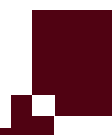


ALLURING, MELANCHOLY AND BEAUTIFUL: QUEER SENSIBILITIES AND NEO-BAROQUE AESTHETIC IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY¹

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ABSTRACT

This study examines queer sensibilities as they emerge in the photographic oeuvres of Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1937-1993), Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1952-2015), Alair Gomes (Brazil, 1921-1991) and Hudinilson Junior (Brazil, 1957-2013). In doing so, we consider in the images what can be seen as queer baroque. Within beauty, mystery and seduction, we find queer affect that revisits not only the baroque, but the neo-baroque in its aesthetic dimension. What the photographs transmit are performative overflows that emulate in the bodies ways of refusing social conventions. When working with sensitivity, we touch the images through affective interaction, and we realize how the body can be read by desire.

Keywords: queer; baroque; photography; contemporary; body.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa as sensibilidades queer à medida que emergem nas obras fotográficas de Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1937-1993), Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1952-2015), Alair Gomes (Brasil, 1921-1991) e Hudinilson Junior (Brasil, 1957- 2013). Ao fazê-lo, consideramos nas imagens o que pode ser visto como um barroco queer. Entre a beleza, o mistério e a sedução, encontramos afetos queer que revisitam não só o barroco, mas o neobarroco em sua

¹ Work produced with the support of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES-PROEX).

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dimensão estética. O que as fotografias transmitem são transbordamentos performáticos que emulam nos corpos modos de recusar convenções sociais. Ao trabalhar com a sensibilidade, tocamos as imagens por meio da interação afetiva e percebemos como o corpo pode ser lido pelo desejo.

Palavras-chave: queer; barroco; fotografia; contemporâneo; corpo.

THE BODIES OF SEVERO SARDUY AND PEDRO LEMEBEL⁴

Coming hard on the heels of Latin American Boom writing, the work of Severo Sarduy often mediates between the celebrated writers of the 60s and 70s and those of the post-Boom. As such, when presented publicly, the author's body often resembles the masculinist and elitist image portrayed by Latin American Boom writers. By obeying codes of conventionality and practices of normativization, Severo Sarduy creates a marketable identity that attracts collegiate alliances and future readers⁵. This being true, I will turn my attention to a series of photographs that appear in *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy*, an exhibition of the artist's visual work curated by Gustavo Guerrero⁶. Among the scattered photographs, I will select some in which Severo Sarduy uses his own body as a form of artistic expression. No longer making an appearance in the public sphere, no longer resembling the marketable image of a distinguished author, no longer appeasing the bourgeois cultural industry; his body becomes a destabilizing force that reveals alternative ways of thinking about and enacting the self. Often understood as a writer, the humor and eroticism that define his literary and theoretical writing are transposed onto his performative work. Simply put, his creative imagination is given non-verbal bodily form.

As the title suggests, *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* turns its attention towards Sarduy's interest in Eastern culture. I would like to begin with a series of images taken by Antonio Gálvez (2018), a recognized Catalan photographer who is widely known for his surrealist photomontages. He is the author of *Mes amis les grosses têtes*, a collection of seventy-five portraits of significant cultural, literary, and philosophical figures, in which Sarduy is included⁷. In the black-and-white portrait, Sarduy draws attention to the plasticity of his body. The camera, in medium close up, centers on Sarduy's face and upper torso as he

⁴ Portions of this study appear in Huber's doctoral dissertation, entitled *Queer Baroque* (JARAMILLO GIL, 2020).

⁵ I draw conclusions from newspaper articles found as clippings in the González Echevarría Collection on Severo Sarduy and Other Latin American Writers at Princeton University's Firestone Library as part of their Manuscripts Division as well as *Cartas a mi hermana en la Habana* (SARDUY, 2013) a compilation of letters and photographs that, accompanied by testimony from Mercedes Sarduy, were published in 2013 by the Severo Sarduy Cultural Foundation. findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/C1543.

⁶ The inauguration of the exhibition was held in Madrid in 2008 before travelling to Paris, Fes, Tangier, Tétouan, Casablanca, Rabat, Pekin, New Delhi, and Manila. Subsequently, the Centro Virtual Cervantes created a digital space for the exhibition which is freely accessible to the public: cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/escritores/Sarduy/.

⁷ The collection includes photographs of Carpentier, Paz, Cortázar, García Márquez, among others. Like Sarduy, under the eye of a fine-art photographer, their appearance is noticeably different than their official/public image. A selection, while cropped and water-marked for online purposes, can be found in the artists website: antoniogalvez.net/.

looks directly into the camera. His confident eyes and calm smile draw our attention away from his chest, which is covered only by a long necklace. Resting just below his sternum, as the hanging strands interlock to create a rectangular design, the necklace brings our gaze to the lower margins of his ribcage, which Sarduy pushes into with his fingers, as he sucks in his stomach. Sarduy's unusual pose, along with Gálvez's surreal style, makes his flesh seem soft and malleable: While the firmness of his chest remains, the flexibility of his abdomen is overemphasized, placing his hands at the exact point in which the solidity and fluidity of his body meet. Moreover, the increased contrast of the portrait, which darkens the shadows of the image, highlights the fingers' deep impression on the flesh. It is important to note that, while he is nude and his midriff appears malformed, Sarduy looks playfully and confidently into the camera; pleased with the anticipated discomfort of the viewer; daring us to contend with his self-distorted body.

El Oriente de Severo Sarduy includes a number of photos taken by Antonio Gálvez, including two related to the official portrait. In the first,⁸ which appears to be part of the same photo session, we find Sarduy sitting with his legs crossed at the knees, his upper body straight, his shoulders raised, his arms evenly bended, as his hands grasp onto his hips. His overextension and symmetry endow his body with a statuesque form that heightens his physical presence, gaining a graceful, dignified, and feminine appearance. In contrast, his body hair, his strong facial features, and his receding hairline give his body a rugged and masculine appeal. We find additional tensions in his attire: his naked torso adorned with an artisanal necklace clashes with his dark trousers, leather belt, and dress watch. First, the necklace, created through traditional methods, varies from the items of clothing that are mass-produced. Second, the feminine elegance of his upper body contrasts with the masculine plainness of his lower body. All in all, we are presented with an unconventional body that embraces differences and oppositions in culture and in gender.

