize those affects, practices, and desires which find no space in liberal imaginaries of gay freedom. And, while evidencing the violence and systematic erasures intrinsic to utopian imaginaries of structural change, they nonetheless stubbornly imagine other ways of inhabiting the world at times of political skepticism and disillusionment.

DISTANT INTIMACIES

If the ByF literary and visual works I study in Chapters One and Two explore dystopian utopias both in terms of form and content, the ByF and BD projects are often and more generally described as invested in the utopian on the basis of their alternative modes of immediate and inexpensive publication and artistic/literary creation, circulation, and reception of works which both sustain and are sustained by queer and feminist communities of friends. As I discuss throughout this dissertation, an analysis of how these two projects conceive of themselves and of the types of aesthetic works they produce shows that those utopian forms of experiencing art and literature are heavily grounded on queer and feminist modes of relationality. In this sense, I bring attention

here to the centrality of these affective, creative networks because I contend that they are deeply embedded in the literary works and visual artworks I examine in Chapters One, Two, and Three. Through their content, format, materiality, and visual elements, these works speak of, register, and archive those communal affects and connections.

The particularity of the ByF and BD projects with respect to the many literary and artistic scenes in which friendship has played a crucial role is the way in which the emphasis on relationality operates not merely as a means towards or an element of aesthetic production, circulation, and reception but rather as an end in itself. At ByF and BD, queer/feminist community formation becomes a central practice and is actively investigated as a main topic of concern. In the case of ByF in particular, the friendships and queer intimacies among its writers, artists, and audience are thematized in its literary chapbooks, in which ByF authors not only frequently make reference to each other but also fictionalize the affective bonds that draw them together. In this sense, the chapbooks contribute to cement those artistic networks.

Furthermore, ByF and BD's practice of publishing friends, and friends of friends, similarly functions to ground and expand the queer and feminist affective networks which amass around them, as do the collaborative, non-hierarchical modes of DIY production and organization that drive these projects forward. Another crucial space for community formation within these scenes is that of reception. On the one hand, both BD and ByF prioritize communal modes of reception of literary/visual works: literary readings and performances as well as art openings and events play a crucial role in the everyday life of these two presses. On the other hand, through their very format, form, and materiality, the literary and visual works I study in this dissertation simultaneously speak of, speak to, and constitute queer/feminist intimate publics – and here I am inflecting the term

‘intimate’ to refer not only to contained or semi-publics but also to publics engaged in modes of queer intimacy with and through the works themselves.¹⁸

At stake in these projects lies the search for a new vocabulary to describe artistic and literary networks and relational formations. I argue that the broad, homogenizing notion of community fails to account for the specific, multi-faceted, and profoundly queer modes of relation which tie these creative networks together and which ByF chapbooks insistently describe and fictionalize. For this reason, this dissertation engages with the question of queer relationality, which I read as particularly productive to make sense of the modes of intimacy thematized in ByF and BD works and playfully re-enacted through the forms of reception they propose. In the case of the ByF project, I argue that such investigation of queer intimacies is tightly bound to the contextual exploration of alternative socialities around the time of the 2001 Argentine crisis. In that context, it is particularly important to think through the modes of intimacy mobilized in queer works to understand the ways in which, mining the politicized affect, they are capable of conceiving of and re-imagining private and public lives, relations, and affects. In this respect, my reading of ByF works as probing dys/utopian imaginaries is enriched by a focus on queer bonds.

¹⁸ As I discuss in Chapter One, with their party gift bag format and accompanying trinket, ByF chapbooks playfully signal, reference, and ground specific, intimate publics – parties, as spaces to experiment with alternative modes of community formation, were a staple of the generation of 1990s ByF writers/readers. The very notion of an inexpensive chapbook in party gift format – the chapbook as souvenir of a communal lived experience – underscores the interpersonal, affective grounding of these literatures. At the same time, through this particular format the chapbooks playfully register and commemorate those communal events, offering themselves as objects of memory through which to remember shared bonds and connections. In fact, if we actually wore the tiny objects in the form of pendants which come with the works, the chapbooks would visually signal a network of ByF readers. In this respect, these texts call for embodied modes of reading, viewing, and performing which, as I show in Chapter One, playfully prompt the formation of queer publics and communities around them. In the case of Jacoby’s *Darkroom* (2002), the very fact that there was a limited list of invited viewers for the piece records and re-asserts a select, inner circles of ByF friends and acquaintances. In addition, the artist’s decision to allow only one spectator at a time to experience it contributes to the work’s fragmentary nature: for its partial reconstruction it becomes necessary to gather the impressions and testimonies of the different viewers. The artwork thus constitutes an intimate network, each of whose members owns but a piece of *Darkroom*.

Building on Guy Hocquenghem's embracing of homosexual desire as that which does not result in oedipal reproductivity and, thus, finds no place in, resists, and corrodes the social order of civilization, Wiener and Young bring attention to how queerness' resistance to and negation of the social structure "is only equal to its ability to suggest new – 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' – modes of sociality." In other words, they remind us that queerness "has long been invested as at once the site of a symbolic disruption (which is also an antisocial negativity) and a particular relational inventiveness" (225). That reinvention of the social, that building of new cultural forms, imply an understanding of queerness not in terms of recognizable liberal identities but rather as naming something that does not yet exist. In this sense, queer bonds have often been read as tightly linked to utopian potentialities.¹⁹ At the same time, however, queer bonds' inherent oppositionality and negativity with respect to the social and its normative regimes of intimacy contribute to make sense of ByF aesthetic works' simultaneous investigation of the dys/utopian, negative aspects of relationality. In other words, the notion of queer bonds deployed in ByF aesthetic pieces forcefully speaks of intimacies grounded on social inventiveness and negativity, utopia and dystopia, closeness and distance.

Young and Weiner reflect on how the concept of intimacy, often defined as articulating commonality, and "whence a shared identity," might need reassessment when deployed to qualify queer bonds (231). On the basis of my analysis of the literary and

¹⁹ The inventiveness of queer bonds help us challenge and re-invent the ways in which, according to Lauren Berlant, a "[heterosexual] community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship" and "a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction" (5). Queer bonds are, in this sense, crucial because "rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects while, at the same time, attachments are developing that might redirect the different routes taken by history and biography. To rethink intimacy is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living" (Berlant 1998, 286).

visual works in this dissertation, I offer the notion of ‘distant intimacies’ – a notion grounded on an apparent contradiction. That semantic contradiction seeks to embrace both the social inventiveness and negativity as well as the dystopian/utopian qualities at the heart of queer bonds. I deploy this concept as a tool to describe both the queer works I examine and the ‘we’ birthed by the local and hemispheric bonds and exchanges those works emerge from. The concepts of ‘closeness’ and ‘distance’ are useful to me because, with their spatial and temporal resonances, they cut across and give account of the formal, symbolic, affective, and sensorial dimensions of these works.

‘Distant intimacies’ simultaneously operates as a descriptor of the geo-political, cultural, and creative exchanges I examine. In this sense, the notion serves to account for the shifts of scale which characterize these projects as their initial, intimate local publics expand to encompass larger audiences when their works become published in book format or online and enter the museum and/or academic and archival institutions. The final stage of such expansion, whose political impact lies in the wider reverberation of the anti-normative forms of intimacies and alternative modes of production, circulation, and community formation championed by these projects within larger cultural arenas, are the hemispheric connections I track in this dissertation. Here again, the term ‘distant intimacies’ is descriptive of the ephemeral dis/encounters these artists experience – encounters which take place in the virtual online realm as well as through fleeting personal travels and connections that, often developed through friends of friends, thrive on the basis of linguistic and cultural differences. In this sense, the specific dis/encounter between BD and ByF is based on a coming together which rests on insurmountable distances. Those distances are geo-political but are also driven by the different emphases of their aesthetic and political investments. While BD is explicitly and programmatically feminist and, from that position, makes space for queer voices; ByF can more readily be

identified as queer but is, however, at the same time deeply feminist. As I argue in Chapter Three, placing these projects side by side enables me to recognize these distinctions as well as their similarities. This dissertation thus frequently resorts to the term ‘queer/feminist’ when referring to these Argentine and U.S. scenes and works. It does so with full awareness of the space for conflict and tension within that pairing but also of the potentiality for alliances and connection which these two projects crystallize. The ‘queer/feminist’ pairing, as I conceive it here, also rests, and thrives, on distant modes of intimacy, working to de-mystify romanticized, uncritical notions of queer and feminist alliances.

Finally, the notion of ‘distant intimacies’ speaks of these works’ temporal investment in dys/utopian futures and childish, naïve, stubborn pasts which the aesthetic pieces I study render both sensorially, affectively palpable and irredeemably beyond reach. As I will discuss, it is not only through content but also through form that a work like Jacoby’s *Darkroom* exploits its interdisciplinary location, and the multiple media it deploys, to create the spatial, temporal, sensorial, and affective effect of both closeness and detachment. Lastly, and anticipating the methodological discussion in the last section of this Introduction, the notion of ‘distant intimacies’ that these works deploy and develop might offer an alternative to current perspectives on literary interpretive models, often perceived as binarily grounded on either distance or intrusive depth.

A central example of the types of alternative modes of relationality this dissertation explores are the close friendships among women at the very core of these projects, which I further analyze in Chapter Three. These result in the emergence of female-run cultural initiatives and in a concomitant investigation of the productivity of those affective bonds for creative practices. Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin argue us that, while “a focus on community coincides, to a great extent, with the way poets represent

themselves publicly, it has proven problematic for analyzing the role of women in poetic production.” In other words, because avant-garde poetic communities and subcultures have tended to rely on masculine constructions of cultural authority, the focus on and vocabulary of community as a descriptor of these scenes can obscure the role of women as agents of literary production and experimentation (15).

The female-run literary projects I examine offer a radical alternative to this tradition by exploring the aesthetic and political productivity of modes of sociability in which the term woman is not one of subordination and difference but rather emerges as the privileged, productive position at their core. In their search for other strategies and vocabularies that bypass the romanticization implicit in the notion of literary and artistic communities as well as the anonymity involved in the concept of publics, these projects articulate themselves around both localized and hemispheric queer/feminist friendships. While the friendships between BD founder Rachel Levitsky and poet Erica Kaufman as well as those between the female poets and artists who make up BD play a crucial role in driving this project forward, Dorothea Lasky’s close bond with her best friend, poet Laura Solomon, plays a grounding role in Lasky’s *The Tiny Tour*. The emergence of the ByF project, on the other hand, is heavily informed by the girl friendship that binds Laguna and Pavón, two ‘besties’ who affectionately refer to each other in their works using the girlish diminutives ‘Ceci’ and ‘Fer.’

Probing the aesthetic and cultural productivity of private bonds, the female friendships behind these projects are equally and intensely private and public: they amplify the closeness of intimate relations through the formation of broader literary networks around them. In the case of ByF, the insistent literary thematization and voyeuristic exposure of Ceci and Fer’s queer friendship further exploit the aesthetic potential of ‘distant intimacies’ by revealing both the passionate attachment and the

conflicts and negativity that permeate their relation. Bringing the private to public light, these works thus showcase and investigate a complex array of queer affects, friendships, and relations at a time when queer lives are becoming increasingly regulated and assimilated into the public realm.

The founding friendships among women and the queer modes of intimacy in these scenes ground these two projects, claiming a central position for queer and women's affective bonds within creative communities. This dissertation thus brings critical attention to artistic and literary practices and networks as sites in which crucial investigations of queer relationality are currently being performed. I propose that these practices and networks explore the productivity of marginal and anti-normative intimacies for aesthetic production, formal experimentation, and both local and hemispheric community formation.

ENCOUNTERING QUEER OBJECTS: EPHEMERAL MATERIALITIES

The founding role of queer/feminist intimacies and affect in these scenes, in turn, challenges and expands the types of works that can be written and created, published and showcased. This dissertation aims to show that ByF and BD aesthetic pieces bear on their surface the traces of those networks and scenes. The heavily material and at the same time ephemeral, performative, interdisciplinary, and hard to classify works it examines simultaneously create, register, and converse with the modes of queer intimacy described in the previous section.

In this respect, the mobile, shifting networks of ByF and BD artists and writers, working and exhibiting pieces together in shared spaces beyond traditional institutional frameworks and disciplinary constraints, are crucial to account for the hybrid nature of the works I study. The interdisciplinary nature of these scenes enabled an approach to

creativity which allowed for experimental and fluid collaborations and incursions across disciplinary boundaries – at ByF, poets such as Pavón would put up visual art installations and exhibits while visual artists like Laguna became writers. The marginality of ByF opened paths to meddle with institutionally mandated career paths and requirements and for a concomitant privileging of a conception and practice of the writer and artist as amateurs – a practice which, at a time of institutional crisis, raised crucial questions about what is a writer, an artist, and, more broadly, how to define literature and art.

In this context, this dissertation sets out to visibilize the intersection of literature and the visual arts as a fertile location for the articulation of queer and feminist modes of producing, circulating, and reading/viewing creative works in contemporary Argentine and U.S. cultures. Their mutual investment in the literary and the visual enables ByF and BD chapbooks to simultaneously heighten and exploit their ephemeral and material dimensions – dimensions more readily associated with the visual and performance. In turn, the encounter of the literary and the visual allows visual artworks such as Jacoby’s *Darkroom* to dwell on its constitutive verbal elements. In the works I study, literature is already, and always, visual, so that the visual becomes one with the verbal.²⁰ With their wealth of sensorial, material, and verbal resources – and their related re-imagining of reception as a participatory and embodied experience – these hybrid work/objects are

²⁰ In the recent exhibit of ByF and BD chapbooks I put up at The University of Texas at Austin’s Poetry Center, I set out precisely to investigate their literary and visual elements in practical terms. I was interested in exploring the effects that showcasing the chapbooks as visual objects within the space of the library would have. I hung the ByF chapbooks from tree branches above the Poetry Center’s bookcases – the disposition of these book/objects in space, along with the fact that the library became the first institution to officially acquire them as a collection, added to their auratic character. But even while, because of the regulations and characteristics of the space, it was not possible to showcase ByF chapbooks so that the viewers could also read them and handle them, I envisioned the exhibit as a disruptive intervention within the structured, sober space of the library – an intervention based, precisely, on highlighting the chapbooks’ visual and material elements.

particularly well positioned to register and investigate the politics of intimacy which bind these queer pieces and scenes together.

The interpenetration of the literary and the visual in these works can be linked to both localized and wider developments in the fields of literature and the visual arts. Current academic discussions on artistic autonomy and heteronomy, spurred by the 2001 Argentine crisis and the re-assessment of art's political role, give account of the increasing interpenetration of the verbal, the material and the visual in contemporary Latin American art and literature through the coinage of concepts such as 'dis-belonging' and 'installation texts' to describe the recent proliferation of works that move across media and disciplinary boundaries (Garramuño 2013, 245-257). The impact of the visual on the literary is also being interrogated in recent discussions on 'post-autonomous' writing. According to Josefina Ludmer, in this type of writing "language becomes visual and spectacular" (2009). In her view, due in part to the impact of mass media and new digital technologies, literary reading and writing are mutating from closed, self-contained disciplines to permeable fields that become indistinguishable from the visual. In the case of the U.S., critics have also noticed the increasing enmeshment of the visual and the verbal, evidenced in widespread trends such as the boom of graphic narratives. According to critic Hillary Chute, "some of today's most riveting feminist production is in the form of accessible yet edgy graphic narratives" where a new aesthetics of self-representation based on taboo aspects of women's lives is emerging (2010, 2).

U.S. contemporary culture seems to be, in this way, increasingly fascinated with print – a fascination evidenced not only by the contemporary boom of graphic narratives described by Chute but also by the current institutional interest in preserving ephemeral printed materials such as feminist fanzines, the proliferation of chapbooks, experimental and artist's books, and a series of print culture events including Printed Matter's

international annual art book fair in New York. At a time when reading and writing are becoming increasingly mediated by electronic interfaces, far from naturally receding in the face of the digital print culture is holding its ground. Rather than discount such fascination as a nostalgic attempt to resist change, I read today's revitalization of material print culture as a unique vantage point from which to examine the current transformation of the literary. At a time when the material support of literary texts becomes increasingly ephemeral as it shifts to digital platforms, chapbooks, with their simultaneous investment in the material and the ephemeral, become a fertile site to probe and work through the crucial question of what is literary reading and writing.²¹

The chapbook format has been crucial in enabling a young generation of Argentine and U.S. poets without financial means to circulate their works. In responding to specific contexts of crisis of feminist/queer media, the chapbooks I study simultaneously recuperate and make use of print culture and older technologies of production such as the photocopy. The political impact of that formal decision is connected to these works' ephemerality – few numbers of each are published, and once they run out of print it is practically impossible to get hold of an original. Often sold or circulated for free through the internet or at alternative publication fairs and conferences, the chapbooks create a literary market of their own – a market which is very much dictated by the context of their publication. The ephemeral chapbook format, though preserving a fetishizing aura of its own, thus defies the traditional book's cycle of reproduction and commodification. This precarious format enables other modes of

²¹ Echoing the ways in which, in the past, new technologies transformed our relation with the book and print media, the advent of the digital and online communications is producing a shift in our relation to print culture. In this sense, my research suggests that precarious, marginal print formats such as the photocopy seem to acquire a newly auratic status in the face of the advance of the digital. Traditionally perceived as merely reproduced/able material, the photocopy constituted a frontier outside and beyond the sacralized realm of the bound book. Today, as online formats gain space, the photocopy appears to retain a sense of aura granted by its very materiality.

encounter of the literary, the material, and the visual which, rather than dictated by the art market or literary institutions, exist in their margins. In this way, these works resist becoming market commodities. At the same time, the inexpensive chapbook format enables ByF and BD to narrow the time gap that separates writing from reading, so that they might – almost – meet. The immediate publication of this type of writings positions them in a privileged position to actively address and engage with our turbulent presents. These imaginaries of writing as heavily tied to urgent action yield ephemeral works in which performance plays a crucial role.

Furthermore, and unlike other critical studies to date which focus primarily on the strictly verbal aspect of the literary works which emerged out of ByF and BD, this dissertation pays special attention and offers a methodological approach to the ephemeral because I read it as particularly significant in the case of queer cultures. In the case of LGBTQ histories, Ann Cvetkovich reflects on how, “in the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories...memory becomes a valuable historical resource and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge” (8). In this line, José Muñoz claims that the ephemeral operates as evidence in the case of queer cultures. And, “because the archives of queerness are makeshift and randomly organized, due to the restraints historically shackled upon minoritarian cultural workers...the evidentiary authority of queer inquiry” is often questioned or altogether ignored (1996).

This dissertation proposes that the ephemerality of its understudied chapbooks and artworks is crucial because it is in part through that very ephemerality that they register the queer intimacies, affects, networks, and relations that give shape to the specific scenes they emerge from. In order to track the queer intimacies and networks I

analyze it became necessary, in this sense, to recover the ephemeral aesthetic pieces at their core. While later version of these works forsake crucial formal elements as they enter institutional and commercial circuits, I here recuperate the original versions of these pieces to think through their critical intervention. Such intervention rests on the intricate relation between art and life, routing key questions about the impact and function of the literary in the world. In particular, I read ByF queer chapbooks as less concerned with representing reality than with re-imagining the relation of literature to the materiality of texts and to everyday practices in a context of imminent social crisis in which those practices were dramatically altered. Through their ephemerality, materiality, and visuals, these ‘performative texts’ re-invent the relation of literature to the (reading) bodies and the world around it by exploring alternative modes of experiencing, attaching to, using, and reading literature. And it is precisely by re-imagining reading as aligned with the ephemerality of performance and of affective, sensorial experiences such as touch that these chapbooks explore fresh modes of readerly participation which gesture towards the constitution of queer communities of readers, viewers, writers, and artists. In other words, queer networks and intimacies are constituted in these scenes through ephemeral performances – in the form of visual art, poetry presentations, and/or embedded in the chapbook format – as well as through ephemeral (hemispheric) modes of relationality.

The ephemerality of these works is, in this sense, tightly linked to modes of authorship and readership articulated around performance and the body.²² As I discuss in Chapter One, much has been said about the possibility that a specific type of performance

²² While ByF chapbooks not only playfully engage the reader in performance actions but are also presented and performed in public, at BD poetry readings and performances are perceived as more important than the posterior literary publication. To shed light on the complex relation between performance, ephemera, and archiving which several of these works stage, I resort to Muñoz’s understanding of ephemera as “a modality of anti-rigor and anti-evidence” that is “linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself” (1996, 10).

may exist in and through writing.²³ The case of the Argentine ‘performative texts’ I study is, however, uniquely complex: their hybrid location in between the visual arts and literature enables the chapbooks to prompt the reader to ‘use’ or ‘perform’ them, physically engaging with them and their accompanying objects. I propose that, in the crisis context, ByF chapbooks’ engagement with performance enables them to investigate what writing can *do* rather than exclusively what it means. And it is precisely these chapbooks’ gestures of performance or, in the case of Jacoby’s *Darkroom*, an actual performance, that enable readers/viewers not only to imagine but also to experience queer intimacies and utopian modes of relationality and community formation.

In this sense, Jill Dolan argues that performance “might offer us consistent glimpses of utopia” (456). Very much in line with how the works in this dissertation enact modes of queer utopia, she is concerned with performance’s capacity to reveal “how utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide” (460).²⁴ The hybrid works I study, however, deploy performance to visibilize and enact not only utopian modes of queer intimacy but also, and crucially, the dystopian, negative dimensions of those imaginaries and modes of relation. Showcasing the potentially repressive aspects of both current liberal regimes of intimacy and idealized projections of futures to come, these works stay close to the sites where other worlds might be envisioned, glimpsed, touched, felt. Simultaneously grounded and distant, real and imaginary, at the reach of the hand and forever retreating, they prompt us to gather at the spot where we fail to meet.

²³ See Pollock (1998) for an account of ‘performative writing,’ and Taylor (2003) for a discussion on the meanings of embodiment with respect to the epistemic change that current digital technologies give rise to in performance studies. For a more traditional account of the ephemeral within performance, see Phelan (1993).

²⁴ On his part, and zooming in on the fertile intersection of queerness and performance, Muñoz argues that “central to performance scholarship is a queer impulse that intends to discuss an object whose ontology, in its inability to ‘count’ as a proper ‘proof,’ is profoundly queer.” He thus espouses a “belief in the performative as an intellectual and discursive occasion for a queer worldmaking project” (1996, 6).

A WORD ON METHODS

The complex, interdisciplinary nature of the pieces I study has shaped the form of my dissertation writing, which often becomes dense with details and deploys extensive footnoting practices more akin to the field of (art) history than to that of literary studies.²⁵ In this sense, the fieldwork, artist interviews, and archival work I carried out, closer to the fields of history and the social sciences, has allowed me to stray from the narrow textual focus of literary studies to investigate other methodological approaches. This strategy was not only adopted because of the centrality of the visual in the works I examine: the task of tracking creative and affective networks is important both to account for specific histories and contexts of production and because they are deeply embedded within the works I study in terms of content, form, and materiality. Furthermore, because I focus on ephemeral queer works that are too often underrepresented in official records and archives, resorting to oral history becomes crucial to interpret them.²⁶

My research and writing process, attentive to the intricate material qualities of my objects and to the creative networks that produced them, thus became a point of departure for an investigation of the methodology of slow, patient description this dissertation enacts. The slowness which has dictated my gaze and my writing, page after page bursting with details, involves an urgent desire to stay with the works, their words and images, the histories they tell and are part of. My slow readings involve a deep reluctance to part with them, and thus entail a mode of affective attachment developed in sync with the exploration of intimacy the works themselves enact – an exploration which feeds on

²⁵ If, as Anthony Grafton suggests, the footnote illuminates larger concerns within the disciplines and thus allows us to speculate on their future (Stevens and Williams 208), it also operates as a space to probe the current re-imagining of literary methodologies. In this dissertation, the extended use of footnotes operates as a response to the growing interpenetration between disciplines as well as the interdisciplinarity of the specific works I focus on, which hover between literature, the visual arts, and performance.

²⁶ See David Reichard (2012) for a reflection on the deployment of oral history in relation to ephemeral evidence in the case of LGBTQ studies.

an insistent dwelling on the eroticism of delay. Slowness as method emerged as part of my search for ways to speak of and critically address the complex affective, aesthetic life worlds these works and the artists I study participate in. In this sense, these creative works have yielded a hybrid critical text aimed not only at speaking of but also at speaking with. Thinking and moving alongside creative works, the form of this writing aims to strike localized, specific conversations.

More than just account for the literary and artistic works it describes, this dissertation's slow writing articulates itself in response to those works. And it is in and through that response that a form of register or archiving of ephemeral artworks, writings, and events emerges. The form of this dissertation, in this sense, has been dictated by the ephemerality of the works I study. Far from an attempt to coopt or systematize these ephemeral works and affective networks, I set out to heed their critical intervention. But how does one speak of, and with, ephemeral literary and visual artworks? The archive of words, sensorial impressions, and feelings this writing resorts to, compounded by extensive description, enables reflections on what the literary pieces I attend to are made of, what they look like, what they mean and, most crucially, what they *do*. At the same time, by testing the productivity of reading ephemeral visual artworks as inevitably defined by the verbal, my reflections raise questions about their disciplinary location. Probing the extent to which verbal description can be thought of as part of the artworks themselves or, at the very least, as intrinsic to their afterlives, this writing functions as a strategy for archiving these works as well as the events, performances and transient communities which have amassed around them. My work here parallels that of the texts and artworks I examine, which often present themselves as traces of, witnesses to, and inseparable from communal events and performances. These ephemeral pieces reconfigure, in turn, reading and writing, yielding a critical text which is not immune to

its objects of study but rather takes shape in and through discursive and formal conversation with them.

The hybrid works I examine imagine other uses for and conceptions of literary reading and writing that, rather than solely benefit from the impulse of deploying one discipline's methodology on the objects of the other, lie precisely at the intersection of these various fields. This dissertation thus forms part of the current the re-assessment of literary methodology at a time when the field of literary studies has been declared in transition and the centrality of critique within the discipline has come under increasing scrutiny. Close reading, the prime method of literary studies, finds root in different, and often differing traditions, including its disciplinary founding role within Anglo-American New Criticism as an interpretative strategy for 'reading with' the text through a focus on its formal and linguistic intricacies. Its deployment in a post-structuralist key has been criticized as problematically partaking in what, making reference to the lasting cultural influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, Paul Ricoeur has termed the 'hermeneutics of suspicion.' Reading the text as symptom, this paranoid conception of interpretation is grounded on revealing a double or hidden meaning. Heather Love notices that, in response to the current crisis of the humanities and the concomitant decline of textuality, some literary critics have renewed their commitment to the discipline by wholeheartedly embracing their focus on form and close reading,²⁷ while others are more strategically turning towards distant disciplines such as the natural sciences, economics, cognitive psychology, and quantitative and digital methods, thus displacing the text from the center of literary studies (2013, 403).

²⁷ A key figure in the staunch defense of traditional literary methodology, in particular close reading, is Jane Gallop. While "in the New Critical model the value of studying literature lay in literature's intrinsic value, which justified the method of close reading," today she suggests precisely the opposite: it is the study of close reading as a valuable tool which can be applied to non-literary texts and situations that justifies the study of literature (2010, 16). See also Gallop, Jane. "The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading" (2007).

In the field of queer theory, alternatives to critique include modes of ‘reparative’ and ‘surface’ reading. Eve Sedgwick articulates the former as a mode of interpretation which counters the paranoia at the core of the critical enterprise through practices whose guiding desire is “additive and accretive.” Such reparative practices set out to nurture their objects of study by privileging what those objects know or need.²⁸ As a further alternative to paranoid reading modes, critics have argued for the adoption of ‘surface reading.’ With its focus on the literal, accessible aspects of texts, surface reading undermines the problematic and still preeminent authority of the literary critic (Marcus and Best, Love). While some critics place the potential of surface reading in a practice of critical description that borrows from social sciences’ methods (Love) or in a focus on materiality, others embrace the surface as an affective or ethical stance (Sedgwick 2003, Cheng). Zooming in on the work of some of these queer feminist critics, Robyn Weigman traces continuities among those who propose an innovative approach to literary methodology, including Heather Love, Elizabeth Freeman, and Ann Cvetkovich. She claims that these authors partake in what she calls ‘the reparative turn’ through their “desire for intimacy with the objects of study” (7) and their particular use of “the temporal frameworks of the everyday, backward feeling, and queer times to reparative ends” (4). These critics thus put faith “in their objects of study as affectively rich environments for cultivating a response to the conditions of the present” so that sensation “replaces the authority of suspicion” (16).

²⁸ Drawing on Melanie Klein’s distinction between the schizoid/paranoid and the reparative/depressive positions in human personality development, Sedgwick calls for a reparative reading mode capable of undertaking “a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks” than those of paranoid reading as it teaches us “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (2003, 150-1). According to Sedgwick “hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates” (2003, 146).

The hybrid literary/visual underground pieces I study here raise related questions about reading/viewing practices and the status and model of the professional critic and writer. Through my methodology and dissertation writing, I set out to address the question of what these works might teach us about other modes of reading and writing. My approach to these pieces builds on the type of slow, loving attention and attachment to objects of study which Robyn Weigman aligns with the reparative turn and Heather Love with surface modes of reading.²⁹ However, rather than shunning from critique, I am interested in raising the question of how it could be re-imagined to better serve our objects of study as well as our drive to build more readily inhabitable, queer presents. In this line, in this dissertation I reformulate José Muñoz's approach to critical utopianism by bringing attention to the workings of 'dystopian utopias' in the objects I study. I thus seek to build on his response to the current state of political pessimism and the critical dominance of post-structuralism in literary and cultural studies – a response aligned with both critique and Sedgwick's reparative approach to reading.³⁰ Within queer studies, further alternative approaches to progress, temporality, and queer utopian imaginaries which feed on reparative practices include Judith Halberstam's theorization on queer failure (2011), which is crucial to my analysis of Fernanda Laguna's work in Chapter One, and Elizabeth Freeman's focus on pleasure and 'queer asynchrony' as a path towards placing "the past into meaningful and transformative relation with the present" (2010, xvi), which resonates with the dys/utopian investment in past, present, and future imaginaries in the ByF works I study.

²⁹ My work similarly resonates with that of Anne Cheng, who imagines the critic as inhabited by what she studies, as losing critical certainty and thus gaining in intimacy. Understanding the life of the reading subject and the text/object as a dynamic interface (102), she proposes to replace suspicion with a 'hermeneutics of susceptibility' capable of undoing the stable dichotomy between subject and object that reading for depth has produced (100).

³⁰ Muñoz argues that "queer utopian practice is about 'building' and 'doing' in response to that status of nothing assigned to us by the heteronormative world." In this sense, this type of practice constitutes "both a critique and an additive, reparative gesture" (118).

Partaking in the current revitalization of book and print history and culture scholarship, this dissertation pays close attention to the material elements of print literary texts, reading the latter as a crucial space in which the tensions and transformations inherent in the current shift of the literary towards the digital are visibilized and negotiated.³¹ Exploring its own iteration of surface and reparative reading modes, this dissertation simultaneously deploys the practice of close reading, a text-centered strategy for staying close to literary works, mining its alignment with the reparative and with a detailed mode of attention that evinces “a respect to the stubbornness of texts” (Culler 22). Jonathan Culler’s reference to stubbornness reminds us that, rather than exclusively linked to paranoia, close reading is capable of being in sync with a wide range of affects. Finally, this dissertation finds further opportunities to probe its intimacy with its objects through translation, which Culler reads as an “artificial way of slowing down reading and producing effects of closeness” (24). This writing is involved in translation not only in the sense that I have literally translated all the passages, testimonies, and (literary) quotes originally written in Spanish into English, but, crucially, because some of the poets whose texts I study are, in fact, translators, and their creative works have undergone this process too as they travel back and forth between North and South America.

While finding inspiration in, responding to, and building on the current calls for alternative methodological approaches to the literary, my dissertation simultaneously departs from existing work in this area. First world texts, theories, and interpretive contexts have thus far guided critical reflections on the present renewal of literary methodology. While the artists I study have been actively engaged in creative

³¹ In this line, Katherine Hayles suggests that a “comparative media studies approach provides a framework within which an expanded repertoire of reading practices may be pursued,” calling for a rethinking of “what reading is and how it works in the rich mixtures of words and images, sounds and animations, graphics and letters that constitute the environments of twenty-first century literacies” (2010, 78). However, far from evincing a narrow interest in virtual media, Hayles’ research on reading practices is invested in both digital and print, book/object literary platforms (2013).

collaborations and joint reflections across U.S. and South American borders, literary critics have yet to embrace parallel hemispheric dialogues. Heeding to these artists' networks, I would like to suggest that cross-cultural conversations are key to current debates on literary methods, since they lead us to look closer at the ways in which many of the key terms those debates are organized around shift meanings in different literary and geo-political contexts.³² I propose that a comparative literature approach provides opportunities to expand the current debate on interpretative methods and showcase the need to sustain a wider, more nuanced discussion before embracing another reading mode as the privileged tool of literary studies.

The texts I examine, as well as the complex trajectory of modes of paranoid reading in Argentina, suggest the importance of analyzing reading strategies and methods as they function in concrete historical and geo-political contexts in order to fully account for their meanings, uses, and political productivity.³³ In Chapter One, I touch upon how, in the Argentine case, paranoid reading responds not only to a humanist approach to literary methods but also to specific social histories of repression and violence which result in paranoia becoming intrinsic to literary texts and to interpretive tools of radically opposite political signs.³⁴ As I discuss in that chapter, the notion of 'surface' is also

³² In this line, Ellen Rooney points out that the concept of the regional is one of the key problems of literary methodology. How is the particular articulated as literary and generalized? And who, with the regional in sight, is the 'we,' what is the 'now' and how does one define the political? (2010).

³³ Far from sidestepping substantial analyses of the historical and social contexts in which artistic works emerge for suspiciously linking the deployment of contextualization to the work of critique, I read such historical grounding as a key methodological tool to understand those works/objects and, in particular, the complex ways in which they speak of how queer/feminist communities have become invested in and attached to them.

³⁴ In this sense, the Argentine case suggests the importance of reflecting upon writing alongside reading debates. Writer and critic Ricardo Piglia forwards a conception of the literary critic as a detective, emulating a form of knowledge that is already present in the detective novel genre. He thus imagines reading as emerging from the concrete tension and dialogue with specific literary texts – while Piglia's paranoid reader converses with paranoid modes of writing, Heather Love's descriptive approach to surface reading seems to converse with the descriptive passages in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Following Piglia, it may be productive to think of the continuities between criticism and literature, reading and writing, rather than conceptualize the former exclusively as a set of tools to be applied to the latter.

inflected differently in the field of contemporary Argentine literature in the sense that it is primarily connected to writing rather than reading, re-affirming the necessity to consider writing alongside interpretative practices. Argentine literary critics currently speak of the literary works I analyze in this dissertation as ‘post-autonomous’ or ‘surface’ writing – a realist, self-referential mode of writing that is literal, metaphor-less, and divested of literary rhetoric, plainly echoing everyday speech.³⁵ Rather than exclusively relegated to the abstract arena of literary hermeneutics, it is at the level of the creative works I study that questions of interpretation, materiality, surface, and critical depth, are raised and investigated. As my close readings of these texts show, they offer their unique reflection on interpretation by yielding imaginative scenarios at the intersection of reading and politics – interpretative dys/utopias capable of birthing other (queer) futures.

My queer case studies re-imagine reading as entailing affects, play, embodied performances, and communal experiences not fully graspable through the lens of a hermeneutics of suspicion. In some senses, then, these works are positioned beyond the play of textual interpretation and meaning and well into the realm of the body, action, and affect.³⁶ While, as signaled above, many of the alternative modes of literary interpretation, including surface reading, have thus far been applied primarily to literature, this dissertation explores what happens when the interdisciplinarity which critics such as Heather Love locate in new methodologies is already present in the literary works themselves. It seeks to raise questions about the redefinition of literary

³⁵ See Ludmer, Josefina (2007) and Palmeiro, Cecilia (2011).

³⁶ Robyn Weigman reads the current turn to the reparative “not as an alternative to critique but as a means to compensate for its increasingly damaged authority,” claiming that, at a moment of institutional instability, the “current attraction of reparative reading is about repairing the value and agency of interpretative practice itself” (7). She thus brings into question the stark distinction between paranoid and reparative reading, arguing that both practices, “engaged in producing, confirming, and sustaining critical practice as a necessary agency,” share “an attachment to *interpretation* as a self and world enhancing necessity” (18-9). However, the multiple investments of the works I study, and the interdisciplinary methodological approach they call for, add further nuances to the potential for literary reading practices to encompass non-textual modes of engagement and relation.

methodology that these works call for while at the same time attempting some possible, initial answers.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In Chapter One I focus on the interdisciplinary literary chapbooks published by independent art gallery/press ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ (ByF) during the period immediately preceding and following the 2001 social and economic crisis in Argentina. The material precarity which marked this period, as well as the urgent need to work together and re-create existing cultural structures in order to navigate the gaps and chasms opened by an absent State, favored the development of a series of strategies linked to the inexpensive, accessible publication of literary works. In this chapter, I recuperate the original ByF chapbooks, which have not been granted critical attention thus far, and argue for the value of heeding to their unique intervention. The neoliberal crisis, and the concomitant decline of literary publishing and mainstream cultural production, inadvertently created the conditions for the exploration of accessible, DIY literature produced and read for and by friends as part of the building of queer and feminist experimental creative communities and politics. These publications thus embody an alternative model for cultural production. At a time when literary institutions were in acute crisis and in need of radical reconfiguration, these works simultaneously recast the literary by presenting it as inseparable from the visual and the performative. In this context, they thus raise the question of literary reading and interpretation.

Focusing on the pole of reception, I examine two ByF literary chapbooks, Fernanda Laguna’s *Tatuada para siempre* and Pablo Pérez’s *El mendigo chupapijas* to show how these ‘performative texts’ physically and affectively engage their readers in order to probe not only how literature means but also what it might do at a time of crisis.

These ephemeral queer writings recreate reading as a site of action and performance as well as a space for the construction of community: they imagine an active reader who, modeled on the intimate public constituted by the inner circle of ByF writers/readers, becomes at the same time a producer. Presenting themselves as party souvenirs, ByF chapbooks reference and register communal celebrations, events, and feelings, visibilizing and enacting the centrality of affective networks to cultural production not only in the field of the visual arts, populated by politically committed art collectives, but also in and within literary scenes during this period. The communal and personal bonds the chapbooks reference often constitute, at the same time, the very content of these works. These precarious writings thus function as an archive or register of ephemeral, shared, and intimate experiences.

In the context of ByF, the embodied modes of reception that literary chapbooks called for became materialized through and entered into direct dialogue with the performative. Heeding to that dialogue, Chapter Two examines *Orgy* (2000), a chapbook by visual artist and writer Roberto Jacoby alongside *Darkroom* (2002), an ephemeral performance piece he carried out at ByF. *Darkroom* revisits and redeploys the chapbook's reflection on reception practices through embodied action. My analysis of Jacoby's video-performance probes the productivity of looking closely at the visual arts to understand literature in a context of interdisciplinary collaborations and experimental crossings. My choice to focus on this work responds to the ways in which Jacoby's *Darkroom*, as well as his biographical connection to previous queer artistic networks, serves to visualize the intersection of the visual and the literary as a fertile site for radical configurations of queerness since the country's return to democratic rule. In fact, the particular connections I draw in this chapter between his chapbook *Orgy* and his art piece

Darkroom epitomize the richness of the literary/visual crux as a space to flesh out dys/utopian queer imaginaries at the time of the Argentine 2001 crisis.

Jacoby's investment in the enactment of what he terms 'dis-utopias' throughout his aesthetic works is, furthermore, of particular interest to this dissertation's investigation of alternative configurations of politics during this turbulent period. In this chapter I propose that in *Darkroom* Jacoby enacts a queer 'dystopian utopia' which, through the deployment of multiple media technologies, investigates the role of anti-normative affects and intimacies in the building of experimental communities. In this respect, through its exploration of notions of closeness and distance this piece raises questions about the relation of the viewer with the artwork – echoing the interdisciplinary ByF chapbooks I study in Chapter One as well as Dorothea Lasky's *The Tiny Tour*, here the former becomes both a producer and part of the work itself. Focusing on the connection between *Darkroom* and *Orgy*, this chapter builds on Chapter One's exploration of the ways in which literature becomes aligned with performance – an exploration which unsettles clear distinctions between literature and the visual arts while offering a register of the types of communities which amass around each. I argue that these works constitute an ephemeral archive of queer cultural production across media.

If Jacoby conceptualizes his art, which frequently explores the notion and practices of experimental societies, in terms of what he calls 'technologies of friendship,' in Chapter Three I set out to investigate what the hemispheric, affective ephemeral networks of Argentine and U.S. writers and artists I have tracked are about. I examine the connection between ByF and Belladonna* through the publication of the Belladonna* anthology of ByF works in translation *Belleza y Felicidad*. This chapbook functions as a register of this hemispheric conversation. The ephemeral modes of togetherness across diverse spatial, cultural, and geo-political coordinates that the Belladonna* publication

Belleza y Felicidad explores resonate with the localized, grounded investigation of distant intimacies in Roberto Jacoby's visual piece *Darkroom* and in ByF chapbooks. Here, however, that ephemerality and those distances are accentuated and expanded on account of the disparate locations and cultural differences between these scenes. If, through their investigation of intimacy, the works I study in this dissertation raise questions about alternative models of community formation, here spatial and linguistic distances provide a fertile space to think through feminist/queer bonds under a different light. As Elizabeth Povinelli reflects when discussing queer bonds, "we meet where we are divided. But we are divided in a way that we can never meet" (qtd. in Weiner and Young 233).

