

## Editors' Forum

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# Queering the Protest's Temporalities

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**Abstract:** This essay reviews a set of contemporary experiences of sex-political organization in the history of the Argentinian antagonistic imagination. It sketches an experimental, theoretical diagram of the power of queer negativity as it has been mobilized by several strategies of public space occupation. Addressing the interference and discontinuity of political time in the wake of new experiences of strike allows one to identify other forms of critical approaches to the streets' heteronormative control systems. It also allows one to trace how new agencies of common organization can be activated for destabilizing the projective direction of emancipatory Left utopias, creating space for new vital protests.

**Keywords:** gender normativity, street protest, crononormativity, Chromoactivismo, queer temporality

## 1985

At the margins of the process of the reconstructive return of democratic opening officially initiated with the electoral success of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) and its candidate, Raul Alfonsín (1983–89), during the elections of 1983, several platforms of political activation began to develop. These platforms resumed the insubordination and sex-political critique displayed between the 1960s and 1970s which were subsequently canceled due to ideological prosecution, political coercion and dictatorship-induced terror. The genealogies started by experiences such as *Nuestro Mundo* (1967) and *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* (1971–75) were incorporated once again into the impetuous imaginaries of a sexual criticism that resisted and reacted not only to the restrictive fences of a repressive sexual morality inherited from the previous *de facto* government, but also to the continuity of the repressive project shaped

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primarily in the form of police edicts and the indiscriminate application of the Background Checks Law (Belucci and Palmeiro 2014). The proliferation of police raids in nightclubs, the stigmatization of youth cultures, the persecution of homosexuals in their spaces of sexual sociability, the absolute criminalization of the travesti identity and the arbitrary arrests for all those bodies that did not comply with the repressive effects of institutionalized gender norms formed the landscape that contained all the disillusionment of the democratic project from those who did not fit into the moral conditions of this new civility. One of the key spaces that would critically reactivate the nonconformist legacy of revolutionary sexual policies would be the alternative cultures and their graphic means of oblique expression.

The *Resistance* fanzine (1984–2001) edited by Pat Pietrafesa at the beginning of the 1980s became one of the most complex platforms of counter-communicative intervention of its time, featuring central discussions of the punk counterculture for almost two decades, generating an ideological and sensitive differential language that brought together specialized notes about food dissent, animal exploitation, vivisection, international eco-terrorist and anti-imperialist struggles, pamphlets disseminated from the first local feminist organizations and interviews with troublesome figures of international rock and punk that raised the question of dissenting sexualities and genders in a transgressive way. In one of her first issues, the editor of this zine articulated a deliberate calling written with the language of urgency, an invitation to be out there and forge potential alliances and utopian fronts, characterized by the emotional pattern of her own time while aiming for the realization of a differentiated body politics: “Depressed? Bored? Maybe disappointed? NO!! Let’s channel our strength and anger in a positive way. 26-4-85- 17 hs. Botanical Garden. “Punx encounter” to create a permanent means of communication. We all have a thousand plans and ideas. Come and bring yours. Tell everyone who cares. FIGHT AND RESIST” (Cuello and Disalvo 2019).

This calling, which made explicit the sentimental structures (Williams 1972) recognized by a large part of the youth during the democratic spring, created the first contacts of alternative cultures in the City of Buenos Aires. The meetings at the Botanical Garden, which lasted throughout the year, were fueled by a desperate urge to radicalize the experience of discouragement, disappointment, fatigue and the non-productive texture of the depressive. Those meetings were composed not only of active participants from the underground of counter-cultural thinking and practice linked to rock music, but also of a prolific series of improper subjects spilling over from the margins of the acceptable, the normal and the morally approved: organized sex workers, anarcho-individualists, drug users, immigrant workers, dissenting homosexuals, low fi artists and cursed poets. Punk ceased to be a cultural reference related to a specific style of music and proved to be instead a territory of negative

connections, a platform of alternative times that would allow community building starting from a common feeling: the temporary mismatch of those lives characterized as impossible, adverse and eradicable. It was a temporary geography for the ease of a discomfort that would not seek a resolution through the empty promise of democratic reinsertion into the efficient regimes of social functioning, but rather would embrace those sensitivities as a guides, imaginary horizons to find new forms of possible life and new modes of direct action through cultural invention (Cuello 2018).

