



Almost the Same but Not Quite - the Prosthetic Condition in Latin American Artistic Practices

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**Almost The Same But Not Quite—The Prosthetic Condition in Latin American
Artistic Practices**

A dissertation presented
by
Jerónimo Duarte Riascos
to
The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
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Jerónimo Duarte Riascos

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Abstract

My dissertation studies works of art that simultaneously feature literary and visual components, and that were produced in Latin America after 1980. To approach them, I propose the notion of the *prosthetic condition*: a way of being in contemporaneity that is opposed to traditional ontology—a manner of existence proper to entities that are produced artificially and that generate effects beyond the boundaries of the art world. Like medical prosthesis, entities affected by the prosthetic condition replace something that is missing. They bring something new into existence while, at the same time, accounting for a lack—whether original or subsequent. They are a testament to the will to continue despite adversity and an invitation to admire the impact of creation, craft, and artifice. I develop the notion of the prosthetic in conversation with a number of critical and theoretical debates, both in the humanities and beyond: the visual turn in literary studies, the performativity of language, the expansion of artistic fields and media, the dematerialization of artistic practices, the conceptualization of the human and the post-human in contemporaneity, the role of spectatorship as a creative activity, and the role of artistic practices in building communities that account for the different ways in which proximity is experienced today.

This notion is particularly helpful when approaching contemporary artistic productions that are resistant to fixed categorizations, or cases when a work of art is several things at once – including, also, non-art. *Prosthetic* entities underscore art's ability to create and modify the world, and affect what communities experience as

real. They remind us that both fiction and reality are malleable, and that one is often employed as a tool to alter and invent the other. The *prosthetic condition* is a tool to interpret the creative power available to humans in contemporaneity, as it is experienced both inside and outside art.

The dissertation is divided into two parts and three chapters. Part A comprises the first chapter and is devoted to *prosthetic objects*, examined through the practices of Mario Bellatin and CADA. Part B explores the notion of *prosthetic beings*: in the second chapter I return to Bellatin's work to discuss the existence of a *prosthetic self*, and in the third chapter I study the possible existence of *prosthetic others*, by looking into the work of Lucas Ospina and Simón Hosie.

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On The Conditions Of Possibility Of A Prosthetic Existence

An Introduction

Fairly recently, I stumbled upon a *New York Times* article titled “How Robot Hands Are Evolving to Do What Ours Can.”¹ As it often happens with news headlines, one does not need to read the full piece to reach a conclusion. In this case, the conclusion being that, indeed, yes, robot hands are evolving in such way. The first few lines of the article confirm:

A robotic hand? Four autonomous fingers and a thumb that can do anything your own flesh and blood can do? That is still the stuff of fantasy. But inside the world’s top artificial intelligence labs, researchers are getting closer to creating robotic hands that can mimic the real thing.

And perhaps because of serendipity, or by the mere salience of information related to one’s research in times of dissertation writing, the article reminded me of a TV show I have been watching recently. The series, set 300+ years in the future, depicts a world in which human bodies are disposable—that is, a future in which your body becomes a non-essential part of your being and you can trade it at will, just like changing clothes. In one of the episodes, the lead female character gets into a really bad fight that severely injures her arm. In order to survive, she has two options: to completely change bodies or to keep her current one, and upgrade it with a prosthetic arm. Options for the arm replacement vary in price and quality, but since the character has a good source of income, she goes for the most state-of-art available version and keeps her old body. When looked at, the new, artificial arm is impossible to differentiate from the *real* one—that is, unless you were to pay attention to what this arm could do. The prosthesis functioned as a ‘super-limb,’ impossible to damage,

¹ Mae Ryan, Cade Metz, and Rumsey Taylor, “How Robot Hands Are Evolving to

capable of unimaginable strength and flexible in ways impossible for a real arm to experience.

Like the hand in the *New York Times* article, this bionic arm was almost the same as the real one, but not quite. The hand was (is?) reality diminished; the arm was (will be?) reality enhanced. In both cases, they share the three main characteristics that define a prosthesis: they are artificial, their existence fills a void, and they are capable of producing real effects. And one more thing: they mimic the real, they are look-alikes.

In a rather straightforward way, this hand and this arm are the result of human *poiesis*. In both cases, the result is akin to an object: material, graspable, approachable, observable. Consequently, today, when one thinks of a prosthesis, of course, one thinks of an object. But what if we use this term to refer instead to a manner of existing, opposed to historical ontology², and particularly present in contemporaneity?

This is the endeavor I attempt to undertake in this dissertation. I want to propose that contemporary artistic practices, especially those coming from Latin America, allow us a glimpse at what I call the prosthetic condition; they give us a foretaste of the possibility of a prosthetic existence affecting objects, beings, communities, and events. They present a way of inhabiting (being in) the world that can disturb, change and create what a community experiences as real. Such manner of existence surpasses the restrictions of ontology, since it is less interested in essences and natures, and clear, graspable, identities. The prosthetic condition effectively grants entities a way of being that is not a material one—we already know that

² For briefs introductions to ontology and its modern and contemporary history see, among others: Nikk Effingham, *An Introduction to Ontology*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).; Stephen, Mumford, *Metaphysics: A Very Short Introduction*, 1st edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012).

physicality is not a requirement for existence and impact; we have the stock market, cryptocurrencies, and religion to prove that.

As a conceptual manner of existing in the world, the prosthetic condition affects entities resulting from complex operations.³ Like regular prosthesis, they are the outcome of human poiesis. They require the creation of *things* that were not there before, and they also necessitate the recuperation of other, already existing *things*, both artificial and not. But perhaps most importantly, for an entity to exist prosthetically someone needs to perform, even if mentally, an act of montage or – maybe even more accurately—an act of assemblage⁴. All those *things*—created and already available—need to be collected, framed, and put together to become a new *thing*, a prosthetic one.

Not unlike you do with a prosthetic limb, you need to turn this:

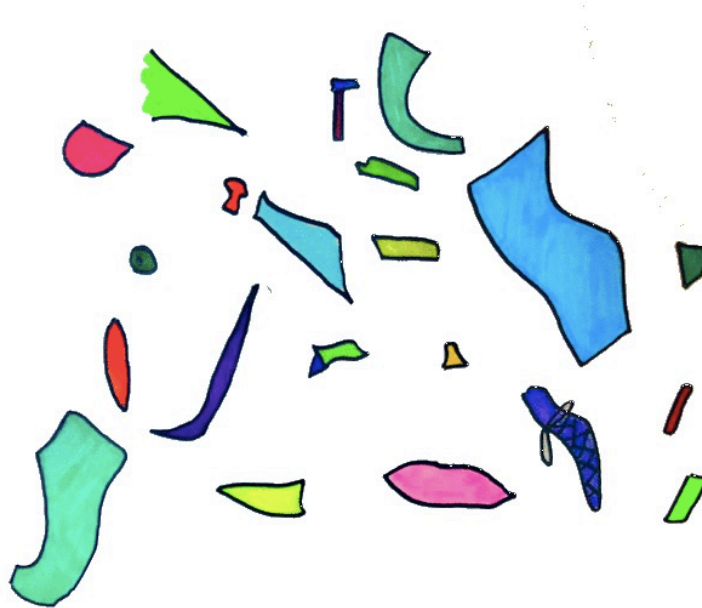


Figure 1

³ Throughout this dissertation I will be using the term prosthetic entity (object, being, community, or event) as equivalent to saying that an entity is affected by the prosthetic condition.

⁴ For a study of the notion of assemblage and its different manifestations in Europe and the US, from the 1960s to today, see: *L'art de l'assemblage: relectures*, Collection "Art & société" (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011).

Into something like this:

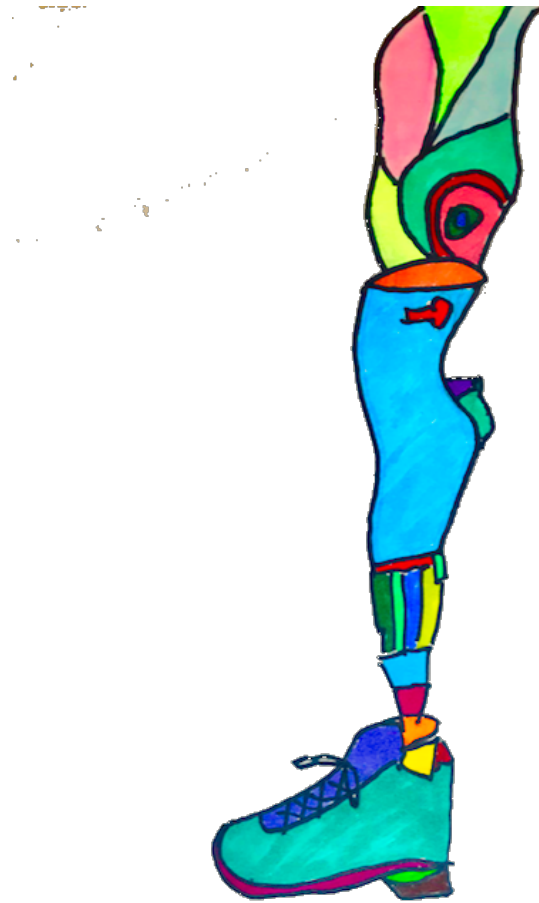


Figure 2

This bionic, human-made leg will come to fill the void left by the lack of a real one and, hopefully, if it is properly assembled and connected, it will allow the bearer to really and firmly walk on two feet. Perhaps, it will allow its bearer to do things that would be impossible to accomplish with a natural leg. And that, I am convinced, is a remarkable fact.

It is remarkable because it confirms that contemporaneity (and the very near future) is a time and a place where the human poetic capacity is exacerbated to extents that were before, merely, “the stuff of fantasy.” Like never before, we are almost as much as makers of the world as we are its inhabitants.

Parenthesis: I want to clarify from the get-go that this is not a dissertation about art and technology⁵, nor is it a digression on sci-fi imagination⁶, or a study of the representations of abnormality and prosthetics in cultural manifestations⁷. The artistic practices that I consider here are mostly analog, very seldom engage with vanguard technological developments⁸, and are, oftentimes, difficult to even understand as art. However, they are, I think, practices that allow for a first attempt at defining what the prosthetic condition is and what it could do. Their fertility resides on their fragmentareity, their *in*-disciplinarity, the manner in which they have been experienced, and the effects they have produced.

I want to propose that the practices I study can be thought of, written about, exhibited, and even sold through the lens of the prosthetic condition—because they exemplify different ways of existing as an object and as an animated being. My objects of study are harder to frame (both literally and metaphorically), precisely

⁵ See among others: Hasegawa, Yuko, Marjory Jacobson, Bill Arning, Joe Haldeman, Jane Farver, Bruno Latour, Mark Doty, et al, Ed. Caroline A. Jones, *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, 1st MIT Press Ed edition (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2006); Camurri, Antonio and Gualtiero Volpe, “The Intersection of Art and Technology,” *MultiMedia, IEEE* 23:01 (2016): 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MMUL.2016.13>.

⁶ See among others: James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, 1st edition, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Seed, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*, 1st edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷ The issue has been studied at length by the discipline of disability studies. For an analysis of the representations of prosthesis in mostly English language literatura see David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001). For a Latin American perspective explore: Susan Antebi and Beth E. Jörgensen, *Libre Acceso: Latin American Literature and Film through Disability Studies* (S.l.: SUNY Press, 2017).

⁸ Despite being mostly analog practices, they emerge in a time of new media and participate of the debates around the contemporary introduction of technology and media into artistic practices and artistic writing. I will discuss some of these connections as I develop my argument.

because they are not *really* objects. They are not—and I am repeating myself already here—entities materially existing in the world as wholes, ready for contemplation, analysis, or purchase. These works appear, at first, as a multiplicity of manifestations, including text, image, performance, documentation, and reception. They are fragmented and fragmentary, and they exist scattered in different media, times, subjectivities and spaces.

They are, again, more like this:

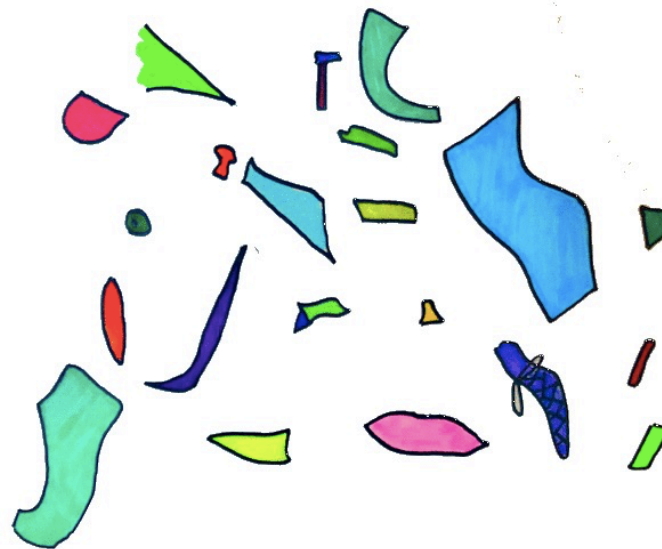


Figure 3

And less like this:

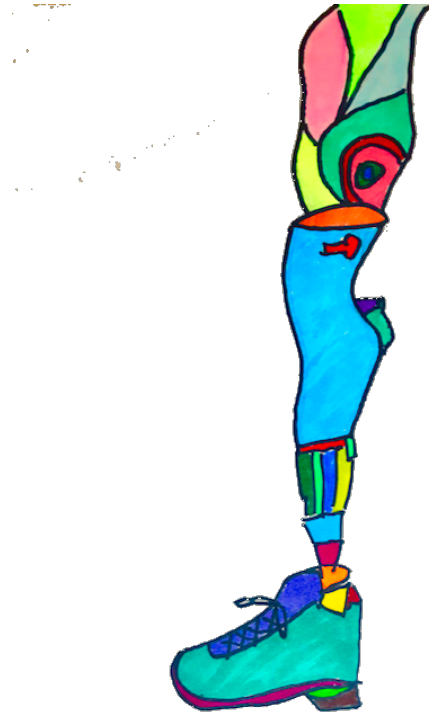


Figure 4

That is—and this is a key condition of possibility for the prosthetic—before their encounter with a spectator willing and able to prosthetically produce them.

Certainly, they are all susceptible to becoming a cohesive whole, but never a final or essential one, since you can always alter—even if slightly—one of its parts or one of the ways in which those parts come together. The prosthetic condition has to do, then, with fragments just as much as it has to do with putting them together to *make sense*⁹.

One can say, without any fear of being wrong, that a fragmentary and scattered way of production and existence is not a novelty in literature or art history. Far from it. Quickly, the Baroque comes to mind.¹⁰ Often, the fragment's notoriety is

⁹ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Sens Du Monde*, Editions Galilee (2001).

¹⁰ And perhaps as salient as the Baroque we have the Avant-Garde, with their multiple experiments on formats, media, and their often frustrated attempt to bring together (conflate, undifferentiate?) art and life. For some of the vanguard's traits that more

indicative of a shift in the way in which the world is perceived and understood. The Baroque is no exception. It appears, as has been said at length before, at a moment when the West had an idea of nature as being harmonious, knowable, worthy and able of being imitated. Similarly, there existed the belief that there was an essence to things, an indubitable truth palpitating beneath them. Baroque art, its semiotics and aesthetics, was “a reaction against the rationalist pretense of penetrating the mysteries of the known with one uniform and conclusive move (...) its techniques would favor ‘expansion’ over depth.”¹¹

The reasons for the pivotal change in paradigm that the Baroque brings are too complex to discuss here.¹² However, I want to underscore the fact that we can understand the Baroque as participating in a ‘prosthetic lineage’ because it is a movement against the idea of unicity and, perhaps more strongly, against the idea that humans could ever see the world ‘clearly,’ depleted of any mystery and fully comprehensible.¹³

Without any desire to generalize and fully aware of the massive differences between the Baroque in Europe and the Baroque and Neo-Baroque in America, I think that it is possible to argue that, eventually, the Baroque stops being a reaction

clearly connect with the prosthetic see: David Ayers, Benedikt Hjartarson, Tomi Huttunen, Harri Veivo, and Þorsteinn Surmeli, *Utopia: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and (Im)possible Life*, European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (2015); v. 4. Berlin ; Clement Greenberg, “AVANT-GARDE AND KITSCH.” *Partisan Review* 6:05 (1939): 34.

¹¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 77.

¹² See, among others: Gregg, Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*. (London, New York: Continuum, 2004); Christopher D Johnson, “Configuring the Baroque: Warburg and Benjamin,” *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 57:02 (2016): 142–165.

¹³ In part, because, Baroque’s historical importance is linked to the fact that faith needs this mystery and extreme positivist approach risked dethroning religion.

against and becomes a way of being in the world. Alejo Carpentier argued, for instance, that the Baroque was not a way of writing but rather one of reading, one that responds to a time of ‘relative truths,’ when uncertainty is pervasive. And in that sense, there is a baroque way of reading in the prosthetic because one of the most powerful consequences of a prosthetic existence is the fact that it reminds us of the contingency of certainties. Not to tragically deny the possibility of ever being *sure*, but to acknowledge the provisory state of any essential claim. If we accept to approach the world in this way, we will have to conclude that meaning is not found inside where an essence resides; instead, it is constructed expansively, through connections and relations, through the act of putting together a bunch of fragments¹⁴.

Another important influence for thinking about the prosthetic is what Umberto Eco theorized as the *open work*¹⁵. Many years after the blossoming of the Baroque sensibility, Eco proposed his theory also as a response against a belief. This time, it was a belief embodied in the figure of Benedetto Croce, according to which art was an unchanged entity, unaffected by the transfer between artist and spectator. For Eco, the modern work came to change that radically. And it did so because it shared the work’s ‘completion’ with the spectator—it was no longer a matter of contemplating and understanding, but one of interpreting¹⁶. Eco argues that this is the Baroque’s

¹⁴ Edouard Glissant will define this as a poetics of relation opposed to one of depth. I will return to this distinction in the chapters to come.

¹⁵ Umberto Eco and David Robey, trans. Anna Cancogni, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ For the prosthetic, understanding and interpreting are key, but not enough. In the prosthetic, the spectator is also required to perform an act of creation from scattered fragments, that once coupled with the understanding and interpreting that Eco talks about, will produce a provisory meaning and a provisory entity.

legacy: showing us that the world is an entity in flux with no final or authorized responses, that needs creativity in order to be approached and read^{17, 18}.

The open work, he continues, reflects the way in which his time views reality, both from a scientific and an artistic perspective. The contemporary ethos of the open work always questions values and dogma, and accepts that the world is an inexhaustible entity. Eco does not use the word *inexhaustible* to describe the open work, but he does talk about countless interpretations, each conducive to a “complete and closed” form without this impinging on its specificity¹⁹. Because, ultimately for him, what art does is to excite our cravings for completion²⁰.

Certainly, the prosthetic condition is indebted and connected to this discussion—perhaps in a way similar to how it is connected to debates concerning ambiguity, polysemy, polyphony, the unfinished, etc. But there are differences. Important ones, I think. The prosthetic condition is, as much as the Baroque and the *open work*, a phenomenon of its time. However, unlike those two, the prosthetic condition is an action for and not a reaction against. Let me try to explain.

The prosthetic condition is only possible in works that exploded and not merely opened. That is, it does not directly concern pieces that allow for the

¹⁷ This does not mean that, for Eco, any interpretation is valid. He actually favors that which “closer to the author’s intention.” He does not address, however, how to access such intention or how to deal with artists who lie.

¹⁸ Ibid. 7.

¹⁹ His words: “In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood (...) A work of art, therefore, is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unalterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.” Ibid. 3-4.

²⁰ Ibid. 74.

intervention of an active spectator, but rather those in which the author has arguably lost control of its creation. Certainly, in some cases, the author's intention can prevail, but does not need to, since the fragments that add up to produce a prosthetic entity may be distant, or even a contradiction to the process that was intended to be set in motion by the artist. A prosthetic entity may result from a work of art even if the artist behind it never envisioned it as such—for instance, an artist can successfully create a being that interacts and produces effects similar to those that a human being would, by only releasing a piece of literary fiction.²¹ And this disconnect between the artist's intention and the entity produced does not diminish or invalidate the prosthetic existence of such a being.

So, certainly, there are several antecedents, precursors even, to the prosthetic condition, but this state of being, I think, is exclusive to contemporary times. For it to exist you need an overproduction of fragments, constructed by multifarious actors with multiple intentions, but triggered (knowingly or not) by a practice that we consider artistic. The fragmentation can take almost any form (a text, an image, a rumor, an object, a person....) and must come from sources that are often difficult, if not impossible, to identify or verify. A given spectator can never state, with full confidence, that certain fragment is, or is not, part of the work at stake. What the spectator can do—actually what she needs to do in order for the prosthetic existence of an entity to be possible—is to combine this scattered production with a creative act of reception that will produce artworks that can, simultaneously, be objects, beings, events, and communities. Almost the same as real ones, but not quite.

²¹ See “Chapter Three” to learn the details of how a piece of literature contributed to the creation of two influential beings in the contemporary Colombian art world.

Simply put, the prosthetic condition is different from its predecessors because what is possible to achieve in contemporaneity, with such baroque amalgamations, fragments, open and exploded works, is radically more powerful than before. And it is so because the prosthetic turns possibilities into actualities—it recognizes the availability of multiple options, of multiple ways of being, but it commits to one, finalizes its creation, and chooses to believe in its effects and its existence. It is a choice, turned into a craft, and secured with a belief.

I cannot pretend to have a complete knowledge of the reasons why contemporaneity is such a fertile ground for the prosthetic to flourish. But I feel confident enough to propose at least four of them, related to art in different degrees but mostly independent from it. First: exacerbated poiesis capacity. It is quite astonishing to witness the current level of human prowess as makers, as beings able to bring all kinds of *stuff* into existence. And I am not thinking here of basic tools, industries or other goods that we have been producing for decades now. I am referring to our capacity to, for instance, in less than ten years, turn a desert into a lavish green oasis that houses a city of more than seven million inhabitants, holding one of the more prosperous communities in the world²². I am thinking about the possibility of using a genome to manipulate and edit our own DNA, and that of our offspring, to make us *better* humans²³. Or about our practice of mixing and matching vegetables to

²² See: Yasser Elsheshtawy, *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle*. Planning, History, and the Environment Series (London; New York: Routledge, 2010); David Bassens, Ben Derudder, and Frank Witlox, “The Making and Breaking of Dubai: The End of a City–state?” *Political Geography* 29:06 (2010): 299–301; Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebookbatch.PMUSE_batch:PMUSE162020150515.

