(Un)comfortable Intersections: A Postcolonial Critique  
Towards a Queerness from the South

by

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Introduction: Acknowledging the (Other) Philosopher

In “Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology”, Sara Ahmed offers a reflexive tour in an office room following the idea that our disposition and inclination towards objects conditions our sense of orientation and our relational experience. Ahmed’s proposal consists in bringing orientation to the center of the analysis in order to rearticulate our understanding of space as a sexualized experience. Building on Husserl’s example of a philosopher constructing knowledge in a study room, Ahmed describes:

“He begins with the writing table and then turns to other parts of this room, those which are, as it were, behind him. We are reminded that what he can see in the first place depends on which way he is facing. The things behind him are also behind the table that he faces: it is self-evident that he has his back to what is behind him. A queer phenomenology, I wonder, might be one that faces the back, which looks “behind” phenomenology, which hesitates at the sight of the philosopher’s back.” (Ahmed 2006, 546)

This project is inspired by Ahmed’s invitation to explore the objects at the back of the philosopher, but it also proposes to consider relations with the objects in the back and those in the front (and anywhere else in the room) from a different starting point. I want to call attention to the fact that the organization of the objects in the room responds to the presence of a Western subject that sits on the chair. As Ahmed puts it, “[t]he world that is around has already taken certain shapes, as the very form of what is more and less familiar.” (Ahmed 2006, 545) This is to say, the philosopher’s intention to adopt a queer perspective is built as a reaction to a non-queer initial viewpoint that becomes hegemonic through repetition. But what happens when we reconsider the relationality of the objects in the room after taking a similar
shift in our viewpoint as the one taken by Stuart McArthur in his “Universal Corrective” world maps? What happens when we imagine a subject that is not sitting at the desk, but is instead looking at a gravity-defiant group of objects from under the desk, from a corner, or from under (or above) the doorframe? And moreover, what happens when this Southern subject does not forge hir orientation solely in relation to the objects in the room, but also considering the actions of that Western subject who is sitting at the table? A queerness from the South needs to take into consideration that differences in the initial positionality of subjects are just as influential in the exercise of queer phenomenology as the inclination towards the objects in the room might be. Building on this premise, I propose to (re)consider what a queer orientation from a Southern perspective can entail.

Concretely, this project is a critique of US-based queer theory from a postcolonial perspective through the examination of the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires, Argentina and São Paulo, Brazil. By identifying common themes and arguments in works by Michael Warner, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz, I argue that, although a common purpose among these authors is the deconstruction of norms as tools of governance of sexual experiences, the texts still reveal a moral valorization that divides political initiatives in the categories of 'radicalism/subversiveness' versus 'asimilationism/normalization.' The ethnographic data gathered in my sites presents challenges to this binary division by putting in evidence its cultural specificity and the limitations of queer theory as a framework for

1 Ahmed proposes: “If we foreground the concept of “orientation,” then we can retheorize this sexualization of space as well as the spatiality of sexual desire.” (Ahmed, 543)
2 Also referred to as 'upside world maps', this cartographical style was first drawn by Stuart McArthur in 1969 at the age of 12, and first published in 1979 in Australia. The first publication did not only reverse the order of the Southern and Northern hemisphere, but also located Australia at the center of
the analysis of non-Western realities. My argument is not, however, one against the foundational worth of a queer perspective, but rather, one against a categorical classification of the practical forms queerness can take. Thus, I advocate for a rearticulation of queer theoretical principles that speaks to the localized interpretations and negotiations of queerness in non-Western settings.

If we take the perspective of the subject sitting on the chair as our initial epistemological framework, the relation between ‘the other’, the Southern, the non-Western subject and the objects in the room is - in the cases when it is even acknowledged- already queer. In other words, if we understand heteronormativity to be the repeated, consolidated relation between the Western subject and the objects in front of the desk, then the relation between that other subject with any object in the room differs from this consolidated orientation and therefore, from a Western perspective, can be thought of as queer. This is to say that orientations vary not only according to the negotiation of the subject towards the objects that surround hir, but also, according to the centrality or periphery of hir initial position. As explained by postcolonial semiotician Walter Mignolo:

“There are, today, a global time and a global space, but they only become ‘visible’ in global places hierarchically organized all over the globe. But the question is not between hegemonic space/time and subaltern places. Places are the only thing we have, so to speak, yet there are hegemonic places where the lived space/time coincides with managerial time/space and places where hegemonic space/time has to be negotiated and articulated with nonhegemonic lived time.” (Mignolo 2003, 58)

Taking Mignolo’s observations, we could also understand normativity as the coherence between managerial and experienced space/time. Because the Southern
subject lives in a nonhegemonic time, hir experience of space is conditioned by its irresolvable discrepancy with managerial space/time, which explains why it is possible to think of the subject in the non-Western position to have an ‘already queer’ orientation inside the room. Within my project’s framework, such challenge to what constitutes queerness and heteronormativity will lead us to reconsider the incompatibility between queerness and the objects in front of the desk, and allow, for example, for the possibility of a queer interaction between LGBT/queer movements with governmental institutions, the market, and legal reform. But what are the implications of conceiving of all orientations that connect non-Western positionalities with any objects as ‘already queer’? At risk of falling on a tautological fallacy that would equate all relations and orientations that involve Southern subjects with liberation of the sexualized experience of space, it becomes necessary to adjust our understanding of queerness to specifically look for initiatives or inclinations that lead towards the liberation, pleasure, freedom and non-governability of sexual experience.

In many ways, looking at the relation between queer theory and the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo is looking at a dialogue that does not happen. The US-based queer theorists that comprise the theoretical framework for this project never address the non-Western subject. In fact, their theoretical articulations are forged upon localized examples and scenarios that exclusively respond to a contemporary US context, and they sporadically acknowledge the historico-political circumstances upon which they build their theories. Taking this into consideration, it could be argued that this project aims to fight against a theoretical strawman. Why would the non-Western subject in the roof
care about the construction of knowledge of the subject sitting on the chair? Upon what grounds is a postcolonial critique of queer theory founded?

Continuing with the visual metaphor of the philosopher(s) in the office for a little longer, let us imagine that someone takes a picture of the entire room. If we believe the picture, the subjects may seem to be mostly disconnected, parallelly negotiating their experiences of space/time. Queer theory would be, following this logic, an epistemic approach for non-normative relations only involving the Western subject, and thus, there would be no reason for the non-Western subject to feel affected by such construction of knowledge. However, if instead of a picture of the room we could analyze a video recording, we could see that there is a systematic transmission of objects through time, which, although not unilateral, strongly follows a direction North-South. Western epistemological traditions have not only been transmitted according to colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial relations of dominance, but also, “the standards, criteria, and norms of the social sciences in the First World became the measuring stick for the practice of the social sciences in the Third World.” (Mignolo 2003, 41) Therefore, the justification for a critique of queer theory from a postcolonial perspective should not be framed as a question of whether the Southern subject is directly addressed in queer bodies of literature, but rather, whether queer theory has implications for the Southern subject’s sexualized experience of space. My fieldwork’s data will show the extent and ways in which queer theory is part of the political landscape in my sites.
Methodology & Data

The ethnographic data for this project was gathered during the months of June and July of 2012. Although my methodological technique included participant observation and discourse analysis of representations of sexual politics in the public sphere, it was mainly focused on collecting information through personal interviews with individuals affiliated with the LGBT/queer movements in both cities. While developing my fieldwork, my intention was to control for variables that could spuriously alter data collection. With this in mind, I spent the same amount of time in each city (30 days), previously contacted potential participants (43 in São Paulo and 36 in Buenos Aires) from a wide range of organizations and initiatives related in any way to sexual politics, and followed a similar interview script with all participants. As a result, I obtained directly comparable data that reveals tendencies and discrepancies in participants’ discourses.

At the same time, my data was not only heterogeneous in content, but also in structure and value. I gathered a total of 31 interviews, from which 18 were obtained in Buenos Aires and 13 in São Paulo. From the interviewers gathered in São Paulo, 8 identified as homosexual men, 3 as lesbians, 1 as female transgender, and 1 as a drag queen. Within the participants in Buenos Aires, 8 identified as homosexual men, 5 as lesbians, 2 as queer, 2 as transgender, and 1 as bisexual. These numbers show that,

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3 The questions were related to six areas: (1) The current goals and obstacles of the LGBT/queer movement (2) Activism and channels of participation (3) Personal political affiliations (4) The particularities of the city as a hub for LGBT/queer activity and activism (5) Opinions on the current government (6) Relation of the LGBT/queer movement with international influences. Some examples of questions asked were: “Which objectives do you identify as primordial within the current LGBT/queer movement?” “Do you agree with such objectives or do you think the LGBT/queer movement should have different priorities?” “What would be the ideal relation between the LGBT/movement and the government?” “Do you believe the LGBT/movement in this city represents the different subgroups effectively, equally and horizontally?” “Do you think there are external influences that condition the LGBT/queer movement? If so, where from, and what do you think about that?”
despite my efforts to reach out to a wide spectrum of participants, one of the main limitations of this data is the predominance of homosexual men in both sites. The interviews also varied highly in duration, ranging from 20 minutes to 3 hours and 45 minutes. Likewise, the small number of total interviews virtually erases any of their quantitative representative value for the wider LGBT/queer movements in each city. My intention is not, therefore, to stipulate nor put into question how widespread or prevailing the opinions of these participants may be, but rather to acknowledge their presence as part of the political landscape, and analyze their validity as representative of different, but not exhaustive, ways of experiencing sexual deviance.

My position as a researcher in these sites is highly hybrid. I have lived most of my life and gathered most of my primary and secondary education in Argentina, and I have also lived and studied in Brazil at a secondary level. At the same time, being fluent in both Spanish and Portuguese and being familiar with the history and political realities of both countries facilitated the process of gathering information and my communication with the participants. In the words of Gayatri Spivak “that accident of birth and education has provided me with a sense of the historical canvas...” (Spivak 1988, 281) in both countries. Nevertheless, my previous familiarity with the cities of São Paulo and Buenos Aires can be reduced to short visits and my relation with LGBT/queer political initiatives was virtually non-existent before entering this project. Moreover, I gathered the entirety of my university-level education in the United States, and therefore the epistemological tradition that forms my perspective is in many ways foreign to my sites. As an observer, this puts me in a conflictive position that destabilizes my role as part of the local and the foreign, of participation and critique, personal involvement and external examination.
Further, this hybridity in my perspective is not uniform. While my familiarity with certain historical facts and political features of my sites surprised my interviewees at times, other times they were surprised at my ignorance of information that they considered common knowledge. It is not my intention, therefore, to delineate the boundaries of my position as an observer. Employing my background to claim that I stand from the perspective of Argentinean LGBT/queer scholarship would ignore the features of my education and political experience that position me as a foreign subject to Argentinean and Brazilian realities. At the same time, adopting an exclusively queer theory-based perspective would erase the political and epistemological perspectives that shaped the foundations of my analytical perspective and still remain essential to my viewpoint. I have gone from crying of happiness in front of the TV the moment same-sex marriage was legalized in Argentina in 2010, to strongly engaging with US-based radical critiques of legal reform. Inversely, I have also gone from absorbing Western-produced social theory texts with great enthusiasm, to contemplating their contextual specificities and limitations in relation to experiences outside of the First World. Thus, my disclaimer is not constrained to inform the reader of my analytical biases, but instead to acknowledge and incite a critical examination of the ways in which my limitations as an observer escape my own eye.

Finally, it is important to clarify that this is not a comparative study between Buenos Aires and São Paulo. My objective by incorporating data from these two sites is to explore different processes of construction of knowledge in postcolonial settings. The processes of construction of knowledge regarding sexualized experience within a postcolonial context are the central object of study of this project. Thus, it is not my
intention to provide systematized information that shows similarities and discrepancies between my sites, in order to theorize on the reasons for these differences. At times, the incorporation of such analysis may serve useful for understanding the political and epistemological initiatives that are being observed, but the focus will always remain centered on the political, theoretical and epistemological dialogue among different perspectives.

A Word on Terminology

The transnational and trans-epistemological nature of this project presents several questions regarding terminology. In order to avoid an arbitrary evaluation on the ‘accuracy’ or ‘properness’ of the terms encountered in my fieldwork and the academic literature reviewed, I decided to take an encompassing approach that would allow me to reference objects without erasing the possibility for the reader to consider them part of a different category.

Probably the clearest example of this encompassing approach is the use of the term ‘LGBT/queer.’ Thinking about the academic tradition that produced queer theory as a reaction to Gay and Lesbian Studies in the United States, and acknowledging the important framework shift that this implied, there is a clear difference between what is considered ‘queer’ from that which is considered ‘gay’, ‘gay and lesbian’ or ‘LGBT’ in this context. The difference has at times been elaborated as one between categories versus an orientation, and from the perspective of queer theory, has often been used to measure the disruptive power of political initiatives against heteronormativity. However, because one of my purposes is to examine how queerness is conceived of and experienced in a context outside the
United States, I want to abstain myself from measuring the disruptive power of individuals, organizations, spaces and political initiatives that associated with ‘LGBT’ or ‘queer’, and instead leave possibilities open through the use of ‘LGBT/queer.’ As it will be explained, some uses of ‘queer’ can respond more closely to initiatives that would be considered normalizing, hegemonic and oppressive in the context of the US, while others that may disrupt heteronormative categorizations may be developed under the framework of LGBT terminology. Thus, I use specific categories the times when individuals or organizations clearly express their self-identification, but I generally employ the term ‘LGBT/queer’ to allow the reader to observe specificities in political initiatives beyond their categorization.

The use of ‘sexual deviance’ throughout this project also aims to work as a loose term that encompasses practices and projects that escape the norm, considering that the construction of the norm may vary in different settings. The use of ‘sexual deviance’ as opposed to ‘counterhegemonic’ or ‘anti-normative’ practices is once again related to my intention to abstain from evaluating the political connotations and impacts of any given actions. Terms like ‘counterhegemonic’ and ‘anti-normative’ imply an articulated political position and intention from the subject against a broad system identified as oppressive. Since it is not my intention to automatically assign any political position to LGBT/queer individuals and practices, I use ‘sexual deviance’ as a way of acknowledging difference from the norm, while not implying direct resistance to it.

Another important clarification regarding terminology is related to geopolitics. It is a funny world critical scholars live in, considering that much of how we conceive of it is by opposing a South to a West. To tackle the question of how to make
reference to this imperfect division, I decided once again to take an encompassing approach and include different linguistic resources encountered in academic literature and ethnographic material. Thus, throughout this project there is mention of a Global North, a Global South, Western and non-Western contexts, and First and Third World. These are not exhaustive terms. While for some scholars, for example, Brazil and Argentina would fall under the category of ‘Western’, for others the Western world is restricted to dominant nations in Europe and North America. Likewise, some may argue that the binary First World/Third World is anachronic because it belongs to a Cold War context, while others use it as contemporary. These are all contested terms that incite different connotations in different contexts, which is why I avoided choosing one linguistic framework over others. I do, however, avoid using the binaries developed/underdeveloped and developed/developing because both of these are necessarily attached to the reinforcement of a capitalist (and usually neoliberal) political model as a universal ideal, and they limit the critical examination of non-capitalist temporalities and experiences of space. Thus, the mapping used in this project places my sites as part of the Global South, non-Western realities and the Third World, and contrasts European and North American influences, which fall into the categories of Global North, Western contexts and First World.

Throughout this piece I characterize the current Brazilian and Argentinean governments as part of a larger framework of “New Left” governments in the region. The Latin American New Left is a term often used to refer to the contemporary wave of presidents in the region who were elected upon ‘socialist’, ‘leftist’ and ‘progressive’ political platforms, built against traditional liberal and conservative parties. This is a highly contested term among historians and Latin American Studies
scholars not only because it is difficult to mark a specific milestone for its beginning, but also because of the heterogeneity of the political visions that coexist within it. For some scholars such as Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, the New Left is the “unprecedented wave of left-leaning governments between 1998 and 2010” (Levitsky and Roberts 2011, abstract), while for others like Cynthia J. Arnson et al, the New Left is the “result of over a dozen presidential elections held in Latin America from late 2005 to the end of 2006.” (Arnson et. al 2007, 3) In the same vein, some characterize the New Left by being centered in the tri-partite combination of the governments of Evo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (Ellner 2012, 96), while others encompass a wide array of governments “that define themselves as leftists or represent parties or party coalitions historically defined as on the Left.” (Arnson et al. 2007, 3) Given that my intention is to focus on political discourse rather than analyzing the consistency between these governments’ discourse and policy, I suscribe to an understanding of the New Left closer to Arnson’s view. In this sense, Dilma Rousseff and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner are part of the New Left insofar as their discursive platform follows that of their leftist precedents, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Néstor Kirchner, and arguably defend principles of social inclusion, redistribution and social justice.

Summary of chapters

This project is divided in four parts. Chapter 1 critically examines selected US-based queer theory literature with the purpose of identifying the construction of a binary of social responses to sexual deviance. Through the analysis of works by Michael Warner, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, José Esteban Muñoz and Lisa Duggan, chapter 1 argues that the principles of liberation, non-governability, pleasure and
freedom, which lie at the core of queer theory, are threatened by the establishment of binary between that which is considered radical/subversive and assimilationist/normalizing.

Chapter 2 is a genealogy of the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. While some context is given regarding early LGBT/queer expressions, this genealogy focuses primarily on social and political initiatives in the second half of the twentieth century. An analysis of LGBT/queer initiatives in relation with the State, international LGBT/queer organizations and the Left reveals that the delineation of the LGBT/queer movements in both sites happened as a consequence of a process of alliance with and resistance to these other social actors. It also reveals that through the use of institutional and socio-cultural channels, the figure of the sexually deviant individual has been associated to foreignness, which further increased the demarcation of the specificities of LGBT/queer movements.

Chapter 3 maps the content of my fieldwork through the exploration of four narratives that I identify as central to the contemporary situation of the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. The narratives focus on analyzing (1) the relation of LGBT/queer initiatives with the State, (2) spaces of hypervisibility as channels for resistance, consumption and communication, (3) the political implications of the use of linguistic signifiers such as LGBT and queer, and (4) types of negotiations between legal reforms and radical politics within the LGBT/queer movements. The objective of this chapter is to argue that although the theoretical framework proposed by US-based queer theorists is compatible with many of the views of my interviewees, the expectations that arise from the binary radicalism/subversiveness and normalization/assimilation are incompatible and
insufficient to explain the forms that LGBT/queer political initiatives take in these sites.

Chapter 4 incorporates a postcolonial studies framework in order to analyze relations of dominance and resistance between US-based queer theory and Southern political and epistemological initiatives. This chapter contextualizes US-based queer theory in terms of geopolitical and epistemological traditions and differentiates these aspects from its discursive intentions in order to find the logic behind different reactions towards its incorporation in a Southern context. By comparing the relation between US-based queer theory and Southern political and epistemological understandings of sexual deviance with the relation between US-based Latin American Studies and Pensamiento Crítico, this chapter also warns against neglecting geopolitical specificities in understanding sexual deviance.

This project concludes with a reflection on the possibilities and implications for the articulation of a queerness from the South. I argue that there is benefit in looking at localized responses towards the axes of liberation, non-governability, freedom and pleasure, instead of the binary between radicalism/subversiveness and normalization/assimilation. Taking into account the contributions of US-based queer theory, while remaining critical of the neocolonial potential of Northern epistemology, a queerness from the South aims to articulate Southern perspectives for the decolonization of sexualized experience.
Chapter 1: The Normalized Queer & The Radical High Horse: A Queer Map of a Binary

In a zine called “Toward the Queerest Insurrection”, printed by the Mary Nardini Gang in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the following passage illustrates the often conflictive relation between ideas and understandings of queerness and LGBT:

“Some will read “queer” as synonymous with “gay and lesbian” or “LGBT”. This reading falls short. While those who would fit within the constructions of “L”, “G”, “B” or “T” could fall within the discursive limits of queer, queer is not a stable area to inhabit. Queer is not merely another identity that can be tacked onto a list of neat social categories, nor the quantitative sum of our identities. Rather, it is the qualitative position of opposition to presentations of stability - an identity that problematizes the manageable limits of identity. Queer is a territory of tension, defined against the dominant narrative of white-hetero-monogamous patriarchy, but also by an affinity with all who are marginalized, otherized and oppressed. Queer is the abnormal, the strange, the dangerous. Queer involves our sexuality and our gender, but so much more. It is our desire and fantasies and more still. Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world. Queer is a total rejection of the regime of the Normal.” (Mary Nardini Gang, 2)

The ideas expressed in this passage illustrate an understanding of queerness intrinsically linked to radicalism. According to this zine, queer as a concept is not only different, but it is also more than any notions of LGBT. Queer is total. Queer is everything in conflict, and not merely another identity. And we are told that failing to understand queerness in this way reflects a falling short in our reading of the concept. But who are we? How can we ever be queer if queer is everything in conflict? Can we exist in permanent conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world? And further, is that conflictive existence what we want?

A position that defends radicalism as a steady and coherent direction, even if intending to disrupt the boundaries of identity definition, may reinforce a binary
between what is desirable and undesirable through a division between what constitutes “subversiveness” and “conformity.” Joshua Gamson explains that “It is socially produced binaries (...) that are the basis of oppression; fluid, unstable experiences of self become fixed primarily in the service of social control.” Following this idea, the intrinsic association between queerness and radicalism may create fixed categories of “subversiveness” and “conformity,” placing more value on subversiveness, and therefore acting as a potentially oppressive standard to evaluate individual and collective actions.

Thus, we seem to face a paradox: the oppositional direction of queerness towards hegemony is the center of its liberatory potential, while at the same time this same oppositional direction can become oppressive when its interpretation is translated into fixed ideas of what is desirable and undesirable. Following this logic, I argue that holding queerness as a steadily radical position creates expectations of coherence in the radicalism of social practices and political projects that can be oppressive towards its actors because they reinforce a model of morality and authenticity that although different from heteronormative structures, still demands particular actions and types of behavior.

Considering that my object of study is comprised by the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, which in turn are comprised by collective negotiations of varied positions towards radicalism, reform and social change, the objective of this chapter is to explore different theoretical frameworks that deal with issues of sexuality and its social manifestations. The discussion of different theoretical approaches has two particular objectives. First, it is meant to map a diverse array of observations from the point of view of US-based queer theory in
order to examine existing frameworks for the analysis of the case studies. Second, it intends to find points of agreement and disagreement among the theorists in order to illuminate trends and controversies related to the sociopolitical aspects of sexual deviance.

With this purpose, I have taken three axes of analysis for this chapter: 1) normalization and queerness, 2) visibility and 3) representation and language, which are all meant to put in conversation works by renowned US-based queer theorists, while incorporating a few pieces of qualitative data from my own ethnographic research as contributions and/or challenges to these theories. It is not my intention to discuss in detail the specificities of what each author states about each axis of analysis, given that different discussions prioritize different axes over others. Rather, the objective of this division is to map commonalities and differences among some key US-based queer academics. Putting these ideas in conversation with one another has the ultimate objective of showing that even though a common purpose among these theorists is to propose alternative understandings to hegemonic binary responses and alternatives of action, binaries are often reproduced in these very contestations.

My interest in this issue arises not only from the theoretical viewpoint, but also for its practical political implications, particularly in my research sites. In this sense, I argue that the continuation of binary understandings of subversive/conformist, radical/normalized, and similar contrasts, might be analytically inaccurate and politically disadvantageous. On the one hand, it might be analytically inaccurate because it can leave complex reasoning processes behind political actions unacknowledged, which more often than not weave together elements that can be considered radical or subversive with other than fit into the category of reformist
and/or assimilationist. On the other hand, it might be politically disadvantageous because this division can alienate what is considered desirable from what is considered possible. Holding up a series of political actions that correspond to radicalism/subversiveness without examining the contextual and cultural specificities that enable the articulation of this very notion, can lead to the neglect, omission and oppression of LGBT/queer groups with different cultural codes and contextual characteristics. That is why, the main objective of this chapter is to put in evidence binary categorizations of responses towards sexual deviance, as presented by the US-based queer theorists discussed.

However, in this chapter I also aim to acknowledge the value of binary categories as guidelines, in a similar way than Max Weber’s ideal types do not aim to directly resemble social reality, but to illuminate tendencies and archetypes. Binary linguistic categories often serve as a tool to identify the particular directions of political initiatives, in order to map tendencies that give information about the political landscape as a whole. Thus, the value of these categories resides in their potential as linguistic signifiers in the communication that is necessary for the articulation of political initiatives. Following this idea, my argument is not built upon the identification of these linguistic signifiers, but rather, of the ethical implications that are tacitly carried with them. In other words, ideal types can be beneficial as long

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4 "According to Weber's definition, ‘an ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view’ according to which ‘concrete individual phenomena … are arranged into a unified analytical construct’ (Gedankenbild); in its purely fictional nature, it is a methodological ‘utopia [that] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality’ [Weber 1904/1949, 90]. Keenly aware of its fictional nature, the ideal type never seeks to claim its validity in terms of a reproduction of or a correspondence with reality. Its validity can be ascertained only in terms of adequacy, which is too conveniently ignored by the proponents of positivism. This does not mean, however, that objectivity, limited as it is, can be gained by ‘weighing the various evaluations against one another and making a statesman-like compromise among them’ [Weber 1917/1949, 10], which is often proposed as a solution by those sharing Weber's kind of methodological perspectivism. Such a practice, which Weber
as they act as buoys in the sea of sexual politics, but translating them into fixed political models can be oppressive towards groups and individuals who build their experience differently.

Another part of the challenge to the binary division between radicalism and assimilation comes from arguing that these are two ends in a spectrum, and although defending one strategy or position over the other may have the intention of setting a liberatory direction for political projects, this division can have the effect of ignoring the constant dialogue between the two as well as their coexistence. Examples from my ethnographic research challenge, at times, these divisions, while other times they can serve as support for some observations made by these theorists, showing that all axes of analysis are constantly reformulated and negotiated in different ways by the social actors in my sites. While some projects can take forms or channels that under the perspective of US-based theorists would be classified as assimilationist/normalizing, they can also, in a non-US context, respond to the localized demands and negotiations of groups that would exceed this category. Thus, my argument is not that queer radical perspectives should be taken into consideration when negotiating political initiatives, but that they often are. In other words, the categorization of LGBT/queer expressions between assimilationist and radical might be detrimental insofar as it may create fixed ideal channels of expression and invisibilize the nuanced dialogue between these perspectives.

An important clarification needs to be made regarding my choice of academic literature. In this chapter I analyze works by queer theorists Michael Warner, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, José Esteban Muñoz and Lisa Duggan, and I use Joshua calls ‘syncretism,’ is not only impossible but also unethical, for it avoids ‘the practical duty to stand up
Gamson’s “Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma” as a theoretical interlocutor for some of the texts. Throughout the following chapters, I refer to these texts when mentioning “US-based queer theorists”, although I am highly aware that within the spectrum of queer theory, which is rich for its heterogeneity, arguments can be found to counteract these observations. Further, there are many angles for the critique of queer theory within the US that may make similar or compatible observations to mine, such as queer of color, trans* and feminist critiques, and that are not considered in this piece. My purpose when selecting these authors was to choose some of the most prominent and consolidated queer theory works, given that, when analyzing the impact of queer politics and queer theory transnationally, it is this category of works that are most often published and distributed outside of the United States.

**Normalization & Queerness: Ontological Anxieties**

Across the scholarly literature on queer politics, there seems to be an agreement about the split response towards sexual deviance. Sexual deviance is understood to always have a positive impact on the social presentation of individuals and groups, although there is variation in the specific forms this impact is translated into. Among the prominent scholars on the subject there are different interpretations for such split. For Michael Warner, there is a bifurcation expressed in terms of stigmaphilia and stigmaphobia. For Leo Bersani, the distinction is centered in assimilationist versus visible homosexuality; for José Muñoz, in pragmatic homosexuality versus utopian queerness; while for Lisa Duggan, the division is one for our own ideals’ [Weber 1904/1949, 58].” (Kim 2007)
between two sectors of LGBT/queer activism, which at times is expressed in terms of language, and other times, in terms of identity-based vs. economic political activism. But beyond the specificities of each view, these authors agree on two things. First, there is a binary response to sexual deviance, divided in assimilation/normalization and radicalism/subversiveness, and second, this division evidences a state of tension that should be changed privileging the latter category over the first one. The question that remains is how are these binaries explained by each theorist. What are the specific motivations they identify as producing factors of these divisions and what are some of their implications?

Leo Bersani finds that contemporary reactions to sexual deviance are bifurcated in the forms of normalized and non-normalized practices. What Bersani calls “de-gaying gaynness” (Bersani 1995, 5) can be compared to Michael Warner’s idea of stigmaphobia, or a broader idea of assimilation into hegemonic norms and practices. Both of these authors conceive the possibility that a deviant sexuality can, paradoxically enough, take a non-deviant, status-quo-conforming form. Bersani explains that “[d]e-gaying gayness can only fortify homophobic oppression; it accomplishes in its own way the principal aim of homophobia: the elimination of gays.” (Bersani 1995, 5) Normalization is dangerous, in this case, for disguising homophobia under the seemingly voluntary and individual choice of sexually deviant individuals who strengthen heteronormativity through an exercise of their agency. Bersani also defends that sexual practices are secondary to appearances and social constructions around homosexuality as a social category. In other words, anal penetration is not what defines an individual as a homosexual man, but rather, the degree of compatibility of that individual with the consolidated set of appearances
and ideas that society has about homosexuals. Therefore, normalized homosexuality erases the potential for radicalism that individuals under the category of LGBT/queer can bring to their social contexts through a somehow consensual process of invisibilization of queerness, regardless of their association with sexually deviant acts.

It is important to note that, for Bersani, the danger of normalization is not related to a potential for mis/representation of sexual deviance to result in the alienation of the sexually deviant individual. Bersani is not looking for a different, ‘effective’ integration of homosexuals. The real danger lies in the material consequences of being discursively included in a homogeneous society, while particular needs and demands are denied and invisibilized. In *Is the Rectum A Grave?*, Bersani discusses media representations of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s to illustrate how an issue of direct relevance to sexually deviant individuals can be transformed, through the use of dominant discourse, to guarantee the protection of the status quo, while at the same time erasing the experiences of the initial object of discussion. Bersani incites, “[t]ry keeping up with AIDS research through TV and the press, and you’ll remain fairly ignorant. You will, however, learn a great deal (...) about heterosexual anxieties.” (Bersani 1987, 202) This is to show how the object of representation in hegemonic discourse is irrelevant when it exceeds the dominant sectors of society. Therefore, normalization is dangerous because it achieves this purpose with the ‘consent’ and through the active participation of the de-gayed gay.

For Bersani, the binary response developed by the individual towards sexual deviance happens through performativity. Although performativity has been generally considered a liberating framework for opening possibilities for the de/construction of
sex and gender, Bersani is sceptical of precisely this potential for flexibility within performativity, because it does not propose the deconstruction of dominant sexual categories exclusively, and therefore hides potential for facilitating normalization. In this sense, Judith Butler argues in the now milestone work *Gender Trouble* for the potential of parody as a practice that necessarily undermines heteronormativity by allowing individuals to disrupt traditionally coherent alignments of sex-gender-sexual orientation categories.\(^5\) However, Taking this into consideration, and with the purpose of questioning the universality of radicalism/subversiveness in performativity, Bersani asks

“how subversive is parody? Butler’s argument against unequivocal gendered identities is most powerful when it is seen as a strategic response to the social emphasis on such identities and the terror of trespassing body boundaries. As an assault on any coherent identity, it forecloses the possibility of a gay or lesbian specificity (erasing along the way the very discipline -gay and lesbian studies- within which the assault is made): resistance to the heterosexual matrix is reduced to more or less naughty imitations of that matrix.” (Bersani 1995, 48)

This shows that Bersani views the presentation and/or representation of LGBT/queer individuals as having potential for assimilation or “moderate” non-assimilation, and not unequivocal radicalism, even within frameworks that aim to enable radicalism/subversiveness, such as performativity. In fact, Bersani’s main concern in *Homos* is that devaluing the coherence between deviant sexualities and deviant gender presentations may erase the very existence of deviance as a social construct. For this author, representation, presentation and ontology are intrinsically related.

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\(^5\) “Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and
An example that closely resembles this logic of assimilation is found in one of the testimonies from my fieldwork. During our interview, Rogélio, a 47 year-old upper-middle class Brazilian psychologist was highly concerned about making clear that he lived a normal homosexual life.

“I have always known that I was homosexual. Always, since I was a small child. But that doesn’t mean I need to show it around by acting in effeminate ways, or that I need to announce it anywhere I go. It also doesn’t mean that I will kiss a woman to hide who I am. I would never kiss a woman! I can have a good job, a house, and live the lifestyle I decide, and if that means sleeping with men, then that’s what it is.”

Indeed, Rogélio’s personal presentation did not include elements that would sign sexual deviance in the streets of São Paulo. Nevertheless, it was his choice that we met in the Frei Caneca shopping mall, the most symbolic commercial spot for male homosexuals in the city, targeted specifically to attract this demographic group. In this sense, Rogélio seems to adopt a politics of selective or flexible visibility. Following Bersani’s argument, Rogélio’s response to his sexual deviance would therefore fall into the category of assimilation/normalization.

