Víctor Ramírez Tur (ed.)

QUEER MOURNING

Grieving at the Museum

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUEER MOURNING: MAKING THE MUSEUM A PLACE TO CRY

Víctor Ramírez Tur

Anonim, *Altarpiece from the tomb of the cavalier Sancho Sánchez Carrillo. Weepings*, ca. 1295 — Gothic, room 19

LITANY

For those who cried in front of a gothic altarpiece, have mercy.

For those who knelt and asked a saint for a favour, have mercy.

For those who imagined that the virgin began to weep, thus sharing her intimate mourning, have mercy.

Pray for those who stooped and claimed, along with mourners carved on the base of a sarcophagus, the dignity of the body of a missing lover.

Pray for those who, pierced by deep mourning, believed that royal blood flowed from a martyred body.

Mary Magdalene, maenad at the foot of the cross, pray for us.

Sorrowful Virgin, beacon of collective mourning and eternal support mechanism, pray for us.

Saint Sebastian, sexy, pray for us.

Weepers of the Hermitage of San Andrés de Mahamud, with your haute couture mourning wolves, pray for us.

Mothers of the bombing of Lleida, discarded before the body of your children annihilated by fascism, be heard.

PSALM OF MISUSE

Miserable, the control of the images. Unfortunate are those who fear audiences capable of using the works, fleeing from the rigidity of their interpretations. What misfortune for the theologians anxious to “clarify” the unique meanings of the images! How hapless the art historians eager to discipline and to install prophylactic approaches that hinder the most intimate uses of those female spectators, whose desires, their readings, they can no longer satisfy. How sad that of the muse-

um incapable of facilitating contact with the deepest areas of the experience of its users! What a pity to have tried to strip the works of the traces of their uses.

So blessed are the misguided and uncontrolled uses.

Praise to people capable of letting themselves be possessed by the onslaught of paintings, marble and stained glass windows. To them, open to rediscovering themselves “with the hope in the active role of the images that should act where others no longer could or did not want to, [because] the images fill voids that arise in the domestic, interior world, functions being transferred to them, which the society cannot face with its own means, thus yielding to supernatural and extraterritorial forces” (Belting, 65). Delight in the image as a means, as mediator, intermediary, as welcoming genealogy, as dense temporality. And, above all, glory! Glory to the images diverted to them, with their crooked uses, we can ask for help, kiss, place small lamps and put flowers! Glory to those images that heal us, that cry with our longing, that summon other friends around them to hold our hands! Glory!

SONG OF THE MOURNERS
MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

Anonim, *Altarpiece from the tomb of the cavalier Sancho Sánchez Carrillo. Weeping*, ca.1295

So let's look for grace in those gestures in the museum's collection that are most likely to provide hugs, shoulders to cry on and painful invocations of justice.

To you, the mourners who at the end of the 13th century decorated the tomb of the knight Sancho Sánchez Carrillo and his wife Juana in the church of San Andrés de Mahamud, we confess. We ask you not only to mourn the privileged nobleman who was able to afford a burial of eternal dignity by founding nine chaplaincies, but also to cut off your beards for us.

To you, mourners who have lost your colour from so much lamenting in the monastery of Santa María de Matallana since the end of the 13th century, we turn. Rebel

against those who use your pain to manifest their rank, raise your arms beyond the Téllez de Meneses family, who bought your infinite tear thanks to the protection of King Alfonso VIII and the foundation of a Cistercian monastery, and come to support our landslides.

To you, mothers who lost their children on 2nd November, 1937 in the bombing of Lleida, and whose painful memory was also buried, we owe ourselves. Help us find the ghostly language that allows us to invoke those life forms that were lost in burying your children and your mourning.

PRAYER

> "Here everything is passage; Before the image of the lamentation, the viewer somehow feels that the sobbing woman passes through him. Suddenly, he finds himself on a bridge between his present—his own mourning, for example—and a long memory of the sacred text, in such a way that he becomes almost, in any age, an early Christian. The image of lamentation literally *transports* him to affections, places and times that are not immediately his own and that, however, lead him at every moment to the most vivid of his emotions." (Didi-Huberman, 157).

PSALM OF AFFECTIVE BRIDGES BETWEEN WEEPERS.

First Reading

Despite good intentions, the hierarchy was made. Despite its apparent democratic character, death did not erase differences. Well, only the nobles could access the burial inside the sacred enclosure. And how monumental was that privilege, standing stone sepulchres with petrified weepers towering several feet through the studs. And how obscene was that display of rank, building pantheons dotted with family coats of arms, elevations of the aristocratic soul, dignified mourners and adorned horses. And how classist was the business of death with its hierarchies of funerary typologies according to the estate.

But the peasant women, the mothers, the blacksmiths, the weavers or the chocolate makers, condemned to bury their bones outside the sacred precinct, did not throw themselves to their knees against the ground to mourn you. Perhaps they did not tear their clothes to mourn the death of Jesus either. And perhaps those weeping companions were simply a refuge of affective empathy and a resort to work through their mourning, to find comfort, to be heard and infected with a vulnerable fury.

PRAYER

> "The gestures of the *pietà* [...] continue to cross the history of our bodies and our emotions, and not only the history of our arts" (Didi-Huberman, 249).

Second reading

Despite good intentions, the hierarchy is made. Despite its apparent democratic character, death does not erase differences. Well, queer people continue to suffer greater exposure to violence. And how hostile is the violence that denies certain lives as worthy of being considered lives and, therefore, lived with dignity. And how cruel is that same violence, that even after annihilating queer lives, it denies them the possibility of being mourned.

But the activists, the performers, the art historians, the deviant and the hurt, condemned to suffer patriarchal violence, drop their knees to the ground and cover themselves with veils to mould new forms of queer mourning. Or perhaps not so new, turned into secular and dissident mourners, covering themselves with mourning she-wolves, tearing their hair and tearing their skins to sing a furious song of anguish and injustice.

HYMN TO THE NEW FORMS OF QUEER MOURNING

Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, *In mourning and in rage,* 1977

Glory to you, entourage of seventy mourners who accompanied, like a horde of tragic visibility, the artists Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz to cry out in mourning and rage after the sexual abuse and murder of ten women in a single month in Los Angeles in 1977. Be honoured for having had the strength to become an antenna, allowing, with your brave vulnerability, your bodies to radiate the pain that hit them, thus tearing you all apart. And be invoked with abandon because, by putting the body at the service of community sadness, you help us become aware of the choreographic resemblance between the gestures of extreme anguish and those of street confrontation, between backs arched in pain and those throwing stones at the police, be-

tween the open mouths capable of invoking the painful cry of the Gorgons, between the nails that tear faces and the heavy feet. Glory to you for letting the procession go outside. By allowing, thank God, that the stridency of the bugle, the dizziness of the incense, the beating of the drums and the shouts of the bearers do not remain entrenched under the skin. Come, full of rage, in front of Los Angeles City Hall, to collectivise the crying, disseminate it and transform it into a polyphonic and forceful demand for social justice.

Glory to you, Lukas Avendaño, who sat *Looking for Bruno* in the traditional mourning dress of the Zapotec women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to mourn with, reaching out so that the pain suffered by the disappearance of your brother would spread, expand and weave a web of *loudspeakers* in which to project the sound of a political train. Lukas,

Lukas Avendaño, *Buscando a Bruno*, 2019

full of grace, holding in mourning some meetings of intermittent fading to remember that there is someone missing, and that this lack, the result of patriarchal and colonial violence, must be repaired. May your living be welcomed and may your social cry interrupt the unpunished murders.

Glory to the activists who attended the Madrid

Orgullo Crítico Demonstration in Madrid, 2016

Critical Pride demonstration in 2016 veiled and in mourning, carrying banners and carrying expressions of painful pathos for the death of 49 women in a queer nightclub in Orlando. Glory when dancing a lament capable of disrupting the normative social order, dancing the frontier of mourning, that which moves between the expression of anguish before the loss - *dolum* - and the impulse of conflictive confrontation - *duellum*. Cavorting between the capacity of mercy to show

an emotion of great love that dignifies the torn bodies and shouting a haunting melody to call things by their name: LGBTI-phobic attack.

TRADE OF THE DEAD - DUSK

Remember, dear reader, that you have between those hands that caress a screen a heterodox book of hours to convey deviant mourning. That each one of the laments that make up this book of prayers should transform the museum into an auditorium of shared weeping, making it easier for the tears of each one, those of Mary Magdalene, those of the medieval mourners, those of the deviant peasants, those of the painful queer and, of course, now yours too, becoming songs of all.

Choose the right time for your trade for the dead and take the tears you need. The laments are about the violence of the management of death that Júlia Sánchez sings, linking a Gothic tomb with the funeral lobbies of our time and all the discomforts derived. Mireia Sánchez's affectionate invocation of queer presences in the museum through supporting hands, intertwining the hands of medieval mourners with those of those lesbians who cared for their friends affected by HIV at a time when no one wanted to ap-

proach and care for those bodies. The visual elegies that Toni R. Juncosa relates, from the Spanish Civil War to the AIDS crisis, proposing an exercise of memory as a practice of radical hope and, above all, of intergenerational tenderness. Or the ashes collected by Diego Falconí, from which we can trace migrant sexual dissent and his prayers articulating other memories to summon, from the voids of the museum, those who are no longer there.

And, above all, don't be afraid of the cry of grief, don't be afraid, like the mourners, to let the body do what it needs, because in its painful violence it strongly invokes other voices, other shoulders and other supporting hands. And in this *compianto*, in this crying, let's shout with the images, let's shout in the museum, let's shout in the streets and transform ourselves into a chorus that is united, but also strident, that flows beyond the walls of the institution to install a revolution of regrets capable of accompanying us and demanding the eradication of heteropatriarchal violence.

Glory! Glory to our landslides, because they have the power to devastate and transform the landscape! Glory!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, S., *La política cultural de las emociones*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mèxic, 2014.

Belting, H., *Imagen y culto: una historia de la imagen anterior a la edad del arte*, Akal, Madrid, 2009.

Butler, J., *Vida precaria: el poder del duelo y la violencia*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2006.

———. *Marcos de guerra. Las vidas lloradas*, Ediciones Paidós, Barcelona, 2017.

Didi-Huberman, G., *Ninfa dolorosa. Ensayo sobre la memoria de un gesto.* Sense ciutat, Shangrila Ediciones, 2021.

VV. AA., *El gòtic a les col·leccions del MNAC*, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Lunwerg, Barcelona, 2011.

VV. AA., *Guia visual arte gótico*, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2005.

VV. AA. *Prefiguració del Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya*, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1992.

Wieck, R. S., *The Book of hours in medieval art and life*. Sense ciutat, Sotheby, 1988.

Yarza, J., *Formas artísticas de lo imaginario*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 1987.

A SCANDAL OR THE POWER TO DIE AND CRY TOGETHER

Júlia Sánchez Cid
Associació Som Provisionals

Anonim, *Sepulchre of a cavalryman of the Téllez de Menese familys*, ca. 1300
Gothic, room 20.1

Scandal:

1. Action or effect of shocking.

2. Objectionable action that attracts public attention.

3. Uproar.

4. Public scandal (law). Attack against indecency and good manners, which has a great significance or which is committed through advertising procedures.[1]

1 Scandal. Valencian normative dictionary. Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua. Web. 10/10/22.

Seven centuries ago someone created a sarcophagus and deposited a dead body in it. It was the Castilian noble family Téllez de Meneses who used their resources to send off with honour the knight buried in this tomb. But today no one knows his name, no one mourns his absence. Today the knight is anonymous, like the artist who represented his recumbent silhouette in stone.

It is often said that everyone is equal in the face of death, regardless of social status, because the time comes for all of us to die. This idea can be found in street conversations, songs and poems, and expresses a shared truth: we all die because it is part of being alive. But we don't die the same or experience mourning[2] in the same way. What we die of, how we die, who accompanies us, how our body is treated from a material and symbolic point of view, what rituals are performed, how we are remembered... All these experiences are conditioned by the place we occupy in the society in which we live.

2 As Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (study of care for dying people, grief and near-death experiences) explains, grief is the process of accepting the loss that serves to make room for other emotions and experiences in life.

We look again at the sarcophagus and find images of different moments of the funeral ritual. On one of the long sides, if we look closely, we can distinguish mourners scratch-

ing their faces and pulling their hair as a sign of mourning. This custom was previously prohibited by Alfonso X the Wise, so the Castilian nobles were making a show of power by ordering the creation of this sarcophagus that contradicted the royal mandates.

What interest can any king, government or state have in regulating funeral rituals in a certain way? With what aim have different ways of experiencing farewells and mourning been repressed (and are being repressed)? How do we say goodbye to our dead today? What relationship can there be between the regulation of mourning and the regulation of gender and sexuality?

In Spain, in 1996, the *Partido Popular* (The People's Party) government presided by José María Aznar approved a Royal Decree[3] with which the funeral sector was liberalised. As a result, small companies and public funeral services have gradually lost space, which has been occupied by larger private companies through contracts and concessions. An example of this phenomenon can be found in Barcelona, where funeral services were entirely municipal before 1998 and are currently 85% owned by a multinational.

3 ROYAL DECREE LAW 7/1996, of June 7, on urgent measures of a fiscal nature and the promotion and liberalisation of economic activity. Published in BOE no. 139, of 08/061996, page 18986.

This company, which has a monopoly in the Catalan capital, belongs to a Canadian pension fund (which is the main shareholder of the largest funeral home in France) and leads the sector in both Spain and Portugal.

This and four other billionaires dominate the funeral business in an industry that has more than a thousand different companies. The five that make up the oligopoly belong to well-known insurance companies,[4] which sell death insurance with which we as customers end up paying three times what we would spend if we paid for the funeral services with our savings.[5] Its advertising tells us about love, safety and care, while they profit from our deaths, imposing practices, imageries and also prices, which have doubled and tripled since the decade of the nineties.[6]

4 Libre mercado,« Five funeral homes share a third of the funerals held in Spain », 01/11/2021.

5 For more useful information, see the article "Death insurance: it isn't worth it" on the website of the Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios (OCU).