²³ See Jennifer A. Doudna, *A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

get more nutrients out of the combination²⁴. Not to mention the mind-boggling advances in biomechanics and robotics that can produce almost anything from devices aimed at ending disability²⁵, to personal assistants that can read the news, predict the weather, and manage our daily calendars²⁶. The reasons for human hubris abound and not necessarily with lack of justification.

Second: acceptance of simultaneous registers/displays of the real. Not only the more obvious advances in the quality and pervasiveness of VRs or the development of devices capable of creating what has been termed ‘augmented reality,’ but more *simple* manifestations—from social media to video chatting—that have radically changed the ways in which we inhabit the real and experience proximity. Or, perhaps rather than changing our approximations to the real, these technological advances have made it possible to come into contact with multiple, often overlapping, sometimes contradictory, registers of reality.

²⁴ See Juan Enriquez and Steve Gullans, *Evolving Ourselves: How Unnatural Selection and Nonrandom Mutation Are Changing Life on Earth*. (New York, New York: Current, 2015).

²⁵ “MIT Media Lab.” *Biomechanatronics*. 30 August 2018. <http://biomech.media.mit.edu/>.

²⁶ See, among others, Keith Collins and Cade Metz, “Alexa vs. Siri vs. Google: Which Can Carry on a Conversation Best?” *The New York Times*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/17/technology/alexa-siri-conversation.html>

Kim Wetzel, “What Is Alexa? It’s Amazon’s Virtual Voice Assistant,” *Digital Trends*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/home/what-is-amazons-alexa-and-what-can-it-do/>; “Best Personal Voice Assistant Device to Make Your Home Smarter: Amazon Echo vs Google Home,” August 2, 2018. <https://thedroidguy.com/2018/05/best-personal-voice-assistant-device-make-home-smarter-amazon-echo-vs-google-home-1067115>; Harrison Weber, “Pretty Soon a Smart Assistant Won’t Be a Choice,” *Gizmodo*, August 2, 2018. <https://gizmodo.com/pretty-soon-a-smart-assistant-wont-be-a-choice-1822037723>; Kevin Murnane, “Dumb And Dumber: Comparing Alexa, Siri, Cortana And The Google Assistant,” *Forbes*, August 2, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinmurnane/2018/05/03/dumb-and-dumber-comparing-alexa-siri-cortana-and-the-google-assistant/>.

Third: increased wariness towards essences or a movement away from ontology. This arguably started before the baroque and, as mentioned earlier, got intensified by it. However, the contemporary rise in secular thinking in the West and the repeated confirmation of tragedies advanced by radical essentialist beliefs—think the Shoah, but also 9/11, or the Trump Wall—contribute to the distrust, at least in some circles of thought (perhaps those that are more prone to participating in the making of prosthetic entities). And this is important because by doubting essences we are, in a way, fighting against our biological drives²⁷ and, simultaneously, combating a major portion of the population that has a very clear unchangeable idea of what is desirable. In 2017, the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard organized a conference on migration and the challenges posed by the phenomenon²⁸. In one of the conversations, a member of the public asked/proposed that the problem with liberal thinking is the fact that it does not have a clear idea of the future it wants—as opposed to the very clear picture of, say, groups advancing white supremacy. Homi Bhabha, responded that it was impossible for the humanities to have such a clear end point, since humanist thought depends on conversation and negotiation. Which is to say that it depends on changing your mind, on distrusting essences. I think that maybe more than ever before the arts remind us of (if not promote) the importance of this awareness.

Fourth: Democracy (and the Internet). Harry Frankfurt has proposed that democracy is one of the most important causes of the contemporary rise and spread of

²⁷ See Paul Bloom, *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We like What We like*, 1st ed (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

²⁸ “Migration and the Humanities: A Conference.” *Mahindra Humanities Center | Harvard*. 30 August 2018. <http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/migration-and-humanities-conference>

bullshit.²⁹ That is, living in democratic regimes (wonderful as it is) pressures the citizen to have an opinion about basically everything, regardless of expertise. This, coupled with what Carrie Lambert-Beatty has called “internet epistemology,”³⁰ results in an abundance of information, easily accessible, difficult to track and, as a consequence, malleable. Democracy and the Internet are rich sources, inexhaustible even, gushing fragments susceptible of being incorporated in the crafting of prosthetic entities. Artists (and critics, and politicians...) know how to make good use of that input, which comes in a scale and a number never experienced before.

Everything points to the fact that these reasons will intensify rapidly. That the crafting will be increasingly advanced, polished, detailed—making it difficult, impossible even, to identify the *original*, the *natural*, from the artificial. The artistic practices I consider in this dissertation anticipate debates and decisions that seem inescapable, given the current state of affairs that has produced and intensified the four reasons listed above. Despite the fact that the works I am interested in here are, as I said, mainly ‘analog’—they are rudimentary collages, letters, drawings, hand-made books—, their reception and effects advance discussions about key issues in contemporaneity. Say, for instance: What is an immaterial object? Is it possible? Is it exchangeable? Is it susceptible of being shown and, consequently, seen? What makes a human? How much artificiality can be constitutive of its being? Who gets to make

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion about Frankfurt’s ideas and the salience of bullshit in contemporary societies see “Chapter Three.”

³⁰ See: Carrie Lambert-beatty, “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility.” *October* (2009) 51–84. For Lambert-Beatty, a considerable portion of contemporary artistic practices “prepare us to be better, more critical information consumers and therefore citizens (...) the crucial skills for thriving in our current and coming information environment—the world of Wikipedia and Google—are the ability to distinguish between various sources’ levels of reliability and a proclivity to question the transparency of information” (137 -138). For a more engaged discussion with Lambert-Beatty’s ideas, in particular her notion of the parafictional, see “Chapter Three.”

the final decision that attributes or denies humanity? How can we understand the *self* in a time when the physical body is no longer necessary for its manifestation? How much fiction can participate in the fashioning of our own self?

Further, and consequently, one must ask what is at stake when we realize that contemporaneity has provided the tools to alter and interrogate the boundaries of the human, while also presenting us with new forms of being together. The practices that allow for the existence of the prosthetic condition can, as well, result in the creation of prosthetic communities. Alternative gatherings of beings are both possible and necessary in a time when *real* communities are increasingly disrupted by war, racism, climate change, mass migrations, etc. The prosthetic condition is, then, a tool of inquiry that contributes to thinking about art's role in the design and rehearsal of different ways of being together. Ways of being together that reckon with the multiple forms in which the present allows us to experience proximity—not only between humans, but also between humans and non-humans, and perhaps even other animated beings.

It seems like time is moving us towards a place in which human agency will be almost limitless, almost “the stuff of fantasy.” And that is, I think, simultaneously terrifying and incredibly exciting. Artistic practices, it seems, can help us think about this journey in real time, preparing us for a future that they are, at the same time, creating. Of course, not without taking issue with some of this future's implications.

Just as there are reasons in contemporaneity that make the prosthetic condition possible and fitting, Western history enabled its existence in manifold manners. I want to briefly mention two of them that, I believe, are particularly impactful and undeniably relevant when discussing the prosthetic condition—and that, perhaps, should make us wary of it. Recognizing the power of human agency and its ability to

create implies acknowledging that the consequences produced, when used at its fullest, have been historically catastrophic.

Closer in time to us is the threat skillfully and grimly identified by Jean Baudrillard. Simulacra epitomize our fear of deception and have, at their core, a discussion about the growing impossibility of distinguishing between reality and representation. To address the phenomenon, Baudrillard proposed the notion of the *hyperreal*, and using Borges' short story, "El rigor de la ciencia," (1946) he laments: "Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être referential, d'une substance. Elle est la generation par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel."³¹ The annihilation of any possible distinction between the real and its representation is, precisely, what alerts Baudrillard. With the threat of simulacra, he warns us, the world becomes a mere figment.

This, Baudrillard continues, would inevitably produce the chaos of multiple, plural and simultaneous meanings that destroy and contradict each other.³² Which poses, at least, two considerable threats that are, for him, 'worse than violence'. First, the fact that we start to live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning. And the second, the fact that it suggests that our technologies of order are, essentially, simulated:

La transgression, la violence sont moins graves car elles ne contestant que le *partage* du réel. La simulation est infiniment plus dangereuse

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *El pintor de la vida moderna* (Taurus, 2013) 10.

³² His words are as follow: "Enfer de la simulation, qui n'est plus celui de la torture, mais de la torsion subtile, maléfique, insaisissable, du sens (...) Ceci ne résulte pas forcément en un désespoir du sens, mais aussi bien en une improvisation du sens, de non-sens, de plusieurs sens simultanés qui se détruisent." Ibid. 33.

car elle laisse toujours supposer, au-delà de son objet, que *l'ordre et la loi eux-mêmes pourraient bien n'être que simulation*.³³

Further, the existence of simulacra implies that reality is no longer the feedstock of the unreal but, conversely, that it is from the imaginary that the real has to be created, as a fiction.³⁴ When presenting a simulation, one is not representing a reality, nor speaking for it. Instead, one is presenting a crafting and its effects, which are, often and simultaneously, incredible and real—even if composed of elements of fiction. We have witnessed during the twentieth century, according to Baudrillard, a constant destruction of meaning propelled by an excessive proliferation of appearances: the real and the fictional have, in this century, swapped places. And read from today, consequently, one can only add that the twenty-first century has exacerbated Baudrillard's fear with, among others, its developments in technology and virtuality.

A bit more removed chronologically, but perhaps not in terms of dire influence, lies the other horrifying consequence: a human's proven ability to objectify other beings, humans included—a capacity that reached its excess when materialized in the Holocaust. Vilem Flusser argues that it was, precisely, the Shoah that caused humanity to lose faith in itself. Flusser, writing in Brazil around the same time as Baudrillard was writing in France, presented a series of lectures (now gathered in a

³³ Ibid. 36.

³⁴ Baudrillard's words are as follows: Il n'est plus possible de partir du réel et de fabriquer de l'irréel, de l'imaginaire à partir des données du réel. Le processus sera plutôt inverse: ce sera de mettre en place des situations décentrées, des modèles de simulation et de s'ingénier à leur donner les couleurs du réel, du banal, du vécu, de réinventer le réel comme fiction, précisément parce qu'il a disparu de notre vie. Ibid. 181.

publication called *Post-history*³⁵), in which he argues, following the Frankfurt School but inserting his idea of the *apparatus*, that this process of dehumanization was the realization of “the Western tendency toward objectification.” For Flusser, the Jewish extermination was the first “time in the history of humanity, (when) an apparatus was put into operation that was programmed with the most advanced techniques available, which realized the objectification of man, together with the functional collaboration of man.”³⁶ Auschwitz, for him, was neither the violation nor the negation of the methods and values that compose Western societies. Rather, it was the result of the application of its models.³⁷

At least at the time of the Holocaust, men were not able to artificially produce other men. Humanity was capable, however, of devoiding a group of men of their subjectivity as such. Capable of turning subjects into objects, as much as they were of turning the real into a simulation and a simulation into the ‘new’ real. Men, the Shoah confirmed, are capable of de-essentializing the world and the beings on it to apocalyptic states. This, according to Flusser, was a sort of natural evolution of the history of the West. For this reason, after Auschwitz, the only thing left for us to do now is to live in a post-historical climate: in a space where, by understanding and studying the horror of the camps, we can foster the hope of projecting ourselves out of the Western project, out of the culture that lead to such reification of man.

³⁵ All of the texts included in the volume were intended to be read out loud and discussed afterwards in different academic spaces in Brazil and abroad. See Vilém Flusser, Trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes, *Post-History* (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2013).

³⁶ Ibid. 6-7.

³⁷ Ibid. 7.

These two dangers, needless to say, have been theorized extensively and have been topics of discussion in recent literature and works of art³⁸, in an effort that appears as a trade-off between warning, condemning, and exhorting. Both simulacra and objectification clearly exemplify human agency, and its ability to affect and modify what a community experiences as real. By doing so, they illustrate that absolutes and essences are not immanent. Rather, that they are the consequence of agreement, belief, craft, and choice.

However, what simulacra and objectification usually fail to show—and so does most of the scholarship and artworks produced as a response to these two particular phenomena—is that this agency, and its confirmation via agreement, crafting, belief, and choice, also has a bright side. It is an opening to the possible. If we can deny humanity, then we are also able to grant it. If we can fashion an indistinguishable copy of the real, then we can create the real. Evidently, such an opening to the possible can go in any direction, history has shown that it is not to be trusted. The possibility of creating the world and affecting the beings on it that was hinted with simulacra and objectification, and that is enhanced with the prosthetic arises as a prerogative but perhaps, most importantly, as a responsibility. I think Jennifer Doudna, the lead scientist in the discovery of CRISPR³⁹, gets at the core of

³⁸ The phenomenon of the reification of humans has been profusely developed in Latin America. Theorists like for instance, Gabriel Giorgi have used Giorgio Agamben's notion of *bare life* to talk about recent literature from the region. See: Gabriel Giorgi, "Lugares comunes: vida desnuda y ficción," *Revista Grumo*, 9; and Gabriel Giorgi, *Formas comunes: animalidad, cultura, biopolítica*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2014). Similarly, the issue has been presented in works like *Mano de obra* by Chilean novelist, Diamela Eltit.

³⁹ CRISPR is the most efficient, cheap, and groundbreaking genetic engineering tool. It is a genome that allows us to tinker with DNA inside living cells, making our genetic composition as editable as a simple text. With CRISPR not only can you treat living human beings, but also affect the way in which future humans will exist.

the dilemma when she asks: “What will we, a fractious species whose members can’t agree on much, choose to do with this awesome power?”⁴⁰

Exacerbated human agency needs to grapple with this question. Up to now, at least when looking at the two phenomena I have briefly discussed here, exacerbated human agency has been mostly received with pessimism and guilt. My dissertation intends to prove that such agency can also be read as a hopeful opportunity. We can create a world that is almost the same as the real one, and we can also, potentially, inhabit it. For it to *really* exist I want to propose, we need relation—non-solitary poetic acts and communities of believers which are, simultaneously, communities of agreement.

Horrific acts of poiesis can be read as potentialities—not to deny, in any way the tragedies of the century⁴¹, but rather to recognize that precisely that very same agency can be used for whatever we understand as good or desirable. And this is a potentiality that is taken very seriously by art and that can, when deployed, be read from the perspective and with the tools for the understanding of art. Ultimately, because it has to do with creation—with the creation of the world and the creation of ourselves and others. A good number of the artistic practices of the last decades, I will argue, have learned to cope with Baudrillard and Flusser’s fears.

These are artistic practices that have come to terms with the fact that reality can be constructed, simulated, built. They know and take advantage of the fact that realities are also manmade and that such artificiality does not taint them with the

⁴⁰ Jennifer A. Doudna and Samuel H. Sternbrg, *A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) xvi.

⁴¹ Or the grave instances of dehumanization in contemporaneity. Especially keen on this phenomenon are the recent analysis of Judith Butler. See, in particular: Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2016).

fakeness of the *hyperreal*. Because a reality that results from human agency depends on belief and epistemology. It needs a community of believers that understands it as true, good, desirable—as a thing we can live *with* or a space we can live *in*.

Similarly, understanding that the fact that we think of humans as subjects that deserve to be protected as such, is a decision and not an essence, opens up a possibility that is also, of course, a risk. Boris Groys reminded us, in his book *Art Power*, that coming to terms with the death of God in Western thinking implies that there is no power in the world that could be perceived as being infinitely more powerful than any other⁴². The only untouchables are the ones that we decide to consider as such. A good portion of the art of our time reminds us of that. They are practices and works that let us think—and show us—that humans, too, can be altered. They can be affected somatically, physically, psychologically. They can consume drugs, wear prosthesis, go to therapy. They can also be protected, dignified, modified. And, increasingly, they too can be artificially produced.

It is important for what follows to make clear that this potentiality is, first and foremost, depleted of any intrinsic, essential value. It is both a source of incredible hope and of tremendous dread. History has show us that human poiesis is capable of producing and maintaining disaster. The works that I will be talking about tend to believe in (and propose) the possibility of producing different scenarios via the coming into existence of prosthetic objects, beings, communities, and events. And so do I.

Here is, precisely, where the prosthetic condition gains its relevance—because it appears as one of the tools available for producing, approaching, and understanding those brighter scenarios. And allow me to repeat it one more time: the prosthetic

⁴² Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2013) 2.

condition is a way of being, a manner in which objects, beings, communities, and events can exist in contemporaneity. These entities result from a collaborative poetic act between producer(s) and spectator(s), which is another way of saying that they are artificial. Their prosthetic existence, more conceptual than material, fills a void and, in so doing, produces a tangible impact in what a community experiences as real. And one more thing: they are akin to physical objects, beings, communities, and events. However, they are not so because of being look-alikes, but instead because they are looked-at-alikes.

The prosthetic condition, and the artworks studied in this dissertation show the importance and power of an agreed upon reality. Not because they praise an excess of relativism, but because they remind us that, as social beings, our survival depends on agreements on what is *desirable*. They underscore the importance of creating frameworks (limits) for communication, despite the fact that before the act of reception that defines its existence as prosthetic entities, these manifestations lacked boundaries. And this is another point of departure of the prosthetic from Eco's open work. Eco argues that a work can be open as long as it remains a work because, if there are no boundaries, it risks becoming too much information, mere noise⁴³. The prosthetic, on the other hand, benefits from that excess of information because, if it is true that more information does not mean, as Baudrillard warned, more meaning, it does equate to more *possible* meanings⁴⁴. That is, meanings that can be brought into existence, that can be created. In the prosthetic, the boundaries—artificial and provisory—are the last act of production, which is to say they are established upon reception.

⁴³ Umberto Eco and David Robey.

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard.

As a matter of fact, they can include such varied fragments of information that it is not uncommon for prosthetic entities to be denied their status as art. This is not very different from what Hito Steyerl argues when stating that “with digital proliferation of all sorts of imagery, suddenly too much world became available.”⁴⁵ This availability, like the surplus of information discussed before, turns images into catalysts capable of affecting people, spaces, system, and politics. The prosthetic condition is one of the multiple ways in which that change is advanced.

This dissertation looks into contemporaneity to assess art’s impact on the real and proposes a conceptual tool to read it. The dissertation also concentrates on Latin America, but not because the prosthetic condition is exclusive to the region. In part, of course, it is a consequence of my training as a scholar and the fact that this document is coming from a Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and more specifically from its Spanish and Portuguese section. But also partly because—and I openly acknowledge my bias here—I believe that Latin America is a fecund locus for the enunciation of the prosthetic condition. Many reasons may explain this: the role of fiction in the region has been clear and prolific since the foundation of the nation states; the history of fragmentation due to political and social unrest makes Latin Americans less concerned with the experience of *wholes*; the lack of financial resources to explore pressing contemporary questions have turned art into the space to discuss and imagine them; the rampant inequality translates in very visible ways in a sort of ‘poetic hierarchy,’ that allows for certain classes to more actively participate in the crafting of the real; etc. I want, however, to call attention to one specific and, I think, powerful reason that perhaps includes many aspects of the points I just listed.

⁴⁵ Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015) 19.

It is the fact that, in Latin America, craft and artifice are radically different than prosthesis. A prosthesis replaces something that is missing, brings something new into existence but, at the same time, its mere presence is also accounting for a lack, whether it be original or subsequent. Most importantly, it is a testament to the will to continue despite adversity, an invitation to admire the impact of creation—of craft and artifice—even when the creative impetus has been thwarted or attacked.

In the pages that follow, I will explore the phenomenon I identify as the prosthetic condition with special attention to three of its manifestations: the object, the self, and the other. Mario Bellatin will be a recurrent presence throughout my project because I think he is, perhaps, the most radical contemporary Latin America artist, who is presenting his followers with such a complex, tautological, scattered, and unstable production. Additionally, he navigates disciplines and spaces with ease: literature, film, visual arts, performance, TV, and pedagogy, to name a few. This is not, however, a monograph of Bellatin's practice. I bring him into the discussion because his work illustrates quite clearly the possibility of building prosthetic entities, but also because I know that the intricacy of his work goes well beyond my proposal and can only be explained partially by the prosthetic notion I want to explore. Bellatin's function then, in the pages that follow, is both that of a kindling and a levee. He is also the connecting thread of much of what is argued.

The first chapter will be devoted to the prosthetic object. I will draw from contemporary Latin American theory and criticism around what has been termed “the visual turn in literary studies,” and I will point to the connections between those arguments and my own. The chapter begins by exploring how two of Mario Bellatin's works, *Lecciones para una liebre muerta* (2005) and *The One Hundred Thousand Books of Mario Bellatin* (2012-present), can produce objects affected by the

prosthetic condition that can be later analyzed, traded, and sold. This chapter also establishes connections and differences with influential theoretical discussions: the performativity of language; the expansion of artistic fields and media; the end/death of art; conceptualism, non-objectualism, and the post-objectual, among others. Producing objects in this fashion seems to be, in Bellatin, a poetics, an aesthetic choice. But it is not always so, sometimes the prosthetic condition or the formal conditions that make it possible are a defense, a survival mechanism. I explore this variation in the second part of the chapter, devoted to the study of Chilean collective CADA. I inquire into how the hovering presence of the dictatorship favored a fragmentary artistic production and propose that the prosthetic condition was, then, a way to avoid censorship and obliteration. Similarly, I discuss how, the dissolution of CADA and its inscription into art history ended up by producing a prosthetic object, “el paquete CADA,” an abstraction that is successfully sold, traded, and exhibited. “El paquete CADA” is a contemporary crafting of the former members of the collective, its existence and effects allows me to consider how a later intervention from the author (and the institutionalized art world) complicates the possibility of a prosthetic existence since it demonstrates how some prosthetic entities are *more real* than others.