In the second photo,⁹ while also sitting down with his legs crossed, now fully dressed in ordinary clothes, his upper body no longer takes an unusual pose. This time, part of what catches our attention is what appears in the background. Behind him, large and imposing, we find a print of what seems to be the official portrait. The use of *mise en abyme* encourages us to reflect on the author's corporality, its changing reality, its endless reconstructions – the infinite versions of the self that the camera captures from photo to photo, each presenting a pause in time and space of an always-changing body. Additionally, as we look more carefully, we realize that what appears to be the official portrait is actually an alternate version of the original onto which a second image has been superimposed. Antonio Gálvez, as stated above, is known for his photomontages. It is likely that Antonio Gálvez played with different versions of his portraits before selecting a final/official one. The alternate version of Sarduy's, while it is partly covered by the foreground, shows the

⁸ Figure 1. Entitled Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez (1971), it appears in the essay "Severo Sarduy: una necesaria relectura" by Juan Goytisolo.

⁹ Figure 2. Entitled Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez (1971), it appears in the essay "Sobre una tumba, una rumba" by Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

image of a beautiful and seductive woman imprinted on his lower chest. Unlike before, from the manipulation of the flesh, a female figure now emerges. The body's plasticity, to which we were exposed in the original, is now used to uncover Sarduy's own femininity.

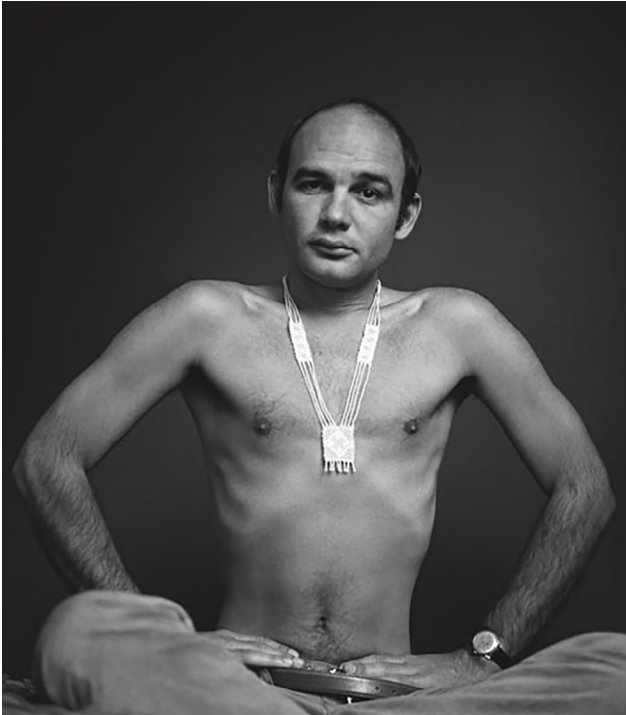


Figure 1

Fonte: Entitled Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez (1971).

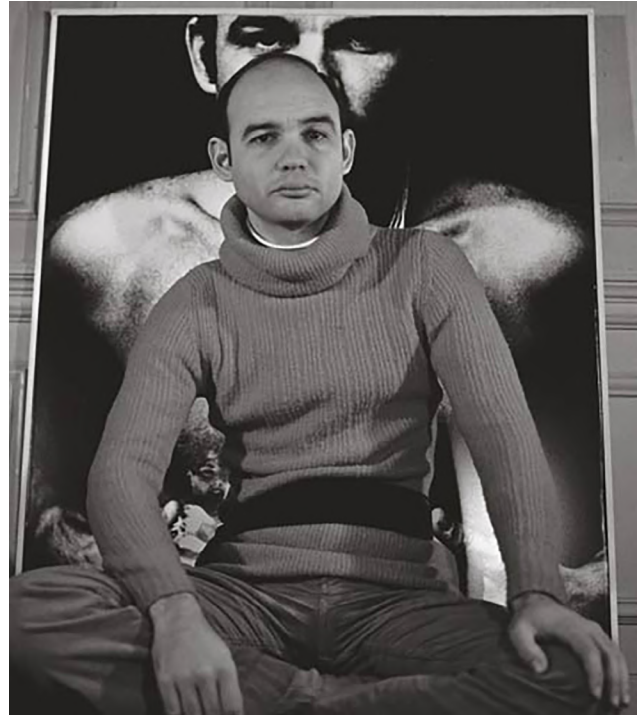


Figure 2

Fonte: Entitled Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez (1971).

Apart from those taken by Antonio Gálvez, in *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy*, we come across photographs in which the author, while traveling East, experiments with his bodily appearance and expression. Focusing on three photographs, all taken at different times and places, we find Sarduy by windows or on balconies, often overlooking Moroccan cityscapes. The first shows Sarduy looking straight into the camera as the light from an open window shines brightly onto his naked chest. Around his neck, we find a self-made choker necklace: from a piece of thin rope, which is tied at the back, a set of decorative hoops hangs at the front. On his head, rests a self-made headdress: from a large piece of cloth, various folds and twists are made, wrapping unevenly around the head¹⁰. The second shows his body and head wrapped in a large yellow cloth. His body bends as it rests on a balcony railing. Behind him, in the midground we find a street lined with palm trees while

¹⁰ Figure 3. Entitled Severo Sarduy disfrazado (1968). It appears in the essay "Notas sobre el Oriente de Severo" by José Rubén Gallo. In the same necklace and headdress, we find two photos of Sarduy in the François Wahl Collection on Severo Sarduy found at Princeton University. findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/C1470.

in the background we find a view of Tangier's white cityscape¹¹. Similarly, the last shows Sarduy on a balcony as the sunlight shines brightly on him as ivory buildings stand in the background. While his body is wrapped in a bright orange fabric, his head is wrapped in a dark black cloth. In addition, the same artisanal golden necklace that he wears in Antonio Gálvez's portraits, now lays diagonally across his headdress, shining brightly against the darkness of the cloth.¹²



Figure 3

Fonte: Entitled Severo Sarduy disfrazado (1968).
Disponível em findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/C1470.