On the question of normalization versus subversiveness, Bersani’s views can be taken as highly compatible with Michael Warner’s critiques of assimilationist actions and performances. One particular point of commonality can be found in what constitutes one of Warner’s main subjects of interest, marriage and family, which is also mentioned by Bersani:

“Suspicious of our own enforced identity, we are reduced to playing subversively with normative identities -attempting, for example, to ‘resignify’ the family for communities that defy the usual assumptions

mimetic -a failed copy, as it were.” (Butler 1999, 186)

6 “Eu sempre soube que eu era homosexual. Sempre, desde criança. Mas isso não quer dizer que eu precise ir lá, andar tudo afeminado, ou que precise anunciar-lo onde seja que eu for. Mas também não quer dizer que eu vá beijar uma mulher. Eu nunca vou beijar mulher! Nossa! Não, eu posso ter um bom trabalho, uma boa casa, e ter o estilo de vida que eu decidir, e se isso quer dizer que eu vou dormir com homens, então tá.” (Rogélio, interview)
A question that can be posed for both Bersani and Warner is, considering that they advocate for queerness as a channel for liberatory social forms, why do they find subversiveness to be important? In other words, could it be that requiring a specific type of response from LGBT/queer individuals, in this case anti-assimilationist, is to require a specific politics of activism? And further, could this form also be a way of reinforcing the hegemonic categorization of sexuality? Although neither of the authors addresses these questions, it might be useful to relate them to the reasons given by Michael Warner on why people choose to assimilate to social norms. For Warner, the will to assimilate arises from a desire to belong and from the need for social approval. “When people want to be normal they might be partly under the influence of an association of the term that has become somewhat archaic in English, in which normal means certified, approved, as meeting a set of normative standards.” (Warner 2000, 56) This desire can be based on presence as created by environmental and social acknowledgement, and the definition of an identity can only happen in opposition to an other.

A case that might support Warner’s argument is once again Rogelio’s testimony. At a different point in the interview, Rogélio stated:

“I don’t know why they [some homosexual male individuals] need to be walking around holding hands or kissing in public. What is the need, tell me! I don’t care about they do in their private lives, I can do whatever I want in my house and so can they, but I won’t go out and make out in the square with my boyfriend [namoradinho].”

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7 “Eu não compreendo como é que, porquê é que eles precisam caminhar todos pegados das mãos, se beijar na rua... Qual é a necessidade! Me fala, qual é! Eu não me importo com o que eles fazem na casa,
What this statement evidences is that Bersani’s and Warner’s anxieties over the assimilation of sexual deviance has yet another dimension of repercussions. By dissociating himself from public deviance, by *de-gaying* himself, Rogélio also finds grounds to identify and stigmatize deviance in others. Warner explains this by stating “On top of his ordinary sexual shame, and on top of having shame for being gay, the dignified homosexual also feels ashamed of every queer who flaunts his sex and his fagotry, making the dignified homosexual’s stigma all the more justifiable in the eyes of straights.” (Warner 2000, 32) This supports the idea that by not claiming a sense of belonging to a subversive group, individuals can negotiate their position into a ruling group, not only in aspects related to appearance, but also by adopting corresponding values and practices. It is also important to pay attention to Rogélio’s claim that *anyone can do whatever they want in their homes*, given that it assumes different types of privilege in other sexually deviant individuals, which further positions his opinion in the frame of the ruling social groups. All of this suggests a possible explanation of why queer theorists like Bersani and Warner may have an interest in subversiveness: because lack of subversiveness does not only imply self-assimilation but also repression of deviance in others. Thus, what seemed at first a personal or localized moral concern may reflect a concrete interest in guaranteeing a personal sphere for LGBT/queer individuals.

However, this underlying material value of subversiveness is not central to Warner’s argument, and a more present element in his logic is the search for a sense of belonging that he identifies in LGBT/queer assimilationist individuals.“Nearly
everyone, it seems, wants to be normal. And who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us? Put in those terms, there doesn’t seem to be a choice at all.” (Warner 2000, 52) Although this might be a component of this type of reaction to LGBT/queerness, I argue that Warner underestimates the concrete material benefits in which belonging may be translated into, as well as the extent to which the social actors involved in these processes may be aware of the tension between normalization and queerness. José, a long-time member of the Argentinean Homosexual Community (CHA), the oldest still-functioning LGBT/queer organization in Argentina, explained in an interview CHA’s position regarding same-sex marriage and the changes that it went through as the debate on its legal approval progressed. CHA’s initial position was, as José explained, highly oppositional to same-sex marriage as the main focus of struggle for the LGBT/queer movement, and refused to support efforts from other organizations that went on that direction based on arguments compatible to those of Warner and Bersani. However, after a series of internal discussions and debates with other organizations, the members of CHA decided to support other organizations in the project for same-sex marriage.

The reasons given by José were two. First, although CHA had a different agenda, the circumstantial momentum of same-sex marriage was larger than for other policies and it was seen as a strategy for visibility and as a precedent for other policy and legal reform. Second, the specific political context and history of Argentina were mentioned by José as a factor to analyze the limits of queer critiques of reform-based activism.

praça me amassar com o meu namoradinho.” (Rogério, interview)
“The economic and political collapse of 2001 meant that a lot of people, including homosexuals, lesbians, etc, needed to rearrange their living conditions, needed to move in with their parents, their couples, etc. We lost our jobs, our savings, everything. It is in this context that we encounter queer theory, (...) which tells us we should fight for our space and our individuality, and to choose different, free and multiple interactions with people. But how can we fight for this when we don’t know how to make it until the end of the month? (...) Queer theory is great, but it doesn’t help you when you need to sell your body for a hotdog.”

This testimony does not evidence the need for social approval Warner identifies. For José, same-sex marriage can be a channel to allow less privileged individuals to access legal and material benefits, like housing or income, in the short run. For Warner, support of legal reform and exercise of practices like same-sex marriage mainly represent a long-term investment into assimilation and self-oppression, based on a state of “false consciousness.” This Marxian concept of “false consciousness”, nevertheless, is challenged by José’s first enthusiastic engagement with queer theory, and by the later choice to still adopt a reformist position on the issue of same-sex marriage.

José Esteban Muñoz’s view of queerness and normalization brings in a different angle through which the case of CHA can be understood. Although Muñoz is critical of rights-focused activism, his reasons are different than those of Bersani and Warner in that Muñoz does not conceive queerness as a choice in the style of individual or group performativity, and therefore does not see potential for radicalism in them. Instead, he ascribes to the “humbleness of queerness” (Muñoz 2010, 27), a
concept that helps to explain the relation of unattainability and simultaneous desire between reality and the ideal. Muñoz sees queerness as a permanently unattained goal towards which individuals can aspire but cannot embody.

“...the utopian is an impulse that we see in everyday life. This impulse is to be glimpsed as something that is extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism. This quotidian example of the utopian can be glimpsed in utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment.” (Muñoz 2010, 22)

The importance given to the utopian opens a conception of temporality that is not analyzed by Bersani and Warner. This idea of temporality that opens a future seems, at first glance, compatible with reformist projects for having in common the allowance of an *ideal*. However, Muñoz does not only oppose Bersani and Warner in their conceptualization of queerness, but he also goes against reform-based movements, for falling in what he calls “gay pragmatism.” For Muñoz, “[g]ay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to a forward-dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer conscious in the service of imagining a futurity.” (Muñoz 2010, 21) Therefore, coming back to the initial idea of a binary response to sexual deviance, Muñoz’s duality can be identified as pragmatism versus utopianism, which, as he argues, is another form of assimilation/normalization versus radicalism/subversiveness of queerness.

An interesting point of convergence is that Muñoz and Warner seem to build their critiques of reform initiatives on similar theoretical bases. What Warner calls “false consciousness” is highly compatible to Muñoz’s idea of the “the not-quite-

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(*José, interview*)
conscious”, two Marx-influenced concepts meant to explain how LGBT/queer movements can engage in self-oppression and/or lack of radicalism. Thus, let us take a short detour from queer theory into Marxist class theory and clarify what it is meant with false consciousness. In an analysis of Marxist terminology, sociologist Daniel Little explains,

“‘False consciousness’ (...) refers to the systematic misrepresentation of dominant social relations in the consciousness of subordinate classes. (...) Members of a subordinate class (workers, peasants, serfs) suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically conceal or obscure the realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination those relations embody. Related concepts include mystification, ideology, and fetishism.” (Little 2007, Web)

Taking this into consideration, there are two angles from which to interpret false consciousness. On one hand, it can be seen as a call for the massive propagation of critical thought through the identification of different mechanisms of oppression. Muñoz clearly ascribes to this purpose by opposing what the present is with what the future can be:

“This ‘we’ does not speak to a merely identitarian logic but instead to a logic of futurity. The ‘we’ speaks to a ‘we’ that is ‘not yet conscious’, the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment. The ‘we’ is not content to describe who the collective is but more nearly describes what the collective and the larger social order could be, what it should be.” (Muñoz 2010, 20)

But on the other hand, false consciousness can be considered a paternalistic pathologization of experience, if we take into account that in order to make such call for critical thought, the philosopher needs to claim a position of higher consciousness

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9 “The not-quite-conscious is the realm of potentiality that must be called on, and insisted on, if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of here and now, the hollow nature of the present. Thus, I wish to argue that queerness is not quite here; it is, in the language of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, a potentiality. Alain Badiou refers to that which follows the event as the thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined, and in my estimation queerness should be understood to have a similar valence.” (Muñoz 2010, 21)
than the rest of the population. There needs to be a subject in the text who assumes the role of doctor in order to diagnose this ‘condition’ from which our consciousness ‘suffers.’ What makes Warner’s and Muñoz’s inclusions of false consciousness particularly interesting is that both authors aim to fight heteronormativity as a system that oppresses, stigmatizes and shames LGBT/queer experiences. Nevertheless, their strong aim to defend radicalism/subversiveness over assimilation/normalization (or pragmatism) takes them to privilege their personal process of construction of knowledge over that of those who could be considered pragmatic or assimilationists, and therefore to reproduce oppression over LGBT/queer subjects whose different experiences have led them to construct knowledge about liberation through different means.

Further, the authority of false consciousness builds upon itself. As Warner notes, “What kind of reasoning would tell us that something could not be false consciousness because it was widely shared? False consciousness is an undeniable force throughout history. (...) Why should gay people be immune to similar mistakes about their interests?” (Warner 2000, 105) First, it is curious that Warner uses the term ‘mistakes’, considering that this term relates to failure, deviance and abnormality, all concepts that could be quickly associated with queerness and its historical pathologization, while it opposes correctness and normality. Second, it is necessary to note that the accusation of false consciousness seems impossible to be refuted. Is there any way for an LGBT/queer person who disagrees with Warner or Muñoz to elaborate a critique without their experience being labeled as ‘less conscious’ or ‘mistaken’? Like in an inversed witch hunt, in which it is not the masses who run against the queer, but the queer against the masses, the denunciation
of false consciousness builds an inescapable hierarchy within what is considered queer.

Having identified false consciousness as one of the main tools through which the binary between radicalism/subversiveness and normalization/assimilation is sustained, let us turn back to the specific question of normalization versus queerness. In order to fully consider this binary between normalization and queerness, it becomes necessary to question once more the categories within LGBT/queer as identity signifiers. The logic behind the construction of categories is clear. As posed by Epstein, “[h]ow do you protest a socially imposed categorization, except by organizing around the category?” (Bersani 1995, 33) Epstein’s point is practical, but the particularity of the signifier ‘LGBT/queer’ is that it implies a remarkably uncomfortable agglomeration of individuals mainly because it is not a category. Not only do LGBT/queer initiatives face obstacles related to the heterogeneity of their members, but also (for the annoyance of Michael Warner) much LGBT/queer discourse is careful not to force cohesion through homogeneity, and thus uses slogans such as “celebrating diversity”.10 In this sense, Joshua Gamson argues that

“The queer tribe attempts to be a multicultural, multigendered, multisexual, hodge-podge of outsiders; as Steven Seidman points out, it ironically ends up ‘denying differences by either submerging them in an undifferentiated oppositional mass or by blocking the development of individual and social differences through the disciplining compulsory imperative to remain undifferentiated.’”(Gamson 1995, 403)

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10 "For some gay men and lesbians, the alternative to the cramping effects of shame in our culture is to ‘celebrate diversity.’ I must confess that whenever I see this slogan I think: why? It sounds like a slogan for a shopping mall. (...) Culture requires common references and norms, as the slogan itself reveals by telling us all to celebrate the same thing.” (Warner 2000, 7)
Gamson’s argument can be well supplemented by the testimony of one of my interviewees. Mario, a homosexual male from the Brazilian northeast who has lived in São Paulo for 7 years shared his reflections on the transnational conceptualization of LGBT cultures:

“If you think about it, gay people are the same everywhere you go. I traveled through Europe, I went to Buenos Aires, New York... the bars we go to, the music we like, the clothes we wear -you know, tight shirts, jeans... I wouldn’t say there is much difference. Gay culture is what it is.”

Besides the questions related to transnational (and clearly Western-led) constructions of identity, a disjuncture between the discursive construction of queerness and its concrete forms is revealed here. While discursively queerness is presented as an ‘ethnicity’, as a group that shares cultural trades transnationally, in practice, this umbrella use of the term can serve to overlook internal differences.

It is precisely the invisibility of difference in this forced sense of cohesion what is identified by many, such as Lisa Duggan, as the main problem in this political strategy. Duggan explains that “[t]he usual response to these difficulties [related to difference] is to resort to what is called ‘strategic essentialism’: the use of essentialist categories and identity politics in public debates because that is all anyone can understand, and we need to be effective in the political arena.” (Duggan 1994, 6) As it might become clear through Duggan’s tone, this author strongly opposes strategic essentialism. What is interesting is that, although Warner and Bersani also oppose this kind of political coalition, they differ with Duggan’s reasons diametrically. As

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11 “Se você olha, os gays são iguais onde seja que você for. Eu já viajei, fui para a Europa, para Buenos Aires, Nova Iorque... e você vê nos bares que a gente vai, a música que a gente gosta, as roupas... sabe aquela roupinha, camisa apertada, jeans... não tem muita diferença. A cultura gay é isso.” (Mario, interview)
aforementioned, Bersani and Warner are anxious about the disintegration of queer specificities, but Duggan sustains that the danger of a coalitionist strategy is that “[i]t consigns us, in the public imagination, to the realms of the particular and the parochial, the defense team for a fixed minority, that most ‘special’ of special interest groups...” (Duggan 1994, 6) For this author, the other side of the coin of specificity is that it relies on sexual deviance to defend political initiatives, and therefore generates a dependency on difference.

Thus, it is necessary to note that queer perspectives on normalization and queerness are simultaneously elaborated, strongly delineated, and heterogeneous. What becomes clear is that these opinions are built upon anxieties. For some, the danger hides in the disintegration of deviance, while for others it is closer to the dependence on deviance. In all cases, however, it is possible to see that the anxieties of the author translates into what is considered normalizing/assimilationist, while the opposite is subversive/radical.

Visibility: Now You See Me, Now You Don’t

An important branch of the question of normalization versus queerness involves visibility. LGBT/queer political initiatives working within a reform-based framework often advocate for a high visibility of minority groups as a way of demonstrating self-sovereignty and building articulate demands in a framework of representative democracy. Joshua Gamson explains that

“[t]he suggestion of most social movement theory, sometimes assumed and sometimes explicit, is that secure boundaries and a clear group identity are achievable, and even more importantly, that ‘if a group fails in [these], it cannot accomplish any collective action’ (Klandermans 1992, 81); without a solid group identity, no claims can be made.” (Gamson 1995, 412)
There is an initial logical assumption that advocates for visibility, at least in the context of reform-based social movements. This assumption follows the idea that existence precedes action. LGBT/queer movements are expected to exercise visibility before making demands of any type because visibility forces a level of social acknowledgment that may not imply legitimacy, but certainly requires the concession of their existence. This may sound assimilationist if it is read as LGBT/queer movements looking for “approval” or “affirmation” from the rest of society, but not all acknowledgment is linked to concessions. Even radical claims like “we are here, we are queer, get used to it” start from the assertion of existence even if they do not pursue reformist demands. Visibility is presented as a preceding step for LGBT/queer political life in the different paths this can take. If we asked people in the streets (of, for example, New York, Buenos Aires or São Paulo) what the first image that comes to mind when thinking about LGBT/queer movements is, chances are that, regardless of their political views on the issue, they will mention either an LGBT Pride Parade or same-sex marriage. Indeed, both of these initiatives are common in LGBT/queer activism across the world, which opens the possibility that visibility does not incite much debate within queer theory and LGBT/queer activism. At first glance there seems to be a clear direction advocating for visibility of sexual deviance.

However, before we jump too fast to the idea that radicals and reformists agree on this (or any?) issue, Leo Bersani argues in *Homos* that “[n]ever before in the history of minority groups struggling for recognition and equal treatment has there been an analogous attempt, on the part of any such group, to make itself unidentifiable even as it demands to be recognized.” (Bersani 1995, 32) Resistance to
visibility seems to be a response that does not fit into the logic of social movements, and indeed, Bersani’s line of thought follows a different path. As aforementioned, one of the central points in *Homos* is the idea that homosexuality is not linked to practices as it is to appearances. Thus, anti-visibility can be understood as a negation of existence, the ultimate assimilation, or de-gaying of gayness.

But is an individual who negates visibility going against the idea of an LGBT/queer existence, or is ze specifically resisting the channels of expression that have been established to demonstrate this orientation? Is the resistance to follow consolidated channels of visibility necessarily rooted in the desire to assimilate into the normal, or could it be a form of resistance towards an established taxonomical social system that benefits from highlighting difference? If we follow this proposal, then the assumption that social movements should strive for visibility, as described by Gamson, may suggest that social movements that highlight visibility benefit the dominant political structure and its desired channels of expressions *first*, and the groups it represents and the forms of their demands *second*. In other words, thinking that visibility is a precedent for any political action may be a consequence of the hegemonic political system that sets a template of channels of recognition, and not always necessarily a function of the demands and desires of those who conform the group.

Bersani also adds:

“[The slogan ‘w]e are everywhere’ appears to be saying: ‘Look around and you’ll find us in all the places to which you thought you had denied us access.’ But the slogan could also have a quite different gloss: ‘Look around and you’ll never find us because we are everywhere. And even if we do the most outrageous things to make ourselves recognizable -even if I kiss my male lover’s mouth in the
middle of your straight suburban mall- we will remain untouchable.’
In invisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere.” (Bersani 1995, 32)

This does not necessarily solve the questions on the table, but it suggests that
the very choice of being visible or not visible might be an instrument for political
action. In other words, although Bersani seems concerned about a structural
normalization that evacuates signifiers of difference (like two male lovers kissing), I
suggest that the possibility of shifting the degree of visibility according to space/time
specificities can be in itself an exercise of agency. Thus, while Bersani’s concern
about structural invisibility is based on his advocacy for subversiveness, the question
of who is the visible queer serving becomes once again relevant. Maybe the lack of
visual signifiers of the queer subject (for the non-queer eye) can be intended to
disarticulate the expectations of a system of categorizations that responds to
heteronormative codes. In order to explain this idea better, we can turn to Judith
Butler’s discussion on the construction of a lesbian sexuality:

“The pro-sexuality movement within feminist theory and practice has
effectively argued that sexuality is always constructed within the terms
of discourse and power, where power is partially understood in terms
of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions. The emergence of a
sexuality constructed (not determined) in these terms within lesbian,
bisexual, and heterosexual contexts is, therefore, not a sign of a
masculine identification in some reductive sense.” (Butler 1999, 40)

Although Butler’s object of discussion is different than ours, this passage
serves as support for the argument that a non-visible queer does not lose its sexual
deviance, contrary to Bersani’s opinion. We could argue, in this sense, that as much
as a lesbian sexuality built around phallic cultural conventions does not equal an
identification with masculinity, the construction of visual cues around a ‘normal
citizen’ do not erase the queerness of the queer subject. Thus, following a Butlerian
logic, what Bersani calls “making oneself unidentifiable” might not be based on a negative restriction of visibility, but rather, a positive construction of gender around discursive symbols of power.

The idea of “choice” in the construction of social perceptions is also present in Michael Warner’s work, where visibility is related to the concepts of stigma and shame in order to explain two oppositional reactions to the category of LGBT/queer.

“Stigma, like its etymological kin stigmata, refers to a mark on the body, like a brand or a tattoo or a severed ear, identifying a person permanently with his or her disgrace. (…) Ordinary shame, by contrast, passes. (…) The shame of a true pervert -stigma- is less delible; it is a social identity that befalls one like fate.” (Warner 2000, 27)

According to Warner, the gay movement has historically needed to combat both stigma. Thus, if there is more than one front for LGBT/queer individuals to “fight”, it only makes sense for there to be more than one strategy regarding visibility. And even leaving aside the often fast association between queer individuals and political initiatives, it is still only strategic for an individual to adopt the suggestion of flexible visibility depending on particular situations encountered in everyday life. However, this flexible visibility has limitations when considering that within the LGBT/queer sphere, some bodies are more easily stigmatized, while others have a larger spectrum to choose how to be perceived in society.

If social movement theory is described by Gamson as clearly advocating for visibility, Lisa Duggan’s opinion can be located on the opposite end of the spectrum. One of Duggan’s central arguments in “Queering the State” is that liberatory political initiatives cannot depend on sexual deviance as a constantly reinforced factor of difference that justifies the interests of the groups. Likewise, The Twilight of Equality aims to point out the ways in which difference is used by the neoliberal state as a tool
to dismember the once strong progressive-left social movements.¹² Thus, when tackling the question of visibility, Duggan is direct: “[w]e need strategies that do not require us to specify who is and is not a ‘member’ of our group.” (Duggan 1994, 9) The anxiety of indefiniteness in Bersani and Warner is flipped upside down in Duggan’s thought once again, as she warns us of the dangers of depending on a specific visibility to construct radical/subversive initiatives.

One of Duggan’s main concerns is the universality or scope of social change. Therefore, the question she is trying to solve is not ‘how do we effectively respond to the demands of specific groups’, but rather ‘how do we destabilize neoliberalism and heteronormativity as systems that oppress everyone?’ With this in mind, Duggan proposes to focus on the structure of the state and not of the LGBT/queer movement, and advocates for the disengagement (or disestablishment, in her words) of the state from heteronormativity. Because the issue is framed as being of interest to the whole society, “...an argument for disestablishment might work better than calls for an end to discrimination against an identifiable population.” (Duggan 1994, 10) According to this logic, by avoiding visibility as a practice, the beneficiary of social change becomes dissolved as a subject and replaced by the figure of the unidentifiable individual. If the underlying interest is to find methods of social change, Duggan’s proposal for the new disestablishment of the State with heteronormativity is strong for including immediate practical suggestions. Thus, while many queer theorists focus on subjectivization from an individual perspective, Duggan’s universalist approach

¹² “Overall, The Twilight of Equality argues that neoliberalism has a shifting cultural politics that the progressive-left must understand in order to constitute an effective opposition. But rather than focus on neoliberalism’s cultural project, sectors of the progressive-left reproduce, within their own debates, Liberalism’s rhetorical separation of economic/class politics from identity/cultural politics. This separation seriously disables political analysis and activism.” (Duggan 2003, xxi)
challenges the idea that initiatives for queer freedom can only be theorized starting from the individual.

Visibility is another dimension in which the position of these theorists is built as a reaction against where they identify risk of assimilation/normalization. What becomes clear through this analysis is that Duggan’s fear is not articulated around the possibility that assimilation happens through the invisibilization of queerness, but rather, that the normalization of LGBT/queer initiatives will arise from the idea of an ‘irresolvable’ difference between these groups with the rest of civil society.

Language & Representation: The Communicability of An Impossible Cohesion

The usefulness of representation arises from the instrumental communicability of consolidated social categories. Communicating social forms and identities can be of great practical utility in political life because consolidated social categories carry acknowledgement and legitimacy in different types of political dialogue. At the same time, categories of representation have unavoidable constraints for social forms because all definitions are built in opposition to an Other. As a consequence, representative flexibility and inclusion are always relative and limited. Taking into consideration the context of LGBT/queer movements, this idea of representation as a double-edge sword becomes central to explain the constant attempt to expand the categories of inclusion, at the same time that conflicts and anxieties around difference originate from within these groups.

This is partly explained by Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble*, which states that

“[t]he domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’ set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the
result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject. In other words, the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.”(Butler 1999, 5)

This passage highlights the constitution of the subject as the connection between representation and language. The subject needs to be interpolatable in order to access representative inclusion, but that involves an adaptation or construction of the individual according to linguistic categories that preceed hir existence. Given that Butler’s object of study in this book is feminism as a representational structure, this analysis can be understood as a deconstruction of an inclusive discourse with the purpose of showing the limitations of its categories of inclusion. Butler’s “suggestion is that the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions.” (Butler 1999, 7) Butler points to a central factor for the argument about representation: unity. How much legitimacy is given to representation is linked to how cohesive an entity can be considered. But the strength of this argument is not only focused on noting the process of delineation of the subject, but also on stressing that this delineation needs an Other that remains excluded to exist. Thus, while in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Butler claims that “...the self is from the start radically implicated in the ‘Other’” (Butler 1991, 26), in Bodies That Matter, the author elaborates: “...the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian term, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the ‘I’; it is the transitive invocation of the ‘I’.” (Butler 1993, 225) Butler therefore grounds her argument against the ultimate value of categories (while acknowledging a strategical use) by identifying that representation is necessarily exclusionary, which
means that its limits are also the limits of its potential for liberation from categories as governing signifiers.

Moreover, taking this necessary contrast as a preceding element of representation a step further, Butler asks, “What sense does it make to extend representation to subjects who are constructed through the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject?” (Butler 1999, 8) With this question, Butler consolidates her vision of representation as inherently segregationist. But, while the notion of the abject as a non-representable subject (similar to Spivak’s subaltern, as it will be discussed later) is fundamental for Butler to defend queerness over sexual categories, I argue that this very need of an Other also exposes the limitations of queer theory itself as a tool for the universal liberation of sexualized experience.

While for Butler representation is necessarily dependent on a non-interpolatable Other that rearticulates the image of the closet in different social spheres, for Michael Warner, representation hides a double intentionality that may seem paradoxical, but that consolidates a working mechanism through which LGBT political movements have come to represent self-damaging interests. To understand the role of representation in Warner’s theory, it is necessary to take his adaptation of Goffman’s idea about the reaction of groups to stigma. In this sense, stigmaphily and stigmaphobia mark a basic division in the LGBT movement. While stigmaphiles form a community around the category of discrimination and can often be accused of victimization, stigmaphobes are seen as assimilationist. (Warner 2000, 43) This is

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13. For being ‘out’ always depends to some extent on being ‘in’; it gains its meaning only within that polarity. Hence, being ‘out’ must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as ‘out.’ In this sense, outness can only produce a new opacity; and the closet produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come.” (Butler 1991, 16)
already a challenge to the representation of a unified LGBT movement, and it becomes a greater challenge when considering, as Warner explains, that stigmaphobes tend to accumulate wealth and power more easily because of their compatibility with the hegemonic social order, which leads to their interests being better represented in the LGBT movement. (Warner 2000, 44) Thus, it seems that although Michael Warner bases his argument in material and political differences within the LGBT group, the underlying question in terms of representation is similar to Butler’s. In this case, this question can be phrased by asking what sense does it make to consider the political representation of LGBT, if this denomination is used in benefit of only some—the most privileged—individuals who fit in the category?

Further, the very categorization of stigmaphiles and stigmaphobes implies a different understanding of LGBT/queer life and the potential for each channel of political struggle. In this sense, Warner seems to imply that stigmaphobes are not aware of their position of power and that stigmaphiles will only engage on stigmaphobe projects as a result of “false consciousness.” (Warner 2000, 43) I would like to argue, instead, that although this is a possible reaction to being categorized as LGBT/queer, stigmaphobes can also try to escape assimilationist positions, and that stigmaphiles can use hegemonic channels of political struggle strategically and intentionally, complicating the boundaries of what constitutes a radical/subversive versus an assimilationist/normalized queer.

Seeing that binary representational and linguistic divisions present problems for the identification of LGBT/queerness, the choice and use of language in LGBT/queer movements becomes central when it is associated not only to their representation in society at large, but also to their internal conformation and cohesion. In this sense,
language can be seen as a tool for the expression and negotiation of LGBT/queer movements in relation to their environment and other social actors, but at the same time, the choice of language within LGBT/queer movements responds to how the subject of political action is conceived within that movement. There has been a fast transition in recent history from language related to “homosexuality”, to an inclusion of “lesbians”, which later led to the notion of “LGBT” and the constant additions to the acronym. If we see this historical evolution as following a linear progressive temporality in our understanding of sexual deviance, it is possible to see why “queerness”, as the newest stage or incorporation, is seen as ‘more evolved.’ This recent evolution, which is not free from conflict and contestation, reveals a constant expansion of the subject of political action as conceived by LGBT/queer movements, and shows the centrality of language as an axis of analysis that does not only represent, but also creates political actors through the validation of their existence.

Furthermore, language can be understood as a combination of channels of communication and symbols, which does not only respond to the needs for communication within the LGBT/queer sphere, but also to the specific characteristics of the context where this communication is produced. However, in the case of LGBT/queer movements, and looking particularly at non-Western cases, the geographical specificities of the conformation of language are blurred by the transnational influences that affect its conformation. In this sense, the testimony of Lucia, a self-identified Trotskyist lesbian activist who has lived in Buenos Aires for 12 years, illustrates this linguistic -and conceptual- conflict: “Queer, queer... What the fuck is queer? I don’t understand it, do you understand it?” -I could have admitted that I was familiar with the term, but that could have changed the power dynamics of
the situation and my interviewee could have changed or ended her answer. Instead, I kept silent and made a puzzled face gesture. “*Queer* is a concept that fell here from the North, and now we’re supposed to adopt it. No one knows what *queer* is! I’m a lesbian, and I’m not going to fool around saying I’m *queer* to seem cooler.”¹⁴ Lucia’s testimony shows that a term that has recently been coded as liberatory in a Western context can be oppressive for not responding to the geographical specificities of the spaces where it is used. Even if Lucia’s political views may be compatible with some strains of queer theory, her criticism of the word *queer* arises from its unquestioned relocation, meaning that *queer* is being primarily evaluated by the forms of its use and impact in her Global-South social sphere. At the same time, the existence of spaces in Buenos Aires that self-identify as queer (like Queer Tango, Casa Brandon and the Queer Studies department of the University of Buenos Aires), show that not even critiques over of the use of language are uniform. This ultimately challenges the use of US-based notions of queerness and queer theory as a framework of analysis of sexual deviance, because there is no less validity in the liberatory potential of queerness as there is in the ways in which it is identified as alienating and neocolonial.

So, once again, we find a binary division in the treatment of LGBT/queerness, having on one end a position of acceptance and adoption of language categories, while on the other end there is resistance and hesitation regarding their applicability. In order to further explore this double reaction, it becomes relevant to look at ways in which language relates to the internal conformation or division of LGBT/queer

¹⁴ “*Queer, queer*, ¿Qué mierda es *queer*? ¿Vos sabés qué quiere decir? Yo no entiendo qué quiere decir. *Queer* es un concepto que vino a caer acá desde el Norte y ahora se supone que lo tenemos que adoptar. ¡Nadie sabe qué es *queer*! Yo soy lesbiana, y no voy a andar por ahí diciendo que soy queer para hacerme la cheta.” (Lucía, interview)
political initiatives. In this regard, Lisa Duggan identifies language as being one kind of division within the progressive-left social movements among which she locates LGBT/queer political initiatives. For Duggan, “…as long as the progressive-left represents and reproduces itself as divided into economic vs. cultural, universal vs. identity-based, distribution vs. recognition-oriented, local or national vs. global branches, it will defeat itself.” (Duggan 2003, xx) For Duggan, the division of the Left into clusters is a tool of the neoliberal State to weaken resistance. In this sense, language works as a powerful tool because the specificities created by it are transformed into boundaries against solidarity within the progressive left.

However, as aforementioned, this does not mean that Duggan advocates for strategic essentialism, but rather that she focuses on the ways in which the State operates as the common governing entity, while systematically oppressing specific social sectors. Thus, keeping the material sphere of social change as a priority, this author claims that “we need to find a way to close the language gap in queer studies and queer politics. We need to do this especially with reference to the operations of the state.” (Duggan 1994, 7) The logic behind Duggan’s proposal is that language needs to serve LGBT/queer politics in a pragmatic or material way, even if its construction may reveal symbolic aspects of LGBT/queerness. Thus, Duggan’s proposal for the reduction of the language gap between queer studies and queer politics should not be read as a way of identifying common ground that consolidates the specificity of LGBT/queer groups. Instead, this language gap should be closed in order to facilitate communication among different sectors of the progressive left, and therefore move the focus of the struggle from sexual deviance instead of depending on this feature for the conformation of an interest group.
It is important to highlight that in Duggan’s texts, the inclusion of the State in the equation of social change is not based on ideological support of its existence, but rather, on a sense of practicality (or what for some like Muñoz could be pragmatism) that comes from acknowledging its centrality in social and political life. The language adopted by state politics has a direct impact on the life of LGBT/queer individuals, and because of this reason, Duggan’s proposal is that closing the gap between institutionalized and non-institutionalized language can help to close a gap between the demands of LGBT/queer individuals and the policies related to them.