Nonetheless reaching towards one another, the works I examine deploy translation as a tool for community formation. It is through translation, as well as through the format, form, and textual content of these works, that the conversation between these two feminist projects takes place. Translation, conceptualized by Gayatri Spivak as both "the most intimate act of reading" ("The Politics of Translation") and, in every possible sense, "necessary but impossible," ("Translation as Culture") becomes a space from where to rethink intimacy and connection. The practice of translation allows for an exploration of both the closeness and distance at the core of relationality. At the same time, the conversation between these two scenes enables the articulation of hemispheric networks which open up these literary works to other publics, inaugurating different readings. The dialogue between ByF and *Belladonna** thus illuminates the former's feminist investments, generally unacknowledged or underplayed in current criticism, as well as its intense involvement with academia, similarly invisibilized by the problematic assumption that ByF was completely oblivious to both literary tradition and criticism. In this line, this conversation sheds light on the centrality of the chapbook format in *Belladonna** and its connection to the live readings at its core. The performative elements

of ByF chapbooks, which I analyze in Chapter One, productively resonate with these readings, building a conception of these hemispheric literatures as heavily embodied, personal, and grounded on the specificity of physical lives and experiences.

Chapter 1: Performing Reading: Textual Textures and Social Crisis in the Queer Literature of 'Belleza y Felicidad'

... it's far easier to deprecate the confounding, tendentious effects of binary modes of thinking – and to expose their often stultifying perseveration – than it is to articulate or model other structures of thought... I've always assumed that the most useful work of this sort is likeliest to occur near the boundary of what a writer can't figure out how to say readily, never mind prescribe to others: in the Jacoblike wrestling...that confounds agency with passivity, the self with the book and the world, the ends of the work with its means, and, maybe most alarmingly, intelligence with stupidity.

Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*

The furious banging of pots and pans reverberated across the city deep into the summer night. The television hummed constantly inside while urgent newsflashes monotonously superseded each other. As Buenos Aires prepared for the New Year, masses of people, many of whom had thus far remained cozily sheltered in the comfort of their middle-class homes, took to the streets. Many participated in public protests, some swarmed banks in a failed effort to withdraw their frozen dollar savings as the peso devalued at alarming speed. Police repression, 39 civilian casualties, lootings, and a state of siege precipitated president Fernando De la Rúa's resignation in December 2001 under the rallying popular cry "que se vayan todos!" (away with them all!). The social and economic crisis was the culmination of a decade of neoliberalism (1989-1999) that resulted in 40 % of the country's population living below the poverty line by 2002, a 15 % unemployment rate, an astronomical foreign debt and the obliteration of national industries (Grimson 2005).

The literary publishing market was deeply impacted by the crisis, particularly during its first year: 200 bookstores closed between 2000 and 2001, and production rates dropped 36.4 % in a year. Publishing became prohibitively expensive since the material

support of literary texts, paper and ink, maintained their price in dollars.³⁷ The crisis fueled innovative strategies of popular organization and political action, which included unemployed workers' taking control of and recovering bankrupt factories, the establishment of local bartering and basic goods exchanges, and the emergence of neighborhood assemblies to address the urgent needs of communities in the face of a collapsing national state. The exploration of new modes of social grassroots politics often functioned alongside a variety of emerging art collectives that actively participated in organizing and sustaining popular resistance.³⁸

In this context and at a time of transition marked by the shift from a neoliberal decade to one of the country's most acute social crises, an eclectic, underground art gallery/literary publishing house, 'Belleza y Felicidad' (ByF), emerged and thrived. Founded by visual artists and writers Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón in 1999, ByF provided young, unpublished writers the otherwise hard to fathom opportunity to informally circulate their work outside the legitimized publishing circuit. Located in the middle-class Buenos Aires neighborhood of Almagro, known for its famous 'tanguerías,' ByF became a purposefully heterogeneous space where experimental literature, kitschy souvenirs, visual art objects, artists' supplies, and punk and cumbia bands lived side by side. ByF has been defined as the first queer press in Argentina, and the compilation of its

³⁷ The importation of books was also affected: the ability to buy them became a marker of class privilege. "An eloquent example of the gap between the price of books and the average salary: the Spanish edition of Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* costs 458 pesos – 75 % of one month's salary" (Seoane and Deymonnaz qtd. in Palmeiro 198). After the first year of crisis, however, the devaluation of the national currency enabled the emergence of new ventures. Publishing houses such as Interzona (2002), Mansalva, and a host of medium and small sized projects that specialized in Argentine literature and essays began to populate the national landscape (unlike 1990s artisanal publishing projects, these took the shape of more traditional presses) (Palmeiro 197).

³⁸ A paradigmatic case is that of 'Taller Popular de Serigrafía' (Popular Serigraphy Workshop), which in public demonstrations and reclaimed factories produced artwork with relevant political content. For a thorough analysis of the intersection of art and politics during this period, see Andrea Giunta, *Poscrisis. Arte argentino después de 2001*.

literary texts in *Aventuras: nuevas incursiones en el imaginario gay* (2001) constituted the first gay literature anthology in the country.

In this chapter, I examine queer literary works that emerged out of this climate of artistic experimentation across media immediately prior to, during, and following the 2001 crisis.³⁹ I focus my analysis on two chapbooks published during the initial stages of ByF, Pablo Perez's *El mendigo chupapijas* (*The Cock-sucking Beggar*, 1998-9), and *Tatuada para siempre* (*Tattooed Forever*, 1999), authored by ByF founder Fernanda Laguna under the pseudonym Dalia Rossetti. ByF's precarious texts, published in the form of bundles of photocopies stapled together, include handmade drawings and illustrations. The chapbooks, which typically consist of short stories or poetry, were sold at ByF, as well as at art exhibits and cultural gatherings, for a very low price, sometimes by the authors themselves. They were distributed in small transparent plastic bags with an accompanying decorative object, enacting a productive encounter between so-called high and popular cultural forms and motifs. The artistic selection criteria behind these trinkets is coherent throughout the present ByF editions, which grants them an aesthetic of their own – in the current editions, the objects are always inexpensive golden pendants. Even while I focus here on two ByF chapbooks in order to showcase the specific ways in which the material, the haptic, the visual, and the verbal operate in conjunction, my general reflections and claims about the materiality, trinkets, and visual elements in these two cases extend to the ByF chapbook collection as a whole. Far from collapsing what I consider to be an extended network of distinct, stylistically diverse writers into a coherent, unified ByF group, I am interested in examining the types of textual and

³⁹ Throughout this chapter, I think through some of the ways in which queerness becomes articulated through materiality, performance, and the visual in the texts I examine. I heed to the local configuration of queerness I outline in my Introduction – a configuration which, aligned with class struggles and structural or systemic modes of critique, becomes central to think through both the precarious materiality and the symbolic dimension of the works I study.

contextual resonances and collectivities which these chapbook publications speak of. In this sense, while the building of art collectives, communities, and networks at the time of the crisis has garnered considerable critical attention, in this chapter I extend this question beyond the field of the visual arts to encompass projects such as ByF which, hinging between the visual and the literary, would profoundly influence the development of subsequent independent Argentine publishing initiatives such as the internationally renowned press ‘Eloísa Cartonera.’

ByF’s project would, indeed, be taken up and re-invented by the publishing initiative ‘Eloísa Cartonera,’ which produced handmade books with colorful cardboard covers. Co-founded in 2003 by visual artist Javier Barilaro, writer/editor Washington Cucurto, and Fernanda Laguna, Eloísa Cartonera provided sustenance to jobless waste pickers (‘cartoneros’)⁴⁰ by buying their cardboard and by training and hiring them to bind books and run their small-scale printing press. The precarious materiality of these book-objects emerged as a response to the Argentine economic and political crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Though with different social investments, Cartonera would continue the project of ByF by publishing texts authored by the same core group of writers⁴¹ while broadening its scope to include queer and marginal Southern Cone writers.

Often dismissed and looked down upon by critics as a paradigmatic example of ‘bad writing,’ work by authors that thrived in ByF and Eloísa Cartonera, many of whom

⁴⁰ Visual artists’ investment in the social aspect of the crisis, and in ‘cartoneros’ in particular, dated back to the early 90s, when this marginal group was beginning to emerge. Argentine artist Liliana Maresca created an installation made up of two waste pickers’ carts (*Recolecta*, 1990), one left in its original, precarious form and color and the other painted white.

⁴¹ Eloísa Cartonera’s first publication was *Pendejo*, a book of poetry by writer Gabriela Bejerman, a close friend of Laguna and Pavón and key figure in ByF. In addition, both Laguna and Pavón would publish their own texts in Eloísa Cartonera.

had belonged to the loose denomination of ‘poets of the 1990s’⁴², has been simultaneously qualified as productively and positively signaling “the end of literature and its dreams of greatness” through its rejection of the traditions and metaphysical aspirations of poetry. Their version of neo-baroque, on the other hand, has been defined as “anorexic, implosive and feminine” in contrast with the “bulimic, explosive and gay” Argentine neo-baroque of the 1980s (Helder and Prieto).⁴³ Further categorizations of the multi-faceted body of literature that emerged out of ByF and Eloísa Cartonera include that of writer and critic María Moreno, who has referred to the literature of Dalia Rosetti (Fernanda Laguna) as ‘bright populism’ (2006). On his part, Eloísa Cartonera’s founder Washington Cucurto has characterized his own literary style as ‘realismo atolondrado’ (absent-minded or reckless realism) in reference to its untidy combination of languages and registers. He has coined the humorously derisive term ‘nueva narrativa sudaca border’ (new Southern Cone border/line narrative) to describe Eloísa Cartonera’s marginal publishing catalogue. On the other hand, in her discussion on Washington Cucurto and Argentine 1990s poets Martín Gambarotta and Roberta Iannamico, literary critic Tamara Kamenszain has referred to their writing as forms of “testimony without metaphor” (2007). To qualify the literatures of ByF and Cartonera, critic Cecilia Palmeiro deploys Josefina Ludmer’s definition of ‘post-autonomous literatures’ - writing that is clear, transparent, ‘pure surface,’ local, self-referential, and lacks traditional literary linguistic density and rhetorical devices such as metaphor and paradox — and the notion ‘anti-estéticas de lo trash’ (trash anti-aesthetics) (2011).

⁴² Several of the authors of ByF were poets who gradually veered towards prose as a space of formal experimentation (this is the case of key ByF figures Fernanda Laguna and Gabriela Bejerman).

⁴³ It is worth noticing that, while the poetry of the 1990s has often been critiqued as an example of ‘bad writing,’ the neo-baroque, like the baroque itself and the Argentine 1980s ‘neobarroso’ version practiced by queer writer Néstor Perlongher, have often been disqualified using exactly the same term. Neobaroque’s ‘bad writing’ has been read as a strategy of resistance against ossified literary institutions that pushed to redefine both accepted styles and modes of subjectivity.

In the 2000s, Eloísa would expand its alternative publishing model throughout the world and, specifically, Latin America, where an ever-increasing number of cartonera projects have emerged, and it would represent Argentina in the XXVII San Pablo art Biennale. ByF's literary project similarly extended its reach beyond the gallery space and the original chapbook format of the texts. ByF closed its doors in 2007, but even while it was still open many of its texts and authors were being published in traditional book form by small scale, independently run presses such as Mansalva, which specializes in queer texts, and Interzona.⁴⁴ The unique, original format and materiality of these texts got lost in translation as they migrated to traditional presses, and a crucial aspect of their critical intervention was thus effaced.⁴⁵ Critical analyses of this literature thus rely on later, book format editions that failed to incorporate the original drawings and accompanying objects as well as substantial references to the chapbooks' format and editing process - the concrete interaction of images, words and objects I examine in these works has received, to this day, no sustained critical attention. I propose that heeding to these neglected textual aspects is crucial to fully account for these writings' critical intervention. As literary critic Cecilia Palmeiro has signaled, the subversive impact of ByF publications is to be found not only in their queer content and in a mode of de-professionalization of writing which privileges the building of community over canon construction, but also in their re-invention of the established means of production and circulation of literary texts (2011, 171-80). I propose that it is simultaneously through the interaction of their images, materiality, and textuality that these works visibilize and negotiate the aesthetic and political tensions around the re-definition of writing which lies at the core of the ByF

⁴⁴ The publishing project of ByF, run by Fernanda Laguna, continues up to this day, and chapbooks still circulate, though more intermittently.

⁴⁵ A trace of the importance of the visual dimension of these texts, however, still remains present in some cases. Interzona, for instance, generally illustrates its covers with visual artworks.

project, radically questioning strictly disciplinary understandings of the literary in the crisis context.

The critical potential of addressing the interaction of images, words and objects resonates with particular force in the context of ByF, whose multiple investments in literature, art, performance, and music enabled creative collaborations and experimental crossings. A crucial instance of such interdisciplinarity are ByF literary texts, whose status as visual artworks is ambiguous.⁴⁶ Furthermore, heeding to the cross-pollination of the visual and the verbal seems crucial at a moment when Argentine literature of the 1990s and 2000s is being defined as “imagized,” that is, as deploying language that is “visual and spectacular” (Ludmer). Current academic discussions on artistic autonomy and heteronomy, spurred by the 2001 crisis and the re-assessment of art’s political role, also give account of the increasing interpenetration of the verbal and the visual in contemporary Latin American art and literature through the coinage of concepts such as ‘disbelonging’ and ‘the unspecific’ to describe recent works (Garramuño 2013). What interests me in this chapter is, specifically, the way in which such cross-disciplinarity impacts traditional strategies and modes of reading literary works. Recuperating the original ByF publications as objects of critical attention, I stay close to the distinct materiality of these chapbooks to show the centrality of their format, with its images and trinkets, to ByF’s project and to the re-imagining of writing, reading, and the literary.

⁴⁶ Discussing her first poems, Laguna comments: “to me it’s all the same, the visual and the literary. To me [my first poems] were paintings, I named them poems but I did not see them as poetry... I see something emotional, like in short stories” (interview by the author, 2013). These multiple artistic avenues of exploration, and the concomitant difficulty in classifying works, would be inherited, in part, by Eloísa Cartonera. In describing his poetry book *Zelarayán*, author and Eloísa founder Washington Cucurto comments: “I would say that *Zelarayán* is not poetry... it is something else, a mix of many things maybe...*Zelarayán* is a book that is on the verge of the unclassifiable. What is it? TV and comics: the noise, the onomatopoeias, the screaming, the violence and the images of TV are present, as is the unbelievable character of comics events and adventures” (qtd. in Yuszczuk 3).

In the first section of this chapter, *To Touch a Story: ByF Chapbooks, Crisis and Textual Textures*, I examine the materiality, visual elements and small objects that accompany *Tatuada para siempre* and Pablo Pérez's *El mendigo chupapijas* (*The Cock-sucking Beggar*, 1998-9), ByF's first chapbook publication. These hybrid works constitute an alternative artistic/literary archive that resists classification within the set frames of media and genre. In this respect, ByF literatures, which I propose might be best accounted for by the term 'textos performáticos' or 'performative texts,' offer a verbal/visual platform from where to reflect on the deployment of touch and the haptic beyond strictly visual disciplinary realms. I argue that, in the midst of the 2001 Argentine social and economic crisis, these chapbooks imagine reading as a performance which entails doing, touching, and being touched back.

In the context of the crisis, ByF texts' interrogation of reception through the exploration of performance and touch routes key questions about the impact and function of the literary in the world. In this respect, the queer texts published by ByF are less concerned with representing reality than with re-imagining the relation of literature to the materiality of texts and to everyday practices in a context of imminent social crisis in which those practices were dramatically altered. Through their materiality and visuals, these texts re-imagine the relation of literature to the (reading) bodies and the world around it by exploring alternative modes of experiencing, attaching to, using, and reading literature. Focusing my analysis on the pole of reception, I propose that, through their re-invention of reading as aligned with performance and touch, ByF chapbooks explore fresh modes of readerly participation aligned with queer community formation. In this respect, I argue that their deployment of what I term 'textual textures' and the haptic within the literary functions to facilitate their intervention in and register of the 2001 crisis. I offer a reading of these 'performative texts' as book objects that, through their

visuals, materiality, and elements of performance raise a key question at a time of impending social crisis: what does and should writing do in the world?

In the second section of the chapter, *Communal Reading and Writing Performances: S/M Conspiracies, Queer Orgies and Random Attachments*, I focus on the alternative, non-conventional literary reading and writing scenes *Tatuada* recreates by resorting to extended metaphors at the level of plot. I read this short story as founding in the project of ByF in the sense that it is one of the first to humorously allegorize the workings of the creative and reading processes, as well as a specific approach to queerness, within the art gallery/press. I draw from writer and critic Ricardo Piglia's theorizations on literary interpretation in Argentina to introduce an influential local model for conceiving reading practices as aligned with notions of suspicion and conspiracy. I show that a central reading scene in *Tatuada* recuperates and re-imagines this model, suggesting an alternative understanding of reading as deeply bound to action, the accidental, and naïveté.

A recent study by Cecilia Palmeiro grants attention to the ways in which the writing that emerges from ByF and Cartonera queerly re-imagines mainstream notions of identity and experience.⁴⁷ However, while Palmeiro defines these literatures in terms of their continuation of the anti-assimilationist, anti-identitarian stance of Argentine gay writer and activist Néstor Perlongher, I propose that they pursue queer politics in less evident, and thus far unnoticed, directions. It is through the deployment of queer, anti-normative affects such as stupidity, childishness, and naïveté, and a concomitant formal exploration of mistakes, non-coherence, and demented narrative voices and storylines that the queer literature of ByF continues, deviates from, and reformulates Argentine literary histories. In the face of a traditional cultural model that has longingly looked

⁴⁷ See Palmeiro (2011).

towards European high culture, and of what literary critic Jorge Panesi has defined as a serious and committed literary lineage that struggles to maintain its autonomy as a field without disengaging from the political (180-1), the queer and childish narrative voices and visual/literary styles of ByF question Argentine literary canons and institutions while imagining other formal and affective avenues for politics. The third section of this chapter, *Argentine 'Boludez' and Queer Childishness*, posits that the exploration of a set of undervalued, marginal and stereotypically female and queer characteristics and affective states such as childishness, naïveté, corny sentimentality, and 'boludez' contributes to the emergence of a particular version of queerness within the space of ByF. Both a damaging insult and a term of endearment among friends, the qualifying adjective 'boluda/o,' unlike other related notions such as 'stupid,' simultaneously encapsulates closeness and distance, intimacy and detachment.⁴⁸ 'Boludez' thus becomes yet another performative instance through which the narrators of ByF chapbooks investigate the modes of relationality which in this dissertation's Introduction I refer to as 'distant intimacies.' In the texts I look at, the male chauvinistic stereotype of the 'boluda' is rendered queerly productive as it functions to vindicate and re-imagine the political potential of marginalized affects and ways of knowing, doing and being in the crisis context.

The texts I examine challenge us to stretch, adapt and re-invent our strategies for reading and knowing. Rather than qualify these post-autonomous writings as incapable of supporting literary readings (Ludmer), I argue that what these texts point to are precisely

⁴⁸ The term 'boludez,' and its derivatives 'boluda' and 'boludo,' emerge out of Argentine and Uruguayan slang. Generationally inflected and often associated with young populations, the term makes hyperbolic reference to male testicles. Its translations, as Luis Camnitzer reminds us, are approximate and somewhat imprecise (2005). The Oxford dictionary defines the term as dickhead, asshole, jerk or imbecile. Often used to describe a person considered slow, stupid, lacking in judgment, it can at the same time constitute an insult and a term of endearment among close friends. In Argentina, as I will discuss, the term acquires specific cultural meanings, in particular when gendered female.

the limitations of current methods of interpretation. These literatures experiment with non-conventional modes of writing that, in turn, transform reading. If we imagine reading as conversant with writing, a productive reading of these texts might entail granting careful attention to the images, objects and descriptions that the chapbooks themselves recuperate and record in detail.

TO TOUCH A STORY: BYF CHAPBOOKS, CRISIS AND TEXTUAL TEXTURES

I first came upon a chapbook published by underground publishing house/art gallery 'Belleza y Felicidad' (ByF) a year ago. After interviewing queer author Pablo Pérez⁴⁹ one late afternoon, he invited me over to his apartment in Abasto to show me his original edition of the first literary text published by ByF, his novel in installments *El mendigo chupapijas* (Figure 1, *The Cock-sucking Beggar*, 1998-1999). He had used his copy of the novel to edit it for its later publication in a 2001 anthology of gay literature: the text was covered with his hand-written revisions. We ran to the corner photocopy shop so that I could take a copy of his novel with me, curiously redeploing, more than a decade later, ByF's technical means of publication in order to circulate and give new life to the text.

That day, I began to gather bits and pieces of an archive that, at the time, did not officially exist. The original chapbooks had not as yet been collected by official local libraries or archival institutions (unlike handmade books published by Eloísa Cartonera,

⁴⁹ Pablo Pérez is a young writer who became well-known in cultural circles in the 1990s for being among the first in Argentina to chronicle his fight with HIV in his 1998 literary diary *Un año sin amor. Diario del Sida*, which was written in 1996 at a time prior to the widespread use of medication cocktails. He confirms his investment in the visual when he professes to be more of a cinema lover than a reader (interview by the author, 2012), an investment which resulted in the adaptation of the novel *Un año sin amor* into a 2005 film of the same name, whose script he wrote in collaboration with film director Anahí Berneri. In 2009, Pablo also wrote and directed a short film based on his novel *El mendigo chupapijas*. He is currently working in collaboration on a graphic novel that depicts a story of gay love after the 2010 passing of the same-sex marriage law in Argentina.

which had made their way to the University of Texas at Austin's Benson Latin American library, among many other international institutions). Loose numbers occasionally became available at a small independent bookstore/publishing house in Buenos Aires, Mansalva, which had recently edited a complete collection of the ByF chapbooks. This collection curiously attests to the unstable and incomplete character of the archive: Pablo Pérez's *El mendigo*, ByF's first publication, is not included in this compilation. The particular character of this archive as live, shifting, and ungraspable is thus re-asserted by its constant re-definition. Furthermore, these texts purposefully deny the notion of the original: their complex relation to the archive, which I further examine in Chapter Three, is related to their status as photocopies. Laguna reminds us that "nobody can have the first one because they all have the same date, with the original ByF phone number. You can only tell how old they are by observing whether the photocopy looks newer or older" (interview by the author, 2013). As I outline in the Introduction, as a result of the writing of this dissertation and of a visual exhibit of these works I curated at The University of Texas at Austin Perry-Castañeda Library's Poetry Center, thirty ByF chapbooks have been acquired by the Poetry Center. These works have thus for the first time become part of an official collection which, interested in their particular format and materiality, is destined primarily to the circulation of U.S. poetry texts. I will analyze some of the ramifications of this addition in Chapter Three.

ByF chapbooks such as *El mendigo chupapijas* and *Tatuada para siempre* (Figure 2, *Tattooed forever*, 1999) conceive of reading as a multi-sensory experience. The glossy, slippery texture of the thin plastic bag that covers the text mediates the reader's initial contact with the piece. The act of reading involves a gift-opening performance – as she opens the bag in order to peruse the story, the golden pendant inside falls into her hands. Its unsophisticated, uneven finishing and slightly protruding surfaces bury themselves in

the reader's skin. The trinket recalls the type of object she might have played with and treasured as a child, in spite of its limited or nonexistent market value. Offering the reader an object which, though designed to be worn as jewelry, is unable to rise above its cheap imitation status and becomes, in consequence, obsolete, the text opens up questions about the productivity of that whose value or purpose lies somewhere in-between the domains of play and use. Subject to the reconfigurations of play, the trinkets cast themselves as performance props, thus imagining reading as a productive, embodied act.

The material format of ByF chapbooks, sometimes distributed in installments, draws both from Brazilian popular 'string literature' and the punk practice of DIY ('do it yourself') (Pavón 2013, interview by the author). In fact, in 2002 ByF published a magazine, 'Ceci y Fer (poeta y revolucionaria)' ('Ceci and Fer (Poet and Revolutionary)') that included poetry, drawings, and established an explicit dialogue with the aesthetics of U.S. feminist zines, with their references to girl culture, pop and punk music, and handwritten personal diaries, their punk attitude, DIY ethics, anti-capitalist and anti-institutional values, and feminist content. In Laguna's words,

we were always influenced by everything. Cecilia (Pavón) often traveled to the U.S., we liked punk a lot, its music, its energy. We didn't seek to make punk fanzines, but were drawn to the eclecticism of punk, to the 'do it yourself', to its sense of immediacy. We were attracted by punk and post punk music, Le Tigre, The Clash, Peaches, electronic music, and also cumbia and Brazilian music. (interview by the author, 2013).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ In fact, the magazine directly refers to feminist music band 'Le Tigre.' This band's founding members met via their participation in the underground, punk feminist 1990s Riot Grrrl network, which Le Tigre members read as "intrinsically connected to the DIY, anti-corporate, anti-capitalist values" of the underground punk scene. Riot Grrrl emerged, in part, as "a response to male-dominated punk/hardcore scenes" and incorporated feminist subject matter and performance strategies. Zines were a privileged medium in Riot Grrrl. (http://www.letigreworld.com/sweepstakes/flash_home/flash_home.html. Accessed April 25, 2013).

The eclecticism that Laguna identifies when reflecting on ByF's influences lends shape to the material form of its literary texts.

At the same time *Tatuada*'s visuals, produced by Fernanda Laguna, raise questions about the status of these texts as visual artworks. While I will be referring to these works as 'chapbooks' throughout this dissertation, the format of ByF literature possesses traits of its own which make difficult its smooth classification within a specific tradition. A visual artist, Laguna was part of the cycle of exhibits of Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, and, as I discuss in the Introduction, she would continue her close relation with several of its referents through the participation and decisive influence of the latter in the initial stages of ByF (Rojas' curator and key artist Jorge Gumier Maier was, in fact, one of the first to exhibit his visual artwork at ByF). The queer art of 'el Rojas' typically made use of everyday, inexpensive objects, including decorative materials of the type sold wholesale at the commercial Buenos Aires neighborhood 'Once.' ByF publications would incorporate that same kind of decorative, popular objects, visibilizing the filiation of these literatures with the world of the visual arts. Such filiation, however, does not translate into a smooth categorization of these works as art books since, through their stance as photocopies and the generic objects that accompany them, they simultaneously resist becoming cult objects to align themselves with the reproducibility of mass production.

During the period that preceded and the years following the crisis, a sense of urgency led cultural workers to rethink the processes of literary writing, (self)editing and publication, consolidating what can be termed an 'aesthetics of crisis.' Certain strategies which had emerged in the field of cultural production during the 90s would find in the 2001 crisis fertile ground to develop and thrive.⁵¹ ByF, along with a number of

⁵¹ A group of writers known as the 'poets of the 90s', of which Laguna and Pavón formed part,

independent presses which had opened their doors in the late 90s, flourished during this period and facilitated the emergence of a fresh group of self-managed projects. ByF in particular became a key player in the underground literary world, subversively producing literature that was both financially and, with its flat, direct style, symbolically accessible, though not necessarily any less complex.⁵²

ByF published precarious texts in the form of photocopies stapled together and distributed them in small transparent plastic bags with an accompanying decorative object. The texts' unconventional format defies the fate of the traditional book which, often destined to gather dust in a bookshelf, is designed to exist at a safe distance from the world around it. By contrast, the ByF text, with its trinket, plastic bag, photocopied pages, and amateur looking visuals, is very much aware of its impending expiration date. Markedly vulnerable to wear and tear, and even to losing its constitutive elements (the unattached trinket can – and does—easily fall off from the bag, which is held close by a piece of scotch tape), these texts poignantly suffer and showcase the scars of time and even, as I will discuss, their purposeful defacement. If traditional books, while also susceptible to the passing of time and the exchange of hands, are designed with preservation in mind, ByF books refuse to imagine the literary as immune to its historical context.

These works, through their very materiality, register their enmeshment with precarious modes of craftsmanship, and with frequent editing and spelling mistakes that resulted from the acceleration of their process of production. Markedly vulnerable to

introduced throughout that decade alternative modes of publishing and circulating contemporary literature. In this way, the relation between “poetry as the privileged genre of the mid-90s and the multiplication of self-managed publishing projects” precedes the turn to the novel, and to a professionalized publishing world, of which several of these authors (including Laguna) would be part during the 2000s (Palmeiro 2011, 176).

⁵² Certain characteristics of the ‘poets of the 90s’ writing, such as (self)referentiality and the deployment of plain, colloquial and literal language, would be taken up and developed in a significant cluster of ByF writings.

wear and tear, and even to losing their constitutive elements (the unattached trinket can – and does—easily fall off the bag, which is held closed by a piece of scotch tape), ByF chapbooks such as *El mendigo* (Figure 1) poignantly suffer and showcase the scars of time and even, as I will discuss, their purposeful defacement. The photocopying process has left traces of black lines and blurred stains on the chapbooks. Such traces register the quirks of the particular copy machines used, or perhaps the outline of tiny objects which might have been accidentally reproduced alongside the written pages. The tactile markings which the fragile materiality of these books welcomes generate a version of texture sensitive to the passing of hands and time.

The chapbooks raise the crucial question of how the notions of texture and the haptic, which emerge from the field of the visual, may become central to the reading of contemporary print culture. ByF chapbooks expand current understandings of touch through a sustained exploitation of the spatial dimensions of literary texts, offering a unique reflection on modes of the haptic enabled by and inscribed within contemporary Latin American queer literatures. Contemporary Latin American literatures, in turn, constitute particularly fertile ground for the study of alternative configurations of touch, the haptic and performance across disciplinary and media boundaries. As I signal in the introduction to this chapter, current academic discussions on artistic autonomy and heteronomy, spurred by the 2001 crisis and the re-assessment of art's political role, give account of the increasing interpenetration of the verbal, the material and the visual in contemporary Latin American art and literature through the coinage of concepts such as 'dis-belonging' to describe the recent proliferation of works that move across media and disciplinary boundaries (Garramuño 2013, 245-257). Florencia Garramuño claims that, after the disillusionment with economic modernization and, more broadly, with modernity experienced by Argentine culture since the 1960s, the category of the literary

subject is radically transformed. In her words, “[the emerging] type of presence [of the subject within literature] is linked to touch and closeness rather than to knowledge or representation” (Garramuño 2009).

Current discussions in Argentine literary criticism implicitly address the issue of touch through an insistent focus on the related notion of surface. The central role of this concept in emerging Argentine literatures is hinted at by the language critics employ to define them. To qualify the writings of ByF, Palmeiro deploys Josefina Ludmer’s notion of ‘post-autonomous literatures.’ Ludmer crafts the term to describe recent Argentine writing that is clear, transparent, local, self-referential, “pure surface,” and lacks in literary linguistic density and rhetorical devices such as metaphor and paradox. Ludmer claims that post-autonomous texts are proof that literature is losing its specificity as a separate field to become enmeshed in other discourses and practices, such as the internet, the mass media, and what she terms the ‘real’ (2011). I argue that emerging queer literatures, heavily invested in their material dimensions, problematize the exclusively verbal understanding of the term ‘surface’ in the context of Argentine debates on post-autonomous literatures and, more generally, in the field of recent literary theory.⁵³ In the case of Argentine queer literatures, the notion of surface does not only qualify the deployment of clear, transparent, metaphor-less language but simultaneously operates as a crucial material category.

Laura Marks, working in film studies, derives her definition of the ‘haptic’ from 19th century art historian Aloïs Riegl’s distinction between haptic and optical images.

⁵³ As this dissertation’s Introduction anticipates, the contemporary Argentine writings I study here provide a fresh vantage point from where to examine U.S. understandings of ‘surface reading’ and writing. U.S. queer literary critics Eve Sedgwick and Heather Love, among others, have questioned traditional literary methodologies informed by paranoid or symptomatic reading, defined as “an interpretive method that argues that the most interesting aspect of a text is what it represses” and that seeks, in Fredric Jameson’s words, “a latent meaning behind a manifest one” (qtd. in Marcus and Best 2009, 3). As an alternative to paranoid modes of interpretation, critics are currently discussing and practicing modes of ‘surface reading,’ a literary methodology that consists of reading texts on the material, literal or descriptive level.

Whereas optical visuality “sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space...and depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object,” haptic looking “tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture” (Marks 2000, 162-3). Eve Sedgwick, building on Renu Bora’s notion of *texxture* (with two x’s), elaborates on the affective valences of the latter. Unlike smoothness, which “is both a type of surface and surface’s other,” *texxture* “is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being” (2003, 14-15).⁵⁴ I propose that, through their materiality, visuals, and verbal elements, ByF chapbooks produce specifically literary, ‘textual textures’ which further our understanding of how these works resonate with and critically intervene in the context of the crisis.

In this respect, ByF’s tight link to the world of the market and, within it, to the basic realm of goods and raw materials, contributes to explain why its literature poignantly reflects on its surface the marks of the commercial exchanges in which the press is implicated. While, on the one hand, ByF’s main source of income came from the sale of visual art supplies, the gallery/press simultaneously functioned as a gift shop which sold decorative and everyday objects in the line of the chapbooks’ trinkets. The mass-produced, inexpensive trinket that comes with the text and the flimsiness of its Xeroxed pages work to undo the aura of the handmade book invested in its own materiality. The ByF chapbook thus articulates, from its very format, a structural critique that involves not only sexual but also class differences as well as inequalities in the accessibility to material resources, recasting these as key to its aesthetic. Emerging at the end of a neoliberal decade that would lead to a deep social and economic crisis in

⁵⁴ On the other hand, Sedgwick speaks of a type of texture (with one x) that “defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information; there is texture, usually glossy if not positively tacky, that insists instead on the polarity between substance and surface, texture that signifies the willed erasure of its history” (Sedgwick 2003, 14-5).

Argentina, ByF writings think of themselves as to be used rather than dutifully read and re-stacked.⁵⁵ In this respect, ByF chapbooks register the material exchanges that take place between the body of the text and that of the reader. Attached to ordinary objects such as trinkets, plastic bags and children's stamps, they imagine new relations between literature and everyday life. These writings can be defined using the term 'surface' not only in the sense that they gravitate towards the use of literal and plain language, but also because their simultaneous experimentation with what I term 'textual textures' makes it feasible to imagine the haptic as a literary category.

HEART DRAWINGS AND PARTY SOUVENIRS: PERFORMING READING AND QUEER COMMUNITY FORMATION

Implicitly addressing the question of reception, literary critic Tamara Kamenzain defines the books that emerged out of a number of self-managed publishing projects, including ByF, as objects whose precarious format makes them more akin to "perishable toys" than to intellectual fetishes (2007). Along these lines, I read the ByF chapbook format (Figure 2) as evoking the local practice of offering small bags with toys and sweets to the guests of children birthday parties, particularly since the visuals in the covers accordingly refer to childhood imaginaries. In this respect, the trinkets that accompany the texts recall the world of quinceañera celebrations.⁵⁶ The literary text, in

⁵⁵ Literary critic Tamara Kamenzain discusses the centrality of the notion of 'use' in the poetry of writer and Eloísa Cartonera founder Washington Cucurto, where it is deployed to give new life to everyday objects through freeing them from the constraints of literary rhetoric. Drawing attention to the role of affect and attachment in this poetry, she speculates that it is through "knowing less about the object and loving it more" that the dimension of 'use,' and the object itself, are rendered present (2007). Building on Kamenzain's linguistic arguments, I turn my attention to ByF's chapbooks in order to investigate how the notion of use functions in relation to the materiality and visuality of the literary.

⁵⁶ The trinkets that come with the texts are often found at 'quinceañera' birthday parties, a traditional rite of passage in which a fifteen year-old girl is symbolically initiated into womanhood. At the party, single women gather around the birthday cake to pick one among many silk ribbons that hang from

the form of a precarious object/present and framed within the context of a gallery/press which functions as a souvenir shop, entails an understanding of art and literature as deeply grounded in interpersonal affects and exchanges. In fact, physically accessing the work/gift involves an affectively loaded performance that evokes the practice of receiving a present. The sense of surprise involved in the reception of the book/gift is heightened by the juxtaposition of some of these radically queer texts with visuals that reference the world of childhood. With her party gift bag in hand, the reader is positioned as a child and the text as an object with which she is invited to play. And childhood play involves, precisely, the performance of fictions. Of make-believe, spontaneous, ephemeral narratives and histories.

Much has been said about the possibility that a specific type of performance may exist in and through writing. When discussing the epistemic change that current digital technologies give rise to in performance studies, Diana Taylor reminds us that the question of what we mean by embodiment has become a central debate in the field. Even though since ancient times performance, as she argues, “has manipulated, extended, and played with embodiment” (2003, 4-5), some critics limit performance to present, physical embodiment (Phelan 1993, 146). According to this view, writing and performance are, by definition, antithetical notions. Other critics such as Joseph Roach, however, propose an extended, nuanced definition of performance as coterminous with memory and history: “performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them)...” (quoted in Taylor 2003, 5). The case of the ByF’s ‘performative texts’ is, however, uniquely complex: their hybrid location in between the visual arts and literature enables

it. Each person then pulls hers out to uncover a small golden trinket of the type that come with ByF texts. A lucky girl gets the wedding ring.

the chapbooks to prompt the reader to ‘use’ or ‘perform’ them, physically engaging with them and their accompanying objects. In this sense, these texts are in a privileged position to investigate what writing can *do* rather than exclusively what it means.⁵⁷

Tatuada engages the reader in gestures of performance through the enmeshment of its verbal, material, and visual elements. In the story, a radically queer narrator is taken to jail where, after solving a long-standing mystery, she unleashes an orgy and decides to get a tattoo of a heart inside a bird cage to remind her of this experience – the story’s title, *Tattooed forever*, makes reference precisely to that decision. My copy of *Tatuada* comes with a golden plastic toy in the shape of a piece of jewelry: a horse’s head framed by a horseshoe (Figure 3). Like Laguna’s drawing of the narrator’s heart tattoo on the chapbook’s back cover (Figure 4), the decorative objects that come with ByF chapbooks (Figure 3) have a small circular hole at the top and can be used as pendants. Though the trinkets that accompany the texts are usually golden pendants, other chapbook copies come with trinkets of different shapes, including doves and hearts. While *Tatuada*’s narrator finds closure to her time in jail by getting a tattoo of a trapped heart to remind her of her queer experience, the reader is left with a trinket which, resembling a party bag toy, functions as a souvenir of the story. Through this operation, the story becomes translated into the shape of a performative object, an object to be worn or fingered while reading. It becomes tactile. What does it mean, the work seems to ask its readers, to touch a story? What do we make of a story that touches us back? When does reading become performance?

⁵⁷ As a modality of inquiry, performance studies can, in fact, offer crucial critical insights in terms of the location of what I term ‘performative texts’ within cultural studies. As Jose Muñoz reminds us, “performance studies can surpass the play of interpretation and the limits of epistemology and open new ground by focusing on what acts and objects do in a social matrix rather than what they might possibly mean” (1996, 12).

While the narrator's corny heart tattoo (Figure 4) forever imprints, as the story's title *Tattooed Forever* suggests, her childishness and naiveté on her skin, the reader is invited to occupy a similarly queer, vulnerable position by wearing the cheap looking, kitschy horse pendant. Tattoo and pendant would rest respectively on the narrator's and the reader's chest. If "by engaging with an object in a haptic way, I come to the surface of my self...losing myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be possessed" (Marks 2000, 184), through the interweaving of the visuals with the trinket, narrator and reader are drawn even closer together as both potentially become queerly vulnerable. Through the visual connection between the trinket, the verbal text and the tattoo drawing, reader and narrator collapse into each other for a moment, making us wonder in whose hands the story rests. Like the pendant, the tattoo functions as an iteration of the story which, imprinted on the narrator's skin, embodies these chapbooks' exploration of affective modes of reading and writing aligned with physical surfaces, performance, and the visual. Reflecting on Renu Bora's understanding of texture, Sedgwick points out that

...to perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way and What could I do with it?...To perceive texture is to know or hypothesize whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack, to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak (2003, 13-4).

ByF writings suggest that the sustained exploration of textual textures may result in modes of reading closely tied to action and performance.

If the resonance between the drawings and the trinket in *Tatuada* offers partial resolution to the story through materially and physically engaging its readers, *El mendigo* similarly invites the reader to literally color the novel's ending frame. Pablo, the story's protagonist, goes through a series of S/M sexual adventures in fairy tale fashion while

searching for his true love. Transformation awaits him at the end of the text in the hands of a beggar whose kiss and touch trigger Pablo's male-to-female transition: he becomes 'Paula.' The last illustration in the final installment of the text is larger in size than the others and includes the instruction 'para colorear' ('to color') at the bottom of the page (Figure 5).

In it, a formally dressed young boy carries a box with what appears to be a live hare inside. The text not only prompts the reader to behave as a child, but also engages her in the disconcerting, queer practice of playfully coloring a naïve drawing in the face of the text's anti-normative sexual scenes. In *El mendigo*, reading is imagined as aligned with the participatory tradition of children's literature and coloring books: a spatial, embodied practice that directly impacts the text's materiality. The illustration functions to build a notion of reading which involves an ephemeral performance practice: the action of coloring the picture can be performed only once. The text's playful prompt to color the final drawing thus turns the reader into an informal, amateur producer of art, reminding us from its DIY format that reading/viewing is now closer to writing/coloring.

These works, which might be best accounted for by the term "textos performáticos" ("performative texts"),⁵⁸ call for strategies of reading akin to those of the visual and performance arts. I use the term 'performative' here to describe literary works whose insistent attention to material and visual elements produce embodied, participatory modes of reading. In the two stories I examine, visuals and trinkets re-imagine the reader's material, performative relations to literature, inviting her to participate in queer

⁵⁸ In a similar line of inquiry, Florencia Garramuño makes use of the notion "texto instalación" ("installation text"), a term coined by Wander Melo Miranda, to describe texts where the "cross-pollination of literature and installation materializes in the structure of a text made out of diverse fragments that, like materials, become integrated within the space of the book" (15). On her part, critic Graciela Speranza qualifies Mexican writer Mario Bellatín's *Perros héroes*, a text that includes images, as "...a complex artifact that only with great difficulty we can continue to call a novel and which rather aspires to the faceted space of the theatre or installation art" (qtd. in Garramuño 2013, 15).

affective modes of attachment to undervalued, discarded remnants of everyday life, to childhood experiences and memories. At the same time, they illustrate the impact of the texts' materiality and visuals on its narrative form: drawings and trinkets cement the role of embodied, performative action in providing a sense of narrative closure, which these literatures are often accused of lacking at the level of plot. Such sense of closure, however, is not necessarily bound to the intricacies and resolution of the stories but rather to the texts' projection on the world around them. It is, in other words, partly through becoming objects of use and prompting embodied actions (drawing and wearing the pendant) that the texts 'mean.' Their re-imagining of the reading process explores the links between the text and the reader, between literature, everyday life, and the material conditions of production, distribution, circulation and reception of literary works. These writings refuse to conceive of any one of these processes without the others.

