

Twisting Language

Cuir and cyborg resistance politics

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Abstract

Language, for its fictitious narrative as original and superior, works with a series of mechanisms that regulate its use. Its implementation is the result of a whole series of colonial violences, designating places and corners to specific bodies within the social field, a matrix of phonetic, visual and somatic order. What means do we have to create disorder within language? How can we mutate and twist it? Let's look at two strategies. The first will be to look at queer politics, a body generating political tension within majority systems, demonstrating what minority groups are capable of. The second will be to demonstrate how cyborg feminism can enable us to imagine and express new and alternative stories, creating resistance against the medical narrative and the disease as a stigma, specifically homosexuals infected with HIV/AIDS. Finally, artist and writer Pedro Lemebel will be the combining component for both strategies, we will look at his book *Chronicles of the Sidario* (1996), where he exposes how sexual minorities in Chile have formed resistances.

Keywords

Language; queer; cuir; cyborg; HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

The proceeding text will present firstly how Language works. On understanding the effects of speaking a language, it will then present two strategies that enable specific bodies of people to generate a resistance against the linguistic-political processes of the hegemonic language. We will explore how we can potentially rebel against the heterosexual and medico-military narratives of HIV/AIDS. For this task we will look at two examples: lx cuir and the cyborg. Combining these two elements with the *Chronicles of the Sidario* (1996) by Pedro Lemebel, who demonstrates how Chilean sexual minorities through appropriation of language and humor, have fought the Hegemonic Language.

Politics of Language

We will begin by exposing the implications of speaking a Language¹, then coupling the effects to those who speak it. Language has fictitiously presented itself as unique, this is imposed through processes of violence and colonial regimen that seek to homogenize ways of expression, intent on producing a correct and singular way of speaking. This can be demonstrated through the interpretation that it is impossible to speak of a language other than in your own words. As Derrida (1997) notes: "You can only speak a language in that language. Even if it is putting it outside of itself "(p.36). This has the effect that every language is in some sense untranslatable. Following this format, if a language operates and differs from another language, it is because it constructs its own frame of references in its words and its forms, creating its own existence outside any other. In this sense, to communicate in any language, speech will always be restricted by our own terms and conditions. Although one may want to express oneself using other words or narratives, to explain it would always require our own formalities to understand what is meant. In that sense language is solitary.

But, we can not reduce language to uniqueness, since a constitutive characteristic of all language is that it is one, it does not belong to us and at the same time that it is not only one. (Derrida, 1997, p.19). Thus, there is no single model for language, it exists amidst constant plagues of meaning and connotations, subjected to specific ways of expression determined by specific contexts, by particular groups of people, creating nuances in language: neologisms, contamination of other languages, gestures, poetry, translations, deformations in its structure, speech itself. What is a language but the variation of another language, perpetually feeding and accumulating from various pools.

In order for language to impose itself as one and erase its multiplicity, there is a whole grammar system that seeks to confirm a correct way of speaking, and a fiction of language as one and whole. This political effect is achieved through colonization processes.

The monolingualism imposed by the other operates based on that foundation, by a sovereignty of a continual colonial essence that tends, repressible and irrepressibly to reduce languages to the one, that is to say to the hegemony of the homogeneous. (Derrida, 1997, p. 58)

This hegemony arises in episodes of territory conquests, of which erase previous languages to make dominant the language of the settler. It is again interwoven within academies, which seek to define language within the configuration that they have determined. It is also notable within the

internal processes of each Nation-State, in their eagerness to establish themselves as one, subject others to their national form of speech.

To submit languages to ruling disciplines, to parade them as unique, to try to erase their differences, to look only for their naturalness, their purity. These pursuits are what lead a language to its death.

There is another death of simple banalization, the trivialization of a language. And then another, the one that can not come from the language but because of what it is, that is: repetition, lethargy, mechanization, etc. (Derrida, 2001)

Language requires a continual flow of content and connotations to breath. For language to survive, to use it, we need to contaminate it, to create disorder, to make that language our own language, we need to split it up and mark it with our own words.