¹¹ Figure 4. Entitled Severo Sarduy disfrazado (1968). It appears in the essay “El Oriente de Severo Sarduy” by Gustavo Guerrero (2018).

¹² Figure 5. Entitled Severo Sarduy disfrazado (1972), It appears in the exposition “Viaje al país de «Las mil y una noches»”.



Figure 4

Fonte: Entitled Severo Sarduy disfrazado (1968). Part of the essay
“El Oriente de Severo Sarduy” by Gustavo Guerrero (2018).



Figure 5

Fonte: Part of the exposition “Viaje al país de Las mil y una noches”.

In the images, the cloths and fabrics that adorn his body take on different forms imitating (without replicating) robes, turbans, and veils. His experimental and improvisational approach distorts traditional forms of dress, disengaging and reconfiguring their social, cultural, and religious affiliations. Moreover, time and again, the body gains a regal and sophisticated charm through graceful poses, rich colors, decorative accessories; all being accentuated by pale backgrounds and bright lighting. We are presented with a beautified and ornamented body that becomes desired, feminized, fetishized, and aestheticized. His body, in its unusual movement and texture, is turned into an artistic object; an extraordinary depiction of the self that embraces gender differences and abandons cultural norms. Despite these tensions, the eye of the viewer is often drawn to Sarduy's daring gaze which, looking straight into the camera, confidently acknowledges his unconventionality while inviting us to embrace our own; this being the aim of both performance and baroque art:

Beginning with the corporeal and the senses, performance transforms the mind and thoughts of the participant, a transformation which is later translated into the intellectual faculties involving language and action. This strategy conforms thoroughly with baroque principles and their insistence on communicating metaphysical concepts by way of the body, the physical, and the sensual. (AUSTIN, 2011, p. 142).

When looking at contemporary neobaroque performance, Kat Austin recognizes in liminal spaces “an innovative way of exploring and understanding today’s world of cultural collisions, confusions, and complexities” (AUSTIN, 2011, p. 133). In the same way, Sarduy makes use of spatial liminality and baroque decentralization to produce tension and contradiction. As we examine his malleable body, it is important to note that the photographs are taken abroad, in cosmopolitan Eastern cities that welcome tourists and travelers.¹³ As spaces of mobility and anonymity, these inspire the blurring of differences between *insider* and *outsider*. Moreover, standing by windows and in balconies, which interconnect the *inside* and the *outside*, Sarduy finds liminal spaces in which to make use of his body’s mutability. Like other neobaroque performance artists, he engages in playful, spontaneous, and subversive action by entering the “liminoid space, a space for transformative theatrical play and invention, a space which becomes a laboratory of new ideas possessing the potential for eventual socio-political transformation” (AUSTIN, 2011, p. 141). Furthermore, through subversive, unpredictable, and transformative reformulations of the body, Sarduy decenters systems of power while offering new forms of existence and consciousness. By reimagining gender norms and displacing cultural referents, Sarduy abandons “the authority of the center in favour of the inclusive power of plurality” (AUSTIN, 2011, p. 136). As ideal settings for subjective transformation and creative desires, liminal spaces provide Sarduy with opportunities to assert his queer unconventionality and baroque decentralization.

¹³ In *Tecnologías del cuerpo* (2014), Javier Guerrero explores the ways in which different authors make use of their bodies' plasticity and malleability to contest norms and offer new possibilities of existence. Furthermore, he recognizes a series of conditions which compel marginalized bodies to contest hegemonic and institutionally sanctioned modes of expression. Among these, the act of travelling allows marginalized bodies to rework the body. He perceives this clearly in Severo Sarduy who, by entering foreign lands, is able to disrupt the sexual and cultural norms associated with his body.

The same can be said of intimate spaces, such as the home, in which the author explores subversive expressions and conveys transcendent hopes through performative and visual experimentation. In *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* we come across a photograph of the author in his home at Saint-Léonard, France. This time, a long fabric contours to the body from shoulders to knees; then flares out in dramatic fashion flowing onto the ground. More of the same dark fabric hangs over the back, creating the illusion of a cape. On his head, we find a tall, large, elegant headpiece of bronze and copper tones; large geometric designs of black color run through the fabric. By his feet, at the edge of the draped fabric, a young feline stands guard. Being a Siamese cat, its presence brings an Asian flare to the image. On his face, red lines are drawn: an upside-down triangle is placed on the forehead, as other shapes take over the eyes and chin. Reminiscent of kabuki makeup, the designs serve to highlight the image's theatricality. Lastly, standing in front of the door to his home, the body of Sarduy is framed by its oversized casing, refocusing our attention back on the author¹⁴. His self-created body is both masculine and feminine, Western and Eastern, atypical and simulated. In the comfort of his home, Sarduy finds a place in which to be creative, expressive, and spontaneous. His unconventional, experimental, and controversial artistic creativity is now inscribed onto the body. By capturing his performance in the photographic image, he encapsulates the elusive and ephemeral act, while inviting those who come across it to partake in the playful and exploratory act.



Figure 6

Fonte: Entitled Severo Sarduy en su casa de Saint-Léonard (1972).
Part of the essay “La entrada de Severo en La Habana” by Nelda del Castillo.

¹⁴ Figure 6. Entitled *Severo Sarduy en su casa de Saint-Léonard* (1972). It appears in the essay “La entrada de Severo en La Habana” by Nelda del Castillo.