These works' attachment to everyday life is simultaneously materialized through the chapbooks' format which, as I discuss above, evokes that of a party souvenir or keepsake. In fact parties (of a quite different type from hetero-normative wedding and quinceañera celebrations), were a staple of the 1990s generation of writers and artists. For this generation, parties became experimental grounds to experience alternative forms of subjectivity, queer relationality and emerging modes of socializing and community building (Palmeiro 2011). Many ByF artists and writers, who in turn constituted an important portion of the readership of ByF chapbooks, took part in these parties, which renders the chapbook party bag format particularly meaningful.⁵⁹

This format positions the literary as inextricably bound to the intimate network of ByF authors and readers – the written text is what sparks and simultaneously serves to

⁵⁹ Parties were similarly integral to the related lineage of 1980s queer performers, artists and writers in Argentina. Following the return to democracy in 1986, parties became a way to rebuild and recreate the social fabric (Garrote 2013).

commemorate ephemeral, communal events, group readings and experiences, shared affects and interpersonal relations. ByF chapbooks' investment in performance is, in this respect, not coincidental. Not only did ByF literary authors often work across disciplinary lines, writers also gave public readings and, in some cases, offered performances of their newly published material. Literary readings/performances were delivered at ByF alongside visual artworks and installation pieces, with which they shared space. Writer Pablo Pérez recalls:

whenever a chapbook came out we did a presentation at ByF. We read, drunk, and smoked. Once, (Washington) Cucurto played [*El mendigo chupapijas*'s character] Commissioner Baez wearing a leather harness, and together we read the dialogues of [*El mendigo*'s] ... third installment. Upstairs there was an art gallery exhibiting art by young artists, and downstairs a basement, we would sit on cushions on the floor (2012, interview by the author).

The ephemeral ByF chapbooks, with their precarious materiality and inexpensive trinkets, thus operate as an informal, queer register, a linguistic translation of affective and aesthetic worlds. These works attach other forms of social value to the literary, since to own them means to be part of an intimate network. In fact, if actually worn by us, the trinkets/pendants that accompany the works would visually signal a queer community of ByF readers. It is in this sense that these publications become auratic: as objects of memory, their value is determined not only on the basis of their intrinsic qualities but also through their reference and proximity to past, irrecoverable events.

Artist Roberto Jacoby describes the specificity of ByF, engaged in a critique of the present through a particular conception of the production, reception and circulation of art at an urgent moment of deep social transformation:

What is quite difficult to convey ... is the importance of communities and of affect to those experiences and those modes of producing, of inventing. The characteristics are there, as you accurately noticed the books were made out of photocopies. That is a kind of scent that is left and that speaks to the nature of

those relationships. To why somebody would want to publish ‘unos papelitos de nada,’ some loose pieces of paper ... All that love, the love in the little presents inside the books, in the small toys they would find in *Once*, in the way in which they prepared meetings over tea or something else. There were meetings [at ByF] all the time, meetings about exhibits, talks, dances they would organize, future plans. [ByF] was like a huge cultural center with a practically nonexistent budget. The meetings worked because they were not programmed, and that was what some people needed (2014, interview by the author).

Even if ByF did not imagine itself nor functioned as a structured, politically-oriented art collective, it became a space sustained by the active collaboration among writers, artists, musicians, and performers and driven forward by the affective, interpersonal bonds between them.⁶⁰ Far from stand-alone pieces, ByF chapbooks emerge as part of a climate of intense investigation of sociability networks spawned by the crisis and, as such, they bear on their surface the traces both of the everyday lived material realities of the crisis and of the impromptu experimental queer communities that emerged in and from that context. If the chapbooks raise the question of what literature can and should *do* in the world, that exploration resonates with and is part of ByF’s investment in building intimate networks of writers and artists. It did so on the basis of ephemeral, inexpensive publications which referred back to the practices of those communities both through their format and content – the circle of ByF writers frequently wrote about and addressed each other in their works. At the same time, these chapbooks’ commitment to the formation of queer publics around them is manifested through their playful prompting of their readers/viewers/producers to participate in queer, embodied performances.

⁶⁰ Interestingly, many ByF artists, writers and literary works have often been dismissed as frivolous, superficial, and socially and politically uncommitted. As a result of these preconceptions, these writers’ affiliation with more directly political events and art collectives, as well as their own socially motivated projects, have often gone unnoticed. A quick assessment of Fernanda Laguna’s work reveals her founding role in the independent press ‘Eloísa Cartonera,’ ByF’s engagement in ‘Taller Popular de Serigrafía’s (‘Popular Serigraphy Workshop’) socially committed activities, and the 2003 establishment of a ByF branch/art school in shantytown ‘Villa Fiorito’ where artists offer free workshops for underprivileged children and youth. Moving beyond binary approaches to scholarly reflection, I am, furthermore, interested in considering the ways in which these writings enact alternative modes of queer politics.

Finally, the chapbooks' investment in the investigation of precarious, ephemeral, dys/utopian queer communities is manifested in the very stories they tell. The plots of the works I examine explicitly explore the tight entanglement of sexual difference and social class, playfully imagining how queer experiences might become shaped and transformed by the crisis. Pablo, *El mendigo*'s protagonist, goes through a series of sadomasochistic sexual adventures in fairy tale fashion while searching for his true love. He loses his home when his aunt kicks him out after she learns of his sexual preferences, and thus finds himself roaming the streets of Buenos Aires. As Cecilia Palmeiro signals, Pablo's journey echoes the lived trajectory of many middle and low-middle class families in Argentina, who lost their jobs and homes at the time of the crisis (2011). Transformation awaits Pablo at the end of the text in the hands of a beggar whose kiss and touch trigger Pablo's male-to-female transition.

In the sexually radical *Tatuada para siempre*, the young female narrator goes out by herself to have dinner. When the check comes, she realizes the gift certificate with which she had planned to pay has expired. As she has no money, she is taken to jail, where she solves a long-standing mystery that had caused a rift between the prisoners in order to persuade the latter not to rape her. She then willingly engages in S/M practices with the inmates, literally and symbolically becoming part of their queer community, and decides to get a tattoo of a heart to remind her of her experiences. In these two stories, being jobless and moneyless lead the protagonists respectively to the streets and to jail. The financial and social precarity which dictates their adventures thus enters into dialogue with the lived reality of the crisis. However, far from a realist, straightforward narrative of the hardships the characters navigate, these works explore the complex ways in which dire moments of social and financial chaos might spawn alternative modes of

collectivity and (queer) relationality. In other words, they investigate the ripe spaces of potentiality that periods of crisis might inaugurate.

S/M CONSPIRACIES, QUEER ORGIES AND RANDOM ATTACHMENTS: COMMUNAL READING AND WRITING PERFORMANCES

The communal scenes of reading, writing, and performance in the ByF works I analyze build on and expand their exploration of queer community formation and embodied modes of reading and writing. In Rosetti's *Tatuada para siempre* (*Tattooed Forever*), the plot itself, like its materiality, visuals and concrete objects, re-imagines the practice of reading. Immersed in a world of crime, police inspectors and conspiracies, and given the life-threatening task of deciphering a mystery, the narrator is required to place herself in the position of a professional detective who deploys critical interpretative strategies. However, in this central reading scene she suggestively deviates from the expected path of paranoid reading, with its reliance on reason, critical distance and suspicion, to adequately solve the conundrum at hand. In this section, I look at Argentine understandings of paranoid modes of reading and writing in order to show their inextricability from and productive intimacy with literary surfaces. While critics have helpfully pointed out that the writings that emerge out of ByF and/or Eloísa Cartonera tend to employ a clear, transparent, metaphor-less language devoid of conventional literary rhetoric (Kamenszain, Palmeiro), I suggest that their stance with respect to such rhetoric is more complex. These literatures often engage in self-reflection and converse with critical discourses through a persistent and playful exploration of allegory.

In the text, the first person narrator recounts a series of adventures she experiences after she decides to go out to a restaurant/dance club by herself one night. When the time to pay for her dinner comes, she realizes her free dinner invitation card has expired. She is not even sure of who gave her this card and, as she has no money to cover the bill, she is taken to jail. In prison, the inmates tell her a mythical story of two young women who have become lovers with the female warden. The warden, who suggestively happens to be a police inspector, forces the girls to engage in S/M relations, and since they are prisoners they have no choice but to comply. The inmates are split on this matter: some believe the girls find pleasure in these S/M practices, while the others maintain they actually suffer. No inmate has ever seen these slave-girls, but each Sunday at 5:00 pm they hear them: screams and yells, crying and moans of pleasure, sounds of chains and shots invade the prison. The prisoners, in an attempt to find a solution to this mystery, ask the narrator for her opinion. They warn her that if she is not able to provide a plausible reading of the situation to satisfy both groups and enable their reconciliation, they will all rape her.

In the manner of a monstrous sphinx, they present the narrator an arbitrary riddle-like problem, allowing her to ask three questions. Under pressure, she comes up with the solution:

At that moment I realized and shouted 'it's a recording!' I stood on the bed and ripped off a small cassette player that was connected to the jail speakers and, risking it all, I pushed play... it seemed so obvious but none of the inmates had realized. (15)

The threat to the narrator's life here nurtures suspicion as a reading mode so that it becomes a strategy for survival. However, far from the reflexive work of a professional detective, the narrator's reading occurs to her at the last minute and could well have

backfired: she is not quite sure of the accuracy of her answer to the mystery, as her use of the expression ‘risking it all’ betrays.

Ricardo Piglia, one of Argentina’s foremost contemporary writers and critics, has reflected at length on the productivity of the comparison between the professional literary critic and the figure of the detective. Piglia has become a central referent in the current narrative revision of modernity, and of the ‘art of suspicion’ in particular.⁶¹ In both his critical and literary works, Piglia tracks what he terms the “conspiratorial nature” of political power in Argentina throughout the country’s history, as well as its impact on local fiction. Deeply bound to the social, Argentine literature, he claims, has often been driven by the investigation of a mystery, a conspiracy.⁶² In the context of a post-dictatorial Argentina where, in Piglia’s words, “reality is woven out of fiction,” he grants attention to the complex interrelations between fiction and the real.⁶³ Within the frame of the country’s last dictatorship (1976-1983), fiction betrays the clash between the intellectual and the military state. The text becomes a war zone, a space to untangle and decode concealed historical truths and facts. The first model Piglia articulates is one in which the writer attempts to disclose what has been erased and hidden by the criminal state in order to weave its power discourses with fictitious threads.⁶⁴ Conversely, from

⁶¹ His analysis touches upon the three modes of critique of capitalism, notions of the subject and language articulated by the masters of suspicion, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche respectively, and how these bear upon the literary realm (Gancedo 9).

⁶² In this line the English word ‘plot,’ which refers to the sequence of events that constitute a story, is also defined as “secret plan” by association with *complot*, in a pejorative sense (since the 16th century, variant of Middle English, Old English). OED.

⁶³ In a 1984 interview, conducted just after the country’s return to democratic rule, he specifies “Argentina today is a good context to understand the extent to which the discourse of power can often take the shape of a criminal fiction. The military discourse has attempted to fictionalize the real in order to erase oppression” (Crítica y Ficción 15).

⁶⁴ This model is epitomized by Rodolfo Walsh’s *Operación Masacre* (1957), the first nonfiction novel of investigative journalism, published nine years before Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*.

the point of view of the state the writer becomes criminalized: in more than one sense, “the critic is the investigator and the writer the criminal.”

Piglia proposes to think of the detective novel as the great fictional genre of literary criticism or, conversely, as Edgar Allan Poe’s inspired deployment of the latter’s narrative possibilities. In this line, literary criticism could be considered an offshoot of the detective novel genre (20). In this second formulation, the writer would become the paranoid criminal that obliterates clues and linguistically encrypts his crimes while being chased by the critic/censor, a decipherer of enigmas. Within the Argentine dictatorship context, then, paranoid modes of reading are deployed as a productive survival strategy as well as a mode of regulating political dissidence. But at the same time, in extreme circumstances, paranoia as a reading mode can render its own fictional quality evident. In Argentine recent history, paranoid reading is intimately tied to the figure of the critic/censor, who gains particular weight during the last dictatorship. The censor represents the oppressive stance of dictatorial law and the writer, positioned as a criminal, delivers a highly coded, heavily complex text that the former attempts to crack. Under this pressure, the writer becomes deceitful, a planter of false clues that disorient the censor and lead him to see hidden meanings where there are none.⁶⁵ Reflecting on Piglia’s model of the critic as a detective, literary critic Idelber Avelar qualifies the overzealous paranoid critic:

these critics prove to be bad detectives in Poe’s precise sense: for Dupin, bad detectives are those who search for a secret when there is none, look for the purloined letter in the most recondite hideaway when it is in fact staring them in the face. (99)

⁶⁵ Piglia himself addresses this tension in his seminal dictatorship novel *Respiracion artificial*.

I find Avelar's derisive comments on the model of the critic as a detective that perseveres in his blind search to crack a non-existent code suggestive. When hyperbolized to its logical extreme, a paranoid reading may lose its grasp of the text and, by finding meaning and intent where there are none, juxtapose and confuse reality with fiction. In other words, paranoia can become a fictional machine: the overzealous censor creates the secret he searches for. His paranoid reading thus fails him as a rational method of knowledge, and the effectiveness of suspicion as a hermeneutics comes into question.

In this same line, and partly as a result of the fact that economic modernization was being violently carried out in the region by authoritarian dictatorships, Florencia Garramuño argues that in this period Argentine culture becomes disenchanted with the modern. Cultural manifestations begin to show “signs of exhaustion of the modern that distance themselves from the notion of artistic autonomy in other ways [...] which range from a renewed interest in experience to the establishment of regimes of subjectivity that replace the objectivism of the constructive modernist project” (Garramuño 2009, 55). In the 1970s and 1980s, both Argentina and Brazil witness the emergence of the marginal as a strategy that serves not only to explore feelings, characters and situations thus far considered irrelevant but also to “build an active, inner margin” that leads to the decentering of the plot in literary texts. A central case is that of Luis Gusmán's *El frasquito*, “a police novel that breaks with the narrative organization of this genre through a radical decentering in which the image of a vial full of semen, which shatters at the end of the story, floods the whole narrative with its liquid.” Following Slavoj Žižek's assessment of the police novel as one of the narrative structures more akin to modernism, Garramuño reads that radical decentering as a symptom of the disillusion with the modern (Garramuño 2009, 79-80). Such disenchantment involves a rethinking of modes of writing, reading, and of the interpenetration of the text and the world.

The literary project of ByF takes up some of these avenues of interrogation. Turning away from reason as a critical project and from suspicion as a hermeneutics, ByF texts radically explore the narrative and political productivity of stupidity, naïveté and randomness as ways of reading, writing and being in the world. In Rosetti's text, the narrator's scene of reading within what might be interpreted as a detective story and where physical survival is under threat is indicative of the specific genealogy of reading and writing practices in Argentina. The narrator unveils the fictional status of a story used as a tool of biopolitical control within the prison, undermining the discourse of power that the inmates' literal reading of the S/M scene had contributed to keep in place. A discourse that fictionalizes the real in order to instill fear and obedience, to discipline criminalized bodies and pathologized desires. The narrator, now a criminal reader, halts the narrative machine that generates paranoid fictions within the prison. When the fictional status of the S/M myth is revealed, inmates' reactions alternate between sadness and fury, and the narrator is hit by another flash of inspiration (15). She plays a song by iconic gay band Erasure, *Blue Savannah*, which gives way to orgiastic, queer scenes of pleasure among the inmates. A reading scene thus leads to queer pleasure: the very same means used to create submission and terror (the tape recorder) are re-utilized by the narrator to unleash the physical, orgasmic resolution of the tale.⁶⁶ After the narrator's reading dismantles the oppressive power mechanisms of jail, which suggestively evoke the Argentine dictatorship period through their introduction of torture and the

⁶⁶ In *El mendigo*, a scene of reading unleashed by the aunt's paranoid search for confirmation of her nephew's sexuality similarly precipitates the resolution of the plot as Pablo queerly becomes 'Paula.' Pablo's aunt discovers and reads his private diary and learns about his experiences with S/M and cruising. This leads to her kicking him out of her home and to Pablo's transitioning to the life of a homeless man. It is not only writing about his queer experiences but also finding an audience for his writing that makes his own personal transformation possible: Pablo's becoming Paula and joining a community of queer beggars is a consequence of his expulsion from the world he had inhabited thus far. Taking the scary leap from his middle-class bourgeois background into becoming a queer beggar would not have been plausible had either of these writing and reading scenes not taken place.

fictionalization of everyday life, the queer party mood sets in and S/M emerges as a mode to negotiate that past and rebuild the broken social fabric.⁶⁷ The enmity between the two groups of prisoners is thus overcome through the subversive embodiment and enactment of the mythical S/M story that kept them in fear and under control. In the words of the narrator, “some of them raped me and I enjoyed it a lot... some asked me to fuck them with strange objects they had put together themselves... I still had forty minutes until Margarita arrived and I liked jail quite a lot” (16).

In the story, S/M functions as an embodied strategy for working through the complex relations between oppressive power and desire, or what the text presents as an interpretative choice between pain or pleasure. The polarization that the story of the sexual slaves creates among the inmates is the result of the warden’s strict policing of the limits between allegedly dichotomous affects and sensations. It is really important to keep such sensations apart because affects are key configurations of the political, particularly in a context where the warden constantly threatens the inmates with physical pain and strictly polices pleasure. If the warden had administered their terror of pain through the S/M recording, it is also through S/M sexual practices that the women in the story reclaim their relationship to pain on their own terms. They find a space for pleasure within and alongside physical pain, which symbolically undermines the prison’s terror machinery. In this sense, the intertextuality this text establishes with Pérez’s *El mendigo* is crucial: Rosetti’s short story takes up the name of S/M master police inspector Báez to designate the female warden. In Pérez’s text, inspector Báez had been taught sadomasochistic practices during his time in jail. In both stories, the sadomasochistic

⁶⁷ The transition from violence, paranoia and imprisonment to queer pleasure in Rosetti’s short story may be read as allegorically evoking the post-dictatorial Argentina of the 1980s, characterized by an artistic scene that, after years of systematic repression, turned to socializing, parties and drugs as a way of reclaiming their freedom in the social arena. In this period, gender and queer sexualities became a focus of exploratory interest on the part of artists and writers (see Francine Masiello and Andrea Garrote for a comprehensive account of the central role of gender and sexuality in the literature and art of this period).

libidinization of authority figures, boots, jail, violence and torture settings subversively collapses pain and pleasure. Rosetti's story echoes the Argentine context to reflect on the deep entanglement of paranoia, conspiracy and queer pleasure and embodiment as modes of understanding the social and the political.⁶⁸

More than a question of whether literature can objectively represent the world, the text exemplifies this writing's interest in fiction's capacity to affect, and queer, life. If what the narrator and inmates had 'read' before was a set of corporeal sounds of pleasure/pain, they later embody, and metaphorically 'write,' the S/M stories they had imagined in order to find, through that embodiment, a resolution to the duality that had haunted them. Fiction can productively come to life, and acquire new meanings, in and through queer embodiment and pleasure. While the trinkets that accompany the ByF texts and the final to-color drawing in *El mendigo* experiment with embodied modes of reception to explore fiction's relation to, and impact on, the world around it, in *Tatuada* the fictional S/M story becomes queerly embodied and recreated by the inmates, who were the recording's initial audience. Both through its material and visual dimensions and through the plot's reading scene, the text stages reading as an embodied, performative activity on a par with, leading to, and inseparable from creating or writing. The inmates act out, and become the protagonists of, the story that had terrorized them.

Through this scene, the text stages other ways of relating to the fictional. The narrator's reading of the S/M mystery comes to her, in her own words, as a "flash of

⁶⁸ These texts raise the suggestive and complex question of whether S/M, with its complex interpenetration of pain and pleasure, might be read as a post-dictatorial strategy to navigate trauma. Since during the dictatorship period anti-normative sexual pleasure, or even slightly deviating from the accepted regulations on physical behavior, could lead to torture, representations of S/M take up a unique valence during the Argentine democratic transition. According to author Pablo Pérez, because of its evocation of torture, S/M became a taboo subject in Argentina in the late 1980s. Pérez's short story on this topic was met by stark resistance by fellow workshop writers and led him to ultimately leave the group (Pérez, interview by the author). In a transitional, politically charged context that did not allow much space for ambiguity, S/M became a forbidden, touchy issue that until this day has not received focused critical attention in Argentina.

inspiration:” it occurs to her at the last minute and could well have backfired, as her use of the expression ‘risking it all’ betrays. (15). The text makes use of the imaginary of writing, with its unpredictability and its dependence on the muses, to portray the practice of reading. Far from the rational, paranoid untangling of a text the professional literary critic performs in Piglia’s model, reading is depicted here as closer to, and one with, writing.⁶⁹

AN ACCIDENTAL POETICS: THE TEXTURE OF MISTAKES

Tatuada’s reading scene serves to further address the importance of the visual, the haptic, and embodied modes of reading in ByF literatures. A detailed reading of this scene sheds light on how ‘textual textures,’ present not only in the concrete material and visual elements of these texts but also inscribed within the verbal itself, function to visibilize these works’ engagement with and registering of the crisis context. The privileging of action to reflection, and the concomitant emergence of mistakes and the unpredictable, is an undercurrent throughout the project of ByF. Cecilia Pavón comments that, at ByF, what was written in the morning was published that same afternoon (2013, interview by the author). In the midst of the 2001 acute social and political crisis, and vis a vis a virtually absent state, it became imperative to attend to pressing social needs by proposing emergency and impromptu solutions which left little time for lengthy contemplation. Acting first, thinking later, opened paths for experimenting with other modes of doing, moving, and being in the world that potentially involve naïveté, stupidity, and the accidental. In this context, these queer, undervalued strategies function

⁶⁹ In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that many of the readers of ByF texts were at the same time ByF writers themselves.

as an alternative to suspicion, paranoia and counter-conspiracy⁷⁰ to respond to oppressive political, economic, and institutional systems. Acting before thinking and publishing before writing⁷¹ can become tools for re-inventing the political.

If these literatures often incorporate errors and incoherence within their narrative progression,⁷² I stay close to the original chapbook version of *Tatuada* to show that mistakes and the accidental can also become productive at the time of reading.⁷³

⁷⁰ In his essay “Theory of Complot,” Ricardo Piglia develops his perspective on how the avant-garde has traditionally functioned according to the logic of the complot or the conspiracy. In this model, the avant-garde reacts to literary standards and institutions by conspiring against canonized models in order to impose a new economy of artistic value. Art historian Andrea Giunta deploys this theory to analyze the way in which Latin American art has often functioned according to the logic of the complot.

⁷¹ “Primero publicar, después escribir” (“first publish, then write”) is a famous precept by Argentine writer Osvaldo Lamborghini – a precept which, Kamenzsain proposes, a younger generation of writers partly incorporated into their practices (2007).

⁷² A friend of the project of ByF, writer César Aira famously proposes a narrative “flight forward in order to cover up the mistake, the badly done” (Flores 2009, 454).

⁷³ The notion of a mode of reading productively tied to randomness and the visual becomes the object of reflection of a science fiction novel by canonical writer César Aira, published by ByF and a fundamental literary influence of the project, titled *Juego de los mundos* (*The Game of Worlds*, 2000). The text imagines a future in which “to read is to see images pass by, one after another.” In this fantastic world, when literature was archived and translated into new media, it was preserved in the form of images: the software transformed words into images, if necessary fragmenting the former in the process. This resulted in random combinations of images being used to translate words: for instance, the phrase ‘día de mayo’ (day of May) could be represented in images through the image of a diadem with zaphires and glittery jewels (in Spanish, ‘diadema’ or ‘día de ma...’). In this future dystopia there are no preserved written originals, so it is not possible to go back to the literary texts. Neither is it possible to reconstruct them, since upon re-reading/re-viewing the texts, images change, either “because they appear at another angle as they are 3-D, or under a different light, or sometimes they are totally different” (25). According to popular opinion, the “essence of the literary would lie in the sequence of images, Cuban combo-rice-clover-warrior, a sequence with which the reader should generate a story, understanding the words by their meaning equaled not understanding anything at all...in this case [the story] could be: some musicians receive as payment for their performance a grain of rice, they plant it and, instead of the foreseeable rice plant, a clover comes out, and its fragrance, which spreads in the air, gives back his youth and a world in which to fight to a warrior who had been under a spell of impotence and old age caused by the music” (72). This ironically dystopic depiction of reading involves the invention of a tale on the basis of images. If images are ciphers, codes that represent a deep, textual meaning, reading them on the surface would yield a story that, far from attempting to excavate or recover that deep meaning, is content with taking them literally. This descriptive form of reading would move closer and closer to writing: the role of the reader in shaping the story would be greater as a number of very different tales could potentially be read in these image sequences. Such lack of certainty, such ambiguity as to the content of stories, functions as a meaning-making, or meaning-unmaking, machine that counters the paranoid, deep readings the narrator proposes and which are doomed to fail. In this text, reading and writing are imagined as propelled by a system of random associations. Both image translation and coding, with its unexpected associations of syllables and words, and the reading

Misspellings are common in the published literature of ByF, and have been associated with the quick publication and the sense of immediacy and everyday-ness that characterizes these texts. In the story, the prisoners present themselves in the manner of a sphinx, and as such pose an arbitrary riddle to the narrator and allow her to ask three questions in order to define her fate. She arrives to her interpretation by chance rather than by design: the inspired solution emerges by looking closely at an everyday object that had escaped the inmates' attention: the 'grabadorsito' ('small cassette player'). The sense of the accidental is further attached to the object through the spelling mistake in the written word (the correct spelling in Spanish is 'grabadorcito').

The misspelled word 'grabadorsito' ('small cassette player') functions to signal the term's entanglement with the mistake which, in turn, calls attention to the accidental nature of the narrator's reading – a reading that centers, precisely, on the 'grabadorsito.' Misspelled, the word visually stands out within the flow of correctly spelled words, slowing us down. The literal, visual bumps that the misspelled letter S draws on the page contribute to create a granulated textual surface that shifts our reading pace. The word 'cassette player' catches our attention just like the material cassette player had caught the narrator's eye in the story, providing the solution to the mystery. Turning our focus to the cassette player, the text urges us to reflect on the narrator's reading scene, as well as on our own (visual) reading of the story.

Sedgwick defines texture as comprising an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure (Sedgwick 2003, 15). In this sense, *Tatuada*'s misspelled 'grabadorsito,' along with the other spelling mistakes in the text, generate a specifically textual texture. In other words, the accidental nature of the mistake, which exempts it from becoming

itself, are driven by surprise, by unexpected juxtapositions that defy causality, linearity and the coherent sequencing of events.

subsumed within a coherent pattern, shape or structure within the text, enables the emergence of a sense of literary texture. If, as Laura Marks suggests, texture involves not only touch but also other senses, the visual bumps which spelling mistakes create in the reading flow produce a sense of spatiality, and, crucially, enable a haptic, visual engagement with the verbal. The narrator's accidental misspellings in the text thus create a textual tex(x)ture which, operating at the level of haptic visuality, speaks of the history of how this writing came into being at an urgent moment in Argentine history.

The mistake and the accidental, along with these chapbooks' materiality, visuality, and performance elements, enable the emergence of affective and historically located textual textures that call for the expansion of current understandings of surface, touch and the haptic. Argentine print culture's consistent exploration of the physical and visual dimensions of writing showcases the aesthetic and political productivity of literary textures which register, enter into dialogue with, and intervene in the crisis context. At a time of acute economic and social crisis that led to the interrogation of the status of the professional writer and of political representation mechanisms, ByF chapbooks explore literature's involvement in the material world around it by conceiving reading as participatory action. If in and through their own ephemerality these writings evoke ephemeral connections and networks, materially and symbolically encoding affective and creative worlds, they simultaneously investigate what literature *does*, rather than what it means, through imagining an active reader who is also a producer, a performer. Invited down a path of unknowing, the reader might become an artist, a child, an actor, even if only for a moment. After all, in Fernanda Laguna's own words, "when you play you can't be outside the game. You have to be right in the middle of it" (2013, interview by the author).

ARGENTINE ‘BOLUDEZ’ AND QUEER CHILDISHNESS

The contextual call to action precipitated by the crisis informs ByF’s re-imagining of reading as a performative activity that puts the reader’s body in motion through prompting her to color a drawing, wear a pendant or otherwise find a way to ‘use’ and ‘perform’ the text and its trinkets. It also informs the validation of amateurism and naïveté as discursive and ideological stepping stones in the project of ByF, a project that enables, in Laguna’s words, “the child Pablo Pérez” to write as if he were playing. The element of performance that enables heteronomous explorations is at the core of Laguna’s definition of ByF as a space where people “acted at certain moments and carried out similar projects” and which generated “a style of doing and living”. She elaborates that, in her view, “a space is like a theatre where one performs in a specific way.” If the space of ByF can be imagined as a theatre, many of the artists that participated in the project chose to change their names as they took on, embodied and acted out different roles as writers, visual artists, musicians or performers.⁷⁴ In this line, the centrality of *doing* translated into what Laguna describes as an exploration of queerness as overtly performative within the context of ByF: “queerness was about doing

⁷⁴ Fernanda Laguna, for instance, generally publishes her literary works under the name Dalia Rosetti but employs her birth name to author her visual artworks. While writer Gabriela Bejerman published some of her literary work in ByF under the name Lirio Violetsky and adopted the name Gaby Bex for singing and performing, poet Cecilia Pavón used pseudonym Margarita Bomero and writer Santiago Vega became known as Washington Cucurto. When asked about her literary penname, Laguna comments: “the medium leads me to different things. I act as a writer, a painter. I author my literary works with the name Dalia because they are about her adventures, I wouldn’t be able to write them under any other name. I put on a disguise, like Spiderman would, I dress up as a heroine” (interview by the author, 2013). Interestingly, the slippage in authorship in many of these texts suggests a shift away from the model of the professionalized writer towards one that recuperates a somewhat mythical notion of the author as a cultural agitator that does not specialize in literature but rather extends his or her intervention to visual arts, music, and performance. The model of the professionalized writer had been in crisis since the 1990s in Argentina: the precariousness of the working conditions under the neoliberal political regime affected writers, editors, producers, curators, and other workers in the field of culture, who were often either unemployed, overexploited, or paid in black. This became a breeding ground for the emergence of independent cultural projects (Palmeiro 199). The authors of ByF move in in-between spaces: as they leave their comfort zones to practice poetry, visual art, music and performance, literature itself becomes permeated by elements of these other areas.

things to feel adult, modern, cool. When you feel like an adult, you become one. Writing about our queerness was fun, it was part of the game” (interview by the author, 2013).

In experimenting with the impact of radical sexualities alongside childishness, naïveté and stupidity, in these works the visual/textual crux operates as a site from where to explore and negotiate the narrative and political potential of juxtaposing different queer affective configurations. In the context of the 2001 Argentine crisis, embracing ‘boludez’ and a queer approach to childishness function as strategies of resistance against the dominant, linear regimes and temporalities that dictate social and individual life trajectories. Rather than represent capitalist social inequalities in realist terms, the works I examine deploy a profound critique of those inequalities by offering queer models of personal and professional growth and development. If the ByF project, with its articulation of queer communities through a financially accessible mode of production and circulation of literary texts written by and targeted at a network of friends, has often been read as courting the utopian, I propose that it is simultaneously through its dystopic imaginings that it performs a critique of the neoliberal discourses of progress and material/symbolic accumulation which resulted in the crisis in the first place. Through their naively queer protagonists and their re-imagining of literary reading as involved in the realm of childhood play, the works I study project a queer present and future stubbornly stuck in the past and its early developmental stages, a dystopic future which warrants no space for teleologies of progress.

STUCK IN A FEELING: BECOMING ‘BOLUDA’ AS A QUEER PROJECT

ByF texts often present themselves as if they constituted an initial approach to the practice of writing through, on the one hand, an apparently transparent, simple, and vernacular prose and, on the other, the frequent inclusion of misspelled words. As I

discuss above, the visual elements and material trinkets that accompany the written texts similarly contribute to evoke a sense of childish naïveté. And ByF authors and artists' investment in playfully disguising themselves behind artistic names and pen names and acting out a variety of roles are part of a cultural project that finds an important resource in the realm of childhood, of the naïve and the amateur.

In Laguna's writing, the effect of her female narrators' stupidity is often humorous. While discussing the literature of César Aira, a central influence both on Laguna and the aesthetics of ByF, as well as a close friend of the project, Ana Flores wonders about the politics of a portion of Argentine literature and culture "not always recognized as humoristic out of fear that it might be confused with comedy." Within this group of writers she identifies Aira as well as Dalia Rosetti (Laguna), and defines their discourses as producing the type of discomfort that makes you laugh. She traces these discourses to the Argentine underground culture of the 1980s, specifically the alternative, queer space of the Parakultural and Alejandro Urdapilleta's performances and to the TV comedy shows "Cha, Cha, Cha," "Delikatessen" and "Todo por dos pesos."

The connection Flores draws between these literatures and TV shows such as "Todo por dos pesos" is central to my argument on the force of stupidity in Laguna's literature. I am interested in particular in how the heavily gendered and class-based discourses around stupidity in Argentine culture inform Laguna's naïve writing.⁷⁵ A very popular sketch first broadcasted in 1999 in "Todo por dos pesos," "Boluda total," ("Totally Boluda") deploys the stereotype of the 'boluda' for comic effect. The Argentine comedian Fabio Alberti performs as Coty Nosiglia, a banal, superficial, naïve, and utterly

⁷⁵ In Argentina, stupidity has traditionally been ethnically and racially coded as well. Among the most prevalent characters in local jokes is the stupid 'gallego' (immigrant from Galicia, Spain).

stupid TV hostess of a show with an exclusively female audience targeted at middle class housewives.⁷⁶

Literary critics have observed a parallel exploration of stupidity in contemporary Argentine writing, which has often been read as marked by silliness, childishness or, more generally, anti-normativity. Ana Flores, after placing Laguna and Aira within the same group of writers, characterizes the latter's writing as "monstruous," "bad" and "silly," "an impossibility, an other, a misunderstanding, pure expenditure, excess," a literature that involves becoming child/girl ("anamiento").⁷⁷ Discussing Laguna specifically, Silvana Santucci argues that her work might be moving towards what she terms a "useless realism" or "realism without use." Santucci examines Laguna's narrative (*Me encantaría que gustes de mí*, 2005) alongside a poetry book by Analía Giordanino (*Nocturna*, 2009) and finds in both cases the deployment of a "linguistically childish real." She argues that Laguna works with childhood in order to project the paradoxical stance of discussing femininity, to then enter into an "erotic real" in neo-baroque writer Severo Sarduy's sense, that is, as the exercise of a type of sexuality without use or utility. Santucci then places Laguna's writing within what critic Jorge Panesi describes as the Argentine literary myth of the lost or dead girl, which according to him dominates the realm of women-authored Argentine poetry.

On her part, drawing also from recent works by Eduardo Muslip (*Plaza Irlanda*, 2005) and Martín Rejtman (*Literatura y otros cuentos*, 2005), Graciela Speranza offers the hypothesis that they constitute a fresh variable of realism that she names "realismo

⁷⁶ The sketch satirized "Utilísima," a well-known TV show that reached national TV in 1990 to later become a cable channel. The show centered on teaching useful domestic tasks such as cooking, crafts, home decoration, knitting and sewing. Topics such as motherhood, health, beauty and fashion were also regularly discussed.

⁷⁷ Aira himself describes his work in terms of the notion of childhood play: ("[...] all my books are experiments. They are conceived as such, but not in the sense of experiments carried out with the methodical seriousness of a scientist but rather with the unmethodical seriousness of a crazy wise man or a child who plays with a chemistry set and mixes two substances to see what happens" (qtd. in Flores 445).

idiota” (“idiotic realism”) or “realismo de superficie” (“surface realism”). These types of narratives are characterized by evincing detached modes of perception, arbitrary associations, an obsession with banal, minor details, and no hidden sense or meaning. If there is any sense at all, Speranza risks, it is the suspicion that reality itself is idiotic.

I would like to move away from the current debate around stupidity in connection to new realisms to consider how the former might function as a queer affective stance in Laguna’s writing. Through both her writing and her public persona, Laguna intervenes in and productively rethinks the local stereotype of the ‘boluda.’⁷⁸ However, her literary and visual works explore ‘boludez’ not so much because reality itself may indeed be idiotic but rather because stupidity can constitute a productive and radical path towards knowing, being, writing, and reading differently. If her literature may be termed ‘boluda,’ it is in the literal sense that it embraces and vindicates ‘boludez,’ queer childishness, naïveté, and forgetfulness.

‘Boludez’ is revealed as strikingly productive in Rosetti’s text. In *Tatuada*, the protagonist grants unwarranted attention to a forgotten everyday object, the misspelled cassette player (‘grabadorsito’), which sticks out from the verbal surface of the text. And

⁷⁸ For Fernanda Laguna childishness, naïveté, and boludez have become a style that not only applies to her literature but also to the idiosyncratic performance around which she articulates her public self. It is not fortuitous that the corny heart drawing that represents *Tatuada*’s narrator (the same heart the latter tattoos on her skin) is a self-referential motif in Laguna’s visual art, a form of self-portrait or portrait of the artist. Laguna has become a mythical underground figure that feeds off a style based on forgetfulness and naïveté: both her work and Laguna herself have been repeatedly read as childish, naïve, underdeveloped. Writer Washington Cucurto describes the main character in his novel *Fer: una fábula encendida y atolondrada*, based on Laguna, as a “super foolish girl of astounding stupidity” (28) who falls in love with everything, with heartless things such as “a brick that sticks out from the wall in her room” (39). In the back cover of Laguna’s last compilation of poetry, *Control o no control* (2012), Alejandro Rubio wonders: “Fernanda Laguna is ‘boluda’ or just pretends to be?” He proceeds to define her as a self-conscious ‘boluda’ who purposefully “turns her boludez into a tool and a weapon to intervene in the literary lineage of Osvaldo Lamborghini and César Aira, focusing on what those writers ignored or left behind in embryonic form.” Discussing the productivity of the practice of naïveté in her own life and art, Laguna reflects: “I am like this, childish, naïve, and at the same time I think about everything. I look at something without assuming I know about what I look at so that I can learn from it. I look at or hear things as if I encountered them for the first time and I allow myself to not understand what the other is saying, even when what they are saying is very simple” (interview by the author, 2013).

it is precisely that (mis)directed attention what saves her by providing her with the solution to the S/M mystery. More generally, the narrator's radical sexual experience is intimately tied to, and becomes possible as a result of, her stupidity. It is precisely her silliness, resourcelessness, and failure to realize that the dinner invitation she received has expired what leads to the narrator being dragged out of the ordinary and confronted with the unexpected. The "murderers and thieves" the narrator encounters in jail overtly read her as stupid from the moment she enters the world of the prison: "They fondled me, they sucked my ears, they approached me in a friendly way and when I smiled at them they laughed, saying to each other: 'She's a bit stupid.' I didn't want to cry" (12). In this way, the text presents the protagonist's inadequacy as precisely what enables the accidental to touch her life.

In *Tatuada*, after the S/M scene, the narrator's naïveté remains intact as she reflects: "the freedom of the heart is a power we must exploit...how nice the world would be if people liberated their hearts and did not see everything so ugly" (16). In that mood, and in order to recall the prisoners' faces "every time I remember that I am free" (17), she decides to get a literal tattoo of a heart on her chest (Figure 4). The narrator had noticed earlier that some of the inmates had tattoos of hearts and rose thorns (13): her heart tattoo plays a crucial role in the symbolic constitution of a queer community. She wants to imprint the image of a blood red heart inside a red cage on her skin, "my heart prisoner of itself," presumably like the drawing featured in the back cover of the book (17).

Tatuada thus exploits and hyperbolizes to comic effect another prevalent stereotype often attached to women in local TV shows such as "Todo por dos pesos:" an obsession with romantic love and a tendency towards corniness and sentimentality. In this sense, the kitschy image of the heart on the narrator's skin can be read as a permanent testament of her affective exposure and vulnerability. That permanence, the

difficulty of erasing a tattoo, leaves the narrator, as the title of the story indicates, ‘tattooed forever,’ forever exposed and forever naïve. ‘Forever’ warrants no space for a different future, so that rather than character growth and development what pervades throughout the story is a stubborn attachment to repetition and anti-normative modes of being and feeling. As the title of the story indicates, the childish narrator remains stuck in the past, not only in the sense that she carries on her skin the memory of her experience in prison but also because, like the stereotypical ‘boluda,’ she proves herself unable to learn and evolve.

In this sense, my reading of ByF chapbooks’ format as evoking the world of children’s birthdays or quinceañera parties serves to further illuminate these literatures’ investment in temporalities that defy linear, reproductive, capitalist models of life. With each chapbook, ByF stubbornly evokes key rituals of passage from childhood or adolescence to adulthood. However, the format, like *Tatuada*’s naïve protagonist, never changes. The childish characters as well as the reader/child these works imagine never grow up, in spite of the obsessive, symbolic repetition of the same (failed) rituals.

In this respect, *Tatuada*’s narrator rests her attention on insignificant objects and falls in love with everything. Hers is an adolescent love, a love that must be remembered through a corny, cheap souvenir (a tattoo, a trinket). This work thus hyperbolizes the feminine stereotype of falling madly in love by creating a character that fails to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate objects of affection. To become stuck in a feeling, or in a way of feeling that belongs to a childhood or adolescent past, can become a queer project. Judith Halberstam looks closely at U.S. popular culture to argue that queer failure often entails “ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success.” As she points out, “success in a hetero-normative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity

combined with wealth accumulation” (2). For this reason, failure can operate as a critique of static models and logics of success. Queers have done exceptionally well at failing to adjust to these models and logics, and failure has for many become a style or a way of life, Halberstam argues. Failure offers different rewards within capitalist societies, she claims, like the possibility of escaping fixed norms of human development that dictate the smooth passage “from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods” (3).

