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## ⇒ Hemispheric Looks at Literary AIDS Discourses in Latin America

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Ottmar Ette's suggestion that we view the construction of the Americas as "hemispheric" will be taken up in this volume in many different ways. A comprehensive explanation of the term will – a sensible procedure – have to come from the *auctor* of the concept himself. My promise of "hemispheric looks" rests on the following understanding: a statement only turns into discourse when the epistemic co-ordinates of its origin are under consideration. A hemispheric look frees an individual phenomenon from the isolation of its local conditions – in Latin America, for example – and embeds it in dynamic relations that always take into account slumbering, global discursive contexts that are only partially developed. The parallels and differences between cultural processes are thus necessarily perceived as complements.

The literary AIDS discourse demands such a complementary approach because of the evident rift between poor and rich countries. If we are dealing here with Latin American AIDS literature – that is to say the literature of a poor region – then a hemispheric perspective will have to widen the binary opposition of Old and New Worlds into a triangle with Europe-USA-Latin America constituting its three sides. It should be stressed from the beginning that quite obviously *the* Spanish, Cuban, German or US-American AIDS discourse does not exist, rather that its diverse individualities in a given cultural area relate to their own and foreign forms of discourse. This should become evident in what follows.

Two theoretical horizons will be present hereafter: gay theory and postcolonial cultural theory. The first is the central point of reference for AIDS discourses even when this endemic disease is not exclusively, and in many countries not even primarily, a problem of male homosexuals. As we know, Michel Foucault situates the construction of the homosexual as species in the sexual disposition of the second half of the nineteenth century when the discourse of medicine and law allowed same sex sexuality a status of its own (Foucault 1976). Such stylization culminates under the sign of AIDS:

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AIDS [...] as a historical phenomenon in the so-called Western democracies [...] has taken shape [...] as that which writes or articulates another subject altogether: a subject whose content is suggested but not exhausted by reference to ‘male homosexuality’ (Edelman 1993: 10).

Lee Edelman’s explanation of why, in contrast to Africa, Western countries automatically linked AIDS to male homosexuality results from an analysis of pertinent reports in the media. If, in the US, Senator Jesse Helms, a representative of an archconservative and homophobic social group, declares before the Senate in 1987: “Every AIDS case can be traced back to a homosexual act”, then this is – according to Douglas Crimp – “entirely wrong about the facts”, yet “entirely right about the representation” (Crimp 2002: 239).

An explicatory note on the postcolonial context: from a postcolonial perspective the Spanish *conquista* of America appears to be a continuation of *reconquista*, that is, the expulsion of both the Arab and the Jewish populations from the Iberian peninsula with its triple cardinal date of 1492.<sup>1</sup> Thus the work of missionaries in America continued Christianisation as a project for extinguishing others or believers of a different faith. Concrete models of discursive discrimination also accompany colonialisation. The Arab who is driven out after centuries of peaceful coexistence, and the Jew who is suddenly excluded for a lack of *limpieza de sangre*, become persecuted people by the fact that they are stylized into prototypal others. Such *racial* discrimination goes hand in hand with *sexual* discrimination when the Arab – and somewhat later the *indígena* – are simultaneously assigned to the space of forbidden sexuality directed towards *contra naturam*, sodomy.

Hardt/Negri describe the dialectics of such colonial discourse. They show the interaction of self and other as soon as the colonial subject has been stylized into the absolute other:

Once the colonial subject is constructed as absolutely Other, it can in turn be subsumed [...] within a higher unity. The absolute Other is reflected back into the most proper. Only through opposition to the colonized does the metropolitan subject really become itself. What first appeared as a simple logic of exclusion, then, turns out to be a negative dialectic of recognition. The colonizer does produce the colonised as negation, but, through a dialectic twist, that negative colonized identity is negated in turn to found the positive colonizer Self (Hardt/Negri 2000: 128).

The link between Latin American postcolonial studies and gay theory means that the Latino is regarded as the prototypal other who, suspected of sodomy, has been regarded warily since the era of the *conquistadores*. At the same time he is frequently, if secretly turned into an icon of desire. Despite his “attractiveness”, the colonial system of functions assigns him merely a “subaltern” role, to which he reacts by taking over the “passive” role of the *marica*, the faggot.

<sup>1</sup> We should remember that in his diary Columbus already connects the expulsion of the Jews with the end of the *reconquista*. Granted, he does not yet observe “sodomite practices” among the *indígenas*; pertinent descriptions are to be found later, in Cortés’ *Primera relación* and in the *Comentarios reales* of Garcilaso de la Vega. See Goldberg (1992), ch. 6 (“They are all Sodomites – The New World”) for more details, particularly with regard to the systematic extermination of “sodomites”.