In spite of the fact that in order to speak, a process of appropriation is required, the colonial violence of a language supplants the narrative that our order of speech is our own, as though it inherently came from us, and not from another who teaches us, or who imposes us.

But then, if it is natural, How do we explain the existence of the institutions that dedicate themselves to the teachings of language? Why the demand to appropriate that which is supposedly natural? How can we understand pedagogical studies about the right use of language, what is less political? (Jerade, 2015, p. 669)

In its very desire to demonstrate a uniqueness, to want to teach it, lies its contradiction. Since this educational process shows its incongruity, its pretension of naturalness. The ambition to prove its uniqueness is coupled with a gesture that seeks to erase its own historical narrative. A fiction of ownership implying a bond to a specific configuration of those who speak that language, a given structure that only belongs to them. But, for the language to remain alive, it requires contamination. It is only through suppression and violence that a ruling form of speech prevails over otherness. But language cannot be kept within a rigid arrangement, it cannot be monolithic nor static, because it requires and needs mutations and circulations, movement for its existence. For speech to prevail, it needs reappropriations, words that others make their own, or rather, that they never finish making theirs.

Language does not only operate within regulations of ideality, it also functions materially, having a materiality of its own.

Because there is another order of materiality that is language, an order that is worked up and down by these strategic concepts. This order, in turn, is directly connected to the political field in which everything that concerns language, science and thought, refers to the person as subjectivity, and its relationship with society. (Wittig, 2006, p.54)

In one sense, language is literally related to the material world, in that, it is printed in dictionaries, on paper, on signage, it continually materially appears in and on various cultural products. But language additionally creates a material relation when we talk, what is said collides and is absorbed by the body. Offenses and flattery affect the body, that evidence of the language is expressed in tears, in smiles and in countless other gestures. Its materiality lies in the expressiveness of our bodies. Varying circumstances are articulated through the disposition of the body in a differing ways, since it is not only in verbal language that the body is able to speak. But its material influence does not end there, language creates ways of labelling the other. These affect the body in relation to society.

These labels given to us can be branding or offensive. They have the power to open wounds of historical inheritance, and to make a hierarchy of those that nominalize against the other, thus reiterating the position of both in society.

The political language is related to a violence of colonial heritage that attempts to impose itself on others, along with the fiction of ownership and of naturalization. In spite of the fact that if there exists a uniqueness in the language, it also exists as multiple, plagued by many other languages, a language is many languages. It makes and affects things, it has a materiality that connects to bodies, wounds or joys, and produces positions in the social field. We have a responsibility with language, its survival is in our hands (Morrison, 1993).

We need linguistic counter-politics that aid disorder within language, to generate alternatives, to contaminate language, to form an event within itself, to create resistance and an escape from those who have nominalized, aiding those who have been branded and rendered to a corner as a minority. For this undertaking we will call upon two agents: *ix cuir* and *cyborg*.

Use cuir language or contort the language itself

Our language is also inaudible. We speak languages like those of the disowned and the crazy.

The white man speaks [...] Stop speaking those languages. Stop writing with your left hand.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1998, pp. 220-221)

Faced with the political processes mentioned earlier, there are ways in which we are able to undo this singular language, to demonstrate how it can be appropriated, to expunge the social positions branded when the other is labelled, denaturalizing the homogenic format. To do this we will draw upon *lx cuir*. The concept of *lx cuir* is defined as a twist made in the language (heterosexual). This contortion enables a minority to flood the dominant language, achieving that those silenced are able to speak, not only liberating those silenced, but with it the language itself. This move also brings about the possibility of it not being a revolt; but a turn inside oneself, towards the hegemony itself, to attempt to become a Unit, as a majority, solidify monolithically. *Lx cuir* is a bastard inheritance of queer theory.