By embracing, hyperbolizing and parodying the female stereotype of the ‘boluda,’ *Tatuada* exploits the productivity of stupidity, naïveté, forgetfulness and corny sentimentality. Inhabiting an oppressive construction of womanhood affords the protagonist, as well as many of Laguna’s literary characters, an alternative space from where to critique normative ways of doing and being without falling into the trap of an oppositional discourse. Assuming the stereotype of the ‘boluda’ to an extreme, she accesses the freedom of acting without thinking, of being silly and childish, kitschy, romantic and corny, of letting her ‘boludez’ drag her into unexpected, surprising, anti-normative situations and feelings. And of getting away with it all.

Chapter 2: Of Orgies in Darkrooms: Queerness, Affect and the Political in the Visual Art of ByF

What is in question in political experience is not a higher end but rather being-into-language itself as pure mediality, being-into-a-mean as an irreducible condition of human beings. Politics is the exhibition of a mediality, it is the act of making a mean visible as such.

Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics* (qtd. in Jacoby *La imaginación del detalle* 137)

The darkness in the basement is almost complete. Faces hidden behind alien-looking white masks, the performers are engaged in moving slowly, coming in contact with each other, or lying in unseen corners. One spectator at a time goes down a set of stairs into the basement of ‘Belleza y Felicidad,’ (ByF) where s/he remains for approximately five minutes. With a night vision camera in hand, the viewer pierces through the lack of light to observe the section of the room towards which s/he chooses to gear the equipment. Objects and bodies are flattened out as they come to inhabit the surface of the video image. Images whose “slender forms, pale silver, ash blues and black greens” (Laddaga 42) the individual spectator can either record or simply observe, a lonely witness to an ephemeral piece.

The first performance of Roberto Jacoby’s *Darkroom*, a piece for infrared rays and one spectator, took place in the basement of ByF in 2002 (Figs. 6-25). Jacoby himself defined the work as a “laboratory of darkness...an installation/video/performance that does not quite fit within known genres though it incorporates elements of video, performance, theatre, dance and even photography” (qtd. in Longoni 21). It was set up for ten days and the performance lasted an hour and a half to two hours each day. The group of eight performers had been instructed not to make dramatic or naturalistic gestures, and

never, under any circumstances, could they touch or contact the viewers. If the public came close, the performers had to move away.

In a 2002 article published in Clarín, a major Argentine newspaper, art critic Ana Maria Battistozzi describes the piece in these terms:

[...the visitor] could choose to look through the camera lens or surrender to the sensations produced by the absolute loss of vision. If s/he chose the former, s/he would discover strange objects and beings which seemed to belong to a phantasmatic world. Anonymous figures, automatons with plain, uniform faces and bare chests sliding breathless down a chair or becoming attached to the wall. While one obsessively ironed clothes, others emerged out of an old barbershop hooded hair dryer and other corners. If, on the other hand, the viewer chose not to look through the lens, the lack of sight enhanced the other senses' perceptions. Groping about blindly, s/he could listen more closely to the coughing, the moaning, the noises and the music that invaded that room with no spatial references.

She records that *Darkroom* “triggered the most varied associations. While for some it evoked detention and torture centers,⁷⁹ for others it offered a descent to hell or Plato’s allegory of the cave. For another group, those most affected by the current Argentine reality, it mirrored the emergence of a sub-world of the excluded.”

In this chapter I argue for the productivity of an in-depth queer reading of Jacoby’s *Darkroom*, a reading which the work’s very title suggests but has so far

⁷⁹Along these lines, art critic Ana Longoni would think of *Darkroom* as a metaphor of the perceptual lived experience of Argentine concentration camps during the last dictatorship: “the performers like the kidnapped who were ‘tabicados’ [to be ‘tabicado,’ in the slang of concentration camps, is to be firmly blindfolded with a piece of cloth or a hood which permanently covers the head], and the spectator, occupying the equivocal position of society which catches a fleeting glimpse of them.” The recounts of the survivors of Argentine concentration camps agree about the fact that ‘tabicamiento’ was the persistent condition in which they lived through days, months and even years during that devastating experience; every since their kidnapping, throughout the torture sessions, the overcrowding of chained, nameless bodies up until – in the overwhelming majority of cases – the extermination of the disappeared. In the dark, other senses became more acute and in the testimonies of the kidnapped what was heard, smelled and touched acquired protagonism. Entering the *Darkroom* drives us back to the fear, the dehumanization, the desolation, the altered perceptions, the dislocated temporality and spatiality triggered by the lack of clarity (due to the momentary blindness and also to the ignorance about the rules of that place, the not knowing where one is, with whom, for how long or what will happen next). A catábasis or descent to hell, but not to any hell: it is the hell of our recent history” (Longoni 22).

remained unexplored. On the one hand, the English term ‘darkroom’ evokes the realm of photography and, specifically, the room where photographic images are developed. It makes sense that Jacoby, looking to investigate the (de)materialization and genesis of images (Jacoby, interview by the author), would conjure up a world where the latter emerge out of darkness. At the same time, in Spanish the literal translation of ‘darkroom,’ ‘cuarto oscuro,’ refers to the space where citizens cast their secret, democratic vote – the site symbolizes the practice of citizenship as well as the sense of belonging to the nation. It is, thus, a primordial space of and for politics. The word ‘darkroom,’ however, has yet another connotation: in Argentina it is used both in its English or Spanish versions (‘darkroom’/‘cuarto oscuro’) to refer to the darkened space for casual sex and cruising in nightclubs, sex clubs, bathhouses, and discos. Heeding to this understanding of the work’s title, my reading involves not only an analysis of the ways in which the piece can be read as queer but also of how, from that queerness, it articulates a specific, alternative version of resistant politics at a crucial moment of Argentine history.

I would like to suggest that *Darkroom* can be understood as queer not just because of its title and physical recreation of a darkroom, or because of the reports that performers actually engaged in sex in the ByF basement, but primarily in light of how the viewer is invited to physically and affectively participate in – and cede control to – an underground world which produces alternative modes of sensing, feeling, and moving through space while coming into accidental, intimate contact with unknown objects and bodies. If the sense of touch becomes key for grasping the piece, darkness builds space for the potential subversion of the social norms that regulate which gendered and sexualized bodies should and should not come into contact, and the ways in which they should and should not do so. The participant is invited into the work’s recreation of a darkroom, a space for public, often anonymous sex, and into its particular iteration of queer modes of relationality. And

it is precisely through its sustained investigation of the queer, anti-normative bodily and affective configurations of receptive participation—and through the alien-looking, otherworldly space it creates—that the piece conjures a queer mode of dys/utopia. At a time of deep institutional crisis and social instability, the meanings and everyday practice of politics were being re-imagined on various fronts – the association of the piece’s title, ‘darkroom,’ with the concrete space for voting where political citizenship is activated is, in this sense, telling. I here focus on Jacoby’s resort to the utopian imaginaries of queer public sex in *Darkroom* less with the intent of qualifying the piece itself as utopian than of thinking through the ways in which these types of queer aesthetic works formed part of this period’s intense re-imagining of resistant politics.

In order to further probe the significance of queerness and dys/utopian imaginings in Jacoby’s work, I analyze *Darkroom* alongside *Orgía (Orgy)*, a 2000 chapbook authored by the artist and published at ByF which offers a thus far unexplored lens to examine *Darkroom*. Jacoby describes *Orgía* (Figs. 37-39) as a set of poems that emerged as the diary of an orgy to which he was invited by artist Juan Calcarami in 1992. *Orgía* and its accompanying drawings – a set of still lives—were originally produced during the meeting, which according to Jacoby was more of a “macrobiotic banquet” than an orgy. He recalls that the gathering lasted a whole weekend and involved mostly artists.⁸⁰ Jacoby retells that, during the 1992 gathering, he dressed up for three days in an orange cloth of the type used by the Hare Krishna, which made him look like Mahatma Gandhi. ByF founders Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón urged him to publish *Orgía* at ByF in 2000 (Jacoby 2011, 340).

⁸⁰ The host Juan Calcarami, an artist and friend of Fernanda Laguna’s and of the project of ByF, organized the gathering in his country house ‘La isla de los monos’ (‘The Island of Monkeys’) located in Brandsen, a town in the province of Buenos Aires.

Published two years prior to *Darkroom*, *Orgía* centers on the fragmented retelling of the events that lead up to, and take place immediately after, an orgiastic party. The narrator observes the action and the orgy participants from behind the ever-present lens of a camera, which structures the text around its visual framework. The narrator thus becomes simultaneously a spectator who invites readers to participate in his voyeuristic promenade. In this respect, *Darkroom* may be read as the actualization of the embodied narrative/viewing experience *Orgía* proposes. Such intertextuality raises, in turn, a provocative question: what is it like to inhabit and experience a literary text?

I suggest *Darkroom* and *Orgía* enter into formal dialogue with each other to offer a reflection on the possibilities and limitations of each media, and on the potentialities of juxtaposing different languages and technologies, with respect to the question of viewer/reader participation. In addition, through its particular portrayal of an orgy, a common trope of queerness often ridden with utopian longings, the chapbook provides us with crucial elements to think through *Darkroom*'s gesturing towards queer utopia. Reading these works comparatively represents a much needed critical approach grounded not only on Jacoby's lifelong investment in working across media⁸¹ but also on the very space where both the performance and the chapbook emerged. As I argue in Chapter One,

⁸¹ The tight connections between literature, the visual, and embodied sound were similarly explored back in the 1960s through projects such as Jacoby's oral literature project, which he carried out at the foremost avant-garde art center in Buenos Aires, the Di Tella Institute. The latter involved an attempt to dematerialize the book, which was replaced by the emerging technology of the cassette player. Recording everyday conversations and random people – among the recorded were a recluse at a women's mental facility, a woman explaining how to kill a chicken, and a street peddler – the artists aimed to expand the notion of literature to capture the embodied nature of language, with its individual marks of gender, class, age, etc. (Jacoby 2011, 27). The 1960s avant-garde preoccupation with the (de)materialization of the work of art would be taken up – and re-invented – within the space of ByF. While in *Darkroom* Jacoby investigates the most basic component of the image – light – by embracing darkness, ByF chapbooks such as *Orgía* continue to explore the question of the (de)materialization of the work of art through their insistent focus on the concrete materiality of the literary. Jacoby comments that early in his career he befriended and organized common projects with writers like Oscar Massota, Raúl Escari, and Eduardo Costa, rather than with visual artists (interview by the author).

interdisciplinary experimentation was at the core of ByF: artists, writers, and musicians constantly gathered to share space, plan and participate in common projects. Most significantly, the visual artworks and literary texts showcased and published at ByF often navigate across media, as is the case of both *Darkroom* and *Orgía*, and thus call for an interdisciplinary mode of reading which accounts for how they operate across distinct visual, textual, and perceptual interpretive registers.

The first section of this chapter, *A Word on Method*, outlines the challenges of working with ephemeral visual materials and my strategies for doing so, as well as the reasons why undertaking this task is crucial to understand this period of Argentine cultural history. The second section, *Argentine Art of the 2001 Post/crisis: Participation, Affective Networks and Desire*, places Jacoby's work in the context of the Argentine crisis and the socially committed art of the period. In *Inside the Darkroom* I analyze the public's reactions to the piece, reflecting on the modes of affective, queer participation it elicited. I argue that *Darkroom* is, above all, a piece to be queerly felt. It is also a work to be touched, and to get touched, or felt through. Playfully recreating public sex cultures, the piece raises a crucial question: what does a queer darkroom feel like? I read Jacoby's *Darkroom* as paradigmatic of the exploration of queer affects and modes of intimacy which formed part of this period's revisiting of utopian imaginaries and intense re-assessment of the politics of sociality. This piece investigates 'utopian dystopian' experiences and feelings by compounding its exploration of otherworldly forms of queer desire and sensuality with the sensation of oppression, fear, and violence it unleashes in its audience. In *A Multi-media Queer Utopia* I propose that *Darkroom* becomes a site – one of the various sites during this intense, urgent period in Argentina – from where to imagine politics, and the political potentialities of queer, anti-normative affects, differently.

A WORD ON METHOD

The radical politics of the literary and visual works in this chapter lies in their queer content and also, tightly linked to the latter, in their anti-institutional modes of production, circulation,⁸² and reception. As I outlined in Chapter One, ByF literary works were produced in DIY format, circulated among friends of the gallery and at art exhibits, and often presented work by young writers. *Darkroom*, on the other hand, was set up in the independent space of ByF – where it took queer shapes its later iterations, as I will discuss, would not – and was visited by a small group of artists and friends. The chapbooks share with *Darkroom* an interrogation of affective participatory reception mechanisms and their impact on the composition of a work of art: if ByF chapbooks like *Orgía* prompt the reader to make performative use of the text by wearing the pendants that accompany them and to become a producer through coloring their drawings, *Darkroom*, even more radically, only comes into being as a videotaped performance at the moment of reception. *Orgía* and *Darkroom*, then, may be read as political both in connection to their material modes of production and circulation and to the affective, queer modes of participatory reception they elicit.

However, it is interesting to note that, echoing the way in which ByF chapbooks have often found a home in traditional presses which translated these works into a traditional book format – shedding along the way the precarity of their photocopied pages, their transparent plastic bags, the drawings and illustrations, and their objects and trinkets – *Darkroom* would become musealized. In 2005, MALBA (Buenos Aires Latin American Art Museum), a private and prestigious institution of Latin American art

⁸² Palmeiro draws attention to the political potential of queerness in the case of ByF writers, who she defines as engaged in “a common practice: destroying cultural hierarchies by asserting throughout the whole ‘line of production’ (from the writing and selection of the catalogue to the sale of the books for practically nothing and their reproduction in the form of photocopies, a counter-cultural, marginal and university tradition – in the form of the ‘apunte’) a *queer* attitude that exalts, without conceptualizing it, the critical value of difference” (2011).

located in one of the most exclusive areas of Buenos Aires, presented the second iteration of *Darkroom* (Figs. 26-36).⁸³ The piece thus entered the museum, which through showcasing it produced an official archive of the work – a work that, while formally similar to the original ByF piece, was at the same time substantially different.⁸⁴ Despite several structural differences, the main distinction lay in the fact that the second iteration of *Darkroom* took place inside the institution of the museum, which meant not only that it was visualized by a much wider and diverse public but also exerted its impact on the configuration of the work itself.⁸⁵ As the videos and photographs of these two versions of *Darkroom* show, the ByF performance took a more ludic, playful, and humorous tone. From the marginal position of ByF, *Darkroom*'s performers indulged in the fun of joking around, of courting ridicule, of acting like children or naughty adolescents, of not taking themselves or each other too seriously.⁸⁶ On the other hand, the institutional version

⁸³ *Darkroom* was later presented at two other official venues: the Third Biennial of Pontevedra in Spain (2006) and Centro Cultural Recoleta (2007), a centrally located, traditional cultural center in Buenos Aires.

⁸⁴ Artist Marina Mariasch description of MALBA's *Darkroom* is informative of the formal differences of this version with that of ByF: "In the waiting room you can see the following: three display cabinets. The first exhibits three white masks similar to those which children build out of balloons, paper and paste, but these are cast in plaster. In the second cabinet, the most enigmatic one, a rose and a watch [...]. The third display consists of water and a fish swimming among algae. On the wall, a series of photographs. Three aligned doors lead to respective cabins, each of which shows eight videos of what happens 'inside,' in the mysterious, disturbing darkroom. On the headphones somewhat strange sounds can be heard" (2005). In addition, unlike at ByF, in the MALBA version of *Darkroom* performers wore tight unisex white suits.

⁸⁵ When asked to choose works or exhibits of the last ten to fifteen years which she considered very significant for Argentine art as part of a special number of art magazine *Ramona*, artist Virginia Spinelli chooses the MALBA iteration of *Darkroom* "because it rendered visible a problem shared by many contemporary works which, due to their characteristics (for example, that the performance is destined to one spectator and that it needed to be modified in its passage from the [ByF] gallery to the museum in order to accommodate, among other things, the much larger flow of public of MALBA) enter into direct conflict with institutional structures such as the museum and thus force a rethinking of each of the elements that make up the piece (artist, institution, spectators, etc)" (2006).

⁸⁶ ByF's *Darkroom* further desacralized art canons and poked fun at art critics through the objects set up in the basement. Jacoby comments: "there were many things... a shelf with plastic bottles, some with texts that worked as a joke about conceptual art. For example, one said 'oro' ('gold') and the other 'oso' ('bear'), stuff like that so that critics would derive meaningless interpretations, just to mess with them. There were also quotes of [writer Jose Luis] Borges and [writer Adolfo] Bioy [Casares], in particular about a writer they made up who produced conceptual novels – the only element of the novel which actually existed was the title" (interview by the author).

Darkroom produced at MALBA reads as a much more measured, serious, and at points ceremonial, iteration.

A crucial difficulty to the analysis of original ByF works such as the first iteration of *Darkroom* and the chapbook *Orgy* is the limited existing and accessible archival documentation around them. As I discuss in Chapter One when I refer to the specific case of ByF chapbooks, archival gaps are characteristic of ByF's cultural production. *Darkroom* is no exception: at the time of our interview, Jacoby himself has no archival records of the ByF version of the performance in his possession – his archive was being sorted after his solo show at the Reina Sofía Museum. I am later able to access a few edited videos⁸⁷ and photographs of the original *Darkroom* made available online after Jacoby's exhibit in Madrid. The short and fragmentary videos, however, enable but a brief glimpse of ByF's *Darkroom*, and are accompanied by no further archival documentation.

If in my first chapter I set out to recuperate the original ByF chapbooks rather than heed to their later, book format publications, here I would like to draw critical attention to the first ByF iteration of *Darkroom* instead of focusing exclusively on its later institutional versions. I make use of the MALBA version of *Darkroom* to record the wider reception of the piece and to shed light on the specificity of the original ByF piece. If my critical focus is on the first version of *Darkroom*, it is not in an attempt to reconstruct the original piece – which would be impossible not only due to archival limitations but also to the very structure of the work, an ephemeral structure that insists on its own incompleteness. Rather, I aim to think through the challenge the piece poses to its interpretation as a key element of what that original *Darkroom* was about and of the

⁸⁷ The ByF videos can be visualized online at <http://archivosenuso.org/jacoby/cronologico> in the section 00s, "Darkroom I: Belleza y Felicidad." On the other hand, video recordings of the MALBA version of Jacoby's piece can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK1Iod89Z7E>.

queer critical intervention it offered. In other words, I read the particularity of a fragmentary – and, at points, absent—archive both as a formal characteristic of the piece itself and as part of this moment of Argentine queer culture – an urgent moment of deep transformation engaged in a critique of the present through a particular conception of the production, reception and circulation of art. Jacoby’s insightful description of the specificity of that moment is worth quoting in length:

Fernanda [Laguna] went to the photocopy shop around the corner and made this calculation: ‘the photocopies cost me \$1,20 and I charge \$2,40, look at the great deal I’ve made!’ She felt that she was printing money, that it was a flawless deal. She would put little objects inside and wrap the books in cellophane. But all that love, the love in the little presents inside the books, in the small toys they would find in Once [a neighborhood in Buenos Aires well known for its popular wholesale shops and affordable prices], in the way in which they prepared meetings over tea or something else. And it was not ‘cool,’ it was not meant to be cool, unlike similar places today such as ‘El Patio del Liceo’ [an alternative art gallery a few blocks from Santa Fe and Pueyrredón, a neuralgic location in the city]. Today that is the ‘cool’ place where ‘cool’ artists show their work. It’s all under the aura of ByF, it’s all designed in the light of that aesthetics, which is actually more than an aesthetics. I’m not sure how to call it: a structure of feeling, a way of looking, of sensing and feeling? But these new places have at the same time become sites to acquire a social caché and a sense of belonging, a sense of being fashionable. ByF was not about that, it existed before what it represented became fashionable. This is what seems very difficult to explain and convey today, how ByF operated, how people related and made art. The relation with institutions when one wants to mount an exhibit is often terrible. But ByF was made by artists. This may sound discriminatory, and it is. What is made by artists is different, totally different to projects carried out by the Secretary of Culture, or an association of gallerists. There were absolutely incredible exhibits [at ByF] that were never shown at MALBA, or PROA (interview by the author).

The elusive literary and visual works I examine attest to, and contribute to the understanding of, this particularly productive moment of queer cultural history in Argentina. This project aims to start building a record of how these visual and literary pieces, in their resistance to be grasped from a specific, monolithic framework of interpretation, constitute an ephemeral archive of queer cultural production across media.

In this respect, it is possible to think of the dialogue *Darkroom* and *Orgía* establish as casting a web of meanings woven across time, space, media and disciplinary boundaries which builds networks of connection throughout Jacoby's work.⁸⁸ But how to fully account for the complexities of *Darkroom*, an ephemeral, trans-media piece of which few records exist?⁸⁹

In this chapter, apart from examining the available archival material on *Darkroom*, I record and describe the reception of the piece both through the public's and critics' reactions – which I gather from critical pieces, magazines and newspapers – as well as the artist's impressions. This contributes to map the ways in which the public's retelling of their sensations, feelings, and experiences while inside the *Darkroom*

⁸⁸ In other words, these trans-media dialogues may become vehicles for yet another version of the notion and practice of the 'network' in Jacoby's art. He would exploit such notion both through the exploration of human networks of exchange and electronic, web-based networks as enablers of the former in projects such as 'Bola de Nieve' and 'Proyecto Venus,' which I discuss below.

⁸⁹ My reflection here on how to critically account for an ephemeral artwork, as well as the role of the museum in such process, is part of a larger discussion which Jacoby's works – and their public exhibition – have prompted. His recent solo show at 2011 in Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, which spans his artistic production since the 1960s, heavily reflects on the question of musealizing this body of work, a question which presented him with an "ethical," "intimate," "personal" and "rational" dilemma and sense of uneasiness in the face of "the attempt to show something that, from the moment it is shown, it is betrayed." The museum show stages and explores the sacralization and practical uses of archives as well as the tension between his art and this institutional setting. Jacoby further reflects: "I might be said to belong to a tradition of practices that try to dissolve into social life, practices of an inapprehensible, ephemeral, discontinuous, immaterial and context-specific character: experiments with mass media and technologies now outdated, social research, festive celebrations, lyrics, political interventions, subjectification operations, experimental communities. Consequently, a museographic review of my work presents, from the start, contradictions and difficulties." The experiment they thus conducted with Ana Longoni, the show's curator, consisted in conceiving of the museum exhibit as "a place to put in evidence our uneasiness and make it visible" (Longoni), in "something like starting from angst and turning it into a reparative act" (Jacoby) ("With Uneasiness as the Starting Point"). The montage of *Darkroom* at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0ACTijapwk&list=UUUV6m-CI9ka2Ni9xsuX1jH2g&index=7>. Other possible responses to the question of archiving participatory experiences, be they artistic or intellectual, is the 2006 book "*La imaginación del detalle. Conversaciones sobre sociedades experimentales y utopías*" which gathered the memories of a cycle of conversations on utopia organized by Jacoby at the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas. The book was the result of a "collective editorial montage" based on cutting and pasting what a group of thirty readers considered to be resonant fragments from the debates, which are not transcribed in order. Finally, yet another possible alternative to address these types of works is that of verbally describing one's experience of them, producing artwork testimonies. This is particularly poignant in the case of *Darkroom*'s reception, and in this chapter I examine *Darkroom* in part through those retellings.

constitutes a crucial part of the piece, which reasserts through its recourse to verbal language its complex multi-mediality.⁹⁰ The piece produces a small community or network of viewers/narrators, each of whom owns but a fragment of *Darkroom*.⁹¹ In particular, these testimonies allow me to assess the centrality of affect to the type of participatory experience the piece elicited – and to its critical interpretation. Heeding to *Darkroom*'s complex straddling across the visual and the verbal, I understand that intersection both as a key element of the piece and as a starting point from which to constitute an informal, linguistic archive of *Darkroom*. This chapter explores alternative forms of transmission and knowledge like testimony and gossip around and about the piece in an effort to understand the ways in which *Darkroom* prompts us to think of the relation of the verbal and the visual differently. These verbal accounts are important not only due to their potential as an informal archive: they simultaneously function as formal elements in this piece. In particular, testimony and gossip bear a complex and productive relation to cultures of queer public sex of the type gestured in *Darkroom*. In the face of this ephemeral visual artwork, I pause on the available descriptions, testimonies, and

⁹⁰ In this respect, art critic and writer María Gainza reflects on the centrality of both affect and the public's testimonies to the constitution of the piece: "Darkroom is above all a work made out of the comments of a few initiated members and, in that sense, it is a typical product of Roberto Jacoby. It aligns with that 1966 idea driven forward by the group "Arte de los Medios de Comunicación" [Communication Media Art, made up by Jacoby, Raúl Escari and Eduardo Costa], to create "an exposition that was just the narrative retelling of an exposition." Because *Darkroom* not only lives out of what people recall of it but further mythifies itself in each retelling. [...] Most probably, in some years *Darkroom* will become one of those pieces that turn into myths due to the absolute lack of objective register of what happened in there and the astounding heterogeneity of the narratives of the few who experienced it. A dark room, inhabited by unknown and simultaneously familiar beings, where you enter alone with an infrared camera to precariously orient yourself, Jacoby's piece seems an enigma of multiple, atavistic and varied signification - war, loneliness, fear, communities, the strange and the unknown" ("Opus Nigrum," my emphasis)

⁹¹ According to Jacoby, a key concept developed in *Darkroom* is fragmentariness: "A whole scene can never been grasped, nobody sees the same thing. Each spectator will perceive something different. That also generated something that has to do with a sociality 'a posteriori.' Because I believe that the piece bears something like a duration beyond visuality, which consists of everything that is said about what was seen, what was felt. The reactions to the piece are diverse: some leave very happy, others cry, others yet suffer panic attacks. There are those who get to the entrance and say 'no, no, I'm not going in. It's all fine, it was very hard for me to get the ticket but I will give it to somebody else.' Or people fear darkness, which is very common (Jacoby qtd. in Ranzani 2005, my emphasis).

gossip on the work in order to understand the multiple ways in which its queerness was articulated, the affective mode of participation it elicited, and its place in the contemporary re-imagining of the political. In this respect, my methodological approach is part of this project's inquiry on the meaning-making productivity of the verbal and visual juxtapositions the works themselves carry forward to their reception and interpretation processes.

ARGENTINE ART OF THE 2001 POST/CRISIS: PARTICIPATION, AFFECTIVE NETWORKS AND DESIRE

Darkroom was first shown in 2002 in the midst of an acute crisis, an intense period of flux and transformation of Argentine social and artistic life. The period immediately following the crisis, defined by Giunta as 'postcrisis,'⁹² witnessed a shift in the modes of production and reception of art. If the crisis fueled innovative strategies of popular organization and political action, which included unemployed workers' taking control of bankrupt factories, the establishment of local bartering and basic goods exchanges, and the emergence of neighborhood assemblies to address the urgent needs of communities in the face of a collapsing national state, the exploration of new modes of social grassroots politics often functioned alongside a variety of existing and emerging art collectives that actively participated in organizing and sustaining popular resistance. The traditional figure of the artist working alone in his workshop lost legitimacy during this period: to intervene in the urgent social context, it was necessary to do so from within a group (Giunta 26). Rather than represent a radical shift, some of the collaborative cultural strategies deployed during this period had already been present before the crisis but

⁹² "The state of recovery, generally slow, which follows a situation of crisis. If the latter is experienced as a mode of violent and unexpected interruption, the post-crisis is the stage for the organization of social forces, planning, resources and new modes of articulation that enable the realization of generally short-term, immediate objectives" (263).

became generalized and more intensified after 2001 in the face of the institutional collapse. In addition, artistic tendencies emerging on the global stage, such as the use and recycling of pre-existing materials in the building of artworks – a trend Nicholas Bourriard would call ‘post-production’ – were adopted more fiercely in a context where recycling became a necessity, a context that would prompt the emergence of a poetics without art supplies (Giunta 55-6). In this sense, if the unavailability of paper and ink during the crisis fueled the growth of existing and emerging alternative publishing projects such as ByF and Eloísa Cartonera, this specific context similarly contributed to determine the materiality of the artworks produced in the face of the difficulty of importing supplies. The material and formal characteristics of these works simultaneously called for a re-imagining of the process of participatory reception.

In a 2005 publication on an encounter of independent art spaces and collectives of Latin American and the Caribbean which had taken place in 2003 at Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, the members of the art gallery and collective Duplus recall that they were aware back then that these art collectives “tended to prioritize the circulation over the production of images, a shift which prompted a reconsideration of art as that which enables mapping affective ties” (“*El pez, la bicicleta*” 8). The work of art collectives during this period would, in fact, involve the blurring of the distinctions of the roles of author and spectator, prompting crucial questions about how to make sense of these new modes of art production. Roberto Jacoby, a key protagonist in the emergence of these artistic manifestations, efficiently sums it up in a text referring to his 1999 work ‘Venus: moneda del deseo,’ the antecedent of ‘Projecto Venus,’ an initiative of material and creative exchanges I discuss below: “I want my work to exist directly through its circulation. Launch it into the realm of exchange so that it may dissolve there” (Jacoby 2011, 403).

Jacoby has been carrying out a series of key artistic projects based on collective and participatory practices since the late 1990s. His project 'Bola de Nieve' ('Snowball') was a website launched in 1998 with the objective of

strengthening the autonomy of the field of visual artists who work in Argentina. Rather than legitimizing the market, gallery owners, critics, curators, civil servants, etc., as those who dictate an artist's belonging to the field of art, we seek to enable the artists themselves to define such belonging (Jacoby 2011, 393).

Another of Bola de Nieve's main goals was to "vivify the network of relations among artists, now eroded by the new social, urban, and economic conditions" in the face of what is perceived as the scarcity of traditional meeting places for artists such as cafés, bookstores, galleries, and cultural centers, which constituted "nodes of exchange of information, discussion, interdisciplinary cross-pollination, intergenerational relations and the cementing of traditions" ("Proyecto Bola de Nieve"). This experiment was based on asking a series of artists which ten live artists they considered the most interesting and relevant today. Then the same question was asked to each of those artists who were mentioned by the first group, and so on.⁹³

This experience led Jacoby to envision an island inhabited by different kinds of artists. 'Chacra99' took place from December 1998 until April 1999 with the support of art collector and patron Gustavo Bruzzone, and involved a group of artists living together during those months at a country house in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. Jacoby defines the space as a

utopian island, full of all imaginable instruments of artistic production: digital photo and video-cameras, recorders, a computer with internet connection, film rolls, cassettes, drawing paper and folders, painting tools, a varied wardrobe with vintage female clothing since the 70s and a wide selection of wigs.

⁹³ Fostering interdisciplinary relations and attempting to map influences across different artistic and intellectual fields, artists were also asked to identify other artists or intellectuals whose focus was not visual as well as events or works they considered significant in recent years (Jacoby 2011, 393).

He comments that the country house was, literally, an island: located in low ground, the adjoining lands would flood as soon as it started raining (Jacoby 2011, 396). The group included visual artists, writers such as María Moreno, ByF authors Pablo Pérez (whose chapbook *El mendigo chupapijas* I analyze in Chapter One) and Gabriela Bejerman (a close friend of ByF), and musicians such as Sergio Pángaro and Leo García. This project yielded different collaborative works, including song lyrics, videos, and a journal written by Jacoby and Pablo Pérez which gestures towards producing “in networks, as a more vast, multiple subject” (Jacoby 2011, 397).

A project that would continue to explore the notion of network was the art magazine ‘Ramona’ (2000-2010), initially pictured by Gustavo Bruzzone as a sumptuous and ambitious visual arts publication. However, fueled by financial constraints, Bruzzone and Jacoby finally conceived the magazine as an independent project designed and written by artists and critics at whose heart lay the notion of reproducing the rhizomatic, entangled nature of the art world and its human and professional relations (Jacoby 2011, 414). To make its production as inexpensive as possible,⁹⁴ Ramona became one of the only visual art magazines with no images. Interestingly, Ramona – which set out to record and comment on all developments in Argentine art—opened up a lively space of debate, controversies and discussion among visual artists, critics, art historians, intellectuals and writers like César Aira and Ricardo Piglia.⁹⁵ The often heated debates and exchanges which ensued among those who wrote in the magazine mobilized confrontations and clashes in which not only political ideologies but also gossip and

⁹⁴ The magazine was financed through the support of foundations, awards, memberships and subscriptions, galleries, public institutions, and companies connected to the visual arts.

⁹⁵ In fact, ByF founder, poet and visual artist Cecilia Pavón was part of the editorial team from the very beginning (Jacoby 2011, 415).

personal issues entered the public arena, mapping both the discursive and affective networks that defined, structured and legitimated the Argentine cultural field at that time.

Financial limitations similarly informed the emergence of 'Proyecto Venus' in 2001, a work which concluded in 2006. Funded by a Guggenheim fellowship, it consisted on the production of an online platform for exchanges among its members. The underlying concept behind Proyecto Venus was to enable the articulation of a community of artists, writers, and musicians, a community which already existed but was spread out. Those exchanges (of material goods or services – you could exchange a haircut or English lessons for a piece of art) took place outside the market: Proyecto Venus created its own monetary currency, the 'Venus.' The initiative, which enabled the flow of inventive projects, worked in a similar way to the 'barter clubs' that flourished in Argentina at that time of deep economic crisis and high unemployment levels.

All of these projects, which Jacoby authored or in which he participated, explore modes of artistic collaboration and collectivity. It is in this sense that his works have often been understood under the moniker of 'participatory' or 'collaborative' art. Reinaldo Laddaga states that, since the early 90s', "an increasing group of writers and artists seemed less interested in the construction of works than in participating in the formation of *cultural ecologies*" (*Emergencia* 9). Among these projects, which "we do not know how to address" since they are often "unrecognizable from disciplinary perspectives," (11) he places Jacoby's 'Proyecto Venus' and *Darkroom* itself. Along these lines, Jacoby's work can be read in terms of Nicholas Bourriard's concept of 'relational aesthetics,' which is based on his perception that the aura of artworks has been displaced to their public.⁹⁶ 'Relational' emerged as a term used to describe a type of art in which "what the artist produces is relations between people and the world, by way of

⁹⁶ In his words, "the aura of art no longer lies in the hinter-world represented by the work, nor in form itself, but in front of it, within the temporary collective form that is produced by being put on show" (61).

aesthetic objects” (Bourriard 42). Relational art, according to Bourriard, breeds “forms which do not establish any preference, a priori, of the producer over the beholder...but rather negotiate an open relation with it” (58). Bourriard elaborates that

these days, utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experiments. The artwork is presented as a *social interstice* within which these experiments and these new ‘life possibilities’ appear to be possible (45).

Bourriard’s notion of relational art has been heavily critiqued for, among other things, its dismissal of aesthetic questions – except in terms of “an ethicopolitical judgment of the relationships produced by a work of art” (Bishop 2004, 65)—and for his problematic assumption that the participatory modes of art which proliferated during the 1990s are intrinsically emancipatory and more democratic than previous forms.⁹⁷ Claire Bishop, a key voice in the articulation of these critiques, joins Reinaldo Laddaga’s call for a “more integrated mode of artistic judgment” to assess this group of works and complains about what she dubs ‘the ethical turn’ in art criticism (2006, 5).⁹⁸

In fact, Bishop recuperates the critical potential of Argentine avant-garde actions of the 1960s as key in the development of a participatory aesthetic. She draws attention in particular to the 1966 “Happening para un jabalí difunto” or “Happening de la Participación Total” (“Happening for a dead boar” or “Happening of Total Participation”), a conceptual piece co-authored by Jacoby, Raúl Escari and Eduardo Costa which involved releasing to the press a written narrative and fictional visual documentation of a happening that had never actually taken place. She writes:

⁹⁷ Claire Bishop draws attention to the way in which social participatory mechanisms, far from exclusively linked to social change, are being deployed for reality TV, or as business tools for improving workforce efficiency and morale (2006, 11-12).

⁹⁸ See Laddaga’s *Estetica de la emergencia* for further elaboration on these types of work and for the place of Jacoby’s art (‘Proyecto Venus’ in particular) as part of what he considers a paradigm shift in contemporary art.

Unlike happenings in Europe and North America during this period, which emphasized the existential thrill of unmediated presence, the *Happening for a Dead Boar* existed purely as information, a dematerialized circulation of facts. As such, it obliterated the problematic dividing line between (first-hand) participant and (secondary) viewer, since there was no ‘original’ event to have attended in the first place. The media itself became the medium of the work, and its primary content. (2012, 108)

A key protagonist of the 1960s Argentine avant-garde art movement, Jacoby probes the question of reception as closely aligned with production and media technology ever since that period.⁹⁹ I would like to position *Darkroom* – with its interactivity, its collapsing of the roles of producer and spectator, and its depiction and creation of communities of masked creatures and viewers—in a lineage of participatory art that, rather than focus on dialogue and conviviality, “avoids the pitfalls of a didactic critical position in favor of rupture and ambiguity” (Bishop 2006, 11), and which problematizes idealized, simplistic approaches to the role of art in community building by staging and forcing us to grapple with the discomfort, the risks, the strangeness of living together in difference. *Darkroom* is less invested in the liberating potential of a mythified sense of bodily immediacy—a charge that is often made against relational art – than in exploring precisely those technologies that mediate the viewer’s contact with the piece and the world.

As Bourriard’s quote above indicates, the utopian longings behind conceptualizations of participatory art as an enabler of concrete modes of emancipation are part of the critical conversation around these pieces. According to Bourriard, rather than hold on to a traditional utopian agenda, today’s artists are “learning to inhabit the world in a better way” and, rather than look forward to a better future, they invest in

⁹⁹ Jacoby’s avant-garde experimentation with the ‘art of mass media’ back in the 1960s involved conceiving of communication media as a ‘new artistic materiality.’ In her analysis of ByF’s *Darkroom*, Battistozzi draws a connection between the piece and *Happening para un jabalí difunto* (2002).

mounting functioning small-scale, concrete ‘microtopias’ in the here and now. Claire Bishop argues that the examples Bourriard uses to convey this notion are artworks which exploit identification rather than tension or friction, relying on a somewhat mythical idea of community (2004, 54). Drawing on Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s understanding of antagonism¹⁰⁰ as intrinsic to democracy, Bishop reminds us that antagonism does not signal the eradication of utopia from the field of the political. On the contrary, the notion of utopia remains fundamental to a radical imaginary (2004, 66). If Bourriard’s artistic ‘microtopias’ are, like utopia traditionally conceived, “predicated on the exclusion of those who hinder or prevent its realization” (Bishop 2004), *Darkroom* on the other hand welcomes difference and tension between the artist, viewers, and performers precisely to account for the complexities of the present. And it is by staying close to those complexities that it creates a space for the political.

INSIDE THE DARKROOM: FEELING YOUR WAY

When I question him about *Darkroom* during our interview, Jacoby seems assailed by a host of memories. The origins of the piece gradually materialize as he recalls:

Darkroom came out of my interest to create a work out of nothing, out of the zero degree of image which is the absence of light. There is image only when there is light, when there is not light there is no image, there is nothing but imagination. The imaginary is at work, but not the image. For this reason I was interested in starting from scratch, starting from the problem. How and what do we see when there is no light? How does light work? So I started learning things, for example that it is very difficult to create darkness, just as John Cage discovered that it is very difficult to find silence...And with light it is quite similar. When you turn off the light, after a few minutes you start to see some light, some light always finds

¹⁰⁰ “...a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate...one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased” (Bishop 2004, 65-6).

its way in. It is not easy to achieve a state where images do not exist (Jacoby, interview by the author).¹⁰¹

Jacoby recounts that it was in *No soy un clown (I'm not a Clown, 2000)*—his first individual show exhibited also at ByF – where he first started working on the idea of an image emerging from darkness. Within the space of ByF, not only the publication of the experimental literary chapbooks but also visual art exhibits played a central role. A variety of young—and a number of more established—artists with a range of diverse aesthetics showed their work at ByF.¹⁰² *No soy un clown* consisted of six photographs of Jacoby dressed up as a clown spread across the walls of the gallery.¹⁰³ The gallery was dark, and the images were barely lit with LED lighting. The viewer needed to stay close to the photographs, of very small size, in order to actually see them¹⁰⁴ (Figs. 40-41).

¹⁰¹ In a 2005 interview Jacoby recounts that this idea was inspired by Malevich's 'zero image' (María Gainza, "La obra según Jacoby").

¹⁰² The magazine of ByF, 'Belleza y Felicidad. Arte y Literatura,' whose first number was published in 1999, served as the informal catalogue of the exhibits. Like the literary chapbooks I examine in Chapter One, the ByF magazine constituted a print space of encounter and interplay between the literary and the visual. And, like the ByF chapbooks, this magazine has not been archived by national libraries or art archival institutions. Its unusual aesthetics – which seems to lie closer to that of independent poetry magazines than to that of art catalogues – and its multiple functions – which include that of cataloguing exhibits, publishing literary works, reproducing visual art, and publicizing the activities of and at ByF – render it somewhat 'unclassifiable,' which may in part account for that oversight.

¹⁰³ "They were like small theatres, because what you saw were photos of me in clown shows. There were only six of these distributed across the gallery space, and they were very small in size, so much so that when you entered the room it seemed it was empty and it took a moment until you could perceive there was something there. When you came close you saw a portrait – those who know me realized it was me, and if not you just saw a clown. There was music also, a song by a 1940s German singer, Lotte Lenya" (Jacoby, interview by the author).

¹⁰⁴ Queer writer Sergio Bizzio's piece on Jacoby's *No soy un clown*, published in the magazine of ByF, 'Belleza y Felicidad. Arte y Literatura,' finishes with a poem in an invented language, stating that "I thought it best – simpler and fairer – to invent a language in order to elevate myself towards what I do not understand, and to use it in all its incompleteness to praise you" (Revista ByF 14, 2001, Cecilia Pavón's personal archive). Unlike a conventional artwork review, what Bizzio (and the ByF magazine) offers is a different type of interaction between the visual work and the discourse that surrounds it. Rather than produce a critical interpretation in order to make sense of or 'decipher' *No soy un clown*, Bizzio embraces the impossibility – and the productivity – of fully accounting for it through the crafting of a literary piece which presents itself as a riddle in an un-decodeable, un-decipherable language. Not only the common concern with light and darkness seems to link this piece and *Darkroom: No soy un clown's* productive opacity, which Bizzio addresses in the magazine, foreshadows the interpretive resistance posed by *Darkroom*.