Moving on, from the moment that he enters the public stage, Pedro Lemebel declares his commitment to feminine disobedience and his rejection of oppressive patriarchy. In his literary work, he advocates for the marginalized and the feminine, the underprivileged and the vulnerable, the forgotten and the repressed. In his performative work, he welcomes us to be critically courageous, publicly engaged and politically aware. Before becoming a renowned author, Lemebel gains notoriety working beside Francisco Casas in the *Yeguas del Apocalipsis* (CARVAJAL; FUENTE, 2018) artist collective.¹⁵ Together, they organized and conducted a series of performative acts that had significant impact in Chile's cultural scene during and after the country's dictatorship. Their performative acts would oftentimes disrupt social, cultural, and political events, causing outrage and confusion in the audience, while gaining interest in the media. In addition to using the camera to document their performative acts, Lemebel and Casas delve into performance photography, creating a series of autonomous works of art.

Among these, their reinterpretation of *Las dos Fridas* is their most widely acclaimed piece. In the form of a *tableaux vivant*, the artists recreate one of Kahlo's masterpieces, seeing themselves reflected in her unconventional beauty and physical disability¹⁶. In the photograph, we find the bodies of Lemebel and Casas replacing those of Frida. Lemebel, sitting at the left, wears a Mexican castor while Casas, sitting on the right, wears a Victorian skirt. By switching places, they point to their manipulation of the image. As they stare back at us, we realize that in their make-up they have imitated Kahlo's eyebrow. Their chests, along with their drawn-in hearts, are exposed. Connecting them, we find an IV line that, as Casas clamps down with a hemostat, Lemebel connects to a small mirror. Lemebel and Casas identify with Frida Kahlo, seeing in her androgyny a depiction of themselves. She is recognized for her unconventional beauty: her neutral skin tone, her strong jawline, her prominent nose, and her facial hair. In her paintings, what she considered her masculine or androgynous features, are often on display: "Del sexo opuesto, tengo el bigote y, en general, la cara". In her beauty, we find the absence of an absolute division between the sexes, which Lemebel and Casas relate to and admire. Through their wigs, makeup, and skirts they feminize their bodies, while exposing their masculine chests and hairy forearms.

¹⁵ Their work has been digitally archived and publicly released. The project, which took three years (2015-2018) to complete, worked closely with the members of the *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*. The digital project provides titles, dates, descriptions, and photographs for each of their works: www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/.

¹⁶ In the original (1939), we find two figures holding hands sitting on a bench in front of a grey sky. The first Frida, on the left, is dressed in Western clothes while the second Frida, on the right, wears a Tehuana dress. Each one holds on to an artery that winds around them and connects to their exposed hearts. The first Frida clamps down on her end of the artery with a hemostat in order to stop the bleeding while the second Frida connects her end of the artery to a portrait of her husband.



Figure 7

Fonte: Entitled *Yeguas del apocalipses, las dos fridas*, 1990.
Part of the Museu de Arte Latino-Americana de Buenos Aires.

In addition to her beauty, Lemebel and Casas identify with her lifelong physical and emotional suffering. Frida Kahlo is recognized for her physical disabilities and relationship to medicine.¹⁷ Despite her ailments and disabilities, she showed great resilience by achieving success as an artist: “A pesar de mi larga enfermedad, tengo alegría inmensa de VIVIR”. Her ability to cope with physical and emotional stress is of great importance to Lemebel and Casas. At the time, they observed their friends die from AIDS, standing by them as their bodies withered away. As such, in their recreation of Kahlo’s double portrait, they explore the individual and collective trauma of AIDS, they show appreciation for queer friendship and kinship, and they denounce social and political negligence towards the victims.

In the photograph, an important element related to AIDS is the IV line. As a medical tool, it serves as a symbol of neglect and pathologization experienced by queer and trans people before and after the pandemic. Within the IV line we find the infected blood. On the one hand, the blood alludes to the painful death of those who contracted HIV. On the other hand, the disease brought queer and trans people together as they were

¹⁷ As a child, Frida Kahlo contracted polio which made her loose muscle on her right leg; as a teenager, she was in a bus accident that left her immobilized in a full body cast; as an adult, she suffered from miscarriages, underwent various surgeries, had her right leg amputated, and died of a pulmonary embolism.

abandoned and left to die. In sickness and in health, queer and trans people showed love and support for one another as they battled incessant physical and emotional pain. In the photograph, in addition to the IV line, their holding hands underscore the bond created among queer and trans people while living through the AIDS crisis. Furthermore, while their unconventional, vulnerable, and sickened bodies are exposed to the viewer, in their solemn stare they show dignity, courage, and strength. Lastly, when looking into Lemebel's mirror, we find a reflection of ourselves. As such, we are invited to consider the ways in which we have helped or hindered the lives of queer and trans people. At the same time, we are asked to find a connection to these bodies with the hope of claiming a position of solidarity and shared identity. Originally taken on December of 1989 by Pedro Marinello, the image is reused in future performance acts: in *Las dos Fridas en Galería Bucci* (July 1990, Figure 8) they carry out a more masculinized version of the image while the original is reflected onto their body by a projector; in *Cuerpos contingentes* (May 1991, Figure 9) they now sit on wheelchairs, marking the decrepitude of the sickened body, while their bodies are wrapped in barbed wire and stuffed birds, marking the imprisonment of the helpless body.



Figure 8

Fonte: Act Two Fridas in The Bucci Gallery. 1990. Available in english.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/1990-two-fridas-in-galeria-bucci/.



Figure 9

Fonte: Act Cuerpos contingentes. May 1991. Available in www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/1990-cuerpos-contingentes/.

In other photo performance projects, Lemebel and Casas offer images in which the lives of queer and trans people are celebrated after death. In *Instalamos pajaritos como palomas con alambritos* (1991, Figure 10)¹⁸, the artists are dressed in black as white doves are placed across their bodies. While we are brought into the realm of death by the dark mourning veil that Casas wears, their fishnet blouses and waist high stockings eroticize their bodies. The doves, as symbols of peace and love, represent the friends who they

¹⁸ Taken by Pedro Marinello.

lost to AIDS. As such, while remaining feminine and sensual, their queer bodies are now marked by the death of their loved ones. They now carry with them the bodies of the dead as survivors of the pandemic. As such, Lemebel and Casas must fight to advocate for the lives that were lost, restoring dignity and justice to the dead.