Cuir is proposed as the improper / deviant derivation of the term queer [...] deviation that seeks on the one hand to affirm itself as a legitimate language, which challenges the hegemonic enunciation [...] a system that opposes verbal, local exuberant resistance and builds a pidgin that permits us to speak in languages proposed by Anzaldúa. (Valencia, 2014)

When we are able to decompose the fiction of Language as unitary, we can reinvent it as multiplicity. *Lx cuir* enables a twist in the language, to self-name, it allows us to nominalize our own codes, to invent our own words. A living space, a habitable body. *Lx cuir* is a necessity within language and needs to be able to demonstrate its potential.

By understanding the materiality of language itself, we are also able to see that there are other existing languages like that of heterosexuality. These languages include several levels of communication: one works at a spoken and written level, another is made up of visual codes that are defined by or for a group, to corporal commands. A certain organ belongs to a certain body, a certain form of the skin belongs to another. Alongside the intention to function at multiple levels, language also attempts to want to present itself as universalizing.

This tendency to universalize has a consequence that heterosexual thinking is incapable of conceiving a culture, a society, in which heterosexuality does not order not only all human relationships, but its production of concepts at the same time as all processes of the conscience. (Wittig, 2006, p.52)

Heterosexuality then, should not only be understood as the affective sex relationship between a man and a woman; but as a Language. Which has a unitary and totalizing narrative that seeks to order life, society, visibility, spoken and written, etc. This is done through opposition poles: male-female, male-female, heterosexual-homosexual. These relationships violently produce the construction of the other, or violence towards the other. Creating social relations in which this dominant language or the dominant seeks to impose itself as natural and unitary.

Like every language, heterosexuality aspires to a certain fiction of ownership, of naturalization, of unification. Because the subjects who speak it act naturally as men, women, homosexuals, etc. By carrying out this process, the historic narrative linked to these subjectivities are erased, making their identification possible. The attempt of the heterosexual language to consolidate itself as the Unit is what shows its multiplicity, its fictionality, its impropriety. To maintain its essentiality, heterosexuality needs homophobia.

Precisely because homophobia often operates by attributing to homosexuals a gender that is harmed, has failed or, otherwise, abject, that is, calling gay men "effeminate" and lesbians "machos", the act of homophobic terror towards Homosexuals frequently coincides with a horror of losing the appropriate gender ("No longer being a real man or a full-fledged man" or "no longer a true woman or a suitable woman") [...]. (Butler, 2012 , p.334)

Why would someone who recognises and narrates themselves as heterosexual be afraid of losing their gender, if it is theirs to own or is natural? Why, if heterosexuality, as a language, is something that belongs to one, would there be a need to reiterate continuously and to assert oneself? It is in this very gesture, where heterosexuality tries to unify and generate appropriation violence on the world, where we can see the fictionalization of the language and where there appears a potential to twist. Exposing their non-uniqueness provides the possibility of demonstrating that other languages exist, that other linguistic singularities exist. This is one of the tasks that *lx cuir* has proposed, to expose that the heterosexual language is not unique, nor natural, that the genre, with its binarization and esthetics, is fictitious. It is these narrative gestures that create singularities in the heterosexual language; Not only that, they also generate their own language. These, are not reduced only to expressions, words, visual codes and materialities, but of another life, of the existence of other bodies in the social sphere, bodies intent on not being destroyed.

Lx cuir² works by stressing linguistic encodings, desordering language forms. They work within the written and spoken; adding an x or * in the place where a vowel should be placed to indicate the gender. Lx cuir offer alternative sounds in speech to erase the assigned sex, so that we are not labelled in the use of language, that we are given an existence in the social field, becoming present. It also operates in the production of visuals, modifying the images assigned to certain subjected types, painting sober skin with lipstick. Lx cuir is a *poiesis* of corporalities: mutate, modify, create, invent.

[...] therefore invent in your language if you can or want to understand mine, invent if you can or want to understand my language like yours, where the event of your prosody does not happen more than once in your home, right there where his "in his home" annoys the cohabitants, the citizens, the compatriots [...]. (Derrida, 1997, p.80)

To speak a language we need to be able to appropriate it, that is only possible with the innovations we make to the language. If to have a social existence you have to force gender, racial, heterosexual grammars, etc. Then lx cuir is poetic because it enables us to create distinct linguistic agents, to appropriate a language, allowing us to speak, name and exist in the social field differently.