## 2. The USA – Hope, Ruin and Myth

Not only are AIDS discourses heterogeneous in given cultures, the images that individual cultural regions fashion of others may be as contradictory as those images of the US that Europe and Latin America created in their literature on AIDS. Two Spanish paradigms: Californian San Francisco is a city of hope and solidarity to the protagonist suffering from AIDS in Agustín Muñoz Sanz' *O Yacoi*. It is quite different in Pombo's *Los delitos insignificantes* where the main character sees a young, white, well-built North American, and the Spaniard immediately thinks of AIDS, that *these boys have really let us have this shit ...* (Pombo 1986). In the course of AIDS endemism, this, for the first time, ascribes the function of a scapegoat (in René Girard's sense) to a member of one of the peer groups of the world – the metropolitan, young, male and progressive North American.

Dennis Altman, one of the chief theoreticians of gay theory, admits that, “viruses know neither nationality nor sexuality”, nevertheless he speaks of an “American Myth” (Altman 1986).

Similarly, in the eighties and nineties the majority of AIDS theoreticians restricted their reflections exclusively to the so-called “First World”. This underlines their relatedness to US American discourse on several fronts. “La cultura en torno al Sida, para lo bueno y para lo malo, nace en Estados Unidos”, asserts the Spanish critic Alberto Mira (1993: 230), and even Alan Sinfield from Great Britain, himself quite critical of the US, concedes, “a good deal of European gay identity derives from the United States” (Sinfield 1998: 91).

From the perspective of hemispheric construction the question once again arises as to whether, and how far, the postulate of a homosexual “identity” is in itself a Western, Eurocentric phenomenon that has simply been loaded onto the former colonies. There are two positions that can be taken here. The first has it that the taxonomy of two opposite sexual identities, homo- and heterosexual (so frequently questioned by gender, gay and queer studies), must fundamentally be regarded as a Eurocentric model which can never be compatible with non-Western societies (e.g. Schmitt/Sofers 1992). The second position has it that the growing “Americanisation” (observed by Altman as early as the eighties [Altman 1982]) should be seen, from a postcolonial perspective, as more differentiated, as the effect of a globalised world, not least in the area of gender performance.<sup>2</sup> Such globalization requires the hemispheric perspective which will now, in the central part of the essay, be applied to some Latin American works.

## 3. Literary responses in Latin America

### 3.1. *The Colibri on the Dead Men's Boat – The Problematical Creation of an AIDS Discourse in Severo Sarduy's Colibrí*

*Colibrí*, written in 1983 by the Cuban Severo Sarduy during his French exile, is set in a jungle brothel with a clientele of men desiring men. Despite his name, *Colibrí* is a

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. several contributions on the Asian and North African regions in Hawley (2001), particularly Altman (2001) who offers a clear perspective on Latin America.

tall, athletic, blond dancer appearing in the shows of the establishment with La Japonesa, a fat Japanese wrestler. Colibrí and La Japonesa fall in love and flee into the jungle, pursued by the henchmen of the ruined owner of the brothel, a transvestite *Regenta*.

During his flight Colibrí comes to his parents' home where he writes down his experiences.<sup>3</sup> Another metaliterary note alludes to Cuba's political reality by speaking, in neobaroque disguise, of the "measures of establishing parameters".<sup>4</sup> Sarduy here alludes to what the Cuban revolutionary government and their macho cult of *hombre nuevo* practised, namely diffaming homosexuals as *gusanos* and exposing them to dangerous forced labour "for their betterment".

The text, drenched in irony and luxuriant with metaphors, has its jungle ambience: carpets of phosphorescing insects, screaming monkeys and a nun hitting her head against the ceiling with every levitation. The text thus carnivalizes that exoticism with which a Western reception spuriously endows, and has endowed, so-called magic realism. This is a decisively innovating strategy; in our context, however, three different aspects are central: first, making homosexual existence a theme ("identity"), then Cuba's political reality, and, ultimately, AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

After many adventures Colibrí returns and himself becomes the boss of the brothel. He comes upon a boat full of pale, haggard men with swollen lymph nodes and white skin splodges. The scene recalls Pieter Brueghel's painting of the *Ship of Dead* (which hangs in the Prado): an allegory of death by pestilence. But here neither pestilence nor any other abstract disease is involved; the text clarifies this with a double acrostic:

–Aquí sí que se acaba todo – susurró al Japonés.  
 –Inútil sería continuar – respondió el Sanote.  
 –Debemos de abandonar a estos escrofulosos.  
 –Sí. Y en seguida.

Esa misma noche, envuelto en un plástico transparente y encordelado, los adeptos de la Mona dejaron deslizar hasta el río el primer cadáver. Más que un cuerpo, era un saco hinchado de pus y de morbo: la boca áspera y carcomida, abandonada a las ratas; la nariz supurante; un sarcoma rosáceo le ampollaba la frente.