6 ORGANISATION OF CONSUMERS AND USERS, « Dark funeral homes. Little information and competition »,Compra Maestra, Nº. 386, 11/2013, p. 17-21.

Meanwhile, the legislation that regulates the sector has not undergone much modification since the Franco law of 1974. The legal framework leaves us few options and imposes a very small win-

dow of time. We have 48 hours from death to cremation or burial, and we can extend it to between 72 and 96 hours if we do a special treatment on the body (embalming, refrigeration or freezing). The law only allows us burial in a cemetery or cremation and, in addition, obliges us to contract a minimum of funeral services and products, to which 21% VAT is applied.[7] Entities such as the *Síndic de Greuges* (The Ombudsman) or the *Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios* (OCU) have been highlighting the lack of transparency in the sector for years. Neither the public administration nor the companies inform us well about what our funeral rights and duties are. Private companies and institutions that have an interest in profiting from our deaths want a malleable and uninformed clientele, and, at this point, the taboo towards death is very convenient for them. If we ourselves as a society do not share and take care of what has to do with dying, when we find ourselves in the situation we delegate and accept everything that is offered to us.

7 Zapater, V.,«Guia pràctica. Afrontar el final de la vida i la mort», Opcions, Quadern núm. 55, El bon morir, 2018, p. 28-41.

According to the anthropologist Marta Allué, the function of the funeral ritual must be to socialise the loss, to make it public and include the participation of the community that

says farewell, to help us elaborate the mourning. Rituals must represent the breakup, the separation, through acts of tribute to the deceased that sanctify the farewell, and must allow the pain to be shown so as to foster catharsis, that is to say, the emotional expression of the feeling of loss. Today, the funeral industry does not allow us catharsis and rituals have lost their communal and public function. The taboo, the speed, the strict regulations, the distance from the corpse and the mechanisation of the rituals represent an escape from death. Rituals become a procedure, and everything that deviates from the regulations and protocols of funeral homes is perceived as negative, irrational, and attempts are made to repress it. Screaming, touching the corpse, dancing, hugging the coffin, throwing yourself on the ground, crying loudly, laughing, pulling your hair, tearing your clothes... instead of being understood as expressions that facilitate catharsis and mourning, are perceived as problematic, an attack on the *stench*, a scandal.[8]

Within this context, in Spain the taboo towards death and the way we relate to bereavement today are linked to our recent history. The Franco dictatorship meant the ex-

8 Allué, M.,«La ritualización de la pérdida», Anuario de Psicologia, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1998, vol. 29, Nº. 4, p. 67-82.

ercising of systematic violence continued for four decades, especially against people opposed to the fascist ideology, such as sexual and gender dissidents. Many people had to flee, hide or pretend, and the vanquished had to mourn their deaths in private, because making it public could be dangerous. Crying over the repudiated could mean suffering more violence.

As the theories on transgenerational inheritance explain, when society does not process collective traumas consciously and openly, the learning and dynamics put into practice to survive these experiences interfere with the social functioning of future generations, that is to say, the traumatic situation is transmitted to the following generations by repetition of group and individual behaviour patterns (such as fear of reporting, obedience, shame, taboo or revenge, among others).[9] Among other things, we have learned to cry in silence and in private.

It is also important to point out that the Catholic Church has had a monopoly on burials and spirituality until well into democracy, so part of the repression in the funerary field towards the dissident population has been exercised by this religious institution, which has persecut-

9 Valverde Gefaell, C., *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical*, Icaria, Barcelona, 2015.

ed and repressed the LGTBI+ collective for centuries.[10]

In the past and in the present, in Spain and in other territories of the world, sexual and gender dissidents suffer specific violence at the moment of death and at farewells, for contradicting the dictates of the Cis/Heteronormativity. We know what it is to cry over unpunished deaths and how censorship is used to suffocate us.

10 Currently, although "secular" funeral rituals are practised, the imagination, the arrangement of objects and spaces, the regulations and protocols that are applied are a direct inheritance of the Christian tradition. In addition, other spiritualities and religions continue to encounter barriers in the funeral sector as the Catholic model is the predominant one.

Death and bereavement are part of our identity and history, and for this reason they have been repeatedly represented in audiovisual and literary (non)fiction created by LGBTI+ people. As a good example, in Leslie Feinberg's famous novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), set in the 1970s in the United States, at one point a butch lesbian important to the community dies. Her friends, colleagues, want to bid her farewell, but the biological family won't let them in if they don't wear women's clothes. The deceased has been given a dress, which she would not have allowed in her lifetime. The ceremony becomes a humiliation. Another example can be found in the Chilean film *Una mujer fantástica* (2017), when the partner (cis man)

of the protagonist (trans woman) dies suddenly and her biological family, who did not recognise their relationship, kicks her out of the house where they lived together and separates her from the dog they shared. In addition, they prevent her from attending funeral ceremonies. The film recounts the violence she suffers for being trans and her struggle to say goodbye to her loved one with dignity. We also find evidence of this in our territories, as in the acclaimed series *Veneno* (2020), which tells the life of Cristina Ortiz Rodríguez, better known as *La Veneno*, who was the first trans woman to become a major visible reference in Spain for being very popular on television. When they died, their biological family, who never accepted their identity, continued to use their dead name until the farewell ceremony. This was celebrated with the Catholic tradition behind closed doors in their native village, from which they had fled as a young person and with which they did not want to have any relationship. Their wish was for the ashes to be scattered, but the family did not respect that. By way of reparation, the series ends by fictionalising a farewell that they would have wanted according to the testimony of their chosen family.[11]

11 García Higueras, Laura. "'Veneno' culmina con un funeral que convierte cenizas en confeti y concede su última voluntad a Cristina Ortiz". El Diario.es. 25th October 2020.

As Caitlin Doughty (funeral director, embalmer and dedicated to outreach) says, funeral homes are one of the places where transphobia can have one of the most painful and violent effects.[12] For sexual and gender dissidents, the ceremonies have often become a scene of domestication, a lesson for those who are alive. Violence in farewell rituals has served to break us as a community, isolate us and eliminate us. And legislation, as a tentacle of the system that oppresses us, has held part of the responsibility.

12 Free translation. See the video *"Protecting Trans Bodies in Death"* on the channel Ask a Mortician of

In Spain, as happens in many countries, the biological family or registered partner has the legal power to decide what happens to our body when we cannot decide for ourselves.[13] But, until the end of the nineties, there was no legal recognition of same-sex couples. The first autonomous community to regulate it was Catalonia, in 1998, and later other autonomous communities joined it. To date, there is no uniform regulation for the entire State. Because LGBTI-phobic rejection is a constant in our history, we have often been left unprotected at the time of death or farewell

13 Currently, we can also name another person responsible for deciding for us if we record our decision at the notary or in the advance will document (DVA).

because biological families have had all the legal power to decide for us and have not respected who we are.

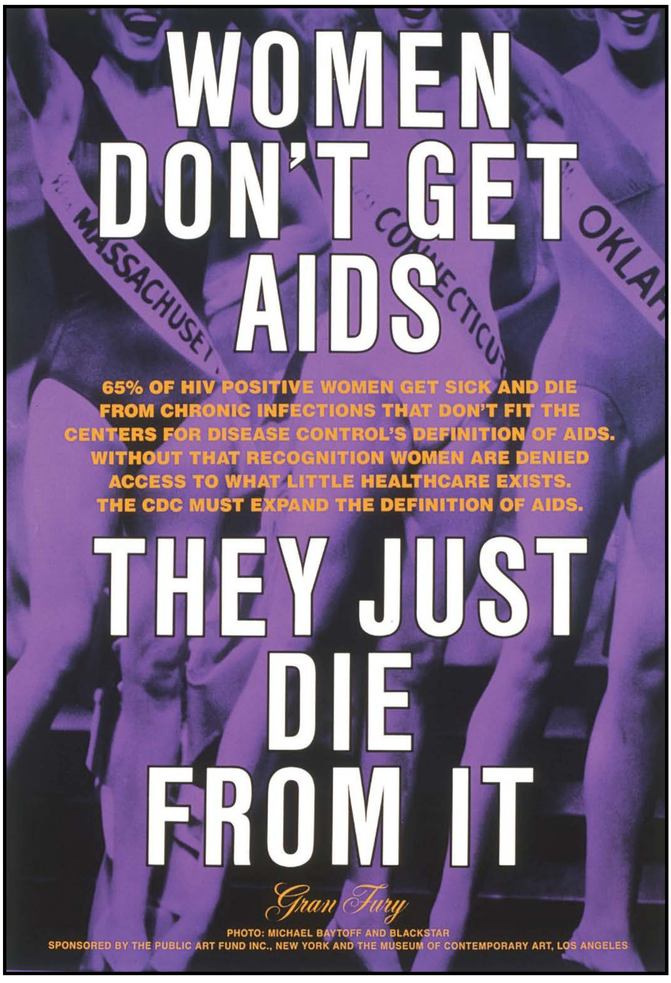
But even if the biological family accepts, respects and embraces our identity, sexuality and affectivity, this is no guarantee of receiving adequate funeral care. Funeral homes are not free of LGBTI-phobia, and we could see this during the AIDS pandemic, when some refused to accept the bodies of people who died of this disease.[14] The misgendering of trans people at farewell ceremonies, the preparation of the body with an aesthetic and gender expression that do not correspond to those of the deceased person, or the denial of emotional life and sexual orientation are also common.

14 See the testimonies and archival images collected in the episode "Red: the unexpected setback" of the programme Nosotrxs somos of RTVE.

For the system, there are lives that matter less and deaths that are better forgotten. At the same time that it educates us in the taboo and deprives us of farewells and death, the system needs to apply policies in which non-profitable bodies are allowed to die (dependent people, chronically ill, elderly, etc.) and are to blame for their own situation and for being a burden on society. This is what neoliberal necropolitics consists of,

in applying specific policies that have the consequence of letting people die or giving death to bodies that are not productive for the capitalist system.[15]

15 Valverde, Clara. *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical*. Editorial Icaria. 2015.



Denouncement campaign by the Gran Fury activist collective.

A good example of necropolitics is what was carried out during the AIDS pandemic. The gay community was stigmatised and blamed for making them sick, while the medical and pharmaceutical establishment, side by side with the politicians, let millions of people die precariously by not devoting resources to research and distribution of an adequate treatment. In addition, once treatments existed, many patients died because they did not receive the appro-

priate treatment, since they had been misdiagnosed, as made visible by the Gran Fury collective, created by ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), in the United States, which reported that women with AIDS, because they were women, were not being diagnosed correctly and were dying without receiving the appropriate treatment.

"Transphobia kills us. I'm Alan too." Political act in the street.

LGTBI-phobia is a structural violence and we suffer it as a collective, therefore, the grief resulting from it is also collective. Therefore, we can only develop them if there are responses of community impact that happen to generate felt and desired rituals, and also acts of public recognition and the open and critical transmission of facts. In this sense, Paul B. Preciado wrote the article "*Un colegio para Alan*",[16] which is a denunciation of the

violence experienced by Alan, a 17-year-old trans boy, who in 2015 put an end to his life because he could no longer bear the harassment he suffered. The tributes to the deceased young man in street demonstrations were also acts of care for this collective mourning.

16 Excerpt from the anti-speciesist transfeminist pamphlet Parole de Queer, created by the ideologues and screenwriters of the Superbollo comic contra la L.E.F.A. To know more: paroledequeer.blogspot.com.

Death has nothing to do with justice. Death is life. What is unfair is that we die when it is not our turn because we are murdered or because we have conditions that make it unbearable to live, and which continue to attack our dignity once we die. Necropolitics, unpunished murders and violence that lead us to suicide are ways of physically eliminating ourselves, while oblivion and invisibility, in any sphere of life, including farewell rituals and mourning, they are ways of removing ourselves symbolically.

Faced with this reality, we have survived because we have created alliances and, when they have not allowed us to honour our deaths through established protocols, we have done it in our own way. We have organised demonstrations; we have made memorials; we have created altars; we have written articles; novels, screenplays; we are explaining what we have lived... so as not

to be forgotten, to accept that we die without accepting or allowing ourselves to be killed. Every time we do public and collective mourning and farewells, we are breaking the taboo of sexuality and death, and we are defending life.

But the road to the empowerment of farewell and death rituals does not stop there. We can do much more to reclaim the knowledge and practices that connect us to (our) nature and community, and gain true sovereignty over our life processes. We need to inform ourselves of our rights, to generate networks of accomplices and to disobey if the regulations do not allow us to take care of ourselves. Popular pressure must be exerted to change funeral services and demand that the sector has as its main aim the care of people and not profit. We need a cultural and systemic change that can only happen if we organise ourselves collectively. We must cry together, unite in pain and love, and make a scandal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allué, M., «La ritualización de la pérdida», *Anuario de Psicologia*, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1998, vol. 29, núm. 4, p. 67-82.

Feinberg, L., *Stone Butch Blues*, Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid, 2021.

Kübler-Ross, E., *Sobre el duelo y el dolor* (Trad. S. Guiu), Luciérnaga, Barcelona, 2016 (obra original publicada el 2006).

Libre mercado, «Cinco funerarias se reparten un tercio de los entierros que se celebran en España», 01/11/2021.

Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios, «Funerarias oscuras. Poca información y competencia», *Compra Maestra*, núm. 386, 11/2013, p. 17-21.