The second and third chapters will explore the production of prosthetic beings. The second chapter will propose a reading of Mario Bellatin’s practice as one that amounts for the creation of a prosthetic self. I will analyze the author’s experimentation with the body as a locus for poiesis, as depicted in his literature and performed in his own biological corporality. Then, I will investigate the connections between Bellatin’s crafting of the self and other historical attempts to do so in Western culture—dandyism, bovarysme, parafictions of the self, biofictions, etc.—to

argue why his particular practices are better read and understood through the lens of the prosthetic condition. Bellatin's fashioning of the self, and the deployment of such craft in his persona and work, suggests a different way of understanding the subject. Perhaps, a way more fitting to existing in contemporaneity.

The third chapter, on the other hand, is devoted to the discussion concerning the creation of prosthetic others. I work with two recent cases in Colombian contemporary art, Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar*, to speculate about the possibility of not only prosthetically crafting one's self, but also of producing other beings, radically different from the artist—different in terms of gender, social class, political orientation, and overall life story. That is, fictional beings whose prosthetic existence makes them operate as *real* ones. In this chapter, I delve into the complexities of expanding the definition of the human and, even, envisioning a future in which the body becomes an accessory of humanity. But I do so with particular attention to the ways in which contemporaneity, and the excess of available information that comes with it, incorporates considerations of how deception and fictional crafting can *taint* the existence, even if prosthetic, of these human-made beings.

Finally, in my conclusion, I imagine possible routes to expand on my thinking of the prosthetic condition and discuss different ways of approaching the conceptual nature of this phenomenon. I consider the central role of language for the visibility of the prosthetic and stress the importance of fiction and our attitudes towards it in its conceptualization. Additionally, and continuing an emphasis I tried to maintain throughout the dissertation, the conclusion reminds the reader of the fundamental ethical implications of my proposal, as they intersect with politics and belief. This before wondering where to go from here: How would this way of being manifest when

thinking about events and communities? How would those communities and events incorporate the prosthetic objects and beings I studied in this dissertation?

And lastly, but perhaps more importantly: What can art *do* in our experience of contemporaneity? Is it doing it *right*?

A –PROSTHETIC OBJECTS

On the Transition From the Fragment to the Whole (and its control)

CHAPTER ONE

The Prosthetic Object

Chapter One – The Prosthetic Object

PART I

Towards the Identification of an Object of Study (And a Tool to Read It)

Imagine encountering, by chance or by choice, a list of elements—rather random ones, with different levels of strength in their connection to one another. It could very well be a list containing elements as dissimilar as anecdotes, events, objects, facts, individuals, characters, works of art, public statements... For instance:

1. dOCUMENTA (13), 2012.
2. Mario Bellatin is invited to participate in dOCUMENTA (13) as “advisor, writer”. His role as advisor was never disclosed nor specified either to himself or to the general public.

“What these participants do, and what they ‘exhibit’ in dOCUMENTA (13), may or may not be art. However, their acts, gestures, thoughts, and knowledges produce and are produced by circumstances that are readable by art, aspects that can art can cope with and absorb. The boundary between what is art and what is not becomes less important”

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, artistic director,
dOCUMENTA(13)

3. Bellatin publishes “The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin” as part of *100 Notes - 100 Thoughts*, a series produced on the occasion of dOCUMENTA (13).

There, he presented a project in which he had been working for a while and that he would exhibit at Kassel. He sought to rewrite and retell his life, by counting the years of his life in books, and not in years as most people do. The plan, as specified by Bellatin himself would (will?) go as follows:

***The Goal:** Compose one hundred titles, with a first edition of one hundred books each. The books will go on sale on a gelatinous state of exchange and under one condition: no book will be free.

***The Object:** Each book will be a unique piece of art, and will be produced in a combination of industrial processes and craftsmanship. They will all have the same layout, design, size, and typography. Paragraph breaks will be replaced by a symbol of small scissors. Each title will be manually placed, with the help of a small seal. Each book will have: 1) A stamp with the name “The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin”; 2) The author’s fingerprint; 3) The number of each copy. Each book will contain around sixty thousand characters, so no more than one ream of paper will be necessary. Each book will contain two statements: 1) This book is not free; 2) The copyright of this book belongs to the author.

4. The opera-film *Bola Negra: el musical de Ciudad Juárez*, directed by Mario Bellatin and Marcela Rodríguez, is screened in Kassel.
5. In 2005, Bellatin publishes *Tres Novelas*, a book containing the short story “Bola Negra”.
6. In dialogue with his text for *100 Notes - 100 Thoughts*, Bellatin announces a ‘performance-project’ including:
 - a. The demolition of one of the walls of his personal library in Mexico City.
 - b. The construction of special wooden shelves designed in collaboration with Ernesto Azcárate.
 - c. The artisanal self-publishing of his works, limited to 100 copies per title. All the books share the same layout, but each of them has a particular mark that makes it a unique art object
 - d. The creation of a system of exchange for trading, buying and selling the books in a somewhat serendipitous and arbitrary fashion
7. Also during dOCUMENTA (13), Bellatin participates in the writer’s residency *Chorality on Retreat*, taking place in a Chinese restaurant close to the exhibition’s main sites.
8. The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin is conceived of as a project that includes all of Bellatin’s literary texts to date, as well as future, not-yet-existing, ones.
9. In the mid-80s, Bellatin was not yet a published author. He was studying Filmmaking and Theology and was just finishing a book that he wanted to publish. Refusing to depend on a third party (an actual publisher) and follow its times and delays, Bellatin decided

to print small white cards with golden letters and sell them—each was worth a (future) book. He sold nearly eight hundred cards, and got enough money to print his first book, which was later distributed to the card buyers—by the time they got their copies, most of them had already forgotten about the purchase.

10. Bellatin has made his career as a writer and artists by constantly presenting two selves: Mario Bellatin and mario bellatin.

For the sake of argument, let us agree that, from now on, we will call these elements the *Bellatin list*. Imagine trying, despite their apparent randomness, to grasp these elements—at least conceptually—as a single thing. Note how in the process of doing so, some of them are lost, and some others appear. Note how to talk about it—them?— you need to cast a sort of medusa effect, similar to the one Benjamin proposes for approaching history⁴⁶. You need to freeze a number of elements that are, since their inception, disparate and fluid.

The result of such freezing, in turn, can be read as a whole: as a work of art. Partly because we are facing a phenomenon that takes place after one of the most important shifts in recent cultural history: the transition from a representational paradigm to a performative one⁴⁷—a transition that accounts for a variety of events.

⁴⁶ For Walter Benjamin, Medusa and history are linked because neither can be viewed directly and, as consequence, any approach to the *real thing* is impossible. Similarly, the cases that I am about to explore can only be seen and understood once they are petrified by a medusan glance--that is the only way to see some of their various and contradictory layers. To read more about Benjamin symbols see: Ackbar Abbas, "On Fascination: Walter Benjamin's Images," *New German Critique* 48: Fall (1989): 43-62. For a thoroughly analysis of the medusan glance and its links to photography and history see: Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴⁷ That is, art is no longer a tool to represent the world and 'report' on reality. Rather, it is now a technology to *make* and *modify* the world. A number of theorists have addressed the phenomenom using a variety of labels. Jacques Rancière, for instance, talks about the transition between a representational regime and what he calls an 'aesthetic regime,' one where art's performativity is much more present and visible. See: Jacques Ranciere and Slavoj Žižek, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Pbk. Ed edition. (London; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).

Say, for instance, the ability to declare a urinal as a work of art—actually the ability to performatively turn anything into art (urinals but also dinners, life, thoughts, xeroxes, lies...). Or the possibility to state with the *rigor de la ciencia* that the only accurate map is the one that can become a territory that is simultaneously different and identical to the mapped one⁴⁸.

But also partly because (Latin American) literature of recent decades seems to be characterized by a crisis of the book as the sole object containing the work of art that a piece of literature aspires to be⁴⁹. The *Bellatin list*⁵⁰, I want to argue, also

⁴⁸ Just as depicted in Jorge Luis Borges' text, "Del Rigor de la Ciencia":

En aquel Imperio, el Arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el mapa de una sola Provincia ocupaba toda una Ciudad, y el mapa del Imperio, toda una Provincia. Con el tiempo, estos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de Cartógrafos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él.

Menos Adictas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Sigüientes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y no sin Impiedad lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y los Inviernos. En los desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por Mendigos; en todo el País no hay otra reliquia de las Disciplinas Geográficas.

Miranda Suárez, *Viajes de Varones Prudentes*, Libro Cuarto, Cap. XLV (Lérida, 1658) 265.

⁴⁹ Scholarship about this phenomenon in Latin American literature is abundant. See, among many others: Natália Brizuela and Carlos Nougué, *Depois da Fotografia*. (Rocco, 2014). Print.; Sandra Contreras, "Formas de La Extensión, Estados Del Relato, En La Ficción Argentina Contemporánea (a Propósito de Rafael Spregelburd Y Mariano Llinás)," *Cuadernos de Literatura* 17.33 (2013): 355–376.; Florencia Garramuño, *Mundos en común: ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte*. Primera edición (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015).; Reinaldo Laddaga, *Espectáculos de realidad: ensayo sobre la narrativa latinoamericana de las últimas dos décadas*, 1. ed. (Rosario: B. Viterbo Editora, 2007). Print.; Graciela Speranza, *Fuera de campo: literatura y arte argentinos después de Duchamp* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2006). Print.

⁵⁰ I do not mean to claim that 'the list' as a creative phenomenon is exclusive of contemporaneity. On the contrary, it has been around for decades. It is common to find lists in works of literature produced during the first half of the 20th Century—i.e. Borges—. However, the main difference is that, in the case of Bellatin's list—or any

aspires to be considered as a work of art, but in a slightly different way: it epitomizes a phenomenon (not exclusive to, but still) very present in contemporaneity, cases in which the work ceases to be something in the world and becomes a network that creates other things and other worlds. Things and worlds that look like, behave like, and produce effects like ‘real things’ in the ‘real world’, but are not quite the same⁵¹. Networks and lists are, needless to say, radically different forms. My argument aims at combining them since it understands the list as a compilation of nodes that, when connected, will produce a network akin to, consequently and among other things, a work of art.

I want to propose that this particular way of existence is especially visible in works of art that are scattered across different media, disciplines, and contexts of reception. Such works, which are often closer to practices and processes than to tangible entities, create and alter realities and can, in turn, produce objects, beings, communities, and events that exist *prosthethically*—objects, beings, communities and events that are affected by what I am calling the **prosthetic condition**. This condition is a characteristic that defines a non-ontological way of being, a manner of existence, that can apply not only to art, but also, plausibly, to any entity that is created artificially, that generates concrete effects on what a community perceives as real, and whose creation is intended to replace something that is already missing.

of the lists that will be explored throughout this dissertation—the elements that compose it are not, necessarily, solely produced by the artist.

⁵¹ “*Almost the same, but quite*” is an expression bearing its own critical baggage. Samuel Weber used it to speak about castration as being “almost nothing, but not quite” (1112). Samuel Weber, “The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment,” *MLN* 88.06 (1973): 1102-1133. Homi Bhabha adopted this expression from Weber when discussing mimicry as a form of difference that is, simultaneously and among many other things, resemble and difference (86). Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

Even though I do not want to equate them to a medical prosthesis, the three attributes I just mentioned⁵² could perhaps be better understood when thinking of a prosthetic leg. First, a prosthetic leg is, of course, artificial (it is composed of different elements than those that compose a real one, it can be removed, eliminated; it may become outdated; it can be transformed into something else; it can be sold...). Second, a prosthetic leg comes to fill a void. Such void could either be one that has always been there (this is the case, for instance, of victims of Thalidomide⁵³, like Bellatin); or it could be one caused by a sudden disappearance (say, for example, a mutilation caused by war). And third, maybe more importantly, when a prosthetic leg is properly built and properly connected, it allows its bearer to really walk on two feet.

I cannot even attempt to briefly present the complexity and exciting possibilities that belong to the field of biomechatronics, and the groundbreaking inventions that are developed as a consequence of the research on how to build better medical prosthesis.⁵⁴ My theorization of the prosthetic condition, needless to say, occurs in a different realm and has a much more humble impact. Because, rather than being prosthesis in the medical sense, the objects, beings, communities and events that I will discuss in this dissertation behave conceptually as such. Let me explain.

⁵² Artificiality, ability to affect and create what a community perceives as real, and an existence that replaces something.

⁵³ Thalidomide is a drug that was first released to the public in 1957. It quickly became an over the counter medication used often by pregnant women to combat morning sickness. Shortly afterwards, thousands of children from users of the drug were born with malformations of the limbs.

⁵⁴ The Center for Extreme Bionics, at MIT Media Lab is one of the leading institutions working on innovation for prosthesis' design and functionality. For more information visit <https://www.media.mit.edu/videos/ceb-2016-05-06/> or watch the Center's director, Hugh Herr, here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/hugh_herr_the_new_bionics_that_let_us_run_climb_and_dance

There are three main functions in a medical prosthesis: mechanic, relating to the way in which the artificial organ is connected to the human body; dynamic, having to do with how they physically move; and electrical, involving the prosthesis' attachment to the neurological system that controls it. None of them are literally present in the prosthetic condition I am proposing—mainly because I am talking about of a way existence that is not, necessarily, material⁵⁵. But there are other traits that are shared and that allow for the prosthetic condition to be as transformative as much as a bionic medical prosthesis can be, despite the condition's conceptual existence.

For instance, artificial parts of the body are always malleable: they can take any form and perform any function. They can always be something else (including, of course, not a prosthesis). And even if there is an important amount of imitation (of mimesis if you will) in the design of a bionic limb, what is more exciting about it (I think) is that such process of imitation and construction often reveals 'deficiencies'—or functional limitations—that the prosthetic could always potentially solve. Both medical prosthesis and the entities affected by the prosthetic condition have the possibility of *enhancing* the real.

I want to return now to the Bellatin list, in an effort to bring clarity to what I just stated. But something else before: because I am discussing a *condition*, I will be understanding this term in a tripartite fashion. As a state of being, as a disorder or ailment, and as a constraint or stipulation. The prosthetic condition, I have said already, is a mode of existence that produces effects. Sometimes, however, being prosthetic can be interpreted as suffering from some sort of defect. And yet other

⁵⁵ However, and this should be the subject of a future project, I believe that when it comes to prosthetic communities this materiality could be more palpable.

times, the prosthetic condition arises almost as a prerequisite of existence. Hence the importance of considering reception when looking at these case studies.

The prosthetic condition then, is so (a condition) because it is the result of a critical operation that puts together (in one of what could arguably be an infinite number of ways) what I am here calling elements on a list. By the creation of this *unity*⁵⁶, these works of art transition from concealment into existence and, as a consequence, they appear in the world as art but also as objects, beings, events, and communities and, as such, they impact the context and the objects, beings, events, and communities with which whom they interact.

I will propose, then, that each element on the *Bellatin list* (as a matter of fact, each element in any given list of this kind), behaves as a node that allows for the creation of a network of meaning and existence. That network creates a space that is both ecological and poetic—it creates things and brings them to life. Whatever surrounds or fills that space may well be in constant flux and it is undoubtedly connected to the placement and identity of whoever is tracing or reading that network (partly, also, due to the fact that nodes can change, move, disappear, be forgotten). Because entities affected by the prosthetic condition are defined by the fact that their alterity is no longer ontological, because what these entities *are* is always in flux. Their alterity is no longer one of being, but one of place: perceived from some coordinates you understand them as art; from others you understand them as life; and from yet different ones as both. Just like Borges' map: both identical and different.

⁵⁶ I understand unity here in the sense proposed by Deleuze and Guattari when discussing the 'body without organs': "Le problème n'est plus celui de l'Un et du Multiple, mais celui de la multiplicité de fusion qui déborde effectivement toute opposition de l'un et du multiple. Multiplicité formelle des attributs substantiels qui constitue comme telle l'unité ontologique de la substance" (191). To accept this definition of unity, as it is to accept the prosthetic condition, entails the acceptance of a context where limits have collapsed. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*. Critique edition. (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1998).

Mario Bellatin, Producer of Prosthetic Objects

Mario Bellatin is a slippery writer, an evasive artist (he even often denies that he is one), and an elusive public figure. The statement becomes apparent when looking into a work like what I have called here the *Bellatin list*, but is also manifest in other pieces that may seem, initially, more traditional. For instance, his work *Lecciones para una liebre muerta* (2005)⁵⁷ is only a novel if one is a firm believer in what Bakhtin defines as the plasticity of the genre. It is composed of two hundred and forty three fragments, all of them shorter than a page and others as small as a sentence. Its organization is perhaps closer to an idea of montage⁵⁸: the author

⁵⁷ Mario Bellatin's oeuvre is as prolific as it is unusual. It includes, among others: a writing workshop/school where students are forbidden to write; an Opera-musical for one of the deadliest places on Earth (*Bola Negra: el musical de Ciudad Juárez*, 2005); a parafictional staging of his text *Perros Héroes*, set in a chapel in Mexico City and featuring the performance of killer dogs; the organization in Paris of a Congress of Latin American Writers, where, stricto-sensu, there were no writers participating; the commissioning of prosthesis to artist friends that we would later use to replace his missing left arm (some of the prosthesis took the shape and form of—were?—dildos, art-deco ornaments, hooks...); an autobiography, that is simultaneously one and 3 (*El gran vidrio*, 2007); etcétera, etcétera, etcétera.

⁵⁸ Eisenstein, of course, is the leading theoretician in the matter. To read about his definition and variations of the term see Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film" and "Methods of Montage" in S. M Jzentejn and Jay Leyda, *Film Form; The Film Sense: Essays in Film Theory* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959). Print.

Bellatin himself, in an interview with Emily Hind, stated: "Yo me nutro mucho del cine, pero no tanto por lo que están contando ni por las propuestas cinematográficas en sí, sino por la estructura. Me interesa cómo se narra y cómo se construye una película. Yo trabajo sobre todo con textos separados y simultáneos. Después realizo un montaje cinematográfico (...) Mi proceso interno tiene que ver con el cine, en la forma de construcción más que nada." See: Mario Bellatin and Emily Hind, "Entrevista Con Mario Bellatín," *Confluencia* 20.01 (2004): 197–204. Print.

proposes a particular juxtaposition, while simultaneously forcing the reader to develop his own.

Those two hundred and forty three fragments have almost an infinite number of ways in which they can be organized. If one wishes to identify lines of ‘cohesive argument’ and group the fragments accordingly, it would be possible to distinguish, more or less, four ‘stories.’ The first one covers thirty-seven fragments and narrates a community of subjects that raise fight dogs and are referred to as “los universales.” “Los universales” end up confined at an institution, “la ciudadela final,” where trafficking with contaminated blood is common practice. This line of argument also includes details about a blind, adulterous poet, who is later assassinated and who documents some of the events that take place at “la ciudadela” in a text that he titles “cuadernillo de las cosas difíciles de explicar.”

The second ‘story’ occupies one-hundred-and-ten fragments in which a first person narrator/character alternates thoughts on writing and illness. This narrator is one-handed, in New York City for a literary residence, and the owner of a house in Mexico City from where a blind drug trafficker (who ends up being a photographer) operates. The third line of argument can be found in thirty-nine fragments that present notes on the life of a Kafka translator and his sister, who decides to adopt twins, victims of thalidomide. Lastly, in the fourth identifiable argument, the narrator remembers stories that he heard from his grandfather; especially those of Macaca, a woman who performed Quechua rituals in a region that could very well be Peru and who had an Asian lover that could have been Bruce Lee.

If one were to approach *Lecciones* as a contained object, featuring as I just proposed, four main lines of argument, it would look similar to this:

Mario Bellatin, *Lecciones para una liebre muerta*, 2004
Total number of fragments: 243

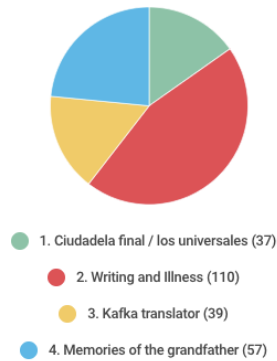
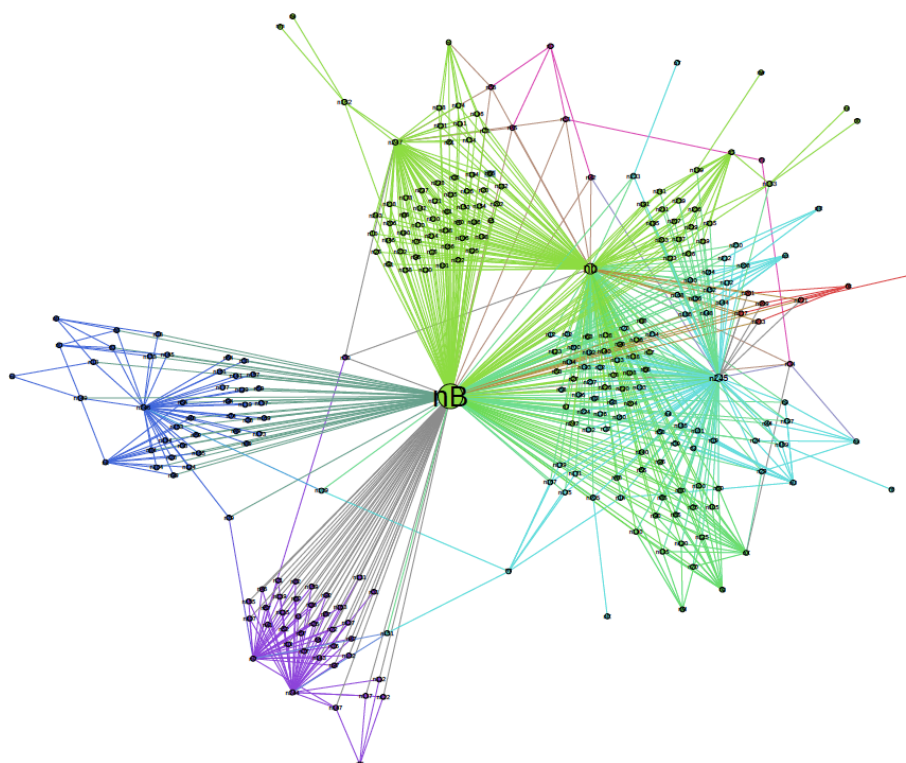


Figure 5

However, if there is something that *Lecciones* is not, is a contained object with a compartmentalized set of storylines that can be individually dissected. Quite the contrary. In *Lecciones*, each fragment contaminates and affects the other, each piece behaves like a node in a network dependent on two rather whimsical and mercurial axes: Mario Bellatin, in caps, empirical author of *Lecciones* and of more than a dozen other texts; and mario bellatin, in lower case, a character in *Lecciones* who, just like his namesake, is also one-handed, a writer of Quechua descent, and the author of a novel entitled *Salón de Belleza*. Rather than a pie chart, it would look more like this:

Figure 6



Because as most of Bellatin’s work, *Lecciones para una liebre muerta* is a piece that needs its *outside*⁵⁹. A big portion of its fragments appear or are linked to his previous publications⁶⁰, some of them reference ‘real’ people known in the contemporary cultural world that become, in a way, pseudo-characters (they too lose the capitalization of their initials), and yet others hint to Bellatin’s visual works. The meaning that can be constructed from this novel, as it can be from almost all of his work, is dependent on the relationships that can be formed with its *outside*. This, I want to argue, is a consequence of the way in which his works exist: scattered, in flux, malleable.