However, in her demand to close this language gap, this author appeals only to one of the sides of the division: “...we need to think seriously about how to formulate the insights of queer theory and transport them into public discourse. We need (I emphasize NEED here) to be both transformative AND effective.” (Duggan 1994, 12) As a queer scholar, the ‘we’ used by Duggan appeals to other queer scholars, and not to the identified sphere of queer politics. Seeing the urgency for transformation and effectiveness transmitted by this author raises the question of whether this call to action may respond, once again, to the established ideas of these scholars about what constitutes a radical/subversive queerness. Taking into account her own (brilliantly articulated) observation that “[t]he production of a politics from a fixed identity position privileges those for whom that position is the primary or only marked identity” (Duggan 1994, 4), it is necessary to question the extent to which queerness, even if it is not considered a ‘fixed identity position’, works as a field where the most those with more privilege are prioritized in the articulation of the demands of the group. For example, considering that Lisa Duggan goes against dependency on sexual deviance for the articulation of political demands, what would happen if she
confronted a faction of queer politics that defended policies that highlight specificity? Following her own line of thought, Duggan’s opinion is more likely to prevail for occupying other positions of dominance within the social sphere. Thus, it is possible to identify, once again, a preference for radicalism/subversiveness, but only as defined by these authors.

Leo Bersani also tackles the question of how sociopolitical realities affect the use of language by questioning the content that conforms a linguistic category. Bersani explains that “[h]omosexual-heterosexual, masculinity-femininity, man-woman: the only proper way of thinking about these categories, many now think, is to investigate their cultural determinants.” (Bersani 1995, 35) But, although Bersani sees value in taking this constructionist approach as opposed to an essentialist one, this author sees the permanence of categories as being inherently incompatible with liberation.15 This means that for this author, to investigate these categories is to investigate how signifiers create different notions of gender or sexual deviance, but that differs from the objective of escaping from these notions. Bersani clearly sides with Butler in this aspect, although their proposed responses differ for defending specificity and deconstruction, respectively. Butler elaborates on the incompatibility between linguistic categories of identity and liberation by explaining that

“For being ‘out’ always depends to some extent on being ‘in’; it gains its meaning only within that polarity. Hence, being ‘out’ must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as ‘out.’ In this sense, outness can only produce a new opacity; and the closet produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come.” (Butler 1991, 16)

15 “…most of these liberalizing argument leave intact the fundamental homosexual-heterosexual dichotomy.” (Bersani 1995, 36)
Underlying this theoretical proposal is Bersani’s idea that there is no characteristic inherent to a category, and therefore, through the use of language to delineate identities, a connection between actions and ontology is assigned. Ultimately, this connection between what an individual is and does reveals the level of cohesion of a linguistic category, which has symbolic and material consequences in the political field. In this sense, Bersani explains that “it is not possible to be gay-affirmative, or politically effective as gays, if gayness has no specificity. Being gay has certain political consequences, which may lead us into making alliances with other oppressed groups.” (Bersani 1995, 61) Leaving aside questions regarding how the ‘us’ Bersani refers to is constituted, we find that specificity has the double effect of strengthening the cohesion of a given category, while at the same time it creates a boundary of exclusion. The practical use of linguistic categories is related to the social acknowledgement and validation of practices and identities. Nevertheless, the fact that there is a constant process of exclusion in the creation of any given category raises the question of who is being excluded not only from linguistic representation, but also from the consideration of political demands.

This question is also addressed by Judith Butler, who in *Gender Trouble* challenges the inclusive intention of feminism, defending the idea that the limits of representational language inherently translates into a shortcoming in political actions. Butler’s “...suggestion is that the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions.” (Butler 1999, 7) Here, the question of inclusion could be seen as less central if the subject of study was not interested in the defense of historically excluded political actors. LGBT/queer movements seem to follow a
trend of expansion in their linguistic representation as a consequence of this underlying inclusive intention. This is why noting the boundaries of such inclusion may help to delineate the limits of political exclusion within these movements.

Queerness, an (In)definition

So what is queerness? Is it resistance to assimilation? Is it an unreached (and maybe unreachable) utopia? An identity category? A potentially oppressive umbrella term? A concept that surpasses cultural boundaries, or does it depend of its context of production to make sense? All of these are possibilities that respond to different theoretical and practical views, and that arguably have supporting opinions, academic literature and examples. In the face of all these questions, Gamson’s words become useful:

“The ultimate challenge of queerness, however, is not just the questioning of the content of collective identities, but the questioning of the unity, stability, viability and political utility of sexual identities—
even as they are used and assumed.” (Gamson 1995, 404)

These words seem to resemble the passage in the beginning of this chapter by constituting once again queerness as a direction and not as a fixed identity. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between constructing queerness as the conflation of everything that is radically opposed to oppression” (Mary Nardini Gang, 2) and conceiving it as a process that questions power relations and the use of identities. Taking this into consideration, I argue that the division between radicalism/subversiveness and normalization/assimilation, which is a trope among the US-based queer theorists reviewed, is detrimental because it privileges the construction of knowledge of some sexually deviant individuals over others. Further, the ideas associated to radicalism/subversiveness and assimilation/normalization are
culturally specific, as it becomes clear not only by observing geographical references in the texts, but also assumed relations with institutions such as the state, the market and with academia. Thus, considering that my project presents an object of study that escapes the cultural specificities of these texts, it becomes necessary to question and reformulate these understandings of queerness from a Southern perspective.

I propose to acknowledge the remarkable contributions of US-based queer theory by suggesting a revision of its culturally specific assumptions and the elaboration of an idea of queerness that opens possibilities for the forms it can take, instead of focusing on what is not queer. Allowing for the flexibility of queerness can help to break away from the reproduction of the binary between what is desirable and undesirable, and therefore highlight the liberatory purpose of queerness. I suggest that it is the tension between extremes in different aspects of social life what lies in the heart of queerness, and not an axis of individual or collective practices that responds to some individuals’ ideals of subversiveness/radicalism. The pivot-like movement generated by queerness is intrinsically dynamic, and as such cannot be understood as universally liberatory nor oppressive. This said, there is value in seeing and pursuing queerness as an instrumental concept that allows for desired social change, in concrete and philosophical spheres.

Queerness can be dynamic only insofar as it becomes a form that challenges the structure through which elements are organized in a given universe. This means that queer is that which makes the rest of the elements in a previously logic organization not make sense. A woman who has sexual relations with other women in a heteronormative context forces the structure in which she exists to be modified in order to assign a space for her (provided that the social becomes aware of this deviant
act). Now, what is it about this action, aside from the transgression of heteronormativity, that makes it queer? Assuming that this action is a consequence of desire, we can identify four factors that the individual gets closer to through performing it. These are (1) liberation, (2) pleasure, (3) freedom, and (4) non-governability. I want to consider these axes when examining the testimonies and representations of non-Western subjects in my fieldwork in order to escape the constraints set by conflicting connotations of queerness. My intention with this framework is to avoid using US-based ideals of the forms that queerness can and cannot take, while at the same time vindicating the liberatory spirit in these works.
Chapter 2: A Genealogy of Dis/similarities

“To localize means to show the place. 
It means, too, to notice the place. 
Both things, to show and to notice the place, are the preparatory steps of a localization. It is already daring for us to conform, in what follows, with the preparatory steps. Localization ends, like any intellectual method, with the interrogation that addresses the very placing of the place.”

-Martin Heidegger, Art and Space.

Martin Heidegger may not give a recipe for an effective process of localization and description of a place in this quote, but he certainly raises questions regarding the subjective and the collective, experience and representation, which is why this excerpt encapsulates the difficulties and ambiguities of the construction and use of specific sites in this project. The two sites chosen for this research have structural commonalities that justify their simultaneous analysis and occasional comparison. A quick view shows that Buenos Aires and São Paulo are cities of a similar and uncommon size, with a political and economic centrality -within their respective countries and outside- comparable to few other metropoles in the continent. In terms of LGBT/queer issues, both cities have been medially constructed as hubs for tourism and anonymity, and their concentration of sexual minorities have also led them to be informal capitals of LGBT/queer activity and activism.

Because of these structural similarities it becomes easy to jump into an epistemological homogeneization when considering both sites as representative of LGBT/queer activity in the region. However, due to the differences that accompany these similarities, it becomes necessary to consider again Heidegger’s discrepancies between noticing and showing, or experiencing and representing a place. The purpose of this chapter is, in this sense, to follow Heidegger’s interrogation of the placing of the place by digging into the historical background and political processes that have
shaped the construction of LGBT/queer movements directly and indirectly in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. I will undertake a genealogical approach and examine different historical sources in order to allow for flexibility in the degree of compatibility between the sites and in the interpretations about each process. My intention is to argue that there is a macro historical dimension that comprises processes that have affected Buenos Aires and São Paulo in a similar manner because they both occupy a similar space in the context of a post-colonial Latin America. At the same time, I will show that specific demographic and political processes account for differentiations in the current characteristics of LGBT/queer social expressions. The ultimate purpose of this analysis is to validate a comparison of both sites based on the idea that there are beneficial aspects, both for analytical and political purposes, of communicating similarities, while it also becomes central to observe and value the variation in the socio-political forms of LGBT/queer presence in both sites.

Before embarking on this analysis it becomes relevant to highlight once again that as an observer, my personal tension between sense of belonging and distance from these sites has a direct impact on my project. It reflects a constant process of negotiation and reconsideration of perspectives that, I believe, do not only reflect my personal experience, but also to some extent the experience of the LGBT/queer movements in my sites, which constantly negotiate their position as a product and reflection of the interconnectedness and needs for emplacement of their communities in a regional and global map. My intention is not to solve these tensions, but to incorporate them into my analysis by putting in conversation different theoretical perspectives on social movements and queer politics, and by keeping in mind
questions of pertinence and potential misinterpretations of non-Western realities through a Western lens.

Following the idea that the present is the representation and reconstruction of elements from the past, the purpose of this genealogy is not necessarily to give a thorough historical account of the history of sexual deviance in these sites, but rather to identify elements in the development of LGBT/queer public life that can help explain its current characteristics. By focusing on São Paulo and Buenos Aires as units of analysis, my intention is to draw relevant information from political and economic history in order to analyze how national and international events and political-ideological trends weave together with particular local characteristics. In this sense, there are four main trends and ideas that I identify in this genealogy.

First, although I use the term LGBT/queer with the intention of encompassing a diverse array of initiatives, groups, spaces and activities, it is also my objective to acknowledge, with the support of historical examples, that LGBT/queer is a forced category that hides much heterogeneity. As such, the use of this term in political activity can have the effect of prevailing the interests of some over those of others according to other signifiers of power, such as class, race and education. In a way similar to how Michael Warner explains that assimilationist views can appropriate gayness and define boundaries of identity, I will argue that LGBT/queer movements can adopt different goals and strategies throughout time depending on their internal relations of dominance, and considering the progressively expansive process of this denomination, I will at times prefer the term ‘sexual deviance’ or anti-homophobic movements to respect circumstantial specificities. The history of anti-homophobic movements in São Paulo and Buenos Aires reveals that not only gender and class, but
also rural versus urban origin, have been strong conditioning factors when delineating goals and strategies of the two movements.

Moreover, this genealogy shows that both movements include groups that could be divided into the categories of assimilationist, civil-rights based and radical. Historian Stephen Brown defined these three categories as part of his analysis of the Argentinean LGBT/queer movement in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, I argue that these definitions can also be used to map the São Paulo LGBT/queer movement, although the strength of each group in different historical periods varies greatly.

According to Brown, assimilationist groups are those that “decry the demonization of and discrimination against gays and lesbians, taking measures that include initiating court cases. (...) these groups seek recognition.” (Brown 2002, 93) Civil-rights based movements follow a “separate-but-equal” logic that is different than the assimilationist approach, and relate to what in the Brazilian context Rafael de la Dehesa refers to as autonomous groups. The main objective of civil-rights based groups is to “limit the state’s reach into the private sphere while working with the state to enact new legal guarantees and mechanisms to ensure equal protection under the law.” (Brown 2002, 94) Last, radical groups reject coalitionist work and defend a critical posture towards the State and assimilationist groups, on the basis that “as insiders, they can do more harm.” (Julio Talavera, interview, Buenos Aires, June 14, 1996 in Brown 2002, 95) Examining the historical shifts in how the movements were built according these categories will help to question later what the present directions and compositions look like.

Second, in this genealogy I identify three main political actors that correspond to each case study: the governments, the LGBT/queer movements (with their
representational variations across time), and international (although mainly Western) political tendencies and events. I argue in this sense that these three actors are organized in a triangle-shaped relation in which they all have direct and indirect relations to each other. LGBT/queer movements have had a direct relation with local governments but also have historically found support and strategic inspiration from international communities, while governments do not only based their actions as a response to the demands of the local LGBT/queer movements, but also to what Western standards consider necessary and/or proper. Shifts in policies and strategies can be seen, from this point of view, as a change in one of these political units, which leads to a chain reaction in the others.

Third, I will show how the genealogy of LGBT/queer movements reveals an association between queerness and foreignness in both case studies. In the Brazilian case, the sources are clear to indicate a direct link between sexual deviance and Europeanness, as opposed to a national identity. In the Argentinean case, perhaps because of a historical intention to build national identity close to Europeanness, the association of queerness to foreignness was displayed differently. Since 1880\textsuperscript{16} sexually deviant individuals were formally excused from voting, and forbidden from entering institutions like the Army. Through the removal of civil rights, sexually deviant individuals were denied citizenship, and therefore formal recognition of belonging to the national identity. Identifying the evolution of this association will later help to observe whether queerness is still associated to foreignness in each case.

Fourth and last, through the revision of LGBT/queer activity in the last decades, I intend to observe how ideas of what is ‘political’ and ‘politically desirable’
have been built, and, from the opposite point of view, how critiques of the goals and strategies of the LGBT/queer movement have also defined what is left out from this category, for being considered ‘apolitical’, ‘recreational’ or ‘undesirable.’ The goal is to examine how ideas of what is ‘political’ condition the goals and strategies of the LGBT/queer movements in a material sense.

The first waves of activism related to sexual deviance in both São Paulo and Buenos Aires started during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but with the purpose of providing context to these early initiatives, I start this genealogy around the decades of 1940s and 1950s.

São Paulo: Negotiating Grays and Rainbows

“A mãe da virgem diz que não
E o anúncio da televisão
E estava escrito no portão
E o maestro ergueu o dedo
E além da porta há o porteiro, sim
E eu digo não
E eu digo não ao não
Eu digo
É proibido proibir”
- Os Mutantes, É proibido proibir (1968)

“*The mother of the virgin says no*
*And the TV ad*
*And it was written on the gate*
*And the teacher lifted the finger*
*And behind the gate is the gatekeeper*
*And I say no*
*I say no to the no*
*I say*
*It is forbidden to forbid”*
- Os Mutantes, It Is Forbidden to Forbid (1968)

16 The very early acknowledgement of sexual deviance in the juridical system is attributed to the imitation of the French legislature in the stages of consolidation of the State. (Bazán 2010, 187)
The social organization of São Paulo around the mid-twentieth century could be characterized by a generalized idea of contrast. Class, wealth, race, urbanity and education were examples of fields where inequality was stark. Therefore, analyzing LGBT/queerness means to analyze how sexual deviance needed to be negotiated in relation to these factors. José Fábio Barbosa da Silva is known as the first Brazilian sociologist to become interested in issues of homosexuality and its urban expressions. Starting his career around 1940, da Silva addresses the issue of polarity in modern social organization by explaining that

“Brazil was still a traditional society, more rural than urban, divided by regionalisms, dominated by the family (from which the high-class rural family remained the model), paternalism, chauvinism, a literary and bureaucratic culture, instead of technical, and with a lot of power invested in the hands of traditional families and institutions.”¹⁷

In contrast to this social scenario associated to traditional structures of power, “the city of São Paulo gave space for a society that was more open, with more diversity, more anonymity, multiple social interactions, greater social mobility and an increasing relevance of trade.”¹⁸ (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 225) Barbosa da Silva’s analysis not only helps to identify the profound contrast that becomes a trope in sexual politics as well as in Brazilian social life in general, but also helps to value the analysis of ‘the city’ as a unit of observation. São Paulo’s growth, unequal from that of the rest of the country, provided conditions for a particular relation of sexually

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¹⁷ “O Brasil era ainda uma sociedade tradicional, mais rural do que urbano, dividido por regionalismos, dominado pela família (da qual a tradicional família rural de classe alta permanecia como modelo), paternalismo, machismo, uma cultura literária e burocrática, em vez de técnica, e com poder investido nas mãos das famílias tradicionais e de instituições, como a Igreja e o Exército.” (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 224)

¹⁸ “... a cidade de São Paulo proporcionava uma sociedade mais aberta, com maior diversidade, mais anonimato, interações sociais múltiplas, maior mobilidade social e uma crescente importância do comércio.” (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 225)
deviant individuals with the rest of the interacting social groups. In this sense, this author identifies sexually deviant individuals (at this point mainly male homosexuals for being the most visibly deviant) gravitated towards the adoption of a set of values related to the high classes in the 1940s and 1950s, regardless of their initial place of origin and socio-economic status. Becoming sexually deviant in a visible way meant also adopting aristocratic practices. This social phenomenon is explained by Barbosa da Silva through a process of “re-identification”:

“For homosexuals, regardless of their place of origin, re-identification is a key process because they adopt values and models of a group (the traditional elite) to which, in the majority of the cases, they do not belong. (...) This tendency leads them to a position of adaptation to what is already established instead than a self definition, even if some become judges of fashion, taste and behavior.”

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The discrepancy between the lack of privilege that arises from belonging to a socially ostracized group and the adaptation to a dominant group can be seen as a strategy to negotiate one’s social position. The relevance of this negotiation is increased when it is related to issues of cultural affiliation. According to James Green and Ronaldo Trindade, “the traditional elite (copying from Europe), appreciated what was ‘different’, and [homosexuals] liked to mingle with the elites, exposing themselves to them, copying their lifestyle in the best way possible.”

20 (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 225) This reveals a particularity of sexual deviance in the context of São Paulo. Sexual deviance has historically been and still is a sign for lessened social

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19 “Para os homossexuais, independentemente da sua origem, a reificação é um fenômeno-chave, porque eles adotam valores e modelos de um grupo (a elite tradicional) do qual, na maioria, não fazem parte. (...) Essa tendência os leva a uma posição de adaptação ao estabelecido em vez de uma definição própria, apesar de alguns poderem se tornar árbitros de moda, gosto e comportamento.” (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 225)

20 “...a elite tradicional (copiando a Europa) apreciava o ‘diferente’, e este gostava de misturar-se com a elite, exibindo-se para ela e, ao mesmo tempo, copiando seu estilo de vida da melhor forma possível (Green, 2001; Needell, 1993)” (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 225)
acceptance in most societies, but the particularity of this case is the association between sexual deviance and origin. The Brazilian homosexual individual of 1940 was faced with an equation where Brazilianness and homosexuality were incompatible, and in order to negotiate one’s social position one of the two categories needed to be subjugated. Considering not only that subjugating national identity would allow for more social acceptance related to sexual behavior, but also that Europeanness was valued as a symbol of social status, it is only logical that this re-identification process would become a popular trend.

The growth of the city in the 1940s and 1950s marked the escalation of these processes, while at the same time shaped contemporary demographical characteristics and tendencies. São Paulo grew consistently during the years between 1948 and 1964, going from 6 million people to 9 million in the metropolitan area, (Marsiaj 2010, 199) and would continue to grow consistently since then. Nevertheless, the military dictatorship that ruled between 1964 and 1985 dramatically reduced foreign migration, which caused demographic growth to depend more heavily on the internal migration of Brazilians attracted by the city’s industrial development. (Marsiaj 2010, 204) It is highly relevant to highlight this trend considering that a great number of LGBT/queer individuals who nowadays live in São Paulo are also internal immigrants (suggesting that a similar trend continues), but also to understand the development of a Leftist movement parallely to the LGBT/queer movement as a product of the socioeconomic conditions of this increasingly industrialized city.

The trend of immigration and growth eventually created the social conditions necessary for the increase in visibility of sexually deviant individuals in the late 1960s. According to Barbosa da Silva, “the homosexual community (...) acquired
greater visibility in the late 1960s, starting new lifestyles, particularly following the Stonewall Inn events..." (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 234). The fact that Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship at the time of this upheaval in New York City reveals that the historical evolution of the movement in São Paulo was to a great extent conditioned by international events, following the idea of the existence of sexual deviance as a category for solidarity and organization beyond the specificities of the place. This is one example in which the relation between the LGBT/queer movement and the international community overshadowed that of the movement with the local government.

In this historical conjuncture that united the international community with the anti-homophobic movement, there was another movement that underwent a simultaneous definition. The Brazilian Left was theoretically built upon similar premises to the LGBT/queer movement not only because it drew from international events like protests and conferences (such as the International), but also because they shared the military government and the Brazilian Right as a common enemy. However, as it will be explained later, the theoretical compatibility of their struggles would put these two movements in conversation with one another, but would also lead them to find more conflicts than alliances.

Several scholars on this matter agree on the “birth” of an ‘LGBT’ movement in São Paulo in the late 1970s. James Green, Juan Marsiaj, Rafael de la Dehesa, Adriana Vianna and Sergio Carrara all identify a landmark around 1978, when several events signaled the internal strengthening of the LGBT movement and its

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21 “... a comunidade homossexual, constituída no final do século XIX, adquiriu maior visibilidade nos fins dos anos 60, inaugurando novos estilos de vida, particularmente com os eventos do Stonewall Inn...” (Barbosa da Silva 2005, 234)
relation to other movements and political parties in São Paulo. The period from 1978 to 1982 -year when elections were held without succeeding in re-establishing a democratic system- can be seen as a time of political upheaval and internal cohesion that located LGBT initiatives closer to the idea of a social movement comprised by groups that fell into the categories of radical, assimilationist and civil-rights based, as explained earlier.

Vianna and Carrara argue in this regard that “public criticism of the view that homosexuality is a mix of immorality, dishonor, sin, and disease began in the late 1970s as the redemocratization process in the country progressed.” (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 124) Although there is an agreement among scholars regarding the relevance of this year, the possibility needs to be left open for previous initiatives to have been disregarded from their historical accounts, maybe because of the use of less confrontational channels or level of popular participation. In any case, during the period between 1978 and 1982, LGBT initiatives became articulated in a way compatible to the liberal ideal of social movement through the strengthening of internal cohesion and the interaction with other political entities recognized by the State, such as governmental institutions and political parties. This contributes to the discussion of what constitutes a political movement, by implying in this case that in order to be “political,” a given sexual deviance-related activity needs to be public, visible and articulated in dialogue with the State.

Two key events in 1978 were the creation of the Lampião da Esquina (roughly translated as Corner Street Lamp) newspaper, and the founding of Somos, the first homosexual liberation group in the city. Lampião da Esquina was an independent publication mainly tailored to male homosexuals, and to a lesser degree
to other minority groups. (de la Dehesa 2007, 178) As argued by Flavia Peret in her analysis of gay media in Brazil, its creation marked the beginning of a chain of underground media publications, which varied in duration of existence, political affiliation and groups that it targeted. Their distribution was usually based on underground networks, sometimes because of their subversive content, and sometimes because newspaper stands refused to publicly display LGBT/queer publications. Their content was varied, going from personal testimonies and political calls to action, to suggestions and advertisements of meeting places for homosexual activities. (Péret 2011, 35; 64) Thus, Lampião da Esquina, together with the other smaller publications, served to link previously disarticulated minorities not only through their representation in paper media, but also through the process of production, distribution and consumption of the newspaper.

The creation of Somos also helped to generate cohesion within LGBT initiatives, at the same time that it set a trend in the type of interaction of the early LGBT movement with other political parties. In 1978, promises of a transition to democracy were prominent after military governments had dominated the country since 1964. In this sense, as part of the transition to democracy, the change from a bipartite system, which was in place before the dictatorship, to a multiparty model (Green 1998, 69) meant that the military government allowed for the creation of parties and prepared eventual democratic elections. When the military government opened the political field for the creation of more than two parties, many started to foresee the transition to democracy and tried to organize political initiatives accordingly. Thus, not only the LGBT/queer movement was in a process of definition
and upheaval, but also political parties -especially from the Left, which had been most persecuted- were delineating philosophies and courses of action.

An example of the shared initial conditions of the Left and the LGBT/queer movement is that Somos was created after a debate on feminism and political action in the University of São Paulo (de la Dehesa 2007, 178; Green 1998, 69) and its conformation happened almost simultaneously as that of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) and the Workers Party (PT). Thus, a close relation between the Left and LGBT groups and individuals (although it should be noted by this time the movement was still mainly dominated by male homosexuals (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 124)) was expected by both sides to flourish. Both movements were directly against the military government, and they both feared the political Right as a continuation of an oppressive State after the upcoming restoration of democracy.

However, much of the Left’s response was either to neglect or block the incorporation of LGBT issues as a central part of the Leftist struggle. An exception to this is the PRT’s incorporation of sexism as part of the Marxist struggle, as a reaction to the debates that occurred within the international arena, more specifically in the Fourth International. (De la Dehesa 2007, 186) Nevertheless, the most common stand taken by the Left was either outspokenly or implicitly against the adoption of sexuality as a valid part of the Marxist struggle, following a twofold argument. The first part claimed that sexuality was too specific of an issue to bring to the center of the discussion because sexuality is associated to the private sphere of human life while political economy, which is the center of interest of Marxist analysis, is associated to a macro structure and to public life. Thus, issues of political economy were thought to affect individuals more than those related with sexuality, not
differently, and not simultaneously. Second, deviant sexualities were considered part of a bourgeois lifestyle because of its association with aristocratic values and practices, which is why it was also considered foreign, and should be separated from Leftist initiatives. In this sense, James Green states that

“[d]efenders of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution argued that fighting against specific issues, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia, would divide the Left. Rather, they opined, people should unite in a general struggle against the dictatorship.” (Green 1998, 70)

Thus, a prevailing fear came from the idea that incorporating bourgeois practices would weaken and divide the Leftist movement, which instead, had the objective of trying to unite the oppressed classes into a homogeneous group.

Complementing the other side of the argument, Rafael de la Dehesa explains that

“the homosexual stigma, for example, was often read through a Marxist lens that categorized it as a product of the capitalist decay and a bourgeois sexuality. In his first interview about this issue, the very Lula [da Silva] confessed not knowing any working class homosexuals.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 46)

Moreover, keeping in mind the association made by Barbosa da Silva between homosexuality and Europeanness in the 1940s and 1950s, De la Dehesa also notes that the same observation is made by members of the Marxist Left by explaining that

“implicit in many of these representations was the notion of the foreign: homologous to conservative representations of homosexuality as alien to ‘national traditions’, although seen through a Leftist nationalism that highlighted the culturally colonized character of a deviant national bourgeoisie.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 47)
It is important to highlight that, even if the Left sustained these arguments, LGBT individuals were in general not rejected from participating in Leftist political parties, as long as they would share their values and adapt to their priorities. This might reveal that there was some degree of acknowledgement of the compatibility of the two, or alternatively, that the Left was more concerned about strengthening the parties numerically than policing the sexual ethics of its members.

Whatever the case might be, LGBT groups and individuals responded to this in varied ways. One was the autonomous reaction of some activist groups -among which Somos, Outra coisa and the Autonomous Lesbian Feminist Group were the most prominent. “[W]hile autonomists generally resisted a close alliance with the partisan Left, most were nonetheless relatively sympathetic with its broader goals and tenets and suspicious of parties of the right and center.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 182) Another position was critical of this autonomous view and advocated for the use of political parties “more instrumentally than ideologically” (De la Dehesa 2007, 182) in order to obtain precise demands. This position resembles the civil rights-based view described in the introduction to this chapter in that it followed a “separate-but-equal” ethics and relation to the State. Last, some individuals decided to follow the premise of relegating sexuality to participate in an orthodox Leftist project, while others were irremediably alienated by their lack of full incorporation.

At the center of this dialogue is the question of class, and I argue that the different responses that the LGBT movement might have given to the traditional Left arise to a great extent from the ways that groups and individuals negotiated this issue.
LGBT/queer politics was built in this sense, following a rejection towards a prevailing and institutionalized discrimination. However, this response to homophobia that was articulated in relation to the State could only arise from individuals who felt that the State was accountable to them, namely the middle class. Thus, not only homophobia but also LGBT/queer issues were associated to one specific socio-economic class. And contrary to what could be assumed, this association between class privilege and interest in LGBT/queer politics was not only accused by heterosexual Marxists. João Antônio Mascarenhas, a renowned homosexual activist in the 1970s and 1980s Rio de Janeiro’s scene stated in an interview that

“Prejudices against homosexuals are a middle-class phenomenon in Brazil. The upper class does not care about them, and the working class’s sexual behavior is completely different. Very often, single urban workers are bisexual, and maintain a very masculine demeanor. (...) For them, homosexuals are those who have an effeminate demeanor. (...) The only people in Brazil who might therefore be interested in the movement come from the middle class, those who suffer deeply from stigma and whose income allows them to face the problem politically.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 189)

Mascarenhas’ analysis does not follow an orthodox Marxist line of thought because it asserts that LGBT issues pertain to those negotiating their position in between the categories of bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the fact that he disassociates the upper classes from the need to deal with prejudice goes against the argument made by some in the Left regarding the intrinsic link between bourgeoisie and homosexuality. In any case, this rejection supports somehow the argument that homosexuality as an identity category requires certain degree of class privilege, and

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una burguesía nacional desviada.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 47)
therefore limits its validity as an organizational axis through which individuals may organize, because the category is dependent on a given socio-economic status.

Considering this as the only analysis of the time would suggest a high degree of connection between bourgeoisie and homosexuality. However, there was also, from within the LGBT movement, a criticism to these Marxist conservative approaches to sexuality. A political organizer of the time, Mario Rodrigues raises questions of queerness and resistance by saying that

“If a person is thinking of their sexual happiness, they can’t wait 70 years to have an orgasm when the Left achieves the revolution... The homosexual places the question of happiness in the here and now, do you understand? Because it didn’t formulate a sexual politics [the Marxist Left] ended up adopting a bourgeois sexual politics.”

(Rodrigues in De la Dehesa 2007, 49)

This argument can be located closely to artistic expressions such as music genre Tropicália, which advocated for a here and now mentality and for the search of pleasure. Some Tropicália artists bended gender categories in ways that the traditional Left found disturbing, such as Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa, whose mannerisms on stage caused rejection among so-called progressive audiences. (Buarque de Holanda in De la Dehesa 2007, 49) This brings us back to one of the initial questions of this chapter. When doubting whether to use the category of queer, my main concern was to use a foreign lens to read a non-Western postmodern case. However, seeing that within the Brazilian movement there were (and are) positions highly compatible to queer theory suggests that, beyond the linguistic signifier, ascribing certain ideas, such as Lee Edelman’s no future argument and Judith Butler’s deconstruction of

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24 “Si una persona está pensando en su felicidad sexual, no puede esperar 70 años para tener un orgasmo cuando la izquierda haga la revolución... El homosexual coloca la cuestión de la felicidad...”
gender, uniquely to a postmodern Western context would mean to overlook the presence and importance of a lot of these social, artistic and political expressions in the Brazilian context. In 1980 the first Pride parade took place in São Paulo, with the slogan “More love and more desire.”

This slogan is far from the 2012 advocacy for criminalization of homophobia, as it reflected more closely these queer demands and ideals.

Other groups were created in the period between 1978 and 1982, from which it is important to highlight lesbian initiatives like the Autonomous Group of Feminist Lesbians (GALF), which were meant to counteract the prevalent male domination in the political arena and the homosexual movement. (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 124) The creation of these groups evidences that although LGBT/queer organizations could have been fighting for inclusion in society, they often reproduced social exclusion barriers in an internal level.

As aforementioned, the general upheaval and creation of groups responded to a great extent to the predictions of an upcoming transition to democracy, but the elections held in 1982 resulted in a ruling group that continued on supporting the military regime. This continuation of the military government for three more years, although in a weakened form, would break the momentum of political articulation within the homosexual movement. Although some groups continued with their activities, governmental repression together with an internal crisis that concerned questions of strategy and objectives marked the end of the first wave of the LGBT movement in São Paulo.

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25 “Mais amor e mais tesão.” (De la Dehesa 2007, 49)
After democracy was reestablished in 1985, the second wave of political organization would only take place around the mid 1990s, leaving a decade of mild LGBT/queer activity, which coincided with the highest peak of the AIDS epidemic. In 1995, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) held its annual conference in Rio, which strengthened the ties once again between the international community and the national LGBT/queer movement, and helped to bring issues related to sexuality into a visible sphere of Brazilian politics once again. (Green 1998, 71) After this conference, the National Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transvestites would be founded (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 125), marking a moment from which it is possible to speak of a more unified LGBT movement, instead of a mainly male homosexual one.