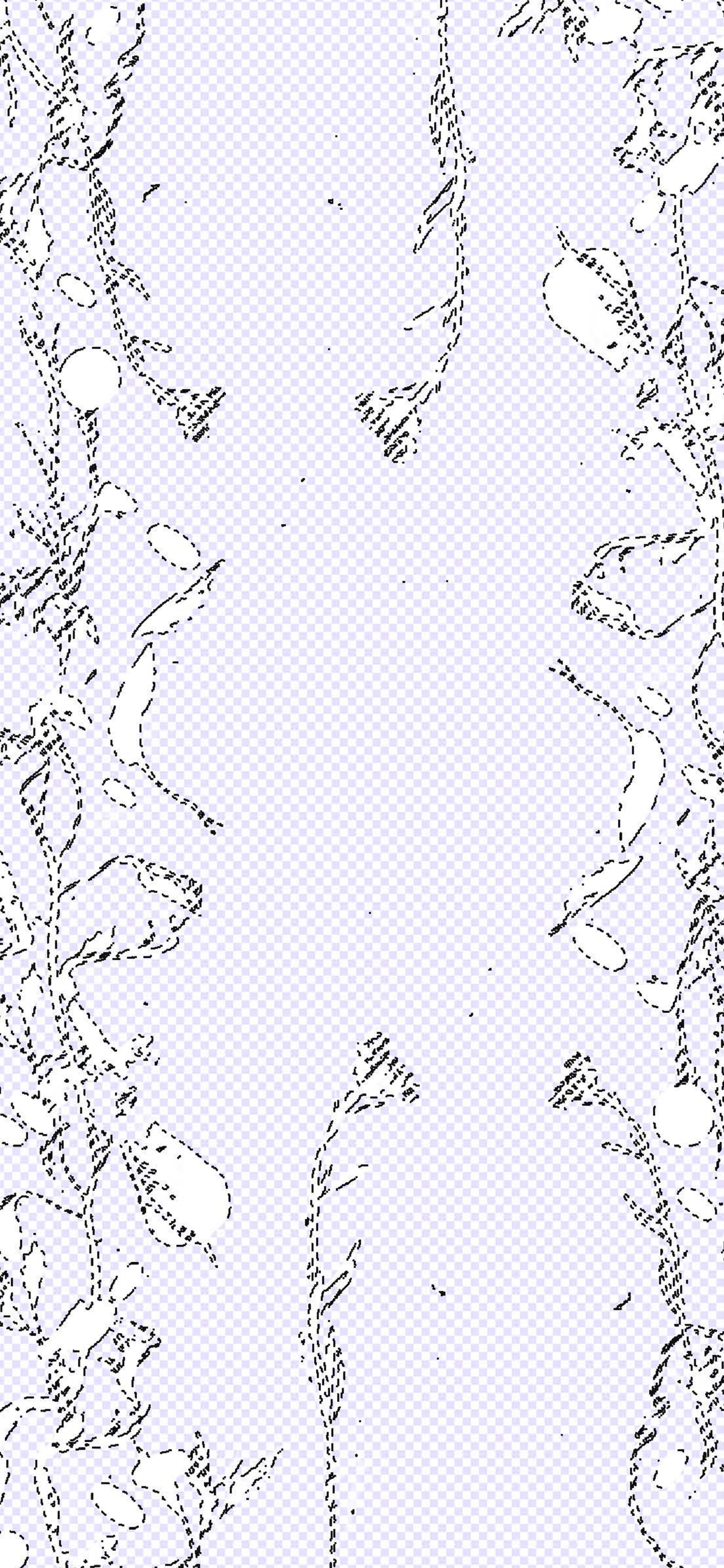
—— «Seguros de decesos: no salen a cuenta», 31/10/2022.

Reial decret llei 7/1996, de 7 de juny, sobre mesures urgents de caràcter fiscal i de foment i liberalització de l'activitat econòmica. Publicat al BOE núm. 139, de 08/061996, pàgina 18986.

Valverde Gefaell, C., *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical,* Icaria, Barcelona, 2015.

—— *Desenterrar las palabras. Transmisión generacional del trauma de la violencia política del siglo xx en el Estado espanyol,* Icaria, Barcelona, 2016.

Zapater, V., «Guia pràctica. Afrontar el final de la vida i la mort», *Opcions*, Quadern núm. 55, El bon morir, 2018, p. 28-41.



CARESS THE CARESSES OF THE MUSEUM

Mireia Sánchez Ramos

Mestre d'Astorga, *Altarpiece of the Passion of Christ* (detail), ca. 1530
Renaissance and Baroque, sala 29

«The terrible thing about the dead is their gestures of life in our memory [...]. These gestures that strangely survive the beings that breathed life into them are recorded, so to speak, in our psychic body and besiege us without being able to separate them from us. They remain captive in us, who continue to be like this, secretly and forever, their exclusive possessors» *(Altounian, 2004: 27-28)*.

The corridors become empty. The roar of the voices is exhausted. The shadows are settling in. The rooms are swept consecutively. The overhead cables are disconnected and put away. All the fuses are turned off. All the doors close and, little by little, all the souls that have occupied it since morning leave the museum, only until, the next day, a new soul turns the key again and the whole process resumes the other way round.

This is the life in which a museum houses paintings and photographs on the walls, sculptures and furniture on the pedestals, jewels and other objects in the display cases, etc., pieces, in short, that listen, sometimes look, feel or smell the souls that occupy the rooms - but these are pieces that, above all, *remain*.

Certainly, the bodies of the works are bodies that remain still, untouchable. Precisely, museum logic wants them to be immobile and inviolable dermis that cannot be affected by anything, not even by the passage of time. It is therefore necessary to touch them *in another way*.

What other touch can we find to do this? Regarding this, the Latvian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas spoke of the caress as a tactile gesture that is capable of questioning our common sense about the sense we call *touch*.

The caress doesn't know what it wants
It is free and prior to any intention
It is a contact, therefore, full of potential
It is already a distinct touch, not alone
It is thus separated from the sense of touch
(That which is caressed, properly speaking, is not touched)
It points to something tender, to a future beyond the future
Those who are caressed in the contact of another can go beyond themselves

According to Levinas, the act of caressing a body sustains it beyond itself, placing it between «being and not yet being» (1987, 269). Caressing is a disordered and ungoverned gesture that only rubs—which, therefore, does not catch, does not appropriate, does not identify. The caress is like the present, pure transit, which is why with Levinas we discover that the present, like the caress,

«[...] is at the limit of being, and dissipates in its own announcement. The present, like the caress, does not capture anything, it requests what will never be present, since it is located on the threshold of the future » (Di Giacomo: 2016, 57).

Indeed, the museum is a unique place to invoke the act of caress. In the first instance, its rooms and its corridors are places of passage for various souls - some, assiduous;

others, occasional - that occupy the building throughout the day. In the second instance, it is a space shared not only by these souls, but also by the *bodies in the past* that inhabit its floors and that have been petrified, engraved, painted, written, drawn.

> Our visit to the museum is a caress
> It is not defining, nor definitive
> But it is necessarily shared in the present
> And the bodies we are going to visit
> Whilst inside the museum
> They don't want to be touched, rushed
> But *caressed*

Understanding our presence in the museum from here, then, the caress becomes a radical gesture and another that allows us to deposit other interpretations on highly coded pieces. If we understand our visit to the museum as a caress, that is, as something contingent, transitory, open, without mistakes, it can become a different way of interpreting faces, torsos, hands, gestures, choreographies and other configurations of history of art extremely fixed in order to divert them. In this sense, the caress allows us something primordial: to not turn the museum into a mausoleum. If we say it with Adorno,

> «[m]useum and mausoleum are not only united by the phonetic association. Museums are like traditional graves of works

> of art, and they testify to the neutralisation of culture" (1962: 187).

In this way, our looks, our concerns, our questions, our needs - and, ultimately, these caresses that we can make when we visit the museum - can establish new dialogues that once again *deneutralise* the pieces, either from their uses as from their power of evocation.

First of all, retracing the museum's works with other eyes allows us to activate their evocative capacity. Indeed, there are numerous existences that have not been able to occupy the hegemonic discourse of visuality, but passing through the rooms from an unsubdued perspective means that certain iconographies can come to *embody*[1] other imaginaries. If we approach the pieces using the words collected here we will realise that, precisely, our visit-caress will on several occasions clash with the gesture that we insist so much on invoking. Especially in the Romanesque and Gothic rooms, but also in the Renaissance and Baroque ones, virgins, Marys and saints hurry to seize, hold and caress the body of the dead Christ. This

1 We understand here *to embody* in the same sense that the thinker Erika Fischer-Lichte defined the German concept *Verkörperung*, usually mistranslated as *embodiment*: "To embody means in this case to make something come to presence with the body, or in the body, that only exists by virtue of it" (2017: 172). In this sense, then, *to embody* would involve the act of getting a contingent evocation to take on a true body momentarily.

is the case of sculptural ensembles such as the *Descent of Santa Maria de Taüll,* in which Mary takes the hand of her son already sacrificed on the cross, but also of pictorial works such as the *Liturgical Cabinet with the Holy Burial, Saint Agnes and a Bishop Saint* or the *Lamentation over the dead Christ and apostles* by the Master of Astorga, where the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, Mary Salome and Mary of Cleofàs gently rub and hold a body that no longer supports itself.

Anonimo,*Figures of the Descent of Santa Maria de Taüll,* Second half of the 12th century, 13th century.

Anonim, *Liturgical wardrobe with the Holy Burial, Saint Agnès and a saintly archbishop,* c. 1400

Once these caresses have been identified, we must think about the second term that our visit can fulfil, which is the possibility of also evoking the functions that this imagery could perform in its original context. So, imagining these pieces inside churches - often in places as visible as the altar itself - al-

lows us to project the effects they could have on the faithful who saw them. Certainly, if we think about it with Didi-Huberman, all these laments full of caresses could contribute, already from the Middle Ages,

> «to place the viewer in a face-to-face situation or of great empathic proximity, a bit like when we encounter a tomb whose dimension is anthropomorphic. There, then, where the tomb forms a mineral case around the body of the deceased, the *compianto* [literally: "weep with". Consequently, *making weeping a part*, a bond or a social good: a "treasure of suffering"] will form a sort of social, bodily and psychic case, which surrounds the dead with the gestures and collective affections of the survivors» (2021: 164).

Thanks to the words of he French essayist, we can notice how the gestures in the scenes we are talking about not only wrap the body of the deceased to say farewell and remember them with love, but that, as images presented in the viewers, can accompany their own gestures of regret when surviving a loss. For us, coming to the museum to cry next to these works can also help us move through our own losses from a shared and, therefore, strengthening perspective. In this way, continuing with the idea of making a caress visit

to the museum, the caresses we have traced so far through the rooms can help us commemorate other missing bodies.

CARESSING QUEER EXISTENCES

We talk about bodies missing from the walls of the museum not only because they do not inhabit the norm, but absent because they also painfully disappeared. We are referring to the queer existences that constituted what in another part of these texts we have called a "promising past". Although it was indeed a pandemic, HIV/AIDS was a health crisis that greatly affected the LGBTIQ+ community, and it did so in conditions that exceeded the medical dimension. The fact that many of the people who began to show symptoms caused by acquired immunodeficiency syndrome during the first months of 1981 were gay-identified men made the stigmatisation easy, since it was a group already marked by previous phobias and myths, as Juncosa (2020) tells us. It is for this reason that, until the terms AIDS and HIV were coined, the disease was called "gay cancer" or "GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency)". Towards 1983, a total of four groups came to make up the so-called "4H disease", since the other risk groups that had been identified with the disease apart from the homosexual commu-

nity had been heroin addicts, hemophiliacs and Haitians (Aliaga, 2011: 23).

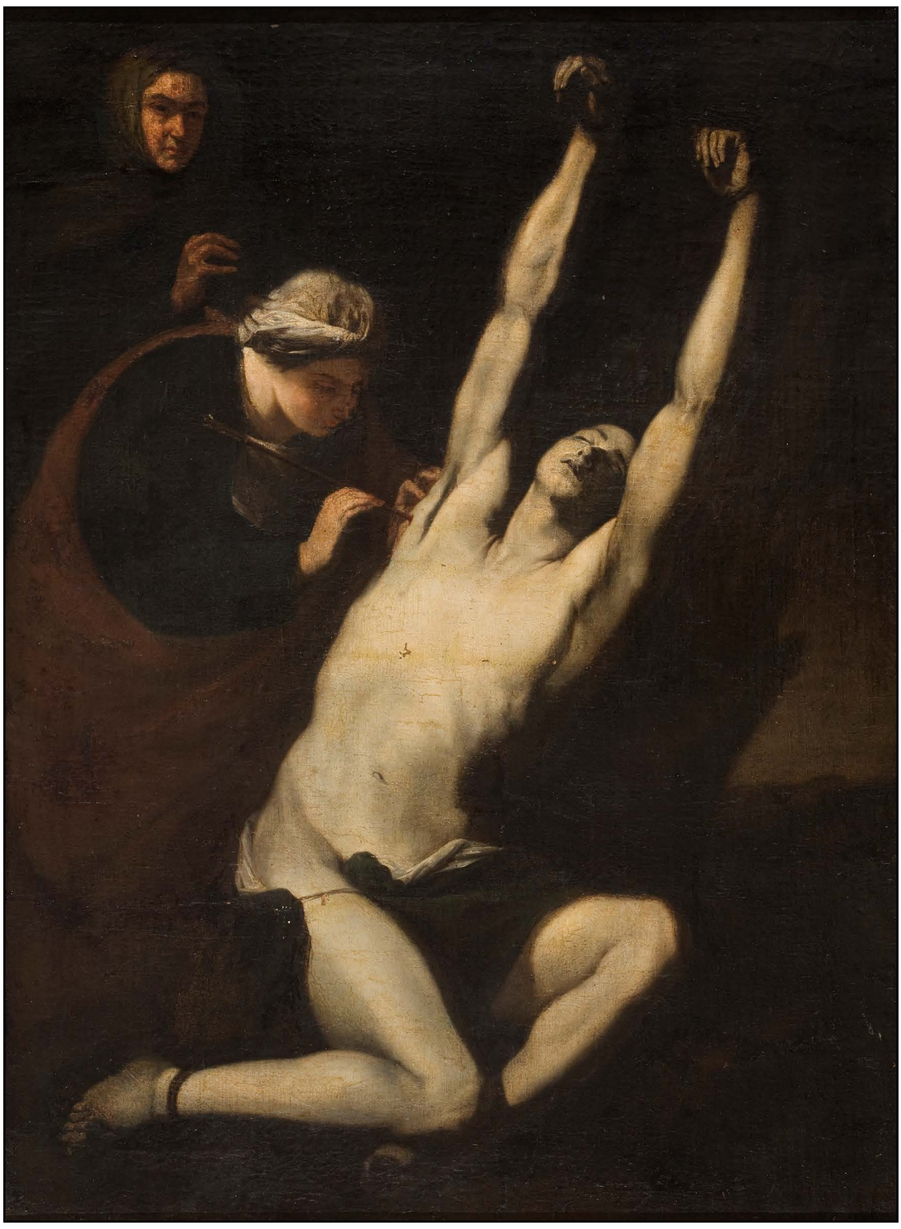
In this sense, it was easy to define a separate side in a struggle that was really shared, since it was made up of easily identifiable groups with "irresponsible" and "reprehensible" practices such as intravenous drug use or anti-normative sexual practices (Sontag, 1996: 112). On the other hand, the stigma was even more poignant because of the visible symptoms that the infection could cause, such as the so-called *Kaposi sarcoma*. The fact that some of the consequences of HIV/AIDS manifested themselves directly on the skin of the patients meant that, in the first stage of the epidemic, when the routes of transmission were still unknown, it was believed that the contagion occurred through contact or even through sweat. It is for this reason that, as the dancer Aimar Pérez Galí assures us, especially during the first years, touch became a precious asset (2018: 18).