Se tiraron al agua Colibrí y el Chinote.  
 Intentaron nadar hasta la orilla.  
 Derecho, siempre derecho, braceando con fuerza.  
 A ver si llegan... (Sarduy 1984: 168).<sup>6</sup>

Thus *Colibrí*, written in 1983 and published in March 1984, is the first Latin American AIDS novel. Characteristically, however, this subject is only touched upon in the

<sup>3</sup> In a text continuously operating on a metaliterary level, the father comments as follows, "Voy a hablarte sonante y cantante. Ya tú eres un hombre y de los Sarduy, hasta ahora, no ha habido ningún pájaro. Y yo no quiero que nadie me señale en la calle. Así es que ahora mismo vas a quemar también esas cuatro mierdas. ¿Quién ha visto a un hombre jugando con fruticas de brilladera?" (Sarduy 1984: 129).

<sup>4</sup> "Argot laboral neo-cubano. Los que, aun aptos para ocupar los cargos más encumbrados, caen en el 'diversionismo ideológico', o en su variante más perversa, el uranismo, se ven *parametrados* de la noche a la mañana, a la limpieza de letrinas y cloacas, o a la suplencia de zacatecas integrados, cuando azota, obra del anófeles apapipio, el dengue viral." (Sarduy 1984: 20)

<sup>5</sup> For other aspects, particularly the aesthetics of excess, see Ingenschay (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the German translator did not render the essential acrostic.

acrostic. At that point neither Sarduy nor the Latin American novel had a determined position vis-à-vis this newly discovered disease which here has been integrated into the bombastic and queer aesthetic of a Latin American discourse of transvestism. This discourse offers its very own answer to the widespread discrimination in Latin America of, above all, effeminate homosexuals, a discrimination with roots going back – as I have mentioned – to early colonialism, which found it hard to classify *indígenas* as human beings with a soul because they indulged in “sodomite practices”.

### 3.2. *The neobaroque AIDS Ward: Pájaros de la playa*

Ten years after *Colibrí*, Sarduy, who was in the meantime suffering from AIDS himself, returned to this theme in the novel *Pájaros de la playa*, published posthumously. Once again the *histoire* is so obstructed by a luxuriantly metaphorical neobaroque discursive surface that it is difficult to reconstruct the plot. Nudist athletes, characterised as homosexuals by the *pájaros* metaphor, have withdrawn to an island without a name. In the vicinity of a grand colonial mansion they live a “sueño abortado de un demiurgo menor” (Sarduy 1993: 25), their lives are marked by constant medication and transfusions and threatened by an omnipresent death: “Ante la indiferencia de Dios caen fulminados hombres y pájaros. Las víctimas se escogen al azar, como en una galaxia el astro que va a consumirse” (Sarduy 1993: 25).

One of the characters (who goes by the telling name of Siempreviva) falls in love with Caballo, the doctor, as well as with Caimán, the advocate of natural medical treatment and bearer of a *nueva utopía*. Caimán removes the massed products of orthodox medicine which lie around in the pots on the dressing table (Sarduy 1993: 33). Whereas in *Colibrí*, the *amour fou* of the dissimilar same-sex couple was placed at the centre, here Sarduy’s typical focus on the body has been transferred to disease, ailing, death and hope of forms of survival. The text makes a game out of the ambivalence between a tone that is, in the truest sense, sad unto death, and the playful handling of transvestite elements, when, for instance, “la de la transfusión”, remembering earlier times, dresses in a sailor suit, or when doctors and male nurses turn into vampires.

Aiming to place Sarduy in a hemispheric perspective, I shall briefly point to the artistic treatment of AIDS in the US at the time when the first enlightening, yet trivial modes of apperception occurred (e.g. Tony Kushner’s melodrama *Angels in America* and the mainstream films *Philadelphia* or *Longtime Companion* [Harty 1992]). In France Cyril Collard, with *Les nuits fauves* and, most notably, Hervé Guibert, with *A l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie* and its sequels, produced literary ego documents distinguished by a highly innovative corporeal self reflection (Wetsel 1992). Sarduy’s neobaroque novel attests to quite a different, novel handling of the disease which grows into a metaphor for the end of the world: “la rubia prerrafaelita... se había encerrado a pan y agua en su celda para redactar un diario sobre la extinción del cosmos y su metáfora: la enfermedad” (Sarduy 1993: 120). It is significant that AIDS is never called by its name, a variation, as it were, on Oscar Wilde’s dictum about homosexual love as “love that dares not speak its name”. Wilde’s aphorism has become radicalized: Sarduy exemplifies, like many authors before him, the silence that has fallen before an illness which was at that time inevitably mortal. As Susan Sontag shows in *Aids and its Metaphors*, this disease makes any kind of metaphor obsolete (Sontag 1989).