There was also a shift in the nature of the movement, which went from being mainly formed by autonomous and radical groups in the early 1980s to having a closer relation to the State. This happened, in great part, because the State provided the logistical support for LGBT groups to sustain themselves through grants and financial assistance of different sources, initially aimed at targeting issues related to AIDS and health in general, and indirectly supporting varied LGBT initiatives. (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 126) While it is true that the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government was in many ways interested in promoting a closer relation between the State and civil associations, the intention of the government at this point seemed to be more related to tackling the issue of AIDS, as the international community pointed at Brazil as one of the most affected countries in the world. The shift of the LGBT/queer movement in relation to the State went against the autonomist position of some
groups, but prevailed for granting better material conditions for organizations that followed this State-oriented path.

The limitations of this strategy became evident when the project for same-sex civil union was not approved in 1996, and instead instituted a less-stable partnership that vaguely acknowledged “affectionate bonds” between the parts. (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 127) Reasons for the rejection of this proposal and others regarding LGBT/queer issues are often related to the strong opposing evangelical block present in the legislative power. Also, the State-oriented strategy of the LGBT movement found constraints specific to the political organization of Brazil. The fact that Brazil allows for different state constitutions and municipal mandates within the nation-state limits the leverage power of São Paulo organizations - and of other highly active LGBT centers like Bahia and Rio - at a national level. Having this into consideration, many LGBT/queer organizations focused their efforts during the second half of the 1990s and beginning of the decade of 2000 on passing local regulations against discrimination of LGBT/queer in different instances of public life.

The demands for non-discrimination were (and are) related to labor market, protection in public spaces, inheritance and insurance rights and conformation of the family. The fact that different state and municipal authorities can pass different laws, and that legal precedents have been set in some cases\(^\text{26}\) without having overarching laws that guarantee a similar legal treatment to all citizens raises the feeling among the Brazilian population that law is not uniform. It is because of this non-uniform treatment that nowadays there is not only confusion over LGBT rights and policies, but also distrust in the legal system as a means to reach “equality”, and this distrust

\(^\text{26}\) Like granting custody of the famous singer Cássia Eller’s daughter to her partner after her death.
does not only come from those critical of equality as a goal. Fabiano, a 28 year-old homosexual waiter, explained that “you may be able to get a civil union, or you may not, you may get your partner’s inheritance rights or you may not. I don’t think I could because I don’t know the right lawyers or judges [laughs].” This serves to exemplify João Mascarenha’s take on legal issues. “The 90 percent of Brazilians who were working class and poor, he wrote an activist in England, ‘do not bother with existing laws, as they [see] them -and correctly- as products of a world they do not share. Sad but true.’” (Mascarenha in De la Dehesa 2007, 189) Mascarenha jumps into seeing the lack of uniform institutionalization of policies as a negative aspect of Brazilian society in general, although maybe the possibility should be opened to examine whether such disassociation from State regulation may open spaces for different types of LGBT/queer resistance and expressions.

Having in mind this disparity in legal treatment, the organization of a upper-middle class LGBT/queer movement that worked closely with the State led in 2005 to the opening of a competition “among public institutions and NGOs to design projects aimed at combating and preventing homophobia” (Vianna and Carrara 2007, 129). A plan to train educators to be able to deal with questions of sexuality and promote gender equality was formed as a consequence of this competition. 5 years later, in 2010, the “kit anti-homophobia” for educators would be proposed, although quickly banned by the Workers Party government of Dilma Rousseff. Many attribute this outcome to the pressure of the evangelical block in the legislative power and not to the personal position of Dilma Rousseff. Nevertheless, this comes to show how the

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27 “Pode ser que consiga a união civil, ou pode que não, pode que consiga a herência do parceiro ou pode que não. Eu acho que eu não poderia porque eu não conheço os juízes e juristas certos.” (Fabiano, interview)
divergence of priorities and objectives between the LGBT/queer movement and the Left is still alive, and how the Left seems to continue on the track of neglecting the incorporation of issues regarding sexuality in order to unify rather than divide its popular support.

Nevertheless, something that the government does not consider threatening to the political hierarchy is the annual LGBT Pride Parade. As explained by Steven Butterman in (In)visible Visibilities, parallel to the evolution of the LGBT/queer movement, the LGBT Pride parade grew constantly since its beginning in 1980. Having started in the period of the first wave of LGBT activism, participants of the parade often faced direct aggression of non-participants and conservative religious groups. During its first years, it took place in the surroundings Vale do Anhangabaú, a public park that would become one of the main LGBT spots in the city, where those who either refused or did not have the possibility of hiding their visibility as sexually deviant decided to engage in a demonstration, following international examples, especially the San Francisco pride parade. Thus, this can be seen as a space that embodies an articulation between the international and local communities, and with the consent of the regional government.

Later, with the return to democracy and the formal engagement of the State in discourses of Human Rights, the organizers of the parade were granted the right to march in Avenida Paulista, the main financial and commercial center. Soon, the parade would become exponentially more popular and would incorporate the participation not only of political parties, but also of companies and corporations that sponsored music trucks. In 2010, a couple of months before presidential elections, all the main candidates marched in different trucks, although none of them incorporated
LGBT issues in their political platforms. That same year the parade would hit a new record, reaching 4 million attendants.

The parade, in this sense, can be seen as metaphoric of some of the trends in the larger LGBT movement. Many of my interviewees coincided in the view that before, the parade was political, while now it is commercial. I argue that although there has been an undeniable change in the general character of the parade, determining that one model is “more political” than another leads to ascribe a fixed idea of the channels that political expressions can take. By the same token, seeing commercial consumption as an “apolitical” activity leads to deny passive consumption as part of a politics of pleasure. What this ultimately reveals is not only that there is a notion of “political” that opposes that which is commercial, but also that there is a temporality associated to it. Before the parade was political and its objective was noble. Now it is commercial, it has been corrupted. Thus, we can see a narrative that judges this evolution on the basis of a pure political essence of the past, which most likely responds to the identification of politics in traditional channels.

In the same way that this refers to the LGBT Pride parade, it also concerns the LGBT/queer movement in general. Lúcio, a 24 year old USP student and member of many student organizations declared in his interview that “we need to work to get people to participate in the struggle. It’s sad to see how the youth is losing hope and quitting...” Many signs of inconformity with the LGBT/queer movement in São Paulo seem to be related to the anxiety of not identifying the channels of expression of resistance, and that this leads to ascribing certain expressions as valid or “political”, and others as passive or consume-oriented. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the definition of what is considered political is still in the making, although
there is a strong component of nostalgia, and therefore projects, goals and strategies might reveal internal discrepancy between what constitutes the ideal.

**Buenos Aires: Waves of Action and Reaction**

“*La revolución sexual unilateraliza el amor y es una animalización del sexo.*” - Moral y Proletarización, Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores.

“The sexual revolution makes love unilateral and is an animalization of sex.”

-Morals and Proletarization, Revolutionary Workers Party.

“*La revolución sexual sólo será posible cuando los hombres heterosexuales socialicen su culo.*” - Néstor Perlongher, sociólogo y poeta.

“The sexual revolution will only be possible when heterosexual men socialize their asses.” - Néstor Perlongher, sociologist and poet.

If São Paulo’s LGBT/queer movement can be traced to a non-uniform sequence of political waves with peaks of activism and periods of stagnant repression, the same pattern can be used to understand the LGBT/queer movement in Buenos Aires. In fact, the contrast between the different trends seems even starker in the latter, with periods of numerous initiatives and others of almost absolute invisibility. In this section I will describe the political waves of LGBT activism in Buenos Aires in the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. I will then examine the relation of the Left with LGBT/queer initiatives arguing that, as in São Paulo, here too, Leftist organizations refused to incorporate LGBT/queer struggles as part of their general political philosophy until very recently, although there was an initial link between the two movements. I will also explain that the question of externalization of queerness is constructed differently than in São Paulo, even though the association between sexual deviance and foreignness still stands. Finally, I intend to discuss the notion of “politicization” in both movements, arguing that all LGBT/queer expressions are political, thus, instead of ascribing a desired channel of political
activity to the movement, it might be more useful to analyze the forms that are taking place in order to identify types of politics that are defended and/or embodied.

The twentieth century was a period of diverse, stark political changes and internal struggles in Argentina. An indicator of this great variation is the fact that since 1930 until 1990 there were no two democratically elected governments that follow each other, and instead the regime changes corresponded to the dispute of different political and economic groups for the control of the nation. By the mid-twentieth century, the figure of Juan Domingo Perón had been consolidated and later overthrown, which led him into exile until 1974. Perón left behind a legacy of followers and opponents, the structure of a previously nonexistent welfare State and a new middle class of larger proportion than that of any other Latin American country at the time.

The original Peronist ideology (which would get divided into many branches after his first period ended in 1955) was based on the institutions of the nation [patria], the family, the Church and the military. (Bazán 2010, 281) Moreover, Peronism was built in defense of an ideal of citizen related to work, tradition and planning, and in opposition to symbols of deviance. Because of this reason, the spaces in which homosexuality could be expressed were informal and constrained to private and semi-private spheres. (Bazán 2010, 274) Anonymity was desired, so spaces such as specific cinema theaters (Bazán 2010, 255), as well as dim-lighted bars and “whiskey stores” [whiskerias] became meeting places for sexually deviance, particularly male homosexuality (Bazán 2010, 314). It is important to take into account this feature of social spaces in Buenos Aires being semi-closed, as the trend seems to continue nowadays.
The main tool for state control over sexuality were regulations “known as ‘police edicts’, [which] existed from 1880 and remained in place until 1996, [and were] forms of urban unrest that were not outlawed in the penal code” (Ben 2009, 36). These edicts applied only to the City of Buenos Aires, as a consequence of the attempt in 1880 to make it a federally representative capital with its own legal framework. Two examples of edicts said that homosexuals “could not join the military” and “could not vote.”28 These prohibitions were a material evidence of the conceptual incompatibility of sexual deviance and Argentineanness, given that the duties and rights associated with citizenship were suspended in the moment that the individual would declare this identity category.

Because stigma and pathologization were linked to sexual deviance, these edicts had a larger effect as tools for invisibilization than as tools to police sexual behavior in the public sphere. Moreover, because of the vague description of what police edicts could concern, much of the logistic applications of such edicts was left to the discretion of police officers, which facilitated police abuse of sexual minorities, sometimes expressed in physical violence and other times through requiring monetary bribing. (Ben 2009, 37) Thus, edicts served as a triple tool that led to ghettoization, invisibilization and repression of sexual deviance, as well as contributing to its externalization from the national identity.

Externalization of sexual deviance from national identity was similar to the discourse used in São Paulo in that it explained difference as foreign. However, unlike the linear association between queerness and Europeanness that happened in

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28 “No podían entrar en el Ejército. En 1951, al Código Bustillo de Justicia Militar se le agregó una enmienda que lo prohibía especialmente. No podían votar. En 1946 el gobierno del general Domingo
Brazil, the official discourse in the Argentina of 1950s was not necessarily as straightforward. Peronism defended the idea of a “Third Position” in a Cold War context where neither capitalism nor communism were valued as political directions, and instead, the independence of the country from World Powers was directly linked to a refusal of both systems. (Skidmore, Smith and Green 2010, 184) Because of this tripartite worldview, the denial of citizenship rights within the context of Buenos Aires did not automatically associate the sexual “other” to a particular foreign identity. It is clear that the sexually deviant individual was not considered an authentic Argentinean, but, unlike the case of São Paulo, where homosexuality was directly linked to Europeanness, in this case it was not discursively explicit what specific foreignness this assigned to the subject. As a consequence of this uncertainty in the dominant political discourse, the identification of sexually deviant individuals with upper class values and practices that characterized the social scene in São Paulo did not translate to the same extent in Buenos Aires.

This becomes clear when we jump from the end of the first Peronist period (1955) to the late 1960s and early 1970s, time of the first wave of LGBT/queer activism, which showed a strong initial link with the Left, in contrast with the early separation between these two in São Paulo. Nuestro Mundo [our world] was the name of the first registered LGBT/queer activist group in Buenos Aires, which started in the late 1960s and met for a long time in a hidden train station cabin in the outskirts to escape the reach of the police. (Bazán 2010, 335) Nuestro Mundo is described by Osvaldo Bazán as having a strong unionist profile and “where ‘the people’
participated”29, handing in flyers and surprising pedestrians for being inconspicuous homosexuals.30 The links between Nuestro Mundo and the Communist Party (PC) were strong as several of its members were also members of the party, and because they relied on its network of media distribution in order to gain participants.

The connection between Nuestro Mundo and the PC shows three important things to highlight. First, unlike the almost immediate separation of the Left and the LGBT/queer movement in São Paulo, there was a period of time where these two would work closely together in Buenos Aires. Second, that this link happened because there were individuals who were members of both groups simultaneously. Héctor Anabitarte, for example, is a prominent activist who was among the founding members of Nuestro Mundo and identifies as “unionist, homosexual and communist.” (Bazán 2010, 336) This combination of identities is what would embody the link between the Left and the early LGBT initiatives, and not necessarily a dialogue among members of one of the two sides. Third, it is useful to compare this to Lula da Silva’s statement in 1980, quoted earlier in this chapter, where he said that he had never met a homosexual from the working class, in order to see that although national identity might be a category of exclusion for Argentinean LGBT/queer individuals, class and socioeconomic status did not play such a linear role in the first wave of activism as they did in the Brazilian case.

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29 “En Nuestro Mundo participaban personas ‘del pueblo’, algunas de las cuales eran portadoras de la ideología más reaccionaria o conservadora.” (Bazán 2010, 335)
30 “But are you a homosexual? It wouldn’t occur to me. As if they were expecting a drag-queen as opposed to a unionist familiar with political struggle.” “¿Pero usted es homosexual? No se me pasaría por la cabeza. Como si esperasen a una drag-queen en lugar de un sindicalista habituado a la lucha política.” (Bazán 2010, 335)
Together with Nuestro Mundo, several activist groups joined forces to found the Frente de Liberación Homosexual [Homosexual Liberation Front, FLH] in August of 1971. The name clearly followed that of the Gay Liberation Front in the United States, which once again shows the important link between the organization of activism around sexual deviance and the international (and particularly Western) political sphere. The FLH as an alliance included “mostly male left-wing university students, anarchists, and religious organizations” (Brown 2002, 87) and had the objective of joining forces in order to fight the oppression of patriarchy and capitalism in a broad sense. The main points of agreement among groups in the FLH were described in their first communiqué, which conveyed a message compatible with other contemporary currents of thought:

○ “...homosexuals are oppressed socially, culturally, morally and legally. (...) This oppression comes from a social system that considers reproduction as the only objective of sex.”

○ “...with the repression of free sexuality and unconventional sexual attitudes, the right of deciding for one’s own body, and therefore of one’s life, is damaged, a right denied by this system of relations of dominance where man is just another commodity.”

○ “...the struggle against the oppression we suffer is inseparable from the struggle against all other types of social, political, cultural and economic oppression.”

○ “...it’s our objective to keep on developing discussions and joint actions with feminist organizations and other movements.” (Bazán 2010, 342)

Reading into some of these ideas it is possible to identify allusions or overtones related to the intersectionality of different types of oppression, queer politics, Marxist notions of self-alienation and even Foucaultian discipline and biopower. This shows that in the same way that expressions like Tropicália included queer ideas, also in Buenos Aires there were local initiatives compatible with this

31 Nuestro Mundo, Grupo Profesionales (focused on media and academia), Bandera Negra (anarchist
framework. A caveat should be made, however, to acknowledge that the FLH was greatly influenced by groups in the United States, England and France, which may help to explain the discursive compatibility between this group and others in the Global North, like the Gay Liberation Front in New York City.

In this sense, the testimony of one of the participants of the FLH to Osvaldo Bazán is telling of the ways in which networks of communication among groups are set up. While fluently versed on the initiatives happening in France, England and the United States, the interviewee was asked if there were similar initiatives in Latin America, to which he answered “I think in Mexico (there are similar organizations), but we don’t have concrete references.” The lack of awareness of parallel movements can be attributed to the way in which the lines of communication are mapped in a postcolonial setting. While geographically, culturally, and tactically it could make more sense for an Argentinean group to communicate with LGBT/queer initiatives in the region, Western powers function as nodes of media information, while peripheral locations tend to be less connected. In this sense, the availability of information tends to be much greater when looking at the North than within the South. In the 1970s, without new forms of media, this explains why LGBT/queer people all across Latin America were able to mention historical landmarks like Stonewall Inn, but did not necessarily have contact or knowledge of more regional initiatives.

The FLH worked as a coalition for more or less five years before dissolving. Néstor Perlongher, famous sociologist, anthropologist and poet, served as president of

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32 “Creo que en México (existen organizaciones similares), pero no tenemos referencias concretas.” (Bazán 2010, 344)
the FLH and led the group to create an alliance with certain factions of Peronism. In this sense, “...Leftist positions became more and more interesting to the FLH’s members, who glimpsed, with Néstor as the leader, that a union between Peronism and the Front was desirable and possible.” But some factions of Peronism, as well as political militancy in general, would become highly violent in the upcoming years. With the return and sudden death of Juan Domingo Perón, militant groups seemed to think that the control over the country was going to be decided in the streets. It took one of the militant groups, the Peronist Youth (JP), to react against LGBT/queer presence in the political scene, to cause a generalized opposition towards LGBT/queer struggles. The mysterious assassination of a member of the FLH in 1975 was the last incident before the members of the FLH decided to dissolve the group. This was the end of the first wave of political activism in Buenos Aires.

Only some months later, the most violent military dictatorship in Argentinean history would begin. From 1976 to 1983 (especially during the first three years), 30,000 people would disappear as a consequence of State terrorism. Anyone who could be considered “subversive” to the eyes of the authorities was in danger of disappearing. As such, sexually deviant individuals who were public about their sexuality were in special danger, and many, such as writers Manuel Puig and Néstor Perlongher, decided to go into exile. (Brown 2002, 87) There are no statistics on how many of the 30,000 disappeared identified as LGBT, although Rabbi Marshall Meyer,

33... las posiciones de izquierda peronista fueron interesando cada vez más a gran parte de los integrantes del Frente que vislumbraron, con Néstor a la cabeza, que una unión entre ese peronismo y el Frente era deseable y posible.”(Bazán 2010, 354)
34 There was a graffitti in July of 1973 that stated “Against the ERP, homosexuals and drug addicts”. “En contra del ERP, homosexuales y los drogadictos.”- (Bazán 2010, 365)
35 The corpse of a young person called Federico whose last name was unknown was found in the Rio de la Plata in August of 1975. (Bazán 2010, 366)
who worked as counselor during this period, claimed that at least 400 homosexual individuals had been tortured and murdered in the city of Buenos Aires. (Bazán 2010, 383) Political/activist initiatives were completely suspended, showing that although the initial peak of activism might have been higher than Sao Paulo’s, the next eight years would be absolutely stagnant.

By 1982, some groups started to reconvene, predicting the return to democracy in 1983. But what for the country was a collective celebration of recovered freedom, for the LGBT movement only changed the landscape for the struggle to obtain those types of freedom. As explained by Stephen Brown, “[t]he rebirth of activism (...) was due as much to continued repression as to new freedoms. Repression had not disappeared under democratic rule, but expectations had grown.” (Brown 2002, 88) In fact, many of the tools for control and repression of sexual deviance, like the police edicts of 1880, would continue for another decade. This meant that although the shift away from the military dictatorship obviously had a strong material impact in the LGBT/queer community, the movement was once again dealing with a socio-political structure that discursively, and in many ways also materially, did not conceive of sexually deviant individuals as part of the nation-state.

In April of 1984, the Homosexual Argentinean Community (CHA) was founded and with its creation started the second wave of activism in the city. The CHA became a node for LGBT/queer activity, and soon began to divide into subgroups. Many activist groups nowadays trace their origin to the CHA (Bazán 2010, 401; Brown 2002, 89). However, there have been reactions against the tacit role of leader organization given to the CHA especially during this period. These reactions came especially from lesbian and trans* groups that denounced the overwhelming
male dominance in the CHA, and refused to trace their origins to it, choosing instead to claim a trajectory of the feminist movement. (Brown 2002, 87) As a consequence, by the late 1980s there was a growing number of LGBT/queer groups associated in two main political lines: those affiliated with the CHA, and those more closely associated to the feminist movement.

Two groups that fall into the second category were Lugar de Mujer (Woman’s Place), which “sponsored lesbian-themed workshops and think tanks [and] the lesbian magazine and group, Cuadernos de Existencia Lesbian, [which] emerged in 1987.” (Ben 2009, 3) These groups and others in the same vein rejected the reproduction of gender hierarchies within the LGBT/queer movement, and still vindicate a reading of history sexuality decentered from male homosexuality. (Fuskova et al. 2007, 2; Brown 2002, 89) The strong division between these currents is important to highlight for two reasons. First, to show that cohesion within the movement is often inaccurately assumed, and second, to show that a vein of LGBT/queer activism has a strong connection with the feminist movement in the Argentinean case, which helps to explain, for example, why nowadays debates over same-sex marriage, gender identity and abortion are often linked to each other.

The decade of 1989 to 1999 marked a neoliberal period in which the Argentinean State dramatically reduced public spending and welfare. This economic strategy was detrimental for most civic organizations, and it clearly affected the capacity of LGBT/queer groups to fund and sustain themselves. (Bazán 2010, 421) Nevertheless, as a reaction to the still latent dictatorship and with the objective of gaining international recognition, there was one social value that the government was
interested in pursuing: Human Rights discourse. The promise of the government was to “bring Argentina to the First World” (Menem in Bazán 2010, 422), which is why it was fundamental to show the world that Argentina did not have problems related to Human Rights violations, so often associated with Third World countries in First World political discourses. In this context, social acceptance of sexual deviance became a more disputed field. While the government would have probably disregarded LGBT political initiatives and remained unconcerned about systematic coercion of sexual minorities in a different context, the particular vulnerability and permeability of Menem’s government in relation to First World nations opened possibilities for LGBT activism.

Within this political framework, LGBT organizations adopted a strategy to increase their visibility. According to Pablo Ben, “during the 1990s many new organizations were created and the Argentine glbtq movement grew in diversity.” (Ben 2009, 3) Most transgender, transexual and travesti organizations like ALITT and ATTTA were formed in this period. (Bazán 2010, 441) In 1991 started the annual LGBT Pride March in Buenos Aires (Moreno 2008, 141; Moreno 2010, 388) and in 1992 the CHA became the first LGBT/queer organization to be recognized by the State as a civil association. This second event is particularly significant considering that it was only after a student at Columbia University publicly accused the Argentinean government of discriminating CHA during a conference given by president Menem, that this recognition was granted. The early 1990s were then a period of increased visibility of the LGBT/queer movement through the creation and institutionalization of organizations and spaces.

36 “[The discourse of Human Rights] is particularly valued in the national context as it has served as
In 1994, a reform in the national Constitution declared Buenos Aires an autonomous city, following the logic that in order for it to serve as a federal capital it needs to be detached from all other provinces. This reform had two effects on LGBT/queer movements. On one hand, it facilitated the communication between the government and the movement as the bureaucratic levels were reduced. The aforementioned police edicts from 1880 were finally abolished and the Code of Existence for sex workers was modified in order to allow prostitution in selected spaces. On the other hand, the autonomy of Buenos Aires limited the juridical leverage power of the city in a national level. The approval of a Civil Union Law in 2002 that only applied to individuals living Buenos Aires showed that although the spirit of the reform in the constitution was to increase the federalism of the city, it also accentuated already stark differences between the metropole and the rest of the country.

In 1998, the limitations of the Human Rights framework became evident when Hebe de Bonafini, one of the leaders of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, told the directors of the Clarín newspaper that she refused to share space in the Sunday magazine with homosexuals, and in the annual H.I.J.O.S demonstration for Human Rights, the homosexual group AGAMOS was left out of the list of the list of participant organizations. (Bazán, 2010 406) For this author, this contributed once again to the notion of LGBT/queer organizations that their struggle was autonomous an element of resistance against the dictatorship.” (Moreno 2008, 141)

37 Which of course does not only concern LGBT/queer individuals, but it becomes of great importance considering that a large number of transgender, transexual and travesti individuals have historically been linked to prostitution, and that before this reforms “[t]here was no transgendered person in prostitution who did not leave a tithe at the customs office of the keepers of the order.” (Modarelli 2004, 303)
and alliances can be strategic but should also be considered circumstantial. (Bazán 2010, 407)

The economic and political collapse of 2001 dramatically changed the relation between social organizations and the State. Like when one opens a can of worms, the abrupt end of the neoliberal era raised multiple social demands unattended for at least a decade. In this context, the Néstor Kirchner government that started in 2002, and later Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s, built much of their popular support through the incorporation of these demands. Journalist Alejandra Sardá argues much of the defense of social demands has been more discursive and symbolic than structural against discrimination. The creation in 2006 of the Argentinean LGBT Federation (FALGBT) was meant, in this context, to organize LGBT/queer demands in a way compatible to right-based reform within a liberal state. The FALGBT, as the articulation of most LGBT/queer organizations in the country, played an important role in the debate and later approval of same-sex marriage in July 2010 and of the law for gender self assignation in 2012. Nevertheless, as it will be argued in following chapters through the testimony of the interviewees, the creation of organizations like

38. “Satisfy some of the movement's most urgent, or symbolic demands, provided they do not threaten the status quo too deeply (i.e., repealing the laws that shielded the dictators from prosecution, now that they are already in their seventies; distributing contraception in public hospitals; granting monthly subsidies of US$50 to the unemployed). Be silent or ambivalent about how far you are willing to go in supporting controversial issues (i.e., the large number of police officers involved in the dictatorship who are still in active positions of power; abortion; land reform; and the expropriation of factories taken over by workers). Spread a few symbolic gestures here and there, provided they do not risk unwanted consequences (i.e., transforming former concentration camps into museums; giving awards to leaders of the abortion struggle; kissing babies in shantytowns). Be generous with money (i.e., grants for friendly NGOs). Divide and rule. Provide government positions for some of the most prominent leaders—provided they are always under the authority of a career politician and can be easily watched—forcing movements to split between those who are working with the government and those who are not. That will keep them busy.” (Sarda 1998, 41)

39. Some, like CHA, resisted the incorporation into the FALGBT arguing for a more independent position. (Bazán 2010, 450)
FALGBT is described by many as a strategic step in order to communicate demands to the State that precede the foundation of the FALGBT.

Since the approval of the law that allows same-sex marriage, government institutions, tourism agencies and much of the media have worked towards representing Argentina as a panacea for LGBT/queers. For the government, this incorporation works to gain international approval through the defense of Western standards of social development. For the tourism industry, which after the economic collapse of 2001 became more interested than ever in attracting foreign currency, it helps to “show that Argentina is a ‘gay-friendly’ destination, and that, unlike other ‘exotic’ landscapes, here sexual diversity even counts with state approval.” Thus, LGBT/queer activism is evidently linked not only to state politics, but also to international (and Western-led) standards of social development directly. It becomes clear that when discussing LGBT/queer activism as a political field, national and international institutions have a direct and indirect relation to the strategies, goals and success of the movement.

Similar Times, Different Spaces: Trends, Ruptures and Disruption

Before moving to a contemporary analysis of the LGBT/queer movements in these sites, let us shortly recapitulate the content analyzed in this chapter by marking three important tendencies that help to explain the similarities and difference between these sites.
First, this genealogy has shown that in both Buenos Aires and São Paulo LGBT/queer movements have been built through non-uniform temporal waves that correspond to the changes in the political realities of Brazil and Argentina in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as to Western LGBT/queer initiatives. Second, there has been a strong difference in the public forms that sexual politics have taken in both cities. Whereas in São Paulo political initiatives have been focused on reclaiming open public spaces, in Buenos Aires, the LGBT/queer movement was primarily built through the networking of smaller semi-open spaces. Reasons for this difference may be traced to the necessity of LGBT/queers in Buenos Aires to escape the repression of police edicts in the public sphere. And third, it has been possible to identify a discursive connection between sexual deviance and foreignness in both sites, although the channels through which this foreignness has been expressed are different in these cities. While in São Paulo, socio-cultural codes and the process of re-identification with European bourgeois ethics led to sexually deviant individuals being associated with foreignness, in Buenos Aires this process mainly happened through the negation of citizenship rights and duties to sexually deviant individuals. Taking these trends into consideration helps to now move to a consideration of discourses surrounding contemporary LGBT/queer initiatives in these sites.
Chapter 3: West, South, Right, Left & Queer: The Cardinal Points of a Map of Tensions

A movement is the projection of an entity across space and time. Thus, mapping a movement involves not only identifying positionalities and locations, but also directions and intentions. This challenge becomes greater when considering that in this case the project is not to map one, but two movements, and that, as mentioned earlier in this project, LGBT/queer is a particularly uncomfortable and heterogeneous category under which to agglomerate individuals and political initiatives. Taking this into consideration, it is not the intention of this chapter to provide a linear comparison between the sites. Quite the opposite, the main purpose is to leave room for the complex relationship between the specificities of Buenos Aires and São Paulo as ethnographic locations by exploring four narratives that, after analyzing my fieldwork, I identify as central to the discussion of LGBT/queer politics in these cities.

By incorporating the observations made in chapters 1 and 2 regarding US-based queer theory and the genealogical formation of the LGBT/queer movements in my sites, this chapter has three objectives. One of them is to show how trends identified in the genealogy of these movements remain present and characterize each one of these sites, revealing that although they have similar geopolitical positions within the global order, they still hold a high degree of heterogeneity with each other. A second objective of this chapter is to put in evidence how Western political and epistemological understandings of sexual deviance have an impact in how LGBT/queer initiatives are negotiated in these sites. And a third objective is to show how the ethical expectations that arise from the division between
radicalism/subversiveness and normalization/assimilation made by the US-based theorists analyzed in chapter 1 do not respond to the specificities of these sites. Ultimately, this chapter reveals the necessity to challenge and rearticulate understandings of queerness that respond to Western cultural specificities if our goal is to use queer inquiry as a means for liberation, pleasure, non-governability and freedom.

The identification of common narratives intends to provide a methodological approach that respects the specificities of Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo as ethnographic sites, while simultaneously putting in conversation ideas on common concerns, demands and channels of expression. First, I will examine the relation between LGBT/queer initiatives and the State. By presenting perspectives on the role of the State as ally, as agent of coercion, and as interlocutor for demands and political initiatives, I intend to challenge radical/subversive and assimilationist/normalizing positions that may view the potential of the state as being restricted to one of these aspects. Second, I will explore spaces of hypervisibility to analyze the ways in which they work as channels of resistance, communication, expression and/or normalization. I will then argue that the multiple interpretation of these spaces is not sufficiently explained by adopting a framework of analysis that either values or rejects visibility. Third, I will analyze different interpretations and uses of linguistic categories such as LGBT and *queer*. I will discuss the extent to which these categories can be useful, and the extent to which they can be limiting, elitist, and/or neocolonial, as a consequence of the disconnection between the context of production of the signifiers and the contexts in which they are used. Fourth and last, I will examine the opinions of my interviewees regarding projects for legal reform that are currently being
developed or that have been recently approved in order to examine if there are grounds for the reconciliation between these reform projects (so often associated to assimilation and normalization) and radical queer politics.

These four sections intend to tackle key issues in the discussion of LGBT/queer politics, but not to provide cohesive conclusions or evaluations within each site. Instead, this examination attempts to show that heterogeneity might be the only constant in these discussions. Taking this into consideration, the objective of this chapter is not to try to find grounds for the reconciliation of different positions, nor to express preference for some initiatives over others. I argue that there is benefit in analyzing LGBT/queer political initiatives by examining their liberatory potential as is the purpose of US-based queer theory, but at the same time, that maintaining US-based ideas of what constitutes radicalism/subversiveness and assimilation/normalization can be detrimental in this analysis. The objective is thus to use the identified heterogeneity as evidence of the need for a rearticulation of queerness in these postcolonial settings.

A Snapshot of Two Cities

Before embarking on the analysis of the four narratives, I want to acknowledge the ways in which the contrasts in my findings respond to factors of difference in the recollection of data. Although I controlled factors such as time spent in each city, format of interviews and amount of potential interviewees contacted, my experience gathering information depended to a great extent on the differences in the type of internal organization of different associations, the networking among them,
their relation with the public and their familiarity and connection with projects similar to mine.

I arrived to São Paulo early in the morning, three days before the 2012 LGBT Pride parade. As I left the airport and took the bus into the city I was surprised to see that the impact of the parade in public spaces was seemingly nonexistent. Although the LGBT Pride parade is the single event that produces most revenues every year (Butterman 2012, 30), there was no publicity next to roads, no public welcoming in the airport and no targeted tourist information, such as other events like the São Paulo F-1 Grand Prix or Fashion Week receive. Nonetheless, that weekend São Paulo would host over a million tourists and launch, once again, the day-long celebration that seems to temporarily reverse all statistics related to violence and discrimination that surround LGBT/queer groups in Brazil the other 364 days of the year. The festive nature of the parade transforms São Paulo into a massive social hub, but it is also what makes many think of this event as a trivial catalyst for the carnivalization of a political movement. (Butterman 2012, 65) Indeed, few flags with political slogans would march down Avenida Paulista that Sunday, no big drums or chants would prevail, and instead plenty of costumes, balloons and pop music trucks would boost people’s participation.