Another way in which lx cuir helps us disorder language is by confronting the names that are assigned to us and changing them. Heterosexuality in its linguistic process reiterates the hierarchies by restating the differences, wounding the non-hetero with offensive words, by nominalizing otherness. Genealogically our disordering agent derives from this tension within the language, since the word queer has been historically an insult. The agency's move has been to appropriate the language of hatred, and in doing so changing its hurtful meaning. The body makes the wound its own, making the place of pain habitable. The hegemonic meanings are broken, letting others originate. What needs to be understood is that we should never finish appropriating the language; since as we have shown, language is not owned by anyone. It would be a fictionalization of unity, of ownership, to point out correct ways of speaking cuir. In addition, the fact that no one possesses lx cuir continues to open the space for resistances and revolts to generate within the language, for it not to remain in a specific corporeality, but allowing that others can also make these singularities as their own. Twists, like the performativity of language itself, are in a continuum. A becoming where the strength of its resistance comes from its reiteration. We inhabit the world as long as we generate a language in the Language.

In short, cuir language is indiscipline because it shows that there is not a single language that is intended as universal and dominant, but many languages within that same language, and at the same time, outside of it.

Also because it invents new ways of nominalization for bodies that do not have an existence in language. They are made to exist, they are named. Our disordering and undisciplined agent transforms social places that are assigned to him through the reappropriation of insults. What you tell me does not mean that, I am not that, that place you give me is another. A narrative event.

Cyborgs, gays and AIDS

The claim of uniqueness and appropriation is established in other types of languages, as we have reiterated in the text. Another example is the medical language, which aims to fictionalize as a unique narrative of corporealities, constructing formats of how disease should be described. Health grammar is not something that exists only in medicine, but permeates the whole social field. There are clinical fictions that need to be dealt with urgently, since their impact hits us with such great force. One of those fictions is the affirmative narrative the clinic has created around HIV/AIDS. We will show the effects of this language and also potential breakouts and resistances. We will look at two counter discourses in the chronicles of Pedro Lemebel and in the Cyborg feminism of Haraway.

The main issue that we find in Clinical Language is that these narratives describe a medical problem as if it were a military problem. Since the disease is narrated as something to be eliminated, eradicated, as an invasion.

More harmful is the [military] metaphor that continues to survive in public health discourses, where the disease is usually described as an invader of society, and efforts to reduce the mortality of a certain disease are described as fights, struggles, wars. (Sontag, 2016, p.52)

The discursive war in the clinic builds stigma, impacting the lives of the sick. The medical narrative is a performative one that has the effect of magnetizing a condition. The body is affected not only by the disease, but also by the grammar that exists around it. The scale of what is damaged corporally is ruled by an imposing military narrative, decreasing the power of the patient. The patient falls back on the linguistic power of what the doctor says. Where what should be sought is that the sufferer also seeks to make that language their own, to look for an active way to respond to what is said.

AIDS, unlike other diseases such as cancer, is caused by an external agent. Something different from the body that stays in it and that damages it. Affecting the social and individual body. AIDS is a foreigner in the body, the

fear of this disease is the fear of the foreigner and emerges from the construction of the other.

The military metaphor serves to describe a particularly feared disease as a foreigner is feared, the "other", as well as the enemy in modern warfare; then the jump between demonizing the disease and blaming the patient is inevitable. (Sontag, 2016, p.53)

Otherness is what is between the human body and the agent that invades it, the sick person who contaminates society. There is not only a fantasy of an external agent that invades the somatic, but a myth of origin that comes from a non-Western otherness, non white, non heterosexual: since gays are responsible for HIV/AIDS, and in the social imagination the disease is something that comes from monkeys, the Africans (Sontag, 2016).