### 3.3. Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* (and *Goytisolo, Las virtudes del pájaro solitario*) - *AIDS and the Virus of Communism*

Reinaldo Arenas' "autobiography" *Antes que anochezca* (1992) is not characterized by a neobaroque, but by its hyperbolic texture. Once again it is a work published posthumously. The seriously ill author dictated it in large parts in North American exile shortly before his suicide in 1990.<sup>7</sup> The text, with its furious attacks on the homophobia of revolutionary Cuba, is important because of its indictment of Fidel Castro. The author blames Castro for his infection with AIDS, not his own excessive sexual activities. Promiscuous sexuality, which Arenas indicates with the astronomical figure of thousands of sexual partners, is to him an element of homosexual self-definition ("identity") that, in turn, declares the hyperbolic to be the allegedly normal in Cuban every day life.<sup>8</sup> "The Latino", by representing himself as an ethnic other, skillfully responds to his being stylized as a monster of alterity throughout the history of colonialism since the *conquista*. Consequently, Arenas' self is the passive, the penetrated. Hardt/Negri recognize this combination of ethnic alterity and allegedly excessive sexuality when they state: "Racial difference is a sort of black hole that can swallow up all the capacities for evil, barbarism, unrestrained sexuality, and so forth" (Hardt/Negri 2000: 124). Living an "unrestrained sexuality" is a means for Arenas for stylizing himself as other.

Robert Richmond Ellis was the first to draw attention to a parallel between Arenas' work and the novel *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* by the Spaniard Juan Goytisolo (Ellis 1997). In his many-layered 1987 novel that cites the Baroque discourse of San Juan de la Cruz, Goytisolo charges several representatives of power with intellectual contamination – from the Inquisition to Franco, Fidel Castro and the Soviet system still in existence at that time; with Franco turning into Don Blas and Fidel into the Marquesa Anastasia. Goytisolo takes this latter image from a story by the Cuban writer Jorge Ronet who died of AIDS. By a stroke of irony, the equation of Fidel Castro with this lady identifies the macho symbol of the *hombre nuevo* with the *marica*, that figure most severely exposed to social defamation.<sup>9</sup> I should like to point out the differing objectives in Arenas and Goytisolo which are, however, complementary with regard to their hemispheric direction. Whereas Goytisolo calls for solidarity against totalitarianism of any kind, Arenas attacks the practice of suppression in revolutionary Cuba. Moreover, the Spanish novelist traces the heresy of the Baroque Carmelite monk San Juan to his references to Arabian Sufi mysticism, and thus finds in the pre-colonial Spain of Al-Andalus a lost, persecuted, but once integral ideal world. Conversely, Arenas, by constructing an identity with the help of Castroist persecution, at the same time rejects the cold economy of desire of the North American homosexual scene.<sup>10</sup> Thus, like Sarduy, he proclaims the Latin American way as having its individual value. It is a way and a discourse, drawing on North American cultural theory and its debate about AIDS, but also going beyond it.

<sup>7</sup> For details see Ette (1996) and Bejel (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Cp. Nagy Zekmi (2000) on this.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Epps (1996) on this.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Smith (1998) on this.

### 3.4. *No/one Answer from the System: Does AIDS liberate?*

In 1997 a small Madrid publisher brought out a collection of eighteen short stories under the title *Toda esa gente solitaria*, written by Cubans who had all taken part in one of the *talleres literarios* (“workshops for literary creation”) spread over the island (Zayón Jomolca/Fajardo Atanes 1997). The *taller* is called “La Montaña mágica” and thus not only alludes to Thomas Mann as a novelist of homosexual desire, but also to Einfried, the sanatorium in his *Zauberberg*. The authors of the short stories are inmates of the AIDS ward Sanatorio de Santiago de Las Vegas, known as “Villa Los Cocos”. The background to the publication was the charge, frequently repeated by the international anti-AIDS movement, that Castro shut up HIV-positive Cubans in a camp (termed “concentration camp” by the historically less aware).

In the preface the editors of the collection indirectly deal with this accusation without taking up a position against forced internment: “La idea de cortar la enfermedad mediante el expeditivo método del internamiento forzoso ha sido fuente de un sinnúmero de conflictos de opinión, tanto en el exterior como en la propia Cuba” (Zayón Jomolca/Fajardo Atanes 1997: 12).

The stories show how these human beings examine their selves, their bodies, their sexuality, their illness. It is interesting to see to what extent the immovable pro-revolutionary ideological basis leads to the same demonization of both disease and their individual forms of desire engaged in by the Cuban mainstream. In this manner, which would be touching if it were not so serious, David Díaz Hernández writes in his story “No le pidas al diablo que llore”: “Para Daniel era de total desconocimiento la condición homosexual de su amigo, en ese momento no supo que hacer pues se sentía engañado, no podía creer que Román le hubiera escondido la verdad durante tanto tiempo...” (Díaz Hernández 1997: 89).