In her analysis of the version of *Darkroom* presented in 2005 at MALBA, Andrea Giunta reflects on the work's involvement with darkness. She defines the piece as a perceptual laboratory that works with "darkness as the curtailment of a sense, as *a means towards the loss of control*" (2009, my emphasis). In this same direction, Elena Oliveras concludes that "Jacoby's investigation of the phenomenology of perception is connected with his desire to dislocate, to force things out of their usual place, and to separate the subject from common sensorial experiences" and imagines *Darkroom*'s viewer as "someone *capable of overcoming our aural fear* of the absence of light and willing to walk around in absolute darkness" (2012, my emphasis). Along these lines, Jacoby reflects when discussing *Darkroom*:

I wanted to create a space out of which you could not emerge feeling indifferent. I began to think that the disposition of the spectator in exhibits is that of a secular sociability. You go there, chat, have a drink, and after that you leave and continue with your life as if nothing had happened. Today there are biennales and shows which you can access through the internet, and even if you're not there you can get a pretty good idea of what they're about. It's not the same as having been there, but it comes close. I was interested in that moment when the spectator is alone in the face of things, that moment when he is isolated from the community of spectators. *It's a moment when he feels like he loses control, and at the same time he has more control than ever.* (Gainza, "La obra según Jacoby," my emphasis)

The piece was, indeed, effective: spectators rarely emerged out of *Darkroom* unscathed.¹⁰⁵ The piece generated "strong sensations" in them. Some of the viewers "confessed that they entered a hallucinatory world, even if the actions they witnessed

¹⁰⁵ The public's reactions were, of course, varied. As Maria Ganza comments with respect to the MALBA iteration: "there aren't two identical narratives." While as she asserts in her newspaper article, some viewers remained unaffected by the work (the reactions she records include 'no es para tanto,' – it's not that impressive - 'no te mueve un pelo' – it does not move you at all -), the overwhelming majority of testimonies and critical assessments of the piece find it deeply moving - and even disturbing - in one way or another ("Opus Nigrum").

were quotidian and apparently irrelevant,”¹⁰⁶ others would leave the space “smiling with an absent look in their faces,” and others still would “go out running” (Mariasch 2005). Mariasch, discussing the second iteration of the piece at MALBA, describes her own experience of visiting *Darkroom* and the tantalizing wait that precedes it in these terms:

The visitors get a number and wait for their turn. Part of the piece takes place outside, in the conversations *to exorcize fears before entering*, in the reaction of those who come out [...] What is inside is uncertain. That uncertainty is the foundation of the whole work. *There are some hints in the ‘foreplay.’* It is known that vision is almost non-existent, that there will be other people, but the information is limited. And in the middle of the day, in the illuminated, controlled space of MALBA, *ghosts, arousal, and the morbid fascination of true ‘darkrooms’* (not rooms where photographs are developed but those private spaces in discos where orgies take place, and the experience of touching and being touched by others without seeing their faces, without knowing who they are) *emerge* (2005, my emphasis).

Darkroom’s reception was, indeed, defined by uncertainty, fragmentariness, and the accidental, as well as by perceptual and sensorial lack. Due to the structure of the work, each spectator’s experience was unique and, to a certain extent, incommunicable.¹⁰⁷ The limited vision, the constricted, confined space, and the surrounding darkness lead some potential spectators to decide against entering *Darkroom* while waiting their turn, giving away their precious, hard to get tickets. Because, in critic and writer María Gainza’s words,

Darkroom opens up a space of paranoia. The lack of information, the loss of referent and orientation, the shifting, unsafe landscape, renders the public particularly susceptible: one does not know the measures of the room, or how

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.ambito.com/suplementos/artes/noticia.asp?id=237739>

¹⁰⁷ Critic Reinaldo Laddaga reconstructs some of his own impressions of the piece in the catalogue of the exhibit: “What you see are some armchairs, bottles, hairdryers, piles of paper. There must be other things, but I’m not sure, and I’m not sure what logic unites these things, or what space confines them. And there are eight people... Two of these creatures are caressing each other on the floor. Someone is sifting through some papers. Another has a bottle in his hand (he is sitting in an armchair, I think). Another is masturbating. In what order did I see these things? It would be impossible to say, but I think I was filming the whole time. Or was I?” (44).

many performers are in it, or what they are doing...In private, many confess that, if one really suspends disbelief during the three minutes the visit lasts (minutes that stretch like plasticine spaghetti), the first thing one feels on entering the Darkroom is fear, a primitive fear, 'cuiqui' say the shyest ones. ("Opus Nigrum," my emphasis).

It is precisely along those lines that Giunta describes her experience of *Darkroom*:

The resistant quality of the work is prolonged by our sensation when we come out of it that, no matter how long we remained in it, we could not have possibly seen it all. Inside *Darkroom* this feeling becomes more acute, *as it is necessary to deal with one's own limitations and fears. Confronting loneliness, the difficult in looking, and the tension between the desire and the fear to see* (*Poscrisis* 213, my emphasis).

The piece exerts a mode of perceptual violence upon its participants—both the performers, blind behind their masks, and the viewers. The first few seconds after the viewer enters *Darkroom* are punctuated by total darkness. It takes some time for the eyes to adjust to the lack of light, and even when they do, the participant's ability to see through the infrared camera is limited. Her body is biopolitically acted upon and reshaped so that its relation with space, and with other bodies, is reconfigured. Drawing both from phenomenology and queer theory, theorist Sara Ahmed reflects on how bodies orient themselves in space. Rather than think of bodies as fixed, bounded entities, she argues that bodies "take shape through tending towards objects that are reachable, available within the bodily horizon." Similarly to bodies, emotions take form as they are "directed to what we come in contact with." Moving us 'toward' and 'away' from such objects, they involve "affective forms of re-orientation" (2). The complex ties between bodily movement, perception, emotions, and subjectivity which Ahmed signals can help us shed light on the intense affective reactions viewers experienced inside the

Darkroom.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the threat to the body's integrity and the curtailment of the physical capacities which the piece enacts prevent some potential participants from entering the space. The work thus takes place not only inside but also outside that room into which the participants' bodies are thrown and where they must learn to sense, move, relate, and feel differently. The piece renders the viewer—and performers –vulnerable by subjecting them to a state of perceptual precarity, interrogating the productivity of fear, surprise, instability, and lack of control as doors of access to and interpretation of an artwork. But through what mechanisms does the piece produce this affectively charged, participatory mode of reception?

In *Darkroom*, viewing is mediated by the camera, a technology of vision. I am interested in the way in which the lens of the camera, along with the material conditions of reception of the piece, shape the scene of viewing. I argue that in his chapbook *Orgía* Jacoby experiments with the specific mechanism of the camera as framing device he would later deploy in *Darkroom*. Crucially, in both pieces reading and viewing are mediated by a video-camera: in this sense, *Darkroom* could be read as the trans-media translation of the experience of reception *Orgía* proposes. In Jacoby's chapbook, bodies and objects are verbally reproduced as if snapshots. That effect is rendered possible through the use of a literal camera as a framing device for the piece. The first lines of the text read:

He. The Reasoner that arrives.

The Camera – located in the space of the group—captures him: he comes near the humid, extended green. Varied green, wide and thin leaf, big and small. The Camera detects shyness. He's not a good actor, but at least he does not overact either. A style?

¹⁰⁸ In fact, Ahmed identifies the moments of intellectual and vital disorientation in phenomenology – moments after which bodies must re-orient themselves - as 'queer.' One of such moments is linked to the example, commonly employed in writings on orientation and phenomenology, of walking blindfolded in a dark room – an example which the experience of *Darkroom* closely echoes.

We, the Camera, are wet because of the thick stream in the blue pool which deep down is a green swamp. Hello, hello. Hello, hello. (1)

The camera is capitalized in the text as if it were a human character with a proper name, and the first character introduced, ‘el Razonante,’ is presented as an actor. Betraying Jacoby’s sustained concern with multi-media works, *Orgy* reads as the textual narrative of a film or video, or of the shooting of a film or video, rather than as a conventional poem or literary narrative. What interests me in particular about these initial lines is the identification of the camera with an “us” that, without clear textual referents, can be read as involving the reader. Echoing the way in which the viewer, the artist and the camera fold into each other in *Darkroom*, the “us” *Orgy* proposes becomes indistinguishable from the technology of vision the camera entails, so that along with the narrator the reader embarks upon a visual and sensory trip. So much so that at the beginning of the text the camera is tested for sound through the repetitive “hola, hola” (“hello, hello”). ‘Hola’ functions as an informal greeting that interpellates the reader and to which the latter might potentially answer back, contributing to the textual construction of the ‘us.’¹⁰⁹

Darkroom’s viewer, like the reader in *Orgía*, momentarily co-inhabits the (behind the camera) space and function of the artist. The recourse to the video camera as a means to view and record the performance grants the viewer power to transform the work of art: not only does her physical presence affect the development of the performance, her orientation towards – and her choice to record – a specific scene, space and/or set of performers, over other/s gives shape to the piece. In a dark, unknown space which the viewer can never fully grasp, the accidental plays a key role in that composition: the

¹⁰⁹ *Orgy* is framed primarily through the third person (the presumed perspective of the camera), some references to the first person plural (which potentially encompass the reader) and a few first person singular passages where the narrative voice, alternatively identified with the camera and with ‘El’ (He), and ‘el Razonador’ (the Reasoner), retells his version of the events and passes judgment on what he observes.

spectator's initial observation of a random scene may well determine the course of her viewing experience.

The eradication of sight the performers are subjected to leads them to rely more heavily on the other senses in order to find their way around and interact with each other.¹¹⁰ While they compensate the un-differentiation imposed by darkness by becoming attuned to sounds, smells and textures, the viewer experiences the space through the mediation of the infrared camera. If performers grasp their surroundings – and each other—through touch, this sense is also exacerbated for the spectator, who apprehends the scene while/by feeling the cold imprint of the camera on her skin. Physically holding on to the technological prosthesis that enables (night) vision, the viewer enters into direct contact with the video camera—and that embodied contact generates sensations that lie beyond the representational capabilities of the video as medium. The video camera as object, its shape, temperature and texture, becomes a focus of attention for the viewer and an element of the piece itself. *Darkroom* thus persists in its interrogation of the limits and untapped potential of media technologies to produce diverse meanings and feelings.

As the viewer looks through the camera lens, she accesses the performance in the form of greenish night vision images. The coldness of the palette of greens, blacks and whites echoes that of the camera she holds. The pixelated, imprecise night vision image in front of her is courted by the all-enveloping darkness of the darkroom, a darkness with a texture of its own. The camera image translates the live performance into the two-

¹¹⁰ Jacoby describes the conditions in which performers worked, and the physical setting of *Darkroom*, in these terms: “the actors had to be blind, they didn’t have to see while they were being watched. In this way, they became animated objects, and at the same time they needed some training to tolerate that situation and know how to behave. We created a setting, I worked with [artist] Sebastian Gordín on that. There was a type of cinema with seats and a screen, the performers would at times be sitting there, watching...The basement was very, very small, but as it was dark it seemed huge, it became an enormous space. The performers stayed in the basement the whole time, all together, for the hour and a half that the performance lasted. After some time they became exhausted, they would go crazy down there, they started screaming” (Jacoby, interview by the author).

dimensional pattern of the lens: the breathing bodies buried in darkness are flattened out as they come to inhabit the surface of the screen. In the ByF video recordings, a performer walks around with her chest bare, and a couple caresses each other until one of them places the other's hand on their genitalia. A creature humorously humps a teddy bear, another masturbates with his hand. Several pairs kiss, hug, and engage in sexual positions, moving rhythmically. A performer stands caressing another who kneels by his side. One drags another across the floor, or hits them, and yet another grabs and violently shakes their partner by the neck.

The viewer is thus left with just those fragments of the action that fit within the frame of the screen, the textured scenes which, like those in the video recordings, have been rescued from the dark and which s/he experiences through a mode of haptic visuality. As I outline in Chapter One, Laura Marks draws a useful distinction between haptic and optical images. Whereas optical visuality “sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space,” haptic looking “tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture” (Marks 2000, 162-3). Haptic visuality tends to be fragmentary, textured, and imprecise – adjectives that also serve to characterize *Darkroom*'s infrared camera images. Through their collapsing of the senses of touch and sight, haptic images work to create a sense of erotic proximity and intimacy with the space and the performers. While the voyeurism the device of the infrared camera creates “relies on maintaining the distance between viewer and viewed,” the eroticism of its haptic images “closes that distance and implicates the viewer in the viewed” (184). This is particularly poignant in the case of *Darkroom*: the display of naked bodies, the sensual and sexual scenes, and the violence the performers exert on each other all attest to the sudden, rough intimacy *Darkroom* creates between its creatures and the viewer. If haptic

visuality implies “making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing” (Marks 185), not only the limited vision but also the type of images that the viewer comes in contact with in *Darkroom* render her physically and emotionally vulnerable.

On entering the *Darkroom* the individual, isolated viewer faces an experience which is both private and anonymous.¹¹¹ This simultaneously central and peripheral positionality of the viewer echoes the spatial configuration of desiring bodies in queer darkrooms, where anonymous sexual encounters produce specific, spatially-bound modes of intimacy. Through its technological prosthesis and its administration of space, Jacoby’s *Darkroom* produces a parallel effect:

the gravitation of the body in the space where it moves and the shifting of the eye within the audiovisual continuum, the floating and the fall combine to produce a singular sort of *intimacy: an intimacy that does not occur* – or does not only occur – *between people integrated into a space, people who can be identified where they appear* (Laddaga 47-8, my emphasis).

Immersed in a scene full of ‘unidentified,’ masked, alien-looking bodies she can not physically touch and can only partially see, the viewer partakes in a mode of looking marked simultaneously by closeness and distance, a mode of estranged intimacy enabled by the lens – and the cold grasp—of a technological bodily prosthesis. An intimacy with and of a world that forever eludes her, moving back as she moves forward. *Darkroom* thus explores forms of mediated touch to conceive other spatial modes of togetherness: while the viewer’s physical contact with the video camera mediates her initial sensory

¹¹¹ Laddaga argues that *Darkroom* imagines the spectator as simultaneously central and peripheral: “No one else could have seen what I saw...At each moment, the piece addresses a unique viewer. This knowledge hovers over the situation, and makes my position absolutely central: the show happening now is happening for me and me alone. It’s just that ‘I’ am also anonymous here. I am more of an intruder than a guest (especially since one of the rules is that the performers not address me at any point)...my centrality is, in a way, circumstantial.” (41-2)

access to the piece, she visualizes the performance through two dimensional, imprecise haptic night vision images. The piece deploys other spatial configurations – those in-between spaces created by the juxtaposition of different media – to explore modes of intimacy which involve being quite close but not close enough to come into intentional contact.¹¹²

In *Darkroom*, however, the frail balance that distant intimacy creates may be shattered at any given moment by accidental forms of physical contact. In Laddaga’s words, “the vision through the camera is quite poor, I have to grope around blindly, unable to really catch my balance” (42). The possibility of bumping into a performer, or the setting and objects that constitute the piece, is ever-present. If off-screen darkness separates the viewer from the performers and the objects of the piece, it is also the very undifferentiated substance that may accidentally draw them together through physical touch:

The feeling I have is that this sub-world has a balance which, from the time I went in, is about to break. This sensation becomes even stronger when I step backwards and run into someone or something and my body, down there, runs into some object or some body that suddenly wobbles, *about to lose control* (Laddaga 45, my emphasis).

Darkness – an overriding force of undifferentiation—blurs the contours of the viewer’s and the performers’ bodies and thus creates a space where they may come in contact, sharing a mode of accidental intimacy reminiscent of queer darkrooms.

To sum up, *Darkroom* investigates the way in which the sensorial, active body maps onto the realm of the affective. Probing the affective resonances of darkness and

¹¹² Along these lines, Laddaga elaborates: “to be able to observe the scene in *Darkroom* – what allows me to observe it, even from this exacerbated closeness (because I had hardly entered the basement when I first approached one of the eight people that were down there, dressed and nude, still and moving, all wearing masks) requires a minimal distance that makes the actions seem to occur in a floating time...” (43).

(limited) sight, the piece explores how embodied regimes of visibility and tactility are experienced and felt. In order to navigate the *Darkroom*, and in the face of the limited, haptic images offered by the video-camera, the viewer is prompted to activate strategies of receptive participation aligned with the other senses – touch, smell, hearing. The piece explores the haptic through technologically mediated, accidental, and direct¹¹³ modes of touch. In this respect, I would like to propose, *Darkroom* is not so much a work to be seen but rather one to be touched, grasped, felt through. This is, perhaps, not surprising: touch is, after all, crucial in a queer darkroom.

A series of key terms—a discursive web which constitutes *Darkroom*—keep coming up throughout the viewers’ and the artist’s own description of the piece I examine in this section: ‘lack of control,’ ‘primal fears,’ ‘isolation,’ ‘uncertainty,’ ‘intimacy,’ ‘desire,’ ‘anticipation,’ ‘excitement.’ Eliciting these conflicting modes of affective and sensorial embodiment and participation from its viewers, Jacoby’s fictional *darkroom* investigates the specific question of what a queer darkroom might feel like. Interestingly, according to viewers’ and the artist’s testimony, the piece functioned not only as an imagined but also as a literal darkroom: the erotic connotations of the work’s title would come to fruition in the basement of ByF.¹¹⁴ Down there, performers’ bodies co-inhabit in an enclosed, dark space, and the erotics of containment give way to the narrative/visual climax of actual sex. In spite of having been given specific instructions “...to perform rather mechanical, cold actions... in order to create a sense of distancing,” in Jacoby’s words the performers

¹¹³ Touch is a key sense for performers, particularly in the original *Darkroom* version. In the videos of the performance, they are often shown touching each other – sometimes tenderly, sometimes sexually, and other times both – with their bare hands. In the MALBA version of the piece, the sense of touch is to a certain degree canceled out for the performers, since the cloth of their suits prevents them from coming into direct contact with the environment, with each other, and with the viewer.

¹¹⁴ Viewers reported having witnessed not only sensual scenes but also sexual encounters in the basement of ByF.

...ended up doing what they wanted. The name of the piece, *Darkroom*, evokes a photograph development room where image appears or emerges, but it is also a space for casual sex, and it was the latter meaning which ended up prevailing as the days wore off. Some of them did things down there, that's why I'm telling you that they were quite naughty. I later saw one of the performers at the gay pride parade, she is now a flamethrower, she would drink gas and throw out flames. She is totally scarified, and has insertions in her head. [The performers were] complete freaks (Jacoby, interview by the author).

While describing the performers of the first version of *Darkroom*, staged at ByF, Jacoby recounts that some of them

came from the world of theatre but also from other areas... they were strange people. We looked for performers who would tolerate the conditions the piece required, they had to be locked up in the dark for long periods of time wearing a mask that made it hard to breathe, it was very uncomfortable for them. And they would not become famous doing this, nobody would even see who they were... it did not pay off (Jacoby, interview by the author).

Interestingly, the second version of *Darkroom* (2005), staged at MALBA, employed a different group of performers. This time, Jacoby recalls, they were people from disciplines related to the body and performance. In this second version, the change of setting and institution resulted in a much more 'correct' version of the piece. The marginal, alternative space of ByF allowed for a queer exploration of modes of closeness, physical contact, and sexuality which would not be possible years later at MALBA.

The ByF version of *Darkroom* – as it lives on in the form of the few remaining video recordings and, especially, of the myths, testimonies and gossip kept alive by its viewers—thus creates space for illicit sensual encounters between performers, materializing the sexual, anonymous modes of touch and relationality which characterize queer darkrooms. In the face of the formal containment created by the piece, the physical flooding and sensual overflowing of living bodies constitute a narrative and visual climax which functions to release and un-do the work's exercise in distancing and enclosure,

enabled in part by the visual framing of the camera as a means of production/reception. In *Darkroom*, not only the viewers but also the performers become queerly affected by the piece, lending it shape by independently realizing and incarnating its potential meanings.

A MULTI-MEDIA QUEER UTOPIA

The performers' masks, their alien-like appearance and demeanor—Jacoby instructed them not to make naturalistic gestures—place them, as Laddaga suggests, in the realm of the non-human (2005). The fear viewers often express is intimately connected not only to the sensorial conditions to which they are subjected but also to how the piece engages them in the experience of co-inhabiting a space with the radically different, that which we can't quite grasp in its entirety, that in whose face we feel surprised, disconcerted, afraid. The performers' masks, mirror-like, flash a stereotypical expression of surprise and/or fear back at us. Jacoby's *Darkroom*, positioning the spectator as an outsider in a radically alien environment, reflects on the formation of alternative, ephemeral collectivities by inviting her to negotiate the discomfort of being with others, articulating other modes of living together. The fleeting contact between the public and the performers, though, lasts only a few minutes. In this sense, the type of connection that draws them together, established through accidental contact and/or the mediation of the infrared video camera, finds a good descriptor in the notion of 'distant intimacies.'

It is, perhaps, telling that the seeds of *Darkroom* can be traced back to Chacra99, an experiment of conviviality which Jacoby describes as a "utopian island." Once having decided to work on darkness and "body fragments," Jacoby recalls that he remembered that in Chacra99 they used an infrared camera "to play around in the basement. Then [artist] Sebastián Gordín created the masks a bit in his own image, and from there

emerged the first *Darkroom*” (Gainza, “La obra según Jacoby”). On his part, Laddaga argues that the experiments in micro-societies Jacoby has been conducting since the late 1990s, and Proyecto Venus in particular, can be read alongside *Darkroom*. In both pieces, he claims, Jacoby “attempts to assemble a device that produces a specific social ecology: a situation where the relations between people, between people and things, between people and the mechanisms that allow them to have an experience take an unusual course and allow for a questioning of the present and its circumstances” (Laddaga 41). Identifying *Darkroom* as part of a trend in Jacoby’s art “that aims not at displaying fixed objects but at displaying the observed life,” (40) he comments that “[the performers] looked to me more like members of a population than participants in a piece” (44). Reflecting on the status of that population as “larval, perhaps, less differentiated, even” and “concerned with simple exchanges: handing objects back and forth, and turning them around to explore their features,” Laddaga concludes that the piece embraces something like a “utopian promise, although the terms of this promise cannot be fully explained” (47). I argue that *Darkroom* presents us with a reflection on utopia, though of a different type than that of the other projects by Jacoby with which Laddaga aligns it. Drawing from a queer tradition of public sex, *Darkroom* recreates a specifically queer mode of utopia. By materializing the affective world of a fictional darkroom in an otherworldly environment, it raises questions about the political potentiality of anti-normative, queer ways of sensing, touching, feeling, and moving otherwise.

In Argentina, commercial darkrooms began to populate the night of Buenos Aires in the 1980s. These spaces for public sex would displace the more radical ‘teteras’ or tearooms that were popular during the dictatorship. As Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli comment in their study of gay life during that period:

The Argentine *darkroom*—or what Buenos Aires gay people until recently called, in a mega disco, ‘the tunnel’—in those establishments where bodies become

entangled replaces the public and free orgy of the tearooms during the last dictatorship, rendering it less radical but decently profitable (23-4).

Reflecting on the Foucauldian resonances of the increasing privatization and public surveillance of spaces for public sex, these critics ask themselves whether

the privatization of the circuit of desire, in taxing the right to pleasure, does not finally return the deviant to the very core of the bourgeois community of which he was a fugitive. In the onerous wait until the darkroom of the cool disco opens for the night, in the sombre ticket booths of porn cinemas, and in the perfumed receptions of saunas, the eye of the good citizen will finally be present, sometimes through tax authorities, others silently authorizing a bribe to a police station... And in this way, the old fugitives of Buenos Aires tearooms... were finally thrown on their knees in our civilization's confessionaries. If neither brute force nor illegality... could stop the games to which they surrendered in the time of the dictators, it was the free market (and not so much AIDS) that was finally able to turn them into new citizens by discovering the potential for profit in the homosexual world (71-2).

Echoing the increasing privatization and administration of the urban grid of desire, a surveillance device is recreated in Jacoby's *Darkroom* through the introduction of the infrared camera.¹¹⁵ Reflecting on how the latter produces images akin to those used in the media coverage of contemporary wars, Laddaga describes how such device situates him "in a position not of that one who observes but of that one who surveys" (11-). This correlation with a world of aggression is not gratuitous: as I commented above, the piece exerts a degree of violence on the bodies that populate it. On the one hand, the viewer's body, senses, and perceptions are forcefully reconfigured as soon as she steps in the

¹¹⁵ Surveillance in tearooms, in fact, has a long history: "the hidden cameras of U.S. police forces always specialized in representing those citizens who were absent and offended [by the public sex in tearooms]. Penetrating with their lecherous lenses those bodies surrendered to a private pleasure, they transform any underground, consented sexual action... in a public scandal. In this way that police force, already from the time of McCarthyism, hid in tearooms espionage systems through truncated mirrors, holes and double roofs, in the hope that the violation would take place, since it needed to take place for their own professional survival, even when no offense had been committed against unaware third parties, even perhaps when it had not even been consummated. It's the technological version of the eye of God that, even when it is not looking at me, looks at me" (Rapisardi and Modarelli 38).

darkroom, and the enveloping darkness leaves her vulnerable to accidental, invasive contact with performers and objects. In fact, the inextricability of that violence – and of the viewer’s fears and anxieties in the face of that violence—with queer modes of sexual pleasure is symbolically incorporated into MALBA’s iteration of the piece: echoing the conventions of an S/M contract, the viewer is provided with a safeword she may use at any time and which playfully engages her in a mode of anti-normative, queer relationality.¹¹⁶ The use of the safeword, in fact, incorporates dissidence and difference as key elements within that mode of relationality: while enabling participants to take more risks, the safeword simultaneously gives them symbolic freedom to structurally offer or deny their consent to participate in *Darkroom*’s utopian imaginings.

On the other hand, the viewer’s very presence enacts a form of violence, an intrusion into this fragile, dark world. Equipped with the infrared camera, her gaze becomes an instrument of surveillance and – echoing the realm of S/M sex – of dominance over the performers. Deprived of sight, the performers are left vulnerable to a gaze which they can’t return or, possibly, even perceive. However, through its formal structure, *Darkroom* gives the observing, voyeuristic eye Rapisardi and Modarelli associate with the public surveillance of tearooms and with darkrooms, a body, sensations and feelings. The eye of the ‘good citizen’ is thus, itself, queered: thrown into Jacoby’s darkroom, the viewer is prompted to experience what a queer space might feel like.

¹¹⁶ The safeword, ‘Marcel,’ playfully recalls both the figures of Marcel Duchamp – a key precursor of conceptual art – and Marcel Marceau, the famous French mime who, in turn, establishes a connection with the topic of Jacoby’s previous exhibit at ByF, *No soy un clown*. In her account of *Darkroom*, artist Marina Mariasch refers precisely to the S/M resonances of the piece: “by the entrance, a young dominatrix, dressed entirely in black and wearing gloves, gives the visitor the ‘infrared vision capsule,’ she points to a map of the place, indicates the strict rules of behavior and the safeword in case of emergencies.”

We witness today a rethinking of utopia and its grounding affects, such as hope, from diverse fronts.¹¹⁷ In the face of the pervasive state of disillusionment and skepticism produced by the contemporary crisis of the political left, there is an urgent need to imagine avenues for progressive politics other than reform and assimilationist policies. In the case of Argentina, the 2001 crisis and post-crisis period offered a privileged standpoint to assess creative social, economic, and artistic alternatives to capitalist, state-mandated modes of organization. As Andrea Giunta argues, “the post-crisis implies a state of expanded imagination in the sense that it requires alternative modes of social organization which must emerge from the debris of a system in crisis. Diverse forms of cooperation, solidarity, and creativity play a key role in such restructuring” (263). That period involved “a perception of a complete change of scene with respect to what came before” since “each action and each image were articulated from the *hope*, from the certainty that it was necessary to change it all, starting by the most immediate things” (Giunta 26, my emphasis). In the case of the Argentine post-crisis, that state of expansion of the imagination simultaneously entails an expansion of the imaginable, of the possible, in the midst of an urgent present. The climate of hope and despair, and the sense that it was possible to start fresh from a clean slate, became a breeding ground for the actualization of alternative forms of sociality and organization which, while very much grounded in the urgency of the present, gestured towards the utopian.¹¹⁸ In her analysis of the Argentine post-crisis, in fact, Giunta records the way in which art produced or exhibited during that period often draws from utopian imaginaries.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See, for instance, Fredric Jameson’s *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), Jacoby’s *Jornadas Fourier*, in particular Pierre Luc Abramson’s contribution in that volume, and, in the field of U.S. queer theory, José Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* (2009).

¹¹⁸ As commented above, strategies of popular organization and political action included recovered factories, local bartering and basic goods exchanges, and neighborhood assemblies to address the urgent needs of communities in the face of a collapsing national state.

¹¹⁹ Giunta deploys the notion of utopia to think through how works by Esteban Álvarez and Tamara Stuby become engaged in recovering space (2002, 165) and titles a subsection of her book - where she writes on

In 2005, as the director of the Area of Experimental Societies, Jacoby organizes a series of meetings and lectures on utopia at Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas. The lectures center specifically on Charles Fourier, a utopian writer whose work has influenced him and whose vision of utopia is entangled with an unprecedented degree of sexual freedom. In his piece on the book publication of the printed lectures, Jacoby aligns his work (specifically, his projects Bola de Nieve, Chacra, Ramona, and Proyecto Venus), with the concept of ‘dis-utopia,’ which suggests the possibility of “unraveling utopia, turning it on its head, or rendering it concrete and – resorting to the oxymoron – turning it in some way accessible, real” (*Jornadas Fourier* 194). In particular, Jacoby’s ‘Proyecto Venus’ defines itself as a dis-utopia “in the sense that it looks to create a space that is not ‘outside society’ but rather entangled with it as part of the desire of rendering the immediacy of utopia as well as its problems concrete” (Jacoby 2011, 419).¹²⁰

In this respect, rather than simply aligned with the utopian, I argue that *Darkroom* imagines the dys/utopian spaces that can be created in the here and now by producing a mediated fictional ecosystem in which participants may partake in queer modes of relationality. *Darkroom*’s investment in the presentness of lived experience – enabled to a certain extent by the elements of performance in the piece – is instrumental to such exploration. In “Performance, Utopia, and the Utopian Performative,” Jill Dolan reflects on the ways in which performance and the theatre “might offer us consistent glimpses of utopia” (456). She advocates for a mode of utopia that, rather than “point to the future, to

Fundación Proa’s 2003 exhibit ‘Arte Concreto Invención, Madí y Perceptismo’ – ‘Utopías de pura forma’ (‘Utopias of Pure Form’).

¹²⁰ To bypass the totalizing, exclusionary, and universal ambition that characterizes ‘serious utopias,’ Jacoby falls back on the term ‘experimental societies’ as descriptive of his work. He connects the term ‘experimental’ with the ‘groupings, networks and collectives’ which have proliferated in the past years in Argentina and in the world. Such experiments range, according to Jacoby, “from the barter clubs to the communal cafeterias and the self-managed companies, from the entrepreneur projects of the unemployed to the art collectives who support and participate in the public demonstrations and demands or simply get together to produce, establish or occupy public places” (*Jornadas* 195).

imaginative territories that map themselves over the real,” “takes place now, in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings” (457). Dolan aligns with Richard Dyer’s notion that “entertainment does not... present models of utopian worlds.... Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents...what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized. It thus works at the level of sensibility, by which I mean an affective code that is characteristic to, and largely specific to, a certain mode of cultural production” (qtd. in Dolan 460). She thus seems to share with *Darkroom* a concern “with how utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide.” However, far from relying on the mythical immediacy and intimacy which Dolan associates both with performance and utopian potentialities, *Darkroom* probes the productivity of intermedia and mediation as modes for enabling a queer glimpse of dys/utopia. Furthermore, its ecosystem, rather than attempt to recreate a perfectly abstract queer utopia, problematizes the less than ideal conditions of the commercial darkroom and, more broadly, of queer utopian imaginaries. By exploring both the radical and repressive aspects of the different potential ‘darkrooms’ (the space of the aesthetic (photographic darkroom), politics (voting ‘cuarto oscuro’), and queer public sex), the piece enacts its own queer ‘dystopian utopia.’ In this way, rather than remain attached to the more radical experimental modes of sociality of the queer past, Jacoby’s piece explores the political spaces which might open up in the present.

And the notion of space is, precisely, central to articulations of utopia. In Thomas More’s fiction, Utopia is an island – originally a peninsula until a fifteen-mile wide channel built by its founder, King Utopos, separated in from the mainland—whose exact location is unknown, and thus remains unreachable, unattainable, never actually present. The very meaning of the word ‘utopia,’ ‘no place land’ or ‘good place land,’ speaks of

the spatial and temporal disjunction that ground the concept. But how does *Darkroom* create the sense of spatial and temporal otherness that are marks of the utopian? Otherness is evoked from the very entrance to ByF's basement: on top of the door frame that leads down the stairs, a sign reads: "all connections to the city have been interrupted" (Jacoby, interview by the author). The sensation of entering a new, strange world is accentuated by the alien looking performers and their mysterious social ecology. However, they are not the only masked, uncanny creatures in the basement of ByF: the viewer also wears the prosthetic camera over her face, rendering her anonymous, undifferentiated. The camera literally mediates the viewer's experience of the space, as it constitutes a physical barrier that separates her from and marks her as an intruder within the dark ecosystem *Darkroom* recreates. In fact, the frame of the camera through which the viewer accesses the performance echoes that of panels in comics, often populated by strange creatures from outer space.¹²¹ The dys/utopian imaginings that populate the world of comics involve, like *Darkroom*, the investigation of other ecosystems, of other ways of living together.

The remaining videos and photographs of ByF's *Darkroom* show performers engaged in a series of domestic, apparently banal tasks: one is taking a shower while others are ironing clothes, drinking from plastic cans, doing their nails, whipping food, or playing children's games. In spite of the quotidian nature of their actions, it is difficult to shake off the feeling that something is off. An effect of uncanniness is created not only by those strange-looking underground beings but also by the unusual ways in which they

¹²¹ Jacoby had experimented with the medium of comics in 1989-1990. It was precisely in collaboration with Sebastian Gordin – the artist who designed the alien-looking masks the performers wear in *Darkroom* – that he produced a series of humorous comic strips on topics such as the technological transformations of contemporary times, an imagined and fearful ecological dictatorship, and the miserable life of a conceptual artist exploited by artistic institutions (Jacoby 2011, 314). In addition, to further consolidate the connection of this piece to comics, Jacoby finds inspiration for *Darkroom* in the otherworldly, automaton-looking sculptures of artist Sebastian Gordin (Battistozzi 2002).

perform those actions. A performer irons another's clothes while she is still wearing them, and in another scene a performer's bare hands and arms are ironed. Another is whipping up food we can not see. Several creatures read in the dark, while two of them stare at a blank screen. Are they incapable of perceiving heat? Is their sense of sight more developed than that of the human eye? Are they able to read in the dark? If at times the performers appear to be carrying out make-believe gestures in the manner of naughty children playing house, they simultaneously investigate modes of doing differently. From a position of childish playfulness and desacralizing humor, the performers' actions court the absurd to suggest a different distribution of the sensible, an array of bodies with other capacities. Evoking the world of comics and science fiction, *Darkroom's* underground world appears to be inhabited by creatures with super-powers of their own. And, like in comics, the capabilities of the human body are simultaneously extended through technological prostheses: the viewer's 'super-power' – enabled by the night vision camera – would be, precisely, seeing in the dark. Offering the viewers the possibility of technologically enhancing their bodies, the piece makes them part of its gesturing towards a dys/utopian universe.

Jacoby's chapbook *Orgy* similarly creates a physical space that resonates with the notion of 'dystopian utopias.' The sensual party in the chapbook sets off when the physical glass pane that separates the inside of the home from the world outside literally shatters: "hubo fiesta puesto que algo se quebró" ("the party took place because something broke," 5). What interests me most here is the image of the shattering glass. The glass marks the limit of the house and it is also the material of the drawn flower vases which appear throughout the text (Figs. 37-39),¹²² a material that evokes a sense of

¹²² As is the case with many ByF chapbooks, the production of *Orgía* entails not only writing but also visuals. On the cover of the chapbook Jacoby reproduces a bunch of wild, overgrown flowers. *Orgía's* inside pages include a series of controlled and standardized drawing exercises depicting still lives. Flowers in a vase appear on the first page of the text, immediately following the cover, alongside the text's

containment. Most importantly, the imagined lens of the camera which mediates our access to the orgy is made of glass. After the boundary of the glass is broken, the containing or controlling spaces and identities suggested by the drawn still lives and the name of the main character, ‘Razonador,’ fail to override the force of the water that floods the gardens of the house.¹²³ The latter is physically detached from the mainland, becoming an island. If in *Darkroom* darkness creates a distinct location, urging viewers to inhabit an un-inhabitable, off-screen, imageless space, in the chapbook it is water which – like the orgiastic bodies in the text—overflows to leave the protagonists stranded in a confined world of their own. Water, like darkness in *Darkroom*, separates the island it creates from the mainland, giving birth to a confined space of undifferentiation where objects and bodies lose their contours to enable alternative modes of relationality. The text thus yields an in-between space which is both intimately connected to the mainland and temporarily distinct from it. The particular trope of the island activates its association with Thomas More’s rendering of the island of Utopia. *Orgía* thus echoes *Darkroom*’s construction of an unconnected, isolated space ripe of transformative queer potential.¹²⁴

dedications and the clarification that the drawings are authored by Jacoby and were produced in the same period as the verbal text. Throughout the piece, still lives convey the sense of a world suspended, a world congealed or left hanging. The controlled, amateurish, field-specific still drawings evoke the aesthetic training of an art student, in tension with a verbal text that is fragmentary and disorderly. A text that, uncontainable within strictly literary narrative codes, structurally (and literally through the trope of the flood) spills over.

¹²³ If the frame of the house is broken as the windowpane physically shatters, and the vases futilely insist in tidily containing water and flowers in the face of the upcoming flood, the lens of the camera as frame of the literary narrative also cracks open. The words and images remaining on the page are but fragments, sensory bits and pieces of what is perceptible during and what is left after the flood.

¹²⁴ In both works, such construction of space is dictated by the erotic tension between containment or enclosure, on the one hand, and sexual and affective release or overflowing on the other. In the case of *Darkroom*, as commented above, the enclosure which the dark ByF basement and the ever-present frame of the video camera enforce finds its counterpart in the physical and affective overflowing of the sensual encounters between performers and the accidental, off-screen modes of touch which involve the viewer. In *Orgía*, the controlled, disciplinary-bound still life drawings and the camera frame are cracked open by the breaking glass. The text above one of the drawn flower vases reads: “The glass spills over. The glass is slippery. The glass falls and sheds its leaves. Champagne dampens the slivers of glass. Water splashes everything. There is no inside or outside: windows and doors open.” On the other hand, the sensual encounters the orgy suggests lead characters to structurally fold into each other, and into themselves:

In *Darkroom*, that sense of spatial otherness is simultaneously created by the technological interface the work proposes. In other words, the piece's queer dys/utopia emerges out of intermediality – it is experienced and felt in the un-archived, off-camera space of the performance where the possibility of (accidental) modes of contact can be felt as a promise, as a form of embodied potentiality, and a threat. If social norms administer touch in such a way that (sexual) physical contact between certain bodies is repressed or forbidden, Jacoby's *Darkroom*, far from presenting a romanticized space of freedom from such norms, produces its own administration of embodied modes of intimacy. As I mentioned before, performers are instructed not to come into contact with the viewer and to dodge her if she tries to approach them. In this respect, the piece interestingly negotiates the tension between the orientation of utopia towards an imagined, un-achieved future and its grounding in a flawed, imperfect present. As I argue above, the viewing distance the work establishes creates a sense of 'distant intimacy' – an intimacy built from a position of remove in relation to the strange population that unravels in *Darkroom*: the strange world recreated in the basement of ByF forever recedes as one moves forward. Structurally located within the unreachable, pieces and fragments of that world can be observed through the frame of the camera, which reminds the viewer of the mediated status of that imagined universe. The viewing distance the frame of the camera establishes places the spectator outside that dys/utopian universe, always close to it, always moving towards it, but never quite 'in' it.¹²⁵ The viewer, outside the frame, is occupied in a constant 'moving towards', which, in turn, is forever

"El=Tim. Tim=El Razonador=Ofelia" (14). The tension between formal containment and the trope of spilling or overflowing, literalized through the physical flooding of the land, drives the text (and the orgy) forward.

¹²⁵ In connection to this, the binary logic that dictates that a thing or event is present/not present at a given time – a logic on which the impossibility of realizing utopian imaginings in the here and now is grounded – is dismantled through the illusion of virtuality in *Darkroom*, an illusion produced by the camera as a viewing device combined with physical movement, which as Laddaga points out alludes to the virtual world of videogames (43).

moving backwards, or forwards, in space and time. And if utopian imaginings find their grounding in hope, both hope and fear – hope’s ‘other’- can be described as anticipatory affective structures in the sense that they are future-oriented (Muñoz 3).¹²⁶ In this respect, it is suggestive that—as I outline in the previous section of this chapter — both fear and excited anticipation are key to *Darkroom*’s varied reception experiences. Hinging on both the potential of embodied contact and on the viewer’s fears, instability and unknowing, *Darkroom* orients its bodies as perpetually ‘moving towards/forwards.’ There are political potentialities in that distant mode of intimacy, in the tension between the viewer’s positionality and that shifting, unreachable world before her.

In the confined space of the basement, darkness overflows the frame of the camera, and the tension between the claustrophobic, disciplinary video frame and the all-enveloping darkness creates space. If we think of the viewing of *Darkroom* in terms of the world of comics, the space of the gutters in between panels would here be occupied by darkness. If in video or cinema the off-screen beyond the frame of viewing signals an indeterminate, absent space, in *Darkroom* such space is eerily present: the viewer literally inhabits the unknowable, fearful darkness looming off camera. That in-between space emerges precisely from the peculiar location—in terms of media and genre—of the work, which involves elements of both video and performance along with an active viewer/participant. The piece thus entails an investigation of dark spaces often unaccounted for in visual or narrative progression, in-between spaces – like gutters in comics—full of affective meaning. This unknown, unseen, dark space – whose particularity echoes Jacoby’s attempt to explore the ‘zero degree of images’ – can not be visualized but it can be felt, it can be touched through.