⁵⁹ That is, it forces the reader/spectator to look beyond the boundaries of the physical book that is printed and distributed.

⁶⁰ To this, one should add that every new edition of Bellatin’s texts appears with subtle variations from its preceding version. When asked about this habit of ‘correcting’ old texts he says: “No son correcciones, sino la versión de ahora. Es obvio que en esos procesos de escritura se gana y se pierde”. See: Fermín Rodríguez and Mario Bellatin, “Mario Bellatin,” *Hispanamérica* 35.103 (2006): 63–69. Print.

Arguably, reading Bellatin, in general, and *Lecciones*, in particular, produces within us a certain Barthesian *jouissance*⁶¹: we encounter these objects as uncomfortable creations that make us uneasy and shake our historical, sociological, and cultural foundations. They force us to reevaluate our taste, values, and memories—to reassess our understanding of art and what we believe it can do in the world. *Lecciones*, at the very least, invites us to think about the artificiality of the boundaries between artistic disciplines; between narrator, character, public figure and author; and between fragment and totality.

In *Lecciones*, such revaluation takes place in what I understand as two mutant bodies: a textual and a biological one. Allow me to focus on the textual body here, to the biological one I will return in the next chapter. So far, I have briefly identified this textual body as fragmentary, in need of connections, divisible in four main lines of argument, etc. Further, I proposed that one way to understand this work is to see it as one whose meaning is dependent on two axial nodes that are often interchangeable and sometimes overlapping: mario bellatin, in lower case, and Mario Bellatin, in upper case.

It is the later Mario Bellatin, the artist behind this unusual practice, who enables the connections that can be traced with his previous works and other entities that are, *sensu stricto*, *outside* of the physical object—the book—containing the fragments that compose the novel. At least for a moment, I suggest to understand this Mario Bellatin as what Giorgio Agamben calls “the author as gesture.”⁶² According to Agamben, the gesture is that which remains unexpressed in any act of expression.

⁶¹ Roland Barthes and Carlo Ossola, *Le plaisir du texte: précédé de, Variations sur l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 2000). Print.

⁶² See Giorgio Agamben, *Profanaciones / Desecrations*, Ed. Fabian Lebenglik (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2005).

This illegibility, however, becomes the characteristic that makes reading and expression possible—because the author as gesture ironically pretends to safeguard a sort of unutterable secret that will decipher the work. In Bellatin, the reader knows that such secret is impossible to access and that it is precisely this impossibility what prevents the work from being a contained object, depictable in a pie chart. Rather, this impossibility demands and enables the work's opening to its *outside*. mario bellatin, in lower case, states this clearly in *Lecciones*—in fragment twenty-two we read:

Sólo ahora, después de tantos años de búsqueda e indagaciones, sé que el misterio seguirá siempre inaccesible. Nunca sabré cuáles han podido ser los motivos por los que, desde mi infancia, me he empeñado en mantenerme varias horas seguidas frente a una máquina de escribir.⁶³

But let us return to Agamben for a moment who argues that the place, or better, *the taking place* of the poem is not the text neither the author—rather, it is the gesture in which author and reader are confronted in a reciprocal creative tension⁶⁴. This confrontation between author and reader also involves, in this case, the fragmentary character of the novel and the previous works that, in one way or another, are present within the pages of *Lecciones*. This clash is thus pivotal for the inception of *Lecciones par una una libre muerta* understood not as the book that was published and distributed under this very same name, but as the **prosthetic object** it engenders.

The reader of *Lecciones*, not unlike the blind man that appears in fragment one-hundred-and-eighty-five, is able to *see* this prosthetic object. His perception, however, is periscopic: in order to *see*, the reader needs to reduce the object to compressed, frozen, expressions⁶⁵ and, most importantly, he needs to trace connections among them. Reinaldo Laddaga argues that this is the quintessential

⁶³ Mario Bellatin, *Lecciones Para Una Liebre Muerta*. Narrativas Hispánicas; 370. (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2005).

⁶⁴ Agamben 93.

⁶⁵ Note here the clear relation to the 'Medusa effect' discussed earlier.

contemporary reader—one who is not interested in submerging himself in the text⁶⁶, but rather unavoidably turns it into a conversation, a deployed network of connections that include a variety of stimuli available within the larger framework of cultural production of a given piece⁶⁷.

A piece like *Lecciones*, I want to propose, elicits the creation of a prosthetic object precisely because of the way in which its textual body is composed, inviting for interactions with its *outside*: with its empirical author, with the ‘author as gesture,’ with the reader, with other works of art. Such interactions are, arguably, unlimited—which, in turn, guarantees that the work is able to generate a multiplicity of prosthetic objects, structured around various concerns and conversations. *Lecciones*, in short, spills beyond the bounded support of the book and because this spillage can go virtually everywhere, it allows for the prosthetic existence of objects that are different among them, as a consequence of being uttered from different locations, deploying different networks.

Further, I believe that in this ‘novel’ we can see the inception of a larger project that materializes in the *Bellatin list* and that includes *The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin*. There, in this quixotic attempt to be surrounded (physically) by literature, in an avant-garde-like desire to erase the boundaries between literature and life, Bellatin proposes an ongoing project that is simultaneously past, present and

⁶⁶ Reinaldo Laddage, *Espectáculos de Realidad: Ensayo Sobre La Narrativa Latinoamericana de Las Últimas Dos Décadas*. 1. Ensayos Críticos (Rosario, Argentina, 2007) 20.

⁶⁷ Perhaps in a similar way to that which Benjamin calls *reception in a state of distraction*. According to Benjamin, the film spectator practices this kind of reception: “Film pushes back cult value not only by persuading the audience to adopt an appraising stance but also by ensuring that this appraising stance in the cinema does not include attentiveness. The audience is an examiner, but a distracted one.” (Benjamin, 35)

future.⁶⁸ He becomes his books: he announces that “(...) he will count the years of his life in books and not in years as most do. He will turn books and not years, so to speak.”⁶⁹ Himself as an individual, he claims, will be indistinguishable from his oeuvre. He presents his work no longer as a sequence of literary texts but rather as what Reinaldo Laddaga calls the “despliegue continuo de una práctica.”⁷⁰ He invites us, readers and spectators, to follow such unfolding and to realize that it often takes place (again) ‘outside’, ‘beyond’.

The *Bellatin list* is a clear example of this. Despite a good portion of it being a ‘part’ of dOCUMENTA (13), the elements that compose it clearly exceed the limits proposed by this art event. And they do so quite literally. *The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin* is a book (or many books) that goes beyond its existence as part of *100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series*. As a matter of fact, it announces potential topics for future books, which paradoxically could also include books and fragments that have already been written. These potential topics range from “Nuns sitting in a nursing home waiting for the last sacraments to be given” to “He lived in a house filled with his own books.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ About this peculiar characteristic of Bellatin’s work see Steinberg, Samuel. “To Begin Writing: Bellatin, Reunited.” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 20.2 (2011): 105–120. There, he states: “The larger suggestion of my exploration here is thus that Bellatin’s works instantaneously—in the moment of their appearance—archive themselves, announce their own ‘untimeliness’, and it is not the work, but the archive of the work, through which the arts might hope to endure this Mexican interregnum. The books appear as an afterthought, as the after-effect of something else, and this after-effect, it seems, is projected as the point of departure, as Reinaldo Laddaga has put it, for something else, or nothing else (151).”

⁶⁹ Mario Bellatin and Documenta, *The Hundred Thousand Books of Bellatin = Die Hunderttausend Bücher von Bellatin* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011) 5.

⁷⁰ The continuous unfolding of a practice (my translation). Laddaga, *Espectáculos* 14.

⁷¹ Bellatin and Documenta, 7-11.

It is, also, a project that leaves dOCUMENTA (13). It leaves the designated exhibition space and installs itself in the form of *Chorality On Retreat*, a writer's residency program during the summer of 2012. The residency took place at a table in the Dschingis Khan Restaurant in Kassel and, according to dOCUMENTA (13)'s catalogue, the retreat was intended to be:

A place for private fiction in a public space, the restaurant table functions as a pause, a place of recollection, of reading and writing, in which the participants to the residency are invited simply to do what they would normally do: write. Visitors are invited to discover the work of the writers-in-residence, and when they step into the restaurant looking for a table—who knows?—perhaps they will be inserting themselves into the work of fiction.⁷²

Crossing the threshold of the restaurant door, the catalogue suggests, could mean crossing the boundaries between fiction and reality, or submerging in a realm where both could be integrated.

But this project also leaves dOCUMENTA (13) to go to Mexico City, to Bellatin's residence and studio, where his hundred thousand books live—or at least, where they would live *prosthethically*. Because as Bellatin himself states: in 2011, he decided to demolish a wall in his personal library (where he writes, reads and works) and modify the space to appropriately (and physically) host his hundred thousand books. Afterwards, he collaborated with designer Ernesto Azcárate to build a set of wooden dispensers, each able to hold five hundred books. Every time a new title is published, only one copy goes on a dispenser—the other nine hundred ninety-nine are sold. Bellatin draws a 'representation' of the copies for sale, a *prosthesis* of sorts, and then places it to the side of the single kept copy in his library, in order for the author (and the potential public) to get a material sense of the development of the project.

⁷² Documenta (13th : 2012 : Kassel, Germany), Documenta GmbH., and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungen GmbH. 2012. *Catalog*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.

The books are crafted in the exact same room, over a long table reminiscent of preindustrial times and craftsmanship. Or so he says.

Further, those nine hundred ninety-nine ‘leftover’ books leave his house while simultaneously leaving the market circuit where publications are traditionally traded. Bellatin’s project creates an independent exchange system beyond any existing one. A community of readers that is also a community of traders. He describes this system as a *gelatinous state of exchange*--meaning that the price of each copy can be altered by Mario Bellatin himself, by a reader, or by circumstance. Each book includes two written restrictions on its exchange. First, “this book is not free,” neither in regards to the retail price nor, potentially, in terms of its freedom to exist as an impervious object, for it is always bound to, and thus affected by, something else: the reader, the author, DOCUMENTA (13)... Second, “the copyright of this book belongs to the author,”⁷³ which, one would assume, is Mario Bellatin. However, by assuming this, Bellatin would then be reinserting himself and his project into the exchange circuit that he has already discarded. That is unless one takes the author’s words at face value when he says: “(...) Tú te conviertes en una especie de co-creador. Lo que quiero poner en tela de juicio es ¿quién es el escritor?, ¿por qué el escritor tiene el rol que tiene?, ¿por qué tiene el espacio o tiempo que tiene?, ¿quién dio las verdades en Literatura?”⁷⁴ That literary creation, he argues, is a prerogative shared by both writer and reader. Bellatin suggests here, I think, to be considered as the Agambian ‘gesture,’ discussed above.

Because of their fragmented state, both *Lecciones* and the *Bellatin list* exist in nodes, scattered in time, space and a plurality of subjectivities. This underscores the

⁷³ Bellatin and Documenta, 5-6.

⁷⁴ Hind Hind, and E. Hind, “Interview with Mario Bellatin,” *Confluencia-Revista Hispanica De Cultura Y Literatura* 20.01 (2004): 197–204.

porosities of the boundaries that Bellatin seeks to erase⁷⁵, not only between literature and other artistic disciplines, but also between art and life, or fact and fiction. Bellatin's practice, its 'despliegue continuo,' goes beyond the finite object to temporarily inhabit a variety of nodes. Nodes that can sometimes be objects, events or subjects—but not in the modern or in the postmodern sense. The nodes that constitute Bellatin's practice are neither unique, nor original, nor identical to themselves, and certainly are not opposed to an equally essential *Other*. They are also not the convoluted rejection of those characteristics. They are not a whole composed of contradictory, opposing or antagonistic parts⁷⁶. Rather, they are *gelatinous*, fluid nodes. They behave more like chameleons changing according to what is next to them, to what connects them to a larger, mobile, contingent whole.

With this I want to suggest that attempting to read or interpret one of these nodes in isolation is, at best, reductive. And this is why often using the traditional tools of literary analysis to interpret Bellatin's work seems futile⁷⁷. For sense to arise

⁷⁵ Natalia Brizuela eloquently phrases this desire: "(...) o projeto da literatura vindoura, do que chamamos literatura contemporânea, se situa, nas palavras de Bellatin, <nas fronteiras> entre a literatura e as outras artes, fazendo com que a escrita <assuma a categoria de prática artística. Nessa zona porosa do limite, da fronteira, espaço e momento sempre de contágio, de contaminação e de metamorfose, tanto a literatura se transforma em outras artes como as demais artes são potencialmente transformadas em literatura" Natália Brizuela and Carlos Nougué, *Depois da Fotografia* (Rocco, 2014) 13-14.

⁷⁶ Much in the way that some contemporary theories have defined the postmodern subject, in clear opposition to the modern ideal of essence. Of particular importance for this discussion is Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Print.

⁷⁷ About this particular difficulty to approach Bellatin's text using the exegesis tools of what we understand as the institution of literature, Florencia Garramuño adds: "Como en el arte de la instalación y de la performance, el libro de Bellatin construye un artefacto verbal en el que se conjugan fragmentos de mundo que cuestionan de modo radical no solo la idea de un género específico al cual pertenecería el relato, sino sobre todo la idea de la literatura como institución con convenciones específicas que la separarían del resto de las artes." Florencia Garramuño, *Mundos en común*:

from this apparent dispersal of nodes one needs to create a network of meaning, to accept Bellatin's invitation and become a co-creator, fully aware of the possibility of understanding reception and production as fluid, as increasingly interchangeable activities. In these works, in the 'despliegue continuo' of these practices, the acts of seeing, reading, writing, and making overlap, replace each other and, consequently, propose different answers to the standard questions, which seek to define a work of art's function and how its reality effect is created.

The prosthetic object that constitutes the work of art produced by a text like *Lecciones* or a practice like the *Bellatin list* exists, of course, only conceptually. There is no material object for the critic to physically grasp. However, there is an object, a unity in the Deleuzean sense, which can be approached recognizing its limitations. For, to continue with Deleuze and Guattari, in cases like those that Bellatin puts forth, it is less important to decipher *what* the work means. Rather, studying a prosthetic object is to investigate *how* the work means⁷⁸, with the knowledge that such meaning is contingent and located, structured through the tracing of networks.

A prosthetic object can never be immanent—it depends always on connections (often invisible ones) between the accidental, the organic or the premeditated nodes that compose them. Their existence depends on mobile networks that have always the possibility of becoming something else. Or nothing else. This is the malleability that they share with medical prosthesis.

ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte. Primera edición. Colección Tierra firme (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005) 192.

⁷⁸ In Deleuze and Guattari's words: "(...) on se demandera avec quoi il fonctionne, en connexion de quoi il fait ou non passer des intensités, dans quelles multiplicités il introduit et métamorphose la sienne, avec quels corps sans organes il fait lui-meme converger le sien. Un livre n'existe que par le dehors et au-dehors." (Deleuze and Guattari, 10)

Towards the Identification Of a Shared (Prosthetic) Lineage I

* *Practices*

The phenomenon visible in the *Bellatin list* and *Lecciones* condenses many of the characteristics that are shared by the works I will analyze in this dissertation and by others that, even-though they are not part of this research, could potentially be read as also affected by the prosthetic condition. The *list* is, as recently stated, fragmentary and always incomplete. The fragments are, in turn, identifiable as, among others, literature, art, life, performance, information, or design. But evidently, Mario Bellatin is not the first artist to present an unstable, puzzling production. Nor am I the first to attempt to explain this state of affairs. I join a conversation started several years ago and I do so with the hope of presenting the reader with a tool of thought.

But, before, allow me a truism: approaching this issue in the manner I intend to would be impossible without looking, albeit briefly, at the ways in which others have tried to understand the peculiar changes that have affected art and literature during the last decades. I intuit that things started to get confusing once disciplinary boundaries started to be disregarded. When, for instance, León Ferrari decided to make a statue of US president Lyndon B. Johnson with words, which turned out to be, also, a written drawing (*Quisiera hacer una estatua*, c.1964). Or when Julio Cortázar published *Ultimo round* (1969) and decided that a piece of literature could be physically intervened so as to make it, simultaneously, a work of interest from the point of view of visual arts.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Needless to say, Cortázar is not the only artist who has proposed such alterations of the book as a medium and format. Some cases of interest are, among many others: Mark Z Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 2nd edition (New York: Pantheon, 2000).



Figure 7. **León Ferrari**
Quisiera hacer una estatua (I would like to make a statue)
 c. 1964
 Ink on paper, 39 1/4 x 27 7/8" (99.7 x 70.8 cm)
 Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin
 American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Connie Butler

Figure 8.



León Ferrari
Quisiera hacer una estatua (detail)
 c. 1964

Obviously, the interconnections between visual arts and literature were not inaugurated by Ferrari or Cortázar. They are significantly older—the experiments of the avant-gardes come quickly to mind, but also ekphrasis, Plato’s *Republic*, and Latin American Colonial painting, among many, many others. However, I do not want to explore here the genealogy of this relationship, nor is this of critical importance to my argument. I use Ferrari and Cortázar as examples of the intellectual lineage I want to propose because it is works like these the ones that prompted the theoretical thinking that I find most relevant to understanding and analyzing the prosthetic condition.

And I build this lineage⁸⁰ as we go, as a critical intervention coming from the reader and spectator that I am. Granted, it responds to very practical situations: mood,

Print.; Juan Luis Martínez, *La nueva novella*, ed. Facsimilar (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Archivo, 1985). Print.; Salvador Plascencia, *The People of Paper*, 1st Harvest ed. (Orlando, Fla: Harcourt, 2006). Print.

⁸⁰ I choose to use the term lineage as opposed to genealogy because I see the historical antecedents of the prosthetic as able to be organized in a line, not necessarily a straight one. What allows for the conceptualization of the prosthetic, I

place, influences, mentors, friends, chance. But this ‘origin’ is not equivalent to an absence of purpose or utility—rather, by identifying the works with which the *Bellatin list* or *Lecciones* could have a sort of kinship I want to expose the sutures of my argument, and explain how it came about. The lineage I propose is not chronological. It resembles more the one indicated by Borges in his text “Kafka y sus precursores.”⁸¹ It is a located, non-genealogical lineage—less interested in finding a beginning, more committed to an exercise in topology.⁸²

If Ferrari and Cortázar connect with the prosthetic in their desire for experimentation and in the promiscuity of their relation to traditional media, others anticipate the prosthetic’s engagement with reality—both in terms of art’s potential to create and modify it. Think, for instance, in Latin American foundational novels, where fiction is largely responsible for the creation of artificial, yet very real, nations.⁸³ Or, in the conceptualist practices of the 1960s and 1970s in the region, that

think, is more of a stumbling path and less of an engendering or generational descent—as it is implied when talking about genealogy. Lineage, the way I understand it, is about connections and traces; genealogy, on the other hand, is about origins and essences.

⁸¹ Borges identifies a number of precursors for the works of Kafka and explains: “Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí. Este último hecho es el más significativo. En cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría (...) El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro.” Jorge Luis Borges, Rolando Costa Picazo, and Irma Zangara, *Obras Completas: Edición Crítica*, 1a comentada (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2009) 109.

⁸² I am grateful and indebted to Luis Pérez-Oramas for introducing me, among many other things, to the possibilities of a topological approach to the study of the arts. Deleuze proposes a similar perspective when talking about cinema in his text *L’image Mouvement* (1983). See: Gilles Deleuze, *L’Image Mouvement*, Critique edition (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1998).

⁸³ Obviously, a mainstay of this argument is Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

Luis Camnitzer labels “didactics of liberation”⁸⁴ and that, with different levels of success, put forth very real changes in the Latin American political and social scenes.

The prosthetic lineage is, to say the least, bastard. It goes well beyond the boundaries of the region⁸⁵ and operates like a rhizome, against any set genealogy. The works and practices that compose this lineage can be easily replaced, modified. They can be connected in infinite ways, giving prominence to a certain characteristic of the prosthetic condition over another. Because, after all, what is there in common between León Ferrari’s *Quisiera hacer una estatua*, Jorge Isaac’s *María*, or *Tucumán Arde* other than the fact that they can all be read as precursors of the prosthetic condition?

Readings

There is also, of course, a critical and theoretical lineage that I want to engage with, and that is perhaps more contemporary and easier to track than the artistic lineage I was just referring to. These readings, both critical and theoretical, have tried to address phenomena like the *Bellatin list*. Cases that blur the boundaries between literature and visual arts, between words and images; where there is no finite object to approach and decipher; where the traditional tools to examine the literary and the visual prove themselves to be obsolete.

⁸⁴ See: Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ In part because it is a phenomenon that has to do more with the experience of our contemporaneity (mobile, dislocated)—less a feeling of belonging to a specific región, the prosthetic is a condition proper to a time.