Daniel is reading the good-bye letter of his friend Román who puts an end to his life because he has infected himself with the HI-virus during an affair with a soldier.<sup>11</sup> Facing the suicide of his friend, Daniel senses “un gran dolor por el camino que Román eligió para exonerarse de toda culpa” (Díaz Hernández 1997: 93). In another story, “En la diversidad” by José Miguel Sánchez Gómez, the protagonist allows himself such considerations as these:

Maricón, ganso, pato, pájaro, homosexual, gay... algunos suenan peor y otros mejor. [...] En Cuba se es hombre o maricón, sin términos medios ni escalita de Kinsey que valga. Nunca quise ser maricón. [...] Mirándome frente al espejo, nunca descubrí esos gestos amanerados que de chiquito veía en Alberto, la loca del barrio en que me crié. Ni engolaba la voz, ni tenía las nalgas grandes como él... (Sánchez Gómez 1997: 133).

<sup>11</sup> “En la parada de la Ciudad Deportiva se montó un militar que era todo una belleza, y se sentó frente a mí. Debo confesar que se me iban los ojos, pero bien sabes que no me gusta forzar las cosas. Inesperadamente comenzó a mirarme y me puse muy nervioso. ¿Te bajas conmigo?, preguntó convencido de cuál iba a ser mi respuesta. Yo sólo alcancé a sonreír, y flechado por el natural proceder de aquel robusto oficial de nuestras Fuerzas Armadas no pude negarme a tan gentil proposición. Después de todo no era más que un hombre vestido de verde olivo que moría de deseos por mí, y como bien sabes el problema de la homosexualidad es de esencia y no de forma como muchos piensan. [...] Ya junto al mar me poseyó una y otra vez hasta el cansancio...” (Sánchez Gómez 1997: 92 f.).

It is evident that here a *loca's* self-congratulatory staging of self, as in Sarduy and Arenas, has been abandoned in favour of a discourse struggling for a pitifully small amount of social tolerance. Whereas Sarduy's neobaroque discourse and Arenas's rage at a totalitarian regime help to articulate a new, individual "postcolonial" self-consciousness, these eighteen stories only manifest how impossible it was for somebody HIV-positive to live his queerness in the Cuba of those years. For this queerness meant more than a discourse of rebelliousness, namely the incarnation of a lifestyle. For the evidence see the volume *Postcolonial, Queer* edited by John C. Hawley (2001). Nevertheless AIDS remains what it is called in one of the texts of this collection: "la Gran Limitación"; a limitation that cannot transgress the principles of a homophobic society, neither in lived *deseo* nor in literary discourse. Thus these AIDS patients remain condemned to an existence at the edge of both their own consciousness and that of others; they remain voiceless victims in a Third World which can no longer count on the solidarity of the First World.

### 3.5. *The New Honesty of the First World*

In a special issue of the *New York Times Magazine* in autumn 2000, an article by Andrew Sullivan, the HIV-positive, "liberal" journalist, appeared. In it he expressed his gratitude towards the US pharmaceutical industry and his private health insurance, because they had made it possible, through their provision of expensive medication, for him to lead a largely trouble-free life, whereas millions of AIDS-sufferers in poorer countries did not have access to such medicines. He writes:

Whether we like it or not, these private entities have our lives in their hands. And we can either be grown-ups and acknowledge this or be infantile and scapegoat them... They're entrepreneurs trying to make money by saving lives. By and large, they succeed in both. Every morning I wake up and feel fine, I'm thankful that they do (Quoted in Crimp 2002: 3).

Perhaps the greatest provocation of Sullivan's article was its appearance a few months after the World Aids Conference in South African Durban. There, the so-called Third World forcefully announced to the rest of mankind the spread, indeed, the explosion, of the HI-virus among the population of the black continent. Sullivan's "mature" realism sets up a very noticeable antiposition to all of the North American movements (from *Act Up* to *Silence = Death*) which, at least theoretically, had demanded worldwide solidarity against AIDS. For this reason Douglas Crimp, one of the leading figures of the *Act-Up* movement, sharply attacked Sullivan in *Melancholia and Moralism*. He accused him of – behind the seemingly happy message of the "End of the Plague" (the title of Sullivan's essay) – once again stylizing the homosexual into a scapegoat and into the prototypical other.

Although Sullivan might believe he is telling an uplifting story about gay men's commendable progress, in doing so, he represents gay men before AIDS as the most odious creatures – men who were all too willing to bargain away self respect and respect for others (Crimp 2002: 6).

and later:

Sullivan's reliance on magical thinking to vanquish both homophobia and AIDS is not, however, a species of optimism; on the contrary, it is mere wish-fulfilment. The continuing presence of illness and death from AIDS throughout the world [...] is, for Sullivan, as it is for much of American society, so repressed that every fact attesting to that continuing presence is denied either reality or significance (Crimp 2002: 7).