¹²⁶ Utopian thinker Ernst Bloch describes the diverse aspects of hope as aligned with fear and the future: “not only hope’s affect (with its pendant, fear), but even more so, hope’s methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy” (qtd. in Jose Muñoz 3).

Though it admits no visual representation, the viewers' verbal narratives step in to offer colorful details of what might have happened, of the unbridled potentiality of that dark, mythified, dys/utopian space. The affective pull of *Darkroom* towards that space without images helps us understand the predominance of the verbal in the piece, which in turn informs my methodology in this chapter.¹²⁷ And it is precisely at the location where different languages fold into or away from each other where those other spaces and temporalities emerge. During an interview, Jacoby reflects on his passion for what he terms 'multimedia networks.' He hypothesizes that such networks, in condensing space, produce a different sense of the temporal:

I have a phrase that I use for the multimedia network project: a shortcut to the present. What it means is this: the present is here, it's just that it's scattered, fragmented. What is the present? They are showing a great movie at the *Hoyst* cinema, somewhere else there is this group of people, somewhere else they are reading poems. Ok, that's all out there, but in different places and maybe you went to one of these things, or maybe you didn't go to any of them, so it's like that present never really happened. The connection between these things is what makes the moment. That's a bit of an obsession of mine: that the present not be individual but the idea of a culture in progress, the emergence of something (qtd in Laddaga 39).

Thus the importance of mapping networks – another spatial and affective concept crucial to this dissertation – of connection among Jacoby's works. In *Orgía*, like in *Darkroom*, spatial configurations emerge at the intersection of media, in this case the literary and the visual. While both public sex and orgies – and, more generally, the greater latitude in the administration of sexuality – are traditionally associated with diverse iterations of utopian thinking, it is interesting to note that, in spite of the sexual excess the title of the chapbook suggests, in Jacoby's *Orgy* there is very little sex. In fact,

¹²⁷ Such archival lack lends the piece its mythical status, a status that simultaneously resonates with the mythified aura of imagined utopias.

we learn about the only explicitly sexual encounter in the text through verbal retelling. Although that retelling is still framed by the ever-present video camera, the scene, the narrator assures us, was not filmed.¹²⁸ From its first lines, the text makes us aware of the presence of a technology of vision that mediates the narrator's sight and shapes the textual narrative according to a visual logic. Nothing much happens throughout the chapbook apart from the camera's aimless wandering around to register the actions of the characters/actors. That sense of aimlessness highlights the fragmentariness of a narrative that makes us wonder what has been left out of the frame. Representative of the disorderly spirit of an orgy, the incoherent, disjointed nature of the imagined footage makes it impossible to reconstruct the whole story. In tension with the world-ordering forces of causality and reason that the main character's name, Razonador, evokes—forces which generally guide the narrative construction of literary works—this text is mostly driven forward by the drifting movement of a mechanical narrative eye/I who offers us a set of disjointed visual and sensorial impressions.¹²⁹ In the complex dance the work

¹²⁸ The text reads: “the Asian music becomes more intense and, with her head between her knees, Esther now trembles on the pillows, the ram skin loincloth becomes undone and her earthy buttocks appear in the forefront, vibrating beyond the rhythm. Another brother takes a candle and places it in that candelabrum which continues to tremble the whole time the music lasts. Nobody speaks and the scene is not filmed” (10). Along these lines, another queer piece which explores alternative affective modes of relationality along with restraint when it comes to showcasing sex is ‘La castidad’ (‘Chastity,’ 2006-2007). ‘Chastity’ was a micro-political experiment Jacoby conducted with young artist Syd Krochmanly. The work consisted in living together for a year – and sharing time, resources, and mutually collaborating in each other’s projects – without having sex. The idea was to explore an affective bond “different from sexual partnership and also different from common friendship” (Jacoby 2011, 444). A video titled ‘La castidad’ was produced as part of this experience (Figs. 42-44).

¹²⁹ While some passages in the text counterbalance that aimless drifting through the narrator's subjective intervention – he passes judgment on what he sees, participates in the action and retells that which the camera fails to register – the overall lack of differentiation between the narrative first person and the camera makes it difficult to draw the line on when the subjective narrator and/or the frame of the lens determine the narrative progression. The point of *Orgía* is precisely to investigate how the human and mechanical I/eye fold into each other: the viewer becomes integrated with the technological prosthesis which mediates his sensorial and affective relations to the world while the camera, in turn, appears to become humanized.

proposes, the verbal at points builds from and becomes structured by technologies of the visual, to then fold back onto itself to account for what is left out of the camera frame.

This use of literary narrative anticipates not only the role of the viewer/producer but also the deployment of the verbal in *Darkroom*, where testimony becomes a key part of the work in accounting for what was not videotaped. While *Orgía* tests the limits of written media by recreating the predominantly visual conditions of reception that characterize the filming of a scene, *Darkroom* probes the role of narration throughout the entire production/reception process of composition, interpretation, and subjective reconstruction of a work of art. The works bleed into, or fold onto, each other, creating spaces of mirroring and difference. In *Darkroom*, the verbal comes in to account for what the visual does not. And, like in *Darkroom*, the off-screen makes its surreptitious appearance in *Orgy*: it is in the undefined, unexplored space outside the camera frame where queer encounters occur – in precisely that queer space which *Darkroom* would, years later, invite the viewer to inhabit.

The alignment of political utopian thinking and the realm of art is particularly productive in the works of an artist like Jacoby who, in the lineage of the neo avant-garde, conceives of the artist as the creator of a new world (Jacoby, interview by the author).¹³⁰ If in the field of art a series of long-standing debates about the connection of art and politics were reactivated by a post-crisis context in which art collectives became actively engaged in sustaining popular resistance, alternative conceptions of the political were being simultaneously and silently articulated by queer artworks like *Darkroom*. While the ByF project – with its frequent reclaiming of the queer, the naïve, the childish,

¹³⁰ Discussing the politicized production, sociologist Lucas Rubinich reflects: “if it can be assumed that a fundamental mode of political struggle is *the struggle for the prevalence of a vision of the world* and that, in that struggle [...], the institutions and agents of the cultural and scientific world play a significant role, it is possible to attend to experiences [along the lines of Jacoby’s art and actions] as a not minor segment within the large category of political art” (154, my emphasis).

the corny, and the amateurish—has often been accused of frivolity, superficiality, and lack of social commitment, the works I examine exploit anti-normative queer affects to imagine politics differently. In *Darkroom*, the political takes the shape of affective configurations enabled by embodied, participatory reception mechanisms which invite the viewer into queer ways of feeling, doing, moving, and touching. Through its multi-mediality, the piece provides us with a glimpse of what a queer dys/utopia might feel like. Averting the temptation of idealizing the subversive, emancipatory roles of queerness, community, and participation, *Darkroom* undoes myths of immediacy to instead investigate—through its recourse to different media—the political potentialities of mediation. In the context of ‘Belleza y Felicidad,’ Jacoby’s piece invites us to participate in a mode of the political that involves imagining a space where one can feel differently – a space where a certain beauty might, perhaps, engender a queer form of happiness.

Chapter 3 : Argentine and U.S. Literary Worlds: A Hemispheric Conversation

In the recently published *Belleza y Felicidad* (2015), the first full-length book with poems and prose by the two founders of the Argentine art gallery/press published in the U.S., Stuart Krimko presents ByF literature to a U.S. audience in terms of the notion of community – a community composed not only by the two close friends who drove the project forward, but also by a larger network of like-minded individuals without whom ByF writings cannot possibly be conceived. Krimko reflects that that affective and creative network played a fundamental role in the re-definition of literature pursued by the ByF project:

The idea of putting together a volume that contained poems (and stories) by both Cecilia and Fernanda began to feel like the right way to introduce their work to English-speaking readers. It would allow those readers to become familiar with two strong, even visionary, voices in contemporary literature. But it would also make it possible to develop *a sense of the worlds, both actual and imagined, that had given birth to those voices, as well as the worlds they had birthed. The strength of each body of writing, on its own, feels to me even more moving for its vital ties to a community of individuals engaged in like-minded pursuits.* The ghosts of previous literatures that serve as necessary interlocutors for all writing are accompanied in this book by living, breathing friends and colleagues; in fact, these friends almost always shove the old ghosts out of the picture altogether, redefining what it means to be “literary” in the process. (Krimko, *Belleza y Felicidad*, my emphasis)

The weight of actual and imagined social worlds on these writings tie the literary to a sense of community always in formation, existing through both concrete exchanges and the sheer force of potentiality, imagination, incompleteness – a world which might shift at any minute, yielding a fresh configuration of connections, words, languages. At ByF, in this sense, the catalogue was built by publishing friends, which in turn led to making new friends: among ByF’s avant-garde precepts – unique at the time in Argentina

– was the fact that “the mode of production is inseparable from the text (so that both the notion of text and of the author’s work must be revised in light of the concept of ‘literary life’ and net) and that literature, besides functioning as writing, entails differential socialization modes and is capable of testing not only personal corporal subversion but also alternative modes of community” (Palmeiro 2011).

But how broad is that community and what is it about? In this chapter, I examine some of the concrete material, creative, and affective exchanges which have informed ByF’s poetic networks both locally and across national borders. I propose that the productivity of those conversations, which have been granted no critical attention thus far, is grounded on synchronous explorations of queer/feminist intimacies and networks which, in turn, are based on communal modes of producing, circulating, and reading literature. Back in September 2005, when ByF was still open in Buenos Aires and a decade before the publication of Krimko’s *Belleza y Felicidad*, Argentine poet and academic Lila Zemborain, who lives in NY, invited Fernanda Laguna to present the ByF literary project at KJCC, a poetry series she curates at NYU. This coincided with a ByF reading and chapbook publication at Belladonna* (BD), a New York-based feminist independent press and salon series. Zemborain would frequently visit ByF during her trips to Buenos Aires to keep updated on their most recent chapbooks. Her partner at the time, Argentine artist Rafael Bueno, met Eloísa Cartonera founder Javier Barilaro in New York. Through him, he became friends with Laguna and put Zemborain in contact with her. Zemborain’s impression that ByF and BD shared much in common led her to invite ByF to participate in the BD reading series, which resulted in the publication of a commemorative chaplet also titled *Belleza y Felicidad* and which I examine in this chapter (personal communication, 2015).¹³¹

¹³¹ In December 23, 2005, Bueno and his Trio LOXON (LOC-SON), a key player in the 1980s underground countercultural movement which flourished during the democratic transition, would present

I focus on ByF's creative exchange with Belladonna* to investigate how, through the building of a hemispheric network, these two U.S. and Argentine scenes engage in a joint exploration of queer/feminist intimacy and sociality as driving forces of creative production and circulation. Those modes of sociality simultaneously shape and inflect their artistic works, publication format, translations, and criticism. My detailed account of these scenes and encounters responds to my investment in first tracking and then pausing on these hemispheric connections in order to assess the types of 'distant intimacies' which bind these artists together. Through these hemispheric networks, ByF extends its investigation of alternative modes of queer/feminist sociality and its impact on aesthetic practices and production. As I argue in Chapters One and Two, ByF literary and artistic works probe the issue of relationality not only through their queer content and their frequent references to members of the ByF community but, crucially, by registering, evoking, and calling for modes of affective (dis)engagement through their material, spatial, and visual elements. In other words, the shared experiences of the community articulated around ByF generate queer modes of togetherness which become a key part of the works produced. If intimacy is key to the mode of production and circulation of works at ByF, at Belladonna* inter-subjective relations play a similarly crucial role in the grounding of a specific poetics, since the reading series and publication list is developed primarily through "affiliation and invitation."¹³² The hemispheric conversation between these two queer/feminist independent projects is thus informed by horizontal, dys/utopian

their work at ByF (although LOXON member Guillermo Conte did not participate in the exhibit, Bueno and Majo Okner, along with Javier Barilaro, Nahuel Vecino, Juan José Cambre and Vicente Grondona as guest artists, painted live with music by local band 'Jesus y Cleopatra'). These informal, affective webs of connections are paradigmatic of the frequent collaborations and contacts between literary and visual art scenes which, as I argue throughout this dissertation, defined the project of ByF.

¹³² "We work with poets with whom we are collectively in conversation; we look for new poets who are doing what we think is resonant and interventionist. In this manner the collective expands as new poets join our conversations, often volunteering to help with our projects." <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>

modes of producing and conceiving of poetry and literature as grounded on the everydayness of friendship and collectivity.

Heeding to the creative network these Argentine and U.S. writers have constructed can help us better understand the dialogues, resonances, and synchronicities that articulate contemporary hemispheric literatures. I pay particular attention to modes of hemispheric creative exchange among authors and scenes whose works are informed by gender and sexuality: as I outline in my Introduction, queer frameworks become particularly productive to reflect on intimacy, community, and affective networks. I read these projects' explorations of intimacy and affect as part of their search for alternative ways to imagine, enact, and account for literary/artistic communities. In this respect, I am interested in bringing attention to these projects' grounding in friendships among women.

But how do ByF and BD come together and what kind of collectivity do they constitute? The fleeting contact and conversation between these two Argentine and U.S. scenes serves to make visible the synchronicities and differences which draw these two projects together while simultaneously pushing them apart. On the one hand, these projects share an interest in experimental works engaged with gender and sexuality and the intersection of literature with the visual and performance arts. They focus on communal, interdisciplinary events and readings and are invested in inexpensive processes of literary publication, circulation, and reception which entail a queer/feminist, less hierarchical approach to publishing. On the other hand, they sustain different degrees of engagement with academic and archival institutions and subsist in differentially precarious, marginal conditions given their accessibility to funding and grants. These factors, grounded on the distinct status of creative writing in each of these two settings, impact the shape of these scenes as well as the form of the chapbooks they publish and the creative exchange between the two presses. I argue that these divergences signal

different but nonetheless related understandings of the materiality and status of the literary and of the critical intervention contextually offered by feminist/queer voices. Parsing out those economies, and the concomitant distances and (mis)communication between ByF and BD, becomes in itself a feminist/queer project as it contributes to demystify romanticized notions of queer and feminist creative networks.

Moving past the paralyzing myth of perfect togetherness to render visible the concrete, material, everyday realities of literary scenes becomes crucial to rethink and rebuild spaces for the political. The hemispheric serves, indeed, as a privileged lens to break through localized, identity-based imaginaries and politics by revealing what does not quite fit in, what cannot be translated, communicated or understood and thus gets left out of the conversation. Drawing attention to the exclusionary, oppressive aspects of collectivities fueled by utopian longings, hemispheric exchanges simultaneously bring into dialogue different modes of feminist/queer community formation through artistic production. In doing so, however fleetingly, BD and ByF inaugurate together a third mode of collectivity – a looser, more open, less permanent network in which miscommunication, conflict, and disencounters become more frequent and spacious. They thus productively amplify the tensions that impact community formation, while at the same time articulating a different type of literary/artistic network – a radically fractured and ephemeral collectivity.

Furthermore, I am interested in investigating how BD's encounter with ByF makes visible certain aspects of the work of these contemporary U.S. writers which have remained largely unnoticed, and vice versa. I argue here that this dialogue sheds light on the feminist drive behind ByF's cultural production – a primary, foundational impulse which has remained largely unexplored by criticism so far. At the same time, the comparison between the two projects reveals ByF's generally overlooked engagement

with criticism and academia, a complex and rich set of relations which have served to ground the project both via opposition and alliance, while raising questions about the relative position of each press with respect to literary markets and institutions. Finally, attending to BD's exchange with ByF focuses attention on the centrality of the alternative 'chaplet' format, the related literary readings, and the alternative understanding of the aesthetic they encompass. Thinking about these two projects side by side serves to illuminate the way in which their chapbooks function as archives of shared ephemeral experiences, modes of intimate sociality, and emerging queer/feminist communities. I propose that, mobilizing complex notions and practices of friendship as a mode of production and reception of literary works across national borders, these cultural initiatives silently theorize the roles of intimacy, distance, and difference in the everyday practices of feminist/queer collectivities.

In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which spatial and cultural displacements enable alternative modes of togetherness. Rather than through the global reach of literary markets and mass media, it is through the concrete exchange and dialogue among these poets that they operate, however ephemerally, as each other's public. They thus explore how the 'intimate' or 'semi-publics' they have created – a strategy which enables the development of a readership while continuing to control their audience – might expand beyond the local, revealing other modes of as well as fresh obstacles for connection. In this context, translation is mobilized as a strategy for alternative community formation. As I will discuss, a dys/utopian space of dis/encounter is inaugurated through and in the translation of ByF works into English – an in-between, third location in which this hemispheric network becomes crystallized. It is through translation that Krimko becomes part of this Argentine poetry scene's hemispheric, extended family – his ByF chapbook and poetry readings are translated by Pavón and he, in turn, translates Pavón's work into

English. It is through that same means that Ariana Reines and Dorothea Lasky become part of ByF's magazine "Ceci y Fer II" and ByF enters BD's collection. Translation operates simultaneously as an enabler of creative and affective connections and a location from which to investigate the nuances and complexities of the role of literature in the construction of communal networks.

In the first section of this chapter, *Belladonna**, I offer a short introduction to the reading series and press to then move on to an analysis of the poems in *Belleza y Felicidad*. In *Belladonna*'s Belleza y Felicidad: Poetry as (Mis)communication*, I argue that the chaplet's ByF poems reveal the complex hemispheric relation between the two presses while simultaneously illuminating their shared investment in feminist/queer friendships among women as the grounds for alternative literary community formation, production, and reception. In *Translating Dis/encounters* I probe the role of translation in the formation of this fractured, fleeting feminist network – a third space of struggle and contestation which BD and ByF inaugurate. I conclude this chapter with *Belladonna*'s Chaplet*, a reflection on this BD publication format, in order to investigate what that format reveals about these scenes' differential engagement with publishing markets, academia, archival institutions, and funding sources.

BELLADONNA*

Founded in New York the same year as ByF (1999) by poet Rachel Levitsky, Belladonna* is a feminist avant-garde collective which originated as a reading and salon series at Bluestocking's Women's Bookstore on New York's Lower East Side. Since 2000 it has been publishing commemorative 'chaplets' of the readers' work in collaboration with Boog Literature, with 163 texts in print today. Poet Erica Kaufman joined Belladonna* in 2002 as Levitsky's co-editor and, in 2005, the reading series

moved its events to Dixon Place, a downtown performance venue. Since 2010, the group has operated as a collective with a ten woman editorial board, and most of its NY activities are currently coordinated by Emily Skillings and Krystal Languell. Belladonna*'s poetry readings are usually held at alternative, independent performance venues such as Dixon Place¹³³ and Bowery Poetry Club,¹³⁴ at local literary bookstores such as Unnameable Books¹³⁵ and Book Thug Nation,¹³⁶ and at small press book fairs and academic institutions like CUNY Graduate Center. BD forms part of the U.S. small press book circuit, and has undertaken co-publication projects with other small presses such as Litmus, Dusie, Futurepoem, and Ugly Duckling Press.

In 2010, Belladonna* published a bilingual chaplet titled *Belleza y Felicidad* which included work by ByF founders Fernanda Laguna, Cecilia Pavón and ByF author Gabriela Bejerman. Belladonna*'s position within the U.S. literary world as a female-run, independent press which emerged in conjunction with poetry readings and a focus on experimental, gender and sexuality-informed new works contributes to explain its interest

¹³³ Dixon Place is a non-profit organization founded in 1986 “to provide a space for literary and performing artists to create and develop new works in front of a live audience” (<http://dixonplace.org/about-us/mission/>). It particularly welcomes “new and experimental work in performance art, literature, dance, and music” by emerging and established artists. Interestingly, Dixon Place supports the development of works in progress, granting the NY artistic community the opportunity “to experiment and test new ideas” by performing them before an audience, feeling “the reaction of a live group of people, without the pressures of production costs and premature press exposure.” Financially supported by different public and private sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts and the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, it offers an open submission system for artists to present their work. However, their best-funded, long-term programs are accessed by invitation only.

¹³⁴ Founded in 2002 by former arts administrator of the St. Marks Poetry Project in East Village and ex co-director of the Nuyorican Poets Café Bob Holman, the Bowery Poetry Club was a poetry performance space which served as a popular meeting point for emerging and established artists.

¹³⁵ A small independent bookstore located in Brooklyn, Unnameable Books was founded in 2006 by Adam Tobin under the name Adam's Books. It sells new and used books, holds literary readings, emphasizes poetry, and carries work by university presses and small independent presses (including ‘Ugly Duckling Press’) not commonly offered by chain stores. It has been profiled as one of the few small bookstores that has been able to survive the proliferation of chains, the internet, and rising real state prices in NY (Peed, 2007).

¹³⁶ Started by four street booksellers (Chris Ramos, Aaron Cometbus, Corey Eastwood, and Josh Westfal), Book Thug Nation is a small independent bookstore that sells old and new books in Brooklyn and hosts readings, movie screenings, lectures, neighborhood meetings and performance art.

in dialoguing with and incorporating Argentine ByF literature as part of its midst. Belladonna* press, like ByF, appeals to the notion of beauty – and its multi-faceted, perverse aspects—from its very name. Firstly, the term ‘belladonna’ designates the plant commonly known as ‘deadly nightshade,’ a highly poisonous specimen with purple or green flowers and shiny black berries which is cultivated for medicinal purposes and used in sedatives, stimulants, and antispasmodics. The asterisk (*) next to Belladonna can be read as a visual representation of the flower. Finally, the phrase ‘bella donna’ literally means ‘beautiful lady’ in Italian. The humorous, playful element in the names of both projects (‘Belladonna*’ and ‘Belleza y Felicidad’/‘Beauty and Happiness’) anticipates their subversive stance with respect to the established literary canon on the basis of their foregrounding of female and queer voices. Contextual, cultural, and specific differences withstanding, Belladonna*, like ByF, is very much invested in creating community “among those with a shared (and ever-evolving) poetics.”¹³⁷

That community includes a variety of authors from all over the U.S. (though most writers are established in either the East or West coasts, authors from the mainland – including Texas—are also present) as well as queer, racial and culturally diverse voices. Many are young, emerging artists whose work is presented alongside that of established ones. Though their works share an interest in formally experimental, gender and sexuality informed writing, their literary associations are varied and sometimes allegedly quite dissimilar ones.¹³⁸ The BD author list includes a number of visual and book artists such

¹³⁷ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/> BD has not garnered, so far, much critical attention in terms of its workings as a cultural project – its publications, on the other hand, particularly its books, have been quite extensively reviewed.

¹³⁸ Poets like Rae Armantrout and Lyn Hejinian are closely linked to Language poetry, though unlike that of many language writers their works openly broach autobiographical subjects as well as gender issues, while other artists such as Dodie Bellamy, Robert Gluck, Kevin Killian and Renee Gladman are linked to the New Narrative movement. The work of others like Kathleen Fraser, the founder and editor of the experimental women writers magazine HOW(ever) (1983-91), is more in line with that of the New York School and Black Mountain poets.

as Susan Bee, as well as interdisciplinary, spoken word, performance poets and sound artists like LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Akilah Oliver, and Tonya Foster. The list also involves a number of poets who work in collaborative projects with musicians and visual artists. Key among the queer voices of the catalogue is Eileen Myles, accompanied by other poets like CAConrad and R. Erica Doyle.

Most BD authors have been formed and/or currently teach or work in academia – a considerable number are, in fact, graduates of MFA programs and some hold Ph.Ds. Critics and scholar poets, as well as Ph.D. students, are present throughout the author list, including women’s writing theorist Rachel Blau DuPlessis and BD co-editor Rachel Kaufman, who at the time of her joining BD was pursuing a Ph.D. in English at CUNY. Many BD artists have circulated their works in the form of chapbooks beyond their BD publications, and some have founded their own independent small (chapbook) presses and cultural magazines. The catalogue encompasses some international writers with particular emphasis on Canadian women avant-garde authors such as Nicole Brossard and Louise Dupre.¹³⁹ It also includes academics such as feminist print culture historian and BD editor, curator, and poet Kate Eichhorn, whose critical investment in feminist fanzine culture as a forum for experimental modes of writing resonates with BD’s engagement with the chaplet format and its capacity to materialize avant-garde literature by women.

¹³⁹ Even if marked by an openly experimental ethos, the variety of voices and influences BD encompasses defines it as a space where second and third wave feminisms and feminists come together under the banner of a common project. Extending Kate Eichhorn’s argument on the various connections and alliances of Riot Grrrl third wave feminist writers and zinesters and their second wave foremothers to BD, it is worth highlighting that drawing critical attention to the shared lineages and objectives that connect different generations of feminists contributes to dismantle pervasive historicizations of feminism in terms of the artificial, self-contained notion of ‘waves’ (Eichhorn). These connections and alliances are made evident through the inclusion in the list of BD authors of prominent figures like Eileen Myles, who not only became a “cult figure to generations of young, postpunk female writer-performers,” but also strongly identifies herself with and has actively participated in third wave feminist cultural projects in spite of the generational gap (Myles 2000).

BELLADONNA*'S *BELLEZA Y FELICIDAD*: POETRY AS (MIS)COMMUNICATION

Belladonna*'s *Belleza y Felicidad* chaplet was published on the occasion of a 13 September 2005 reading at Dixon Place.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, ByF thus became the only artist collective featured as an author in BD's author list, and the only other project with which BD enters into direct dialogue. I would like to highlight the fact that, while ByF is read as a feminist project and becomes part of a feminist catalogue in this specific U.S. context, in Argentina it has often been discounted as frivolous, superficial, and banal on the basis of a narrow conception of political art and literature as engaged primarily with issues of social class and economic/cultural disparity. This reading adds a further dimension to the experimental and queer interpretations of ByF literature active in Argentine criticism: focusing on the concrete dialogue between ByF and BD allows me to render visible the influence of (U.S. punk) feminism in the ByF project and to think of the latter's intervention as intimately connected to third wave feminism.

The BD *Belleza y Felicidad* chaplet includes poems and prose selected by their authors – Laguna, Cecilia Pavón and Gabriela Bejerman, the three close friends at the core of the ByF project. I now focus on the specific works chosen for this anthology to outline how ByF presented itself to this U.S. audience as well as on the specific dialogue these two scenes establish by means of these literary pieces. The poems in this chaplet

¹⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that, in holding poetry readings at Dixon Place, BD echoes the ByF scene's investment in physical spaces devoted not only to literature but also to the visual arts. Dixon Place, the performance space where the ByF reading takes place, is also particularly significant since it thrives on similar predicates as ByF and BD: providing opportunities for new artists, a focus on experimental performance and literature at a distance from the commercial cultural circuit, and their allocation of the biggest share of their artistic and financial resources by invitation and affiliation. In addition, Susana Cook, a key lesbian performer of the 1980s Argentine underground scene, has been an active member of this community and frequently showcases her work at Dixon Place since her migration to New York. Revealing further hemispheric connections between the 1980s queer cultural scene in Buenos Aires, ByF, and BD, she conceives of Dixon Place as her home away from home – the New York space which, in her view, most closely echoes the underground scene of the multi-disciplinary Argentine art center 'Parakultural' of which she used to form part (interview by the autor, 2014).

undertake the difficult task of introducing—and, broadly speaking, translating—the ByF project for a U.S. audience, with the concomitant challenge of rendering ByF and its stakes readable in a new context. In this section, I will focus on the exercise of linguistic and cultural translation enacted by the literary texts themselves to then move on to an analysis of the materiality and format of this particular chaplet and, more generally, of BD publications.

Aligned with the way in which Laguna herself conceives of the literary, poetry operates here first and foremost as a tool for (mis)communication. Most poems in the chaplet were translated into English by Puerto Rican poet, scholar, performer, and translator Urayoán Noel. His semiotic translations are, for the most part, scholarly correct and largely uneventful except for certain awkward sections in which, due to his staying too close to the original, the ironic tone of the poems is lost in their English versions. If translation is important for feminism because, as the BD chaplet shows, it constitutes a unique space “from which to take on critical analyses of representation and power and the asymmetries between languages” as well as to “examine the knowledge formations and institutionalities in/through which these theories and concepts travel” (De Lima Costa 20), it is also fundamental to consider the types of poetic networks that are being built through it.

The first poem in the chaplet, “Salvador Bahia, She and I” (1999) encapsulates some crucial elements which drive the ByF project forward. The poem, written by Laguna, retells the persona’s experiences during a trip to Brazil with her two close friends and fellow collaborators in the ByF project and in this *Belladonna** chaplet, Cecilia and Gabriela. This writing thus functions as a departure point or story of origin of

ByF¹⁴¹ – a story in which the centrality of the three girls’ friendship features prominently. The poem signals its intimacy with scenes of readings and performance through the persona’s admission “I am very excited... as I *present* this story that I have written for all my friends and my family,” simultaneously defining both its own intimate target audience and the structural role of friends and family as those who have, perhaps unknowingly, prompted the act of writing. The BD public is in this way positioned as alien to the intimate target audience of this writing, the persona’s friends and family. *Belleza y Felicidad* thus visibilizes from its very first poem BD’s distance from ByF, its non-belonging within its tightly woven public of readers/writers. If the gesture of defining an intimate public alienates readers who do not partake in the inner ByF circle, it doubly marks BD as an outsider in linguistic, cultural, and geo-political terms. This poem further works as a story of origin because, the persona confesses, “it’s the first time that I write anything resembling a short story.” But what is before us is not (just) a story, it is a poem – the piece thus hones in from the very beginning on the experimental aspect of Laguna’s writing, which involves playing with and subverting generic boundaries.

From the very outset of the chaplet, the girlish, immature, somewhat stupid voice of the persona is deployed for comic effect – it is a stereotypically ‘boluda’ female voice that regards itself as incapable of achieving not only literary grandeur but also the feat of putting the six page long poem together even at its most basic, structural levels:

I had never intertwined
so many characters
so many situations
relationships, actions, suspense.

¹⁴¹ At the same time, the poem starts out with a statement in prose about its own origin, which refers to one of the sources of inspiration of this poem and, more broadly, of the ByF chapbook format: Brazilian ‘string literature’.

It was difficult for me
to keep the plot understandable
in something of this length.
It was also hard for me
to conjugate the verbs well
and find the appropriate adjectives. (5)

The persona here adopts and inhabits the stereotype of the stupid young girl, playfully giving shape to a comically critical female voice. In the context of a U.S. publication of Argentine literature, the deployment of that voice can be read as playing into, and thus disarming, exoticized, demeaning, and colonialist U.S. perceptions of Latin America. Exploiting the Argentine aesthetics of ‘boludez’ I analyze in Chapter One, when revisited in this U.S. context the poem reveals the problematic prejudices which often underlie the type of programmatic, inclusive, multi-cultural, politically correct feminist ethos embraced by BD.

While BD founder Levistky associates her own investment in multi-lingualism with her formally experimental drive,¹⁴² she simultaneously points to the need to rely on other literatures in order to overcome the limitations of the U.S. experimental scene’s understanding of politics.¹⁴³ For Levistky, the pull towards other geographies is thus linked to the need to establish feminist alliances beyond national borders which serve, in

¹⁴² When discussing her own innovative writing in her novel *The Story of my Accident is Ours*, Levistky comments: “I am using contemporary English but borrow from encounters with the grammar of other languages, in particular French, Spanish, and modern Hebrew. The long sentence I use is a bit perverse in English. I had to work to write sentences that I could read aloud without suffocating. I work with excess (for which the devilish preposition is particularly useful), but when I get to a full stop I feel a sense of completion and allow it” (Levistky and Ives, 2013).

¹⁴³ In this sense, Levistky “stresses the importance of the ‘Canadian feminist avant-garde’ for offering her a model for expanding the politics of an experimental American literary scene that, in the aftermath of Language poetry, believed ‘language dissonance and disruption was political in and of itself’” (Zurawski 2014).

turn, to enrich and nourish the political and linguistic valences of U.S. experimental writing by women. The tensions, clashes, and contradictions inherent to these modes of hemispheric exchange become materialized in the literary chaplet *Belleza y Felicidad*. Even though, according to Levitsky, “presenting a blithe unity is not what we who make Belladonna*...intend,” BD’s utopian, egalitarian longings can be detected in its programmatic approach towards gender and class inclusivity and multilingualism. While BD understands its mission as involved in promoting “the work of women who are adventurous, experimental, politically involved, multi-form, multi-cultural, multi-gendered, impossible to define, predictable to talk about, unpredictable and dangerous with language,” it defines its participants in the following terms:

Our list of authors, presenters, organizers includes writers of every gender, and gender definition, every age, poets writing in English, French, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, Black poets, Latina poets, poets from Mexico, Canada, Chile, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Ireland, India, China, Philippines, Korea, Japan, the Middle East, middle America, urban America, old poets, young poets, working class, poor, and rich. (<http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>)

This very idealistic mission statement, with its investment in the problematic multiculturalism of the 1990s and its homogenizing unification of the radically dissimilar peoples coming together under the BD project, is burst open by *Belleza y Felicidad*. In the light of this new context, ByF writings can be productively read as humorously mobilizing prevalent stereotypes of First world contexts (and feminisms) with respect to Third world women. Laguna’s poem turns on its head BD’s explicit alignment with a multi-national community discursively founded on idealized alliances. By embodying female stupidity and naïveté to an extreme, and thus symbolically becoming the arguably ideal interlocutor of traditionally imperialistic iterations of feminism, the text responds in kind to BD’s romantic sense of feminist mission – a mission which, while aiming at

horizontal rather than pedagogic, colonialist modes of dialogue, nonetheless obscures the unequal geo-political power relations latent behind the multiple ‘we’ it articulates.

At the same time, mocking literary tradition and institutional legitimation, the poem functions as a humorous comment on the professionalization of the artist and of the very act of writing:

This story
is very pretty
and simple.

It is my first story
it is the longest
I have ever written.

My ambitious project,
my consecration.

/.../

I have imitated great writers/like Bocaccio, César Aira,
Clarice Lispector,
Cecilia Pavón,
Gabriela Bejerman
and Paulo Coelho. (5)

The improvised canon the persona puts together, her ‘family’ of literary influences, is in this sense telling. Drawing together a universally recognized writer like Bocaccio, Argentine contemporary vanguardist César Aira, Jewish-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, her friends Cecilia and Gabriela and self-help guru Paulo Coelho, she

recognizes and opens space for popular culture as well as for a generation of peripheral, young female writers within Western high literary culture. In the context of ByF's introduction to this U.S. scene, the choice of opening the anthology with this particular poem reads as a statement on the relative positioning of ByF writers with respect to geopolitically and culturally central ones. Though many BD writers can be thought of as marginal in a variety of ways that range from their sexual, gender, racial, and ethnic identity to the alternative modes of production and circulation of their works, their marginality entails a different set of cultural and financial restrictions and constraints from that of Argentine writers. In the context of the BD publication, the persona's humorously naïve stupidity and obliviousness with respect to the hierarchies which determine her own peripheral literary status thus operate as a strategy to surreptitiously reclaim voice and legitimacy.

In this line, halfway through the poem a disoriented persona admits she does not quite know what she is doing: "I'm already so lost/all these words/make me dizzy" (9). She complements these confessions with expressions of humorously corny naïveté: "how lovely it is to write!... the love, the love, the love!" (9). And, in the midst of all that stereotyped female sentimentality, unexpected little windows into her queerness: "delicious kisses on the beach/tit-lickings, ice-cold/drinks of abacaxi, guava an vodka" (7), "the topless part/and the part about the black man/who jerked off/behind the rocks/is also true" (9). These snippets anticipate her queer, romantic, and clichéd encounter with "her goddess," a woman who approaches her at the beach with the pick-up line of asking for a light. At the end, the persona imagines that she undertakes an "...eternal trip/on the beaches of paradise" with her new lover. But this is not a happy ending: girl friendship is stronger than any summer love. The lost beach dream would be incomplete without her friends, who the persona invites to come along to the desert island and with whom the

poem concludes: “She and I/but also later on/Gabriela and Cecilia” (15). The persona’s fellow poets and close girlfriends thus become part of her romantic utopia – no perfect world could ever exist without them. The centrality of her friends, and not just the romance, thus proposes a twist on the long-awaited happy ending of so many (fairy) tales. As the persona anticipates from the beginning, this is a different type of story – this is a story/poem not only about a close group of literary authors but also about how girl friendship may be deployed to subvert and re-imagine storytelling conventions. Like at BD, at female-run ByF intimacy among women friends becomes both a mode of production and, often, the very content of the writing. Drawing from girl culture and its genres, ByF associated itself with a specific girl-inspired aesthetics and worldview which would impact the form and visuality of the chapbooks, their writings, and the mode of relationality at the core of the project – the tight girl friendship between Cecilia and Fernanda, frequently thematized in ByF chapbooks and in the zine-format ByF magazine “Ceci y Fer I: poeta y revolucionaria.”

This poem raises questions about the type of affective community around which ByF is articulated. Christopher Beach has defined a poetic community “as a group of poets with shared interests, goals, orientation, or background.” According to this critic, a community can be local (around a bookstore, bar, coffeehouse where particular kinds of poetry are read, displayed or discussed) or encompass a larger regional or national group of writers as in the case of those gathered around slam poetry or Language poetry (5).¹⁴⁴ Beach refers to the persistent tension between the level of literary community and that of the institution, “a form of social organization structured by some force outside the immediate control of the poets themselves” (5-6). Literary institutions, typically publishing houses, cultural magazines, literary organizations, the university, and funding

¹⁴⁴ Ron Silliman, on his part, categorizes poetic communities into ‘scenes’ (communities specific to a place) and ‘networks’ (trans-geographic communities) (qtd. in Beach 5).

agencies, often lead to the bureaucratization and commodification of literary works and constitute, according to Pierre Bourdieu, the means through which cultural value is allocated (6). Small independent presses like BD and ByF subversively place the power to build alternative canons directly in the hands of the poetic community. At the same time, the literary and artistic community of ByF differs from the types of network Beach describes: rather than simply shared goals, interests, or background among its members, it is simultaneously a social climate of economic and political violence and repression what here generates communal, aesthetic spaces and practices.

It is fundamental to consider, within this discussion, the specificities of the communities which have amassed under the sign of feminist publication projects. While drawing from and participating in the poetry small press (chapbook) lineage,¹⁴⁵ BD is simultaneously shaped by the tradition of feminist publication projects. According to Simone Murray, since the 1990s there has been a steep decline in feminist media production: most feminist publication houses in the U.S. and abroad, particularly those with radical feminist objectives and women-only policies, have closed their doors or, alternatively, they have become integrated into larger, mainstream publishing projects (9). Projects such as BD, which emerged in the late 90s, become an exception within this decline. While relying on the incorporation of more ephemeral and economically viable poetic formats, such as the reading and salon series and the chaplet publications, BD simultaneously publishes beautifully bound, hard-cover books. It thus echoes the second wave feminist print publication objective which, “nothing short of revolutionary,” set out to “capture women’s experiences and insights in durable – even beautiful – printed forms

¹⁴⁵ BD, as its founder Rachel Levitsky asserts, “is a far cry from the only avant-garde poetry collective producing books and other literary forms by these means of meandering, rhizomatic, non-hierarchical, non-merit-o-cratic correspondences.” Each year, a variety of U.S. small presses including the likes of Ugly Duckling Press, Switchback, Booklyn, Krupskaya, Sous Rature, and Palm Press, participate in Poets House “showcase of 4,000 or so volumes of poetry and poetry-related material produced independently that year” (2010).

through a communal network free from patriarchal and capitalist control” (Travis 276). BD draws on a tradition of feminist publishing houses which, emerging and thriving in the 70s and 80s, were driven forward by the strong belief that “cultural production must transform both the process and the product” and were thus characterized by “non-hierarchical, collectivist structures” and “an emphasis on political engagement over profit generation” (Murray 127). As I show here, the encounter between ByF and BD expands this feminist publishing tradition to encompass other, less permanent and structured types of networks – ephemeral queer/feminist literary webs formed on the basis of linguistic and cultural difference. The distant intimacies and networks that result from these encounters build on the already ephemeral, commemorative status of BD and ByF chapbooks to investigate even more impermanent, detached, performative modes of queer/feminist sociality doubly grounded, in spite of BD’s homogenizing ethos, on difference and negativity.

Reflecting on the deployment of notions of community and friendship within poetic communities, Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin argue that, while “a focus on community coincides, to a great extent, with the way poets represent themselves publicly, it has proven problematic for analyzing the role of women in poetic production” (12). Because avant-garde poetic communities and subcultures have tended to rely on masculine constructions of cultural authority and ‘compulsory homosociality,’¹⁴⁶ the focus on and vocabulary of community as a descriptor of these scenes can obscure the role of women as agents of literary production and experimentation. Calling for investigations that stretch beyond the notion of literary community in order to identify

¹⁴⁶ Michael Davidson’s *Guys Like Us* traces how Cold War “heroic masculinity” and “compulsory homosociality” shaped a broad spectrum of the period’s poetic subcultures (2003, 16–18). Belladonna* author Kathleen Fraser records the absence of women experimental poet models in scenes of male writers in which women were relegated to the position of “wait[ing] to be taken up by powerful male mentors” (qtd. in Dewey and Rifkin 13).

other locales of women's poetic production and thus map new configurations of experimental poetry, Dewey and Rifkin propose that gender and, specifically, female friendships, become key to the construction of American poetic avant-gardes since 1945. In this context, friendship serves as a stage for the individual negotiations which, within communities, "fight, fracture, and queer the masculine and homosocial conventions that have characterized avant-garde authority since the early twentieth century" (15).¹⁴⁷ Intimate female friendships, as well as the poetry that derives from them, thus offer spaces of creative exchange and contestation.