Figure 10

Fonte: Instalamos pajaritos como palomas con alambritos. 1991. Available in www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/1990-instalamos-pajaritos-como-palomas-con-alambritos/.

Lastly, in *Lo que el SIDA se llevó* (1989) we find a variety of feminine bodies¹⁹. In some, wearing plain clothes and standing in natural poses, they may remind us of our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters. In others, as they wear masks and their bodies are in motion, we find bodies in pain, in glee, in love. As they all show the innocence, happiness, and glamour of those who died because of AIDS, there are two photographs that make direct reference to the disease. In the first²⁰, Lemebel lays in the arms of Casas, who screams in pain and sorrow. Lemebel's lifeless body emulates the dead, while Casas desperately cries at the loss of his friend. The second,²¹ shows Casas in a wedding dress kissing Lemebel, who wears a skeleton mask. The kiss, which once expressed affection and sexual desire, now signals the moment of infection. In their act of love, they have sealed their fates, transmitting the virus from one to the other.

¹⁹ Taken by Pedro Marinello.

²⁰ Figure 11.

²¹ Figure 12.



Figure 11

Fonte: <https://radio.uchile.cl/2018/04/28/yeguas-del-apocalipsis-un-archivo-incomodo/>



Figure 12

Fonte: Lo que el SIDA se llevó, 1989. Available in <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/lo-que-el-sida-se-llevo-yeguas-del-apocalipsis-slash-francisco-casas-y-pedro-lemebel-lo-que-el-sida-se-llevo-13>.

Before joining Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, Lemebel had engaged in performative acts of his own. In 1986, we find Lemebel standing in heels reading out loud his *Hablo por mi diferencia* at the Mapocho train station, which he then takes to the Congreso del Partido Comunista with the hammer and sickle drawn with makeup on his face.²² When speaking about the latter, Nelly Richard notes that:

La lectura que hizo P. Lemebel de su manifiesto en zapatos de taco alto desestabilizó la compostura de izquierda del Partido Comunista que, habituado a la seca propaganda de la consigna y el panfleto, le asignó carácter de sedición literaria a una prosa en la que se encartaban, como perlas en un collar, las alegorías y metáforas de la carnavalización sexual. (RICHARD, 2018, p. 85).

Lemebel, as shown above, was aware of the ways in which trans and queer bodies are excluded from most spaces, including those who claim to be liberal, open-minded

²² Figure 13.

and inclusive. In the zigzagging²³ motion of his Neobarrocho²⁴ style, he presents trans bodies that enter and exit spaces, avoiding ideological capture. In other words, Lemebel was able to define transhood in his own terms by entering official and unofficial spaces, by presenting a distinct way of thinking and acting, by showing support for different sociopolitical movements without settling on one:

P. Lemebel supo evitar que estos cuerpos vagabundos quedaran atrapados en algún paradero o casilla que los volviera fácilmente recuperables para la sociología de la marginalidad: una sociología de la marginalidad cuyos recuentos estadísticos quieren objetivar lo desigualitario del sistema con la exactitud del dato, la presión de la cifra, sin tomar en cuenta que se trata de vidas humanas ya pulverizadas como restos en aquellas orillas de inadaptación al sistema que quedaron hace mucho fuera de todo cómputo numérico. De ahí que la creatividad barroca sea uno de los pocos recursos que salvan a esos cuerpos de la indigencia. Revistiendo de excedentes de sentido aquellas existencias que parecían condenadas a la falta del todo (RICHARD, 2018, p. 82).

Thus, what Lemebel seems to inherit most from the Baroque is its unintelligibility. The trans body is unlike any other it is not a copy, it is not simulation it may resemble masculinity or femininity, but it never settles on either one completely. As Lemebel continues to stage performance expressly for the camera, many of his pieces are used as covers for his books. One in particular calls my attention: the untitled photograph used by Seix Barral for its third edition *La esquina es mi corazón*²⁵ (LEMEBEL, 2004). In the image we find Lemebel's unshaved body covered by a stuffed caiman, he wears an extravagant headpiece with two large wings pointed upwards on both sides, while wearing makeup he draws large black stripes around his eyes, one of his legs wears a fishnet stocking, a red dress lays on the ground in front of him presumably after he has taken it off. As such, while his body hair points to his masculinity, his femininity is found in the makeup, stockings, and dress. Furthermore, the sensuality of his body is accentuated by a South American reptile that curves across his body. His makeup, while conventional below the eye, adds elements that are reminiscent of indigenous face paint, alluding to his non-Western body. The headpiece, while feminine, captures the presence of Hermes, Mercury and Roma which were often depicted in winged helmets. All in all, we are offered a body that is neither masculine nor feminine, neither Eastern nor Western. Unintelligible and unconventional he represents queer bodies for what they are: they are alluring, mysterious, and beautiful.

²³ When speaking of his own writing, Lemebel recognizes that “En vez de asumir una frontalidad con el poder, ya sea literario o político, más bien he intentado el zigzag, un entrar de perfil y salir también de perfil, que no se sepa como uno entra y que no se sepa como sales. Es una escritura que entre comillas podríamos llamar escritura marginal, para evitar ser consumida y absorbida. (Lemebel, “Lemebel oral” 36). Thus, Lemebel's (2018) writing is in constant motion, keeping readers and systems of power from grasping it and defining it, making use of its marginality to freely explore dissimilar spaces.