Over the recent decades, there has been a remarkable corpus of authors that have used the notion of *queer temporality* (Freccero 2006; Freeman 2005; Halberstam 2005; Love 2007) to refer to those assemblages and dispositions that complicate the imperative of a linear and transparent relationship between past, present and future, thus naming a perverse turn that makes one detach oneself from the coherent narratives of heterosexuality as a principle for the reproducibility of subjective and corporal experiences. The possibility of imagining a queer time implies not only a theory and a sensible practice that experiments with deviant ways of being in the world, ways that do not fit and oppose the normative life narratives that privilege marriage, reproduction and inheritance among other norms made flesh through productive rhythms – those narratives called *crononormativity* by Elizabeth Freeman, the social and institutional scripts that distribute the time of the human experience and its mechanisms of sociosexual intelligibility and that establish the terms of possibility for the development of a successful, coherent and classifiable subject; they also create queer temporalities as a general form of reflecting on the queer condition of time itself, exploring the way lived temporality comes into tension with the arrow of time and becomes disorganized in a manner that it is impossible to reduce to the continuous and homogeneous approach dictated by hegemonic time (Solana 2017).

In that sense, I am interested in evaluating the potential contribution that queer activism can offer regarding the reflexive launching of other possible times for organized action. Considering that queerness can affect the experience of time and time itself with its diagonal expression in being capable of queer out experience, I articulate here the way these languages of antagonistic imagination might push the limit of the possible, open spaces for other bodies, redefine the political and derail, in the best of cases, the process of assimilationist deactivation (Duggan 2003) of militant cultures.

## 1993

On a cold night of June in the city of Buenos Aires, a group of travestis gathered at a birthday party started to worry about the absence of two of their friends. By word of

mouth the news spread from corner to corner; the precarious networks of support organized for the survival and preventive care brought up the news that the missing friends had been arrested once again; a destiny of violence for the travesti lives still naturalized during the 1990s. While preparing the “bagayo,” a package with food, blankets, cigarettes and other supplies of urgency for the friends deprived of their freedom, the collective conversation ran bitterly about the systematic exhaustion produced by criminalization and constant political persecution. The same night, María Belén Correa and Claudia Pía Baudracco began to discuss the relevance of a union resembling the international experiences of trans organizations that they knew about due to their previous forced sexual exiles. Amidst laughter, María Belén Correa recalls that they chose to name themselves after one police officer from the 23 Station, annoyed with their resistance to being arrested, asked them: “but who do you think you are, the Association of Argentine Travestis?”<sup>1</sup> Among “cumbia, *copeteo* and *lágrimas*” (“cumbia, booze and tears”), ATTTA was born, the Association of Travestis, Transsexuals and Transgenders of Argentina that would group all these solitary travesti activists who fought face to face against repressive power, and that would hold networks of collective communication and alternative cultural knowledge as means of horizontal organization against the harsh severity of repressive power and sexual normality. After an arduous work of alliances, dialogs and disputes with local cis lesbian gay movements, and following their protagonist participation in Pride marches, ATTTA prepared their first public demonstration in 1995. In a context of continuous repression and absolute economic instability that disqualified them from their circulation in public spaces and access to cultural institutions, housing, health and work, this group of organized travestis called for a sit-in at the door of the Casa Rosada (the presidential mansion) under the slogan “We sit down because we want to walk.”

The contradictory force of this oxymoron managed to condense both the profound experience of a predestined impossibility for the travesti lives and the abrasive effects of the persecutory power. It was a sensible operation that succeeded in producing the experience of immobility, halt and pause to summon a critique of institutional violence that would imply another form of action over the real, detaching itself from the single narratives of mass mobilization available at that time. The detention, a restrictive mark placed upon the time of a travesti life, became an inventive language to reach for a critical subjectivity capable of linking the effects of the repressive continuity, the models of economic flexibility and the

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<sup>1</sup> The full chronicle of this night can be read in the publication commemorating the death of trans activist Claudia Pía Baudracco published in “Suplemento Soy” of December 2017 in *Página 12*.

sex-political economies intertwined within the systems of surveillance of the public space.

This social image provided by travesti activism in its insubordinate street occupation activated opaque forms of reverberation that would impugn the sexual regimes of urban organization, while also dismantling the naturalized modern temporality of what one understands as a legitimate political strategy. Being affected by the strange time of these strategies could allow one to think of mismatches from temporal narratives instituted inside the language of protest, modulated in its broad ideological spectrum under the sign of a linear and progressive monolingualism. That is a prospective architecture obsessed with the discourse of futurity, which according to Lee Edelman (2004) exists as a heterosexual machine of projective (social and subjective) identification that guarantees the reproducibility of capitalism as a mode of political and cultural organization, outlining the affirmative arrow of time around figures such as heterosexual hope. Such a corporative principle that manages the experience of time forms consequent narratives in which origins, intentions and ends generate an immobile movement of obedience to the demands of a productivist sense that naturalize those regulatory political fictions of social experiences within the framework of what has previously been called *capitalist chrononormativity*. These experiences become more significant through repetition, and their political effectiveness accumulates a symbolic recognition that ends up discrediting other temporal approaches to the realm of the political.