As I walked down the Avenida Paulista to a techno version of the Brazilian anthem that evidenced the constant tension between the local and the globalized, I could spot the slogan of the parade in most buildings and trucks: “Homophobia has a cure: education and criminalization.” Accustomed as I have become to pay attention to the intersectionality of types of oppression, it was puzzling to me to see the incorporation of criminalization as a LGBT/queer demand. Projects that are usually
commonplace among reformist LGBT/queer movements, such as same-sex marriage and property-related benefits, were presented as secondary. Criminalization of homophobia was discursively framed as a means to reach protection and safety for LGBT/queers. But what is the potential of a tool of institutional coercion that has historically targeted LGBT/queer individuals (and other minorities) being used in a reverse direction against normative discrimination? This question would stick with me, but it was far from being the main concern among the participants of the parade. The trucks moved through the blocks of Av. Paulista and headed to Largo do Arouche, where the party would continue for some more hours. The next day, São Paulo would come back to its naturally gray tones, suggesting that in this metropole, rainbows are shiny but fleeting.

Buenos Aires does not host a yearly 4-million people party, but it only requires a quick google search or visit to a tourist information spot to see some of the spaces and activities that constitute its gay-friendly personality. At first sight, one can find clubs, bars, queer tango, male gay-only hostels and other spaces in the LGBT/queer agenda. Digging a little deeper, it is possible to also find queer multi-purpose spaces like Casa Brandon and SIGLAS, which are permanently launching initiatives that range from public queer theory study groups to movie screenings and panel discussions. The University of Buenos Aires’ inclusion of a Queer Studies department in 2005 also shows that LGBT/queer presence has entered many different dimensions of social life and gained, for better or for worse, much institutional legitimation. The predominance of this type of spaces, which are semi-public and meant to gather small amounts of people at a time, contrasted highly with the
prevalence of open massive spaces in São Paulo. This shows a continuation with one of the trends identified in chapter 3, which found roots of LGBT/queer initiatives in Buenos Aires in underground ‘whiskey shops’ and bars in order to avoid the gaze of the police and its questionable edicts. In contrast, the roots of the São Paulo movement were linked to the public sphere, first through the creation of media, and later through demonstrations and parades.

The differences between my sites became more evident after I conducted my first interview in Buenos Aires. I arrived to this city only weeks after the new cutting-edge law for gender self-identification was promulgated, guaranteeing State financial and juridical support for transitioning individuals without requiring the clinical examination and diagnosis of gender dysphoria\(^{41}\) that is necessary in countries with similar laws.\(^{42}\) My interview with Rosa, a long-term member of the Argentinean Transgender, Transexual and Travesti Association (ATTTA), showed that at least some sectors of the LGBT/queer movement were highly satisfied with the approval of this law in particular and with the relationship between LGBT/queer associations and the current government in general. Rosa did not need to hear much about my project before asking me to come to her office that same day at 6 pm, when she combined my interview with two others in the interest of time. It became clear that the type of articulation among some activist organizations, academia, the media and the government was set up like a well-oiled machine. Rosa was clearly used to giving

\(^{41}\) Diagnosis of gender dysphoria is currently performed through the use of the Gender Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire developed by Deogracias et al. in 2007, which is “aimed to provide further validity evidence for the dimensional measurement of gender identity and gender dysphoria in both adolescents and adults” (Singh et al. 2010, 49)

\(^{42}\) Spain was often mentioned by the interviewees as a case for comparison because of State laws that guarantee state assistance to transsexual Spanish citizens and residents, although they are based and increasingly depend on the diagnosis of gender dysphoria for their applicability. (Gómez-Gil et al. 2009, 378)
interviews, and realized quickly where our interests lied. In a matter of ten minutes she had gone from explaining the struggles of prostitution as a transsexual woman in the 1980s, to showing us a picture of her with Cristina and Néstor Kirchner, describing Néstor’s endearing character and remembering her sadness after his death.

The fact that a member of a transexual/transgender/travesti association can speak of a good personal relationship with ex and current presidents (a relationship that was forged thanks to her position within the association and the LGBT/queer movement) speaks to a level of articulation and institutionalization of the LGBT/queer movement in relation with the government different than the one in São Paulo. These two initial scenarios would show me that these political initiatives differ in numerous aspects, and that there are social forms that escape expected channels of expression and communication in both sites.

New Left and Female Leaders: Radical Views in Traditional Politics?

Since January 1, 2011, day when Dilma Rousseff took office in Brazil, both Brazil and Argentina have been governed by self-identified leftist female presidents. For many, this is an exciting time for social change, as terms such as “social justice”, “redistribution” “defense of minorities” and “social inclusion” are being included in institutional discourse. However, to think that a strong relationship between LGBT/queer groups and these governments would arise from the fact that both leaders belong to a gender minority might be slipping into a quick essentialist assumption. Likewise, to assume that effective governmental responses to LGBT/queer demands would arise from these governments being part of the New Left would mean to ignore the ways in which LGBT/queer political initiatives have
been historically distinct (and often confronting of) the traditional Left. Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration the ways in which these governments are discursively compatible with LGBT/queer demands in order to examine the different roles that the State can have in the pursuit for liberation, pleasure, freedom and non-governance.

First, there seems to be a theoretical political affinity between LGBT/queer demands and the discourse of social justice upon which the New Left is arguably built. Much of the discourse of New Left governments is built upon the response to popular demands that have been neglected under neoliberal regimes. In this sense, Fernández de Kirchner’s response to indigenous groups’ demands for land and property protection,\(^{43}\) expansion of the welfare state through multiple Conditional and Semi-conditional Cash Transfers\(^{44}\) and the nationalization of multiple companies\(^{45}\) all enter a framework of inclusion of minorities, being defined in terms of ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status. Dilma Rousseff’s government has continued the social programs initiated during Lula da Silva’s term, focused on Conditional Cash Transfers such as Bolsa Familia and Bolsa Escola,\(^{46}\) following the same principle of

\(^{43}\) Such as the promulgation of the Law 25517 for the restitution of indigenous remains to indigenous communities (Coordinadora de Comunicación Audiovisual Indígena Argentina 2013), the judicial protection of sacred Mapuche land in San Martín de los Andes, Neuquén (Coordinadora de Comunicación Audiovisual Indígena Argentina 2013), and the Law 26.522 for corporate disinvestment of media channels and recognition of the “rights for communication of indigenous peoples.” (Coordinadora de Comunicación Audiovisual Indígena Argentina 2010)

\(^{44}\) For example the Asignación Universal por Hijo, Plan Familia and Plan Trabajar, which provide economic support for individuals under the line of poverty through the family unit and institutions such as schools, municipalities and hospitals, while at the same time incorporating requirements such as children vaccination and school attendance. The impact of these policies has proved beneficial in lowering the amount of people under the line of poverty and improving life conditions rates. (The Guardian, 2011)

\(^{45}\) Such as the nationalization of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Federales (YPF) (La Nación 2012), the nationalization of the previously private system of retirement funds (El Mundo 2008) and promulgation of the Law 26.522 for corporate disinvestment in media (Coordinadora de Comunicación Audiovisual Indígena Argentina 2010)

\(^{46}\) “The Bolsa Familia Programme, which is part of the Zero Hunger strategy, is a programme of direct income conditional transfer that benefits families living in poverty (with an income per capita between
inclusion of historically neglected social sectors. Thus, it is clear that both
governments have taken some measures towards redistribution and social welfare.

Nevertheless, this seemingly similar characteristics and political views were met
with highly differentiated reactions of LGBT/queer groups towards the governments.
This became evident when observing the data obtained through my interviews.
Whereas responses towards Fernández de Kirchner’s government were in general
positive, Rousseff has become a widely rejected political figure for this
LGBT/queers. When participants were asked whether they thought the current
government had contributed to the demands of LGBT/queer organizations, responses
were unanimous. All participants in São Paulo were fast in answering that Dilma
Rousseff’s government had been detrimental to LGBT/queer activism, while every
interviewee in Buenos Aires (including members of different parties and political
affiliations) stated that Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s term had been a period of
great advance for LGBT/queer activism.

Another piece of evidence of this differentiated response is the fact that
Rousseff won the 2012 “Greasy Pole Trophy” (Troféu Pau de Sebo) to a “great
enemy of the LGBT cause”, after vetoing an anti-homophobia educational plan for
high schools. (Fernandes 2012) In contrast, in Buenos Aires, the official sanction of
the same-sex marriage law of 2010 became a gift-giving ceremony where numerous
LGBT/queer associations gave tokens of appreciation to Cristina Fernández de
Kirchner. (Visión Siete 2010) What this differentiated response towards both

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47 The Pau de Sebo prize is a yearly initiative of the Grupo Gay da Bahia (GGB) that started
in 1980, and never before had a Brazilian president been nominated for the prize. Dilma
Rousseff was criticized for the “lack of public policy projects for LGBTs” and “vetoing the anti-
homophobia kit for schools.” (Fernandes 2012)
presidents initially shows is that although the foundations of both governments are discursively compatible, their relation with LGBT/queer groups depends on the particular attention paid to their articulated demands. Underneath the demystification of this assumption, there is the suggestion that LGBT/queer activist groups maintain a sense of independence and evaluation of political parties beyond their discursive platform. Further, it is possible to relate this independence to the process of separation between LGBT/queer demands and the Left explained in chapter 2, despite a theoretical commonality in the goal of inclusion of minorities.

Two particular testimonies illustrate the tension between LGBT/queer initiatives and political parties. One of them is Bia’s, a 42-year old lesbian who was affiliated to the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista do Brasil, or PCdoB) for a total of ten years, and who attributes her disassociation from the Party to the lack of consideration of gender and LGBT/queer issues, as well as the centralization of power in decision-making processes. When I tried to ask Bia about a greater sympathy between LGBT/queer initiatives and the Left, she gave me a categorical response against the assumption that Leftist political parties worked outside of the generalized patriarchal political framework.

“[What happens in the PCdoB] is a reproduction of what happens everywhere (...). Masculine domination happens everywhere, why wouldn’t it happen in the Communist Party, or even in the LGBT movement? (...) I was affiliated to the PCdoB for ten years, and there, decisions were also centralized. We used to talk about democratic centralism, meaning that decisions were taken at the base, then went up [to the representatives] and would later come back to us. But that didn’t happen, in actuality decisions came from the top (...) and all the positions of greater power were occupied by men, who of course were heterosexual.”

48 “[O que acontece no PCdoB] é uma reprodução do que sucede em todas as esferas da vida. A dominação masculina está por todas partes. (...) Eu fui afiliada com o Partido Comunista por dez anos, e lá também as decisões eram decisões centralizadas. A gente falava de centralismo democratico
The main idea articulated in Bia’s testimony is that because patriarchy invades all spheres of political life, the separation of LGBT/queer demands and the Left is as logical as its separation from other political parties. Although the ideological foundations of the PCdoB may be compatible with some of the interests of sexuality and gender minorities because of common discursive interests in freedom, their limitation lies on the disconnection between heteronormativity and capitalism. This testimony therefore shows that unconformity with traditional channels of representation is not only related to the ideological pillars upon which a given party is built, but also to the methodology and logistical development of its internal structure. The fact that Bia associated hierarchy in decision making with masculine domination shows that the interests of some LGBT/queer initiatives are not limited to projects that directly target sexual minorities, but rather challenge structures of dominance in a wider sense, and demand a rearticulation of channels of participation for the effective satisfaction of LGBT/queer demands.

A second telling testimony is that of Fernando, a 27 year-old homosexual man who has been a highly active member of the Socialist Party in Buenos Aires for 9 years, and who explained the tension produced by the constant interaction with the government and the sense of independence of LGBT/queer initiatives. I interviewed Fernando in an office of the Socialist Party, and got in contact with him through this channel as well. This close association to the Socialist Party, however, did not turn the testimony of this interviewee into a defense of this particular Party in the scene of porque as decisões eram tomadas na base, iam para a cima e voltavam para a base, mas não era assim. As decisões viam de cima. (...) e as posições de poder eram dos homens, que claro, eram heterossexuais.” (Bia, interview)
LGBT/queer politics. In fact, although part of Fernando’s testimony consisted on highlighting the work of non-ruling political parties (such as the PS), he was mainly interested in acknowledging a division between LGBT/queer activism and political parties in general:

“I don’t attribute [the success of recent legal reforms] to the government, but to our constant militancy. Of course that the government’s collaboration helps, but we can’t invisibilize the over 15 years of work behind recent reforms. If it had been for the government alone, we wouldn’t have achieved anything. If it had been for the Left alone we wouldn’t have either. It was our militancy and transversal activism what generated change.”

It is telling that even a highly active member of the political party that took the project of same-sex marriage to the Chamber of Deputies makes a point to distinguish LGBT/queer demands from the agenda of any particular party. Instead of entering on a discussion regarding the roles of each party, or a defense of the Socialist Party over others, Fernando called for the further delineation of a LGBT/queer movement independent from these institutions. He points out that Mauricio Macri, who is the Head of Government of the City of Buenos Aires for the right-wing party PRO (which oscillates between liberal and national conservatism) “publicly supported same-sex marriage before Cristina [Fernández de Kirchner] did. (...) Both Macri and Cristina check statistics before expressing opinions on projects like this one.”

(Fernando, interview) In other words, there is no ideological base that pre-determines the position of a given party towards LGBT/queer issues.

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49 “Yo no le asigno [el éxito de las reformas] al gobierno, sino a la militancia constante. Claro que la colaboración del gobierno sirve, pero no se pueden invisibilizar los más de 15 años de trabajo detrás de las reformas recientes. Si hubiese sido por el gobierno, no lográbamos nada. Si hubiera sido por la izquierda tampoco. Fue la militancia y su activismo transversal lo que generó el cambio.”-Fernando
As demonstrated by Bia’s and Fernando’s testimonies, there are members of the LGBT/queer movements in both cities who are conscious and explicit in the particularity of their demands and the delineation of their initiatives. At the same time, when asked whether they thought that communication with the government was necessary in the pursuit of a satisfactory LGBT/queer movement, almost all participants in both cities, with only one exception answered yes. This means that although there is a defense of the independence of the LGBT/queer movements, there is also a general tendency against total separatism from traditional channels of political participation.

If the logic of the US-based queer theorists analyzed in chapter 1 was satisfactory to explain this political scenario, we would need to identify a separation between assimilationism/normalization and radicalism/subversiveness. This means that we would either need to identify a complete engagement of the participants with political institutions that aim to incorporate LGBT/queer demands at least

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50 “Macri salió antes que Cristina a apoyar el matrimonio igualitario. (...) Tanto Macri como Cristina se fijan en las estadísticas antes de pronunciarse al respecto de una propuesta como ésta.” (Fernando, interview)

51 The only exception was Lucía, whose trotskyist perspective was built aside from the State as a desirable institution, and therefore proposed communitarian alternatives rather than focusing on public policy. Nevertheless, she did categorize same-sex marriage as a ‘help’ from the State, which means that her criticism towards LGBT/queer policies is not focused on the specific communication between LGBT/queer groups and the State. Her statement explained:

51 “Sí, es que yo no creo en el Estado. (...) La ley de matrimonio igualitario fue una ayuda del Estado, pero nosotros podríamos haber logrado lo mismo, quizás en más tiempo. Me parece que las cosas se cambian de otra forma, haciendo charlas, visibilizándonos en las plazas. Para mí el mostrarse da poder, te ayuda a estar en medio de la sociedad y decir ‘soy lesbiana y soy maestra’, ‘soy lesbiana y te atiendo el
discursively, or alternatively, identify a complete rejection of the relation between LGBT/queer initiatives and traditional channels of political activity. As revealed by the combination of Bia’s and Fernando’s testimony, which expressed hesitation towards political party representations of the LGBT/queer movements, with the overwhelmingly clear tendency to maintain a relation with the state, the division between radicalism and assimilation as presented in Chapter 1 becomes insufficient to explain the relationship between LGBT/queer initiatives and traditional political channels in these sites.

In this sense, anxieties over possibilities of co-optation, invisibilization and assimilation of LGBT/queer initiatives in the texts of US-based authors such as Michael Warner, Leo Bersani and José Muñoz, (thinking particularly about notions of normalization, de-gaying gayness and gay pragmatism) label any interaction of LGBT/queer organizations with State institutions as assimilationist. Following this logic, the strong inclination towards maintaining a relation with the State revealed in my interviews would be explained through claiming that these interviewees are immersed in a state of false consciousness. In other words, there is no way out within this logic for LGBT/queer groups to escape the label of assimilation once they engage with institutionalized channels of political participation because any claim of agency can be dismissed by arguing that these LGBT/queer initiatives are unaware of the ways in which their participation in the structure is related to their very oppression. However, as explained in chapter 1, the diagnosis of false consciousness requires that the observer claims a position of greater understanding of a given situation. Given that one of the objectives of this project is to leave aside a Western-centric
epistemological lens, I argue that the agency of these activists needs to be acknowledged by understanding their political views as being rooted on the specificities of their experiences.

By maintaining a constant relation with political parties and State institutions, while simultaneously claiming independence from all of them, the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo destabilize and push traditional channels of political expression in order to respond to their demands. When these demands are satisfied, like in the case of the gender self-assignation law in Argentina, it is after a restructuring of political and administrative channels impulsed by the LGBT/queer movement. When these demands are not satisfied, as in the case of the anti-homophobia educational kit vetoed in 2012 in Brazil, the unsatisfactory working mechanism of the hegemonic channels of political control becomes evident for the LGBT/queer movement. This shows that LGBT/queer groups can be at the center of these negotiations, and not only at the edge as passive receptors of hegemonic control. In this sense, in the cases where LGBT/queer political groups seem to maintain a sense of independence from political institutions, the use of traditional political channels may enable a greater level of freedom and pleasure of sexualized experiences, as long as conditionalities are not part of institutional concessions.

It is important to clarify that this argument is not meant to dismiss critiques that may point out the ways in which interactions with institutions can indeed have assimilationist effects on LGBT/queer groups and individuals. Instead of denying this, my intention is to show that agency should not be only attributed to hegemonic structures, and therefore the possibility for LGBT/queer political initiatives to use

cambien la vida cotidiana de la gente.” (Lucia, entrevista)
traditional political channels with autonomy should be taken into consideration in a theoretical framework that examines sexual politics critically.

Let us now consider the second assumption of compatibility between current governments and LGBT/queer political initiatives, which was related to the presentation of both presidents as leaders interested in social inclusion and members of a gender minority. Aside from both presidents being women, they also share the fact that speculations abound about both of them having belonged to subversive groups during Brazil’s and Argentina’s last dictatorships, and that neither of them is currently married. These commonalities are more than anecdotal when taking into consideration the presentation of the figure of a leader as a factor in the relation between the State and the civil society. Evaluating the relation between State and LGBT/queer organizations by only observing their relation with institutions would be to use a traditionally liberal lens and ignore a history of personalistic leadership in both countries, particularly within the Peronist and Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) traditions. Thus, the question of whether it matters for LGBT/queer groups to have non-married women with a background in radical politics in the presidency is more than an expectation of identitarian or essentialist solidarity. Instead, this question arises from the premise that both presidents belong to a political tradition of charismatic leadership, and therefore, the presentation of their character reflects intentions and effects of their political projects.

Nevertheless, despite the logic that defends this argument, my interviews would show that the participants had very different opinions on the role of identity categories in relation to the presidency. While many simply stated that they did not
consider identity to be a significant factor for the relation between LGBT/queer groups and the government, some elaborated their reasons to take this position, while a few identified a connection between this factor and the relation of the government with LGBT/queer groups.

For Bia, for example, “Dilma being a woman does not influence the way in which she interacts with discriminated groups because in order to be the president, she needs to leave her femininity aside.”

This testimony does not only put in evidence the theoretical incompatibility between leadership and femininity, but also reveals the analytical, suspicious eye of many of my interviewees, who quickly disassociate rhetorical discourse from concrete behaviors or material reality. In this sense, being a woman becomes a transitory fact, not a fixed category, and when put in a position of authority, the individual, in this case Dilma, needs to negotiate roles that can be contradictory. In other words, no one argued for the disassociation of Dilma’s figure from womanhood, but there are multiple interpretations for what this womanhood implies. These multiple interpretations do not necessarily arise from the intention of LGBT/queer of individuals to redefine womanhood, but rather from the mistrust between what is being stated and what is being performed.

This mistrust becomes more articulated in Lucía’s testimony. When I asked Lucía whether she considered Cristina’s womanhood to be a factor in the relation with LGBT/queer groups, she said

“I think it is, but I think it is not something conscious. Maybe it has to do with the fact that the LGBT collective has a ‘socialist’ tendency, meaning that because it is a group that has always been discriminated against, belittled, minoritarian, it tends to support other groups that are

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52 “O fato da Dilma ser mulher não influencia o jeito que ela trata com grupos discriminados, minoritários porque para ser presidenta, ela precisa deixar a sua feminidade de lado.” (Bia, interview)
also minorities, and that’s where the ‘socialist’ tendency arises, not from an affiliation to political parties. And Cristina, being a woman, also belongs to a historically belittled group. (...) Nevertheless, I don’t think of Cristina as a feminist woman. Saying todos y todas doesn’t turn you into a feminist. Pronouncing yourself against abortion, (...) being super close with the Catholic Church... that’s making an effort to show that kind of affinities, which make me not think of her as a feminist.”

This testimony challenges possible associations between womanhood and feminism, as well as womanhood and receptiveness, inclusion and acceptance. These associations, which could arise from essentialist expectations of solidarity and behavior and from discursive claims of defense of minorities, are met by the critical eyes of LGBT/queer activists, who examine performed behavior over identity categories. Moreover, even those interviewees for whom womanhood was identified as a factor in the relation with LGBT/queer groups followed the reasoning process of evaluating the performance of womanhood in articulation with a position of authority, instead of ascribing characteristics to the leader as a consequence of essentialist identity categories. In this sense, according to João,

“We have an idea of the role of women in society, [but] nowadays, with a female president, a person who has never studied our movement, maybe doesn’t even know how to read, knows about the importance of a woman in the presidency. So I do think that the fact that Dilma is a woman has an influence on people’s minds. (...) I think the difference this makes is significant. For the [LGBT/queer]

53 It has become a common rhetorical practice in Fernández de Kirchner’s speeches to use both gendered forms of nouns and adjectives in Spanish, as a sign of the inclusion of women in the national project. Todos y todas means everyone and everyone, in both masculine and feminine gendered forms of the noun.
54 “Creo que sí, pero creo que no es consciente. A lo mejor tiene que ver con esta cuestión de que el colectivo LGBT tiene una tendencia ‘socialista’, y al ser un grupo que ha sido siempre discriminado, menospreciado, minoritario, tiende a apoyar a otros grupos también minoritarios, y de ahí nace la tendencia socialista, no de una cuestión partidaria. Y Cristina, al ser mujer, también pertenece a un grupo menospreciado históricamente. (...) Igual, yo no la veo a Cristina como una mujer feminista. (...) Decir todos y todas no te hace feminista. Estar en contra del aborto (...), seguir codo a codo con la Iglesia Católica, hacer esfuerzo para mostrar esas afinidades hacen que yo no la vea como feminista.” (Lucía, interview)
movement in particular, if the homosexual is considered feminine by society, this is directly related. (...) Also, when Dilma was running for the presidency, people started saying ‘Dilma, admit you are homosexual’, and it never became clear whether she is or not. (...) That could be because she is taking masculine roles (...) but personally, I do think she’s a lesbian. Coincidentally, the Mayor of São Paulo is gay. He doesn’t admit it, but everyone knows that.”55

The speculation in João’s testimony is again, more than anecdotal. His tone when explaining popular opinions on the sexual orientations of political representatives was far from excited or amused. Instead, he sounded detached and unsurprised, which reveals that he did not assume solidarity from these authority figures even following the premise that they would share identity categories. In other words, it seems that even operating upon the assumption that Dilma could be a lesbian, the degree of empathy towards the figure of the leader remains highly attached to their performance. In this sense, the reasoning of these LGBT/queer activists could be seen as compatible with a queer theoretical approach insofar as the judgement of political figures refers to performativity much more closely than to identity politics. The insatisfaction showed towards Dilma Rousseff can be linked to her concrete political decisions, and not to the identity categories she can be linked to.

Beyond the question of whether ‘female presidents make a difference’ in the the government’s relation with LGBT/queer groups or not, I am interested in the fact that there is a framework of LGBT/queer interaction that is compatible with queerness in these sites. The simultaneous appreciation and critique of the performance of the

55 "A gente têm uma ideia do papel da mulher na sociedade mas hoje, quando você tem uma presidente, uma pessoa que nunca estudou sobre o movimento, talvez nem saiba ler, sabe da importância de ter uma mulher na presidencia. Então eu acho que sim influencia na cabeça da população o fato da Dilma ser uma mulher. (...) Eu acho que a diferença que ela faz é significativa. Para o movimento em particular, se o homosexual é considerado feminino pela sociedade, diretamente essa questão se relaciona. (...) É quando ela foi correr pela presidencia, as pessoas disseram ‘Dilma, assume que você é homosexual’, e nunca ficou claro se ela é ou não. (...) Pode que isso seja porque ela está ocupando papeis masculinos (...), mas em particular eu acredito que ela é lésbica."
presidents challenge both radical/subversive and assimilationist/normalizing assumptions. The hesitation and mistrust of LGBT/queer groups towards these authority figures should not be interpreted as a disregard of their symbolic relevance, but as an exercise of independence from institutional attempts to reduce LGBT/queer demands to essentialist identity categories, and as a dissection of political rhetoric from practice. Identifying LGBT/queer agency and an independent reasoning process in the relation between LGBT/queer activists with the State opens possibilities (or at least invites to question the existence of possibilities) for an idea of queerness that could interact with the State without being object of State dominance and governability.

2. Spaces of Hypervisibility: We Are Here, Are We Queer?

There are three questions that give shape to this section. First, what are some of the uses of public LGBT/queer spaces in Buenos Aires and São Paulo? Second, to what extent is the creation of these spaces based on demands for commodity consumption, for network creation, or for the “positive” representation of sexual minorities? And consequently, is there a type of use that is better perceived by the LGBT/queer activists interviewed, and if so, what is the reasoning behind this preference?

I use the term “spaces of hypervisibility” to make reference to spaces that are specifically designed for the public gathering and perceptibility of LGBT/queers. Probably the most clear example in my fieldwork is the São Paulo LGBT Pride Parade, although there is a list of other spaces that fit into this category. Among those
I visited or attended in São Paulo are the Diversity Fair in the Vale do Anhangabaú, the Frei Caneca Shopping Mall (specifically targeted to a homosexual male public), a demonstration for LGBT rights led by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the LGBT Museum in the República Metro Station, an LGBT “Sports Day”, and LGBT bars in the Largo do Arouche area. In Buenos Aires, the spaces of hypervisibility I visited were Casa Brandon (self-titled “A very queer space”), Queer Tango classes, public meetings of La Fulana (lesbian organization), Otras Letras LGBTI bookstore, Queer Studies Space in the Rojas Cultural Center, offices of the Argentinean Transexual, Transgender and Travesti Association (ATTTA) and Argentinean Homosexual Community (CHA).

Although these spaces have the common characteristics of being open to the public and being targeted to an LGBT/queer population, they vary widely in size, degree to which they are known, permanence and recurrence of participants. From a first glance it is possible to notice a general trend for massive open spaces in São Paulo, and a contrasting tendency for smaller semi-open -yet public- LGBT/queer spaces in Buenos Aires. Taking this into consideration, the analysis of their significance for expression, consumption and representation needs to be complicated in order to respect their heterogeneity. With the purpose of acknowledging the limitations of my fieldwork, and without the intention of evaluating particular spaces in a spectrum of radicalism and assimilation, the purpose of this section shall be not to analyze the specific characteristics of each space, but rather to identify the desires and anxieties regarding these spaces as expressed by the interviewees and participants. In this sense, my objective is to theorize about discourses surrounding
spaces of hypervisibility in order to examine value judgments of creators and participants.

When discussing spaces of hypervisibility in São Paulo, it is necessary to consider the LGBT Pride Parade as central and highly symbolic for a series of reasons. First, the size of this parade is not comparable to any other LGBT/queer event in my sites. Second, the parade has received not only great attention from the media for being the largest Pride Parade in the world, but also academic attention from scholars in different disciplines. Third, the same way that LGBT/queer associations in Buenos Aires are linked through the Argentinean LGBT Federation (FALGBT), LGBT/queer groups in São Paulo communicate among each other through the LGBT Pride Parade Association (APOLGBT). This organizational structure, aside from showing once again that LGBT/queer activism is more closely linked to open spaces in São Paulo than in Buenos Aires, shows why a discussion about hypervisibility needs to be centered around the LGBT Pride Parade, which beyond being an event, has become a characterizing feature of the LGBT/queer movement on a regular basis.

Surrounding the parade is the popularized opinion that the parade used to be political but now it is commercial. Most interviewees mentioned this by making a connection between its “commercialization” with its great popularity and the addition of “foreign” cultural elements, such as American electro-pop music and party trucks. Rafael and Lucas, a couple of homosexual men that has lived in São Paulo for the last 25 years, explain:

“In the beginning, the parade was much smaller, but it was for us. We used to go there and there were, I don’t know, a thousand, maybe two thousand people, so it was possible to meet up with people we knew. We used to chat around, discuss the political scenario, and of course,
we drank and had fun as well. But now it’s not possible to enjoy it anymore. Now it’s just a big party that is not even for us. It’s for the outsiders, who come that weekend and dress up and make noise.”

Bia adds:
“I don’t go [to the parade] anymore. In my first years in this city it was still possible to go, but now there are too many people and it has no political purpose. (...) [Some years ago] I went to some meetings for women of the association [APOLGBT], and I saw a lot of fighting (...), a lot of divergence, a lot of ego.”

This suggests that the inconformity with the parade is highly related to its size. However, size is not only seen as an inconvenient factor for communication, but also as a cause of the parade’s lack of response to local demands for a common space for LGBT/queers. Rogélio expressed this directly by saying: “the [LGBT/queer] people who are really from here, don’t go to the parade. That’s for outsiders.” In other words, interviewees seemed bothered by the size of the parade because it evidenced that the targeted audience was not them, but a foreign tourist public.

Steven Butterman, author of (In)visible Visibilities: Media Representations of the Largest Pride Parade in the World, discusses the carnivalization of the parade as a process that has differentiated its evolution from the first five years of its realization toward more recent editions. Carnivalization can be understood as the process through which the parade distanced itself from expressions that more closely resembled traditional political demonstrations, through the incorporation of certain

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56 “No começo, a parada era bem mais pequena, mas era para a gente. A gente ia lá, e tinha, sei lá, uns mil, talvez dois mil pessoas, e dava para encontrar pessoal que a gente conhecesse. A gente falava, discutia da situação política, e claro, também bebia, curtia. Agora não dá mais para curtir. Agora é só uma festa que nem é pra nós. É para o pessoal de fora, que vem nesse final de semana, e faz barulho com fantasias. É uma coisa louca.” (Rafael and Lucas, interview)

57 “Eu não vou mais. Nos primeiros anos que estava aqui, ainda dava para ir, mas agora eu muda gente, e ja náo tem proposição politico. (...) Eu fui numas reuniões de mulheres da associacão [APOLBGT] e vi muita briga (...), muita divergência, muito ego.” (Bia, interview)

58 “O pessoal que é realmente daqui não vai para a parada. Isso é só para o pessoal de fora.” (Rogélio, interview)
('modernizing’ and ‘ludic’) elements and the removal of others (Butterman 2012, 12; 42). In this sense, Butterman notes that the increasing addition of music trucks was accompanied by the abandonment of flags with slogans, and that costumes became more popular at the same time than alcohol and drugs consumption. (Butterman 2012, 124; 143) But although Butterman identifies this as a “controversial debate about the extent to which the LGBT Pride Parade could be considered an immense carnaval-like party instead of a call to militant political action”59, I argue that this is an unnecessary binary distinction. Going back to an argument made in chapter 2, evaluating practices in terms of their political value is necessarily normative because any evaluation needs a standardized system that gives preference to certain channels of expression over others. In other words, the fact that the parade may not work as “a call to militant political action” does not necessarily mean that this space is being assimilated into a hegemonic capitalist practice. In fact, one could argue that the three to four million people who make their way to the Avenida Paulista that day are making use of a State-sponsored space for their own pleasure. An alternative angle of analysis to the assimilationist versus radical framework would imply the appreciation of the passivity, yet exercised agency, of the participants of this “immense carnaval-like party.” Thus, the critique of the parade not being political could be rearticulated into the observation that the parade seems to work as a space of expression outside of traditional political channels.

Taking this into consideration, there is yet another element in the anxiety of the interviewees about the parade not responding to local LGBT/queer groups and individuals. This same anxiety was part of Mariana’s testimony in Buenos Aires.

59 “O debate controverso sobre o nível em que a Parada do Orgulho LGBT poderia ser considerada
Mariana, a 22 year-old bisexual woman explained, when making reference to the Queer Tango space, that

“It’s cool, the idea of queer tango is cool, but you go there and they are all foreigners. They usually teach the class in English, or at most, bilingual. And what does that say? That it is not our space. (...) And if you think about it, a lot of ‘straight’ tango spaces are also for foreigners, so I guess it makes sense that the same thing happens... It looks like yanquis like tango [laughter].”