²⁴ Soledad Bianchi (2015) coins the term neobarrocho to speak of Lemebel's baroque style: the prefix neo alluding to his affinity for the neobaroque and barrocho to reference the river which runs through the nation's capital. Other artists, contemporary to Lemebel, have been similarly linked to a form of Chilean neobaroque: Raúl Ruiz, Diamela Eltit, Rodrigo Lira, Raúl Zurita, Diego Maquieira, etc. As a result, The University of Chile has even established the first *Grupo de Estudio sobre Barroco y Neobarroco en Chile* of which Pedro Lemebel was a participant and which showcased the work of other Chilean neobaroque authors in its *Barroco Fronterizo* (2015).

²⁵ Figure 14.



Figure 13

Fonte: Caracter “La Loca del” from Pedro Lemebel. 2001. Available in Frente <https://www.zendalibros.com/pedro-lemebel-la-loca-del-frente/>.



Figure 14

Fonte: Book “La esquina es mi corazón” from Pedro Lemebel. Available in <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-96701.html>.

MELANCHOLY IN THEIR WRITINGS: ALAIR GOMES AND HUDINILSON JUNIOR

Considering what Lopes (1999) brings to the neo-baroque movement in Brazilian and Latin American cultures, which is meaningful and deserves attention, by offering visual imagery of crisis in modern art during the second half of the 20th century, this study reflects on affect and artistic creation in the neo-baroque tradition as an activated category of comprehension of the contemporary world. Within frictions and encounters, the poetic image as a form of semiotic expression contains ways of extracting an aesthetic intentionality, which appears in the photographs of both Alair Gomes and Hudinilson Junior; nuances of a melancholic sensitivity in the neo-Baroque imagery and its singularities. Alongside contemporary photography, this study recognizes melancholy in the body of the Other which, given that melancholy as a singular object mobilizes the reading of the artists’ poetic fragments through images. Lopes (2016) even mentions how the “Neobarroco” was translated and recreated in Argentina as “Neobarroso”, following the example of Perlongher (1997).

This way, the fragment appears through the images in their ambiguity. In a way, it can undergo profane illumination reminiscent of Alair Gomes’ images that evoke experiences, desires and sensations. If the photographer’s images were seen as palimpsests of desire, in the lust of another image, perhaps the photographs could be seen as an image that can be read through another image. “Perhaps in the desire to retain the images of the loss a little more, to want to give them thickness, to give time so that we can stick to every detail [...]” (LOPES, 1999, p. 10). Given the value of aesthetic experience, the images of male bodies seem to determine unpredictable frivolousness in a melancholia of the irrecoverable, of the fragile nature of the performative. If Alair wanted to be a writer, it could be that he became a photographer due to the ruin of desire found in the images, like someone who

is in two worlds and writes with both hands, in fact, with both hands and both eyes. If the Baroque man is configured as an anonymous and lonely subject, both Alair's voyeurism and Hudinilson's narcissism present the artist as a spectator, due to his performative and unstable nature.

The recovery of the baroque, according to Lopes (1999), unfolds in a politicization of the microsocial, of daily life, of minor movements and verifies the dissipation of borders between the public and the private, providing an understanding of the present. For the parts of Hudinilson's body that are copied and for the parts of the male bodies recorded by Alair, it is fitting to think of the images not as metaphors, but as vestiges that unfold over time, as "mystery in fragments", whose meaning is found at the interstice. In a way, the attitude of the melancholic flâneur is found in the photographic production of the artists. Thus, I dare to think of a minor neo-baroque aesthetic expression in Lopes (1999) to reflect on the delicacy in the records of Alair Gomes, in the fragment that has a fragility of the gestures due to the sublime nature of desire, in view of melancholia as a lens to see the world as an articulation of contemporary fragments. If the neo-baroque recreates the baroque in the dimensions of the present, through an aesthetics of transgression, would it be possible to perceive a transgressive inclination within the photographers' images?

Considering the question of melancholia, Santos (2006) situates Alair's texts and his photographic work from a specific way of being in the world, when the concept of melancholia apprehends the modes of artistic creation. The photographic sign appears as a means of expression of a fragmentary nature, having interesting relations with the ideas of baroque ruin and historical allegory found in Benjamin's²⁶ thought. If photography is a territory of melancholy, according to Santos (2006), due to the experience of loss between the photographic act of the symbolic sign and of reality, Alair's personal memory goes back to imagery of the unfulfilled desire. This way, we analyze the way in which Vieira (2003) sees Alair's work as one which initiates the language of homoerotic desire, in a conflicting coexistence. When mentioning the construction of the male body in imagery, Santos (2002) mentions the work of Alair Gomes and Hudinilson Junior as examples of how the male nude goes through the experience of personal life, whose poetized presence composes the transgression of behavioral codes and norms.

²⁶ As stated Sontag (1986) to define Benjamin as melancholy, in the reading of his work to life, melancholy makes you see the world become a shelter, a thing or an enchantment. "Both the Baroque as surrealism, sensitivities with which feel a strong affinity Benjamin, see reality as a set of things" (Sontag, 1986, p. 92).