Fortunately, some hands were not afraid to touch (and caress) these vulnerable bodies. Starting from the same caresses we talked about in the museum room, in this case it is also the hands of many women that we have to mention. Certainly, and indeed within the tradition of care in which the female figure has always been involved, both

in hospitals and in domestic spaces many women adopted this role without reservations. Among all these caresses, there are specific ones that we will propose highlighting: the caresses of lesbian women. Firstly, it must be borne in mind that, at that time, queer women had distanced themselves from the global movement for the rights of sexual diversity, since it had focused mainly on cis or cisgender men. On the other hand, although they ended up being a group where HIV/AIDS infection was not very common, the association of homosexuality with the fact of being "carriers of the virus" meant that they were equally stigmatised. However, theirs have been caresses and cares that have often gone quite unnoticed.

Again, the museum space itself serves as a space in which these narratives can be mirrored. Although we have been able to talk about the previous hands that *do* occupy the rooms, in the museum where we find ourselves, there is also another touch of importance. In this case, just like the cares of the lesbians, it is a caress that does not inhabit the main itinerary, but we will have to go to the gloom of the deposit to rescue it. This is the gesture that we find on the canvas *Saint Sebastian tended by the Holy Women*, an anonymous copy that would have been

done between 1775-1825 of the original with the same name by Josep de Ribera.



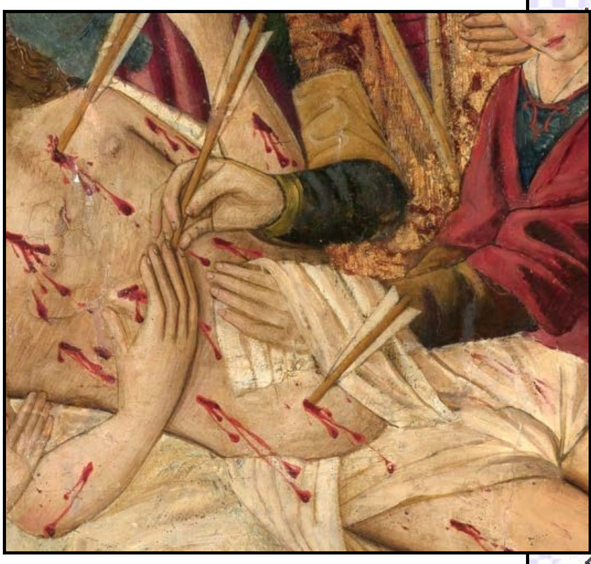
Anonim, *Copy Saint Sebastian cured by the Holy Women*, 1775-1825.

The painting shows Saint Sebastian, a martyr who was a soldier in the Roman army under Diocletian in the 3rd century AD. For us, the part of the saint's biography that we should highlight the most is the one that continues on the sidelines of the Roman court, once they discover his Christian faith. The different narratives will link him to the famous persecutions of Diocletian and, in fact, key texts such as *The Legend of the Vorágine* already

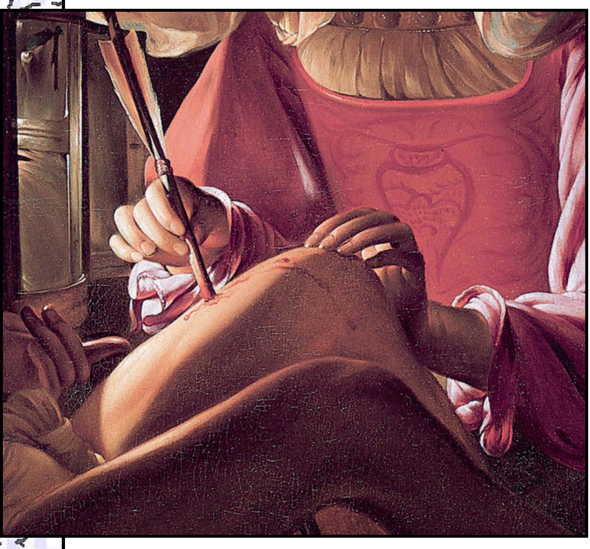
compare his martyrdom, tied to a wooden pole and martyred with arrows, with the passion of Christ. However, it is often not known that this martyrdom is not actually the cause of his death. His body is collected by his companions and healed by some women, among whom Saint Irene of Rome is usually mentioned, a figure who has been vaguely located in the Rome of Diocletian and who, together with her husband Saint Castulus, would have helped the clandestine Christian community.

It is not surprising that, as Ribera's original from around 1620-1623, this theme began to be represented more especially from the Baroque period, coinciding with the Counter-Reformation. As the art historian María Condor points out, the counter-reform movement gave a new iconographic role to women, since it was defended that they constituted the ideal figure to express compassion, mercy and, ultimately, works of charity, which, according to Catholicism, were the only vehicle to bring the faithful to salvation (Condor, 2018). Certainly, if we trace the gesture of the saint in other representations, we will appreciate that the delicate and firm way with which she removes the arrows almost seems like a caress, approaching the skin of the martyr with care and readiness.

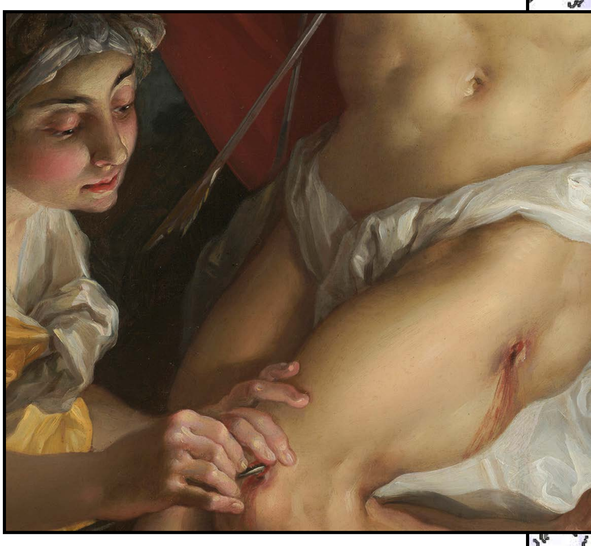
Nicolas Régnier, *Saint Sébastien cured by Sain Irene and her servant,* ca.1623-1625



Anonimo, *Saint Irene pulls out the arrows from Saint Sebastian* , Second half of the 15th century



Attributed a Georges de la Tour, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*, ca. 1649.



Vicente López y Portaña, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Saint Irene*, 1795-1800

This fact is even more revealing if we consider the appropriation that, historically, the LGBTIQ+ community has made of the iconography of Saint Sebastian. Apart from being a body that has led to numerous homoerotic interpretations due to a naked and highly eroticised iconography, it is the biography itself of the saint that, once again, has made him the object of this appropriationism . On

the one hand, Saint Sebastian's stance of reaffirmation of faith serves as a mirror, as an example to call out pride as a homosexual at times, even when it was not so common to throw this reaffirmation to the four winds. On the other hand, and consequently, the persecution and suffering experienced by Saint Sebastian for having made his faith explicit will be compared to the ordeal experienced by those homosexuals who dared to present themselves without hiding or euphemisms to the public sphere. Following this interpretation of Saint Sebastian as a "sublimated homosexual", then, our visit-caress can mirror the often overlooked work carried out by the saint with the healing and help that lesbians offered during the decades in which the virus shook the community more strongly.

Some testimonies of these caresses that have indeed been collected take us, in the first instance, to the United States, one of the countries where the pandemic advanced more quickly and strongly. When the epidemic broke out, Kristen Ries was a lesbian doctor specialising in infectious diseases who worked at Holy Cross Hospital in Salt Lake City (Utah). Due to her specialisation, Ries quickly became interested in the HIV/AIDS virus that was claiming so many lives among the group. It is for this reason that as early

as 1982 she asked the Utah Department of Health to take more direct action against the incipient health crisis, but the central health system did not want to take charge of a virus that only seemed to affect the marginal "4H".

Faced with this, Ries began to receive those affected in her surgery, to the point that it became the hospital of reference where patients knew they would receive care. Quickly, many of Ries' regular patients left the clinic because of the discomfort they felt sharing the space with the "infected". Nevertheless, the doctor, as well as the nuns of the hospital, continued to take care of them.

Given the avalanche of cases, specialised external help became necessary. This is how Maggie Snyder, a lesbian nurse willing to help Ries, reached the clinic. According to their words, there was little they could do faced with a virus they had almost no knowledge of, so at first their work was not so much aimed at curing the sick as helping them die. In this way, Ries and Snyder held on to the historical roots of medicine in order to treat patients who were not only affected by the virus, but also by the stigma and shame that it entailed (and more so, if we consider account the Mormon confession of the State of Utah).

This is how the doctor and nurse abandoned the practice of establishing barriers

with their patients, by showing themselves to be close to them during consultations, without even using plastic gloves. Certainly, both of them understood that those affected, who felt alone and ashamed at a moment of maximum vulnerability, needed the physical contact of others, a minimum of warmth to feel accompanied. “The hugs were perhaps the most effective part of the treatment”, Ries explains in the documentary *Quiet Heroes,* 2018, dedicated to the work of these two lesbians.

Amanda Stoddard, Jared Ruga, Jenny Mackenzie, *Quiet Heroes*, 2018. Photo still: Kristen Ries hugs a patient in her practice in Salt Lake City.

Yet, fortunately, this is a narrative we can trace back to our context as well. Mercè Poal, a now retired lesbian nurse, was the health worker assigned to the infectious diseases unit of the Hospital Clínic of Barcelona more than twenty years ago, just when the virus was at one of its most critical points. As

she herself explains,[2] the unit in which she worked alone for many years quickly became a care space primarily for those affected by HIV/AIDS.

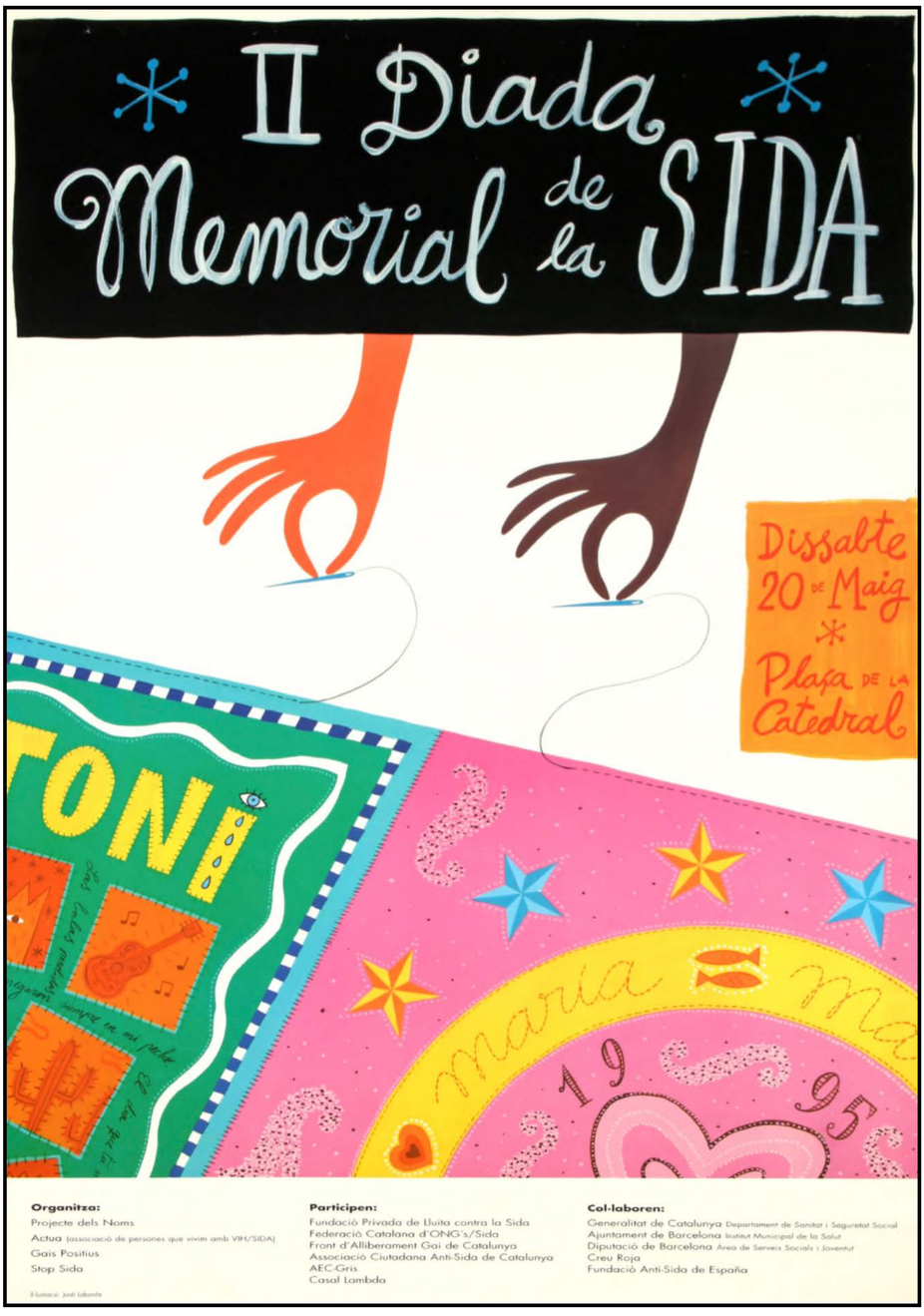
2 Taking advantage of the occasion, I would like to thank Mercè Otero Vidal, advisor at Ca la Dona, for her help in the search for materials and testimonies, such as that of Mercè Poal herself, whom I also greatly appreciate for her generosity in telling me about her experience.