Before taking a closer look at the ways in which theory has attempted to deal with this phenomena, let me state the obvious. With Marcel Duchamp⁸⁶, the art object ceased to be a purely ontological category: he made evident the fact that most artworks are based on the deployment of networks—and their institutional validation—, which are not necessarily limited to what has been historically considered an *art object*. To make sense of art in the post-Duchampian world one needs a network, a thread to produce meaning. One needs to put together, in some way, the object urinal with the Mutt signature, with the institutional context, with the historical moment, with Duchamp himself, with his statement about the work, with the spectator, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera...⁸⁷ One, thus, needs to do what Bellatin himself hinted would be an act of conceptual montage.

Approaching the subject from a different discipline, Bruno Latour has argued that network is invaluable conceptually whenever action needs to be redistributed. I want to suggest that reading works like Bellatin's and the other works I will be discussing is, always, a redistribution of action, which is itself always an act of

⁸⁶ Scholarship about Marcel Duchamp and his influence in Western modern and contemporary art is endless. See, among many others: Dawn Ades, David Hopkins, and Neil Cox, *Marcel Duchamp*, First Edition Thus edition (New York, N.Y: Thames & Hudson, 1999). Print.; Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, eds. *The Duchamp Effect*, F First Edition edition, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996.) Print.; Judith Delfiner, "Éros, c'est la vie: un dialogue entre Marcel Duchamp et John Cage," *Histoire de l'art* (2010): n. pag. Print.; Walter Hopps, *Marcel Duchamp; Ready-Mades, Etc., 1913-1964*, Milano, Galleria Schwarz (1964). Print.; Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, 1st MIT Press paperback ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990). Print.; Calvin Tomkins and Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (Badlands Unlimited, 2013.) Print.

⁸⁷ Conceptualism used (and abused) this act of montage. In fact, it was the gap between the art object, its meaning, the context of its creation and reception, and the gesture of the artist, what allowed for and demanded the consolidation of a conceptual network in which the artwork would *live*. Think, for instance, of the now iconic cases of Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), or Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* (1964). These works exceed the object and exist, quite literally, in a dematerialized yet real and graspable manner.

creation. This is the case even when an active process of reception is not apparent, when the networks that create meaning remain somewhat invisible. In Latour's terms:

Take any object: at first, it looks contained within itself with well delineated edges and limits; then something happens, a strike, an accident, a catastrophe, and suddenly you discover swarms of entities that seem to have been there all along but were not visible before and that appear in retrospect necessary for its sustenance.⁸⁸

For Latour, there is always a network of support that grants meaning to any contained object. Such network, in turn, remains invisible unless "something happens" that destroys the unicity of the object and reveals its structure—the network in which it depends. For the prosthetic, the process is usually inverted. What is visible at first is the network or the nodes that make a given network possible. Then, as well, 'something' happens. In this case, it is, I think, the action of the spectator, who takes the nodes and puts them together to create a visible or invisible network, making the prosthetic object possible as a 'singular,' conceptual, entity. An entity that depends on other entities—I am calling them here nodes, or elements—that are no longer framed nor pristinely contained in an object or a discipline. They remain a bit outside of them: after art, *fora de sí*, fuera de campo...

For reasons that exceed the scope of this project, the abandonment of the object seems to have happened, first, in the visual arts. Boris Groys states that, with the advent of the 20th century and the death of God, asserting anything (whatsoever) about art 'in general' appears to be reductive and almost naive. When one is thinking about modern or contemporary art, Groys adds, the only generalization allowed is the assertion that art escapes any generalization.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Latour, B. 2011. "Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist." *International Journal Of Communication* 5: 796–810, 797.

⁸⁹ See Groys.

After the avant-gardes, one could argue that scholarship on western art agreed that every individual artwork had become a paradox-object, insofar as it can always be art and non-art simultaneously⁹⁰. To this, Groys proposes the impossibility of approaching modern and contemporary art in ways that are non-paradoxical:

De facto there is only one correct interpretation that they impose on the spectator: as paradox-objects, these artworks require a perfectly paradoxical, self-contradictory reaction. Any non paradoxical or only partially paradoxical reaction should be regarded in this case as reductive and, in fact, false. The only adequate interpretation of a paradox is a paradoxical interpretation. Thus the deeper difficulty in dealing with modern art consists in our unwillingness to accept paradoxical, self-contradictory interpretations as adequate and true.^{91 92}

What Groys is pointing out here is, in fact, the expansion of art into the realm of life and vice-versa. But even if one doesn't want to go that far and desires to maintain the division between these two (art and life), it becomes imperative to accept that there was an expansion that actually took place. This phenomenon has been largely

⁹⁰ Arthur Danto suggests that this phenomenon translates also as an approximation of art to philosophy: "(...) it gradually became clear (...) that there was no special way works of art had to look in contrast to what I have designated 'mere real things' (...) nothing need mark the difference, outwardly, between Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the Brillo boxes in the supermarket. And conceptual art demonstrated that there not need even be a palpable visual object for something to be a work of visual art. That meant that you could no longer teach the meaning of art by example. It meant that as far as appearances were concerned, anything could be a work of art, and it meant that if you were going to find out what art was, you had to turn from sense experience to thought" Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art*, 1ST edition (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) 13.

⁹¹ Groys 4.

⁹² Which is a contradiction that Jacques Rancière has also identified as defining contemporaneity in some western societies. What Rancière calls the ethical turn in aesthetic and politics is, in fact, the illusion of being in a plural all-inclusive society where any approaches to communal life that are non plural or all inclusive are, automatically, excluded. Communities where dissensus is not allowed.: "L'exclu peut signifier deux choses bien différents. Dans la communauté politique, l'exclu est un acteur conflictuel, qui se fait inclure comme sujet politique supplémentaire, porteur d'un droit non reconnue ou témoin de l'injustice du droit existant. Dans la communauté éthique, ce supplément est censé n'avoir plus lieu d'être puisque tout le monde est inclus" (153). See: Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, First Edition edition (Paris: Galilée, 2004) Print.

theorized and dealt with: the expansion of sculpture to Land Art and architecture, the expansion of painting into sculpture, the expansion of the object to the conceptual, the expansion of the poem to the wall, the expansion of the institution to its outside, and so on⁹³.

In some cases, the expansion has been so extreme as to be equated to *death*. The death of art. Of course this does not mean that art has ceased to exist but rather, as Arthur Danto—following Hegel—would put it, this expansion determined the death of a reassuring narrative in which art followed an evolutionary process⁹⁴. It underscored the need for new tools to understand what was happening with aesthetics. Similar is Rancière’s invitation to think about the present and the recent past as time periods that are part of an aesthetic regime, opposed to the previous ethical and representational ones⁹⁵. Art, it seems, is no longer there to teach (as it was the case in the Middle Ages, for instance, during the ethical regime); nor is it there to represent the world (as was the case for the representational regime). In the aesthetic regime, art

⁹³ See, among many others: Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting,” *October* 16 (1981): 69–86. hollis.harvard.edu. Web.; Arto Haapala, Jerrold Levinson, and Veikko Rantala, *The End of Art and beyond: Essays after Danto* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997) Print.; Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985) Print.; Rosalind E. Krauss, “A Voyage on the North Sea”: *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) Print.; Aleksandra Semenovna Shatskikh and Marian Schwartz, *Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism* (United States: Yale University Press, 2012) Print.

⁹⁴ Danto’s words are as follow: “(...) A story was over. It was not my view that there would be no more art, which ‘death’ certainly implies, but that whatever arte there was to be would be made without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage in the story. What had come to an end was that narrative, but not the subject of the narrative.” See Arthur Coleman Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) Print.

⁹⁵ Even though Rancière present these three regimes as being somewhat chronological, he leaves open the possibility of all of them coexisting synchronically, as may be the case of the times we live in.

affects reality in a particular way, it exists as a tool for the redistribution of the sensible⁹⁶ that allows us to see the possible⁹⁷.

Because what happens when art ‘dies’, when there is no distinction between art and non-art is that the artist becomes a maker not only of art objects but also, potentially, of everything else: haptic and not. It is precisely this question, about how art “aside from being critical, can create and challenge reality,”⁹⁸ that lies at the core of Dorothea Von Hantelmann’s book *How To Do Things with Art*. There, she bases her argument on two theoretical premises that I want to propose as critical for the development and understanding of the prosthetic condition. They come from J.L. Austin and Judith Butler:

(...) First, there is no performative artwork because there is no non-performative artwork. Austin introduced the notion ‘performative’ into language theory in order to refer to the act-like character of language. In certain cases he argued that something that is said produces effects that reach beyond the realm of language. Under certain conditions signs can produce reality; one can do things with words (...) I believe the same principle applies to artworks (...) Second, the notion of performativity has nothing to do with the art form of performance.⁹⁹

Talking about Daniel Buren’s work, Von Hantelmann argues that if the ready made endeavours to show the world as it is, Buren (and his situationist heritage is clear here) sees art as a tool for shaping and making reality. I’m not interested here in

⁹⁶ In Rancière’s words: « J’appelle partage du sensible ce système d’évidences sensibles qui donne à voir en même temps l’existence d’un commun et les découpages qui y définissent les places et les parts respectives. Un partage du sensible fixe donc en même temps un commun partagé et des parts exclusives. Cette répartition des parts et des places se fonde sur un partage des espaces, des temps et de formes d’activité qui détermine la manière même dont un commun se prête a participation et dont les uns et les autres ont part à ce partage » {12 Rancière, Jacques 2000}

⁹⁷ See: Kelsey, Fulvia Carnevale, John. “ART OF THE POSSIBLE: AN INTERVIEW WITH JACQUES RANCIÈRE by Fulvia Carnevale, John Kelsey.” *artforum.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 July 2016.

⁹⁸ Dorothea von. Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: The Meaning of Art’s Performativity* (Zürich; Dijon: JRP Ringier ; Les Presses du Réel, 2010) 17.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 18-19.

discussing whether or not this is an appropriate reading of Buren's work. Rather, I want to retain from Von Hantelmann's proposal what I think is an accurate description of what happens when one takes seriously the assertion that art and non-art have become interchangeable, as most (Latin American) contemporary art practices seem to propose. This would mean, consequently, that through art one could create non-art and, by using non-art, it is possible to produce art.

Such consequence is far from being trivial. It empowers art and the artist in ways that endow them with much more agency than, for instance, the one that was granted by Adorno¹⁰⁰, who argued that art can only bring forth symbolic, rather than real, change. And it also gives art and the artist much more agency than the one that is often afforded them and that Peter Burger¹⁰¹ identified as its actual function: critique¹⁰².

That is not to say that the cases that I will analyze here do not bring forth symbolic change or advance criticism concerning the status quo: they do so while engaging in different forms of production of reality—not only by being, themselves, a reality claim, but also because of their reality effects; it matters little whether these are intentional or not.

Further, and as Andrea Giunta proposes, there is a contemporaneity in visual arts, populated by: “(...) obras que se demarcan de los lenguajes tradicionales y que

¹⁰⁰ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) Print.

¹⁰¹ See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) Print.

¹⁰² Von Hantelmann's reading of contemporary art proposes a scenario where the function identified by Burger changes to a more proactive one: “Today an art that is ambitious with regards to its societal impact mostly operates under the paradigm of critique. An art that is conscious of the efficacy of its own performativity could possibly replace it with a more constructive and effective attitude” (Von Hantelmann, 193).

incorporan otros medios u otros sentidos, más allá de la visión, pero que circulan en los espacios dedicados a expresiones que, de un modo general y ya inexacto, se vinculan a las artes visuales.”¹⁰³ This incorporation of other ‘media’ and ‘senses’ is, needless to say, not unique to the world of the visual arts. It is also increasingly present in manifestations that we consider to be literary. In such a way that the spectator is challenged with works of art that seem literary, and with literary works that seem visual. To approach works like these, Giunta continues, one needs to be situated, to be located. Precisely because the network of meaning that the critical operation deploys depends on that:

Situarnos en el territorio de la obra misma permite también construir un archivo: aquel que, mediante la descripción (un relato¹⁰⁴), compartimos con el lector y que sirve de punto de partida para la interpretación sobre la que se avanza. Otras descripciones configurarán nuevos archivos para otras interpretaciones¹⁰⁵

The dispersed and fragmentary condition of these works demands a description¹⁰⁶ that, because it establishes connections and networks, produces a narration that lies at

¹⁰³ Andrea Giunta, *Cuándo empieza el arte contemporáneo? = When does the contemporary art begin?* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fundación arteBA, 2014) 6.

¹⁰⁴ The importance of this ‘relato’ and its fallibility is also discussed by Reinaldo Laddaga in his book *Estética de Laboratorio*. Further, it underscores the unavoidable presence of testimony when addressing these kinds of works. Talking about Roberto Jacoby’s piece *Dark Room* (2002) and the difficulty to approach it critically he states: “(...) no hay ninguna posibilidad, para nadie, de tener una visión completa de lo sucedido durante el conjunto de días y horas en los que el proyecto se desplegó: todo comentario corresponde necesariamente a una parte, y el conjunto de las partes no puede reconstruirse. La condición estructural de la pieza es que una reconstrucción completa de ella es imposible; pero, por eso mismo, fuerza un abordaje particular para todo aquel que quiera comentarla. La crítica de esta pieza (si es realizada por alguien que ha participado en ella) debe mezclarse necesariamente con el testimonio, por supuesto, personal” (111). See Reinaldo Laddaga, *Estética de Laboratorio* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2010.)

¹⁰⁵ Giunta, 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth considering here the connections between ‘descripción,’ ‘relato,’ and ‘testimonio.’ When do they constitute ‘narration’? Is there a difference between narration and description when thinking about the prosthetic? Which one comes first?

the core of meaning production and, inevitably, casts a medusan effect. By proceeding in this way, by studying artworks as situated phenomena, the critic is able to understand that, more often than not, artworks produce contexts¹⁰⁷.

Narration is, thus, pivotal. But not because the works that interest me here have literary components—often, despite them being literary, such components are non-narrative. Narration is pivotal for the prosthetic condition because, so far, it is the only way that seems to be available to materialize what is otherwise a conceptual category. You can think of *Lecciones*, as I propose, as a piece that creates a prosthetic object. You can think about such objecthood and its implications, you can conceptually picture it as this complex set of relationships connecting disparate nodes. However, to really approach it critically, to grasp it, the prosthetic object needs to be narrated in what will always be a located, incomplete, contingent petrification of an artistic practice characterized by perpetual flux. Perhaps more than others, prosthetic objects fit well into Groys' notion of the paradox object in contemporary art.

But let us go back to what Giunta hints is a broadening of boundaries that has produced visual work with literary traits and vice-versa. This phenomenon, which is at the core of what I propose in this dissertation, has been largely theorized in Latin America. Contemporary works as varied as those of Mario Bellatin, Joao Gilberto Noll, Carlito Azevedo, Fernando Vallejo, César Aira, Nuno Ramos, Diamela Eltit, Alan Pauls, and Tamara Kamenszain, among many others, have prompted thinking that accounts for this particular way of production. Reinaldo Laddaga is perhaps one of the scholars that has most consistently reviewed this phenomenon and, in his book *Espectáculos de realidad*, he proposes a generalization that, despite the exclusions

Are both necessary? See: Georg Lukacs, *Problemas del Realism*, trans. Carlos Gerhard (Fondo de Cultura Economica 1966).

¹⁰⁷ As opposed to being, merely, a reflection or a consequence of a given context.

that every generalization entails, is a helpful tool for understanding the works of artists and writers that also, I think, engage with the prosthetic condition.

He argues that some of the pivotal figures¹⁰⁸ in Latin American literary production of the last decades have built works that are closer to the methods and strategies of the visual arts than they are to traditional literary characteristics. This leads him to argue that contemporary literature aspires to a number of *conditions*: the condition of contemporary art, the condition of improvisation, the condition of instantaneity, the condition of mutability, and the condition of trance. For Laddaga, one of the consequences of such aspirations is an exacerbation of the presence and importance of the fragment.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, the artistic practices that I will engage with in the pages that follow can be partially described as lists, as groupings of sets of elements (of fragments) that can never be stable unless, of course, we decide to narrate them, to cast on them a medusa effect. For Laddaga, this is accompanied by a particular ethos that values “todo aquello que incremente la vida asociativa, al mismo tiempo que la propensión a inventar modos inéditos de asociación.”¹¹⁰ The texts that are studied by Laddaga and the practices I will further discuss appear as a series of snapshots. But snapshots in the digital age, when images can be infinitely altered:

¹⁰⁸ He is thinking here of very specific cases. His book addresses, mainly, the productions of José Lezama Lima, Jorge Luis Borges, Severo Sarduy, Fernando Vallejo, Reinaldo Arenas, Joao Gilberto Noll, Osvaldo Lamborghini, César Aira y Mario Bellatín.

¹⁰⁹ In a very different way than the one explored during other moments in literary history, for instance, during Romanticism. For the meaning of fragment in English romantic poetry see: Christopher A. Strathman, *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). For a look at the same topic in the German tradition see: Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) Print.

¹¹⁰ Laddaga, *Espectáculos de Realidad*, 17.

Esta es la literatura de una época en la cual un fragmento de discurso está siempre ya atravesado por otros. No me refiero a esa manera de ‘estar atravesado’ que llamábamos ‘intertextualidad’, por la cual un texto exhibía siempre ecos de otros textos remotos, sino un ‘estar atravesado’ por los textos e imágenes contiguos, sin poder acabar de asegurarse de sus bordes, de manera que todo punto de emisión se vuelve parte de algo así como una vasta *conversación*, sin comienzo ni fin determinados.¹¹¹

This is the literature of works of art (it makes little sense to label them as exclusive to any discipline) that leave the book. Literally. Physically.

The Object is Not (Only) The Book

Note how, partly, what theorists like Laddaga are responding to is the abandonment of the object book¹¹² as the sole support for the artistic manifestation we understand as literature. The connections to what art theory has identified as the post-objectual¹¹³ are clear; however Latin American literary scholars have approached the situation from a different perspective. Perhaps because, as I will try to prove, historical and political circumstances have conditioned the Latin American geographic space in a way that has ignited the production of works that create

¹¹¹ Ibid. 20.

¹¹² For a thorough analysis of the importance of the object in Latin America during the XIX and XX Centuries, and the transition from objecthood to non-objecthood in the region’s artistic practices see: Rachel Price, *The Object of the Atlantic: Concrete Aesthetics in Cuba, Brazil, and Spain, 1868-1968*. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

¹¹³ For a discussion of the non-objectual practices and theories in Latin America see Juan Acha’s text for the First Latin American Conference on Non-Objectual Art in “Non-Objectualist Theory and Practice in Latin America | Post.” <https://post.at.moma.org/sources/31/publications/288>. For a polyphonic account of the multiple practices and networks labeled as conceptual art in the Western tradition see: Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Reprint edition. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) Print.

contexts and that, as a consequence, produce greater effects in what a given community experiences as real. My dissertation will explore some of those circumstances. Josefina Ludmer, for instance, talks about them as works capable of *producing present*.¹¹⁴

Because, it seems to me, these works do not only leave the book. Rather, they do so to create new ecological spaces. Contemporary literature (and art in general), and this is an idea developed by Ticio Escobar in his now classic text *El arte fuera de sí*, loses its ground. The boundaries that guaranteed art's independence, isolation, and uncontaminated definition are cracked.¹¹⁵ Some contemporary (Latin American) artistic practices show us, once again,¹¹⁶ that art and life/reality can be easily comingled, conflated—and that one has always the potential to become the other. This is partially Laddaga's point, and appears as the 'horizon of desire' in Florencia Garramuño's proposal—when trying to answer the questions that are at the core of her book, *Mundos en común*:

¿En qué sentido estas transgresiones y expansiones de los diversos medios y soportes imaginan formas diversas de habitar el mundo? ¿De qué manera esa porosidad de fronteras y campos discursivos propicia modos de la no pertenencia que ofrecen imágenes de comunidades expandidas y hospitalarias?¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Speaking of what she calls 'literaturas postautónomas', Ludmer argues: "Estas escrituras no admiten lecturas literarias; esto quiere decir que no se sabe o no importa si son o no son literatura. Y tampoco se sabe o no importa si son realidad o ficción. Se instalan localmente y en una realidad cotidiana para 'fabricar presente' y ése es precisamente su sentido." In <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/ludmer.htm>

¹¹⁵ See Ticio Escobar, *El arte fuera de sí*. (Asunción, Paraguay: CAV, Museo del Barro, 2004.) Print.

¹¹⁶ This is a claim that is far from contemporary. It has ancient roots but has been rebooted recurrently, for instance, in the proposals of Situationism or the Avant-gardes.

¹¹⁷ Florencia Garramuño, *Mundos en común: ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte*. Primera edición. Colección Tierra firme (Buenos Aires, Argentina). Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015) 14.

Garramuños's responses are compelling. Part of the examples that she uses¹¹⁸ are cases that circulate and are read as literature but that, in their construction, disturb the boundaries between reality and fiction to a point where the reader can no longer identify what is fact and what is fancy. These cases of juxtaposition and confusion vary in degrees and intensities but, ultimately, what Garramuño proposes is that they help us imagine ways of being together where specificity and individuality are no longer the nucleus of relating.¹¹⁹

My argument feeds from those ideas but goes further. The radicality of the prosthetic condition is not only that it allows us to imagine the possible, but rather that it constructs it, turns it from a potentiality into a certainty. But I want to be careful with the use of this term. I do not mean certainty as dogma. And to make this distinction I go back to Garramuño, who argues that the works she is interested in are not direct descendants of the *collage*, where a number of fragments create a somewhat stable whole. The certainty of the prosthetic lies in two main points. First, its ability to produce reality effects. And secondly, the awareness of the contingency of such certainty—that is, the awareness that we are not facing a series of fragments that compose a whole (as is the case with *collage*) but a series of fragments that have the potential to construct wholes that are always mutable, temporary, variable, located.

¹¹⁸ Garramuño discusses, among others: Carlito Azevedo's *Monodrama* (2009), Bernardo Carvalho's *Nove noites* (2002), Tamara Kamenszain's *El eco de mi madre* (2010), and Nuno Ramos's *O* (2008), as well as several of Mario Bellatin's texts.