The inability to critically evaluate the operability of political affirmation and other time registers of protests that turn into nature, means that a conjunctural change should be inscribed in the political history of humanity in which its existential modes of organization depend on fast devices of computer circulation regulating the productive traffic of meanings that define the real. The speed of data, the immediate transparency of the message, the proximity and the activity of signs are all characteristics of this new global cycle of power that one joins and wages battles with. Those technologies that are incorporated as prosthetic techniques during the development of everyday experience work faster every day; modes of transport and virtual techniques of distance reduction are increasingly expanding; and communications in general require less time to comply with their goals and commercial objectives. This adrenaline relationship with the speed of surplus value and the constant acceleration as an organizing principle of subjectivity can be explained by a complex range of cultural phenomena that are also translated as concrete demands in the antagonistic political imagination. The acceleration of the rhythm of life, and through competition, the demand for performance, the ambition of total experience and the desires of eternity or transcendence can be identified with the radical impact and profound intensification

produced by the development of those technologies whose configurations remit to the hyper-productive ideal of ongoing capitalism and its commercial instrumentalization of all life.

Facing the increasing speeds of daily experience and their correlate in the modes of political organization cornered by the imperative of actualization, the twisted temporality of queer activism and its creative protest devices could work as poetic strategies that embrace the power of knowledge and communication distortion, through operations that divert the frenetic rhythm inherent in the device of livestream politics. Both queer ways of affecting the time of politics and political experiences exposing one to the queer time that constitutes them, interrupt the known way of doing politics, introducing sensible forms of unproductive opacity, disrupting the code of expressive languages, altering the circulation of involved communities and discussing preset representations as exclusive registers for sexual protest. These pauses, breaks, cuts, shocks, silences and detours in the accelerated time of productivity from the current political realm existences, can be conceived as possible ways of breaking the alienation produced by the regimes of transparency, effectiveness and competition from the financial principle that organizes the real, orders bodies and manages the meaning of desires.

## 2017

Under the slogan “Macri is Silence, Debt and Terror,” the Column Orgullo en Lucha, a flexible articulation between organizations, collectives, groups and sex-dissenting experiences that intervened in the public space of the City of Buenos Aires through a critical perspective in matters of sexual and body politics, and strategically articulated and published a dissident voice in the Pride march of that year. From an intersectional perspective, the Column Orgullo en Lucha questioned not only the capitalist instrumentalization of sexual difference by current neoliberal politics and pointed out the effects of normalization produced by the screens of integrationist assimilationism, but also disputed the temporal registers characterized as possible by the institutionalized repertoires of sex-dissenting politics.

The collective Cromoactivismo<sup>2</sup> made the decision to experiment with new sensitive registries displaced from the majority affective thermals associated with

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<sup>2</sup> Cromoactivismo is an art collective formed by Guille Mongan, Mariela Scafati, Marina De Caro, Victoria Musotto y Daiana Rose in the year 2016 in Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, they define their work as poetic activism that seeks to investigate the cultural construction and function of colors.

sexual protests. Cromoactivismo worked coordinately with political subjects on a critical redesign of chromatic palettes, redefining the historical content assigned to pigmentation and affecting the sensitive regimes of the social perception in those rewriting devices. Thus it emerged to challenge and re-examine “the colorful joy” historically associated with the institutionalized images of sexual diversity politics, inviting at the same time the construction of an estrangement device to mobilize ways of representing an indisputable common sensation: an absolute state of fatigue, exhaustion, discomfort, fear and impotence over a juncture deafened by the sound of uninterrupted collapse, constantly shaking up the force of possibilities. The decision was unanimous: “we felt like shit, let’s go with the brown.” The following work was the redesign of this palette looking for new associations that demanded the urgent reconfiguration of the word *brown* in an experimental key: “Brown Fat,” “Brown Raw Body,” “Brown Without Borders,” “Brown Without Clothes,” “Brown Tired Ghost,” “Brown Muscle-Mouth,” “Brown Tomorrow Parties,” “Brown Mask,” “Brown Remoteness,” “Brown Deep Surface,” “Brown Forward” and “Brown Wound,” among other monochrome signs that prayed in a shy and almost clandestine way: “I am very tired!” “I can’t take it anymore!” “I’m scared,” “Here we are!” “My feet!” “Artisans of twisted pleasures!” This is how a mobile device of unimaginable dimensions was built that, thanks to the strange beauty of its abrupt irruption among the vertical marketing of the new homonormative landscape, proposed a neo-thermal unraveling of the sexual powers of a crowd enraptured with the force of nonconformity.