Mainly, the tasks she had to carry out were the extraction of blood for examinations and primary care for the skin, one of the organs most affected and weakened by the virus. As we have already discussed, the skin became a means of 'reporting', making visible the acquired immunodeficiency of bodies against which the healthy population did nothing more than protect themselves - when, in fact, the bodies that were more vulnerable than ever and what needed to be protected were theirs.

Nevertheless, Mercè, like Kristen Ries and Maggie Snyder, often chose not to use gloves, and she also understood that, surely, this safety we are talking about went beyond prophylactic barriers and what needed to be taken care of was the shame and loneliness with which those affected went through the disease. Thus, to a quality of life that deteriorated and worsened in many cases due to the numerous side effects of the medication that began to be tested at the time, it was neces-

sary to add the fact that being infected by the virus often meant 'coming out', making addiction visible or making public the husband's infidelities with prostitutes, trans* people or other men. All of this meant that, in the vast majority of cases, those affected had to live it in secret, without anyone's support. Thus, Mercè's surgery, and the few questions and advice she could exchange when treating those affected, created a small healing intimacy; her listening and her bare hands *caressed* bodies that, in every sense, needed, more than ever, contact and love as survival tools.

Beyond private therapy, Mercè also remembers the work of various associations that, based on activism, sought to transfer all these individual problems to the public sphere. Some of these organisations, such as *Stop Sida* or *Creación Positiva*, have not abandoned this task. As an example, one of her collaborations with another organisation, the *Names Project*, has left us with posters like the one from 1995, which shows us hands that, in this case, weave the so-called "Memorial Tapestry", made by friends and relatives of those affected by HIV/AIDS who record their names by weaving them into an immense tapestry. In this way, it is again hands that try to approach with a delicate gesture to bodies that are no longer with us.



Poster of the II Diada del Memorial de la Sida (1995). Courtesy of Ca la Dona.

In the museum, with our visit-caress, we interpret the hands we found as the hands that also firmly caressed bodies that became untouchable, such as the bodies of gays, drug addicts or also numerous women infected by the extramarital relations of their husbands; the hands of women (especially lesbians), like those of Saint Irene and the other women, knew how to find a way to take care of those affected. Thus, the pieces that remain in the museum can give life to other narratives; *caressing* the caresses of the museum with

these readings we were able to momentarily rub hands that caressed the skin of a promising past. In the end, an open, affectionate and relational gesture becomes one of the few ways to touch queer existences, since, as Esteban Muñoz tells us, these are nothing more than an ideal. Although it is very likely that this ideality can never be achieved, "we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon tinged with potentiality. We were never queer, but queer exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past, and used to imagine a future" (2020, 29).

CARESS IN INTIMACY AND MELANCHOLY

Arriving this far, we could question the melancholy so felt with which we propose remembering the gestures of all these women. However, if from a queer perspective we vindicate the cures once again, it is because the melancholy to which this caressing visit provides us with is not at all pathological, if not quite the opposite. The remembrance that we have tried to transfer to the museum rooms is nothing more than a sample of the constant struggle with what is lost, because, if we think about it with David Eng and David Kazanjian, melancholy does not simply involve "holding on" and "clinging on" to a fixed

notion of the past, but rather a continuous commitment to loss and its remains » (2002).

Our visit-caress, therefore, is a strategy to make the museum an intimate space of complicity and coexistence with the pieces and with other souls; it is from the intimacy of the caress and the shared intimacy of the rooms that we will be able to record in our psychic and bodily memory all the caresses that have also shaped queer existences.

We caress with deep melancholy
We reminisce in a radical intimacy
To remember and save
These gestures
With commitment

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor (1962). *Prismas. La crítica de la cultura y la sociedad*. Barcelona: Ariel.

Aliaga, Juan Vicente (2011). «Memòria i sida». *You are not alone*. Barcelona: ArtAids Foundation, pàg. 22

Altounian, J (2004). «De quoi témoignent les mains des survivants? *De l'anéantissement des vivants, de l'affirmation de la vie», Témoignage et trauma. Implications psychanalytiques*. París: Dunod.

Condor, María (2018). *San Sebastián. El Apolo cristiano*. Disponible a: https://www.youtube.com/watch?-v=1-jAVBx1fyY&t=1s [Data de consulta: 20 de juny de 2022].

Didi-Huberman, Georges (2021). *Ninfa dolorosa. Ensayo sobre la memoria de un gesto*. Valencia: Shangrila.

Di Giacomo, Mario. (2016) "Caricia, alteridad y trascendencia en el pensamiento de Emmanuel Levinas". *Apuntes Filosóficos*, 25 (48), pp. 46-68.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika (2017). *Estética de lo performativo*. Madrid: Abada.

Eng, David L., Kazanjian, David (2002). «Introduction: Mourning Remains». *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-26.

Esteban Muñoz, José (2020). *Utopia queer. El entonces y allí de la futuridad antinormativa*, Buenos Aires: Caja Negra.

Juncosa, Toni R. (2020). «CoronaVIHrus o l'impacte del discurs en temps de pandèmia». A: *Directa.* Disponible a: https://directa.cat/corona-vihrus-o-limpacte-del-discurs-en-temps-de-pandemia/ [Data de consulta: 15 de setembre de 2022].

Levinas, Emmanuel (1987). *Totalidad e infinito: Ensayo sobre la exterioridad*. Salamanca: Sígueme.

Pérez Galí, Aimar (2018). «Manejar riesgos. Aspectos comunes entre el Contact Improvisation y el VIH/sida». *Lo tocante.* Barcelona: Album, pp. 17-23. (2019b).

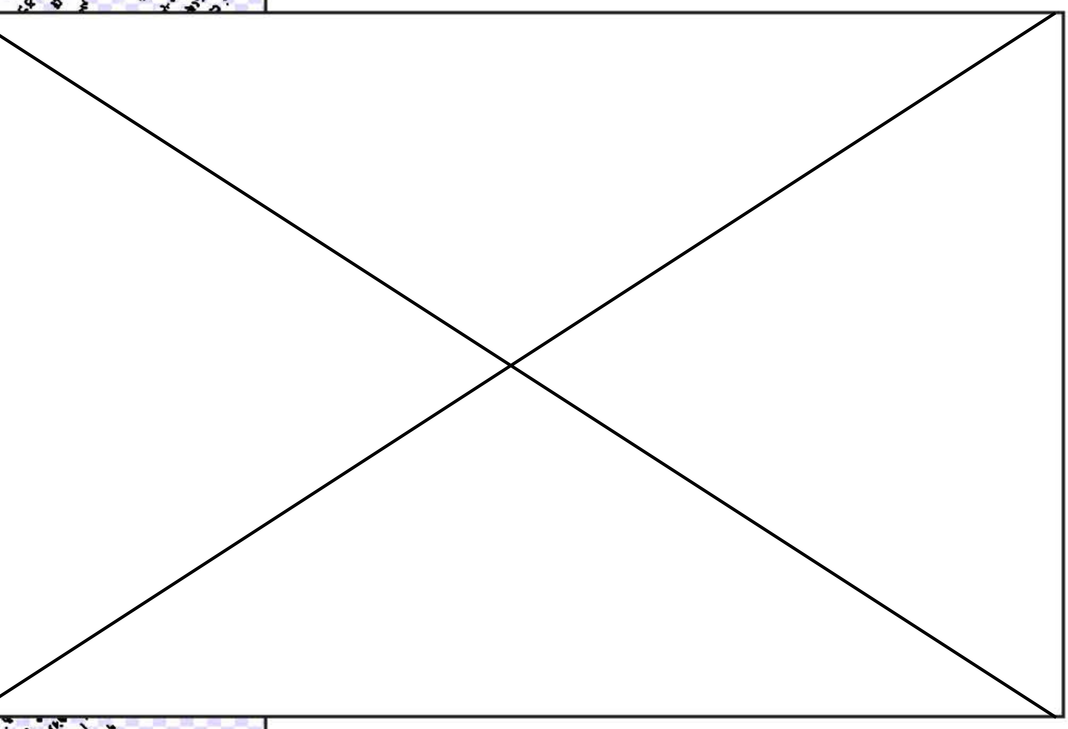
Ramírez Tur, Víctor (2019). «Mirades insubmises: lectures de la col·lecció en clau LGTBI». *Museus LGTBI*.

Sontag, Susan (1996). *La enfermedad y sus metáforas; y el sida y sus metáforas.* Madrid: Taurus.

Mackenzie, Jenny,. Ruga, Jared., Stoddard, Amanda (2018). *Quiet Heroes* [documental]. Vavani Productions.

FROM THE ASHES TO PALOMA: SKETCHES FOR THINKING ABOUT THE GRIEVING SEX-DISSIDENT AND MIGRANT FROM THE ANDES[1]

Diego Falconí Trávez



1 Part of the title and the look of the work comes from the book "*De las cenizas al texto: literaturas andinas de las disidencias sexuales en el siglo*". I thank Mafe Moscoso and Personaje Personaje for the prayers. Likewise, to Carolina Torres Topaga for accompanying this text and the performance that accompanies it.

Sketch 1.

BODIES AND PRACTICES TURNED TO ASH

The word *sodomite*, originated in Europe and "turned viral" by the Inquisition, served to define the person, usually a cis man,[2] who committed "a prohibited act (almost always, anal penetration) without intending to tell us much more about his being" (Zubiaur, 7-8). The adjective *sodomite* became

a noun that erased the identity of the accused person, renaming him based on the heinous sin/crime.

2 "Perfect sodomy" was that practised by men and "imperfect sodomy" involved one or more women; which accounts, even here, for the extent of patriarchy.

However, thanks to the very active Christian imagination, which was nourished by mythologies and mercantile intentions, conquerors and priests integrated new characterisations for this meaning, sodomite, in their encounter with indigenous people and their bodily-other practices. Thus, the sodomites became giants, guardians of gold, cannibals (Gutiérrez de Santa Clara, 118; Cieza de León, 22; Amodio, 66), highlighting the figurations that sought to return to otherness, even more *otherness*. There was, in addition, a fundamental characteristic for this form of designation: the new sodomites of the Abya Yala,[3] in addition to being effeminate and lascivious, they were cross-dressing (Bertonio, 154), a particular sign that changed the history of dissidence

3 The decolonial discourse has taken up the continental name of Abya Yala, proposed by the Kuna people, over the European name America, which was later accepted by the Creole people. The Kuna political proposal was used as the political assumption of the indigenous movement in spaces such as the *Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas* (Bogotá, 1989) and the II *Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala* (Quito, 2004). People committed to decolonisation use that term, although with the complexity that rethinking history today always implie

and sexual diversity forever.

At the legal level, the sodomite subjectivation was a good alibi to attribute the native people as infidels (or even more infidels from the Mediterranean point of view, since they worshiped profane deities and made aberrant uses of meat), which served to take away their lands, dispose of their goods, both material and symbolic, and return the free workforce. But this and other idolatries were also an effective way of conquering their bodies to impose, with extreme violence, a worldview based on germs, guns and iron (Diamond, 1998), which built an unprecedented idea of superiority for the Europeans.

Here in Barcelona I wrote my doctoral thesis, which dealt with literary sexual dissidence in the 20th century. In my research I came across some colonial chronicles that spoke of sodomite discipline, near what would be the city of Guayaquil today. The chronicler Pedro Gutiérrez de Santa Clara describes his fate: “Burned with heavenly fire” (313). He and others follow the monarchical regulations, dictated by the Catholic kings, which stipulated the penalty for heinous sin: “[T]hat be burned in flames of fire in the place” (Llamas, 98). Although the condemnation of heinous sin in Europe also punished sodo-

mites, there is something particular about that burning carried out on the other side of the Atlantic.

The desire to exterminate the sodomites brought the conquering European mind to a climax, which saw the possibility of fulfilling the biblical myth of Sodom and Gomorrah, unlike what happened in European territories, where the burning of a city or an entire population because of heinous sin was allowed to happen. But in the lands of infidel peoples that could be desired... and even carried out. Fulfill divine punishment without guilt. A (proto)genocide based on gender little studied by history. Thanks to this overwhelming defeat of sodomy, and due to the globalization of the imperial project of the 16th century, the Mediterranean Cis-heteropatriarchy system became universal. *Cistem* ('Cis' system) that continues to this day, with its necessary and limited claims, also universalized through LGBTTI identities and policies.

The Andean bodies and their practices that in the present we would call sex-dissidents do not have a name. We only have the word sodomite as a reminder of the outrage of their existence. Their absence is today an absurd and impossible way of reconstructing history.