¹¹⁹ Her words: "(...) ese entrecruzamiento de fronteras y esa apuesta por la inespecificidad ofrecen figuras de la no pertenencia que propician imágenes de comunidades expandidas. Por sobre el cuestionamiento del 'medio específico', al cuestionar también la especificidad del sujeto, del lugar, de la nación, hasta de la lengua, muchas de estas prácticas crean una noción de lo común que permite imaginar una comunidad más allá de una esencia producida colectivamente, incluso más allá de la identificación homogénea que funda la pertenencia. Esa invención de lo común me parece la gran conquista de la apuesta por la inespecificidad del arte (...)" (Ibid. 39)

For such wholes are the result of an expansivity of media—which is not the same thing as a mere operation of mixing media. Rather it is an expansion of art into its ‘other’ which, in this case, is life. The works that I will discuss do not only mix the literary and the visual (or the painterly and the sculptural, the lyric and the narrative, and so on), but they present something that ignores and thus lacks those distinctions. They are, as Bellatin would put it, makers of art *in general*¹²⁰. They are, as I will argue, makers of life—prosthetic life, almost the same as *real life*, but not quite. This faculty provides the artist (and the critic) with a political tool because it allows them to use the rules of the real to create real apparatuses, whose existence is more the result of operations of desire, belief and epistemology and less the consequence of ontological immanence.

One could propose that throughout his career, Bellatin has tried to blur the lines that separate what we call literature from what we call art—pushing his exploration well beyond those lines and crossing also the ones that connect art and life. As Natalia Brizuela states, “Na busca de características narrativas das outras artes, Bellatin levou sua produção literária para essa fronteira ou limite onde as

¹²⁰ The idea of ‘art in general’ is also discussed by Graciela Speranza, albeit from a somewhat different perspective. She understands Duchamp as the hinge for this transition: “Desde Duchamp, se diría, esa interacción se materializa y se vuelve constitutiva de la representación: todos los medios son mixtos en alguna medida y, aunque el impulso de purificarlos ha sido una de las grandes utopías de la modernidad, no hay ya artes puramente visuales o verbales. Empujadas por el deseo de ser *otro*, las artes visuales—pero también la literatura y el cine—se lanzan hacia el afuera de sus lenguajes y sus medios específicos, y encuentran en el *fuera de campo* una energía estética y crítica liberadora. Los campos estéticos se expanden en la posmodernidad y la transformación de los medios individuales se abandona a favor de nuevas prácticas del <arte en general> que desestiman la especificidad de los soportes tradicionales” (23-24). See Graciela Speranza, *Fuera de campo: literatura y arte argentinos después de Duchamp*. (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2006).

distinções entre meios e artes se apagam: o cinema, a música, a performance, a fotografia, e também sempre, <a prosa da vida>.”¹²¹ When the artist situates himself as an agent intervening <a prosa da vida,> his production demands a reading that abandons the desire and the quest for a mode of reference—a reading that is more interested in approaching art as a mode of effect. Thus, the effect of man’s ability *to create*.

Evidently, the *Bellatin list* can be read as an exacerbation of Bellatin’s desire to mingle art and life: counting his life books, not years; surrounding himself physically by his creation; underscoring that he *is* his books; infusing each copy with the mark of his body; etc. And it can also serve, I want to propose, as a sort of poetics for the prosthetic condition. Because one of the many important aspects of such list is the gaps that are disclosed within it—what remains unsaid, not included.

It is precisely this attention to the unsaid what allows for Bellatin’s transition between artistic media and, perhaps more importantly, between art and life. The unsaid creates—or comes with—a void, and a void can always be an opening. Bellatin’s sees it that way and I tend to agree, because this opening *democratizes* creation and takes it ‘away’ from the author’s hands. The proliferation of voids is, in Bellatin, an invitation to compose. As I pointed out earlier, he proposes his own action of montage¹²² while simultaneously inviting the reader to develop his own.

¹²¹ Brizuela, 16.

¹²² Talking about Flores, one of the texts that productively exploits the existence of the void, Bellatin states: “Lo que hice durante esa instancia fue crear, a partir de textos aparentemente inconexos, aparentemente escritos por distintos motivos, la estructura de un ramo de flores, basado en una técnica sumeria: buscando puntos de unión entre un texto y otro, y, lo más importante, ver que esos textos, a pesar de que no tenían una conexión obvia en cuanto a contenidos, sí tenían una que es fundamental: que habían sido escritos por una misma persona.” “Mario Bellatin: Me siento escritor cuando voy describiendo.” Mario Bellatin, “Me siento escritor, cuando voy describiendo,” *Boletín Electrónico Spondylus*, Universidad Andina Simón

Once the works are in the public they no longer belong solely to him—Bellatin cannot control their meaning nor curb what they can produce.

This is the reason his practice is so interesting for the prosthetic condition. He invites us, readers and spectators, to compose in the very literal sense of the term: to arrange, or to direct elements, to produce a desired effect. Each composition, I claim, is not only a possible reading but also an act of creation. Critically approaching a text like *Lecciones* implies, of course, an assessment of this particular assemblage proposed by Bellatin, but it also makes possible the creation of an object that exists *prosthethically*. This object is as multiple as the attempts to grasp and define it. Its prosthetic condition prevents it from remaining static—because in Bellatin’s practice, works of art serve as platforms to *build upon*, and every act of building is different because, as stated before, it is located both spatially and temporally.

Bellatin himself has addressed this creative impetus, which is latent in his work, in the following terms: “Alguien puede construir un texto, y también ese es uno de los fundamentos de mi trabajo: que sirvan de plataforma para que otro construya lo que deba construir. Tú, al momento de acabar un libro mío ya eres autora, ya estás al mismo nivel que yo.”¹²³ Evidently, what the reader/spectator/critic creates is not a new book. It is a prosthetic object (or a being, or a community, as I will propose later)—it is artificial, it creates effects, and it appears to fill voids that were either always there or that, as Bellatin likes to argue, were voids created by ruin—voids that are charged, eloquent; voids that are there because something (or someone) has ceased to fill this place.

Bolívar, <http://www.uasb.edu.ec/web/spondylus/contenido?mario-bellatin-34me-siento-escritor-cuando-voy-desescribiendo-34>.

¹²³ Ibid.

Bellatin's methods however, are not the sole methods through which prosthetic objects can be created. Throughout his career, we have seen a progressive (and intentional) loss of control of his work—from a text like *Salón de Belleza* (1994), with a somewhat traditional narrative structure, to an experiment like the *Bellatin list*. But things can certainly go in the other direction: from a very scattered, elusive production, to a more controlled definition of the boundaries that compose a given work. This second *style* is the one adopted by the Chilean Colectivo Acciones de Arte, CADA. CADA's work allows for the creation of prosthetic objects. Some of them are actually advanced and preferred by the members of this collective and, as a consequence, their act of composition produces very different effects. Effects whose difference does not compete, at all, with *real* existence. This is what I will explore in “Part Two” of this chapter.

PART II

Towards the Identification of an Object of Study (And Trade)

Grouping Mario Bellatin's practice with the work advanced by the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte, CADA, may seem, arguably, as a farfetched endeavor. However, and despite being historically apart and produced in radically different contexts, there are some points of contact that I would like to explore and that will allow us to approach CADA's pieces through the lens of the prosthetic condition and, more specifically, through that of the prosthetic object. First, one must say that all of the works by the Chilean collective can be presented as lists composed of dissimilar elements. Like Bellatin's, some of those elements are textual, others visual and yet some others, performatic. What in Bellatin appeared as perhaps more of a poetic decision, in CADA was also a very practical desire to contest and avoid materiality (integrity and, thus, graspability), in an effort to escape censorship and persecution.

Let us think of a work like *Para no morir de hambre en el arte* (1979), the first action by CADA and perhaps one of their most discussed pieces¹²⁴. It too can be presented as a list including (not exclusively, of course) the following elements:

1. A written document in which the action is described in detail

¹²⁴ See, among many others, Robert Neustadt, *Cada Día: La Creación De Un Arte Social* (Santiago, Chile: Cuarto Propio, 2012).; Roberto Amigo Cerisola, David Gutierrez Castañeda, Rafael García Horrillo, Tamara Díaz, and Red Conceptualismos del Sur, *Perder la forma humana: una imagen sísmica de los años ochenta en América Latina* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2012).; María Berríos and Gerardo Mosquera, *Copiar el edén: arte reciente en Chile = Copying eden: recent art in Chile* (Santiago: Puro Chile, 2006).; Diamela Eltit, *Réplicas: escritos sobre literatura, arte y política*, Primera edición, Biblioteca breve (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena SA, 2016).; Alberto Carneiro, *Arte vida/vida arte = art life/life art*. (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 2013).; Coloquio Internacional de Arte y Política (2004: Santiago, Chile). 2005. *Arte y política*. Santiago de Chile: Universidad ARCIS.

2. A written document expressing the theoretical justification supporting the action.
3. The speech “No es una aldea” delivered in five different languages: English, Spanish, Russian, French, and Mandarin.
4. An advertisement-like intervention in the Chilean magazine “Revista Hoy”
5. An advertisement-like intervention in the Chilean newspaper “Diario La Tercera”
6. The distribution of one hundred liters of milk among one hundred families, inhabiting an impoverished area in the outskirts of Santiago
7. A manifestation in front of the UN Headquarters in Santiago
8. Former president Salvador Allende’s promise to guarantee .5lt of milk to every Chilean child.
9. An intervention at “Centro Imagen,” an art gallery in Santiago, where CADA deposited a number of bags of milks in a container and left them there to rot.
10. The invitation to fellow artists, not official members of the collective, to use the empty milk bag as a canvas to produce a new work. These empty bags came from some households in the impoverished community that had participated in the previous action of distribution.
11. A video documentation of important moments related, in one way or another, to the elements in this list.
12. Photographic documentation of important moments related, in one way or another, to the elements in this list.¹²⁵
13. A milk-related performance-lecture by Cecilia Vicuña in Bogotá
14. A milk-related performance by Eugenio Téllez in Toronto

Here, unlike what could happen in Bellatin, this fragmentary state is not necessarily an opening. Or it is, but it is an opening hidden under a layer that is created as a result

¹²⁵ It is not unimportant to note that copies of these videos and this photographic documentation are currently part of the permanent collections of prestigious museums like the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. More about this in the lines that follow.

of the hermetic character of each of these elements, especially when taken in isolation. Here, the fragment serves a dual purpose. On one hand it is the materialization of a desire that was fundamental to CADA: interdisciplinarity¹²⁶. On the other, it makes more difficult the grasping of a work that could appear as revolutionary, as attacking the regime of General Pinochet.

It has been argued that the visual and textual interactions that characterize CADA's work and that largely account for their fragmentary existence was also a reflection of the state in which the citizen subject had been disarticulated by dictatorship¹²⁷. This disarticulation of the work was similarly aimed at unveiling the abuses of the regime, because to question the boundaries of the artwork was a way of questioning, albeit subtly, order and authority. The members of the collective shared such belief and, perhaps more importantly, their ultimate goal was to successfully change the world—to make a new reality through their artistic practice. Choosing to call their works *acciones* is, of course, indicative of this desire.

However, in the context of their 'production' and 'display' the atomization of CADA's pieces produced a hermetic practice, difficult to read, which partially thwarted the collective's desire to have the spectator complete the message, intervene

¹²⁶ Nelly Richard, in her now iconic and seminal text, *Margins and Institutions*, describes what she coins as the *Escena de Avanzada* (CADA was part of that scene) in the following terms: "Quienes integran dicha escena reformularon, desde fines de los años setenta, mecánicas de producción creativa que cruzan las fronteras entre los géneros (las artes visuales, la literatura, la poesía, el video, el cine, el texto crítico) y que amplían los soportes técnicos del arte a las dinámicas procesuales del cuerpo vivo y de la ciudad: el cuerpo, en el arte de la *performance*, actuó como un eje transemiótico de energías pulsionales que, en tiempos de censura, liberaba márgenes de subjetivación rebelde, mientras que las intervenciones urbanas buscaron ellas alterar fugazmente la sintaxis del orden ciudadano con su vibrante gesto de desacato al encuadre militarista que uniforma las vidas cotidianas" (15). See Nelly Richard, *Márgenes e instituciones: arte en Chile desde 1973*. 2. ed. (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones/Metales Pesados, 2007).

¹²⁷ *Ibíd.* 16.

the work and guarantee its heterogeneous significations. But it also proved to be a fertile hermetism because it ignited the exacerbated production of critical writing. The spectator of a work like *Para no morir de hambre en el arte*, or of any of CADA's works¹²⁸ for that matter, needs to behave like an archeologist—he must identify clues, collect them, put them together in an effort to reconstruct the work and produce sense. Not unlike what Bellatin demands of his readers. Of course, the 'archeological' work needed to interpret CADA today is much less demanding than the one that was required during the years immediately following the occurrence of the actions. This, I want to propose, is possible because the contemporary critic often approaches the work of the collective by engaging with the prosthetic objects it has created. And the most influential one of those has been, by far, that crafted by Nelly Richard and accessible mainly through her text *Margins and Institutions*. This is not to say that Richard has been the only critic to engage with CADA's production, but she was, arguably, the first to do so—and in so doing she used language to put together lists of actions that when combined produced objects and effects. Richard's writing, despite how one could feel about it, produced the prosthetic objects that for many years served as catalysts for the interpretation of the practices of CADA, and many of the others that fell into her *escena*.

But before delving in more detail into the peculiarities of this prosthetic object and the potential existence of others that share some of its nodes, I want to go back in time to underline a characteristic of the Chilean context both before and after the CADA years. If, as Laddaga has argued, one of the characteristics of contemporary Latin American literature is the fact that it aspires to the condition of contemporary

¹²⁸ CADA produced a total of six actions during its existence as an active art collective: *Para no morir de hambre en el arte* (1979); *Inversión de escena* (1979), *¡Ay, Sudamérica!* (1981); *Residuos Americanos* (1983); *NO +* (1984); and *Viuda* (1985).

art; I would propose that, in Chile, this aspiration is reversed. And it has been so for a while: contemporary art aspires to the condition of literature or, at least, to the condition of textuality.

One could trace a very wide-ranging arch starting with the *Quebrantahuesos* in the early 1950s, all the way to today to works like *Décimas Telúricas* (2010) by Francisca Benítez, or *Primeras Palabras* (2014) by Catalina Bauer. This arch will also cover practices such as those of Nicanor Parra, Juan Luis Martínez, and Raúl Zurita¹²⁹, among many, many others¹³⁰. But I am not necessarily interested here in analyzing the complex relationships between text and image in Chilean cultural history¹³¹. Rather, I would like to note that this interdisciplinary articulation grounds CADA in a context familiar with the explorations of the gap that is produced once word and image come together in one piece of art. Most of CADA's pieces are text-heavy and are often accompanied by descriptions and theoretical justifications. The collective fed form that lettered tradition, while simultaneously infusing their practice

¹²⁹ Zurita is a figure of particular interest to the discussions about the abandonment of the book. Very early in his production, he leaves the object to write on the sky, mountains, etc. I have not, however, seen Zurita's work analyzed from this perspective.

¹³⁰ Óscar Galindo traces a similar lineage when he states: "No se ha hecho la historia de las relaciones entre poesía y plástica en la poesía chilena, pero podemos mencionar al menos tres antecedentes relevantes: los caligramas y poemas pintados de Vicente Huidobro en los años 20, los collages poéticas de Ludwing Zeller y el *Quebrantahuesos* de Parra, Lihn y Jodorwosky. La eclosión se produce a fines de los 70, fundamentalmente en la reflexión sobre arte conceptual y poesía han sido Ronald Kay junto a Eugenio Dittborn y Catalina Parra con el grupo V.I.S.U.A.L (1977). A estas alturas ya teníamos *Artefactos* (1972) de Nicanor Parra y de 1997 es también *La nueva novela* de Juan Luis Martínez. En 1979 se publica *Anteparaiso* de Raúl Zurita, aunque un par de años antes se habían publicado algunos avances en la mítica revista *Manuscritos I*. A partir de los años 80, Enrique Lihn trabaja en la incorporación de fotografías, plástica y videos a sus creaciones artísticas." See Oscar Galindo, 2007. "Palabras E Imágenes Objetos Y Acciones En La Postvanguardia Chilena," *Estudios Filológicos*, 2007, 42.

¹³¹ See Alberto Madrid Letelier, *Gabinete de lectura: poesía visual chilena*. Cuadernos de movilización (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2011).

with discussions about art as ‘vida mejorada’, a topic that was particularly lively during the years in which CADA was active due, in part, to the personal relationship that some Chilean artists had with figures like Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostel¹³². Both of these characteristics impacted the desire for expansion/expansivity and mixture of artistic media and formats which, consequently, produced works that were difficult to identify as such and thus succeeded in navigating a public sphere under constant vigilance.¹³³

This specific context was, I claim, particularly apt for the development of artistic practices for which the prosthetic condition functions as a productive tool of analysis. I have argued how, in Bellatin’s case, the unsaid and the gaps created by it are fundamental for the deployment of networks and connections that produce the prosthetic object. When thinking about CADA one must recognize that, during dictatorship, silence itself becomes a sign and a method of resistance—hence the importance of reading and understanding it. Such silence can be absolute, or it may arise from the juxtaposition of actions (political, artistic) that are hardly translatable.

¹³² Specifically, Ronald Kay and Catalina Parra who were back in Chile at the time, after spending some years in Germany where they interacted closely with ideas and practices proposed by both Beuys and Vostel.

¹³³ Diamela Eltit has described those years as fundamentally fragmentary, difficult to apprehend: “Es muy complejo intentar dar cuenta de ‘esos’ años y es complejo porque la suspensión total o parcial del estado de derecho penetra, circula y se instala en el cuerpo del sujeto interceptando el pensamiento y cambiando los rumbos y las energías de la vida cotidiana. Lo que quiero expresar es que la dictadura ‘está en todas partes’, tanto en los espacios macro como en los micro, y por eso es imposible establecer un relato lineal ni menos total, porque, precisamente, se trata de una situación porosa, permanente y multiforme” (290). See Diamela Eltit, *Réplicas: escritos sobre literatura, arte y política*. Primera edición. Biblioteca breve (Santiago, Chile, 2016). Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena SA.

In either case, it produces a gap that allows for the establishment of relationships, for the creation of networks of meaning that, in turn, produce objects—prosthetic and not.

Writing about CADA today may seem, also, redundant. No other artist or collective active during the Chilean dictatorship has received comparable attention, praise, and critical discussion. CADA's resistance, interdisciplinary impetus, political radicality, and hermetic condition, have been studied in multiple ways by both Chilean and, increasingly, foreign scholars. Its importance for the Chilean cultural scene of the end of the Pinochet era and the following transition are seldom contested. I subscribe to those arguments but do not wish to entertain them here. My interest is to examine the ways in which CADA's practice has produced objects that, despite being dematerialized, are still capable of circulating not only as objects of study, but also as objects of exchange within art market's economy.

I am well aware that pairing the work of the Collective with that of Bellatin can seem reductive as it implies overlooking the very different contexts of production and the almost opposed political stands of both practices. However, I do believe that they share important formal attributes: fragmentary 'nature' of the works, the desire to overlook the boundaries between artistic disciplines and between art and life, the commitment to collaborative creation, the use of different platforms for circulation, and the importance of voids and silences for the articulation of meaning, among others. This, coupled with the Collective's recent maneuver that I will discuss momentarily and that guaranteed the inscription of CADA's works in networks of exchange and exhibition, allows me to delve deeper into the possibilities of what I am here calling prosthetic objects. As I will explain in the lines that follow, CADA's prosthetic objects, when crafted by members of the collective themselves, put forth, at

least, issues of poetic hierarchies that pose a key question: could some prosthetic objects be *more real* or *more valuable* than others?

Most of the readings about CADA's work have been articulated around the concept of *vida mejorada*, which often functions as a structural axis for interpretation. It accounts for their political vein, their use of urban space, and their almost obsessive desire to act collectively questioning the boundaries of authorship and authority. However, life understood as a work of art—or art as a sort of 'improved' life—is not quite the same as understanding art as a tool to produce, modify, and shape what a community experiences as reality. I am interested in exploring the later. But not because I think that the former lacks pertinence; on the contrary, its pertinence has been underscored by the scholarship produced about it. Rather, I want to propose a reading of CADA's works that claims that their disregard for the art object, their interest in fragmentary production, and their interdisciplinary practices are precisely what equips the spectator with the necessary tools to produce objects—to 'rematerialize' what once needed to be immaterial.

CADA: Dematerializing and Rematerializing Artistic Practices

Perhaps one of the most salient consequences of CADA's context of production is an urge to dematerialize, which is something that was of course experienced elsewhere. By the time CADA was producing its works, dematerializing practices had been around for over twenty years. Conceptual art, as an international movement was long gone, but conceptualism—understood as the prevalence of the idea, the transience of media, and the questioning of the art object, among other

characteristics—infuses art up to this day¹³⁴. The fact that Conceptual art investigates the nature of the art object and its relationships with the structures and institutions that make it recognizable as such is a precedent of critical importance to the prosthetic condition. And so are the Latin American variations of these inquires¹³⁵ that posit, like Hélio Oiticica did, that the artist's position is “no longer (that of) creator for contemplation, but an instigator of creation” (8);¹³⁶ or that a work of art could exist only in its telling, as proposed by Roberto Jacoby, Raúl Escari and Eduardo Costa in their Manifesto for the Art of the Mass Media.

Similarly, Oiticica's *New objectivity* suggested a Brazilian-based reconciliation of the idea with the object in a way not too different from the one that comes with the conceptualization of the prosthetic object. If New Objectivity uses the object to elicit action, to trigger the production of situations and objects; the prosthetic occurs inversely. Oiticica was referring to a moment in time in the late 1960s. CADA was working in the early 1980s and in those years dematerialization (and the possibility to, if desired, rematerialize) came with a twist: dictatorship. And yet, despite the difference in time, both CADA and New Objectivity share this productive tension in which the object—prosthetic and not—can serve as both enabler and condenser. That is, it can be something that starts action and creation or it can be the repository of multiple acts of creation and lines of action.