In *New Social Ties*, Deborah Chambers argues that friendship ties "are beginning to be viewed as an expression of intimacy that replaces the sense of social integration associated with the concept of 'community'" (2). As the hemispheric encounters I track here attest to, novel forms of socialization, global communication, urban movements, and sexual communities have all impacted upon discourses of belonging. While community is oriented towards the public, "friendship is more personal, ambivalent, and complex in attachment" (Dewey and Rifkin, 192). Karina Butera notes that friendship has often been treated as a "peripheral and seemingly accidental occurrence located outside core social structure" largely because, unlike marriage and kinship, friendship is viewed as "an individual choice based on emotional bonds rather than binding personal contracts." Friendship thus "receives no institutional status" (qtd. in Dewey and Rifkin 192). Whereas community can often be tracked through instrumental belonging, friendship is marked by a series of affective transactions. The marginality of friendship in relation to the more structured, institutionalized, socially mandated, ideologically charged roles of

¹⁴⁷ The poetics of community, and the organization of literary history around communities, have been a productive focus for mapping literary history since the birth of the modernist avant-garde. Group manifestos, alternate canons, little magazines, and anthologies have functioned as a crucial source of mutual support and promotion for many of the scenes organized after 1945. Communities have served, in Michael Davidson's terms, as "enabling fictions" to establish a countercultural poetics, as "not only a vehicle of personal expression but a complicated intertextual and dialogical field" (2003, 17–22).

citizen and family member has attracted critical thought on its subversive and transformative potential.¹⁴⁸ As “community” is viewed alternatively as impossible or, at best, in flux, there has been “a postmodern shift of emphasis from kinship and community networks to personal bonds” to the extent that friendship is now the privileged term (Chambers 2). Dewey and Rifkin point out that this shift from community to friendship can be seen first in how poets themselves are imagining their relationships to one another.¹⁴⁹ Although community remains integral to an understanding of literary practice, the identification of a writing self to a community has become complicated and, indeed, rendered interpretatively awkward, by a recognition of relationships as incessantly mobile, dependent on circumstance, and variable (115).

The female-run literary projects I examine here offer a radical alternative to the traditionally male homosocial focus on literary community by exploring the aesthetic and political productivity of modes of sociability in which the term woman is not one of subordination and difference but rather emerges as the privileged, productive position at their core. In their search for other strategies and vocabularies that bypass the romanticization implicit in the notion of literary and artistic communities as well as the anonymity involved in the concept of publics, these projects articulate themselves around queer/feminist friendships.

¹⁴⁸ Signaling the difference between friendship and “fraternity,” whose role as a unifying force among the marginalized or oppressed is fundamental, Hannah Arendt evinces wariness of the exclusivity of fraternity and its inability to encompass difference. Jacques Derrida, on his part, advocates for a type of friendship in which friends’ “irreplaceable singularit[ies]” be preserved within the relationship” and calls for maintaining “distance within” friendship (qtd. in Dewey and Rifkin 6-9).

¹⁴⁹ While the late 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a more explicit theorization and enactment of community practices and values, particularly in the case of Language writers, poets emerging in the 1990s would explore different, looser but nonetheless binding and intense social bonds. This paradigmatic shift is also being registered critically, with recent books like Lytle Shaw’s *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (2006) and Andrew Epstein’s *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006) tracing the sociality of poetry through the framework of friendship.

While the friendships between BD founder Rachel Levitsky and poet Erica Kaufman as well as those among the female poets and artists who make up BD play a crucial role in driving this project forward, Dorothea Lasky's close bond with her best friend, poet Laura Solomon, plays a grounding role in Lasky's *The Tiny Tour*. In the case of ByF works, female friendships are often in excess of what is traditionally considered appropriate for that particular type of bond. For instance, the founding friendship between Pavón and Laguna, frequently thematized in ByF chapbooks as well as in the magazine 'Ceci y Fer: poeta y revolucionaria,' is defined by queer desires and ambiguity. The queer friendship between Ceci and Fer is presented as simultaneously defined by love and hate, closeness and distance. Drawing from girl culture and its genres, ByF associated itself with a specific girl-inspired aesthetics and worldview which impacts the form and visuality of the chapbooks, their writings, and the mode of relationality at the core of the project.

The key role of friendship within these projects is, furthermore, evidenced by the fact that both BD and ByF ground the construction of their catalogues on personal affinities and connections. Unlike other small experimental writing chapbook presses like the feminist "dancing girl press" or "Little Red Leaves" and its "Textile Series," BD's approach makes space for difference by avoiding evaluating anonymous submissions and, thus, the obstacles inherent in determining a work's worth, and its potential publication, on the basis of specific cultural and contextual hierarchies and standards. In Levitsky's words,

Rather than address a lack of representation of women poets in anthologies or poetry readings or book titles, Belladonna* sought and *seeks to address the way in which poetry is organized*. We hold no contests, and we offer no prizes. We don't even have an official submission process. What we do instead is *precipitate poetry production by relationship, correspondence, aesthetics, and community*" (2010, 5, my emphasis).

As discussed above, this feminist, affective strategy for literary canon (de)construction through feminist community formation emerges as an alternative to the institutional adscription of literary value. Through its organizational strategy, which involves writers often participating “in the process of publishing their work and the work of others” to then become involved in the collective, BD embraces its feminist goal of “allowing for creativity to take leaps and meander rather than a top-down hierarchical structure.”¹⁵⁰ This conception of BD as an open, experimental platform which champions a feminist notion of writing aligned with editing, producing, and becoming part of a community involves a different distribution of work – and thus a different understanding of what literature is and how it comes about—from that of mainstream cultural institutions and markets. The BD chaplet showcases, through its materiality and contents, its intricate enmeshment with alternative modes of producing and conceiving writing. Its status as literature cannot be artificially divorced from the literary net and life from which it emerges and the definition of the artwork thus expands to encompass the communal and material processes that give it shape. Furthermore, the hand-to-hand circulation of the accessible chaplets at the reading events, as well as their online acquisition at BD’s webpage, are key to the ongoing formation of networks of publics/producers aligned with this aesthetic and political project.

At the same time, it is important to account for the ways in which these two projects conceive of themselves as feminist in order to make sense of their aesthetic and political investment in alternative, dys/utopian modes of literary and artistic community. When questioned about the forms of community “that editors, publishers, distributors, poets, and readers of independent presses are in the process of participating in &/or inventing,” Levitsky articulates the following reflection:

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>.

Asserting aesthetic and political strokes is a force towards community formation...I am attached to Feminism's critical notion that the personal is political. Being an avant-gardist in poetry, I have the impulse to add that the personal, which is politic, is aesthetic... It's impossible to separate an intention, or an ideal, from the action that fumbles forth. The fact that we are feminist is not separate from the fact that we aim to be non-competitive, and the fact that we aim to be non-competitive and avant-garde and bent on demographic parity, and interested in Immediacy, in fast and cheap and not so very institutionalized and hybrid and narrative and interrupted and kind and multi-lingual, these are all intertwined by the personal, political, aesthetic hyacinth we present (2006).

Levitsky thus defines the specific form of feminism and avant-garde feminist poetry – experimental and mindful of aesthetics and form—at the core of BD. Referring to Poets' House annual showcase of poetry published independently in the U.S., Levitsky further reveals the utopian longings which, for her, lurk behind alternative modes of understanding and producing culture: “to see [the volumes of poetry], to be at this event, is to witness the non-capitalist life that, in the US, flourishes outside a hegemonic market model” (2010). Those utopian longings, in turn, are for her very much connected to the project's investment in experimental modes of writing. Her conception of formal experimentation, in this sense, both validates this mode of writing as a feminist endeavor and anticipates the affective pull of her literature, which she describes almost as if in the service of articulating a structure of feeling. That affective pull is anticipatory, as is the utopian investment in writing's ability to capture or, perhaps, enact, what is to come. When discussing her novel *The Story of My Accident is Ours*, Levitsky reflects:

I emphatically don't buy into the notion that avant-garde writing is inaccessible [...] I think the role of the avant-garde is not to represent the present in past tense terms, but rather to make the present in present tense forms...*we live in a time in which affective environments are the grounds for a still-inarticulate set of linguistic gestures. I favor the mongrel, the neologism, the error. I talk about grunting a bit in the novel, about the importance of listening to the sense of a thing being there, of giving time to the as-yet-to-be, the sensed but not yet visible/audible. Listening to the not-yet, which is also the noise of ancestors, is distinct from the insistence that we are making anything new.* That multiplicity of

noises and traditions, that is avant-garde to me and political. *It seems important not to be making so much useless noise (in the rush to make something 'new') that it becomes impossible to hear, or to be with or in relation to.* (2013, my emphasis)

Levitsky thus makes explicit BD's founding investment in a utopian conception of avant-garde feminist writing as deeply affective and anticipatory – a conception which echoes José Muñoz's definition of queerness in utopian terms and which suggests another vocabulary to describe avant-garde writing (“to hear, or to be with or in relation to,” “affective environments,” “make the present in present tense forms”) beyond its traditional patriarchal association with war and combat.

On the other hand, without espousing a programmatic political stance and aesthetics as in the case of BD, ByF converses with Levitsky's approach to avant-garde writing by privileging a mode of experimental and yet symbolically and financially accessible literature. With its investment in a literal, colloquial style tied to action and the everyday experiences of women and queers, ByF combines the experimental and the political to create its own dys/utopian worlds and publics on the outskirts of literary institutions. Unlike BD, however, ByF's investment in feminism was not explicit nor programmatic, and feminism was frequently questioned and problematized in its writings. Adopting a less idealized and more pragmatic approach to feminism, Pavón claims that at ByF it worked as a strategy to start writing: “we were in our early 20s, and it was hard to be heard in the Argentine literary scene as a young woman. In that context, feminism functioned as an excuse that enabled and authorized us to write.” At the same time, reflecting upon the influence that having studied at a U.S. university in the 90s had on the emergence of ByF, she highlights the importance of her exposure to gender and sexuality issues and theories which were not discussed in Argentina at the time (interview by the author, 2015). Feminism and friendships among women thus differentially enable the formation and development of these two projects, crystallizing their related and yet quite

different approaches to feminist politics – while at ByF it is conceptualized as a means to an end, at BD it is understood as an end in itself.

Finally, in BD's *Belleza y Felicidad*, Cecilia Pavón's featured work includes the prose piece "Licorice caramels," which playfully replicates and enters into dialogue with the adolescent, girlish tone of Laguna's initial poem. This piece is followed by a letter: Pavón's "Dear Timo." A fundamental genre in ByF literature and, particularly, in Laguna's writing and visual artwork, the letter written to a friend records the type of affective exchanges which lie at the core of the ByF project. This particular investment echoes not only BD's commitment to 'inter-subjective,' 'performative,' and 'witnessing' literature¹⁵¹ but also the concrete, epistolar collaborations among some of their women authors.¹⁵² And it is, precisely, in dialogue that writing is created at ByF. The notes, emails, and letters which populate not only the literature but also the ByF magazine "Ceci y Fer (poeta y revolucionaria)" constitute an archive of these writers' everyday dialogues and thoughts. An affective architecture of quotidian objects, words, and exchanges thus give shape to these writings.

In "Dear Timo," the narrator communicates to her German friend Timo her desire to physically touch and reach other cities and countries, in particular Berlin, the epicenter of contemporary art and culture and the place to be in the 90s' and 2000s', but also Lima, a peripheral South American capital disruptively positioned in the same level as the former. Not writers, as in Laguna's poem, but the political and cultural hierarchies which define spaces and cities become re-arranged here. The narrator's friendship with Timo

¹⁵¹ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>

¹⁵² Carla Harryman and Lynn Hejinian's *The Wide Road*, published by BD in 2011, is the result of a twenty-year collaborative investigation on friendship, the female body, writing, and community carried out partly through epistolar writing exchanges between the authors. See also BD's *Looking Up Harryette Mullen: Interviews on Sleeping with the Dictionary and Other Works* (2011), a postcard format interview which resulted from the post-card exchanges on politics and poetics between Harryette Mullen and Barbara Henning.

bridges, in part, the distance that separates peripheral cities and art scenes such as Buenos Aires from central ones like New York. In this respect, however marginal the BD project conceives itself to be, its central location – as well as the financial resources which that location and its tight connections to academia grant it—problematize that marginality in the face of geopolitically peripheral scenes such as ByF. It is nonetheless telling that in this poem friendship and affiliation emerge, once more, as tools for building transnational bridges out of writing and desire.

TRANSLATING DIS/ENCOUNTERS

However, the sense of literature as a tool for communication finds its limits in linguistic specificity and translation. As Gayatri Spivak reminds us, the very notion of linguistic translation, conceived as one word or idea standing in for another, “dislodges any possibility of literal translation.” Translation, in this sense, should be understood “as a catachresis, as an always already misuse of words, an impropriety and inadequacy that underpins all systems of representation” (2000, 12). The first poem by ByF’s close friend and collaborator Gabriela Bejerman, “Shyness, confession, debut,” is translated into English by the poet herself. It is significant that, from the very beginning, the poet/translator signals the lack of identity between the two versions of the poems by titling the English iteration differently – the original Spanish title is “18° C.” If the original title would, perhaps, be more difficult to immediately grasp for an American audience used to thinking in degrees Fahrenheit, the English title becomes quite explanatory of the poem’s content. By contrast, small semantic disparities or grammatically inexact or unclear (mis)translations between the two versions of the poem yield an English version ‘with an accent’: “yo me resistía disimulando ante mí también”/“I resisted pretending on me too,” “el agua y la cerveza nos dictaban

palabras”/“water and beer dictated us words,” “no sé por qué casi hago el amor sin desear”/“I don’t know why I almost make love unwillingly” (18-19). Retaining marks of linguistic difference, the poem thus refuses to lose its attachment to a specific place, time, and poetic subjectivity through translation. At the same time the English, accented version opens up a potentiality of alternative meanings by de-familiarizing and bursting open the grammatically straight-forward original in Spanish. If Levisky associates BD’s multi-lingualism with the need to expand the avant-garde potential of its literature, here translation becomes a tool for literary experimentation as it simultaneously creates disparate meanings for English and Spanish speaking publics. In this way, the piece showcases the linguistic and cultural differences which distance these two audiences, the difficulty of creating a conversation between them, and the literary richness of that ‘flawed’ encounter.

The chaplet includes a second piece by writer Gabriela Bejerman which is not translated into English. A heavily experimental, neo-baroque text without punctuation, “agua mansa agua brava agua cascada” is built on the centrality and sensuality of sound in the cumulative flow of words. Untranslated/able, the work stands isolated within the chaplet, a lonely witness to the unsurpassable distances which separate these Argentine and U.S. scenes. Those distances, however, come to be experienced, and sensually enjoyed, through the reading/performance of the poem. This un-translated poem pushes against the homogenizing force which ByF’s inclusion as part of BD’s catalogue involves.¹⁵³ As part of its transition from a traditionally peripheral to a central cultural and geopolitical location, Bejerman decides to preserve this poem’s illegibility by

¹⁵³ As Millie Thayer reminds us, “translations themselves are objects of struggle and translation, or its refusal, is a strategic political act ... whether it involves sharing knowledge to foster an alliance or interrupting a dominant discourse to defend autonomy” (2010, 6). Walter Mignolo’s theorizing on the coloniality of power similarly teaches us to become aware of the unequal traveling and translations of feminist practices, theories, and texts and their reception (2000, 8).

denying us its translation. The poem thus becomes in itself a boundary that renders visible the necessarily incomplete and failed project of cultural and linguistic translation.¹⁵⁴

This (lack of) dialogue is important, I propose, because the hemispheric networks these authors embrace might become redefined and find traction precisely in and through the different understandings of literary production and modes of inscription of diverse institutional and material realities active in these writings. Evincing the cultural, linguistic, and ideological fractures which make up these groupings, this complex hemispheric commerce becomes fundamental to account for the emerging notions of poetic community these projects actually enact and carry forward. In this respect, through cultural, media, and semiotic translation, the BD chaplet articulates a hemispheric community inevitably fractured from its genesis. Unlike BD's homogeneous, multicultural communal ethos, this hemispheric network is founded on the impossibility of ever becoming one – and impossibility which, apart from the inherent ambiguity and volatility that haunt all languages, feeds on linguistic and cultural difference. These two projects' reaching towards one another in the face of that impossibility becomes, in this way, a dys/utopian gesture. In the case of Bejerman's untranslated piece, such 'reaching towards' is grounded purely on an aesthetic of sound and letters – it becomes an experience. Language is thus the space where these two scenes come together but also the site at which their encounter falls apart. Hemispheric contacts enable the investigation of strategies for being together in difference as they inaugurate forms of ephemeral, fleeting, distant intimacies. Those distances, both cultural and physical, become productive

¹⁵⁴ In this respect, this gesture exacerbates the “ontological condition of sociality grounded in the material fact of our interdependence as bodily beings” which, Young and Weiner suggest, can also be described “as a sociability without sociality, a bare being together that emerges where symbolically mediated social relations fail because of the pressure of affectivities in excess of or to the side of known identities and forms of recognition” (236).

creative spaces – spaces for the unfinished, the un-accomplishable, the imperfect translation, the impossible dialogue, the error. They enable modes of intimacy predicated on loss and non-belonging, distant intimacies which, like dys/utopias themselves, tend to be born out of spatial dislocation.

BELLADONNA *’S CHAPLET

By now turning to examine BD’s *Belleza y Felicidad* ‘chaplet’ format closely, I continue to parse out the specifics of the dialogue and creative exchange which the ByF project established with Belladonna* at that time. As I argue in the previous section, through this publication the two projects engage in a conversation about experimental writing by women¹⁵⁵—a conversation made possible in and through translation. And I refer here to not only semantic but also formal and cultural translation as well as to the trans-mediation of these Argentine writings, originally published in ByF and ByF-related chapbooks and magazines.¹⁵⁶ The process of translation of aesthetic forms and stakes of a project into the framework and formats of another makes visible their specific conditions of production, circulation and reception, along with their distinct politics, contextual critical intervention, and understandings of the materiality and status of the literary.

BD publications range from what they term ‘chaplets’ to beautifully bound hard-cover books. The chaplets—modest, concise and simple print publications—constitute a financially viable alternative to circulate works by both young and established women

¹⁵⁵ This type of conversation is key to the overall mission of BD. According to the press’ self-definition, the work of BD writers, both as performances and in print form, “collects, gathers over time and space, forming a conversation about the feminist avant-garde, what it is and how it comes to be.”

<http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>

¹⁵⁶ I deploy a broad notion of translation, understood as engaged not exclusively with strategies for semiotic processes in the field of translation studies but also with debates on cultural translation, articulated on the premise that “any process of description, interpretation and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions and peoples” (Niranjana 1992).

writers (Figs. 45-46). In the face of the relentless advance of neoliberalism in the 90s, and the increasingly limited space it allowed for “imagining feminist alternatives to profit driven endeavors,” the chaplet format embraces “the anti-economic mandate of second wave feminist presses” and third wave feminist zines (Eichhorn 14). The deployment of the very term ‘chaplet,’ privileged for these BD publications over the more standard denomination ‘chapbook,’ suggests an encounter of a chapbook and a pamphlet. The political resonances of the latter, as well as its investment in its smooth, easy circulation, come together with the chapbook format to render a hybrid chaplet which, evoking self-publication cultures, is nonetheless produced by a small press. With its investment in publishing both high-end feminist books and accessible chaplets, BD incorporates second wave strategies, with their reliance on literary publishing “as a central authorizing mechanism” (Eichhorn 14), while referencing third wave modes of feminist self-publishing which thrived largely outside the market such as feminist fanzines. In this line, BD poet Krystal Languell describes their chaplets as tightly linked to the notion of ephemeral zines:

The Belladonna* chaplet series is deliberately lo-fi; we print at a copy shop ... and our covers are of a uniform design—the image is a belladonna flower found in HR Hegnauer’s yard. The books are 8.5x11 folded over, stapled, like a zine. This method of production mirrors the idea of ephemerality, which we are interested in as documentarians. (Languell)

Belleza y Felicidad, stapled together at its seams, has a green cardboard cover, thicker than its inside pages (Fig. 46). From the cover we gather that this is Belladonna*’s #78 chaplet and that the edition is bilingual. As a background to the title of the piece, a bunch of pale greyish leaves spread across the green and the black frame, which includes not only the name ‘Belladonna*’ but also the definition of the belladonna flower (“deadly nightshade...”). The Belladonna* chaplet is better quality (thicker pages

and cover, more professional looking design) and has a more institutional, formal feel than the ByF chapbook (Fig. 2). A crucial difference between them is that, while ByF publications are photocopied, Belladonna*'s are printed, which results in a higher definition and quality while simultaneously mobilizing a different production mechanism. We learn on the last page of the chaplet that it was published in an edition of 300, 25 of which were numbered and signed by Laguna at her reading at Dixon Place. The signed copies are more expensive (\$ 6) than the regular ones (\$ 4), thus directly reflecting through their price, in spite of their modest format, their auratic status as collectible objects. In fact, Languell comments that a number of the signed copies (26 out of the 126 chaplets printed each time) currently find their way to archives and university archives, including Brown, NYU-Fales, and University of AZ Poetry Center (Languell).

Unlike the ByF chapbook, forever reproducible and forever generic through the magic of the photocopy, the Belladonna* rendition of *Belleza y Felicidad* is invested in the uniqueness, and in the exchange value, of its more pricey copies, which through their numbering evoke the mechanism of visual art prints. Belladonna* editions effectively do run out (when I acquire my copy of the *Belleza y Felicidad* chaplet online, I am advised to hurry, since there are “only a few left!”).¹⁵⁷ BD's strategic investment in positioning its chaplets as unique, archival objects can be in part linked to the fact that most of its members are actively engaged in academia in a variety of ways, which range from holding MFA and Ph.D. degrees to current teaching positions, and thus actively cultivate close bonds with cultural institutions. This is significant because it locates the project at a distance from ByF while simultaneously revealing some common elements between the two.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/chaplets/>

On the one hand, both BD and ByF chapbooks interestingly inhabit the uneasy, in-between space where sacred and desacralizing understandings of the literary come together. ByF chapbooks' ambiguous status as visual artworks, like BD's strategy of numbering and signing some of its chaplets, render them into archival, collectible objects. BD's investment in the chaplets' unique "magic" and "traceability" speaks of the project's understanding of how these works operate as sacralized material objects:

And though we love the internet, we have not mastered it, damned to still have a blog not a web-site because the people who love us and would do this for us are involved in a million other under-the-radar-of-capitalism cultural and political projects, and the fact is that we, like the DJ's who held onto vinyl for the rest of us, are attached to textual objects and imbue into them the possibility of that special combination of magic and traceability (if not 'aura' despite their being reproduced). (Levitsky, 2006)

Playing with the divide between literature and other cultural fields while experimenting with the (sacralized) notions of value which define the literary itself, BD and ByF works actively investigate fresh criteria of literary value. Drawing from and in line with the tradition of zine culture and its recent archivization, these chaplets hover between their status as cheap reproductions and valuable objects of attachment and collection and, through that indeterminacy, strategically find their way into the archive. Entering archives and libraries as ephemeral print publications, they thus compound their function of registering, recording, and archiving communal experiences and events by becoming part of official archival institutions. In this two-fold way, these publications strategically give space and visibility to the feminist and queer events they crystallize.

To account for why publications takes this particular shape in the experimental context of a feminist press such as BD, I would like to suggest that the chaplet format both drives and is driven by this project's investigation of forms of literature grounded on feminist community formation. Similarly to how, at ByF, chapbooks functioned as a way

of registering shared and communal life experiences and were presented at literary readings or events, BD chaplets work first and foremost as archives of ephemeral poetry readings and performances. According to its mission statement,

Belladonna* is committed to building publication and literary community between women writers who write off-center – poetry and prose that is political and critical, that is situational rather than plot-driven, that is inter-subjective or performative or witnessing rather than personally revelatory, that reaches across the boundaries and binaries of literary genre and artistic fields, and that questions the gender binary.¹⁵⁸ (my emphasis)

BD's emphasis on the intersubjective, performative, and witnessing as the basis of the literary underscores its investment in a conception of writing which privileges live readings and performances over the written text. The reading performance comes first, and the accompanying chaplet is intended to commemorate that event (the chaplets are defined as "commemorative" in the BD webpage). In Krystal Languell's words, the chaplet series "creates a historical record of NYC poetry and politics; it's a record of the event, which happens in a time and a place, but it's also a record of/for/about the person who is reading and performing at that event, their work at that moment." In this line, in its 1999 founding mission statement, BD presents itself as a "feminist avant garde *event*" (the BD Series) and "publication project" (BD Books), in that order (Languell, my emphasis). Live readings are fundamental because they provide an opportunity for poets and audiences to come together, offering a space for community formation. And BD fuels a distinctly feminist understanding of the artist, and of art itself, as blossoming in and within a community rather than in isolation. The readings, typically featuring two or three poets each time, are sometimes preceded by an open mike, which allows anybody present at the event to take turns reading or improvising poetry.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>

As I outline in Chapter One, in the case of ByF performative literary readings of new materials also played a crucial role. So did the party souvenir gift format of the inexpensive chapbooks which, made up of plastic bags, drawings, and trinkets, similarly position the literary as an alternative record or archive of an ephemeral communal event. The written text is what comes after or alongside those events, ‘commemorating’ them. In the case of BD, the registering of the poetry readings is performed not only through the printed text but also through the recording of sound and its posterior online publication.¹⁵⁹ Literature becomes, in these two contexts, an object that functions as the crystallization and is a product of ephemeral group readings, parties and experiences, shared affects and interpersonal relations. Writing is what is left of a connection, of experiments with community building: it operates as an informal archive, as a linguistic translation/trans-mediation of these ephemeral experiences, these affective aesthetic worlds, and as the concrete manifestation of the inextricability of art and life. It is also in this sense that these publications become auratic: functioning as objects of memory, their value is determined not only on the basis of their intrinsic qualities but also through their reference, proximity, and connection to live, ephemeral, irrecoverable events. The centrality of these events and readings, with their visual and performance art elements, signal these projects’ reliance on a conception of literature as inextricably bound to other art forms.

In short, the chaplet format is key to BD’s exploration of communal-based criteria of literary value and legitimation. Such criteria find their roots in interpersonal relations, affiliation, and affects as well as on a feminist take on the relation between experimental literature, lived experience, politics, and community formation. Functioning as archives of ephemeral events, encounters, and communities, the chaplets enact the material,

¹⁵⁹ See <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Belladonna.php>

formal, and semantic exploration of intimacies and affects as productive creative forces. Positioned in-between the realm of self-published chapbooks and that of a formal press, the chaplets involve a degree of institutionalization. They materialize, through their inexpensive, reproducible, communally created and edited, commemorative format and through a catalogue built by affiliation, the distinct BD social organization, division of work, and collectivity.

The chaplet format is simultaneously crucial to the constitution of those collectivities and publics because of its investment in immediacy. In Levitsky's words, at BD "the poets have a chance to publish what is happening in their minds or writing at that moment and have it distributed (somewhat) immediately." In this sense, the project's idea of immediacy underscores not just that a manuscript "is written now, but that it is *relevant to the now*" (Levitsky 2003). BD's investment in the chaplet format thus enables, as in the case of ByF chapbooks, a narrowing of the gap between the writing and publication of poetry, which can more effectively activate urgent political and contextual conversations, as well as the simultaneity of the reading and publishing event. In this sense, BD and ByF engage, in a period marked by the insistent questioning of the relevance of poetry, in a parallel exploration of new understandings of literature as immediately reactive to current conversations and debates through their community-based modes of publication, circulation, and reception of literature.

Considering the further distinctions between ByF and BD, however, it is important to note that BD's interest "in immediacy, in fast and cheap and not so very institutionalized and hybrid and narrative" (Levitsky 2006) means and is materialized differently in the case of American BD and Argentine ByF. Crucially, the two projects differ with respect to the financial sources which keep them afloat. While BD is financed

by a number of public and private agencies and donors,¹⁶⁰ firmly positioning it within the realm of the capitalist cultural economy in spite of Levitsky's assertions to the contrary (Levitsky and Ives 2013), ByF's main source of income comes from the sale of visual art supplies. In this respect, the difference in funding might contribute to explain the clear articulation of a mission statement and a defined but inclusive community in the case of BD, necessary to promote the project to funding agencies, versus the looser, non-explicit, more organically fluctuating politics and community at ByF. BD is driven forward by a clear, explicitly stated political and aesthetic program: nurturing the work of innovative women writers, which in turn contributes to build and position an alternative, female canon of experimental literature which disrupts previous male-dominated lineages. In this respect, the fact that BD is founded and run by women is far from circumstantial, as is its reliance on alternative, independent poetry presentation venues and communities.

On the other hand, Laguna and Pavón's project is openly and undeniably linked to the world of the market and, within it, to the basic realm of goods and raw materials exchange rather than to the loftier arena of intellectual endeavor. This somewhat less idealized approach to the possibility of positioning culture completely in the margins of the capitalist system of exchange, derived in part from the disparity of material resources in the U.S. and Argentina, might contribute to explain why, as I argue in Chapter One, ByF literature reflects on its surface the marks of the commercial exchanges in which its press is implicated.¹⁶¹ In this respect, the ByF chapbook articulates, from its very

¹⁶⁰ These include The Fund for Poetry, The Brooklyn Arts Council, The New York State Council on the Arts, The New York Community Trust, Poets&Writers and the City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs. Furthermore, BD has established an online webpage for tax-exempt donations, memberships, and subscription as well as internships for NY college and graduate students from schools such as the Pratt Institute and Queens College.

¹⁶¹ The mass-produced, inexpensive trinket that comes with the text and the flimsiness of its Xeroxed pages work to both undermine and re-deploy the aura of the handmade book invested in its own materiality.

materiality, a structural critique that involves not only sexuality but also class as well as differences in accessibility to material resources, recasting these as key to its aesthetic.

In the context of the U.S., feminist publication projects have often been tightly bound to both academia and the archival apparatus. By the end of the 90s, at the time when BD first emerged, Beach broached the question of whether it was still possible to “define the poetic culture as divided between academic mainstream and experimental, oppositional or countercultural poetry with an avant-gardist aesthetic and political agenda,” wondering about “the status of ‘resistant’ or ‘marginal’” at a time when language writers and other experimental poets [were] gaining academic recognition and moving into positions within the academy” (8). However, as Eichhorn has signaled, the case of feminist publishing projects merits its own analysis, since at least since the 90s they have tended to survive and thrive on the basis of strategic alliances and deployments of the material and symbolic resources offered by academia and, particularly, the archive as key modes of legitimation – this became “necessary in an economy hostile to the production and circulation of works produced quite literally at the cost of profit” (15-16). Rather than as “a destination or barrier to be breached” or a “form of institutionalization and assimilation,” Eichhorn sees the archive as a “site where academic and activist work frequently converge,” a strategically deployed apparatus which serves “to legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious present” (4). According to her, the Riot Grrrl collection at Fales exemplifies such strategic use of the archive on the part of third wave feminist publishing projects – a use that foregrounds Riot Grrrl’s previous “link to the academic apparatus and to some of the theoretical and aesthetic movements it has sustained.”

In this line the BD project, in accordance with its political objective of furthering experimental literature by women, has taken advantage of its capacity to position itself

within the New York academic world. That capacity has to do with the fact that a substantial number of its authors and editors (including BD co-editor Erica Kaufman) are affiliated with universities, teaching at universities, and/or MFA program graduates. BD has not only held many of its poetry readings at CUNY Graduate Center but has also organized and co-sponsored (along with the Graduate Center Poetics Group, the Center for the Study of Women and Society, the Ph.D. program in English and the Center for Humanities) the 2009 AdfemPo (Advancing Feminist Poetics and Activism) conference there in celebration of its 10th year anniversary. Its panelists included both academics and BD poets, and revolved around topics such as radical language and political thought, utopia and feminism, exile and language, eco-poetics, multilingualism, and the body as discourse. This is paradigmatic of the status of creative writing in the U.S., which is very much shaped by the widespread impact of creative writing programs and MFAs (Master of Fine Arts) and its concomitant firm positioning within the academic realm.

However, BD's strategic enmeshment with academic and funding institutions, which contributes in part to explain the need for a programmatic stance with respect to feminist aesthetics and politics, can lead to ossified, homogenizing notions of feminist community such as the ones discussed above. It can also result in the subtle but problematic articulation of the BD project, its goals, and its readings and chaplets in terms of its strategic positioning within those funding and academic markets – each time a chaplet is published, several numbers are sent to archival institutions and libraries, and the poetry readings are now being recorded and posted online by Penn Sound. While in Jacoby's *Darkroom* or Lasky's *The Tiny Tour* it is audience members who produce and record fragmentary renderings of the works, here the reading events are tidily recorded for Penn Sound, an institutional poetry archive housed at The University of Pennsylvania's Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing. These projects raise the

question of where to draw the line between feminist modes of strategic positioning within institutional and liberal settings and the danger of becoming shaped and defined by those very institutions and settings.

If the historical alliances between feminist publishing endeavors, academia, and the archive contribute to explain BD's investment in the uniqueness of its chaplets, which as I discussed above regularly end up in libraries and special collections, the ByF Argentine context is quite different.¹⁶² On the one hand, the very limited academic market there offers a significant contrast with respect to the U.S., where an expanded playfield favors the competitive search for innovative topics and objects on the part of academics and archival institutions. At the same time, the lack of creative writing programs within public universities in Argentina is counter-balanced by the proliferation of more informal, less institutional spaces of instruction and exchange for creative writers such as private writing workshops led by poets, bookstores, coffee houses, and art galleries/presses like ByF itself. This derives, in turn, in a different mode of experiencing culture and a unique type of literary net.¹⁶³

¹⁶² In this sense, my personal experience as a ByF and BD chapbooks' exhibit curator at The University of Texas at Austin has confirmed that, while it is indeed feasible to showcase and incorporate ByF works within academic and archival institutions, due to a range of bureaucratic and logistical issues this involves a much more complex and strenuous procedure than in the case of BD chaplets.

¹⁶³ Stuart Krimko description of the bookstore 'La Internacional Argentina,' around which many of the authors connected to ByF gather to this day, and of his chance encounters with Laguna and Pavón, is indicative of the specificity of that local literary culture: "...in the late afternoon, the store was quieter. Besides Francisco [Garamona], there were three or four writers on the couch and two folding chairs. They invited me to sit down and drink beer with them. The conversation was rapid, and my Spanish is good but not perfect, so I had to ask people to repeat what they were saying, and even their names. It took me a few minutes to realize that one of the women in the group, introduced to me as Fernanda Laguna, sometimes used the nom de plume Dalia Rosetti, and that she was the author of two books of fiction [César] Aira had suggested I read. Though I would soon learn that such encounters were common coincidences in literary Buenos Aires, I felt as though I had come across something rare and essential: a community in which literature was both a forum for experimentation and a way for people, writers, to spend real time together. What differentiated this scene from others of its kind was its informality and warmth, the transposition of Buenos Aires' embodied urbanity into a heady space of ideas. I left the store a little drunk, and with the intention of seeing these people again at a reading Francisco [Garamona] was giving the next night at another, more established, bookstore in another part of the neighborhood. The following evening, on the sidewalk outside the bookstore before the reading began, Fernanda introduced me to another woman,

It is interesting to note, however, that academic connections become crucial to facilitate ByF's creative exchanges with U.S. poets and scenes. While Pavón first comes to the U.S. to pursue an M.A. in Spanish, U.S. poet Jacob Steinberg meets her in Buenos Aires while on an exchange NYU undergraduate program through a course on Argentine art led by gallerist and friend of the ByF project Mariano López, who invites Pavón to give a guest lecture. Similarly, it is poet and critic Lila Zemborain who invites Laguna to participate at KJCC, a poetry series she curates at NYU, and a BD publication in 2005. Though I argue that the BD/ByF connection contributes to visibilize the centrality of ByF's relationship with the academy, that relationship was often conflicted and punctuated by episodes of mutual distrust and harsh disavowal. While critic Silvia Delfino, a professor in the emerging queer studies program at UBA, would become a source of legitimation for the ByF project, the latter was read as a queer press/project only in retrospect—its queer/feminist politics were not inscribed as part of an explicit program. Not only through its experimental literature but also through its more oppositional stance towards academia, ByF gained its status as a marginal, underground press. This, in turn, granted it its own form of legitimation as many of its visual and literary strategies would gradually become widespread and 'fashionable,' though not mainstream. Most ByF chapbooks, in fact, are not part of libraries or archival collections and, until recently, only BD's *Belleza y Felicidad* chaplet could easily be found, for instance, at The University of Texas at Austin's Poetry Center, where it could be accessed as 'library use only' material.

The different ways in which these two projects understand what utopian feminist/queer objectives consist of, and how they become materialized, result in distinct,

Cecilia Pavón. I recognized her name from books I'd seen at La Librería Internacional, particularly from the series of photocopied pamphlets, each packaged with a cheap gold plastic charm in clear plastic envelopes, displayed in a cardboard box next to the register" (2015).

unique takes on the ephemerality and reproducibility of their publications, which in turn place each of them in unique relations to the archive. The political gesture active in ByF's photocopied chapbooks, once translated into BD's print, numbered and signed format, loses part of its efficacy. Devoid of its Argentine pre and post-crisis context, where this intervention resonates with a range of systemic critiques, BD's *Belleza y Felicidad* loses traction as it enters library holdings, while simultaneously gaining another form of legitimacy. If this case exemplifies how, "due to the intense migration of concepts and values that accompanies the travels of texts and theories...often a concept with potential for political and epistemological rupture in a particular context may become depoliticized when carried over to another context" (De Lima Costa 29), at the same time this translation of ByF into another format will, like translation itself, "always entail defacement." In Hillis Miller's terms, "when a theory travels, it disfigures, deforms, and transforms the culture or discipline that receives it" (qtd. in De Lima Costa 29). In this case, ByF's intervention in a BD publication results in a hybrid assemblage of two formats which operates as a stage where different worldviews compete—a third space that is both critically and aesthetically productive.

Translation thus emerges as a mode for feminist/queer community formation. The commemorative BD chaplet of a ByF reading/event operates as a shared platform for these two projects to come together, compete with each other, and hold a critical and creative dialogue. According to Claudia de Lima Costa, in the U.S. and Latin America the academy and feminist NGOS are the two most important locales for the production, circulation, and reception of feminisms (25). I would like to claim space in that list for cultural projects like BD and ByF which, through their literary, visual, and performance works silently experiment with and reassess feminist/queer practices while strategically utilizing and critically interrogating cultural institutions, thus actively articulating

(hemispheric) feminisms. While intimately connected with the academy and the political ethos of NGOs, these projects simultaneously probe the aesthetic as a way of negotiating difference and imagining other modes of connection across borders. In opening themselves up to a hemispheric public, these writings and the projects which sustain them expose themselves to being read differently, and invisibilized elements of each are thus illuminated. The poems, their translations, the reading at Dixon Place, and the material chaplet format become, in this context, spaces for dis/encounters. Showcasing the productivity of those dialogues and silences, they serve as a platform to investigate the multi-lingual, cross-cultural modes of literary experimentation which enable the articulation of distant intimacies and ephemeral, estranged networks. In this context, BD's *Belleza y Felicidad* serves as an archive of these hemispheric dis/encounters, of fleeting instances of impossible togetherness.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to describe the ways in which the precarious modes of production, circulation, and reception of ByF and BD literary and visual artworks both enable and are enabled by social networks grounded on embodied, affective approaches to aesthetic practices. I argue that those queer/feminist creative networks become embedded in the Argentine and U.S. hybrid works I study. This dissertation deploys the notion of ‘distant intimacies’ to account for the formal, affective, and sensorial qualities of those works as well as for the specific modes of queer relationality on which they are grounded. Through their investment in queer, distant intimacies, these literary and visual objects and scenes consistently investigate experimental modes of community formation. Such investigation, in turn, grounds ByF chapbooks and visual artworks’ exploration of what I term ‘dystopian utopias’—queer imaginings, materialities, performances, and visuals which function to rethink radical politics at a moment of neoliberal social crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These works’ dys/utopian projections give account of the complex ways in which recent and long histories of local and global economic, social, and political violence are enmeshed with queer affects and desires in the Argentine context.

The hemispheric encounters and connections I track throughout this dissertation have taught me other ways of thinking about national literatures and creative practices. As a Latin American woman pursuing a Ph.D. in the U.S., I have long been disheartened by the scarcity of serious networks for academic exchange and horizontal, balanced modes of dialogue between South and North. Following the affective and creative transits of queer and feminist writers and artists across borders has deepened my conviction that, as critics, we need to join these hemispheric conversations. There is much to learn from the important explorations of alternative ways of connecting and relating across borders

which the queer/feminist projects I study enact, as well as potentially from other creative encounters and exchanges which, at this very moment, might be thriving unnoticed below the radar.

As outlined in this dissertation's Introduction, the hemispheric encounters I track here suggest a number of directions for further research in the fields of literary methodology and contemporary experimental literatures. However, I have chosen to focus on examining the ways in which, exploiting a range of material, visual, verbal, and performative resources, these queer/feminist scenes and aesthetic practices negotiate and work through imaginaries of structural change. Living in the U.S. has granted me the necessary distance and perspective to look back to Argentina, my home country, much more lovingly but also much more critically. It has been sad to observe how, in spite of recent gender and gay marriage laws and efforts to protect the physical and psychological integrity of women, everyday violence against us is rampant.¹⁶⁴ The ongoing legacies of patriarchal and homophobic modes of understanding the social and the political are, to say the least, deeply disturbing. Thus this dissertation's investment in making sense of the ways in which, at a period defined by queer liberalism, ByF and BD queer/feminist aesthetic works and practices are helping us re-imagine what politics is and what it can do.

These works and scenes have taught me to read, see, touch, feel, and write differently, leading me to rethink and transform my own ways of thinking about literature and the visual. For this reason, I conclude this dissertation with *The Tiny Tour*, a 2007 visual/literary work by U.S. poet Dorothea Lasky.¹⁶⁵ My reading of this piece threads

¹⁶⁴ Just a few days ago, on June 3, a historic and massive demonstration against femicides and all forms of violence against women gathered thousands of people in front of the national Congress in Buenos Aires under the banner 'ni una menos' ('no more murdered women').

¹⁶⁵ Lasky was raised in St Louis, Missouri. She earned an MFA at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and holds a doctorate in Education and Creativity from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2013, she was a Bagley Wright Fellow in poetry and is now an Assistant Professor of Poetry at Columbia

together many of the concerns which have driven this dissertation. It is no coincidence that my final reflection focuses on a literary/visual object – as throughout this dissertation, I set out to let the work itself unfold alongside my writing. I conjure it here to listen attentively as it speaks back and with the other works I have focused on. Finally, as well as resonating with what has already been said, I am interested in *The Tiny Tour*'s capacity to suggest further avenues of investigation.