Crimp stresses the fact that in the US too, the gay community is far from being accepted by society as a whole, and that this aspect must therefore be included in the hemispheric perspective. Here Crimp articulates the awareness of problems in a new otherness founded on economic privilege in contrast to those cultures that were always regarded as the other and will be so, presumably, in the future. His merit lies not only in identifying the new North American mainstream as such, but also in bringing to light what is ultimately its homophobic attitude. He thus recognizes new common ground in the differences between the hemispheres.

I will now show, with the help of three more recent examples, that "hemispheric awareness" has since entered the Latin American *novella gay*.

### 3.6. *In the Realm of Postcolonialism: Pedro Lemebel*

Of all the novels, that of an outrageously gay writer and performance artist topped the best-seller lists in Chile in 1998: Pedro Lemebel's *Tengo miedo torero* (2001).<sup>12</sup>

This novel will not be under discussion here, but rather Lemebel's collection of sketches, published under the title *Loco afán*; its subtitle *Crónicas del sidario* explains its relevance for the theme under consideration here (Lemebel 2000).

Lemebel's chronicles in *Loco afán* present a consistent mythology of the everyday life of the gay community in Latin America, since here the para- and subcultural "achievements" of the US, from Madonna to AZT, enter into the discourse. The critical objective is manifest behind the ironic one at all times. One of the texts in the collection offers the clearest résumé of his position towards the brave new and sound world. In the gay Mecca of New York, the thirtieth anniversary of the so-called Stonewall Riots, the legendary strike against homophobic police raids in the city's Christopher Street, is being celebrated. Lemebel receives an invitation to New York. On arrival, he feels as little at ease as Arenas before him in the smoothly styled and impersonal North American homosexual scene. However, in contrast to Arenas ten years before, Lemebel justifies his subjective dislike of the New York ambience with his role as a representative of the Third World who, if he can be considered a guest, is very much a marginal one.

Cómo te van a dar pelota si uno lleva esta cara chilena asombrada frente a este Olimpo de homosexuales potentes y bien comidos que te miran con asco, como diciéndote: Te hacemos el favor de traerte, indiecita, a la catedral del orgullo gay. Y una anda tan despistada en estos escenarios del Gran Mundo, mirando las tiendas llenas de fetiches sadomasoquistas [...] Pero aquí en el Village, en la placita frente al bar Stonewall, abunda esa potencia masculina que da pánico, que te empuqueñece como una mosquita latina parada en este barrio de sexo rubio.

<sup>12</sup> For a general overview of Lemebel see Blanco (2004).

[...] Porque tal vez lo gay es blanco. Basta entrar en el Bar Stonewall, [...] para darse cuenta que la concurrencia es mayoritariamente clara, rubia y viril, como en esas cantinas de las películas de vaqueros. Y si por casualidad hay algún negro y alguna loca latina, es para que no digan que son antidemocráticos (Lemebel 2000: 71-72).

The rejection of North American / European consumerist gay culture by Latin Americans is nothing new.<sup>13</sup> Yet in this tragical-ironical stocktaking, Lemebel proves to be specifically anticolonial because he refuses to accept the system of rationalisation produced by the US “coloniser self” (in Bhabha’s sense). He connects the familiar recourse to the identity of the *loca latina* with the explicit rejection of a hegemonic culture and its strategies of stylization, strategies to which he is subjected without sharing in them. Consequently he eschews this way of life, even if in practice his daily existence is determined by an aesthetics à la Madonna. Dennis Altman says of this new kind of hegemonic consumerism: “American gay consumerism soon became the dominant mode for the new gay style [...] In one sense the importation of gay style and rhetoric is part of the ongoing dominance of the so-called First World” (Altman 2001: 29 f.).

If, generally, I find in the Latin American neobaroque discourse of transvestism a response to the fact that over the centuries the Latino was shunted into the area of fundamental alterity, then Lemebel’s chronicle offers special testimony that this other has found his own: he finds it in literary discourses that seek, find and obtain their own locus not in independence, but in hemispheric reference to the tendencies of Western mainstream cultures. Alongside the subalterns of the former British Empire, homosexual Latinos have also found their voice. That AIDS plays a decisive part is shown by the same Lemebel in another volume, as he reconstructs his old, AIDS reduced circle of friends with the help of photos (Lemebel 1998). The labor of memory and heightened awareness of a postcolonial *conditio* characterize a manner of writing that is, beyond the celebration of its own *locura*, on the way to accepting its self, and to resisting the general tendency of many homosexuals to identify themselves with their phallogocentric homophobic suppressers (Bersani 1995). Lemebel’s queerness is thus superior to Manuel Puig’s impulse of didacticism, to neobaroque gender trouble, as well as to Arenas’ furious political and social charges. Lemebel not only shows to what extent AIDS has changed the structure of homophobia, but also that a response of its own is possible from the perspective of Latin American queerness.