The common element in the critiques of these spaces comes from an unmet desire that spaces of hypervisibility respond to local LGBT/queer demands, at least before responding to the demands of outsiders. Here it becomes necessary to bring to the table the discussion of hybridity between centrality and periphery within my sites. Spaces of hypervisibility accentuate contrasts and tendencies. Thus, while these spaces often serve as major points for the connection and communication of LGBT/queer groups and individuals, they are also highly permeable to foreign influences. In recent years, both São Paulo and Buenos Aires have been profiled as gay-friendly tourist destinations, and this has led to the observation and response, by the creators/organizers of spaces of hypervisibility, to foreign -and mostly Western- demands of what a gay-friendly or queer-friendly space is.

In this sense, it was very telling that in my visit to the LGBT fair in the Vale do Anhangabaú in São Paulo, two days before the LGBT Pride Parade, I asked a definitely unamused saleswoman if she was excited about the upcoming parade, and her answer was serious and categorical: “I’m not going. I’m here working only. That uma imensa festa carnavalesca em vez de um chamado à ação política...” (Buttermán, 141)

60 . “No, está bueno. La idea de tango queer está buena. Pasa que vos vas allá y son todos extranjeros. Si la mayoría de las veces dan la clase en inglés, o a lo máximo, bilingüé. ¿Y qué te dice eso? Que ese espacio no es nuestro. (...) Pero bueno, si te pones a pensar, hay muchos espacios de tango ‘straight’ que también son para extranjeros, así que supongo que tiene sentido que se repita lo mismo. Debe ser que a los yanquis les gusta el tango [risas].” (Mariana, interview)
bracelet is 4 reais.” Her attitude was decidedly hostile towards the expressions of sexual deviance around her, while at the same time she maintained a commercial interest in LGBT/queers as consumers of rainbow bracelets. Within seconds of leaving that stand, I lifted my head to the stage, where a drag queen’s performance of Caetano Veloso’s *Sampa* had been interrupted mid-song by the police as a consequence of a big fight in the middle of the audience. As the performer would explain minutes later, “it was just some dudes who don’t like us and don’t think it’s cool that we have a party.” What both of these micro scenarios within the LGBT fair have in common is to show that while one intention of spaces of hypervisibility might be to be used as tools to show social inclusion and as safe spaces for LGBT/queers, behind this presentation, the recreational and consumption uses are threatened by the unsatisfactory delineation and sense of ownership of these spaces as LGBT/queer.

Thus, while the critique of ‘lack of political value’ can be rearticulated by changing the framework of analysis, the second part of this critique, which is focused on the lack of response to local LGBT/queer demands needs to be considered taking into account the potential for the subjugation of these spaces of hypervisibility to global relations of dominance. This shows that in order to effectively analyze the ways in which spaces of hypervisibility work in these sites it is necessary to incorporate a postcolonial theoretical framework in order to put in conversation discussion of power dynamics in relation to sexuality and global structures.

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62. “Foram uns carinhas que não gostam da gente e não acham legal que a gente faça essa festa aqui.” (performer, unrecorded declaration)
3. Queerness: The Paradox of Imperialist Liberation

When Lucía asked “What the fuck is queer?” I realized that the question of linguistic categories could not go unattended in an analysis of the power dynamics surrounding LGBT/queer movements. Although everything in her testimony suggested compatibility with the liberatory goals of queerness and queer theory, her critique was based on a sense of alienation from this linguistic signifier. And thus, the question arises: is a signifier that alienates its subject still effective in its use? Can queer still be queer in the context of my sites, or does it become hegemonic for representing a Western object in a non-Western context? Considering the highly differentiated reactions and uses that I observed in my fieldwork, it is not my intention to give a single response to this question, but rather to use it as a guide for the exploration of different argumentative positions. Further, I intend to expand the discussion surrounding the particular use of queer into a wider examination of the use of other signifiers and of epistemological.

The level of popularity of the term queer was without a doubt one of the characteristics that most starkly differentiated my sites. While in Buenos Aires there are multiple spaces that incorporate this term in their name, only three of the participants interviewed in São Paulo were familiar with the word, and all of them dismissed its role in the process of shaping spaces and organizations within the wider movement in this city. Reasons for this stark difference between the sites were hypothesized by some of my interviewees. Rogélio, for example, related the familiarity with the word to social class and cultural capital. “Those people don’t know what queer is. (...) It’s just not a used term, only gay, and it only applies to
men.” Beyond the passivity ascribed to Brazilian LGBT/queers in Rogélio’s testimony (which could also be interpreted as classism, as it will be analyzed in the next chapter), his statement suggests that queer has not reached a level of wide popularity because it has not been adopted by the media, by commercial initiatives and by informal spaces that exceed high-culture spaces.

José, member of the Argentinean Homosexual Community, also responds to this question by proposing two factors that would explain this contrast. First, he explains that “Queer arrives to Argentina thanks to academia. And in Brazil there are fewer academics focusing in this area, because there is less access to education and [the higher education system] is more elitist.” And he adds, “the educational system in Brazil is designed to assure that those who don’t access education won’t access education in the future either.” There are indeed structural differences in the higher education system of both countries that could explain a different level of access to queer theory and queer studies. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that José’s testimony complements Rogélio’s insofar as they both identify an association between cultural and intellectual capital with the use of queer. Despite of the different levels of popularity in both sites, the point of entry into both cities is through those

63 Such as Queer Tango, Queer Studies Area, Casa Brandon, Queer Theory Workshop Group and Queer Newspaper.
64 “E eles não sabem o que é queer aqui. (...) Não é um termo usado. E gay é só para homem.” (Rogélio, interview)
65 “Lo queer llegó a Argentina de mano de la academia. Y en Brasil hay menos académicos formados en esta área, (...) porque hay menos acceso a las universidades y la educación es más elitista. (...) Es que el sistema educativo brasileño está diseñado para que aquellos que no acceden a la educación, no accedan en el futuro tampoco.” (José, interview)
66 Analysts suggest that “higher education in Brazil began based on institutions organized as isolated establishments, and mostly privately owned,” (de Siqueira, 170) while “Development of the contemporary Argentine university system has been influenced by two strong traditions: the Napoleonic model, whereby the state takes on the responsibility of higher education and the regulation of professions with a rigid, compartmentalized bureaucratic structure; and the model of the German scientific university created by Wilhelm von Humboldt, which gives precedence to research.” (NFS 2007)
with access to foreign and Western high culture, which changes the connotations of the term from the initial connotations that it had in its context of production. While in the United States **queer** initially had pejorative undertones and later became reclaimed as part of academic and activist circles, this process seems to follow an inverse direction both in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. In this sense, Judith Butler explains that in the United States

> “The term ‘queer’ emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, within performativity. The term ‘queer’ has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject through that shaming interpellation. ‘Queer’ derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time.” (Butler 1993, 226)

Through Butler’s explanation is possible to understand the subversive and vindicating character of ‘queer’ as a signifier for sexual deviance and sexual politics. However, this author’s claim that “[t]his is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time” (Butler 1993, 226) should be complemented with a clarification that acknowledges the limitations in the specificities of space. This said, Butler’s analysis serves useful to propose that the difference between the use of ‘queer’ in these sites is related to the channel of entrance (or lack thereof) into popular discourse. Given that ‘queer’ has never been used within Brazilian and Argentinean contexts to shame and pathologize, the intention that is invoked with its use is to demonstrate a connection between the subject and channels of Western culture, which in a regional scale takes the form of high culture. Thus, this contributes to the continuation of the tendency identified in
chapter 2 regarding the association between sexual deviance and foreignness in both cities.

This elitist connotation becomes even more clear considering the second reason given by José for the differentiated level of familiarity with the term ‘queer.’ For José, the propagation of a queer framework “came up in order to go against [the project of a] civil union. Activists that felt left behind in this initiative, and that had an important name within academia used queerness to attack our initiatives. There was no civil union project in Brazil, so there was nothing there to go against.”67 Taking into account that a queer framework theoretically proposes liberation from oppressive socially constructed categories, the identification of that which is queer as something that can (and often does) go against the interests of the LGBT/queer movement is one of the greatest paradoxical points in this analysis.

José continues,

“In fact, here in the federation [FALGBT] there is a queer group that, a couple of years ago, was saying ‘Well, we don’t want our sex to appear in our ID at all.’ The whole [LGBT/queer] movement responded ‘Wait a second, here our transsexual peers are fighting for their inclusion into the system. It might be binary, it might be subjugating, it might be anything you want to call it, but first we need inclusion because people are dying, people are cold [in the streets], people have AIDS. So first, let’s discuss inclusion, and later we can discuss the deconstruction of our identities, [when we have] a warm bed, or with good coffee in the Café Tortoni68, but first, inclusion.”69

67 “Lo otro fue que acá surgió para contraponerse a[...] proyecto de] la unión civil. Algunos activistas que se vieron relegados, y que tenían peso en el mundo académico, empezaron a usar lo queer para atacar nuestras iniciativas. Eso no pasó en Brasil, no hubo proyecto de unión civil, entonces no había nada a lo cual contraponerse.” (José, interview)
68 Café Tortoni is a famous Buenos Aires café where intellectual celebrities along history were known to be regulars.
69 “De hecho acá hay un grupo queer en la federación que hace dos años decía ‘bueno, pero nosotros no queremos el sexo en el documento.’ Todo el movimiento les dijo ‘momento, acá las compañeras transexuales están luchando por la inclusión dentro del sistema. Será binario, será sometedor, será todo lo que vos quieras, pero primero la inclusión, porque acá la gente está muriendo, porque pasa frío, porque tiene SIDA. Entonces primero la inclusión, y después discutimos deconstrucción de identidades
And in a different section of the interview, he adds

“We need to generate sexual and political identities. How are we going to do that if you all are here fighting sexual identities? The only thing that the queer debate achieved in Argentina was to allow many, who had not yet admitted their sexual identities, to go to a [Pride] demonstration with a sign that could say ‘Long live the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo’ (...) and it was considered super modern. ‘I’m queer, I don’t have a sexual identity.’ (...) But it’s lacking reality. Because from where Judith Butler and other theorists wrote was within a cultural framework, within a different culture. And generalizing that is neocolonial. (...) All that is queer, is a step that needs to be taken, it will be a reflection on our identities the day that we are free from those identities. When you don’t question my identity for being gay, that’s when we can talk about this.(...) Not before.”

This critique is clear in asserting the association between queerness and privilege, both in intellectual and material forms. Now, can this deliberate focus on inclusion be explained through Michael Warner’s understanding of assimilationism? Although José defends an active engagement of LGBT/queer politics with traditional institutions, the critique of queerness in his testimony is not based on a desire to belong to society, but rather, a desire to access immediate material benefits. In a different section of the interview, José stated “We know what we are, do you want to call us putos, tortas, trabas, or that we make a ring out of our buttholes? Then go ahead, we’ve heard it all.”

Thus, the goal of legal inclusion seems more closely

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70 “Hay que generar identidades políticas e identidades sexuales. ¿Cómo vamos a hacer eso si ustedes están acá combatiendo las identidades sexuales? Lo único que consiguió el debate queer en Argentina fue permitirle a muchos que no habían asumido su identidad sexual ir a una marcha con un cartel de ‘Vivan las Madres de Plaza de Mayo’ (...) y quedaba super moderno. ‘Yo soy queer, no tengo identidad sexual.’ (...) Pero le falta realidad. Porque desde donde escribió y para quien escribió Judith Butler y otros teóricos es dentro de un marco cultural, está dentro de otra cultura. Y que se generalice es neocolonial. (...) Todo lo queer es un paso que hay que dar, que es una reflexión sobre nuestras identidades cuando seamos libres de estas identidades. Cuando vos no me cuestiones más mi identidad gay, ahí podemos hablar de deconstruir mi identidad. (...) Antes no.”

71 “Si nosotros ya sabemos quienes somos. ¿Qué nos querés decir? ¿Putos, tortas, trabas, que hacemos una argolla de nuestro culo? Y dale, decinos, si nosotros ya sabemos.” (José, interview)
related to access to material benefits than in Warner’s analysis. Warner’s distinction between assimilationism and subversion relies heavily on the loss of identitarian specificity through normalization, but José’s proposal for the focus on rights-based activism does not include an intention of cultural assimilation into “the normal.” Rather, it is articulated as a demand for institutions to adapt to the needs of those who do not qualify as the majority.

Can this critique of the inclusion of queerness in Buenos Aires then be considered “gay pragmatism”, following Muñoz’s terms? The fact that in José’s testimony there is a preference for immediate material gain over a broad philosophical debate could lead to conclude so. Nevertheless, Muñoz’s understanding of “gay pragmatism” relies on the assumption that those who engage in reformist projects are necessarily overlooking the difference between these projects with queerness. José’s critique of the environmental and temporal inadequacy of queerness seems compatible with Muñoz’s advocacy for “the humbleness of queerness.” The idea of a temporality that can allow for the inclusion of a queer perspective in the future, even if it is disengaging with it in the present, is part of both reasonings. The difference between them is that while for Muñoz this should be the end all goal of present political projects, for José this would be a secondary by-product of the success of inclusionary policies.

Putting José’s testimony in conversation with Warner’s and Muñoz’s analysis does not invalidate their identifications of that which qualifies as subversive, humble, or queer. Rather, it challenges the extent to which the political initiatives defended by José can be left out from the category of ‘queerness’, because it reveals that this definition depends not only on the radical/subversive image of a project, but also on
the reasoning behind each political action. Although José is highly critical of the particular expression of a queer framework that has been built in Buenos Aires, there is an underlying point of agreement on the philosophical value of queerness. “Queer is a view that society needs (...) [but] considering that queer[ness] has no recipe.”72 Thus, the purpose of presenting this critique of queerness is not to invalidate the theoretical framework that it provides. Instead, the intention is to challenge ethical judgements that may rely on queer theory and may misunderstand or overlook the process of political negotiation that goes behind LGBT/queer projects outside of the context of the United States.

Nevertheless, an exploration of the uses of a queer framework would not be complete by only observing its critiques. Florencia and Julia lead the space “Casa Brandon, a very queer space”, with the intention of propagating a queer perspective and serving as a cultural multi-purpose space. And although their proposal is articulated as a commitment to queerness, their reasoning does not oppose to the elitism of queerness that José pointed out. Florencia explains that “[r]eaching queer information requires a certain degree of privilege. Queer[ness] is not there. That’s why we create spaces like this one [Casa Brandon], and like our library.”73 So the underlying idea that queerness is somehow elitist seems to be shared by those who lead queer initiatives as much as by those who take a right-based approach.

Differences between the approaches taken by queer and right-based initiatives are not few. For Julia, for example, there is no such thing as “an articulated queer movement. I see queer expressions, but we are interested manifestations, not in

72 “Queer es una mirada que la sociedad necesita (...) y entendiendo que lo queer no tiene receta..” (José, interview)
articulation. We are into creating a lot of art, not into creating long-term projects.”74 And Florencia adds, “[w]e are more into a happy type of militancy than into angry militancy.”75 Indeed, Casa Brandon hosts a great amount of recreational events and artistic expressions, while organizations within the FALGBT mostly organize political demonstrations and legal reform projects.

However, the differences between queer spaces like Casa Brandon with right-based activism should not be immediately understood as incompatibility or conflict. In fact, as much as activists like José and Lucía expressed their appreciation for Casa Brandon, Florencia and Julia see value in the actions of those involved in the FALGBT. Julia explains: “[Along with reform-based activism] a language was learned. We learned how to ask and demand what we wanted from our representatives, but in exchange for nothing, because the LGBT movement will give nothing to the government.”76 With this statement Julia seemed to support the idea that a struggle for legal reform can happen without a necessary co-optation or assimilation of LGBT/queers into normativity. At the same time, José’s opinion on queer spaces is also appreciative: “The queer message in Casa Brandon and Queer Tango is not confrontational to our struggle for rights. Anyone can go to those places (...) and it is a great initiative for reflection, especially for those who see [queer

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73 “Llegar a la informacion queer requiere cierto privilegio. No esta ahi lo queer. Por eso estamos creando cosas como la biblioteca.” (Florencia, interview)
74 “Yo no veo un movimiento queer articulado. Yo veo mas expresiones queer, pero (...) estamos interesados en manifestaciones, no en la articulacion. Estamos metidos en crear mucha arte, no tanto en crear proyectos a la larga.” (Julia, interview)
75 “A nosotras nos gusta mas la militancia feliz que la militancia enojada.”(Florencia, interview)
76 “Se aprendio a hablar un lenguaje. Se aprendio como pedir, como demandar a nuestros representantes lo que queramos (...) y aprender a gestionar (...) pero a cambio de nada, porque el movimiento LGBT no le va a dar nada al gobierno.” (Julia, interview)
expressions] for the first time.” This mutual appreciation does not erase differences between both positions, but it allows to think of these differences as denaturalized from individuals and spaces. This denaturalization of what constitutes subversiveness/radicalism and what constitutes assimilation/normativity is one of the main challenges that the analysis of these case-studies can bring to a the discussion of queer theory. Moreover, it is this same denaturalization which complicates the use of *queer* as a signifier by detaching it from an intrinsically radical perspective. My objective through the analysis of these initiatives, however, is not to expose a tautological reasoning that erases the significance of queerness. On the contrary, my purpose is to detach radicalism from queerness as a helpful move to expand our understanding of the social forms that the concept of queerness can take.

4. The Problem With False Consciousness: Legal Reform and Queerness

As established in the previous section, the LGBT/queer movements in São Paulo and Buenos Aires show a relation between reform and assimilation that is just as complicated as the relation between queerness and radicalism. In order to explore a different angle of these (dis)associations, I will now examine the specific projects for legal reform that are currently being developed, or that have recently been approved, in order to analyze the discursive reasoning that accompanies them. If we start from the premise that political reality is formed by a linguistic and a material dimensions, evaluating the radicalism or assimilation of a given policy on the basis of only one of these aspects would be unsatisfactory. Therefore, I propose to re-examine Western

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77 “El mensaje queer de casa brandon y tango queer no es combativo a la lucha de derechos. Ahi puede ir cualquiera (...) y la propuesta es que reflexione el que vaya, y sobre todo el que lo ve por primera vez.” (José, interview)
queer critiques of legal reforms in order to remove essentialist parameters of evaluation.

Undoubtedly, reform-based initiatives in São Paulo are currently focused on fighting for a Law that criminalizes homophobia. Under the slogan “There is a cure for homophobia: Criminalization and Education”78, the 2012 LGBT Pride Parade symbolized the generalized anxiety over the unsafety of the LGBT/queer population. When I asked interviewees about the priorities that they identified in the LGBT/queer movement, all participants mentioned criminalization of homophobia, and the great majority agreed enthusiastically with this objective. Some added education to this priority, although education was perceived as a long-term project while criminalization of homophobia seems to appeal for the immediacy of its impact in society. Márcia, a 31-year old drag queen activist, explains this idea by saying:

“São Paulo is the frame for the rest of Brazil. (...) We are hitting on that key, we want to see homophobia to be declared a crime, and only when a person feels the danger of going to jail, they will learn to respect difference. I agree [with criminalization being our priority] because we first need to end violence, and then fight for other rights. That’s the root of the problem.”79

The fact that criminalization is seen as the priority for the LGBT/queer movement in São Paulo reflects that protection is a value that goes above freedom for this group. In this sense, the intention of engaging with legal regulations not with the purpose of expanding the rights of some, but rather to limit the possibilities for others, marks a stark difference between the philosophical bases of this project and the projects of inclusion developed in Buenos Aires. Behind this priority there is a sense

78 “Homofobia tem cura: criminalização e educação”
79 “São Paulo é o marco do Brasil. (...) A gente esta batendo nessa tecla, a gente quer que homofobia torne-se crime, e so quando uma pessoa sinta o perigo de ir preso, vai aprender a respeitar a diferença.”
of urgency. Brazil is the country in the world with the largest number of homophobic crimes per year (JusBrasil, 2011), which is a statistical measure that has been challenged by many analysts who maintain that we need to control for the rates of non-homophobic crime in Brazil before seeing this as a targeted phenomenon. However, according to my interviewees, assault in public spaces is not uncommon in São Paulo, as all of them except for three individuals have suffered different types of aggression in public places.

But although the motivation for the defense of criminalization of homophobia is clearly related to protection, it is particularly interesting that the LGBT/queer movement is aiming to engage with coercitive governmental tools because an initial assumption could link these coercitive mechanisms with the historical oppression of LGBT/queers. Here, it becomes necessary to recapitulate one of the arguments in chapter 2, which relates LGBT/queerness in São Paulo with upper social classes. In this sense, it is key to remember the image of the eccentric, European-like homosexual man that adopts cosmopolitan values regardless of socioeconomic background, symbolic since the late 19th century. Only by understanding a historical lack of alienation between coercitive institutions and the discourse of LGBT/queerness in this city, it is possible to explain a project based on the use of rather than liberation from coercitive institutions like prisons. This argument, however, is not meant to paint an image of an LGBT/queer movement predominantly dominated by European-like, eccentric, upper-class homosexual men. In fact, this is a call to critically examine the ways in which the interests of most privileged subgroups within the LGBT/queer movement might be invoking a sense of cohesion within the

"[Eu concordo com essa prioridade porque] a gente tem primeiro que terminar com a violência, e
movement to defend the interests of some. Fátima, a 46-year old transsexual woman stated:

“The problem is that gay men are the head of the movement, while we, the transsexuals and travestis, and also the lesbians, are the legs. So when it is time to design projects, they want to make the decisions, but when there is a demonstration in the streets, that’s when they call everyone.”

Taking into account this critique of a cohesive LGBT/queer movement, it is possible to associate the demand for criminalization with a specific sector of the movement, while keeping in mind that the politics of representation are particularly conflictive in this case-study. The insatisfaction with the internal conformation of the movement as reflected by Fátima (and echoed by many of the interviewees) also helps to explain the diversity of directions that the projects for legal reform have taken in the last years. Even though projects that have proved popular in other countries have not been approved in Brazil (such as same-sex marriage and gender self-identification laws), these projects seem secondary in the agenda of the movement. In fact, the slogans for the past sixteen São Paulo LGBT Pride Parades show a trend that involves a fight against homophobia in institutional and public spaces, as well as a fight more a more satisfactory relation between the LGBT/queer movement and the state, but not the prioritization of a focus on equality-based
depois lutar por outros direitos. É essa que é a raiz do problema.” (Marcia, interview)

80 “O problema é com os homens homossexuais, porque eles são a cabeça do movimento, e a gente, as transexuais e as travestis, e as lésbicas também, somos as pernas. Então quando é para planejar coisas, eles querem decidir tudo, mas quando tem uma marcha na rua, aí eles chamam tudo mundo.” (Fátima, interview)

policies. Carlos, a 34 year-old homosexual man, relates the lack of focus on marriage equality to the characteristics of class structures in Brazil.

“Those who have money don’t need to get married because they live in closed buildings, they have their privacy and no one cares about what they do. And those who don’t have money won’t get married because there is no privacy at all! (...) There is too much violence, no one will want to get married. (...) That’s why (...) only middle-class gays want marriage.”

Thus, the large socioeconomic gap in Brazil could be seen as a factor not only in the explanation of the secondary place of same-sex marriage among legal-reform projects, but also in the lack of articulation of a general LGBT/queer agenda. Although for many this disarticulation is seen as a sign of weakness in the movement, an alternative explanation could see this as a strength because it allows for the elaboration of varied and specific demands. In this sense, for Márcia “maybe the fact that same-sex marriage has not been approved in Brazil has helped to diversify our struggle. Because that’s how it is. There are many struggles. There’s same-sex marriage, there’s transexuals’ rights, there’s the criminalization of homophobia. It’s not possible to choose only one.” Taking into account the intersectionality of different types of identity as a conditioning factor in the production of demands, this testimony raises the question: do movements that do choose one struggle over others necessarily put in evidence the control of one subgroup over the totality LGBT/queer movement?

Exploring different discourses surrounding the support for same-sex marriage in Argentina helps to expand the spectrum of possibilities for the interpretation of legal

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82 “Quem tem dinheiro, não precisa se casar porque mora num prédio fechado, tem a sua privacidade, ninguém se importa com o que ele faz. E quem não tem dinheiro, não vai casar porque não tem privacidade nenhuma! Se mora com a família inteira, você acha que dá para (...) dizer para eles olha mamãe, vou casar com o meu namorado Não! Tem muita violência, ninguém vai querer casar. Por isso que só gay de classe média quer casamento.” (Carlos, interview)
reform. In this sense, none of the participants in Buenos Aires declared that they were satisfied with the goals of the LGBT/queer movement after the sanction of the same-sex marriage law. In fact, many explained that they had to negotiate a great sense of hesitation towards marriage with the specific project of same-sex marriage. Lucía explains “I supported gay marriage, aside from the fact that I’m against marriage as an institution, because it was the moment of doing so. What was happening was that. I don’t know what will happen tomorrow.” Therefore, it is possible to identify a point of convergence in the criticism towards heteronormativity and legal reform. This point seems to be related to the demand for immediacy in change. In other words, in addition to demystifying the desire to be normalized behind reformist projects, the idea of a normative, progressive, linear temporality should not be automatically assigned to legal reform projects in these sites.

The main point that arises from the exploration of these testimonies regarding legal reform is that LGBT/queer activists ground their support and criticism towards these projects from the specificities of their experiences. Engaging with legal reform projects would be seen, following the perspective of the US-based queer theorists analyzed in chapter 1, as following an assimilationist/normalizing direction as a consequence of collective false consciousness. Nevertheless, these testimonies reveal that often individuals support initiatives or embark on projects against which they have hesitations and strong criticisms. This is to say that when negotiating political positions and actions, LGBT/queer actors take into account many of the criticisms

83 “Talvez o fato do Brasil não ter aprovado o casamento gay tenha ajudado a diversificar a luta. Porque é assim, têm muitas lutas. Tem o casamento gay, tem os direitos de transexuais, tem a criminalização da homofobia, nao dá para escolher só uma.” (Marcia, interview)
84 Yo te digo, yo apoye el matrimonio gay, mas alla de que esté en contra de la institución del matrimonio, porque era el momento. Lo que pasaba era eso. Yo no se que va a pasar mañana. ” (Lucia, interview)
that would be defended from a radical/subversive US-based queer position. The fact that they may still decide to engage with these political initiatives therefore does not depend on their ‘degree of consciousness’, but rather, on the spatio-temporal specificities of their experiences and their political projections over time. ‘False consciousness’ and ‘degree of consciousness’ imply that experiences can be diagnosed and quantified in their comparative validity. If the goal of a queer perspective is to disengage from governability, this comparison needs to be dismissed as a valid framework of analysis by acknowledging similar validity in Western and non-Western productions of knowledge. The queer goal is therefore to remove Eurocentrism in the production of knowledge regarding what is desirable, undesirable, assimilationist/normalizing and radical/subversive within specific spatio-temporal locations.
Chapter 4: Towards A Queerness from, for and of the South

“Es una estupidez hablar de queer en Brasil.”
“It’s stupid to talk of queer[ness] in Brazil.” (José, interview)

“Yo creo que éramos re queer sin saberlo.”
“I think we were super queer without knowing it.” (Florencia, interview)

“Sabemos que la etiqueta sirve, pero nuestra meta es la libertad de esas etiquetas.”
“We know labels are useful, but our goal is freedom from labels.” (Julia, interview)

In 1996, Australian academic and gay rights activist Dennis Altman, famous for his work on the links between US and Australian sexual politics, published the article Rupture or Continuity, The Internationalization of Gay Identities. In this article he wrote that “[i]t is certainly possible that many people in developing countries, whatever their exposure to Western media imagery and consumer affluence, will not adopt Western sexual identities, or that terms such as gay, lesbian, even queer will be taken up and changed...” (Altman 1996, 29) A couple of lines down, and before it could become clear to the reader whether this possibility for non-Western sexual identities to break some of the ties with the West was seen with hope or with anxiety by the author, Altman added: “[y]et many non-Western homosexuals are nonetheless attracted to a Western model, which they seek, consciously or not, to impose on their own movements.” (Altman 1996, 29) According to Altman, the conformation of non-Western sexual identities depends to a great extent on the type of communication with, and consumption of, Western sexual identitarian parameters.

But what makes this excerpt particularly interesting is the inversion of the syntax of power that constructs dominance and agency through the form subject-
Critical postcolonial perspectives generally agree in identifying the position of highest dominance as Western, (taking into account that this does not necessarily equal a negation of the agency of non-Western groups), and yet, Altman’s text presents non-Western homosexuals as hyper-agential subjects who *adopt, take, change, are attracted, seek and impose*. All verbs display non-Western individuals as being in the subject position, while Western subjects are dissociated from exercising any actions. Even more telling is the fact that the Western subject is never mentioned directly in the text. Instead, there is mention of ‘Western media’, ‘consumer affluence’, ‘Western sexual identities’ and ‘a Western model’ as indirect elements that interact with non-Western subjects.

These indirect elements resemble the tentacles of an octopus whose head is somewhere else. If there were (and as it will be explained, there still are) political and spacio-temporal forms in which the octopus was fully addressing, embracing, and squeezing the non-Western subject, this is not what Altman is describing. His deposit of agency on the non-Western subject comes from the fact that the octopus seems to be caressing instead of squeezing the non-Western subject. And the non-Western subject is portrayed as fully capable of deciding their degree of engagement with the tentacles. But although the eyes may not always be directly focused on this subject, and the form of discipline may have shifted from squeezing to caressing, it is important to remember that the octopus is still present. In a way, this is the purpose of

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85 This syntax of power is based on Gayatri Spivak’s analysis of signifiers that are used as means of subject-constitution and object-formation (Spivak 1988, 306) since the beginning of imperialism and its social values: “Imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind. How should one examine the dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as *subject*?” (Spivak 1988, 299) The articulation of the grammatical structure subject-action-object is best illustrated by her sentence “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988, 296) where the subject of power is ‘white men’, the object is ‘brown women’ and the action is justified
this chapter, and arguably this thesis. My intention is to argue against a position like Altman’s, in which the non-Western person is now seen as hyper-agential, while at the same time I intend to show and acknowledge the power and resistance that are expressed in the different types of negotiation of non-Western individuals in relation to these tentacles..

Chapter 3 showed that the analyses provided by the queer theorists reviewed in Chapter 1 can be linked to some of the phenomena within the LGBT/queer movements in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. It also showed that a theoretical framework that examines the particular organization, objectives and evolution of these movements needs to incorporate a postcolonial body of literature that leaves room for their historical and genealogical specificities. Thus, the main purpose of this chapter is to bring together queer and postcolonial perspectives in order to imagine what “a queerness from the Global South” could look like. This exploration starts from one single premise: a queerness from the South needs to respond to heteronormativity at the same time, and to the same extent as it responds to (Northern) hegemony and domination. Crafting such project therefore involves critical consideration of epistemological, political and historical relations of power that do not only involve heteronormativity and queerness, but also North and South.

This chapter is an exercise of simultaneous acknowledgement of, and abstraction from, the values that rule Northern and Southern epistemological perspectives on sexual deviance. Taking into account the words of postcolonial semiotician Walter Mignolo, “[t]hat the perception social scientists in the North had (...) was correct (that is what happened) doesn’t mean that it was right (what

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85. “...for the establishment of a good society...” (Spivak 1988, 298)
happened was bad)” (Mignolo 2009, 42), I intend to branch out from the framework of US-based queer theory that I have presented thus far in order to escape from the culturally-specific binary between assimilation/normativity and subversiveness/radicalism. By examining different perspectives of non-Western subjects on the role of queerness, queer theory and queer studies, I propose to denaturalize their radical and liberatory potential. My intention with this is not to minimize the brilliant, ground-breaking contributions of queer scholars and activists, but rather, to contextualize them. Therefore, an elaboration of a queerness from the South is a call to bring the principles of liberation, freedom and pleasure to the center of the analysis of the non-Western experience.

Also, the genealogical and epistemological distinctions included in this chapter question the extent to which there is and there can be communication between Northern and Southern political responses to sexual deviance. Is it even possible to imagine a queerness from the South? Or is this a paradoxical conjunction of Northern and Southern elements? Or in other words, are there material, political and/or epistemological benefits in articulating these ideas, or would this conjunction necessarily work as yet another channel for the transmission and propagation of Northern hegemony? To think about queer theory as hegemonic can sound deliberately contradictory (and maybe even unnecessarily incendiary) if we consider the cutting-edge role it plays in Northern academia. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to consider this question if our project is to denaturalize the subversiveness of any given practice by exploring its context. Thus, the questions for this chapter are two. First, can we think of a queerness from the South? And second, do we want to?
Let us be clear from the start. There is no evidence of an expansionist or colonial intention in any of the queer theory pieces analyzed here. There are, clearly, Western LGBT/queer political initiatives which, built upon the idea of a universal solidarity that arises from sexual deviance, actively intervene in non-Western contexts with an organized agenda. The LGBT/queer tourism industry, as described by Jasbir Puar in “Circuits of Queer Mobility”, deliberately defends the idea of a universal LGBT solidarity in order to frame Western LGBTs’ international consumption practices under an idea of transnational activism. In the same vein, examples of Western NGOs and governmental institutions taking active roles in the Global South have been elaborated by Mathieu Vervynckt in the article Gay Imperialism and the Clash of Ignorance Making reference to this defense of a universal LGBT/queer solidarity, Vervynckt explains

"One can easily make the link between the “Gay International” and a new form of imperialism, namely “gay imperialism”: white subjects take on a civilizing mission and claim the right to define and theorize sexual liberation. Typical of this is the “save the gays” rhetoric, which aims to create a universal homosexual identity. As a result, it becomes necessary to save “others” from any form of homonegativity."  
(Vervynckt 2013)

Needless to say, there is a great difference between this type of gay imperialism and the queer theory pieces reviewed in Chapter 1. The queer theorists analyzed are careful not to generalize nor over-expand the scope of their observations. From the traced genealogy of LGBT/queer activism to the examples used in their texts, Michael Warner, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz
make perfectly clear that their object of analysis is constrained to a US contemporary society. Moreover, despite their degree of rejection or sympathy towards queer theory, none of the interviewees in my fieldwork identified any intention from queer theorists to colonize Southern epistemology nor LGBT/queer movements.