The temporal regimes associated with the politics of pride and their historical strategies have prioritized languages of political action built upon social visibility, and they have operated through the affirmative effects implicated in the constitutive positivity of these forms of interpellation. They build a sense of time whose assertiveness is established through processes of alchemical transmutation that strategically turn shame, an affective mark resulting from a matrix of historical, systematic and global oppression over non-conforming sex and gender experiences, into a sentimental rhetoric that has obtusely molded the repertoires of the sexual protest into a synthesis between stoicism, transparency and identity. Undoubtedly, as a historically situated tactic, the temporal and affective politics implied in the economies of pride have been profoundly productive in their capacity to set common horizons for the emergence of an activism questioning normative sexual politics. But in the same way, and as already seen in this history, they have shaped restrictively the temporal-spatial experience in which sexual politics takes place, establishing themselves as a single possible language, constraining the capacity to imagine new repertoires for such protests through the success of emotional optimism, political progressivism and the integrated fluidity of assimilation.

Feeling brown (Muñoz 2006) was not only the possibility of arranging a critical way to poetically occupy the street, making the color of the sexual protest an experimental laboratory of new ways for building the commons, but also the opportunity to reconnect with a forgotten language in the history of sexual disobedience: one that recovers the cadence of the wounded, the discomfort of loss, the weariness of systematic violence, the melancholy of recurrent failure and the deafening acknowledgments of the unequal; all these things banished from sexual politics because of increasingly aggressive neoliberal systems of friendly assimilation. And finally, it meant reoccupying, with an unparalleled desiring affirmation, the power of brown desires as fugitives from the norm, with desires decisively writing their freedom from this brown south, the racialized edge where the world ends.

In this sense, to ask about the queer temporalities of sexual politics means opening a reflexive field to overcome the sensationalist strait-jacket the affirmative strategy has become, making other forms of response, modes of organization, agglutinative emotions audible and able to act the emancipatory transformation against the systems of bio-political assignment of human bodies. Queer activisms, which have always placed suspicion on the semiotic-political functioning of the ontological statutes of the normal, might offer from the diagonals of their strategies of direct action, the capacity to deepen projects of estrangement and cessation of the current politics through other temporary regimes for the political.

The fundamental taking into account of the contributions of queer activism for the redefinition of the temporal cartographies of the antagonistic imagination given the relevance of *sex-politics* (Preciado 2004) is one of the dominant forms of bio-political action in the current capitalist model. Here I speak of a mode of organization and a productive principle of bodies that is a central part from the calculations of power, making discourses about sex and their associated technologies one of the constitutive forms of control over life and an object central in global governance, one that depends primarily upon flows of accelerated sexualization in which images and technical knowledge about the body and its policies of corporative management, productive modification and normalized representation are constantly circulating.

These images which embrace mostly negative effects as modes of approaching the real can teach alternative critical diagrams to the experience of the normalized time of *straight politik*, a temporal canon that acts through the stoic modeling of the will, hetero-reproducible progressivism and the melodramatic romanticization of utopian action. Instead, the conflictive dimensions of queerness alter the economies of hegemonic temporality of political agency, making space for experiences such as shyness, paranoia, ambivalence, fear, failure, melancholy, loneliness, shame, immaturity, slowness, contempt and despair. These are hitherto discarded affects,



morally considered as unproductive for the exercise of politics, but they are also emotional aspects that account for a critical state of generalized precariousness in people's lives, which insist and resist stubbornly the alchemical processes of queer suffering (Love 2007) in order to challenge the crisis of political imagination that does not dare to reconfigure their economies of access and representation.

These experiences immerse one in a nonconforming energy that questions the rhythm for imagining the forms of collective organization and disputing today's adverse conditions, and push people to imagine vital protests outside of reproductive imperatives, market optimism and the promise of redemption associated with normalizing integration. The question about the queer time of protest is a call to make audible all those minuscule barricades, those twisted gestures, those forms of indirect action guided by the slow modes of insubordination that, even from the confused shadows of their backwardness and drawing the desiring insistence of their stuttering languages, keep whispering revolution.

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