¹³⁴ For a discussion of this difference with especial attention to the Latin American and Brazilian cases see Cristina Freire and Ana Longoni, *Conceitualismos do Sul/Sur = Conceptualismos del Sur/Sul* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2009).

¹³⁵ For an analysis of the peculiarities of the Latin American conceptualist practices vis-à-vis their American and Western European counterparts, see: Mari Carmen Ramírez. 1993. “Blueprint Circuits : Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America.” In *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, by Waldo Rasmussen. New York: Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by HNAbrams.

¹³⁶ Hélio Oiticica, “Position and Program,” *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2000).

Artist Carlos Altamirano, in a visit to Harvard University in 2008¹³⁷, succinctly explained the need for dematerialized artistic practices during the rule of Pinochet: “It was necessary for those works not to exist, but it was also necessary that they could be reconstructed,”¹³⁸ he stated. This is a paradox at the core of CADA’s production, and one that partly explains why the collective’s works exist, mostly, prosthetically. Diamela Eltit explains it in the following terms:

En ese contexto social, la propuesta del CADA fue múltiple y vanguardista. Intentábamos establecer una poética conceptual y una visualidad que, sin renunciar al objeto, lo superara como mero deseo ornamental. En un cierto sentido, el CADA se pensó entre la visualidad y la escritura. Para eso pensamos en el diseño de series de actos artísticos que denominamos ‘acciones de arte.’¹³⁹

A ‘conceptual poetics’ and a ‘visuality that surpasses the object’ is another way to refer to what I have been identifying as fragmentary, because it implies thinking about the work of art as something that simultaneously inhabits a variety of registers. Such ubiquity becomes all the more relevant during times of surveillance and social fragmentation. CADA successfully navigated that peculiar context, its works effectively did not exist—partly, because there was no object to seize, to find.

However, I want to argue that today there is, actually, an object. Or better: a multiplicity of objects—because CADA’s pieces are, as Altamirano suggested, susceptible of being reconstructed. They have been so in a number of ways, most of them affected by the prosthetic condition. They are almost the same as traditional art pieces, but not quite.

¹³⁷ See Sergio Delgado and José Falconi, *Conceptual Stumblings: Experimentalisms in Chilean Art and Literature Since the 1950s* (Harvard University, forthcoming).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Diamela Eltit, *Réplicas: escritos sobre literatura, arte y política*. Primera edición. Biblioteca breve (Santiago, Chile, 2016). Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena SA, 309.

A good number of the practices that, in one way or another, fit into the large framework built by the history of conceptualism and dematerialization—and this is largely known and has been discussed extensively—pose a challenge for art history that, in its very own way, translates into the circuits of the art market. The absence of material object forces the historian (and the trader) to develop a supplement of sorts, something that can come to fill the void that these practices create and that can, thus, allow us to grasp them both as objects of study and as objects of exchange.

A way to do this is by consolidating an archive. Archives come, of course, in all shapes and forms. Especially when they are art-related archives from a time, like the Chilean decades of the seventies and eighties, when art revealed itself to be a ‘solution’ to the political problem. In Chile, when political discourse *tout court* was non-existent and forbidden, art became the vehicle through which a convoluted, camouflaged, political discourse could be channeled. The consolidation of CADA’s archive needed (needs?) to account for both the collective’s aesthetic and political potency.

During the Pinochet regime, artistic and publishing venues were welded together and, often, printed matter became the repository of actions that took place *outside*. The magazine *Manuscritos*, for instance, became a privileged space for this—notably through the recuperation of Parra, Linh, and Jodorowsky’s intervention in the public space, *Quebrantahuesos*. *Manuscritos* became, in this case, an archive of sorts that safeguarded the piece’s visual prowess while simultaneously infusing the *Quebrantahuesos* with a new ontological status. In a gesture that I propose to understand as halfway between a ‘narrative afterlife’ and the consolidation of a prosthetic object, *Manuscritos* not only preserved the image of the public intervention, it also registered its reception as publicized in a local newspaper and

advanced a critical interpretation by Ronald Kay that explained, situated, and interpreted the piece.

But before describing in more detail what I suggest to understand as the narrative afterlife of a work of art, I want to go back to the archive. CADA's work is particularly susceptible to producing and manifesting itself in archives—sometimes gathered in publications, not unlike *Manuscritos*, where fragments and traces were 'stored' and, often, interpreted. Other times, and this was also one of the many areas pioneered by the collective, such archive took audiovisual forms. CADA realized that their practice could be contained, archived, through video. For them, the technology of this medium materialized a medusa effect like the one I have referred to. Eltit explained this by stating that, for the collective, video became “el exacto soporte para retener el acontecimiento” and adding that “(n)o se trataba de un manejo estético de la tecnología, sino más bien de revelar su útil carácter testimonial y reproductivo”¹⁴⁰.¹⁴¹

Video in this case—and according to Eltit—becomes an attempt to make the piece graspable, to objectualize what is otherwise a mostly dematerialized practice¹⁴². However, for CADA, video was never a substitute for the work; it was never to be equated with an art object. Rather, it was one more way (sometimes a privileged one, but one among many in any case) of documenting an action that no longer existed.

¹⁴⁰ This, of course, is exclusively Eltit's thinking about the utility of video. Other members of the collective, including Lotty Rosenfeld who was, *sensu stricto*, the videographer, may differ.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 305.

¹⁴² If video was a way to materially contain the work that each action was supposed to be, the 'conceptual container' was the notion of social sculpture. In the essay that is part of *Para no morir de hambre en el arte*, CADA states: “Entendemos por escultura social una obra y acción de arte que intenta organizar, mediante la intervención, el tiempo y el espacio en el cual vivimos, como modo, primero de hacerlo más visible y, luego, más vivible...El presente trabajo...es escultura en cuando organiza volumétricamente un material como arte; es social en cuanto ese material es nuestra realidad colectiva-”

Video, for them, was to be ‘complemented’ by testimonials, ephemera, theoretical descriptions, photographs, etc. Very much in the same way in which Boris Groys explains the contemporary shift in interest (for institutions, critics, artists) from artwork to art documentation. Allow me to quote him at length:

The artwork as traditionally understood is something that embodies art in itself, that makes it immediately present and visible. When we go to an exhibition, we usually assume that what we will see there (...) *is* art. Artworks can, of course, refer in one way or another to something other than themselves (...) but they cannot refer to art, because they *are* art. But this traditional assumption about what we find at an exhibition or museum is proving more and more misleading. Increasingly, in art spaces today we are confronted not just with artworks but with art documentation. The later can also take the form of paintings, drawings, photographs, videos, texts and installations—that is to say, all the same forms and media in which art is traditionally presented—but in the case of art documentation these media do not present art but merely document it. Art documentation is by definition *not* art; it merely *refers* to art, and in precisely this way it makes it clear that art, in this case, is no longer present and immediately visible but rather absent and hidden.¹⁴³

CADA produced and preserved documentation of its actions. A lot of it. It includes video, photography, correspondence, intervened milk bags, audio recordings, press clippings, interviews, copies of texts that were read, copies of texts that were thrown from the air, copies of texts that never circulated... The collective’s members are aware of the significance of these traces and they protected them accordingly. Today, this reservoir of information is freely accessible to the general public. It is officially titled *Archivo CADA* and there are three iterations of it—each containing ‘original’ documents, therefore each one different to the other. They live at the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in the same city, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, in Madrid.

The *Archivo CADA* does not, of course, contain CADA’s works. When art, as CADA wished, becomes a life form it cannot be grasped nor archived. It can only be

¹⁴³ Ibid. 53.

documented. Groys argues that art documentation is a way to show the living by replacing it with the artificial while inscribing the work in history, giving it a lifespan—documentation severs a moment in life and suggests the boundaries produced when thinking of such moment as an object¹⁴⁴. What this archive holds, then, is the potential of artificially recuperating a moment in life that is considered art through, I claim, the production of a prosthetic object. But this is not, evidently, the only way in which such recuperation can take place. For years it lived in myth and materialized itself in narration.

The fact that CADA's work is accessible mostly through narration is not unparadoxical. Its practice also responded to what I have described as the 'crisis of the book' in Latin America, not only because two of its members were predominantly writers—Raúl Zurita and Diamela Eltit—but also because, quite literally, the book was, for them, insufficient¹⁴⁵. Despite this fact, CADA's work often ends up located

¹⁴⁴ Groys words are as follows: "If the living thing can be reproduced and replaced at will, then it loses its unique, unrepeatable inscription in time—its unique, unrepeatable lifespan, which is ultimately what makes the living thing a living thing. And that is precisely the point at which the documentation becomes indispensable, producing the life of the living thing as such; the documentation inscribes the existence of an object in history, gives a lifespan to its existence, and gives the object life as such—independently of whether this object was 'originally' living or artificial (...) The difference between the living and the artificial is, then, exclusively a narrative difference. It cannot be observed but only told, only documented: an object can be given a prehistory, a genesis, an origin by means of narrative. The technical documentation is, incidentally, never constructed as history but always as a system of instructions for producing particular objects under given circumstances. The artistic documentation, whether real or fictive, is, by contrast, primarily narrative, and thus it evokes the unrepeatability of living time. The artificial can thus be made living, made natural, by means of art documentation, by narrating the history of its origin, of its 'making'. Art documentation is thus the art of making living things out of artificial ones, a living activity out of technical practice: it is a bio-art that is simultaneously biopolitics." Groys, 56-57.

¹⁴⁵ Zurita is know for his poetry on the sky, the beach, cliffs, etc. Eltit has clearly stated: "Quería salir a otro espacio, salir de la literatura. Eso era lo que quería hacer, porque el libro me parecía y me sigue pareciendo insuficiente, insuficiente en general, insuficiente como discurso. Antes me parecía más insuficiente que ahora." Zurita, 356.

in books, in texts—both before and after the events took place. One could understand this as a desire, perhaps unconscious, for rematerializing a practice that needed to be ephemeral—a characteristic that fits well into Chile’s tradition of favoring the textual and the narrative. Similarly, it spoke to an increasing interest in the archive championed by the desire of making visible any historical records that could bring light onto the years of dictatorship and some of the abuses perpetrated by the regime. CADA’s work, its ephemerality, the time-based character of most of its interventions, and its fragmentary existence lends itself pretty well to processes of archiving and narration.

As I mentioned before, Nelly Richard occupied a privileged position in the narration, criticism and recuperation of CADA’s practice. Her writing, opaque, theoretically charged and difficult to explore, became a creative exercise in its own right. In many cases, Richard became the model spectator of the collective’s work—she connected the disparate nodes that composed the actions, built her own, specific prosthetic object and then translated it into writing. By doing this she petrified a practice that, before Richard’s operation, existed in what artists Ignacio Gumucio describes as “slightly fraudulent documentation,”¹⁴⁶ relaying heavily on oral accounts—sometimes even accounts by ‘witnesses’ that were not really there, partly because it was impossible to identify a specific place for the witness to inhabit—. All this coupled with the utter state of confusion created by any act of rebellion happening under dictatorship, which prevented the citizen from being certain about any official and unofficial act of narration.

¹⁴⁶ Delgado.

Richard, then, granted stability and certainty through writing¹⁴⁷. Her text is further authorized by her proximity as spectator, collaborator and friend of the collective's members and is the first manifestation of what I would like to call a narrative afterlife of CADA's production. Such afterlife is not exclusive to the collective; on the contrary, it is often a way in which time-based, ephemeral pieces enter into history. However, in CADA's case there is an additional component: the pieces are accompanied by a number of meta-texts that are both part of the actions or attempts to frame them. In Richard's words:

La mayoría de los textos incorporados a la visualidad revisten un carácter metadiscursivo: son enunciados que entregan ayudas conceptuales y testimonian a la vez la necesidad (autorreflexiva) que tiene el artista de ir comentando su propia práctica para orientar el desciframiento de la obra en un contexto de censura, opacidades y conflictos de interpretaciones.¹⁴⁸

For her, those texts work as hinges that allow for the 'faithful' reconstruction and interpretation of the works. Understood in this way, they can also be read as performative texts, in the sense proposed by Austin. CADA's pieces are long gone, but they are still accessible in their afterlife—both as narrations that incorporate myth, oral accounts, and documentation; and as prosthetic objects hovering over every attempt to conceptualize and interpret them today.

As I have argued, the prosthetic existence is not material, even when it incorporates materiality. Usually, the operation that consolidates the prosthetic (object, in this case) is performed after the action has taken place. In CADA's practice

¹⁴⁷ Diamela Eltit sums up Richard's contribution in the following terms: "(...) ese libro [*Márgenes e Instituciones*] vino a recoger los flujos dispersos en años de configuración de una mirada. El texto reunió territorios artísticos agrados de crítica y les otorgó una textura a formas productivas que poblaban las orillas de escenarios cuando no marginales, sí desafilados" (109)

¹⁴⁸ Nelly Richard, *Márgenes e instituciones: arte en Chile desde 1973*, 2. ed. (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones/Metales Pesados, 2007) 97.

however, because of the importance of textuality, this operation can also happen before the fact. The objects produced, of course, are different, but what I want to underline here is the collective's reliance on the concept. The *Archivo CADA* contains detailed descriptions and theoretical justifications of almost every action. Taken in isolation, those documents are enough to create a prosthetic object, even if fictional in the most traditional sense of the term—they engender the possible by imagining it and narrating it.

Such 'possible', in turn, loses its fictionality when it becomes an actuality. Because after-the-fact, the number of nodes that participate in the construction of the object that can be manifested in what I am calling a narrative afterlife increases drastically and, perhaps more importantly, the crafting and identification of those nodes is no longer an exclusive prerogative of the author. Creation is thus opened and shared with the spectator—the strict control of the actions and their meaning, one could think, is lost. But CADA's case includes an unexpected turn of events in which that control is somewhat recuperated.

Authorial Control (Or Why Some Prosthetic Objects Are More Real Than Others)

The collective, no longer extant as such, granted two of its members (Diamela Eltit and Lotty Rosenfeld) full agency in terms of representation and ownership of their legacy. This mandate produced among many other things, a prosthetic object of sorts that encompasses their full production, from 1979 to 1985. It is called *El paquete CADA*—not to be confused with the *Archivo CADA*—and it comes in a

limited edition of five¹⁴⁹. Currently, there are three copies available for purchase. The other two are part of the permanent collections of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, in Madrid, and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, in Santiago.

The *Paquete* contains documentation of every action authored by the collective, including vintage photographs, video, and printed matter. It also comes with a written introduction to the group and its context of operation, and every action is explained under two rubrics: concept and description. The videos also include a brief and purposefully neutral description of each action and are edited so as to not exceed a length of around five minutes—this is a particularly interesting and charged decision if one takes into account that previous video documentations of the action largely exceeded that time limit, as it is the case with the tapes that are part of MoMA’s permanent collection that run for over twenty minutes. Additionally, a stamp marks each document and labels it as authentic (a stamp that is also present in the *Archivo CADA*).

The creation of the *paquete CADA* materializes a practice so as to make it able to be included in the museum. Despite the fact that, during the time of existence, CADA theoretically and actively rejected the institutional art space as a locus for its work. As argued by Eltit:

(...) el grupo pensó teóricamente, en esos años, que la galería, el museo y el cuadro y sus técnicas era insuficientes y, más aun, permitían la objetualización del arte para establecer y perpetuar dominaciones culturales hegemónicas (...) Mientras las acciones de arte se cumplían en sus tiempos más literales, el registro-video, en

¹⁴⁹ The “Paquete CADA” was produced in connection with an exhibition featuring CADA’s work at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. Eltit and Rosenfeld were in charge of putting the Paquete together with assistance from the Museum and members of the Red Conceptualismos del Sur. Conversation with Diamela Eltit, Spring 2017. For more information visit: <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/colectivo-acciones-arte-cada-1979-1985>

tanto marca y huella, se erigía en archivo y posibilidad de obra simultáneamente.¹⁵⁰

The more than seven years of CADA's operation are condensed in the prosthetic object that this *paquete* is. Because what the collective is doing here is selecting the 'authorized' nodes for the construction of the prosthetic existence of its works. This particular selection, despite being arguably one of an almost infinite number of possible selections, functions as a way to not only produce a prosthetic object that can be traded and, in a way, exhibited, but also as a way of regaining control over the work and its potential narrative afterlife.

I am less interested in commenting on the commodification that the *Paquete CADA* entails, or in bringing about judgments concerning that authorial move. Instead, I argue that the CADA case grants an additional layer of depth when thinking about the prosthetic condition. The narrative afterlife guaranteed by figures such as Nelly Richard and the existence of both *Archivo* and *Paquete CADA* created different, real, prosthetic objects—not only objects susceptible of being grasped and critically approached, but also objects that can be bought, sold, and displayed. And even if those are not the sole prosthetic objects derived from CADA's practice, they appear as more legitimate—because some prosthetic objects are more real than others.

The different 'degrees' of reality affect, of course, the effects that an object can produce, but perhaps more interestingly, they remind us that also when it comes to art practices, authority has the upper hand when defining what is 'legitimately' real. We have tried to kill the author, resuscitate him, open the work, release control of meaning construction, etc. and yet the author, perceived as not only the 'owner' of the work but also as the one with more creative agency, stills has more power when

¹⁵⁰ Eltit, 294.

tracing the boundaries of objects engendered by him but with a completely independent life of its own¹⁵¹.

Nicolas Bourriaud, in his text *Postproduction*, has proposed to understand contemporary art not as the conclusion of a creative process that often produces an object but rather as what he calls a *générateur d'activité*: “Dépassant son rôle traditionnel, celui d'un réceptacle de la vision de l'artiste, elle [l'oeuvre d'art] fonctionne désormais comme un agent actif, une partition, un scénario plié (...)”¹⁵² Evidently, Bourriaud generalizes here and his statement could not apply to the entirety of contemporary art, but it seems pretty accurate for describing CADA's practice both as it has been conceived by the collective's members and by most of the criticism that has guaranteed the works' narrative afterlife. Understood in this way, the active agent that is the work of art produces, then, the real. If one agrees with Bourriaud—and I do at this point—then one must conclude that reality is a montage, but that it is also not the only montage possible. This argument becomes evident when thinking about the multiplicity of montages that can produce the prosthetic and it also furthers the argument, not exclusive to Bourriaud's thought, that claims that

¹⁵¹ Each and everyone of CADA's work had an 'independent life', but perhaps none of them to the extent to which the *NO* + action did. The *NO* + was an almost exaggerated explosion of the fragment, a complete dispersion of authorship and meaning production that, in turn, reduces the collective's possibility to control it. It was, as Eltit has argued, CADA's glorious failure: “A partir de esta experiencia parece posible pensar la relación arte, política y ciudad que se planteó el CADA como un logro, pero también como una forma de fracaso. Un fracaso glorioso, se podría decir, en la medida en que la antigua obra ya está inscrita como patrimonio social, sin arte. Porque solo es recuperable como arte en museos y galerías por donde circula la obra CADA. De tal manera que ese 'arte público' es posible consignarlo ahora en los espacios privados del museo y de la galería.” Eltit, 314.

¹⁵² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction : La culture comme scénario : comment l'art reprogramme le monde contemporain* (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 2004) 12.

contemporary art presents itself as a pool of alternative montages, capable of disturbing, reorganizing, or changing what a community perceives as real¹⁵³.

The *Paquete CADA*, I want to suggest, confirms and demonstrates that art practices can produce alternative montages, that in turn produce reality—real objects, albeit prosthetic. But it also underscores the fact that even when we are in agreement about reality's malleability, the agency to shape it is not distributed equally. The ethical and political consequences of this fact are, perhaps, worth considering.

Coda: Notes on Trickstery

I want to conclude this rumination on the prosthetic object by briefly commenting on a point of contact between CADA and Bellatin that is very rarely explored. I have argued that both practices, in different ways and almost opposing circumstances, succeeded (and continue to do so) in creating what is experienced as a reality. This creation, precisely because it is artificial, resorts to fiction and, often, requires flat out trickstery that may or may not include different levels of lying.

Tricksters inhabit the in-between; they cross boundaries and locate themselves on the margins¹⁵⁴. I have largely argued that this is precisely both CADA's and Bellatin's locus of enunciation. For very different reasons and with very different outcome, these artists behave like trickster when they create exceptional porous

¹⁵³ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 70.

¹⁵⁴ For an extensive and eloquent analysis of the role of the trickster in cultural history see Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

situations that spill to their *outsides*. Bellatin's work is full of lies, fake clues, and disillusionments of certainty. CADA encrypted and distorted its works to cross boundaries surveyed by the dictatorship powers—this lying, funny at times, was the force that propelled its actions to fruition. One can only imagine the collective's members tricking Soprole, the company that lent the trucks that were used in CADA's second action, *Inversión de Escena*¹⁵⁵. Or presenting *¡Ay Sudamérica!*—a clearly revolutionary work—to the military and the national air force, as an example of the fashionable land art that was flourishing in Japan¹⁵⁶.