My focus on *The Tiny Tour* enables me to further visibilize and grant attention to ByF writers' connections to the underground U.S. literary scene, conveying a sense of wider hemispheric, synchronous creative and affective networks. Dorothea Lasky is one of the key voices within those networks: Stuart Krimko initially introduced her poetry to Cecilia Pavón and Fernanda Laguna, leading to the publication of the 2010 ByF magazine 'Ceci y Fer II,' an anthology of work by Pavón, Laguna, Lasky, and Ariana Reines (the two U.S. poets' works were translated into Spanish by Krimko himself). Lasky's poetry collection *Thunderbird* has been translated into Spanish and published in 2014 under the title *Pájaro del trueno* by independent and ByF-related press 'Triana,' and her manifesto *Poetry is not a Project* was read live by Pavón within 'Tu Rito,' an experimental art space founded by Laguna after ByF closed its doors. This is, in fact, quite telling of the ways in which U.S. poetry currently enters into dialogue with contemporary Argentine scenes. The chapbook *Poetry is not a Project* was celebrated at

University's School of the Arts. She is the author of four full-length collections of poetry: *Rome*, *Thunderbird*, *Black Life* and *Awe*, and her writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *POETRY*, *Boston Review*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*. A significant part of her work was initially published in chapbook format: some of the poems in *Awe* were originally published in the chapbooks *The Hatmaker's Wife* (Braincase Press, 2006), *Art* (H_NGM_N B__KS, 2005), and *Alphabets & Portraits* (Anchorite Press, 2004). As I outline throughout this dissertation, such investment in the chapbook format is intimately tied to the alternative modes of production and circulation of literature deployed by recent generations of U.S. poets, and to the complex ways in which those modes function as a key element in their poetics. Lasky, Reines and Krimko, in fact, have all manifested their commitment with alternative modes of literary production, publication and circulation, as well as with the materiality of literature, through their independent presses Katalanche, Mal-o-Mar, and Sandpaper respectively.

'Tu Rito' because the work, both through its content and format, articulates the value of DIY, non-commercial modes of poetry and art which were crucial to the ByF project. In the face of the relentless advance of mainstream, global literary and art world markets, this text calls for the type of experimental exploration of non-institutional spaces for and of poetry carried out at ByF – spaces invested in the investigation of alternative ways of bringing hemispheric scenes, as well as visual and textual languages, together.

While located in Philadelphia, Lasky is simultaneously connected to the Belladonna* collaborative, which I focus on in Chapter Three: she participated in Belladonna*'s book release party in 2010 by presenting her newly published poetry compilation *Black Life* at Dixon Place, and donated personal objects to a BD benefit auction and dance party in support of its feminist poetics publications in 2013. Lasky's work, with its close links to both ByF and BD, serves as a connecting thread which productively brings together both scenes by further visibilizing their common explorations and mutual commitments. If at both ByF and BD poetry crosses media and genre boundaries through its attention to the visual and the material, poetry and performance simultaneously shade into each other in Lasky's work *The Tiny Tour*.

Some years before Lasky first encountered ByF artists, the poet organized a very particular book tour for the release of her first poetry anthology, *Awe* (2007). Lasky explains the tour in the following terms in her website, where she uploaded the videos of its poetry readings/performances:

Due to the practical limitations of trying to put on a full scale national poetry tour at this time, I have decided to call back to a long intellectual tradition of holding salons, happenings, lectures, and readings within one's home through something I am going to call a Tiny Tour. I am going to squeeze a book tour into my Philadelphia apartment, and invite guests to experience the readings by joining me there and here on this website. Guest readers, musicians, dancers and other performers will join me for a series of readings in the kitchen, living room, bathroom, bedroom, fire escape, and hallway. It is my big hope to both gain agency over the event of a poetry reading, as well as demystify the experience for

a larger poetry-hungry audience, by providing easy access to my readings over the internet. (<http://www.birdinsnow.com/2007/10/what-is-the-tiny-tour/>)

The first installment of *The Tiny Tour* came out in October, roughly a month after *Awe* was released in early September, and the project continued during the following months. As a doctoral student in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, Lasky took a film class and rented a camera from the school in order to undertake this DIY filmmaking experience. After the shooting of the reading performances by an audience member, she edited them herself and uploaded them to YouTube and Vimeo.

In “Tiny Tour Movie,” a promotional 2007 video Lasky shoots with her best friend, poet Laura Solomon, the two writers anticipate the upcoming work (Figure 47).¹⁶⁶ They each read a poem into the camera, one at a time, sitting next to each other as they perform, both looking straight at us. As in the case of ByF writings’ focus on Cecilia and Fernanda’s queer friendship, the tight, and at times homoerotic friendship between Dorothea and Laura, is thematized in the former’s work as well as in their shared publications such as the chapbook *On Old Ideas* (2007). Echoing the network of writers and artists who coalesced around Pavón and Laguna’s ByF, and deploying a mode of feminist DIY participatory media based on video and performance, *The Tiny Tour* explores the expansion of dyadic women’s friendships as locus of production to a larger community of friends/poets who become both the audience and producers of the work.

In this respect, the work functions as an archive of the network of poets and friends showcased in the video – they both constitute the work through their on-camera appearances and collectively produce it by taking turns filming and reading. Significantly, in her statement above Lasky presents her book tour as involving not only, as might be expected, her own poetry but also the creative production of a larger group of

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1RmPXkvJt4>

artists and friends. Rather than portraying publishing and reading as individual endeavors, *The Tiny Tour* imagines them as communal processes. Since its very conception, this work thus resonates with the collaborative modes of production of independent chapbook presses like BD and ByF.

In this way, *The Tiny Tour* offers a portrait of a Philadelphia based network of poets, highlighting their centrality to the production of literature through a work that roughly showcases its participatory, DIY seams. In the middle of a performance inside her closet, which includes her playfully suitable poem “Whatever you paid for that sweater,” Lasky interrupts her reading to ask Laura (Solomon), who is doing the camera work: “Laura, how long has it been? Like 5 min. 5? Oh shit!”¹⁶⁷ In the ‘hallway leg’ of *The Tiny Tour* ¹⁶⁸, the image quality of the shots is substandard, as the light is too dim. It is hard to make out the profiles of the readers and audience and the focus is consistently off. The ludic introduction to the session is carried out with a dog on a leash in reference to those who frequently go through the hallway space. Three poets (Lasky, Sherlock and Behrle) take turns behind the camera in what feels like a very informal, fun get together with friends. After the readings, audience members (who are also poets) are invited to read. People tell anecdotes, tease each other, and overall allow us to witness the intimacy of their friendship.

Both in the closet and hallway readings, the video’s behind-the-ropes are thus coarsely rendered visible, underlining once more its amateur, DIY quality as well as the fact that, even if staged, registering and recording this community of poets and artists, with their forms of intimacy and affective/creative exchanges, is what the work is actually about. The exposed seams and crude treatment of the video medium, devoid of the formal and aesthetic sophistication of which it is capable, echoes the simple, DIY, on

¹⁶⁷ <https://vimeo.com/1076947>

¹⁶⁸ <http://www.birdinsnow.com/2008/03/hallway-leg-tiny-tour/>

the go quality and materiality of BD and, in particular, ByF chapbooks, with their inexpensive trinkets, missing pages and frequent spelling mistakes. DIY amateurism is, in both projects, central in the sense that it enables artists to playfully cross disciplinary lines and try out other roles and aesthetic media – while at ByF visual artists write books and writers perform their work, in *The Tiny Tour* poets become performers as well as filmmakers working behind the camera and in the video's edition.

As a video performance filmed by an audience member, *The Tiny Tour* formally converses with Roberto Jacoby's *Darkroom*. Lasky's piece resonates with *Darkroom*'s investment in the formation of intimate publics of artists and poets who are simultaneously the collaborative producers and audience of the work itself. Intimate bonds thus function as driving forces of these works, which in turn operate in different ways as informal archives of those very intimacies, relationalities, and communities. If in *Darkroom* a strange world of alien-looking creatures are surreptitiously watched and filmed by audience members, *The Tiny Tour* portrays yet another inaccessible community performing for the camera – a community made up of writers and artists dressed up to recite poetry, with their particular interactions and 'habitat.' Video technology operates in both cases as the medium through which we get a mediated glimpse of these experimental performances, since the videos of the works are later published online. Both works are invested in the audience's participation to the point that the viewers produce the work by filming it. And, while through embodied sensation and physical closeness in the dark, *Darkroom* investigates the dys/topian dimensions of queer intimacies, *The Tiny Tour* explores the cramped, awkward, and at times unsettling modes of togetherness which its reading performances in the house's tiny, private rooms give way to. The cluttered distribution of bodies in space produces the sensation of psychological

vulnerability in Lasky, who declares herself unable to step into her usual performing voice and persona.

Through the YouTube and Vimeo videos, as viewers we are invited to take a peek, via the technological mediation of an online platform, into Lasky's home, her stuff, the rooms in her house, her clothes. Lasky's playful set up, in this respect, enables a unique, spatial investigation of the role of distant intimacies in poetry readings and reception through its disposition of reading/listening bodies in both physical and cyber space. It is fitting that the spatial exploration of intimacy in these video-performances is staged in her own house. The home can be read as an extension of the body in space, and, simultaneously, as the space of the body, its needs and rhythms, its most intimately private rituals (Figures 48, 49). As the work's audience, we witness a video rendering of a world in which we do not belong, we become intruders in her house, an intimate, embodied territory which is rendered palpable through the spatial configuration of each recorded reading. *The Tiny Tour* thus functions, like ByF and BD chapbooks, as a register of the everyday lives, private spaces, felt and lived intimacies and vulnerabilities of both the poet and her network of artists and friends.

If the chapbooks I analyze in this dissertation grow out of the dys/utopia of DIY, inexpensive, amateur publishing of and by friends and a focus on works which visibilize complex queer and feminist intimacies, *The Tiny Tour* is built on the related conception of an inexpensive book tour which might enable a poet to circulate her work in dialogue with her literary/artistic scene without resorting to the machinery of literary presses and institutions. The collaborative modes of producing culture I have examined in this dissertation thrive on the invention of intimate forms of writing, publishing, creating, circulating, reading, viewing, feeling, and showcasing aesthetic works – an invention

which, once unleashed, might just be the first step towards both imagining and enacting politics otherwise.

Figures

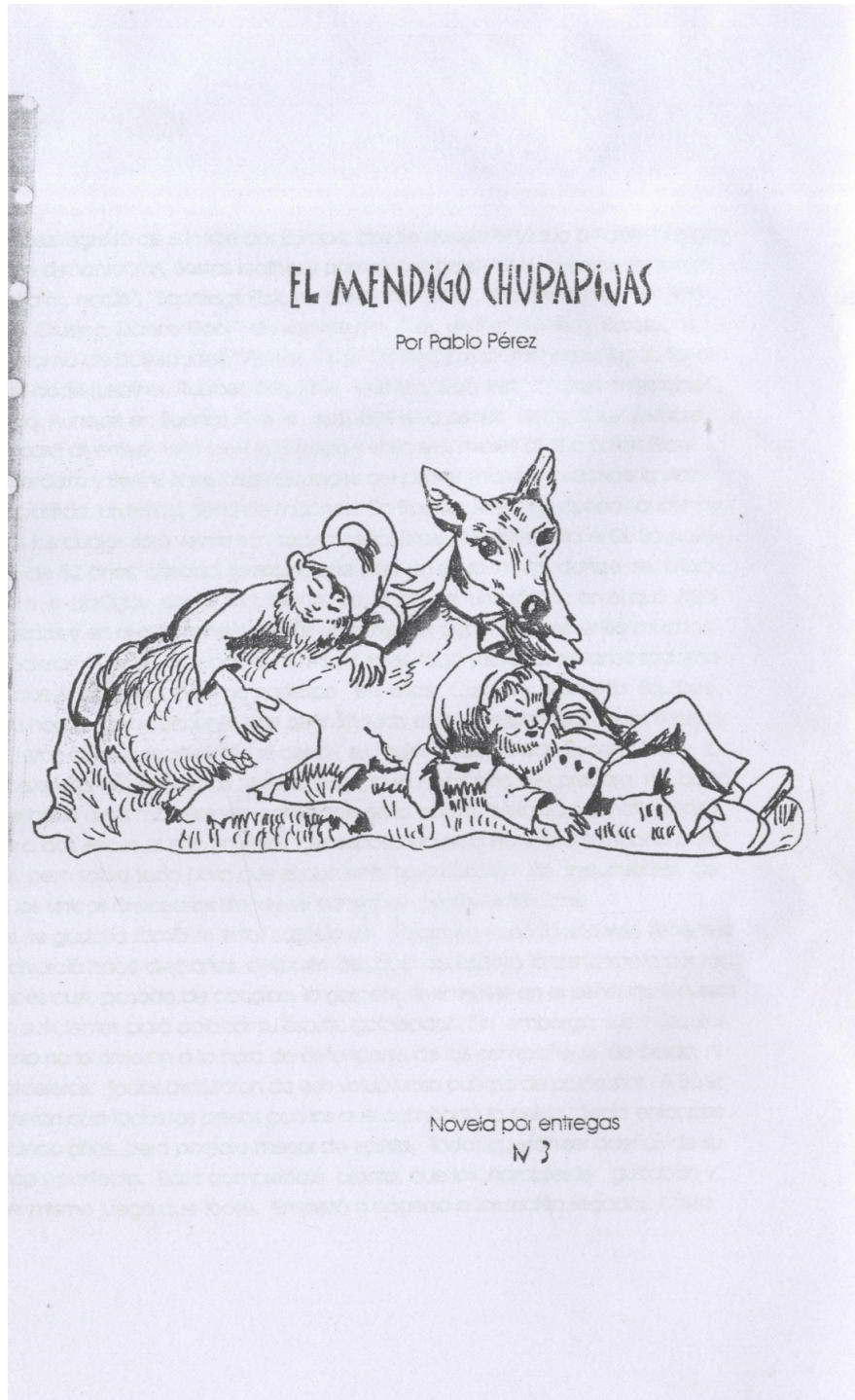


Figure 1. *El mendigo chupapijas*, 1998-1999, Number 3, Pablo Pérez. Chapbook cover.

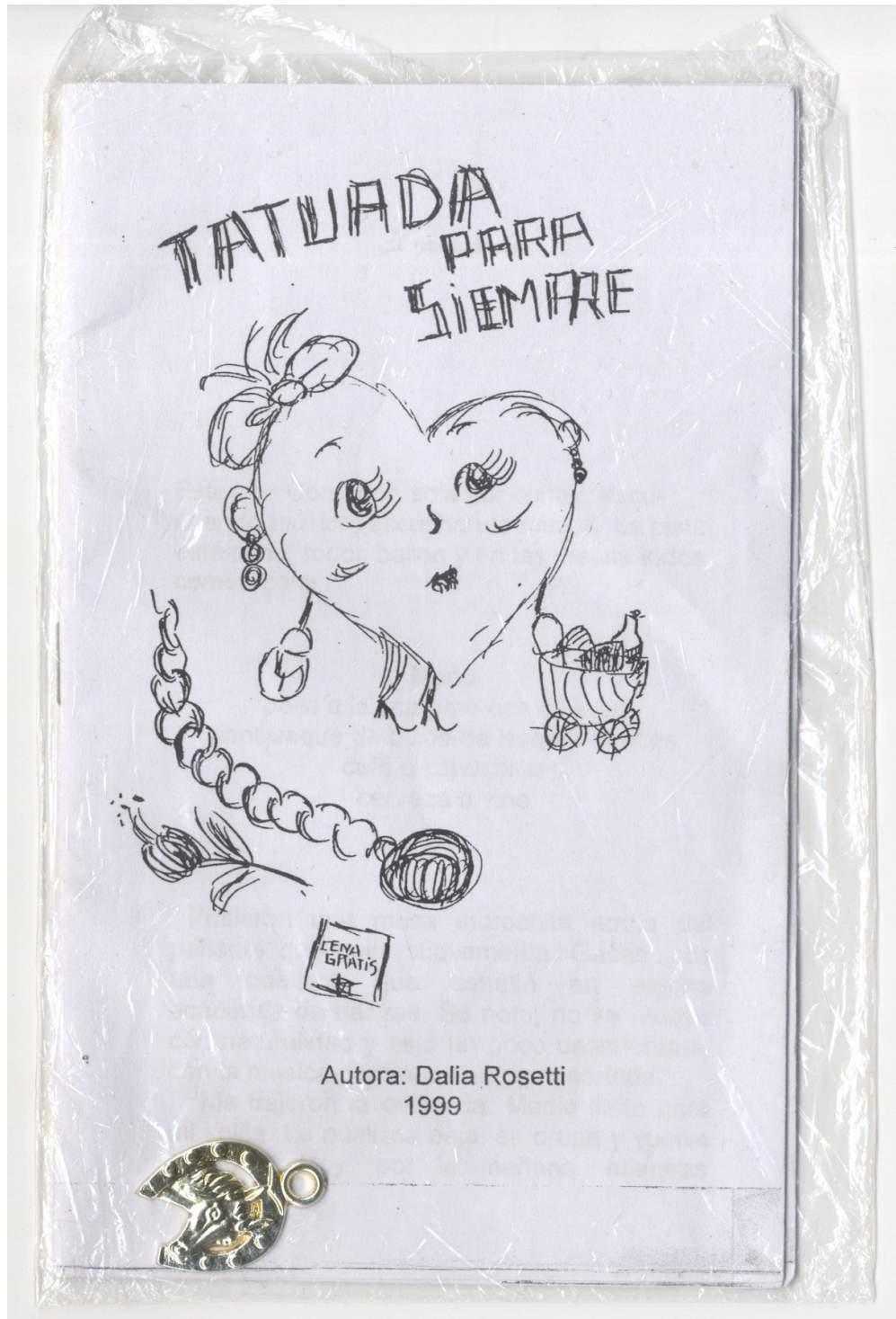


Figure 2. *Tatuada para siempre*, 1999, Dalia Rosetti. Half letter-sized pages folded and stapled at the middle, plastic bag, scotch tape and golden plastic pendant. Drawing by Fernanda Laguna.



Figure 3. *Tatuada para siempre*, 1999, Dalia Rosetti. Golden plastic pendant.

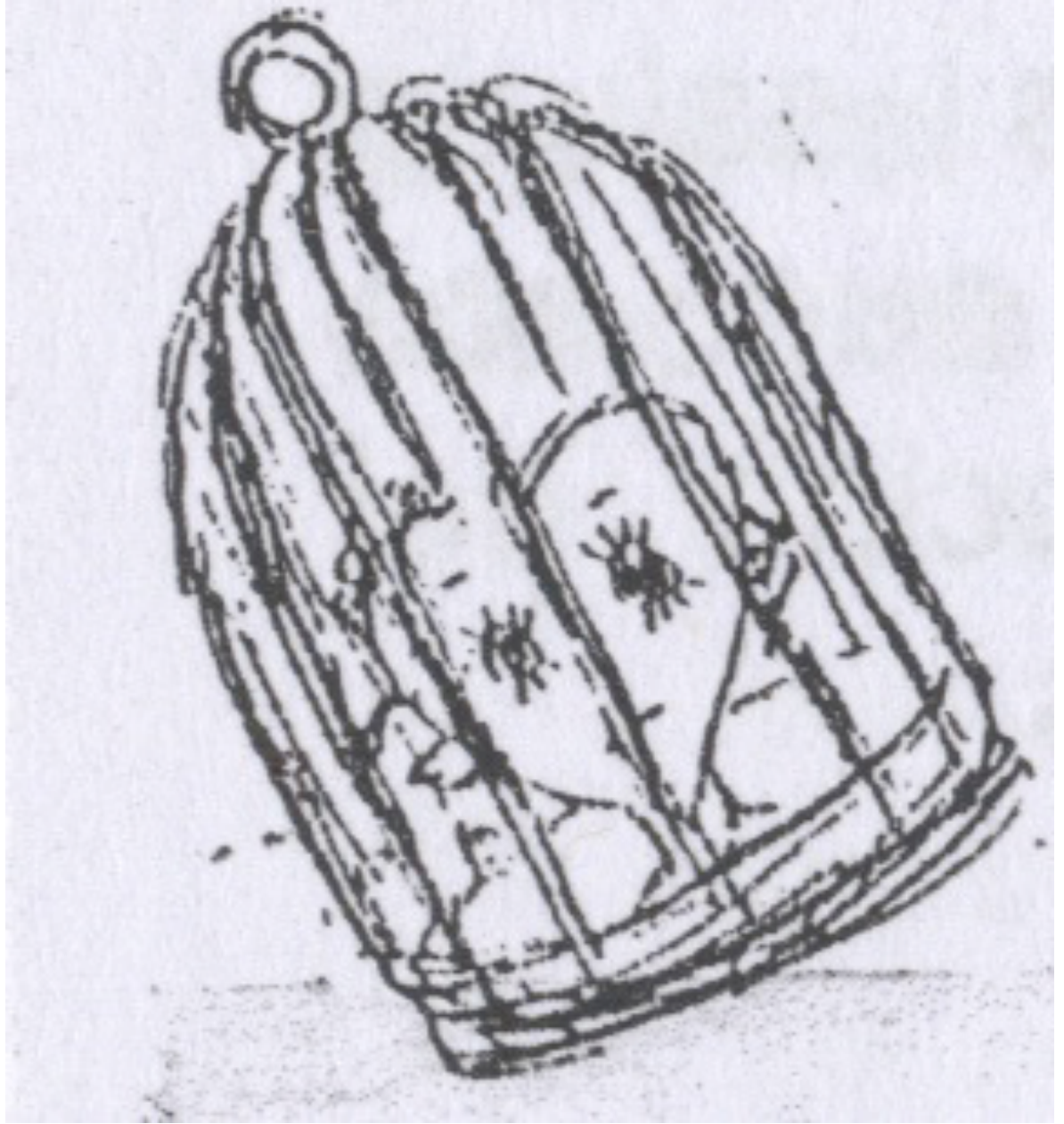


Figure 4. *Tatuada para siempre*, 1999, Dalia Rosetti. Line drawing by Fernanda Laguna.



Figure 5. Pablo Pérez, *El mendigo chupapijas*, 1999, Number 5. To color.



Figure 6. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 7. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 8. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 9. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 10. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 11. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 12. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 13. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 14. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 15. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 16. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 17. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 18. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 19. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.

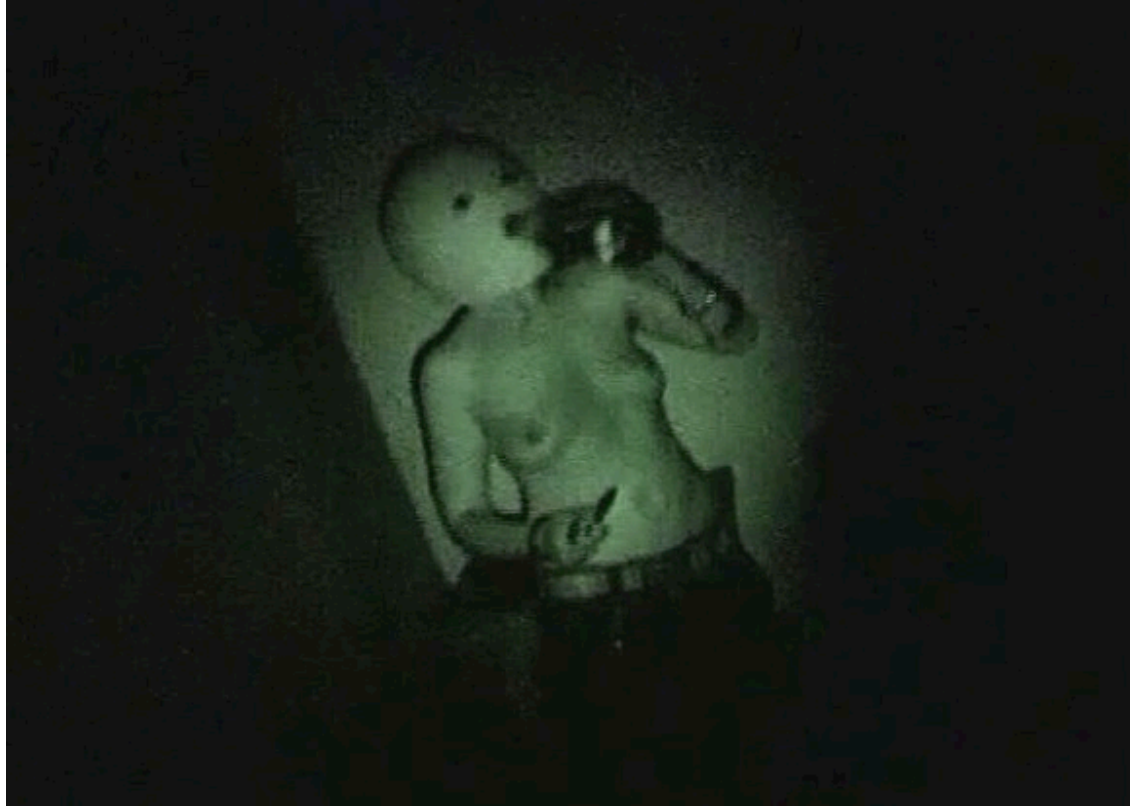


Figure 20. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 21. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 22. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 23. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 24. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.



Figure 25. ByF Basement, *Darkroom* (with light), Roberto Jacoby. ByF, 2002.

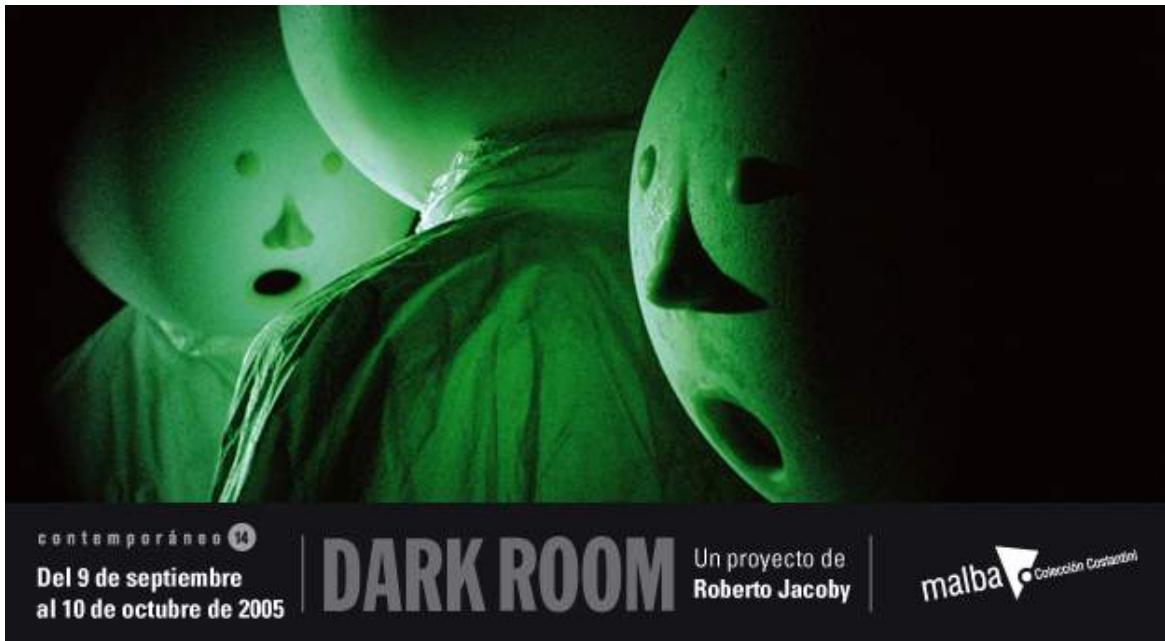


Figure 26. Brochure of *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 27. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 28. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 29. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 30. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 31. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 32. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 33. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 34. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 35. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.



Figure 36. *Darkroom*, Roberto Jacoby. MALBA, 2005.

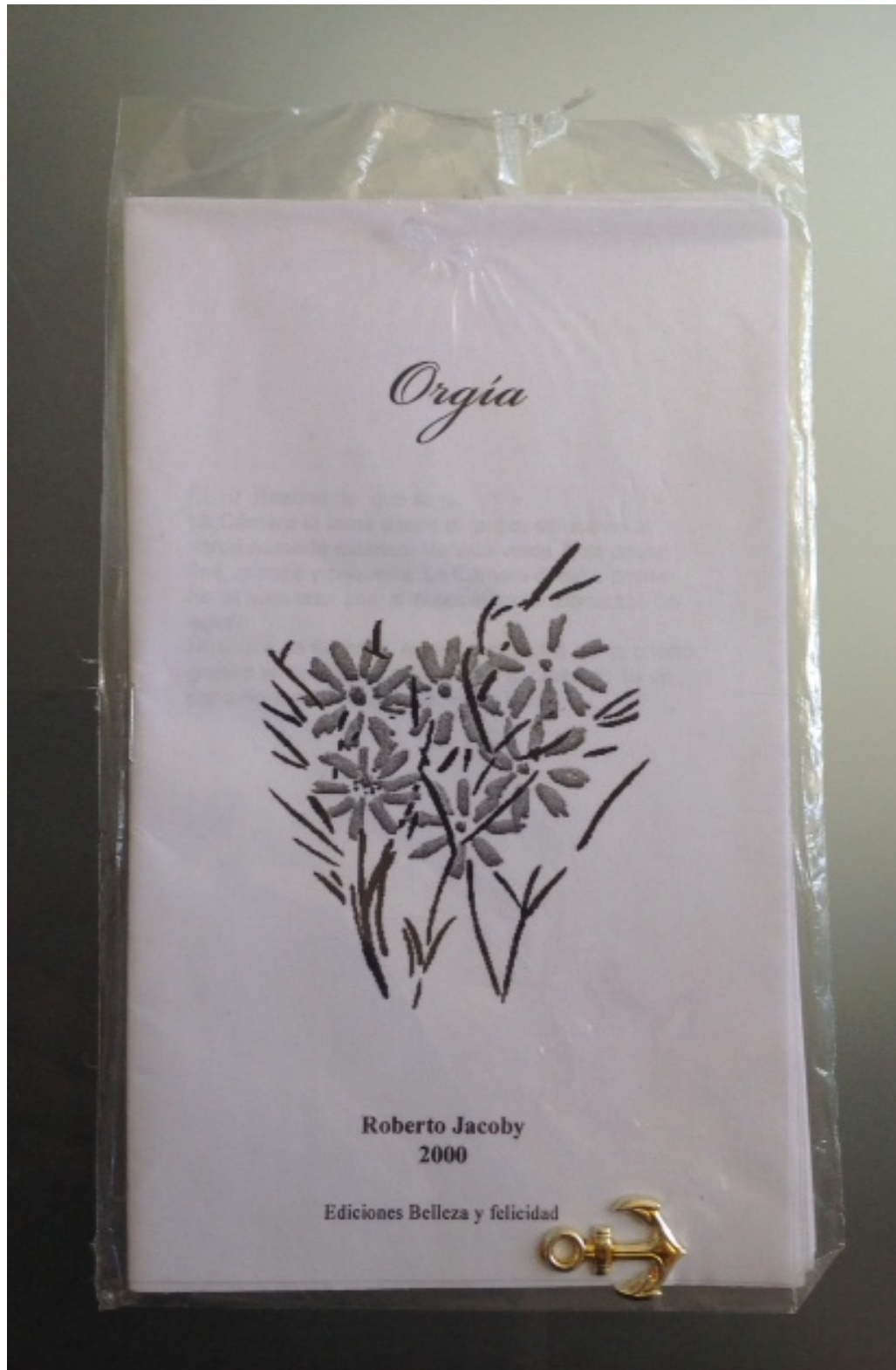
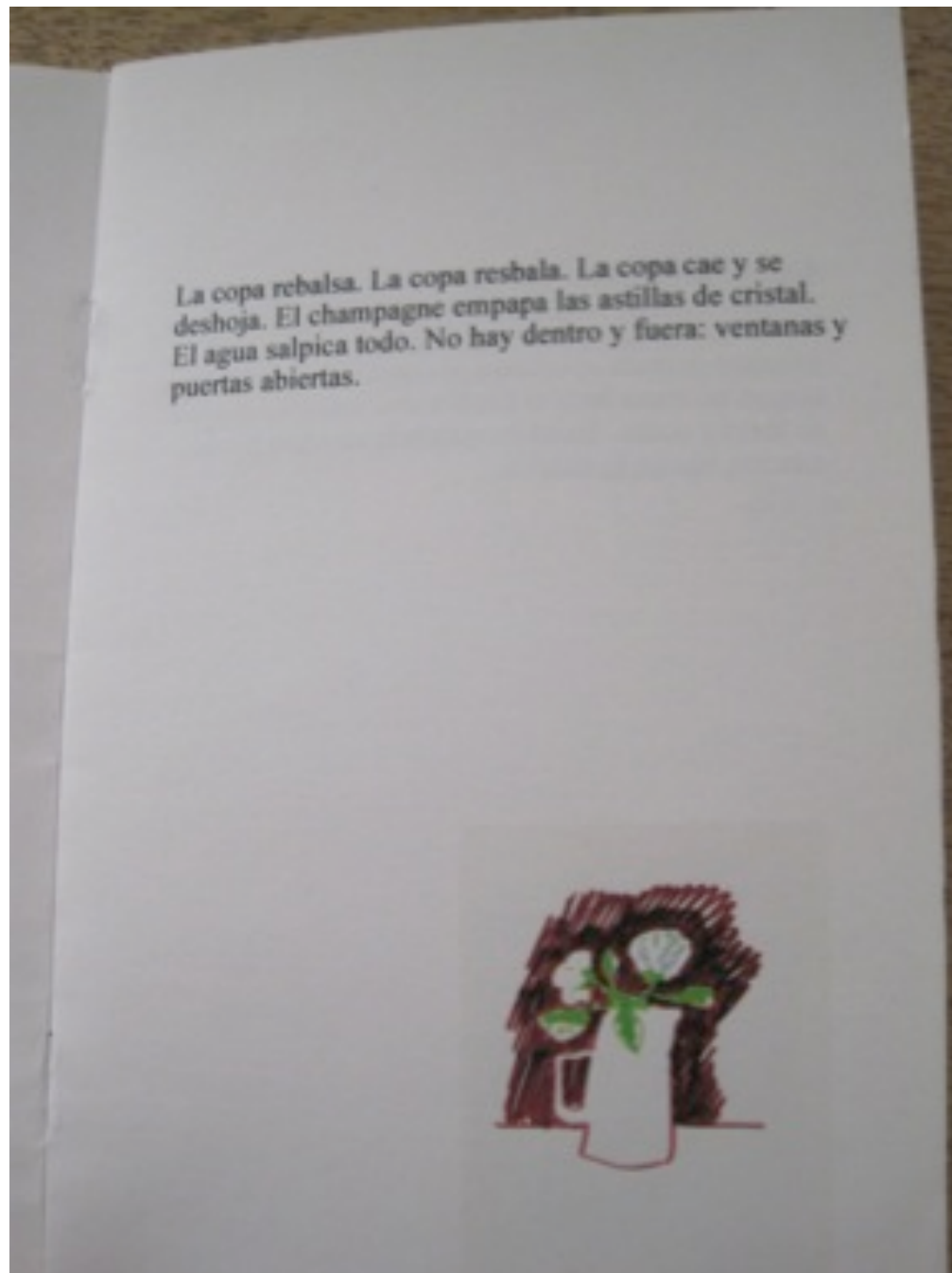


Figure 37. *Orgía*, Roberto Jacoby, 2000.



La copa rebalsa. La copa resbala. La copa cae y se deshoja. El champagne empapa las astillas de cristal. El agua salpica todo. No hay dentro y fuera: ventanas y puertas abiertas.



Figure 38. *Orgía*, Roberto Jacoby, 2000.

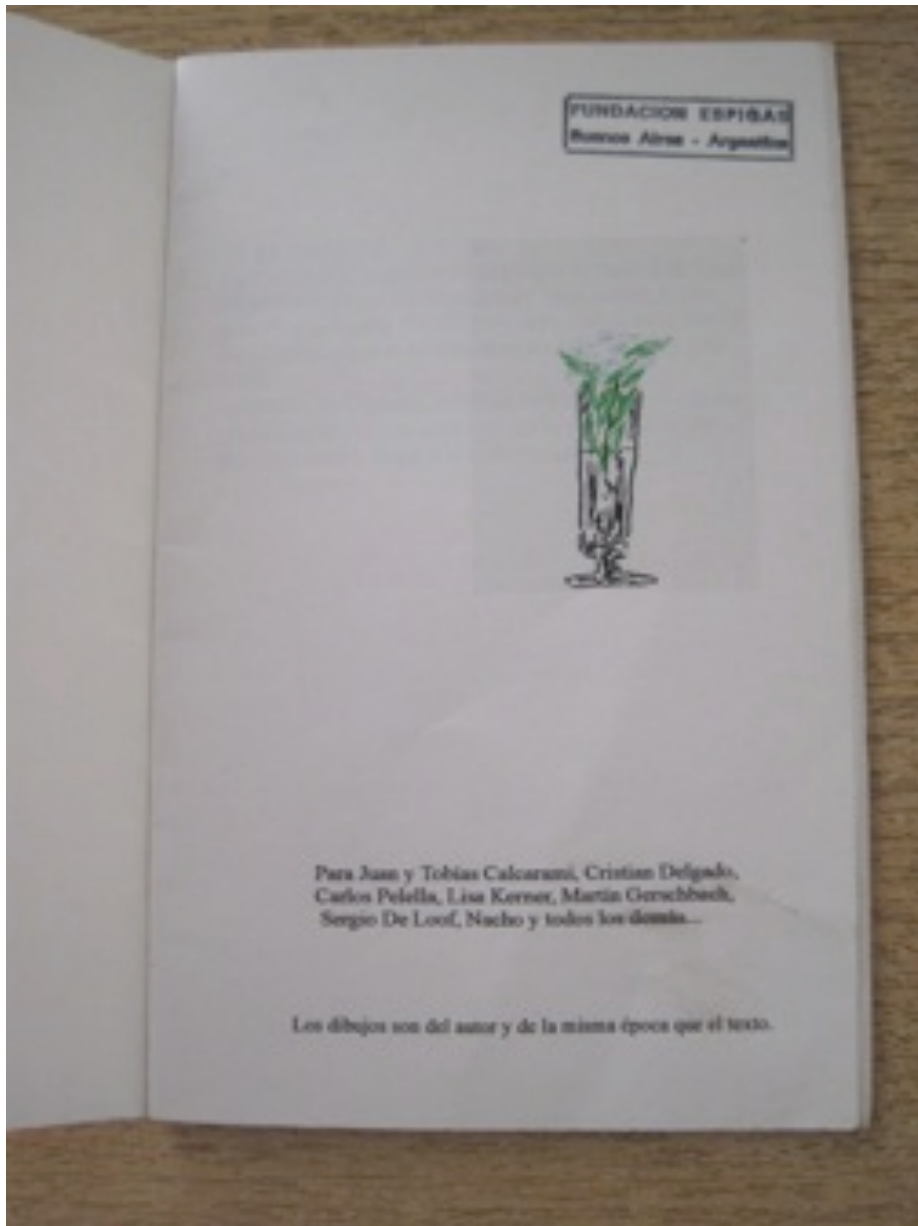


Figure 39. *Orgía*, Roberto Jacoby, 2000.



Figure 40. *No soy un clown*, Roberto Jacoby, 2000.



Figure 41. *No soy un clown*, Roberto Jacoby, 2000.



Figure 42. *La castidad*, Roberto Jacoby and Syd Krochmalny, 2006-7.



Figure 43. *La castidad*, Roberto Jacoby and Syd Krochmalny, 2006-7.



Figure 44. *La castidad*, Roberto Jacoby and Syd Krochmalny, 2006-7.



Figure 45. Belladonna* poetry chaplets.

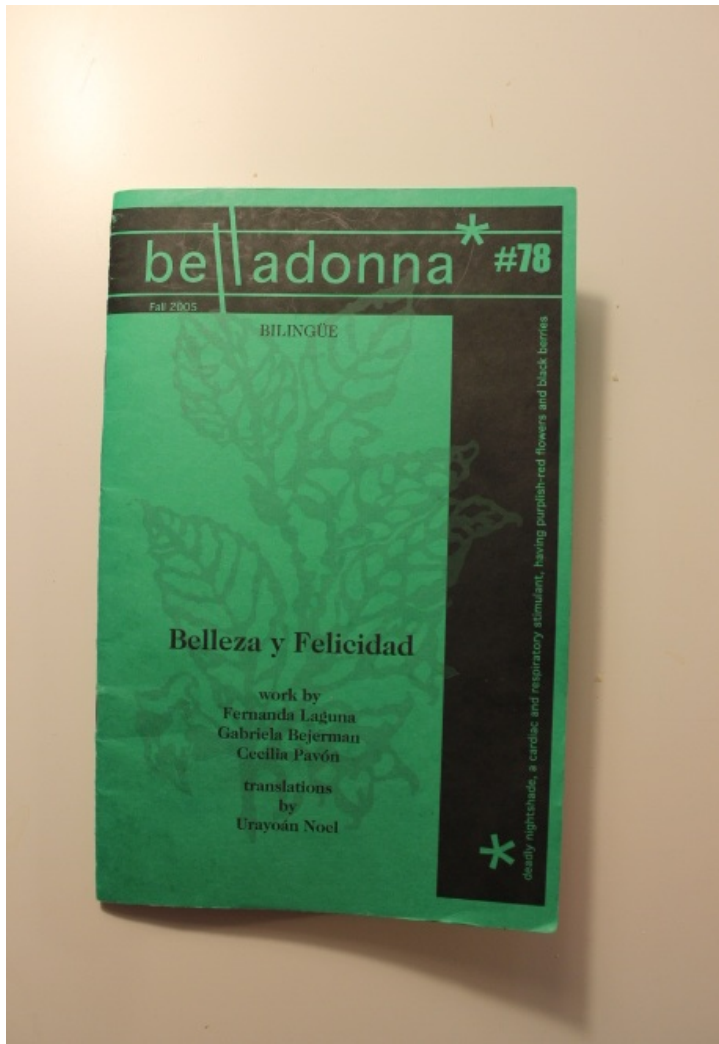


Figure 46. Belladonna*'s *Belleza y Felicidad* (2005). Fernanda Laguna, Gabriela Bejerman and Cecilia Pavón.



Figure 47. The Tiny Tour promotional video (2007), Laura Solomon and Dorothea Lasky.



Figure 48. *The Tiny Tour* (2007), Bathroom Leg, Laura Solomon.



Figure 49. *The Tiny Tour* (2007), Bathroom Leg, CA Conrad.

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