### 3.7. *In the Realm of the Abject: Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez*

The response given by the Puerto Rican Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, who teaches and writes in the US, to the challenge of the endemic disease is more abstract than Lemebel’s

<sup>13</sup> “Mexican liberation organizations eschew the term ‘gay’ because their leadership do not consider Anglo gay culture to be what they aspire to emulate. They are also sensitive about ‘cultural imperialism’ from the north and the elitism of expensive local replicas of Anglo gay bars” (Murray/Arboleda 1987: 136). Lemebel, however, articulates his critique in full awareness of the inevitability of Anglo-European influences, and, moreover, not in a theoretical context but in literary discourse. Gluckman/Reed (1993) testify that in the US too, the “consumerism” of the gay scene has by no means overcome the normative demands of a heterosexual society.

because, for him, it consists of accepting his own abjectness, (admittedly, his textual form is not that of “fiction” but the discourse of criticism<sup>14</sup>). His provocative question: “¿Es posible un ser ‘más abyecto’ que un latino maricón con SIDA? [...] ¿Cómo sentirse en una sociedad que expulsa al enfermo, al latino, al raro / *queer*, al migrante, al Otro?” (Sandoval-Sánchez 2003: 344 f.) links Julia Kristeva’s theory to the situation of his own postcolonial otherness which he, like Lemebel, deliberately stages in order to reveal, as an other, the provisional nature of identities and cultural practices:

En efecto, ¿hasta qué punto las *performances* culturales de latinos/as *queer* materializan un lugar discursivo de/hacia lo abyecto, capaz de amenazar la estabilidad y la homogeneidad de la cultura y la identidad hegemónicas, y sus ansiedades que mantienen aprisionado en “su lugar” al *queer*, al sobreviviente con SIDA, al latino inmigrante, al otro étnico/racial? Puesto que lo abyecto problematiza cuerpos e identidades una vez que los límites son atravesados, lo que está en juego es la construcción dramática de subjetividades en proceso y formaciones identitarias en transformación, siempre en riesgo de disolución y marginalización más profunda. Privilegiando y reclamando la propia abyección, el ‘otro’ habita un espacio liminal e intersticial que reconoce la provisionalidad de la identidad y la naturaleza procesual de las prácticas culturales (Sandoval-Sánchez 2003: 349).

From the perspective of the hemispheric gaze, Sandoval-Sánchez is more than a Latin American with a job in the US and a knowledge of French cultural studies. His dramatic construction of a subjectivity, which feeds as much on Hervé Guibert’s “ego documents” as on Julia Kristeva’s theories, gives an idea of how full of gaps any analysis of literary AIDS discourses must remain when they focus exclusively on Latin America. The process-like nature of cultural practices, mentioned by him, makes reference to the European and North American AIDS discourse which is also inevitable for the Latin American AIDS discourse.

### 3.8. *In the Realm of AIDS, Sex and Hope: Pablo Pérez, Un año sin amor*

In *The Hispanic Homograph* Robert Richmond Ellis (1997) stresses the role of autobiographical representation for the formation of a homosexual identity in Hispanic Literature. This very autobiographical discourse has been decisively modified by the emergence of that immune deficiency disease AIDS: novel forms of ego documents proclaim an “authentic” narrative of bodily suffering, and make the kinds of experience connected with it their central theme. Birger Angvik (forthcoming) designed the term “thanatography” for the suffering in the shadow between life and death, as dealt with by AIDS literature, and he finds the term most notably realised in Hervé Guibert.

In 1998 the Argentinean Pablo Pérez published *Un año sin amor* with the subtitle *Diario del Sida*.<sup>15</sup> In the narrative a thirty year old first person narrator from Buenos

<sup>14</sup> See Sandoval-Sánchez (2003).

<sup>15</sup> I thank Daniel Link for drawing my attention to the book dealt with here. Its film version of the same title, directed by the Argentinian Anahí Berneri, was awarded the Gay Teddy Award, the prize for the most popular film with homosexual themes.

Aires, suffering from the symptoms of AIDS, describes his life between February 17 and December 31, 1996. He speaks of literature and music, of his work as a translator, his hopeful and desperate moments and also minutely of his sex life. In the course of the narrative the medicines combating the disease gain an important role. While he rejects them at the beginning of the diary (“no me interesa tomar AZT para llega vivo” [Pérez 1998: 21]), he finally starts the treatment when his state worsens and he exists on the edge of death. At the end of the book and the year, he says goodbye to his readers by wishing them (and himself) a happy new year.