Sketch 2.
LGBTIQ+ FORGETFULNESS

With the arrival of the 20th century, sexual and gender claims in the Global North, especially at the end of the century, gave the illusion that LGBTTI populations were accepted "again", since the time when Catholicism condemned them. Enthusiastically, a chronological memory began to be built, and continues to be built, which, from the Greek homopatriarchy to the present, included Socrates, Aristotle, Catalina de Erauso, Oscar Wilde, Federico García Lorca, Freddie Mercury or La Veneno.

The American sodomites could not be a substantial part of that reconstruction of that memory, since they only existed in a story of extermination; also through the chronicles, documents where history must elbow its way through a story permeated by fiction (O'Gorman, 61). But, above all, the sodomites cannot be part of the Hegelian historical narrative based on European progress (Hegel, 18) to understand the story of the world, since they were more past than present, impossibility of future, far from the perimeter of the true development. Neither in the national narrative of the country where I was born and grew up, Ecuador, much less in that of Spain and Catalonia, places where I have lived for

almost 20 years, did I find texts that lament the sodomite loss. Who in their right mind was going to cry before those beings that aroused a drive for violence from those who controlled and control the world? Who would want to honour the departure of identities and practices that were forced as unnatural and that settled in the Americas?[4] Who was going to care about the memory of people who, according to the narration of the chroniclers, were more myth than humanity?

4 I will use in this writing the denomination *Abya Yala* and the *Americas* to account for the region known as *Latin America*. Both denominations, at different times and articulated by different groups, have sought to rescue a critical look at this form of regionalization.

One night, while I was writing the final part of my thesis, 10 years ago, I dreamed of those sodomite bodies of the Andes, while they were horribly burned by fire. Upon waking up, I realised that their body and their memory had literally turned to ashes. This element, the ash, modified my writing of that academic document, which I return to today for this other text that I am writing. Thanks to the dream space and its power to reconfigure reality, I realised that it was neither unfeasible or absurd to build their memory. It was absurd to think that their story of death and the past, as historical as it is fictional, could only belong to the European chronology and imagination.

Sketch 3.
REIMAGINING THE ASHES

Ash is an inherent material in the Andean zone, with its black sand beaches and volcanoes that do not stop expelling it all the time. But it is also a powerful symbol in indigenous, Afro and mestizo rituals, linked to life, festivity and death. It is possible to think that sodomite ash is also the symbol of the repressive economy of the native, Afro, mestizo and even white corporalities of the Americas, marked by oppression and privileges, but with the absence of several fundamental rights; memory of the severe punishment for sexual dissident acts, which after the punishment of the heinous sin became new/old forms of repression established by the scientific-judicial system that articulated new categories: hermaphroditism, homosexuality, hysteria, etc. So successful was the process of coloniality with respect to sexualities that it had an impact even in the 20th century, when the new American republics saw homosexuality (lesbianism and transvestism) as a European vice that wanted to reconquer the recently liberated territories (Montero, 1995).

In my research, however, I found that the vice of sodomy and all subsequent medical forms, despite the effective European and

then Creole discipline (almost always Eurocentric), continued to repeat themselves and find new ways of expressing themselves in Abya Yala. In mestizo queers who strutted through the metropolises; in Aymara tortilla makers who thought of new forms of eroticism and resignification of their own bodies; in Afro mythologies of beings that went beyond the binary, and transformed the body and sexuality of people, beyond Creole national borders. I understood that the ash was not only an undaunted remains of death but a disturbing material, capable of stealthily flying, settling on objects, food, bodies. With enough skill to blend into those beaches and mountains to camouflage itself until it returns to its eternal journey. The ash was a persistent powder that served as fertilizer for the plants, nutrient for the waters and make-up so that new corporeality and embodied acts could flourish.

Christian and profane uses of ashes returned to my memory that, in my childhood and adolescence, allowed me to remember those who were no longer there. Something has that final remnant of flesh, organs and bones that invites us to rebuild existence. Ash as background and form of body representation that refuses to be just absence.

Ash as destruction, ash as fuel, ash

as a trigger for memory... and, finally, ash as a warning that prevents the history of the Andean region from embracing LGBTTI sexual diversity or the most transgressive queerness, without remembering and understanding the consequences of this massive erasure that is the beginning of all the imbalances, oppressions and complex expressions of the Americas, at least for those of us who understand that sodomites are an insurmountable genealogy in the history of all our sexualities.

In that polysemy of ash, rooted in anticoloniality, is the contradiction and beauty of the record of current sexual dissidence.

Sketch 4.
ENTERING (AND DRAWING) THE MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

To prepare this writing I walk with my friend Carolina Torres Topaga (alias Missex) through the corridors of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. She, a Colombian actress and sex-dissident activist (or *Locombiana*, as she herself expresses), accompanies many processes of transfeminist, queer and sex-dissident political vindication through committed art, theater and performance. She also accompanies me in this project; and in life

sudacuyr (Latin American Queer). We walk next to tombs, frescoes, sculptures. Nothing in that museum resonates with us to talk about our mourning. Our imagination makes efforts to artistically use fragmented bodies in Romanesque facades; to try to problematise how, from one century to another, Baltazar becomes a black person in the paintings of the Nativity; or to invoke the very few bodies with signs of racialisation in that museum with walls that are so, so white...however, our imagination has a limit that we cannot ignore: the history of the concealment of the Catalan colonial past, which is diametrically opposed to our past and our future as *sudaka* people (Latin Americans) and, therefore, to our mourning.

In the Modern History of Catalonia course that I took at university I saw this concealment many times. My teacher repeated, at least three times in the course, that, from the death of Queen Isabel until 1778, the Catalans were prohibited from trading with the Indies. We never agreed in class because I had a different version of the story and a different understanding of the facts. Now I'm a professor (associate ☹) in the same university, I ask my students in the subject Cultural representations of masculinity if they know who is the man portrayed in the sculpture

that is part of the monument to Columbus, the conqueror who has an Indian kneeling in an attitude of submission. No one in the entire class of fifty or so people knows. It is Pere Bertran i de Margarit, a Catalan who traveled on the second voyage with Columbus and who, according to the study by Fernando Mires, saw the indigenous people in his imagination "as cruel and bloodthirsty warriors whom he should defeat with his sword» (Mires, 59).

I investigate a little more and find that they do not know that on *La Diada*, in the years of greater social cohesion, prior to the referendum and which had independence as its goal, several people held hands around sculptures of slave-owning heroes (in fact, the slave money helped to lay the foundations for the architectural and urban projects of the 19th century that today give the Catalan national identity [Sanjuan, 147]). Fewer still knew that Catalonia had an intense trade with "the Indies" in the 17th and 18th centuries (Martínez Shaw, 24). We reflect together on how, in the *worst* of cases, if many people have been able to enter and live without "having papers" in Europe today, nowadays, many people from Catalonia with and without permits have probably gone to "do the Indies". In any case, just like me, in their history classes

in Catalonia, my students were not told anything about that colonial story that forces us to get out of our comfort zone and tackle a problem not visited in the Spanish-Catalan national narrative. Or Catalan-Hispanic.

Carolina and I go very close together through this museum in which nothing can enunciate our mourning. Suddenly, an idea comes to her, as if from the centre of the world, and, excited, she points out that what best represents our mourning in this museum is a white wall. On that wall, we imagine, we could project those bodies that are not there. Although, in reality, it would be necessary to draw on the walls of the museum. "Hopefully with ashes," I tell her, while we look at each other with complicity and longing for the future.

Sketch 5.
PURITA AND HER TESTIMONY

About a year ago, two editors from Ecuador asked me to write a text. It is to accompany the book by Purita Pelayo, a trans woman and one of the heads of the Coccinelle movement, which began the decriminalization of the crime of homosexuality in Ecuador at the end of the last century. I read the book *Los fantasmas se cabrearon: Crónicas de la despenalización de la homosexualidad en*

el Ecuador and I remember the queer and transvestite life of my land, so precarious and complex. It is a miracle that with the machinery of death that hovered over post-sodomy bodies, Purita, a racialised woman from Esmeraldas, one of the poorest provinces in Ecuador, is alive. Her honest testimony, that of survivor of the horror, is very different from that of the chronicles and is today a fundamental document for understanding political resistance and the value of certain lives. The transvestite, racialised and impoverished body is the one that, as happened in the hypervisible Stonewall in the United States, threw the first heel that started the sex dissident revolution, which in the Andes is a revolution, still in process, to decolonize those who they were called sodomites. In fact, the actions of Purita and her companions described in the book are the memory of the burning power of sodomite ash.

When I finished reading the book I saw myself in those wild years, full of violence. Somehow, I understand again my own migration and my life full of privileges and detriments... there and here. Today I understand that mine is a voluntary *sexile*, also tinged with complex ash. It is, however, the reflection on rights that most challenges me as a reader. Which sex-dissident lives have been

able to access the right to have a future and scare death, and which still do not have fundamental rights on both sides of the Atlantic? What deaths have not been entitled to mourning anywhere? How can transnational alliances be articulated to support dignified lives and deaths? What diasporic gestures can invoke *good living* and *good dying*?[5]

These questions that, never better said, travel through my head, are linked to something that has disturbed me about that book with such deep testimonial profundity. Purita dedicates her entire story to Paloma: "To our eternal Paloma, who, in joyous flight, left to crash like lightning" (25). Paloma migrated to Spain; she is part of that racialised migration that was able to enter the First World by coming to take care of the white body and doing, once again, jobs that European people no longer wanted; trans-

5 *Buen vivir* (Good living) is a principle articulated by indigenous populations and has been legally recognized in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador; therefore, an attempt to translate the *Sumak Kawsay* principle to the mestizo populations, which proposes a dignified life. However, the indigenous leader Luis Macas (2014) comments that *good living* is not an adequate translation for *Sumak Kawsay*, since there is a process of westernization of indigenous cultures in this use, as if they were synonyms. The prevention of it helps to think that precisely the dialogue of knowledge, if it is not based on intercultural paradigms, will inevitably be appropriationist and recolonising. I use the term *good living* to account for an *other-genealogy* that seeks to think of fundamental rights as universal, but that calls for contextualisations at the time of their access.

national care that generated wealth on both sides of the Atlantic (Herrera, 33-36). Paloma was surely part of the pichinchas, panchitas and machu-picchus who came from the Andes, new forms of pejorative designation that account for colonial history, and that were applied to indigenous, Afro or mestizo people.

However, this trans woman, Paloma, was the powder keg of the entire explosion in Ecuador. Purita recalls that the rest of the transgender and transvestite companions called her *La Derechos Humanos* (The Human Rights). A designation that strikes me as almost miraculous, Purita, moreover, highlights:

Paloma, one day, had summoned all her friends and colleagues to her modest home, a small villa inherited from her mother, located on a mound of earth, which seemed to be supported more by the branches of a grove than by the dilapidated foundations of its walls. There she proposed that it was time to act, to get together to achieve the repeal of the first paragraph of article 516 of the Ecuadorian Penal Code (...) [years later] she went to Spain and adopted the name Ámbar. There she worked in cleaning tasks in the Gay Collective of Madrid, Spain (COGAM), but not for that reason did she stop contributing in favor of respect for the rights of the GLTBI groups of Ecuador (28).

I timidly begin to investigate about Paloma/Ámbar. I have some conflicting data from people in Madrid who say they think they know who she is. I am moved because a former militant of the *Front d'Alliberament Gai de Catalunya*, Juan, claims to know her, since she also passed through Barcelona. But one day when I meet him he tells me that he could tell me everything "about Paola". Much more research is needed on Paloma, which I hope will continue after the writing of this text.

Thanks to Purita's editor, Fausto Yánez, who acts as a mediator, I obtain a vocal testimony from Purita about her friend Paloma so that it can be part of this text and the project to which Víctor Ramírez Tur, the kind curator, has invited me/us to think about the queer mourning. I listen to the audio. It is infinitely beautiful. Elegy of immense respect that I keep today as a treasure and that every time I hear something again tears me up. Purita's life on the Peninsula was marked by new forms of violence and discrimination: racism, xenophobia, transphobia, medical violence, etc. Usual narratives of the colonial system. When she died, she was finally able to return to Ecuador, to her native Esmeraldas. In a repository that she kept her ashes that are now on the same Pacific coast where they burned the sodomites.

Two days later, again thanks to Fausto, who also keeps Purita's magnificent archive of more than 2,000 photographs, I receive a photo that Purita gives us, not only to the two of us but also to you, who read this text. It is the only photo that remains of the two together, Purita and Paloma, in their youth. Their bodies stick together, wrapping themselves subtly, without each one losing her independence, her beauty and her glamour. The ashes turned into WhatsApp audio. The ashes turned photo. The ashes turned flesh.

Sketch 6.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR 12TH OCTOBER

Today is October 12, a day that commemorates Mediterranean colonialism and not only the Spanish imperial project. Spain, Catalonia and Italy have disputed the origin of Colón/Colom/Colombo/Columbus in their lands, showing how pertinent it is to think of this man, a symbol of colonization, beyond national projects, which serve as a ruse and euphemism for not discussing racism and coloniality in situ. He flew back to Barcelona from Ibiza. Below is the Mediterranean, today, the deadliest border in the world, whether due to systematic murder or wrongful death of people who try to cross to Fortress Europe; and which, of course, also includes sex-diverse and sex-dissident bodies, especially from Africa, who seek *sexiliation* (sex-exile). Although Barcelona and Spain always come out in some ranking as the safest city and country for LGBTTI+ people, there is an artifice in that statistic that never reviews matrices of race and coloniality; that does not understand the processes of suspicion and criminalization of sexually diverse bodies and racialized sex dissidents, or of impunity regarding aggressions that intersect ethnicity/national origin/gender, to mention a few

issues. This calls us, those of us who come from former Mediterranean colonies and who, therefore, have possibilities of expression such as language and writing, to think about oppression in a broad way, emerging from the crossfire of national debates and with proposals that link to other bodies affected by the colonial regime.