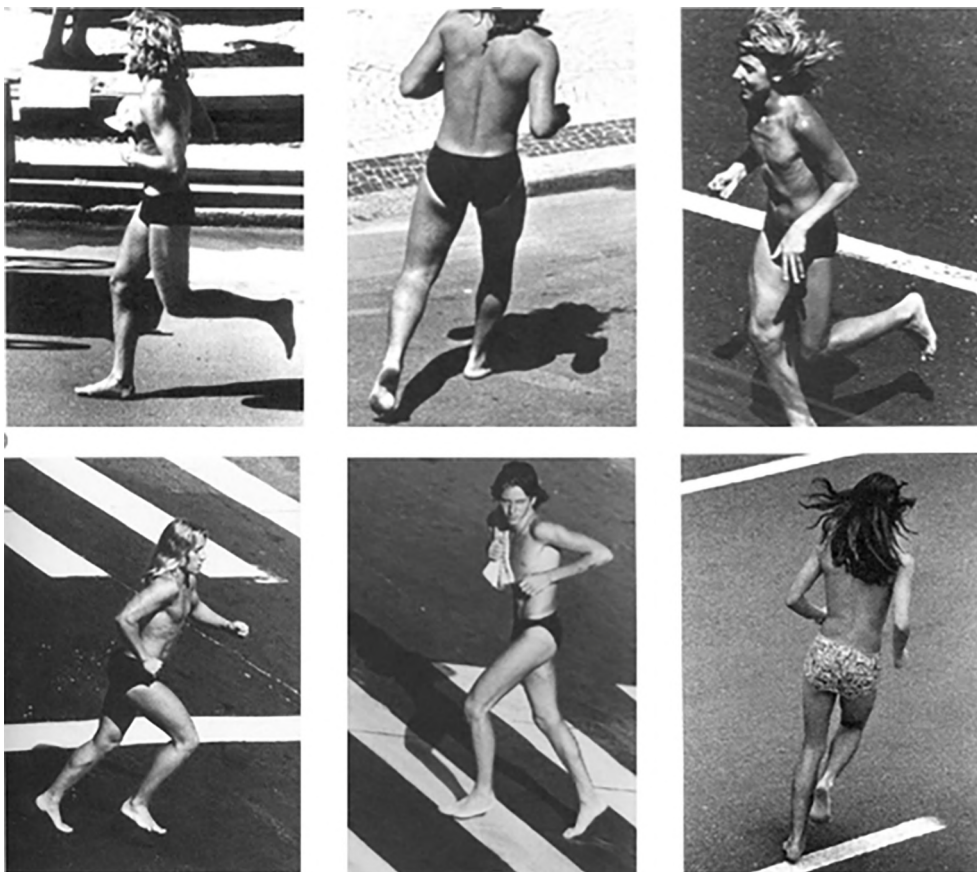


Figure 15²⁷

Fonte: Entitled *A Window in Rio* (1977-1980). Fragments de Alair Gomes.

From the relationship between the creative act and the experience of loss, Santos (2006) considers the photographic image as a sign incorporated into thought that keeps its ontology, insofar as it narrows the condition of loss. Reading the work of Alair Gomes in the sense of what represents the unfulfilled desire, by reinforcing a duplicated experience reinforced between daily life and memory, the author finds in the visual poetics that emerge from the male body in the photographic image an unattainable desire. From the artistic trajectory of the photographic realm, two paths bifurcate his artistic production, between fiction in literature and in photography, and he can be seen as a writer and a photographer of his own image of desire. For this reason, in his visual poetics, his melancholic potential is found in the fictionalization and aestheticization of everyday life. Compared to those who believe more in fantasies than in ideas, Alair believed more in the visual poetics of the bodies of men than in the ruins of his desire.²⁸ “Photography is, in this sense, a modern analogy to the dramatic content that takes place, safeguarding its specificities, from allegory in baroque drama” (SANTOS, 2006, p. 37).

²⁷ Figure 15. Entitled *A Window in Rio* (1977-1980). Fragments de Alair Gomes. Available in the work of Pitol (2013).

²⁸ The concept of ruin through Benjamin’s perspective (1984).



Figure 16²⁹

Fonte: Entitled *Beach-Triptych, n.10* (1980) de Alair Gomes.

Through microstories, the fragments of reality experienced in the photography of Alair Gomes exude melancholic sensitivities, being themselves forms of resistance. Thus, Santos (2008) explains that the streets in Alair is a way of searching for beauty constituted through photographic images that cross a poetic erotic gaze in the perception of the city as a place of flâneur. The rediscovery of the experience lived in Alair's photographs captures the ordinary, the banal and the everyday that devours the desire. Amid the frivolity of the crowd on the beach, the photographic act articulates the perspective of those who walk in the urban environment, captures the beauty in the precariousness of that which was lived and by chance makes an uncertain curve into the fascination that breaks apart the desire within the matrix of the bodies that sweat, that run and that move through water. From the seventh floor of the window of his apartment on Rua Prudente de Moraes, in Rio

²⁹ Figure 16. Entitled *Beach-Triptych, n.10* (1980) de Alair Gomes.

de Janeiro's Ipanema, the voyeur gaze opens up other temporalities through the objective lens, perhaps Alair has made through the sublime a rediscovery of the everyday through body movements, since comprehension takes place at a time not given, but slow and random, intimate, so to speak of contemporary visual poetics.

Almost like a flâneur, Alair constructs his imagery on the frivolity of the street, due to the precariousness of that which was lived and of the place of fortuity. In this case, the sublime appears in Alair's oeuvre as radical experience due to excessive attention given to the artwork or to the objective of the ruin of perfection, resulting from the magnitude of frivolous bodies and their distance from the voyeur. The sublime appropriates the city of nomadic bodily experience, involving fascination and mystery by the images that invoke affection in Rio de Janeiro's boys (GOMES, 2016). Thus, what Gomes (2010) points out about the fascination with the male body in Alair's photography is the unfolding on the edges of the images which embody corporality as an obsessive extension for the flagrant man who inhabits corporal plenitude.

Thus, Pereira (2017) reveals how Alair mapped the unguarded and indifferent areas of masculine behavior by looking at the relationships between men in the public space, above all, or what should happen and be seen, as he imagined the new composition of the body in its photographic fold³⁰, standing out from the "heteronormative" context found in the history of Brazilian photography. Based on Foucault's heterotopia, the author explains how Alair did not seek to "represent" reality, but to create another reality through the narrative of these images. If images of him were taken in broad daylight and almost all of them on Ipanema Beach, both the space on the street and on the beach appear to have elapsed in temporality due to the relationship between heterotopias and homoeroticism. As a cartographer of the imperceptible, Alair appears as a voyeur who not only seeks the act of desire, but the blatant pleasure of temporary and passing performances, with regard to the theft of body codes of the male body.

³⁰ In deleuzian terms on the concept of folding (DELEUZE, 2012)



Figure 17³¹

Fonte: www.galeriajaquelinemartins.com.br/artista/hudinilson-jr#19-468.