Language as an entity and unity also fears the foreigner, resisting the pollution of its language, just as heterosexuality fears being contaminated by homosexuals. Violence to otherness is made possible by this political paranoia. For it is those others, the foreigners, the uncivilized, who do not speak as "we" do. While protective borders are built, so too are frontiers alerting to any possible invasion to Language, medical grammar or heterosexuality.

Another trauma is the anguish of losing the human form. Disease is dehumanizing, it unravels the body and modifies it. But the human, with the help of medical means, survives, adapts to the new possible body and way of being, erasing the traces of its historical narrative, its construction.

Then, humanism invented a different body to what he called human: a sovereign body, white, heterosexual, healthy, seminal. A body stratified and full of organs, full of capital, whose gestures are timed and whose desires are the effects of the necropolitical technology of pleasure. (Preciado, 2014)

The human is opposed to disease, to the queer, to those with AIDS. The healthy human; synonym of vitality and power, of whiteness. Its configuration is commanded: avoid, eradicate, control, educate, civilize the different, the non-human. The body with HIV or AIDS in turn seeks to present itself as something outside of this sovereign organicity. The trace of bodily contamination is scrutinized, and so the body seeks to identify itself, to declare its alternate presence.

The most terrifying diseases are those that seem not only lethal but dehumanizing, in a literal sense [...]. On the contrary, they are the stigmata of a survivor. The marks on the face of a leper, of a syphilitic, of someone who has an ear, they are the signs of a progressive mutation, of a decomposition: something organic. (Sontag, 2016, p. 67)

Traces of deviation are hunted, these traces of otherness are then fictionalized in such a way that they appear to correspond to a different species. Rumors of deviation, uncivilization, danger, guilt, fall on the patient. This dehumanizing imprint forces the patient to belong to a "community of pariahs". The patient is then segregated, and excluded from the social field.

Within all linguistic construction we can find mechanisms of resistance and escape. Two examples of narrative techniques that generate resistance to the oppressive medical language structure are the cyborg concept proposed by Donna Haraway and the AIDS Chronicles by Pedro Lemebel. Both narratives help us to imagine and retell another form of existence.

"The vitality of language lies in its ability to paint the current, the imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers" (Morrison, 1993). A poetic rupture to the social structure, creating a uniqueness that allows fluidity not only in the language itself, but in the life of those who speak it.

By looking at the concept that cyborg proposes, we are able to build an alternative narrative to the existing medical one that dominates the way people with HIV/AIDS are described. To demonstrate this political fiction we look at how Donna Haraway characterizes the cyborg. She presents the cyborg as: "a hybrid of 'machine and organism' (Haraway, 1991, p.25), furthermore adding: "I am arguing in favor of the cyborg as a fiction that encompasses our social and bodily reality and as a resource imaginatively suggestive of very fruitful couplings" (Haraway, 1991, p. 254). The cyborg is defined as a body that is a mixture between something technological and something organic. The body of the queer with HIV/AIDS reverberates with the discourse proposed by the feminist philosopher, because it is in that very similar circumstance the body HIV/AIDS finds itself, in fact their very survival depends on it, without continuous medical support, the body with HIV/AIDS would die. To survive these bodies need distinct medical setups, technological couplings: syringes with which to inject doses of AZT³, truvada pills, pharmacological substances such as Prep. These prostheses allow the body with HIV/AIDS to identify as a cyborg corporality. In addition to clinical dependency, alternative mechanisms are created to narrate another possibility of the body outside of the heterosexual language: silicones, wigs, heels, glitter. The homosexual with HIV/AIDS, as we mentioned above, faces a discord with the animal, the body is modified by the disease, the face begins to dehumanize. The body with HIV/AIDS becomes a hybrid between machine and organism, with not only its life but also its social existence requiring various technological couplings, without them, survival would be impossible.