As explained by José,

“There is no colonial intention because there is no colonial project. It’s not like queer academics came like those Spanish politicians to bring us [same-sex] marriage. It wasn’t a queer invasion. However, it was an intention of building a political identity against the movement (...). I take a queer position, which is unbeatable, is unquestionable, is the most progressive thing ever, and I start criticizing the main social actors. But that group was completely vulnerable to the attacks of our very reality.”

This testimony supports that neither US-based queer theorists nor Western-based queer activists lead a project to control or dominate Southern political initiatives. When José speaks of “those Spanish politicians”, he is making reference to the negotiations that the Spanish and the Argentinean LGBT Federations maintained in 2005, after same-sex marriage was legalized in Spain.

“...as soon as Spain legalized same-sex marriage, [the Spanish LGBT Federation] developed a program to assist South American [LGBT/queer] organizations financially. (...) Their contributions were quite important, a lot of money (...), but as soon as the CHA presented the civil union project in 2004, 2005, their delegation visited us. They said ‘well, there is a lot of money here. You need to fight for [same-sex] marriage.’ We tried to explain to them that in Argentina we were building a progressive discourse (...) for a civil union project that would include more rights than marriage. On top of that, we defend sexual freedom, and the regulation of couples includes a series of

86 “No hay intención colonial porque no hay proyecto colonial. No es que académicos queer vinieron como esos políticos españoles a traer el matrimonio. No fue una invasión queer, lo que sí, fue una intención de formar una identidad política en contra del movimiento (...). Tomo lo queer, que es imbatible, es incuestionable, es lo más progre, y me implanto a criticar a los principales actores sociales. Pero ese grupo fue completamente vulnerable a los ataques de la realidad misma.” (José, interview)
sexual values crafted by the Church. We told them ‘don’t try to subjugate us to this type of contractual slavery.’”

After this incident, the federations broke their financial and collaborative ties, and the civil union project was approved in the city of Buenos Aires (but not federally) in 2005. The three interviewees that were familiar with the specifics of this interaction (José, Lucía and Mario) spoke of it as a neocolonial attempt of shaping and regulating local initiatives by taking advantage of the particularly precarious economic situation in Argentina in the early 2000s.

What differentiates the descriptions surrounding Spanish activism versus those of queer approaches are two keywords that appear in the first excerpt of José’s testimony: intention and project. The Spanish LGBT Federation’s gay imperialist enterprise can be ascribed with both, while US-based queer academics do not explicitly articulate any. And yet, José -together with Fernando, Lucía, Elena and Mario- sees queer theory as a foreign adversary or obstacle for local political initiatives. If we take intentionality to be a central component in the creation of a colonial enterprise, and likewise, we understand that a particular project needs to be elaborated discursively by those in the North, then we are left with the -hardly solvable- question of the conflict between Southern LGBT/queer initiatives and queer theory. Alternatively, LGBT/queer activists may use or elaborated

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87 “...ni bien en España consiguieron (el matrimonio igualitario) (...) construyeron una política de asistir a organizaciones sudamericanas, una política financiada. Las organizaciones recibían mucho dinero para realizar convenios de cooperación con organizaciones sudamericanas. (...) La cooperación resulta ser bastante importante, mucho dinero (...), pero junto con eso, ni bien la CHA presentó el proyecto de unión civil en 2004, 2005, recibimos la visita de la comitiva de la federación. Dijeron ‘bueno, aquí hay mucho dinero, ustedes deben reclamar el matrimonio.’ (...) Queríamos explicarle a los españoles que en Argentina estábamos construyendo un discurso progresivo (...) [de unión civil] que tenía más derechos que el matrimonio. (...) Además de esto, nosotros defendemos la libertad sexual, y la regulación de las parejas (...) tira por tierra una serie de valores sexuales cultivados por la Iglesia. (...) Les dijimos ‘no nos quieran subsumir a este tipo de esclavitud contractual.’ (...)” (José, interview)
explanations for this conflict based on Western hegemonic understandings of
development and knowledge. Rogélio, for example, stated that

“Because those who don’t know how to think adopt the language of
others, they speak in that language [English]. That’s why we have so
many foreign [linguistic] entries, that’s why people use gay to describe
what before was called viado, but why do we say gay? We’re just
using their language.”

Yet, when I followed up with the question “do you think the word ‘queer’ is
also used in the same way?”, Rogélio was categorical: “The people here don’t even
know what queer means. I know because I’ve read a lot about it, but they have no
idea.”88 With this statement Rogélio asserted his subjectivity as a knowledgeable
person, in contrast to “those who don’t know how to think.” It is important to note
that his identification and dismissal of the subaltern is made by linking himself with
queer theory and breaking any connection between the subaltern -or the abject- and
any notion of queerness. One can stipulate that, for any of the US-based queer
academics included in this piece, that other, that subaltern, that abject, would be
central in the analysis of social manifestations of sexual deviance. And yet, Rogélio
gives us an example of how queer theory can be used as a colonial tool in the form of
intellectual capital. At the same time, it is also noteworthy that Rogélio criticizes the
lack of contact with queerness as a lack of intellectual capital, while at the same time
sees the use of gay instead of viado as an unnecessary adoption of a foreign term.
This suggests that the high-culture value of a foreign element decreases as its popular
use increases. Gay is now seen as mainstream, while queer is still restricted to those

88 “E como quem não sabe pensar pega a língua dos outros, eles falam naquela língua [inglês]. Por isso
existe tanto verbetes, por isso as pessoas se chamam de gay, antigamente era viado, mas por que falar
gay. [Você acha que a palavra queer entra dentro dessa categoria?] O pessoal aqui nem sabe o que é
queer. Eu sei porque eu tenho lido muito, mas eles não fazem ideia.” (Rogélio, interview)
with greater contact with Western culture, therefore serving its purpose of signifier of intellectual capital more effectively.

One could still argue, however, that this cannot be considered a mechanism of neocolonialism because it is not the use that queer theorists (especially those concerned with the democratization of queer studies, such as Lisa Duggan) intended their observations to result in. Although US-based academics may produce queer theory with a great degree of awareness about the limitations of their scope, the established channels of communication and dominance exceed their individual will. As stated by Gayatri Spivak, “...the production of theory is also a practice; the opposition between abstract ‘pure’ theory and concrete ‘applied’ practice is too quick and easy.” (Spivak 1988, 275). Thus, inspite of the greatly liberatory character of queer theory and queer studies within their context of production, it is necessary to take into account the ways in which theory, as a practice, happens within a context of global relations of dominance, and therefore cannot be disembodied nor disaffiliated from the reinforcement of Western dominance.

In this sense, it is helpful to consider Gayatri Spivak’s articulation of Ranajit Guha’s “dynamic stratification grid” to move past a binary understanding of the relation colonizer/colonized and complicate the role of intention and project in a postcolonial setting:

“Elite: 1. Dominant foreign groups
   2. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
   3. Dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels.
   4. The terms ‘people’ and ‘subaltern classes’ have been used as synonymous throughout this note. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the ‘elite.’” (Spivak 1988, 284)
This dynamic grid is based on a premise of relational identity, or, in Spivak’s words, “an identity-in-differential.” (Spivak 1988, 284) It is important to note that Spivak includes this grid in an analysis that vindicates Marx’s conceptualization of class, in contrast to the position of poststructuralist scholars, particularly Foucault and Deleuze, who are concerned about a false sense of identitarian and phenomenological cohesion hiding behind Marx’s class categories. But Spivak’s “point is that Marx is not working to create an undivided subject where desire and interest coincide. Class consciousness does not operate toward that goal.” (Spivak 1988, 276) Ontology and identity are conceptually divided from positionality, and none of them is absorbed by the other. Thus, Marx’s division of classes in proletariat-bourgeoisie and Guha’s dynamic grid can be used as diagrams that identify distinct yet internally heterogeneous social groups. This conceptual distinction is key not only to observe the different responses to sexual deviance in my sites, but also to understand queer neocolonialism as a phenomenon that happens without needing explicit articulation from queer theorists. There is no intention and there is no project, but there are channels of dominance that precede and exceed queer theory, and locates it in a position of dominance towards the epistemology created by postcolonial subjects.

Considering the centrality of Buenos Aires and São Paulo at their national levels, all interviewees can be associated to the second and third groups in Guha’s

89 Marx’s contention here is that the descriptive definition of a class can be a differential one--its cutting off and difference from all other classes; ‘in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that cut off their mode of life, their interest, and their formation from those of the other classes and place them in inimical confrontation [feindlich gagenüberstellen], they form a class’”(Spivak 1988, 276)
90 The unrecognized contradiction within a position that valorizes the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual, is maintained by a
grid. Nevertheless, following Spivak’s differentiation of class and other identity factors, their perceptions and intentions in relation to queer theory are highly heterogeneous. Let us further dissect and interrogate the example of Rogélio, given that he presents a clear case of a member of a dominant indigenous group engaging in neocolonial practices. As aforementioned, for Rogélio, queerness works as a form of social and intellectual capital instead of a counterhegemonic framework of analysis. Queerness is consumed through literature and incorporated into the bank of resources that, taking a Bourdieusian approach, defines the social self and hir class position. Let us also remember the first sentence in Rogélio’s excerpt: “Because those who don’t know how to think adopt the language of others, they speak in that language.” I doubt that Rogélio was responding to Can the Subaltern Speak? but his choice of words puts him in direct conversation with Spivak. A fundamental difference between these positions is that, whereas Spivak’s objective is to denounce domination, Rogélio’s is to justify it. Rogélio would probably agree with Spivak in that the subaltern cannot speak for themselves, but what for Spivak is an oppressive problem in the relations of dominance that has nothing to do with a naturalized subalternity, for Rogélio is evidence that the subaltern is essentially a non-interpolatable non-subject. Following Rogélio’s idea, queer theory will never be available, nor relevant, nor produced by the subaltern.

Coming back for a second to a US-based queer theory framework, does this use of queerness then not defeat its aim to act as a destabilizer of hegemonic power relations? Despite debates on what queerness constitutes or how can the concept be defined, there are some elements that, most queer theorists would agree, lay at its verbal slippage. Thus Deleuze makes this remarkable pronouncement: ‘A theory is like a box of tools.'
core. One of them is the critical valoration of the figure of the abject, and of the social relations that intervene it the production of such abject (which can be linked to the postcolonial concern of the figure and conformation of the subaltern). Another important element, following Eve Sedgwick’s idea that every category is a closet,91 is the aim to disrupt fixed categories as they demand normative behavior from individuals. Finally, it is central to queer theory to fight heteronormativity.

Rogélio, however, seems to go against all of these premises, while still claiming an association to queerness. What would Judith Butler say about queerness being used to assert categories instead of critically examining their relation with performativity? What would Leo Bersani think of queerness being linked to strengthen the boundaries of a dominant subject instead of attempting to shatter the self? What would Lisa Duggan say about the language gap between those who read queerness and those who experience it being celebrated as an evidence of essential differences? My guess is that these authors would want to dissociate Rogélio’s opinions from a proper understanding of queerness, but in order to do so they would need to assert their position of dominance as Northern subjects and defend their construction of knowledge as superior. It is also my guess that queer theorists would be likely to use false consciousness as a reason for Rogélio’s ‘misled’ interpretation, but that would imply the adoption of a queerer than thou position that would once again reinforce Northern epistemology as ‘correct’ and Southern articulations as ‘mistaken.’ In the words of postcolonial and queer scholar William J. Spurlin,

Nothing to do with the signifier.’’” (Spivak 1988, 275)
91 “The analytic move [Epistemology of the Closet] makes is to demonstrate that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions - heterosexual/homosexual, in this case - actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation...” (Sedgwick 1990, 10)
“...queer inquiry needs comparative, relational, historicized, and contextualized understandings of ‘queer’, engaging *localized* questions of experience, identity, culture and history in order to better understand specific processes of domination and subordination...” (Spurlin 2001, 186)

Spurlin’s observation shows that the liberatory goal of queer studies cannot be reached without taking into account the specificities of the context where it is experienced. This means that some forms may be relatively similar, while others may be radically different than those that the discipline has identified in Western contexts. So, if the exercise here is to distance ourselves from both Southern and Northern epistemological frameworks, Rogélio’s interpretation of queerness needs to be considered a legitimate contestation to US-based queer theory’s idea of queerness. Furthermore, if our aim is to break away from academic West-centrism, it is not enough to ‘tolerate’ alternative perspectives that challenge what we consider to be an ideal experience of queerness. Rather, it is necessary to move past representationalism and see this understanding of queerness as the discursive dimension of a phenomenological relation between a non-Western subject and an imported object. In other words, there is no less truth in the idea that queerness can be liberatory than in the idea that it can contribute to hegemonic domination, if these statements are elaborated upon localized experiences. This is an important point to consider towards the goal of elaborating a queerness from the South that attacks heteronormativity as well as Western dominance. If the quest is one for liberation, freedom, pleasure, and non-governability it is necessary to reflect on the limitations that arise from working within a US-based queer studies discipline that dismisses and often alienates non-Western subjects by omission.
While Rogélio provided a clear hegemonic interpretation of queerness through his explicit disengagement with the subaltern, it is important to take into account at least one more case to avoid the singularization of a non-Western subject. Julia and Florencia, funders of Casa Brandon, a queer public space in Buenos Aires, offer a diametrically different type of engagement with queerness. For them, queerness is mainly related to cutting-edge creative and artistic expressions, and their main purpose is to provide a space for people to display and access these expressions in Casa Brandon.\(^92\) Similarly to Rogélio, they identify a lack of accessibility of queer expressions and literature, but, unlike him, they respond by challenging these limitations and promoting access. On this note, they explain some criticisms they have faced from the LGBT movement as associated to socio-economic privilege:

“Julia: -I think that the LGBT movement’s prejudice against queerness is similar to this thing about the white, middle-class, gay man in that, well, if you have time to think about queerness it must be because you have a lot of basic and non-basic needs solved.
Florencia: -Yes, and also, accessing queer information is not something that is just there. That’s why we are setting up a library, for example (...), but [queerness] is not something that is at everyone’s reach, and our intention is that it is.”\(^93\)

Something that differentiates Julia and Florencia from most of my interviewees is an enthusiastic engagement with queerness, in contrast to a more common sense of alienation, hesitation and/or distrust expressed by others, and to the same of

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\(^92\) “We approach queer[ness] from the angle of art. Because that which is queer opens a space for the avant-garde, for a lot of things that otherwise would be much harder to produce and to get to know about.” “Nosotras lo vemos a lo queer más por el lado de la vanguardia, para muchísimas cosas que si no, sería más difícil producir y que se den a conocer.” (Julia, interview)

\(^93\) “Julia: -Yo creo que también el prejuicio sobre lo queer del movimiento LGBT (...) se parece a esto del gay blanco de clase media, que bueno, si tenés tiempo para pensar en lo queer es porque tenés un montón de necesidades más que básicas resueltas, ¿me entendés?
Florencia: -Sí, aparte llegar a la información queer no es algo que esté ahí. Por eso estamos armando una biblioteca, por ejemplo, y ya tenemos libros muy interesantes, pero es algo que no está a mano, nuestra intención es que eso empiece a estar a mano.” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
entitlement expressed by Rogélio. They explained that their encounter with queerness came through contact with artistic expressions from Europe and the US that incorporated this term in their description, and that this sparked a personal research on queer theory and queer spaces. “[Before knowing what queer meant] we were gay girls. We didn’t feel like lesbians, because it seemed to us that gayness was more laid back. ‘The lesbian’ was much more serious, and we like happy militancy more than angry militancy.” The relation that Julia and Florencia built with queerness required an active effort from them, an effort that seems to have been fueled by a desire to rearticulate (or escape from) existing sexual categories. It could be argued that this is the objective of any individual who actively engages with queerness and/or queer theory. However, I argue that in this case the desire to escape sexual identity categories is not only informed by the Sedgwickian idea that every category is a closet, but also by a common postcolonial desire of breaking with a traditional past and engaging with modernity. As posed by Altman, “...some homosexuals in non-Western countries seek to establish historical continuities, while others are more interested in distancing themselves, psychologically and analytically, from what they consider old-fashioned forms of homosexuality...” (Altman 1996, 25) It was clear that Julia and Florencia were closer to the latter description when later in the interview they explained

“ Florencia: -For the porteño95, it is hard to adopt the Latin American discourse.
Julia: -The lesbian movement, for example (...) is more associated with organizations in other Latin American countries. They identify more closely with this thing about the origins, of indigenous peoples, of

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94 “[Antes de saber que era lo queer] nosotras éramos chicas gay. No nos sentíamos como lesbianas, porque nos parecía que lo gay era más descontracturado, la lesbiana era como más seria, no sé, a nosotras nos gusta más la militancia feliz que la militancia enojada.” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
95 Porteño/a comes from puerto (port), and makes reference to a person from the city of Buenos Aires.
Latin American traditions. For us, as *porteñas*, it’s harder to do that. It’s as if it was a foreign thing. Florencia: -We may identify more with something happening in Berlin rather than Costa Rica, for example. (...) It’s like a mirror that you see in some places and not in others.”

It is important to recognize that there is no evidence of the lesbian movement being comprised by fewer individuals from Buenos Aires than those who could be considered part of the queer sphere. So, when Florencia and Julia explain their disconnection with political and artistic Latin American initiatives, instead of *porteñas*, we could read cosmopolitan, urban, or, more clearly, searching for modernity through forging a connection with that which is Western. Because often times that which is Western is associated with high culture, queerness works once again as a form of cultural capital that positions the non-Western subject in a higher rank than those who do not have contact or association with the concept, even if Julia and Florencia seem to suggest that identification either happens (organically, essentially) or it does not. Thus, the mirror that Florencia mentions should not be thought of as an essentialist reflection of the individual, but rather as a performative articulation of desire to reach and to be the image of a modernized Other.

It is important to clarify, however, that my analysis of the connection between *porteño/a* identities and the incorporation and/or rejection of Western elements is not meant to measure, value, dismiss, or place a hierarchy in how these identities are local to Buenos Aires. The fact that the queer sphere as represented by Julia and

96 “Florencia: -Para el porteño apropiarse del discurso latinoamericano es difícil. Julia: -Por ejemplo, el movimiento de lesbianas (...) está más asociado con movimientos de otros países de Latinoamérica. Se identifica más con esto de los orígenes, de los pueblos originarios, de las tradiciones latinoamericanas... A nosotras que somos porteñas nos cuesta más. Es como si fuera ajeno. Florencia: -Por ahí nos identificamos más con una movida en Berlin que en Costa Rica, ponele. (...) Es como un espejo que ves en algunos lados y en otros no.” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
Florencia differs in its relation with Westernness from that of the lesbian movement, which may incorporate signifiers of Latin American indigenous traditions in its channels of expression, is only one more example of the tension between modernity and tradition that forge social forms in postcolonial sites. Thus, queer spaces such as Casa Brandon are seen in my analysis as ‘local’ to this space as a *peña*\(^{97}\) organized by lesbian organizations may be.

Following this line of thought, the idea of modernity has taken Florencia and Julia to construct an initiative that breaks with many traditional channels for LGBT (and non-LGBT) politics in Buenos Aires. For them, it is fundamental to incorporate entertainment and ludic creativity into a queer project, and they associate queerness with phenomena rather than structures. This means, among other things, that they do not consider possible for queerness to exist within an established political organization that keeps a fixed structure to operate. In this sense, they attributed their disengagement with the FALGBT to the confinement they felt in traditional politics. Julia explains, “look, I will communicate with my people in a language that they can read me. If I give them a black and white pamphlet, they won’t look at it, they won’t even take it. And also, that is a traditional way of doing politics that comes from the Left.”\(^ {98}\) (Julia and Florencia, interview) We see therefore that queerness is used as a means to link and communicate with individuals who choose not to follow a traditional channel for political expression within the communitarian Left. This queer critique of the LGBT movement and the Left puts in evidence the limitations of both.

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\(^{97}\) A *peña* is a celebration, usually held at night, where folkloric music is played, traditional dances are performed, and regional foods such as empanadas and locro are served. Lesbian organizations in Buenos Aires such as La Fulana often hold *peñas* as recreational spaces for the lesbian community.

\(^{98}\) “Mirá, yo voy a comunicarle a mi gente en un idioma que me lea. Si yo les doy un volante blanco y negro no lo van a mirar, no lo van a agarrar. Y además es una forma tradicional de hacer política de la izquierda...” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
of these political traditions to lead to liberation, given that it brings to light the fixed hierarchical mechanisms that are implemented in political initiatives that discursively strive for democratic participation.

Despite their strong case for the incorporation of queer manifestations in the FALGBT, Julia and Florencia faced much “prejudice against queerness for being imported, as if it was superficial, some sort of trend or fashion.”99 This anxiety over the ‘importation’ of queerness, however, is not always related to seeing it as temporary, but rather to seeing it as yet another Northern discourse the non-Western subject needs to learn to perform. Lucía’s words become once again relevant: “Queer is a concept that fell here from the North, and now we’re supposed to adopt it.”100 In Queer Resistance to (Neo-)Colonialism in Algeria, Jarrod Hayes speaks to this conflict by analyzing the title of a conference as representative of a general sense of division between queerness and homosexualities:

“The second title [Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities] associates Hall’s global/local binary with another, queer/homosexualities. It also associates ‘queer’ with globalization and the more modern (and therefore less postmodern) ‘homosexualities’ with the local, which in Hall’s account, marks the resistance of ‘traditional’ cultures to the forces of globalization.” (Hayes 2001, 82)

Considering that Julia and Florencia admittedly break ties with what they consider to be traditional, the anxiety over ‘importation’ of queerness may arise as response to the seeming erasure of the Southern identity in a North-led process of globalization. Queerness thus resembles a new type of technology that those who are farther from modernity have more difficulty manipulating. This alienation becomes

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99 “Hay un prejuicio hacia lo queer por ser importado, como si fuera superficial, una moda.” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
greater if we consider that seeing queer theory as an enabler of globalization, as Hayes proposes, may not be far from seeing it as an enabler of other recent characteristics of globalization in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, such as neoliberal policies and neocolonialism. Taking this a step further, let us consider Donald Morton’s association between queer theory and capitalism, which -he argues- is undeniably close when observing the coincidence of the rise of queer theory with the fall of the Berlin Wall:

“...why did the appearance of bourgeois ideology’s strongest declaration of the ‘autonomy of desire’ (queer theory), with its emphatic endorsement of the shift from a conceptual economy to a libidinal economy model of culture, coincide with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe? (...) Isn’t queer theory, which at one level seems to be a socially harmless extension of ‘sexual liberation,’ actually an allegory of the ‘freedom of desire,’ which is little more than the celebration of the ‘triumph’ of capitalist ideology?” (Morton 1997, 225)

There are a lot of unexplained assumptions in this excerpt, such as the idea that queer theory claims to be ‘socially harmless’, or the automatic association between freedom of desire and capitalism. However, leaving those observations aside for a second, Morton allows us to identify the anxiety about queer theory and capitalism as an anxiety rooted in a historical context. Doing the same exercise in my sites reveals that queer theory is being introduced in a historical period when the political discourse of the governments of both Brazil and Argentina is moving away from neoliberalism, at the same time that it is looking for alternatives to political, social and economic relations with dominant Western nations.101 This means that, if we

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100 “Queer es un concepto que vino a caer acá del norte, y ahora se supone que lo tenemos que aprender a usar.” (Lucía, interview)
101 In the case of Brazil, an example of this is the strengthening of relations with China, India and Russia, and a movement away from using the US dollar as a currency for trade and negotiations. In the case of Argentina, this discursive movement from neoliberalism can be seen in the nationalization of
considered for a moment queer theory to be a product imported from the North (as Lucía stated for example), this product’s label would have as many warnings against its use as a box of cigarettes nowadays. This is to say, queer theory’s efforts to offer a theoretical framework towards freedom and liberation may be met with scepticism by individuals who experienced and still experience a series of Western discourses presented in a similarly optimistic lenses, while at the same time causing various degrees of pain, suffering, as well as the de-subjectification of the non-Western person. When I asked Julia and Florencia about their opinions on the Northern origin of queerness, they seemed annoyed at the question, as if it was a critique they had heard many times before:

“Florencia: I mean... I think it is used as a tool that (...) transcends borders, as I believe all real ideologies should. Yes, it comes from North America, but... 
Julia: -But here people also celebrate [the anniversary of the Stonewall riots] every 28th of June. The [LGBT Pride] Parade was only moved [to November] because (...) in the 1990s people had AIDS and June was too cold.”

An important point is raised here. Looking at queerness as an imported product can lead to the assumption that other language surrounding sexual identities is, in contrast, autochthonous to these sites. Hayes analysis becomes once again useful to note that “the globalization of sexuality may be as much a product of the much earlier colonial project as of late capitalism...” (Hayes 2001, 82) Acknowledging that the language that surrounds sexual politics in postcolonial settings has always been service companies, strengthening ties with New Left governments in Latin America, and renewed dispute with Britain for the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.

102 “Yo creo que se usa como una herramienta que (...) trasciende las fronteras, y me parece que todas las ideologías reales deberían trascender fronteras. Sí, viene de Norteamérica, ok, pero... acá también se festeja el 28 de junio. La marcha se pasó [a noviembre] porque (...) la gente en los 90 tenía SIDA y hacia mucho frío.” (Julia and Florencia, interview)
negotiated between what constitutes local and global, or better, local and Western, can lead to re-examine resistance to ‘queerness’ as a ‘new’, or ‘foreign’ term. This argument, however, is not meant to advocate for an unquestioned permeability of the non-Western subject towards notions of queerness based on the fact that there is a tradition of permeability that precedes the queer framework. It is also not meant to assume interest of postcolonial subjects in queerness or queer theory. Instead, this argument is focused on demanding a greater permeability in the forms that queerness, queer theory and queer studies, as Western-originated products, can take. Thus, my argument is one that locates the postcolonial LGBT/queer individual in the subject position in relation to queerness, instead of seeing it as only affected by the effects of US-based queer theory. Spurlin makes a similar proposition by saying:

“Queer inquiry can most productively intersect with postcolonial work and with emerging queer movements in postcolonial locations if it engages in comparative exchange so that queer studies, as they have developed in the West, do not become another master discourse of the postcolonial, if it maintains gender and sexuality as intimately entangled axes of analysis, and if it analyzes sexuality as always already mediated by gender in addition to race, geopolitical location, and class.” (Spurlin 2001, 192)

Taking this into consideration, an important part in preventing queer theory from becoming -or stopping it from already being- a master discourse of the postcolonial, is to critique the binary between radicalism/subversiveness and assimilation/normalization, not only for being culturally specific, as it has been argued throughout this piece, but also for creating a new norm between what is and what is not desired and/or desirable. This serves as yet another argument for the critical examination of the compatibility and/or incompatibility between queerness
and the deconstruction of identities, the role of visibility, and the role of the state through reforms and policies.

Another way of dialoguing with queerness from a postcolonial setting may involve critiquing the very concrete linguistic form of queerness. Going back once again to Guha’s dynamic grid and to Butler’s analysis of queerness, the word ‘queer’ in the US was initially used as a category for the abject or subaltern and therefore has the impact of calling for a restructuring of social categories that acknowledges queers as subjects and not abjects. In São Paulo and Buenos Aires, however, the introduction of the word has an inverse genealogy; it enters society through the Western elite and moves down, arguably, only to the national indigenous elite. Therefore, for many, the word helps to create or reinforce their position as objects of dominance from the elite groups instead of acknowledging their subject position. Queer is not bicha, viado nor sapatão, nor is it puto, tortillera or trava. It lacks a connection with the abject and therefore does not imply a social restructuring in the same way than it does in its context of origin.

Now, one could argue that advocating for the critical examination of all these elements is not far from dismembering all of queer theory, queer studies, and maybe even queerness. After all, this is even an argument for a change in queerness as a linguistic signifier. So what is left of queerness? To defend this argument for the destabilization of the concept, it is useful to come back to the (in)definition of queerness suggested in chapter 1. There, I proposed as understanding of ‘queer’ as

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103 These are derogatory terms for homosexual men, lesbians and transsexuals. The three first terms are in portuguese and are specific to the Brazilian context, while the other three are in Spanish and are specific to Argentina.
that which makes a set of elements not make sense in their previous logical relation, and therefore forces their reconfiguration in a given spacetime.

In order to fully embrace this (in)definition it is necessary to adopt an epistemological approach similar to Karen Barad’s anti-representational performative framework and think of our basic unit of analysis as being a phenomenon instead of a thing. For Barad, “the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather phenomena,” because “phenomena are ontologically primitive relations, relations without preexisting relata.” (Barad 2007, 139) In other words, if we take a performative approach instead of a representationalist one, we need to think of the world that surrounds us as a conjunction of performed and fluent phenomena, even when our epistemological formation may suggest that we think of it as a structured compound of fixed objects. In order to understand queerness as a phenomenon even in its material expressions we need to assume that

“Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences.” (Barad 2007, 137)

Once we think of queerness no longer as a thing but as a phenomenon, the relation between the self and queerness is rearticulated. A person cannot ‘be queer’ without implying an essentialist understanding of the concept that suggests a consumption and identification with a fixed image. In fact, neither queerness nor ‘the self’ can be associated inherently with each other, given that both phenomena are fluid and therefore unfixed. It is also useful to think of queerness in a similar way to
how Foucault refers to power. Like power, queerness cannot be possessed, transmitted, taught nor imposed. In other words, changing the analytical framework from being based on ontological to phenomenological units leads us to stop thinking of queerness as a form of capital. Taking into account that the fieldwork revealed that much of the alienation and critique towards queerness in these postcolonial sites has roots in its interpretation as a form of intellectual and cultural capital, this epistemological reconfiguration can allow to eradicate the neocolonial tendencies and potential for alienating individuals that queer theory has in these sites.

As it will be explained in the conclusion, making this conceptual shift opens possibilities for a queerness from the South based on a politics of inauthenticity. But before fully developing this idea, let us elaborate on one more angle of analysis of the relation between the postcolonial and the queer. Having taken into account opinions of social actors concerning the role of queerness in the postcolonial socio-political sphere, it becomes useful to trace the epistemological traditions that have shaped the production and distribution, or lack thereof, of knowledge produced in the North and the South.

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104 “...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.” (Foucault 1976, 93) “Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.” (Foucault 1976, 94)
Latin American Studies & Geopolitics of Queerness: Epistemology, Traditions and Possibilities

In *Capitalism and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*, Walter Mignolo explores the relation between Latin American Studies (LAS) and Pensamiento Crítico (PC)\(^{105}\), for being two disciplines that rhetorically agree on their subject of study, but differ on their practical elaboration. For Mignolo, “...the question is not just to study the subalterns, but whether you study them from/in the South or from/in the North.” (Mignolo, 51) In this sense, PC is seen by Mignolo as an endogenous discipline that responds to the epistemological demands of Latin American intellectuals, while LAS puts these Latin American intellectuals in the position of “known” instead of “knowing” subject.

I argue that there is a similarity between Mignolo’s critique of Latin American Studies and the development of a queer theoretical perspective that does not respond to the experience of Southern subjects. Although queer theory differs from Latin American Studies in that it does not claim to study non-Western subjects rhetorically, the tendency to associate sexual deviance with the position of the abject, or the subaltern, leads to the tacit inclusion of non-Western sexually deviant individuals to be in a position of doubtful inclusion within a queer theoretical framework. Mignolo states that “in all likelihood intellectuals based in Latin America may feel that they are the object rather than the subject of Latino Americanism.” (Mignolo 2003, 38) I argue that in a similar way than the Latin American subject can see hirself represented in a LAS text while hir wants are never fully addressed, so can the non-

\(^{105}\)Roughly translated as “Critical Thought”, this is a discipline that examines Latin America from a multi-disciplinary approach in the social sciences.
Western LGBT/queer person find hirself tacitly included in US-based queer theory texts while the analysis fails to speak to hir desires.