In light of his own writings, Hudinilson Junior is considered by Santos (2002) as one of Brazil's artists who use photography in an autobiographical, transgressive and confessional style. From the work of writing the body in the image, Hudinilson combines body and machine in a creative process in which he makes of himself an unfolding of another body. If on the one hand Alair composed the images through the fragments of the naked male body, Hudinilson composed the images through the fragments of his own naked body, being the work and process of unification with the machine. Alair's erotic diaries may resemble Hudinilson's sketchbooks. In 1981, because he posted an image of his own xeroxed groin on a street in São Paulo, at the Arte na Rua exhibition, Hudinilson was censored.

As a pioneer of xerox art, Hudinilson is seen by Kac as a multimedia artist due to the poetic and plastic approach of his artistic production, which Tomazi (2009) situates as the electromechanical means of composing the artist's work. In fact, Gilbert (2015) brings Hudinilson Junior as an affiliate of the Movimento de Arte Pornô based in São Paulo, whose work has contributed to several joint publications. Through the "Manifesto of Arte Pornô", the author understands Kac's premise that "art is penetration and enjoyment", highlighting how much the experimental was disdained by the Brazilian literary elite as well as investigating the relationship between body and language in the context of the military regime. The core of the group, Glauco Mattoso, Leila Miccolis, Sandra Terra,

³¹ Figure 17. Entitled "Registro fotográfico da performance *Exercício de Me Ver II*". Hudinilson Junior: galeriajaquelinemartins.com.br/artista/hudinilson-jr#19-468.

Braúlio Tavares, Teresa Jardim and Cairo de Assis Trindade, lived in Rio de Janeiro and made of Friday nights an expression of porn poetry in Cinelândia. Kac (2013) himself points out how the experimental art movement that he started lasted for two years, from 1980 to 1982, with a latent pragmatic interventionism of porn poetry, pornism or porn movement, starting with lyrics and expanding to other areas, subverting norms aesthetics and conventions of everyday experience.

When considering the work “Narcissus”, started in the 1970s, in which the artist created and recreated images of his naked body in a loving position with the photocopier, Gilbert (2015) realizes that Hudinilson’s xerox art presents another way of engaging in the artistic process: in sexual intercourse with other objects and means which are capable of unfolding the body in itself. Through the concept of self-image in the work that runs through his house / apartment / studio, Oliveira (2016) thinks with Hudinilson about the fragments that unfold in the images, considering the body and the homoerotic themes as marks of this artistic production: “The spaces that this artist inhabited say a lot about his self-image, because there he could see a lot from his daily life, from these relationships between processes of creating and living” (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 146). Thus, the artist’s space / apartment was seen as having life in and of itself, as being a part of the work and the experience.

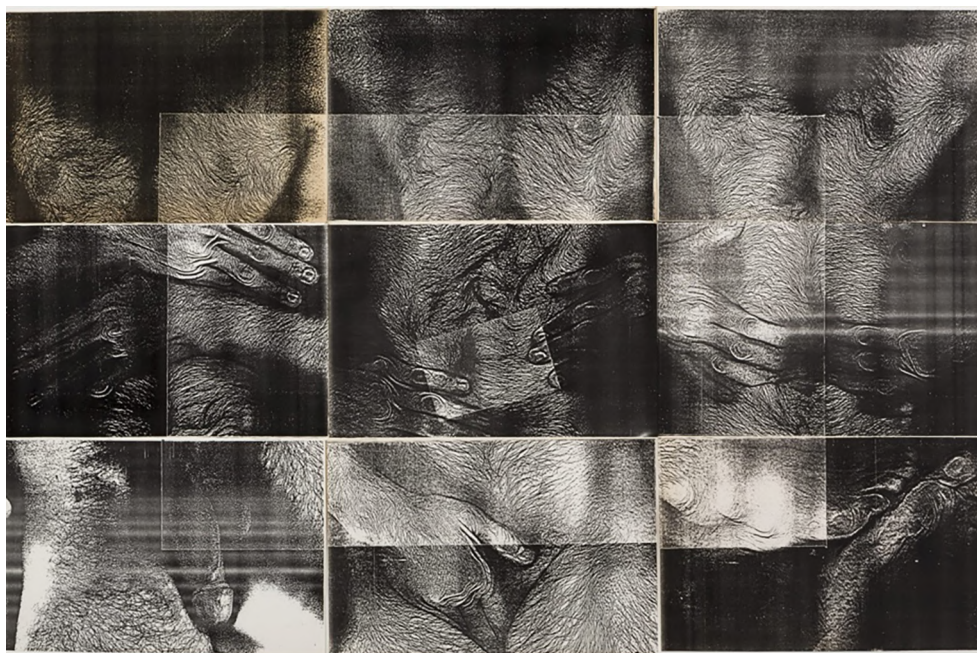


Figure 18³²

Fonte: www.artequacontece.com.br/hudinilson-jr-explicito-na-pina_estacao/.

³² Figure 18. Entitled *Exercício de Me Ver*. (1980-1984). Hudinilson Junior. www.artequacontece.com.br/hudinilson-jr-explicito-na-pina_estacao/.

In the early 1980s, through the “Exercício de Me Ver” photographic series, Hudinilson takes Narciso’s myth as reference, in his self-reflected image upon a lake, to think about his artistic process. On the performative side, Hudinilson photographs naked on top of the typewriter, copying parts of his body, highlighting gestures in images of himself. Thus, the author shows how photocopying, and as such creating a copy of a copy, ends up becoming a voyeuristic act enacted on himself, at the moment when he himself speaks of his body in pixels, lines, shadows and derivations on piece of craft paper. Hudinilson’s artwork appears within the photocopier’s turn into a neo-avant-garde device that crystallized in the 1970s, which was yet more brutal than the military dictatorship. About Narciso’s metaphor in Hudinilson’s work, I consider, along with Lopes (1999), the photocopier, as not only copying fragments of the photographer that destroy the body’s self-identity in splinters but reflects before the plural and the ephemeral he projects onto the world, as marks of the artist’s subjectivity.

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