The cyborg constructs another metaphor for the body, distinct from the dehumanization proposed by medicine. This insulting political narrative aims to erase ontological boundaries. The AIDS body is not very different from the cyborg body, a concoction of human, animal and machine. This political fiction can permeate and extend further afield, not only creating an alternative narrative for queers with HIV/AIDS, but to all bodies: we are all cyborgs. In other words, we all require different types of technical prosthesis that are necessary for our existence: medicine, computers, cell phones, etc. This form of narration, with the precaution of undoing it if necessary to prevent its totalization, enables us to narrate a new story, one where there is no unique human form, where no such totalizing fiction exists, but that we are all bodies with different technological needs. Each individual will have the necessary (bio) technological prostheses that it requires to live and to increase its powers. Some need substances such as coffee to write a text, alcohol for socializing, misoprostol, sertraline, a cell phone. There is nothing that needs to be eradicated, eliminated, there is no contamination of the body, the body is already hybrid, contaminated, blasphemous. What exists are the different conditions of each body, necessary adjuncts for their empowerment and survival. There is no unique way to be a cyborg, there is always divergence, always otherness.

Lemebel also uses a strategy that fights the dogmatic medical language, in turn resonating with those of *lx cuir*, an appropriation of insults. Queers with AIDS reappropriate the connection with the animal and the stigma, repairing the wounds while making another life possible. Some examples of reappropriated names are: *La Loba*, *La Lui-sida*, *La Frunsida*, *La Madonna*⁴.

Adjective and nouns that are continuously renamed according to the state of mind, appearance, sympathy, anger or boredom of the Sodomite clan always ready to reschedule the party, to speculate with the semiotics of the name to the point of exhaustion. From this nobody escapes, except the *AIDS sisters*, who are also cataloged in a parallel list requiring triple to maintain the antidote of humor. (Lemebel, 1997 pp.57-58)



Lembella (digital illustration), Nicolás Marín (Mr. Poper), 2016.

Faced with the seriousness imposed by the clinical language, Chilean transvestites react with humor and laughter. The tragic of the disease vanishes, the sufferings that weigh such huge stigmatizing forces in the narrative are weakened, and become comical. The nominalization is no longer that of a wounded patient, it can be that of a diva, of an animal.

The narrative that the Chilean AIDS fads have invented reinterprets the disease from tragic to glamorous, the indication of an unwanted death veers instead towards death as an event. The diseased body is not described in terms of exclusion, it is something to which one aspires, in this context an individual with AIDS becomes a celebrity.

Now the AIDS death has class and category. Not just anyone can say goodbye to the world with the Hollywood glamor that took the lives of Hudson, Perkins, Nureyev and Fassbinder [...] With this approach, adorned with drama, the fantastic and ludicrous have made their death a flamenco tablao, a catwalk of fashion that mocks the funerary ritual. (Lembel, 1997 pp. 73-74)

The definition is contorted and through technical couplings (glitter, makeup, dresses) the performativity of the suffering body is transformed, the

narration changes. The creative scheme of over-experience is shattering, inventively mutating language, making stigma a uniqueness.

Faced with a Language that is imposed by colonial violence as unique and proper to certain bodies, we must oppose different mechanisms, techniques and poetics that destruct its singularity. We must create new ways of survival for those that the hegemonic Language strives to stigmatize. In this effort we can call upon the examples of *ix cuir*, a minority language making insults their own, cyborg mythology questioning the conformation of the body and its narrative and *The AIDS chronicles* of Lemebel, using the wit of words and the use of healing through laughter. In front of oppressive language we must resist and attack with poetry, creativity, blasphemy, mutation, reappropriation, and rob its concepts. We must confront Language to survive, resist, and liberate.

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Notes

¹ Capitals are used as an epistemic resource to emphasize that the linguistics processes are pretend to be hegemonic.

² Lx cuir (Latin American queers) add an x or * in the place where a vowel would normally be placed to indicate the gender in Spanish language structures. Liberating the agency of a labelled gender and confronting the binary codes of the Spanish language structure.

³ The first medicine use in the HIV treatment.

⁴ Reappropriated Spanish labels, nicknames and insults: La Loba, La Lui-sida, La Frunsida, La Madonna. Confronting and changing animal connotations among others, in the case of "la Loba" meaning "the wolf".