Many activities will take place today around the day that begins the conquest and the imposition of a world-*cistem* ('cis' system) in Catalonia. The anti-racist and anti-colonial political movement is growing larger and more complex every day. The "Regularization Now" campaign is the vertex that brings us together today from different places and positions in the discourse. For the first time, the march protesting what this day means will not end at the Columbus monument, which connects Las Ramblas with the port. We must begin to forget about these references, since national and local governments refuse to overthrow these monuments of violence.

It is better to remember our ancestors, although without falling into the appropriations of indigenous and Afro subjectivities that migrant mestizo people, not recognized by native communities in their countries of origin, from art and activism, have been do-

ing for several years. That act of recalling life and death from careful acts that, without losing the power of the symbol and the claim of colonial history, do not operate from the exoticisation and new subalternisations in their demands, is a challenge in our diasporic communities.

I talk with two dear sex-dissident colleagues, Mafe Moscoso and Personaje Personaje, to create a more meticulous perimeter that thinks about our deaths, so close and disturbing these days,[6] and that accounts for the strength of the heteropatriarchal system in our transit between here and there. We agreed that they would pass on their prayers to me to honour the ashes of our elders and their miracles. It is also a way to honour those ashes that we will one day be. Of invoking those ancestors from the power of the ash

6 I am not referring only to the time of COVID and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which mark the contemporary rhetoric of mourning, but rather how Ana Carolina Alvarado, another important trans activist from the Coccinelle Collective, has just died in the city of Quito without their violated rights being repaired. Likewise, Jéssica Martínez, Afro-trans leader and sex worker, died in the city of Ambato with indications of a hate crime, after she made complaints on social networks about criminal groups. And to CoCa, a Pacha Queer activist from Quito, who was shot in the stomach a few days ago and now has a reserved prognosis. All these acts against people who lead trans, transvestite and sexual dissidence processes today are highly worrying, and show the link between the resurgence of conservative movements and colonial discourse.

so that the body appears from the text... and their disturbing actions.

Today, before continuing walking, I will leave a copy of this writing, a kind of chronicle against the grain, in an envelope that I will place at the foot of the Columbus monument. Until we can enter the Museu Nacional to honor Paloma and reimagine the potency of sodomite ashes.

Sketch 7.
SODOMITE PRAYERS

To the tearing of the sack, which allows me
to escape.
To dislocated temporalities, which allow me
to wriggle.
To the tender mist, which allows me
to doubt.
To poisonous tongues, which allow me
to speak.
To the lost bodies, which allow me
to incarnate.
To the celebration of fury, which allows me
to walk.
To the mystery, which allows me this profane
to love.
I do this via a lot of chatter and all my life.

Personaje Personaje

Under the weight of banana uprooting, this queer daughter turns to you, beloved Santita, the one from the initiatory journey, the first of ours to arrive.

Under the weight of banana uprooting, this queer daughter turns to you, queen of our hearts, queen of our dedications, guardian of the disobedient.

Under the weight of banana uprooting, this queer little daughter turns to you, oh mighty Saint. I turn to you in a gesture of humble gratitude. Oh powerful Saint, guide of the uprooted, godmother of the insolent, guardian of the doors of our sexiles, we appeal to you.

Under the weight of banana uprooting, in times of colonial devastation, this queer daughter turns to you, Saint among Saints, inverted migrant, to you, wonderful ancestor, the first of ours to arrive, goddess of our lineage.

Under the weight of banana uprooting, this queer daughter addresses you, divine death, I address you in gratitude and exaltation. Your little queer daughters celebrate your brilliant memory, we ask for blessings and we shout out loud all your names so that they can never be erased again.

Amen.

Mafe Moscoso

Bibliografia

Amodio, E., *Formas de la alteridad. Construcción y difusión de la imagen del indio americano en Europa durante el primer siglo de la conquista de la conquista de América*, Abya-Yala, Quito, 1993.

Bertonio, L., *Vocabulario de la lengua aymara*, Centro de Estudios Económicos y de la Realidad Social, Cochabamba, 1984.

Cieza de León, P.,*Crónica del Perú. El señorío de los Incas*, Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas, 2005.

Diamond, J.,*Guns, Germs and Steel. A Short History of Everybody for the last 13,000 years*, Vintage Books, Londres, 1998.

Falconí Trávez, D.,*De las cenizas al texto: literaturas andinas de las disidencias sexuales en el siglo xx*, Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 2016.

Gutiérrez de Santa Clara, P.,*Historia de las guerras civiles del Perú (1544-1548) y de otros sucesos de las Indias,* tomo III, 1905,en línea: http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/cronistas-coloniales-primera-parte--0/html/.

Hegel, G. W., *Lecciones sobre filosofía de la historia universal*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1985.

Herrera, G., *Lejos de tus pupilas. Familias transnacionales, cuidados y desigualdad social en Ecuador*, ONU Mujeres-FLACSO, Quito, 2013.

Llamas, R.,*Teoría torcida. Prejuicios y discursos en torno a la homosexualidad*, Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1998.

Macas, L.,«El *Sumak Kawsay*»,-*Sumak Kawsay Yuyay. Antología del pensamiento indigenista ecuatoriano sobre Sumak Kawsay*,editores: Antonio Luis Hidalgo, Alejandro Guillén García y Nancy Deleg Guazha, FIUCUHU, Huelva-Cuenca, 2014, p. 179-192.

Martínez Shaw, C.,*Cataluña en la carrera de Indias*, Crítica, Barcelona, 1981.

Mires, F.,*El discurso de la indianidad*, Abya-Yala, Quito, 1991.

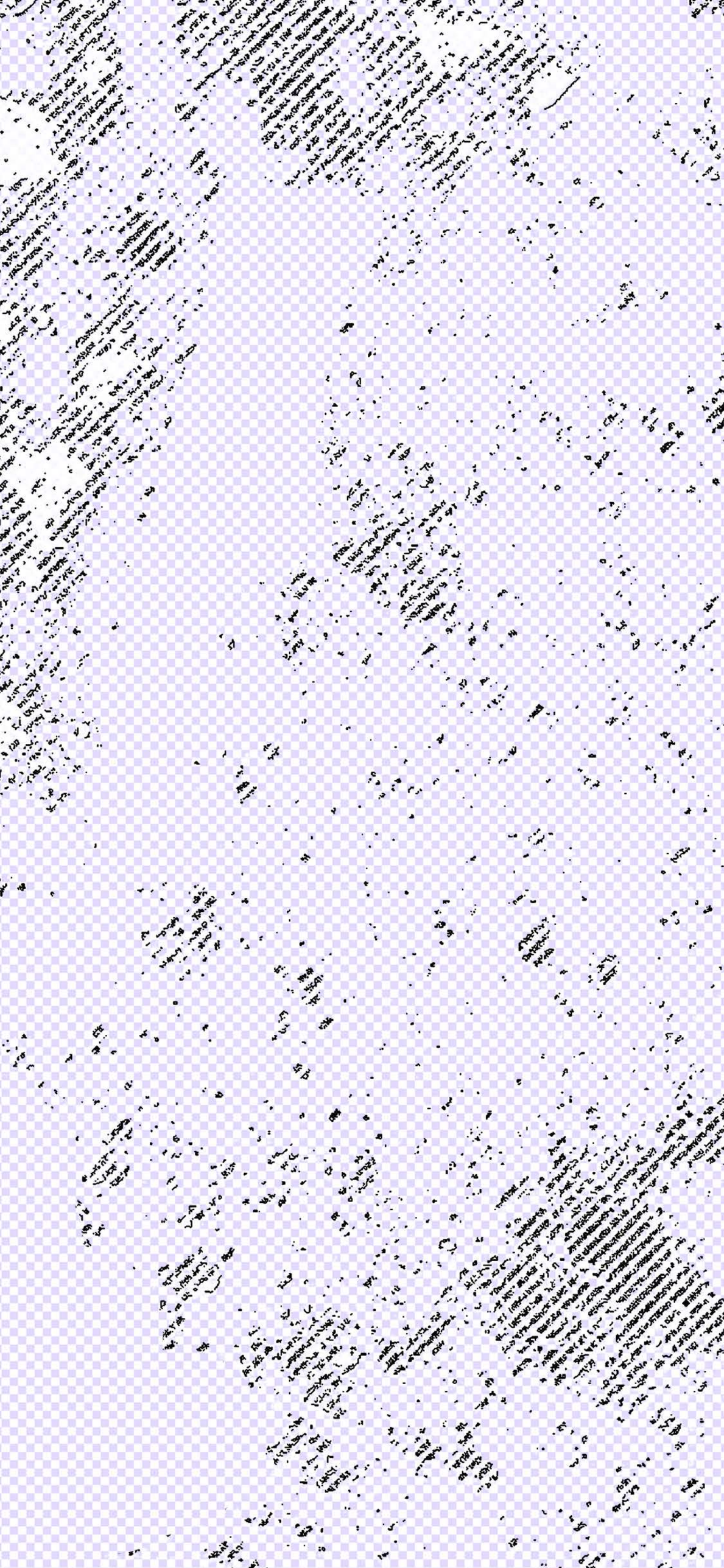
Montero, O.,«Julián del Casal and the Queers of Havana»,*¿Entiendes?: Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*,editores:Paul Julian Smith i Emilie L. Bergmann, Duke UP, Durham, 1995, p. 92-112.

O'Gorman, E.,. *La invención de América*: FCE, ciudad de México, 2002.

Pelayo, P.,*Los fantasmas se cabrearon. Crónicas de la despenalización de la homosexualidad en el Ecuador*, Severo/USFQ Press, Quito, 2021.

Sanjuan, J. M.,«El tráfico de esclavos y la élite barcelonesa. Los negocios de la Casa Vidal Ribas»,*Negreros y esclavos: Barcelona y la esclavitud atlántica (siglos xvi-xix)*,editores: Lizbeth J. Chaviano Pérez i Martín Rodrigo i Alharilla, Icaria, Barcelona, 2017, p. 131-149.

Zubiaur, I.,*Pioneros de lo homosexual: K. H. Ulrichs, K.* M., Kertbeny*, M. Hirschfeld*, Editorial Anthropos, Barcelona, 2007.



THE POLICY OF FORGETTING AND MEMORY

Toni R. Juncosa

Agustí Centelles, *Bombardeig de Lleida*, 1937
Modern, room 76

If we accept the elegiac condition of life, it is likely that, at critical moments, we only find in the references to what was already the possibility of orientation and guidance: fragile possibilities, no doubt, but the only ones that are in the reach of a human being.

—Joan-Carles Mèlich, *The experience of loss*

On a dusty field, among some bushes: the inert body of a child. Next to him, a mother who, kneeling, has just recognised her son. Other bodies are spread around him: old people, peasants, no one in uniform. The image is from 3rd November, 1937, near the Lleida cemetery, after a Savoia-Marchetti SM 79 air squadron bombed the city. The concreteness of this historical framework is blurred, however, under the weight of mourning for the loss of a son. With this work, the photography of Agustí Centelles joins the artistic tradition of the *pietà*: the mother who embraces, holds or gazes disconsolately at her dead son. Built on one of the most recurring motifs in the Western imagery, the work vibrates within a specific context and at the same time expands with the power of universality.

Far from the divine calm with which it is customary to surround the *pietà*, however, the emotion that occupies the centre of the image in *Bombing of Lleida* is so intense that the contours practically disappear from view. As a visual elegy, the work is endowed with a centripetal force that sucks us in and immerses us in the temporary state in which we fall with grief: a stagnant time, an inescapable continuous present.[1] At the same time, this present is an insistent recovery of the past, of a past so fragile that it requires

every possible effort to record it, to prevent it from being lost forever. In its artistic expression, elegy clings to the not forgetting of what is experienced as unacceptable, as unjust. The artist's gaze thus rebels against the rule of progress, against the insistent obligation of progress. Faced with a promise of growth based on collective amnesia, the elegy stops and rebels.

1 Clifton Spargo reflects in depth on the link between present temporality and elegiac expression a «The Contemporary Anti-Elegy» (2010).

It is because of this opposition to the historical flow of grief that the prevailing order accuses us of surrendering to melancholy. We refuse to forget, we cling to what is ours and claim the only thing left to us: an interrupted past. The past dimension is, par excellence, the kingdom of the vanquished. History with a capital letter, inexorable, does not stop, while we losers cling desperately to the remains of what was, of what could be, of what will never be. For decades, fascism has erased those narratives that did not fit into the triumphant universalism of its victory. Franco's regime set out to eliminate by fire all evidence of another way of being, of feeling, of living. During this process of forced oblivion, minority groups—left-wing people, but also women, racialised people and LGBTIA+—were given a voice in the writing of

the past; and the statement of any unauthorized version of history has been proof of our treachery, our lack of reason, the most pathological madness. This is why works like Centelles's, where the existence of a divergent way of life materializes, are key in determining reality.

In his famous first writing on loss, Freud distinguished between mourning and melancholia.[2] Mourning, for Freud, was a healthy and natural reaction, a temporary psychic state characterised by the ability to gradually overcome the psychic negativity and pain surrounding loss. Melancholy, on the other hand, would be the morbid inability to leave this state behind, a situation that, when prolonged and beginning to have negative effects on the person, would end up requiring medical treatment. While Freud himself renounced the binarism of this distinction in his later writings,[3] the pathologising view of melancholy persisted for decades in diagnosis and medical practice, and survives today in the dominant discourse of today's capitalist neoliberalism. Because of the temporary stagnation it entails, melancholy is an impediment to productivity; it is therefore necessary to

2 «Mourning and melancholy» [Trauer und Melancholie], published in 1917.

3 For example *The Ego and the Id* [Das Ich und das Es](1923).

prevent it from spreading. In the society of self-help and optimism Mr.Wonderful[â], feeling loss is a symptom of weakness and vulnerability.