In his prologue to the volume Roberto Jacoby brings out what is specific to this narrative; he underlines that it contradicts the genre of AIDS novels by not narrating “prolonged agony” (Pérez 1998: 9) and, consequently, that it lacks the “pathos of AIDS testimonies” (Pérez 1998: 11). This means that *Un año sin amor* does not represent a thanatography (in Angvik’s sense). Nevertheless the thoughts of the narrator seem to approach thanatographic discourse at a certain moment (in July, half way through the period narrated), when his fear of dying grows. But this state of mind is not the rule. Generally we read about a (guardedly) optimistic protagonist who speaks of his sexual desire and his erotic adventures in discos and porno cinemas, of his experience with contact ads in gay papers and of his newly discovered pleasure in sadomasochist practices. All this goes against the regulations of thanatographic discourse (as described by Guibert) which focus solely on suffering and the dissolving body. Instead Pérez changes AIDS into a pornographic disease which permits the protagonist to describe his varied sex life in simple and unambiguous language that occasionally strongly recalls techniques typical of pornography. At the same time he represents the life of a modern homosexual human being within the globalised infrastructure of a globalised metropolis.

The new position occupied by *Un año sin amor* in the development of AIDS literature becomes entirely clear from the contrast with its primary intertext – Hervé Guibert’s work – which appears in Pérez’ text quite distinctly. Among the protagonist’s dead friends, who have been buried by their parents, there is also a Frenchman called Hervé whom the first person narrator got to know in France when he was living there. The protagonist, who finances his existence by giving language lessons, translates Hervé’s personal / literary texts into Spanish. This reference to a French author with the same Christian name is easily understood as an allusion to Guibert. Concrete details point to his ego document *Le protocole compassionnel* of 1991, where he minutely describes his first experiences with DDI and AZT.<sup>16</sup> It should be mentioned that in Guibert’s time these drugs were almost unknown and were both seen as an anchor of, as well as a potential

<sup>16</sup> Despite a few misleading references – Pérez’ protagonist claims that “RV” (the shortened form of “Hervé”) died in 1994; Hervé Guibert died, however, as early as 1991 – the postulated intertextual reference is supported by several pieces of evidence. First, by the central theme of treatment with the new drugs DDI and AZT, second, by the fact that the beginning of the treatment with anti-AIDS medicines is dated as July 13 in the diary entries. In *Le protocole compassionnel*, too, July 13 (Guibert 1991: 96) has a special significance:

“Je me sens beaucoup mieux depuis le vendredi 13 juillet [...] Depuis le vendredi 13 juillet, le jour de la renaissance, où je me suis remis à vivre, grâce au DDI du danseur mort, tout en restant moi-même le cadavre ambulante que j’ai mis des mois à devenir, je ne pourrais pas dire que je suis devenu bon, mais j’ai cru comprendre le sens de la bonté...” (Guibert 1991: 62; 131)

threat to, bodily existence. Nevertheless medical progress in itself is not the central theme in Pérez' book but one of its consequences: the rediscovery of sexuality as an integral part of the sick body. While Guibert was interested in meditating on survival with AIDS, Pérez' protagonist focuses on a narrower aspect, namely living out his sexuality under the conditions of the disease. Aside from the search for a steady partner, corporeal self affirmation is at the centre, and this oscillates between two absolutely contrary sexual practices. Above all, the transposition of sadomasochist fantasies is repeatedly at stake (Pérez 1998: 124), through this the protagonist reassures himself, as it were, of his corporeality. One must add to this, however, the staging of a faggot travesty at the end of the work (and thus, also, of the year described there) (Pérez 1998: 144). Only a few pages separate the use of whips and leather equipment from the recourse to high-heeled shoes and evening dress, a recourse so frequently staged by the "classic" Latin American discourse of travesty. Yet the first person narrator differs from the stereotype of the passive, suffering Latino; he must speak about the details of his sex life in order to achieve compatibility between his life and his illness. Only in privileging eroticism by means of this sexualised discourse does the protagonist succeed in overcoming despair and in designing an alternative to thanatography.

The innovative potential of the three new Latin American paradigms discloses itself only from the perspective of hemispheric constructions. Pedro Lemebel goes on staging himself as *loca latina*, but as one who is aware of the fact that she is at the mercy of North American hegemonic culture (and, simultaneously, of the conservatism of [post-]dictatorships). It is precisely through this awareness that she is able to self-confidently assert her independence, as that of a postcolonial subject, against *sexo blanco*. Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez employs the "abject" position of a Latino suffering from AIDS in order to point to the processual and provisional character of any cultural practice, including the sexual, and thus to relativize the hegemonic superiority and the sovereignty over discourse claimed by the US gay community. Pablo Pérez has recourse to sadomasochist sexual practices which have hardly ever been a theme in Latin America in order to overcome the discourse of thanatography which had for a long time characterized autobiographical ego documents as well as AIDS fiction in Europe and the US. His metropolitan protagonist is, on the one hand, a member of a community globalised even in their sexual practices, on the other, he defines himself both through the local colour of Buenos Aires and the memory of the tradition of the *loca latina*.

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