Thus, with the purpose of working towards a critical understanding of queerness that also addresses the effects of Western hegemony in localized productions of knowledge and their global acknowledgement, “knowledge shall be looked at spatially and not (only) chronologically. Chronological ordering of intellectual and scholarly achievements is one of the most damaging principles of modern epistemology, which runs parallel to the modern economy: what is new is better, and the idea of newness is running the market.” (Mignolo 2003, 34) The idea of a ruling constant newness establishes a sense of temporality that necessarily locates Western epistemology ahead. The introduction of Western disciplines in non-Western contexts started in the colonial period, and continues in postcolonial times. “Once this happened, the standards, criteria, and norms of the social sciences in the First World became the measuring stick for the practice of the social sciences in the Third World.” (Mignolo 2003, 41) This way, non-Western constructions of knowledge are not seen as different, but rather, as undeveloped, incomplete, lagging behind.

The particularly critical character of disciplines surrounding sexual politics towards normativity could suggest a possibility for them to escape the reinforcement of a linear, First-World led, epistemological temporality. Nevertheless, taking into consideration, for example, now widely acknowledged critiques of second-wave feminism, or without going much farther, forms of gay imperialism such as those mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we see the need to remove assumptions of critical perspectives being included in studies of gender and sexuality. In this sense, observing queer theory in particular, and considering the theorists examined in this
piece, it is possible to see the reinforcement of a linear temporality in which not only the Western, but also what are considered radical forms of the Western, occupy the first position in this ‘race’ towards the production of knowledge.

As it has been noted, despite substantial differences in objectives and proposed strategies, a recurrent tool among these texts (particularly Warner’s, Muñoz’s and Bersani’s) is the use of false consciousness. Relying on the concept of false consciousness to define a given action as normative implies that the observing subject is in a position of farther development in a linear temporal dimension. The action of identifying, or claiming to identify, false consciousness in the actions of others, resembles the attitude of a parent who predicts their child will fall off their bike the first time they ride it. Except, when translated into academia, and especially transnational academia, false consciousness can be used to perform a paternalistic prediction of failure towards bodies whose experiences have not been fewer, have not been less formative, but rather, have taken them to form different epistemological orientations. Moreover, taking this idea a step further, the very conception of what constitutes success and failure is conditional to the perspective taken by the theorist, and, remembering Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological orientations once again, of the objects the observer is surrounded by.

There is another parallel between the objective of queer theory as it is presented discursively in these texts, and Mignolo’s description of area studies. As the author notes, “[o]ne of the missions linked to area studies was to develop and modernize the known, the underdeveloped South. This mission was parallel to the missions associated with Occidentalism and Orientalism respectively, that is, to Christianize the Occident (...) and to civilize the Orient.” (Mignolo 2003, 40) Queer theory’s
object of study is not rhetorically linked to geopolitics, and the lack of intention for a neocolonial impact that I explained earlier this chapter liberates it from having an articulated mission. Nevertheless, although the intention of queer theory is not to influence a foreign territory, there is an intention to influence a queer territory. The question then becomes, how do we define the geopolitical boundaries of this queer territory? Are they constrained to the spatio-temporal specificities of the authors that formulate queer theory, or can they stretch, modify, and adapt to encompass individuals in other geopolitical locations? Although, as it has been established earlier in this chapter, queer theorists are careful not to over-expand the scope of their observations, their audience is also not rhetorically constrained to any geopolitical borders. This is to say that queer theory, Orientalism and Occidentalism share, curiously enough, the characteristic of targeting an undefined population and an undefined territory.

It is important to highlight that by drawing this parallel I do not intend to equate queer theory’s project with that of Orientalism and Occidentalism, in the same way that Mignolo’s comparison between these processes with area studies is not meant to unify their characteristics nor impacts in the non-Western world. Instead, by pointing at these common features among them, the purpose is to identify the epistemological tradition that precedes the production of newer disciplines. Following Spivak’s idea that theory is a practice, identifying who occupies the subject and object positions in the action of construction of knowledge shows that, despite queer theory’s attempt to break with normativity, the continuation of an epistemological structure that prescribes actions from the North and (arguably unintentionally) to the South, goes against the very mission of radicalization that it proclaims.
Thus, as explained by Mignolo, “[i]n spite of the distance in time, one element remains in common between Occidentalism in the sixteenth century and Latin American (area) studies in the second half of the twentieth century: the difficulties in recognizing the intellectual and epistemic values of the known subjects.” (Mignolo 2003, 40) The need for a queerness from the South comes from the fact that an observer will never recognize these intellectual and epistemic values as long as it is positioned externally. Spivak’s distinction between representation and re-presentation helps to understand the conceptual miscommunication that will inevitably arise between a non-Western LGBT/queer subject and a Western queer observer:

“Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representations as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy. Since theory is also only ‘action,’ the theoretician does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately).” (Spivak 1988, 275)

According to Spivak, the inevitable misrepresentation of the subaltern, the abject, the other and/or the oppressed does not have an origin in a linguistic difference or language gap, but rather, this miscommunication is a product of the irreconcilable ontological differences between the parties. This is why a project of ‘expansion’ of queer theory to ‘include’ the experiences of non-Western LGBT/queers would only accentuate the relations of dominance instead of serving a liberatory purpose. Following this idea, Mignolo notes, “...in the South the most innovative works in social sciences were produced precisely by departing from the disciplinary control of the social sciences imposed in and from its place of origin.” (Mignolo 2003, 42) Indeed, critical works concerned with questions of liberation,
governability and freedom\textsuperscript{106} have been elaborated by adopting, adapting and creating epistemological tools to respond to localized desires and necessities.

By understanding liberation as an autochthonous concern to Latin American epistemological and socio-political traditions, it is possible to see the benefit of bringing back to the table the analysis and reformulation of queer theory, as a discipline with a similar objective that can be reformulated, contested and manipulated for localized purposes. In the same way that philosophy of liberation was elaborated after dependency theory, and that Pensamiento Crítico and Latin American Studies exist as different formulations of similar epistemological questions, so can a queerness from the South that contests or responds to US-based queer theory, serve as a channel for non-Western LGBT/queer individuals to address localized needs and desires.

I choose to call this a queerness from the South, as opposed to a queerness of or for the South, because the two latter options have static and possessive connotations. Of ascribes a sense of inescapable and exclusive possession between the two elements in the sentence, while for suggests that this project plays the role of a gift, which in turn implies that the subject who creates it is different than the subject that it is meant to address. In contrast, a queerness from the South mentions the subjects that it can represent and re-present, while at the same time leaves the opportunities open for the directions it can take. From also allows us to embrace Mignolo’s idea of diversality as a central component of this Southern queerness. Diversality has been shortly defined by Mignolo as the universal project of diversity, but in order to understand

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} “Parallel to this debate in the social sciences [related to dependency theory], there was a continuous production and discussion in the emergence (approximately 1970) and growth of the philosophy of liberation, parallel because philosophy of liberation responded to the more general episteme of dependency theory.” (Mignolo 2003, 50)
\end{flushright}
the centrality of this concept in the articulation of a queerness from the South, let us consider a more complete definition:

“...diversity as a universal project (that is, diversality) shall be the aim instead of longing for a new abstract universal and rehearsing a new universality grounded in the ‘true’ Greek or Enlightenment legacy. Diversality as the horizon of critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism presupposes border thinking or border epistemology grounded on the critique of all possible fundamentalism (Western and non-Western, national and religious, neoliberal and neosocialist) and on the faith in accumulation at any cost that sustains capitalist organizations of the economy.” (Mignolo 2000, 743)

The importance of building a queerness from the South in articulation with diversality arises from the value that is given to difference, tension, and dynamism within both ideas. Thus, a diversal Southern queerness can serve as a framework for the localized inquiry and pursuit of liberation, freedom, non-governability and pleasure, while remembering that a queerness from the South is a queerness which is not one.
Conclusion: The Dynamic Value of Decolonizing Queerness

The general aim of this project has been to call attention to the political implications that the association between queer theory and Northern epistemology have for LGBT/queer political initiatives in the Global South. The cultural specificities of US-based queer theory help to build a division between radicalism/subversion and normalization/assimilation that is reinforced through the use of political and analytical tools such as the denunciation of false consciousness. While US-based queer theorists may be far from pursuing the creation of yet another channel for neocolonialism, global relations of dominance often exceed the critical character of this project by introducing queer theory in non-Western settings as a signifier of intellectual and cultural capital. In order to acknowledge the value of queer theory as a framework for liberation of sexualized experience, while at the same time respecting the phenomenological and epistemological specificities of individuals and groups outside of the Global North, I would like to conclude this project by proposing two theoretical/practical articulations for the proposal of a queerness from the South.

The Case for a Politics of Inauthenticity

Having elaborated on the worth of articulating a queerness from the South as a response to the limitations of a US-based queer theory, I now attempt to formulate a non-prescriptive framework that allows for an initial grounding of this theory. The binary between assimilation/normalization and subversiveness/radicalism is currently used by Northern epistemology as a standard for the evaluation of the degree of desirability of political initiatives, following the ethical perspective of US-based queer theorists. In order to articulate a queerness from the South that in addition to
attacking heteronormativity, tackles Western hegemony - in particular the colonization of the processes of construction of knowledge- I propose to challenge this binary through a politics of inauthenticity.

Authenticity can be understood as an assumed relation of consistency between ontology and performance. In other words, authenticity is an expected coherence between what a given entity is and what that entity does. This means that an authentic mother will love her child, an authentic Brazilian will speak Portuguese, an authentic recipe will include specific ingredients. But hidden in authenticity is also the negative definition of what a body cannot be and cannot do. An authentic revolutionary cannot participate in capitalism, an authentic local person in a remote touristic location cannot speak the language of the visitor, an authentic man cannot be penetrated. This way, a system of morality and ethics is built upon the intention to predict the actions that the taxonomically organized bodies that surround us will and will not take. Accordingly, authenticity is necessarily essentialist and communitarian. Acting consistently with the categories that are ascribed to the individual makes the subject interpolatable and gives access to spaces, social groups and material benefits. Thus, an ethics based on authenticity is taught and reproduced with the purpose of governing, controlling and predicting individual actions.

Following this logic, the concept of authenticity could be thought of as a consistent relation between norms and sexualized experience in a heteronormative framework, in the terms of US-based queer theorists. It would be plausible, for example, to think of authenticity as an expansion of Gayle Rubin’s “charmed circle”, which already three decades ago categorized sexual practices according to their position in the sex hierarchy of a Western postmodern society (Rubin 1984, 13).
Indeed, there is much compatibility in the observations of US-based queer theorists with my critique of authenticity, given that they are both based on a denunciation of the oppressive impact of morality and normativity. Nevertheless, it would be mistaken to equate inauthenticity with queerness as conceived by US-based queer theorists. Queerness can be inauthentic, but inauthenticity can take different forms than queerness. In other words, Rubin’s charmed circle can be seen as a model of authenticity, but through the identification of the binary radicalism/subversiveness and assimilation/normalization I have tried to demonstrate that models of authenticity are not exclusive to dominant systems like heteronormativity and capitalism. Following the logic of US-based queer theorists regarding the forms that queerness can and cannot take shows that there are expectations of consistency between ontology and performance, even within critical analysis of performativity.

The difference between inauthenticity and queerness as elaborated by the US-based queer theorists analyzed here lies on the degree and type of engagement with moral norms. Often, the responses towards the regulation of sexual experience suggested by US-based queer theorists gravitate towards the active rejection and deconstruction of categories. Other times, there is anxiety over the lack of definition of sexual identities being translated into an invisibilization of sexual deviance, which, as a reaction, leads to the defense of a coherently subversive, anti-normative behavior. Unlike both of these positions, a politics of inauthenticity proposes a concession of identity categories created by the social without following the expected relation of coherence between identity and action.

I argue that in order for queer politics not to become dependent on a particular moral, political and economic system, it is necessary to reclaim queerness as
intrinsically dynamic. In this sense, the potential for seeing queerness as a dynamic concept depends on the possibility to escape authenticity as a limiting boundary. The approach promoted by most US-based theorists of either deconstructing categories or engaging exclusively with that which is considered radical/subversive, often works as a way of reaffirming the strength of (Western defined) norms. At the same time, the prescriptive aspect of a politics of compulsory radical/subversive queerness works as a measuring stick for the actions of others without taking into account the particularities of different experiences, which among other things, are conditioned by the initial positionality of the subject in the global order. Considering that this project has been built as a postcolonial critique of queer theory’s unacknowledged cultural specificities, looking at the relation between LGBT/queer individuals and normative institutions in postcolonial sites has showed that processes of strategic negotiation cannot be thought of as more or less informed of their political impact and connotations than those considered radical/subversive in a Western context, but rather, as being informed by differently constructed experiences.

Let us illustrate a politics of inauthenticity through an example. Starting with the gendered speech act performed by the person who delivers the newborn, there is a set of expectations -expressed in the form of categories- which are imposed onto the body to condition the individual experience of space/time. While a US-based queer perspective may ask that body to either attack the normalizing impact of these categories or to embrace their radical/subversive potential, a politics of inauthenticity defends an engagement with categories and a simultaneous disruption of the content of its expectations. Judith Butler, using a conveniently similar example to illustrate the power of categories to govern bodies, explains that “[t]o the extent that the
naming of the ‘girl’ is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain ‘girling’ is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm.” (Butler 1993, 232) While agreeing with Butler on the undesirability of the governing power of a gender category, I propose that one way of answering to the welcoming ‘It’s a girl!’ may not necessarily involve disengaging oneself from the gender category by not performing femininity, nor purposely performing femininity to exercise its radical/subversive value. Instead, an approach based on a politics of inauthenticity would lodge the will and task of assigning a category to the body onto the social context without internalizing the demands that are associated to it. The reasoning process behind a given action, initiative or performance would not be based on political connotations, but upon the relation of the action to liberation, pleasure, freedom and non-governability. Whether that body categorized as ‘girl’ chooses to wear lipstick, to grow a beard, to wear lipstick and grow a beard, or to not do any, would then be a product of where pleasure and freedom are identified by the individual in specific space/time circumstances, instead of what is socially defined as radical/subversive or normalizing/assimilationist.

For example, when I interviewed Tomás, a 28-year old, working-class mechanic from the outskirts of Buenos Aires, who enjoys F-1 races and met his current boyfriend singing in the neighborhood’s choir, he expressed simultaneous support and distance towards the LGBT/queer movement. But this conflicted position should not be equated with a somehow more commonly criticized combination of rhetorical support of a cause with disengagement from actions that contribute to it. In other words, Tomás’s testimony was not the typical ‘talking the talk but not walking the
walk.’ In fact, Tomás explained that he had tried to walk the walk by attending meetings and demonstrations led by different LGBT/queer organizations, and that he had been part of Leftist and Rightist political parties, because “you need to know what things are like before making up your mind.”\(^{107}\) However, he found that often people in LGBT/queer circles interpreted his gender presentation and expressions of taste as a way of forcing or faking a heterosexual identity.\(^{108}\) Although Tomás opposed this recurrent reaction, he kept an interest in the movement conditional to the concrete benefits that it could provide him with.\(^{109}\) Tomás seemed legitimately unconcerned about being labeled as wanting to pass as heterosexual, but he maintained that passing was not his objective. In fact, at another point in the interview he stated “my friends from the auto repair shop [taller] used to make jokes, not to me, but to everyone, and say things like ‘What? Are you a fag or something?’ And I told them ‘I am a fag, so? What’s the problem?’”\(^{110}\)

I read in Tomás’ negotiations of identity a detachment from socially conceived ideals of normalization/assimilation nor radicalism/subversiveness. His indefinition, his inauthenticity, is precisely what generated anxiety for both social spheres, the heteronormative and the

\(^{107}\) “Yes, I was part of some parties in the Right and some in the Left, but never too extreme, neither extreme Right nor extreme Left. But yes, I did that because you need to know what things are like before making up your mind.”

\(^{107}\) “Si, yo milité en partidos de derecha y de izquierda, pero nunca de extrema derecha ni de extrema izquierda. Es que sí, yo milité porque tenés que saber cómo son las cosas antes de formar una opinión.”

(Tomás, interview)

\(^{108}\) I mean, I’m familiar with quite a few organizations, and I tried going to their meetings, but I have never felt comfortable. Like, because I like different things they think I’m faking [my identity]. I don’t like that so I go to some events but I don’t let them tell me what to do.”

Y sí, o sea... yo conozco bastantes organizaciones, y yo traté ahí de ir a algunas reuniones, pero no es lo mío. O sea, ellos se creen que porque a mí me gustan otras cosas yo me estoy haciendo... a mí eso no me va, así que a veces voy a los eventos pero a mí no me van a decir qué hacer.”

(Tomás, interview)

\(^{109}\) “I don’t participate all the time because it is not my circle, but as long as I am benefitted from the reforms they fight for, I don’t care about being different from each other.”

“Entonces no participo todo el tiempo porque no es mi ambiente, pero si las reformas que consiguen me benefician, no me importa ser diferente uno del otro.”

(Tomás, interview)
homonormative. In this case, there were two ‘charmed circles’ that he was escaping. His selective participation and identification in the realm of sexual politics oscillated between these poles in order to respond to a personal search for pleasure, non-governability and freedom.

I found another clear example of inauthenticity in Lucía’s relation with same-sex marriage. Lucía explained that she understood marriage to be “an institution based on patriarchy and capitalism that is meant to control and limit the role of women in society”111, and that the purpose of LGBT/queer political initiatives needed to focus on different axes of social change. Her strong stand against reform-based LGBT/queer initiatives was complemented by her support and years of militancy in community-based projects that worked outside of institutional structures. And yet, Lucía explained that she is now married to her longterm partner because “it made the most sense, it was easier that way... if we are looking to adopt a child it is more convenient to have that paperwork done.”112 The inauthenticity in her politics comes from a disconnection between her political views and her behavior. The reasoning process that lies underneath this disconnect challenges the two predominant positions regarding same-sex marriage. Lucía refused to be considered an uncritical assimilationist/normalized lesbian, while at the same time her relation with marriage differs from radical/subversive positions that condemn all interactions with the institution for reinforcing the governance of bodies. It should be made clear that in identifying the inauthenticity in Lucía’s behavior I am not dismissing the ways in

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110 “Los chicos del taller antes me decían, o no a mí, pero hacían bromas así entre todos, y decían ‘Ah ¿sos puto?’ Y yo les dije ‘Yo soy puto, ¿Y? ¿Cuál hay?’” (Tomás, interview)
111 “El matrimonio es una institución basada en el patriarcado y el capitalismo que tiene como propósito controlar y limitar el rol de la mujer en la sociedad.” (Lucía, interview)
112 “Sí, me casé porque tiene sentido, es más fácil... si queremos adoptar es más fácil cuando tenés ese papeleo hecho” (Lucía, interview)
which she being married may indeed reinforce state control of interpersonal relations. In fact, she does not ignore this possibility either. Her process of negotiation of these variables prioritized that which would lead to a higher degree of freedom and pleasure in her actions, which in this case combines using marriage as a bureaucratic channel for opening possibilities of behavior with rejecting marriage as a normative capitalist institution. And to the extent that her reasoning is in tension and represents a conflict for any framework of analysis, she is challenging behavioral expectations of authenticity.

As a last example, let us look at the testimony provided by Márcia, a 31 year-old drag queen, regarding the political impact of the São Paulo LGBT Pride Parade. Márcia, opposing public opinion, sustained that “[p]eople say that the [LGBT Pride] Parade is not political, but it’s not true. What we want to do is to show ourselves in society, and to do it in a funny, ludic way, with music. Yes, there is a message, but we are trying to have fun.” In this testimony, the ‘message’ of the Parade is secondary to a higher purpose of finding pleasure. Bringing back an argument made in Chapters 2 and 3, there are two popular readings of the parade. One criticizes it for being ‘too commercial’ and ‘apolitical’, while the other values its mission to celebrate diversity. Nevertheless, they are both constructed upon an ideal of what a collective LGBT/queer expression should be like, and both fear the possibility of the parade falling into a process of *carnivalization*. An alternative view of the parade, following Márcia’s testimony, could be that, while there is an interest of the State to sponsor a one-day event that counteracts discursively all the ways in which the Brazilian State

113 “O pessoal fala que a parada nao é politica, mas nao é assim. O que a gente quer fazer é se mostrar na sociedade, e fazê-lo de um jeito divertido, lúdico, com música. Quando a drag sai na parada, tem gente que nao gosta de que é sempre a drag que sai na tapa do jornal. Mas a drag nao é nem travesti,
systematically oppresses sexual minorities, the participation of LGBT/queer individuals in the event does not make them less conscious of that reality. In fact, the ‘lack of’ political parties flags and slogans, in contrast with the abundance of costumes and alcohol, may be evidence of a use of this space that puts personal pleasure and not collective reform at the center of the demonstration. What Márcia highlights is that this use is not less political. This use of the parade is inauthentically political because it allows for the existence of a misrepresentation (the parade as either assimilationist or subversive) while it actually disrupts any and all of these expectations through partying. Thus, partying is political, and its power to disrupt heteronormativity and Western hegemony is revealed through the derogatory connotations of the carnivalization of the parade, which show the anxieties of groups that try to control the direction of its use in a collective scale.

After the consideration of these examples, it could be argued that within this politics of inauthenticity there is a strong anti-social component, especially taking into account the primordial premise of personal liberation, non-governability, pleasure and freedom. Although a dismissal of the social is not central to this politics, there is a proposal to engage with the social differently. Instead of thinking and searching for a collective queerness, this politics advocates for a process of progressive localization of experience up to the point when it becomes a reflection and analysis of the self as it is in the present space/time circumstances. The underlying intention is to escape representationalism and prioritize the performativity of liberation, non-governability, pleasure and freedom. Thus, the social may be searched by the individual as a source for benefit, be it in the form of communities,

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nem lésbica, é um gay que bota a fantasia. A mídia retrata o que é mais visível. Tem uma mensagem,
individuals or institutions, but not as a source for morality, consciousness, or ethical guidance.

Another potential critique against this framework could be that it essentializes ‘the individual’ by ascribing it with a series of agential capabilities that surpass the social. While this is a valid critique, the idea here is not to build an image of the individual that dominates the social, nor that precedes the social. In fact, the purpose is more closely related to shattering the wholeness of the person by opening possibilities for inconsistent desires. Thus, although this is is not a case for individual reflection on the social construction of taste, identity, desire and behavior, neither is it a denial of this process. This is not a project to ‘uncover’ a hidden individual ‘essence,’ nor to build the idea of the individual as a structure of power. If we take the Foucauldian idea that power is everywhere, it comes from below interpersonal relations and it cannot be divided, restricted nor shared (Foucault 1976, 139), then this can be seen as a project to reflect on the impact that the idea of a consistent ‘self’ can have on the governance of pleasure and freedom. Thus, this proposal involves shifting the focus of analysis from the person to the desire, and ponder, instead of how the environment constructs the subject, how the subject and other institutions govern and can stop governing pleasure and freedom.

Beyond Governance and Representation: Performing Decolonization of Sexualized Experiences

Having explored possibilities for the practical and theoretical articulations of inauthenticity, my intention now is to strengthen the articulation of queer and

claro, (...) mas estamos tentando curtir.” (Márcia, interview)
postcolonial perspectives. Thus, I propose an experiment: what if we thought of heteronormativity in a similar way than Guha invites us to think about colonial dominance? This would imply breaking binaries to examine internal systems of dominance within sexually deviant groups and articulating an understanding of a postcolonial heteronormativity. We could therefore propose the following hierarchical grid:

1. Heterosexual dominant groups.
2. Sexually deviant groups that actively participate in heteronormative structures with the purpose of minimizing and erasing the disruptive power of queerness.
3. Sexually deviant groups that actively resist heteronormative structures with the purpose of maximizing the disruptive power of queerness.
4. Inauthentic sexual deviance.

I ask from the reader to consider the grid I propose as a valid framework for a moment. US-based queer theory, in this case, would be a heterogeneous conjunction of representations that concern the third group. If we consider the US-based queer theory pieces examined in this essay, queer theory’s interlocutors are the first two groups, the heterosexual dominant elite and the sexually deviant groups that support heteronormative structures. Nevertheless, representation is always necessarily built in contrast to a non-representable group, in a similar way than identity is built in contrast to an abject. Spivak explains,

“So much for the intermediate group marked in item 3. For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject’s itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual.” (Spivak 1988, 285)
In the same way that the intellectual is incapable of representing the subaltern because its heterogeneous identity is only built upon difference, so is the intellectual unable of representing the inauthentic sexually deviant group, for its identity is chameleonic by definition. However, there is an important difference between the grids. While Spivak advocates for structural changes that withdraw individuals from subalternity, I advocate for a politics of inauthenticity. The discrepancy might rely in that, although I have built an analogy between heteronormativity and postcolonial dominance, these systems operate with some differences.

Heteronormativity operates on the body through the control and discipline of behavior, while the degree postcolonial dominance depends on capital. Thus, under heteronormativity the desire (often translated into assumption) of a member of the heterosexual dominant group who faces an Other is that the Other will belong to the dominant group. This is because heterosexuality is defined behaviorally and not through possession of capital, which by definition is limited. In contrast, the desire of a member of the foreign dominant group in a postcolonial imperialist setting is that the Other will occupy a lower position of dominance because their supremacy depends on a relational gap in the possession of capital. In other words, although both dominant positions need an Other to exist as such, heteronormativity is strengthened as a system when more people occupy the position of higher dominance, while postcolonial domination is strengthened by more people occupying the position of the subaltern. Taking this fundamental difference into consideration, advocating for a politics of inauthenticity is just as oriented towards the disruption of heteronormativity, as the erasure of subalternity is towards fighting postcolonial dominance.
In order to explain this from another angle, let us take into account Gayatri Spivak’s grammar of power as an instrument to exemplify the potential of a politics of inauthenticity. The construction subject-action-object is seen by Spivak as the basis for social hierarchy in different spheres. A politics of inauthenticity proposes a systematic blurring of social categories to such an extent that the division between subject and object is challenged and a higher level of social horizontality is reached. This horizontality, however should not be confused with homogeneity. In fact, considering that the purpose here is to explore possibilities of horizontality as a channel towards decolonizing sexualized experiences, difference and specificity are key in this process.

Now, what does it mean to decolonize sexualized experience? Does it involve systematized resistance? Does it imply the existence of a ‘true self’ that we are not accessing? I propose an understanding of decolonization of sexualized experience that shifts from both systematized resistance and the existence of a ‘true decolonized self’, as concepts that reinscribe an ideal ethic and ontology. Instead, I argue that decolonization can be thought of as a very queer process. If we take into account that decolonizing may too involve the pursuit of non-governability, liberation, freedom and pleasure, the linguistic signifier becomes secondary to the axes that we identify as objectives or priorities. Further, if we remember Butler’s ideas once again regarding gender as a process of becoming, and not as a category, decolonization can be thought of as the consciously performed exercise of liberation from governance, and not as a condition or state of being.

Decolonization is a simultaneous process of becoming and unbecoming: becoming the free future, unbecoming the colonized past. The tension between these
forces do not only generate a dynamic present subject, but also means that this is a failed copy of a decolonized subject as much as a failed copy of a colonized subject. In the introduction I proposed that queerness needed to be thought of as that which destabilizes the logical relation of the elements of a given universe by maintaining a dynamic pivot-like position. Taking this into account, together with the observation that the process of decolonizing turns the subject into a double failed copy, I want to value the tension that is generated by the conjunction of the ideas of queerness and decolonization. In this sense, although I have used the theoretical tools of postcolonial studies in order to show the ways in which global relations of dominance are reproduced, this should not be equated with neocolonial determinism, because that would ignore that the space generated by the combination of queerness and decoloniality is one of dynamism, failure and uncertainty. As such, this space not only challenges Western hegemony and heteronormativity by asserting different types of specificity, but also, and most excitingly, it challenges our imagination regarding the forms that power, epistemology and sexualized experiences of space can take.

**Reviewing the Room: Immediate Projections**

To conclude, I want to return to Sara Ahmed’s invitation to inhabit the office room queerly. This project has been an exploration of different approaches towards the objects that surround us. Ahmed tells us “that what [the philosopher] can see in the first place depends on which way he is facing.” (Ahmed 2006, 546) Following this, I have tried to face different directions in the room, considering as well that my own positionality is (at least to me) highly undefined. Further, I have tried to explain how epistemological hierarchies that respond to global relations of dominance
currently govern the construction of knowledge regarding the social forms that queerness can take. My intention has not been, however, to vindicate Southern political initiatives over Western political forms as a means to ‘reverse’ global tendencies of dominance. Instead, taking Mignolo’s idea that “[t]he abstract universal is what hegemonic perspectives provide, be they neoliberal or neo-Marxist,” (Mignolo 2000, 743) I have pointed at the ways in which following culturally specific ideals of the directions that queerness ‘can’ and ‘should’ take can work as hegemonic tools for governance in any given setting. Also, by proposing a dissected view of postcolonial and heteronormative dominance I have shown how ideals of radicalism/subversiveness can infiltrate exogenous social settings and reinforce relations of dominance instead of serving liberatory purposes. I have, ultimately, attempted to advocate for a decolonized queerness from the South that confronts the mechanisms of governance of postcolonial and heteronormative rule.

But what does this mean? If we are sitting in a given space in the room, where am I proposing to go, or to avoid going? Are there objects that should be faced and others that should be avoided? In short, the question that is left is: is there somewhere to go? Notice that this is an inquiry that interrogates projections over time and over space. Is there a place where a queerness from the South should go, and is there a set temporality that should be elaborated to complement such directionality?

Following the premise of non-governability behind the proposals for inauthenticity and decolonization, this project defends spatio-temporal immediacy. Proposals for the spatio-temporal forms that queerness can take often oscillate between a necessarily utopian queerness and an embracement of the negativity of queerness through the rejection of futurity. A queerness from the South is an
articulation of both, but total support of neither, of these proposals. In other words, my proposal is not one for a queer utopic futurity that builds a queerness from the South upon hope and desire for a better horizon, in the way that José Muñoz suggests. Neither is this a case for Lee Edelman’s resistance to reproductive futurism, which, by identifying the myth of the Child as an underlying motivation for the defense of a linear temporality, advocates for the disassociation from any projection for the future. A queerness from the South is neither built upon a premise of no future nor on the idea that “[q]ueerness is utopian” (Muñoz 2008, 26) because both of these perspectives, although highly valuable and informational about the possibilities and limitations of the potential forms of queerness, preconceive the delineation of limits. While for Muñoz the limits are in the present, and thus “...we gain a greater conceptual and theoretical leverage if we see queerness as something that is not yet here” (Muñoz 2008, 22), for Edelman the idea of the future holds constraints because queerness is necessarily associated to negativity and the death drive. But if we part from the premise that queerness is something necessarily dynamic, it would be counterproductive, and potentially fallacious, to think that we can exclusively associate queerness with only one of these dimensions.

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114 Muñoz defends the idea that “holding queerness in a sort of ontologically humble state, under a conceptual grid in which we do not claim to always already know queerness in the world, potentially staves off the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture.” (Muñoz 2008, 22)

115 Edelman argues that “For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, as its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child.” (Edelman 2004, 2)

116 “The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order’s pulse, but queerness, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order’s death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally, and hence a place from which liberal politics strives -and strives quite reasonably, given its unlimited faith in reason- to disassociate the queer.” (Edelman 2004, 3)
Thus, I jump from a premise of uncertainty and advocate for immediacy. We do not know where queerness can go, but we can use it now. My proposal is to incorporate both perspectives in order to escape a dichotomy of expectations. Walter Mignolo argues that in the evolution of epistemology “[k]nowledge production directed to problem solving will take precedence over concerns for the method and adherence to disciplinary norms.” (Mignolo 2003, 53) I want to take this idea and translate it into the scope of a queerness from the South as a way of advocating for a politics of here and now, while at the same time considering the possibility of a tomorrow and a somewhere else.

Some immediate applications of a decolonized inauthentic queerness can involve a critical evaluation of the current goals and delineation of the boundaries of the LGBT/queer movements in my sites. Irene, a 78-year old lesbian from Buenos Aires, explained for example that she “currently works in an environmentalist activist group because [she] got tired of the fights within feminist and lesbian groups after over 40 years of militancy.” For Irene, following ideas of what an LGBT/queer movement ‘should focus on’ limits its potential to act upon the specificities of its location. She was categorical when stating that “the [LGBT/queer] movement needs to become conscious of the intersections with environmentalism and the struggles of indigenous groups.”117 Irene advocates for attention to issues that challenge what is expected from the LGBT/queer movement and that still focus on a pursuit of pleasure, non-governance, liberation and freedom. Irene’s suggestion is one of many

117 “Yo trabajo actualmente en un grupo ambientalista porque me cansé de las peleas de los grupos feministas y lésbicos después de muchos años de militancia. () Hay un gravísimo tema con respecto a los glaciares y a la minería a cielo abierto. El gobierno está sumamente ligado a corporaciones, mayormente de Canadá, Suiza y Gran Bretaña, que están prácticamente destruyendo la Cordillera de los Andes con explosivos poderosísimos. (...) Al movimiento le falta tomar conciencia sobre las intersecciones con el ambientalismo y las luchas de los pueblos originarios.” (Irene, interview)
roads that can be taken, and that are being taken, in forging a queerness from the South. The value of these initiatives lies in the tension between the here and there, the self and the Other, the now, the yesterday and tomorrow, where the performed present becomes excitingly queer and the possibilities for the decolonization of sexualized experience let us escape from representationalism.
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