The debate still alive today around the removal of monuments and other symbols that pay tribute to colonialism – here I'm talking about the Christopher Columbus column in Barcelona's Ramblas - demonstrates the general reluctance to review any aspect of the past. *Get over it. It's been a long time. Don't think about it anymore. Let it be.* The acceptance of certain discourses implies, however, playing the game of forgetting and, therefore, perpetuating the imposition of a single version of what is possible.

Despite everything, history is full of glimpses into a past that overflows with alternative lifestyles. In the Old Testament, God warns Lot that he will destroy Sodom and Gomorrah with a fire storm. One of the conditions of this punishment is that, when fleeing, no one turns to look at the destruction, with the threat of being turned into a pillar of salt. As they flee, however, Lot's wife looks back. Hers is an act of defiance, yes, but above all of empathy. Lot's wife - whose name History has obviously erased - refuses to forget. She is the melancholy look, the petrified witness to the existence of an alternative narrative

and the rigidity with which every attempt to preserve it is censured. For many, the past has been the only sphere in which to find other ways of being. In “Ode to Walt Whitman”, Federico García Lorca imagined the American bard with a beard full of butterflies and held on to the vitality with which he lived—and wrote—his diversity, almost a century before him. The exercise of the poet from Granada is familiar to us because it is ours: it is the vindication of the existence of a divergent past to the hegemony of the prevailing discourse, a past that shows that what has been denied to us is possible, a promising past, a queer past. Lorca’s song is the same as the recovery of the feminine power of the witches in the poetry of Maria Mercè Marçal, the vindication of the homoerotic tolerance of the classical world in Derek Jarman’s *Sebastiane* or the praise of the ancient malleability of the sex-gender system that Virginia Woolf unearths in *Orlando*. They are all examples of what Heather Love calls “affective historiography”: exercises in digging through the archives of the past with the stubborn conviction and hope that what we people who occupy the margins feel is not just ours, it’s not just now and here.

Assimilating the prevailing futuristic gaze, and as a reaction to the widespread re-

jection of any recovery of the past as melancholy and toxic, feminism and queer movements have often sought to focus on the promise of a better future. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz explained that the present is not yet queer; that it is with imagination and creativity that we can begin to build a world that has not yet arrived. Living the absence that Muñoz talks about, but with the fear of seeming hysterical, we have swallowed in silence the evil that we have had to experience. Against this tendency, I join the proposal of Sara Ahmed when she defends that if living our reality coherently means shaking the status quo and making it uncomfortable, then we must do so: we must complain, we need to bother.[4] Crying our mourning out loud means reclaiming what has been taken from us: children, hope, childhood, the future. The recovery of the past - Muñoz himself explains in *Disidentifications* - is sometimes the only possible political reaction to a present that excludes us. What is needed, explains Muñoz, is

> [...] depathologise melancholy and understand it as a necessary sentimental structure and not always counterproductive or negative. What I am proposing is that melancholy, for racialised, queer, or

4 *The Promise of Happiness* (2010).

> racialised and queer people, is not a pathology but an integral part of our daily lives [as a] process of managing the catastrophes we experience [...]]. It is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct our identity and carry our dead with us in the many battles we fight in their name... and in our name. (74)

Mark L. Fisher public burial, Gran Fury / ACT UP, photo by Stephen Barker

Bringing their dead to the battles they fought is what the members of the New York art collective Gran Fury did, literally, during the first decade of the AIDS crisis. Faced with the political inaction of the United States government during the epidemic, Gran Fury organised public burials where the body of one of the members who died of AIDS-related complications was carried to the front of public buildings such as the House White.[5] These acts were protests that demanded responsibility from

the authorities, but they were also occasions of mourning in which the existence of deaths - and lives - that the public discourse showed in a biased way was made visible - and therefore acknowledged, when they did not ignore them completely.

5 See Jack Lowery, *It Was Vulgar & It Was Beautiful* (2022).

The recognition of the AIDS crisis as a national trauma has been one of the goals of queer and feminist activists and theorists.[6] Indeed, the official acts of mourning are key symbolic moments in the integration of certain marginalised subjectivities within the national identity. A state that mourns a loss is a state that recognises the lost life as worthy of mourning and thus as an integrated, valid and representative member of the society that remembers it. As Sara Ahmed stresses in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, however, the goal of a "queer politics of mourning" should not be national validation but rather obtaining the time and space to mourn our losses, without expecting that "the nation" in general will come to mourn them, and regardless of whether they come to be considered official national losses. Our mourning policy is a policy that demands the right to cry, to remember, to not turn the page.

6 One of the texts most explicitly dedicated to this issue is *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), byAnn Cvetkovich.

The first years of the AIDS crisis staged a setback in the advances in the fight for sexual dissent. Under the discourse of punishment and guilt, the sexual openness that had been achieved during the sixties and seventies of the last century was reconfigured as the main cause of the pandemic. Thus, the most radical positions—promiscuity, polyamorous, less normative affection networks—were not only hidden, but rejected, denied, and erased by the prevailing discourse, and even within important parts of the same group, in order to achieve a minimum social acceptance. Because, as Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed report in *If Memory Serves*, the AIDS crisis was the perfect pretext for

> «[...] effectively concentrate a set of cultural forces that made (and still make) the syndrome an agent of amnesia, thus erasing memories not only of everything that had existed before, but also of particularly creative and original strategies with how gay communities were responding to a catastrophe of disease and death, and how they had sought to honour our dead.(3)

Faced with the "degenerational unremembering" that Castiglia and Reed detect in contemporary public discourse and after

the first years of the crisis, the visibility of mourning in the funeral marches organized by Gran Fury is a claim of queer loss as political event.

David Wojnarowicz, *tríptic Peter Hujar*- Untitled, 1987

The same claim is given to the portraits that David Wojnarowicz made of his teacher, lover and life partner, Peter Hujar. Hujar's portraits take us into the intimacy of a death scene that refers to the motif of Christian mercy. Like the body of Christ in the *pietà*, Hujar's body is too young and shows signs of the passion—in Hujar's case, premature aging due to the opportunistic diseases associated with AIDS, visible in the hands and feet, where the stigmata of Jesus would be. Perhaps an even more symbolic link is the fact that both Hujar and Christ are innocent victims of intolerance and discrimination. But it is in the differences between the representation of Hujar and that of Jesus that Wojnarowicz's melancholy message lies. Hujar's portrait does not present him with the frequent divine solemnity, but with his mouth and eyes open, in his impersonal hospital gown, and with his beard and hair unkempt. The state of

his body is proof of the cruelty of his death. Hujar also appears in complete solitude. No mother accompanies him or mourns him. Wojnarowicz thus illustrates the absence not only of the health authorities in the face of people affected by AIDS, but also of the biological families, who, in so many cases, abandoned the sick in their last moments. And, despite everything, in Hujar's portraits, the intimate proximity of the camera to the dead body indicates an undeniable accompaniment. Instead of portraying the whole body, Wojnarowicz approaches Hujar with tenderness. The piety of these portraits can be found in nothing less than in the photographic gaze itself. If the biological family is not with Hujar on his deathbed, his life partner is. Wojnarowicz's portrait-elegy is thus irrefutable proof of the presence of the chosen family, the queer family.

The family is above all a structure of material and emotional support, but also a constellation of references. To lose a family member is to lose a guide, an open path, a life model. This loss is always felt, but the void it leaves is of a particularly deep darkness when, beyond the family, references are either scarce or non-existent. The people who died during the first years of the AIDS epidemic were family. They were brothers, they

were uncles, they were children, parents and lovers. But they were also members of a wider community that, without them, remains orphaned. His absence leaves a void at home and on the streets. His projects, his ambitions, his presence, his advice... with his life, he paved the way. How would Wojnarowicz have lived if Hujar had not died? What would he have taught him? What work would Wojnarowicz himself have produced if he had not died at the age of thirty-eight? How many young people would the artist have taught to rebel when growing up? How would he have changed, even more so, the way we see art today? What music would Freddy Mercury have offered us? What would Gil de Biedma have made us understand? What rights would this generation of activists have achieved for us? How else would we have grown up if we had had them by our side?

The mother's lament in front of her son killed in the bombing of Lleida is, in essence, the same lament as ours: the mourning we weep in the face of an eradicated potential. But remembering these lives is not falling into the stagnation of an obsolete past. Remembering is also unearthing dreams, projects and realities, it is bringing to light denied existences, it is affirming the possibility of a past life to give it body today. It is in this

sense that melancholy is necessary for us, and that is why, as Heather Love explains,

> "we could consider the work of historical affirmation not as it is often characterised, as a lifeline thrown to the figures that they drown in the negativity of the in the bad gay past, but as a resource to ensure a more stable and positive identity in the present» (34).

Both Wojnarowicz's work and the events of Gran Fury, as well as the photographs that Centelles left as a testimony to the Civil War, represent the claim of a set of past lives, but also the reaffirmation of one's own existence in the present. Recovering their voices is making possible again what someone wanted to eradicate, it is a clear and powerful response to forced amnesia and learned disremembering. Making memory is a practice of radical hope, it is clearing the paths that connect the past, present and future in order to live in a true way.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, S., *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Edinburgh University Press, Edimburg, 2004.

———. *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010.

Castiglia, C. i Reed, C., *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of a Queer Past*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012.

Cvetkovich, A., *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Duke University Press, Londres, 2003. [Print.]

Sigmund, F., *Obras completes*, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 1996.

Love, H., *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Harvard, Cambridge, 2007.

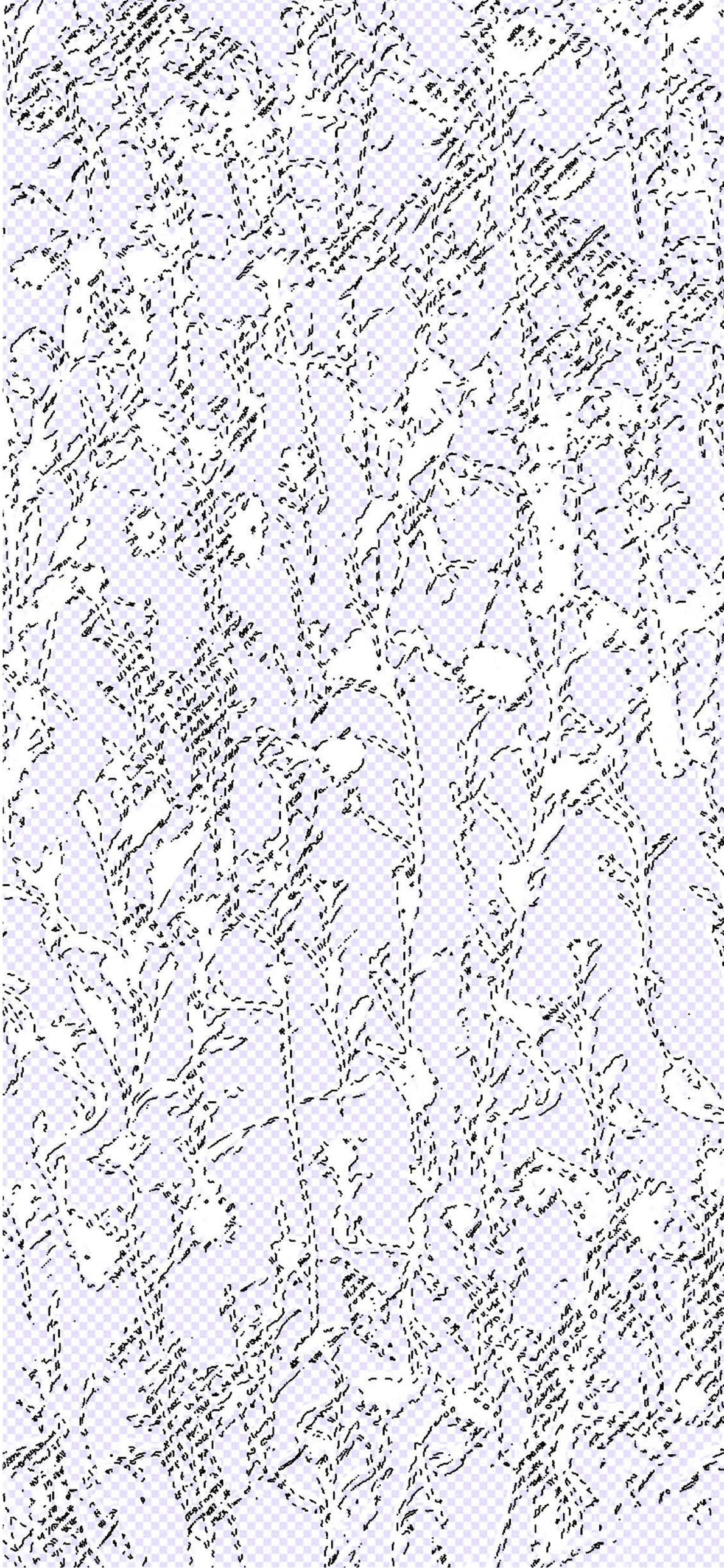
Lowery, J., *It Was Vulgar & It Was Beautiful: How AIDS Activists Used Art to Fight a Pandemic*, Bold Type Books, Nova York, 2022.

Mèlich, J.-C., *L'experiència de la pèrdua: Assaig de filosofia literària*, Arcàdia, Barcelona, 2017.

Muñoz, J.E., *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* New York University Press, Nova York, 2009.

———. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991.

Spargo, R. i Clifton, R., «The Contemporary Anti-Elegy», *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, Ed. Karen Weisman, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 413-429.



Authorship and edition
Víctor Ramírez Tur

Texts
Diego Falconí Trávez
Toni R. Juncosa
Víctor Ramírez Tur
Mireia Sánchez
Júlia Sánchez Cid

Graphic Design
Sergi Casero

Proofreading and translations
Barcelona Textos
Anthony Nicholson

Edition: December 2022
ISBN: 978-84-8043-398-3