Bellatin and CADA's practices are confusing; they resist being deciphered through the employment of traditional, established tools. One does not necessarily have a grid to read those works—rather, it is necessary to build it. One has to invent new ways of approaching and understanding art and its place in the world—because CADA and Bellatin are producers of the new, agents that facilitate the transition from concealment into existence. Lewis Hyde describes the trickster in a way that could very well apply to the artists I have been referring to so far:

Seizing and blocking opportunity, confusing polarity, disguising tracks—these are some of the marks of trickster's intelligence. The last of them leads to the final item on this initial list: if tricksters can

¹⁵⁵ Robert Neustadt remembers this episode as follows: “Lo de los camiones y el lienzo recuerdan el aspecto tramposo del grupo CADA. Para conseguir los camiones (según Rosenfeld) convencieron a un dirigente de Soprole de la belleza de la imagen. ‘Imagínese,’ le habrían dicho al señor, ‘la belleza de diez camiones lecheros en frente del Museo de Bellas Artes’. Después del evento (otra vez, según la versión de Rosenfeld) alguien le habrá dicho al gerente de Soprole que fue víctima de un engaño, digamos, de ‘mala leche’. El gerente trató de comprar el video de la acción y cuando CADA no quiso vendérselo, llegó al extremo de cambiar el logo de sus camiones.” (57)

¹⁵⁶ Regarding this action, Neustadt comments: “Los pilotos, según Juan Castillo, eran ex-militares y para conseguir permiso el CADA tuvo que dirigirse directamente a la Fuerza Aérea. En la carta de solicitud a la Dirección de Aeronáutica (18 de junio de 1981), Lotty Rosenfeld presenta la obra como un ejemplo de arte ecológico, *land art*, un campo artístico que se ejercía según el CADA, principalmente en USA, Europa y Japón.” (68)

disguise his tracks, surely he can disguise himself. He can encrypt his own image, distort it, cover it up. In particular, tricksters are known for changing their skin. I mean this in two ways: sometimes tricksters alter the appearance of their skin; sometimes they actually replace one skin with another.¹⁵⁷

Makers of the world as they are, tricksters can, as well, construct themselves as motivated fictions. Artistic practices, I have argued, are capable of producing and modifying what a community experiences as real—often through a joint act of creation that includes author and spectator. Artistic practices, also, can produce entities affected by the prosthetic condition that have similar effects on the real. Up to now I tried to show how prosthetic objects are produced, by whom, and in what contexts. I have also considered their materiality, the ways in which they are transmitted, communicated, and controlled. And lastly, I have claimed that a prosthetic object can have different ‘levels of reality,’ often dependent on the authority of whomever is proposing a given prosthetic object. I will now turn, in the next chapters of this dissertation, to the peculiarities of using art practices to produce prosthetic beings; discussing, among other things, the variation on the ‘levels of reality’ when producing such beings. Because we tend to believe that creating the self is more real than creating the other, despite the fact that contemporaneity continuously (and from a variety of perspectives) contradicts this belief.

¹⁵⁷ Hyde, 51.

B –PROSTHETIC BEINGS

On The Trnasion From Concealment into Existence

CHAPTER TWO

The Prosthetic Self

Mario Bellatin Makes Mario Bellatin

(With a Little Help)

Chapter Two – The Prosthetic Self

Mario Bellatin Makes Mario Bellatin (With a Little Help)

In “Chapter One,” I analyzed the work of Mario Bellatin—in particular his novel *Lecciones para una liebre muerta* and his participation in dOCUMENTA (13)—alongside the practice of Chilean collective CADA. I argued that the practices of both Bellatin and CADA can produce what I termed *prosthetic objects*, which are engendered as the result of a creative and critical operation that aims at grasping—if only conceptually—works of art that share a number of attributes. Such works often exist in a fragmentary way, they combine, expand, and exceed disciplinary boundaries, demand an active reader/spectator, and succeed in creating or altering what a community experiences as real. Consequently, the objects created from these works share a particular way of being opposed to traditional ontology, a manner of existence that affects entities created artificially, and whose creation is intended to replace something that is already missing. I have used the term *prosthetic condition* to refer to this way of being in the world, and I have argued that it can affect not only objects but also beings, communities, and events.

This chapter will be devoted to developing and presenting what I propose to categorize as the **prosthetic self**. I will study, again, the figure of Mario Bellatin to claim that the interplay between his artistic production, his persona and public appearances, and the spectator of his practice allows us to understand his *despliegue continuo* as one that amounts to the construction of a *prosthetic self*—a construction of the self that is different from other ‘historical’ attempts to do so, both in the arts and beyond. By analyzing the construction of Bellatin’s prosthetic self, I hope to

consider pressing issues in contemporaneity that relate to the ways in which the present allows for manifestations of the self that don't need materiality—that exist, for instance, without a physical body. How is contemporaneity modifying our idea of the subject? What is the role of spectatorship in this new configuration? How (and why) do the different technologies to perform the self today present us with fragments rather than wholes?

Towards a Chameleonic Condition: The Biological Body

Thinking about the self and the other implies, necessarily, thinking about the body. In “Chapter One,” I discussed the importance of the textual bodies that are present in and that compose the work of Mario Bellatin and the Colectivo Acciones de Arte, CADA. Here, I want to turn my attention to the biological body as it appears in Bellatin's writing: mutable, chameleonic, monstrous, provisory. Very much like his texts, the bodies that surface on Bellatin's work change in response to their *outside*: their boundaries are open and constantly redrawn. They are constituted *in relation*¹⁵⁸.

Lecciones para una liebre muerta, for instance, is a novel populated with ‘abnormal’¹⁵⁹ biological bodies: mario bellatin (in lower case), a one-handed writer

¹⁵⁸ One cannot talk about existing *in relation* without mentioning the importance of Édouard Glissant's theory for the understanding of phenomena that lack atavist origins. See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ Throughout this chapter, I will use terms like ‘abnormal,’ ‘monstruous,’ ‘defective,’ etc., to talk about bodies that appear both in literary fiction and in *real life*. I want to clarify that my use of these terms is not, by any means, a value judgement. Rather, it is a way to refer to bodies that strand away from what has been largely understood as ‘normal’ in Western culture. Normalcy, needless to say, is a problematic concept from my perspective and one that is at odds with the proposal of the prosthetic condition. There is no normal prosthetic entity simply because each

suffering from asthma and psychiatric disorders; the kuhn twins, thalidomide victims and, consequently, lacking upper and lower limbs; Mexican writer margo glanz (also in lower case), who one day wakes up as a young legal apprentice; and a golem, created by glanz's imagination that walks around what is probably Mexico City.

By no means is this *sui generis* cast an oddity in Bellatin's writing—rather, it 'infects' all of his production and, as I will discuss later, it extends to his own biological persona. In *Salón de Belleza*, bodies contaminated by an unnamed epidemic settle in the 'moridero' when they are almost nothing other than rotten objects. In *Perros Héroes*, a man that cannot (or does not) move, possibly a quadriplegic, trains assassin dogs and turns them—alongside the three human bodies that live with him—into extensions of his own corporality. Shiki Nagaoka, the main character of the novel by the same name, has a nose so extravagant that it appears fake. And in *Biografía Ilustrada de Mishima* the protagonist has a body with no head. This list is far from being exhausted and exceeds the literary production of the author—it is, also, a trademark of what could be understood as his more 'visual' work.

Bellatin's characters are beings that are thoroughly aware of their own materiality. They are fully cognizant of their mutability as a consequence of their interactions with their *outside*. They know that identity, as it relates to corporality, is also the somatic result produced by culture and context¹⁶⁰. Often, these same

prosthetic entity, even when composed of the same fragments, is different from the other. The prosthetic invites us to accept and incorporate variations, just as the discipline of disability studies has proposed, and rejects any attempt to 'correct' entities according to an ontological ideal.

¹⁶⁰ Anne Fausto-Sterling has carefully developed theorization of this phenomenon, as it affects sexuality, in her text *Sexing the Body*. See Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000).

characters are granted more agency and appear as responsible for their own transformations—in *Lecciones*, to continue exploring the same text, the narrator devours pharmaceutical products to alter his somatic composition and modify his experience of the world¹⁶¹. Often, Bellatin’s narrative reminds us that, when the context exerts enough influence to permeate the body, there are usually, only, two choices: mutation or death. This happens, for instance, with the fishes from *Salón de Belleza* that reappear in *Lecciones*—only one of them survives but it does so after suffering a major mutation that produces a monumental lump on its back. Other characters, like the transvestite philosopher, modify their materiality more willingly, as means to craft their own existence and individuality.

Just like the textual bodies construct different meanings according to the ways in which they are connected to their outside, the biological bodies featured in Bellatin’s narrative know that it is in relation where the possibility—and the threat—of being other, different, resides. Perhaps the materiality of the body, as a commonality between living beings, justifies the use of lower cases in all the first and last names that appear in *Lecciones*¹⁶². Perhaps, this lower case strategy points to the fact that, ultimately, the body is an objectual repository, and, as such, can be successfully altered and modified as a consequence of its interactions with culture, physical surroundings, medicine, illness, power discourses, and, of course, other bodies. And this is important because if we, either beings or characters, share a common objectual core—a body—then we too can become just that, objects.

¹⁶¹ Similarly, the same character reminisces about his childhood when he would induce asthma attacks: “Al comenzar a pedalear la crisis de asma se manifestaba de inmediato. Sin bajar la velocidad sacaba el inhalador y me aplicaba dos dosis seguidas,” we read. Bellatin, *Lecciones*, 102.

¹⁶² mario bellatin, sergio pitol, joseph beuys, kawabata, kafka, arguedas, bruce lee, césar moro, etc...

Interestingly enough, Bellatin's monstrous characters own their bodies with no shame or hesitation. In a way, they are presented as embodying a new idea of the subject—no longer essential, nor whole in its contradictory nature. Rather, they present a subject that behaves like a chameleon—always a different color as a consequence of, and in response to, its *outside*.

Bellatin's 'chameleon' is not, however, just a passive entity. Granted, it is affected by its surroundings; its surroundings can make it other—but it is also an agent, responsible and equipped to alter its body and the identitarian traits that stem from it. I want to propose that, in Bellatin, the body is the locus of *poiesis* as developed in Greek thought and stated in Plato's *Symposium*.¹⁶³ These bodies often transition from concealment into existence through mutation, addition, subtraction or flat-out creation—a crafting that is most of the time an interested one, the production of a will¹⁶⁴.

The parallel between Bellatin and the transvestite behavior becomes evident in this creative impetus. The body, regardless of whether it is textual or biological, is used as a canvas for creation—and with transvestism, this act of creation also contests and mocks the desire for essential categories and meanings¹⁶⁵, it engages with the redefinition and challenging of genres and gender. García Caballero understands Bellatin's writing in this way, as transvestite writing: "(...) la literatura de Bellatín

¹⁶³ See Platon and Patricio de Azcárate, *El banquete [o del amor] (Spanish Edition)*, Centaur (2012).

¹⁶⁴ To see more about the poetic act as an interested one and its contemporary and historical implications see Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁵ Nelly Richard has explained this mockery in the following terms: "El travestismo burla espectacularmente toda pretendida unidad de significado de la categoría 'mujer', con el quiebre antinaturalista de su torsión de signos que *sobreactúa* la identificación del género femenino para enfatizar la norma retórica de las convenciones sexuales" (214). See Nelly Richard, *Masculino/femenino: prácticas de la diferencia y cultura democrática* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1993).

puede ser considerada travesti en cuanto no se siente cómoda totalmente dentro de los límites impuestos por su cuerpo (literario) y busca identificarse o atribuirse—de forma artificial o natural—los rasgos de otro género.”¹⁶⁶ This is no longer only a way to, like I pointed out before, play with the expansivity of media—additionally, this transvestite impulsion is, I think, the point where the intersection of Bellatin’s writing with the biological bodies inside and outside it becomes the most productive. The biological bodies in Bellatin, and this includes his own human corporality, are continuously showing and performing their transvestite potential to question, mock, invent but, above all, to experiment with the possibility of being other, always different, in flux. Bellatin’s texts, his characters, and himself serve and occupy a variety of positions—in their mobility they often remind us of the possibility of being other *beings*, but also ceasing to be so and becoming mere objects.

The insistence on the body, its malleability and even its monstrosity makes Bellatin’s practice one that rejoices in spectacle and voyeurism¹⁶⁷. His texts and performances contribute to the creation of a reader and spectator eager and avid to see always more, more clearly (perhaps in an effort to understand). This voyeuristic desire is manipulated over and over again, always obstructed—even when the vision is allegedly enlarged; when, for instance, Bellatin introduces photography into his

¹⁶⁶ <https://elcoloquiodelosperros.weebly.com/hemeroteca.html>

¹⁶⁷ García Caballero argues that Bellatin’s practice, in addition to being transvestite is also “profundamente narcisista que, desarrolla «cuerpos extraños» porque tiene necesidad de ser vista; de convertir al lector en un voyeur intrigado por un cuerpo lingüístico tanto más atractivo cuanto menos responde a las expectativas (...) Lo que confiere una explicación al exceso de teatralidad o la abusiva neutralidad de tantos personajes —¿de extracción barroca?— tullidos, contrahechos de la literatura de Bellatin que no parecen encontrarse melancólicos ni se encuentran ansiosos por recuperar su salud o miembros perdidos.” Herminio García Caballero, “Mario Bellatin: la literatura travesti,” *El-Coloquio-de-Los-Perros-Mb*, n.d. Scribd. Accessed, August 31, 2018. <https://www.scribd.com/document/383657727/el-coloquio-de-los-perros-mb>

texts. Not because the photographs are rarely descriptive, but rather because they encourage an instability of the gaze, that is also fostered by the rhetorical devices used and the elusive graspability of the author's practice.

Further, Bellatin willingly embraces monstrosity¹⁶⁸. His 'abnormal' body, victim of thalidomide and consequently lacking one arm, allows him to experience with artificiality. In a much more direct way than the one that is available for 'normalcy,' Bellatin's 'defect' is turned into an opening for the crafting and the constant modification of his existence, as a human and an artist. The author's performance of the self—and I will return to this idea momentarily—includes a celebration of its unabashed artificiality. There is a biographical anecdote that illustrates this celebration perspicuously: at a critical moment in his life (or so he says), during a trip to India, Bellatin threw his orthopedic (prosthetic) arm into the Ganges. Commenting on the estrangement he felt afterwards, he stated:

En cierto momento advertí que lo que me hacía falta era la artificialidad que había estado presente en mi cuerpo durante todos los años, casi todos los años de mi vida, en que porté un brazo artificial. Pero a pesar de que sentía la necesidad de ese brazo no quería volver al

¹⁶⁸ Theorization and criticism about the monster and the implications and politics of a monstrous bodies in Latin American literature has been extensive. See, among many others, Giorgi, Gabriel. 2014. *Formas comunes: animalidad, cultura, biopolítica*. 1a ed. Crítica. Ensayo literario. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2014. // Wood, Andrea, and Brandy Schillace. 2014. *Unnatural Reproductions and Monstrosity: The Birth of the Monster in Literature, Film, and Media*. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press. // Colanzi, Liliana. 2017. "Of animals, monsters, and cyborgs. Alternative bodies in Latin American fiction (1961-2012)." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. // Braham, Persephone. 2015. *From Amazons to Zombies: Monsters in Latin America*. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press. // Calafell, Bernadette Marie. 2015. *Monstrosity, Performance, and Race in Contemporary Culture*. New edition edition. New York Bern Frankfurt Berlin Brussels Vienna Oxford Warsaw: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers.

mundo de la ortopedia, de donde habían salido casi todos los adminículos utilizados hasta entonces. En ese ámbito, por lo general, en lugar de resaltar lo artificial se busca esconderlo^{169 170}.

Here, the feeling of *wholeness* depends on the incorporation of the prosthesis: Bellatin claims that he only feels whole when he is his *prosthetic self*. This realization prompts him to stress the importance of the part of his body that is ‘missing,’ the lack that constitutes his ‘monstrosity’ and permits the embracing of artificiality as a constitutive part of his ‘nature.’ According to the author, this moment catalyzes his decision to turn his prosthetic arm into an ‘hecho comunitario,’¹⁷¹ an opportunity to collaborate with artists in the production of prostheses that disregarded orthopedic ‘propriety.’ Aldo Chaparro was the first artist to participate in this communal poetic act. There have since been several collaborations with different artists, and Bellatin has worn prostheses that either are or resemble, to name only a few, dildos, women’s legs, tweezers, hooks, and art deco designs. His prosthetic limb has since become the site of collaborations, *spectacularizations*, alterations, and *fetichization*. However, this

¹⁶⁹ Similarly, one of Bellatin’s characters, Mishima, in his search for a prosthetic head, ends up imitating his creator in very conspicuous ways: “Después del fracaso que significó no encontrar una cabeza profesional, Mishima pensó que quizá aquella falta podría enmendarse buscando algo que contuviera la esencia de una artificialidad extrema. No pensaba que lograría algo en ese sentido recurriendo al campo de la ortopedia. Sabía que en ese ámbito, por lo general, en lugar de resaltar lo falso se trataba de esconderlo. Allí estaban para corroborarlo los bisonés, los ojos de vidrio y las manos de amarillentas pieles de plástico que se ofrecían en negocios especializados. Mishima tampoco quiso apelar al mundo de la religión (...) Mishima supo que su siguiente cabeza tenía que provenir del universo de las artes visuales.” Mario Bellatin, *La Clase Muerta* (México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2011) 42 – 43.

This decision, at least as it pertains to Mishima, is remarkable. Disillusioned by the solutions proposed by science and religion, Mishima resorts to the visual arts. By equating these three realms (science, religion, and the visual arts), the character (the author?) is underscoring the poetic capacities of each, as well as their constitution as belief systems. Art is, thus, presented as equivalent to science and religion in its ability to produce Mishima’s prosthetic head.

¹⁷⁰ Mario Bellatin, “Escribir Sin Escribir,” *Obra reunida. Bellatin - 2*. (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2014) 16.

¹⁷¹ *Hecho comunitario* can be translated as ‘communal event.’

is not, by any means, the sole part of Bellatin's body that is constantly fashioned and re-fashioned—it extends, for instance, to his perfectly shaved head, his Sufi-style wardrobe and even goes outside to include his ever-present dogs, his medication, his writing. He is not only an abnormal, freakish body; he also, very purposefully, looks like one.

Ariel Schettini has argued that Bellatin's 'defect,' as a marker of his 'monstrosity,' puts him in a "state of fiction."¹⁷² Being a freak, a being whose body incorporates artificial components, means being a living fiction. I suspect that Bellatin would endorse such an ontological assessment—, he embraces a similar concept through what Héctor Hoyos has identified as one of the traits that Bellatin shares with Joseph Beuys: "a commitment to shamanistic pedagogy; and the decided purpose of turning their bodies into quizzical art objects"¹⁷³,¹⁷⁴

Ultimately, the manipulation and construction of the body that we see in Bellatin's practice propels questions regarding how much alteration of an object is akin to humanization and, perhaps more visibly, how much alteration of the human body produces dehumanization. The matter is philosophical as much as it is political and historical. Deciding on what makes a human is a long and old battle impossible to trace here¹⁷⁵. Often, as theorist Mel Chen or artist Aliza Shvarts have claimed¹⁷⁶, the

¹⁷² Ariel Schettini, "En El Castillo de Barbazul. El Caso Mario Bellatin," *Otra Parte. Revista de Letras Y Artes* 6 (2005).

¹⁷³ Hoyos adds that it is precisely this negotiation between the Latin American traditions and its metropolitan counterparts, visible in the influence of figures like Beuys or Duchamp, what makes Bellatin's work "global".

¹⁷⁴ Héctor Hoyos, "On Duchamp and Beuys as Latin American Writers," *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) 171.

¹⁷⁵ The question has been addressed by multiple authors from a variety of perspectives. Bartolomé De las Casas did it about the natives in Spanish America (Casas, Bartolomé de las. 1992. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Penguin Classics. London, England ; New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books); Aimé Césaire

dehumanization verdict may come wrapped in adjectives like ‘abnormal,’ ‘freak,’ or even fictional. For Chen, animacy is a slippery unfixed category not exclusive to humans. Rather, it expands and includes other beings while questioning, and thus revealing, the grounding from which the essentialist idea of the human sprouts. Acknowledging animacy in inorganic matter expands the repertoire of the human, or at least promises to do so. Shvarts, on the other hand, underscores the parallel, if not the equivalence, between the declaration of someone or something as fictional and the consequent erasure of agency and, eventually, humanity.

If the biological body, as I think is suggested in Bellatin’s practice, is not a ‘natural’ single whole, then it follows that the organic matter that participates in its construction is a mere dispensable fragment, not essential to the existence of beings. I mean to say that in Bellatin’s work we get a glimpse of a potential phenomenon that is quickly becoming an actuality: the possibility of creating contexts where immaterial, fictional, artificial bodies dwell, interact, and generate real effects¹⁷⁷.

Needless to say, this is a possibility often equated with dystopian decadence.

Katherine Hayles sums this arguable fear as follows:

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the postman that embraces the possibilities of

talked about thingification (Césaire, Aimé. 01. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Monthly Review Press); Primo Levi And Giorgio Agamber to consider the jewish experience during the Shoah (PRIMO, LEVI. n.d. *TRILOGIA DE AUSCHWITZ*. Unknown edition. EL ALEPH // Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Gimeno Cuspinera, *Estado de excepción: Homo sacer, II, I.*)Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2004); etc.

¹⁷⁶ For Chen’s argument see: Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012).

To learn more about Aliza Shvarts work visit: <https://alizashvarts.com>

¹⁷⁷ See Joshua Rothman, “Are We Already Living in Virtual Reality?” *The New Yorker*, March 26, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/02/are-we-already-living-in-virtual-reality>.

information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life as embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend on for our continued survival.¹⁷⁸

As soon as the discussion shifts to consider a future where body-less humans are conceivable, the conversation ceases to be aesthetical and becomes, very radically, political and, especially, ethical. The problem is not that Bellatin's work engages with a human, with a freak, monstrous, body. The issue is that once we accept that a human body can be artificially altered, modified, and constituted, we open the door to a future in which the body becomes a disposable part of being.

The Internet has partly materialized this contemporary fear. Floating in cyberspace, as Žižek has proposed, infuses us with the freedom of possessing *another body*—one that is not attached to organic materiality and, thus, open to manipulation, artificial crafting, and enhanced poiesis¹⁷⁹. Bellatin reminds us that the biological body is only a fragment of being, a part of one's *self* that needs to be connected to its outside to make sense and be, momentarily and contingently, whole. The Internet allows us to experiment with disposing from the organic, material, biological fragment of the *self*—and to observe what a being with this *another body* could (and would) do. For better and for worse.

¹⁷⁸ Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, 1 edition (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 35.

¹⁷⁹ His words: “The literal ‘enlightenment, the ‘lightness of being’, the relief/alleviation we feel when we freely float in cyberspace (or, even more, in virtual reality), is not the experience of being bodiless, but the experience of possessing *another*—etheric, virtual, weightless—*body*, a body which does not confine us to the inert materiality and finitude, an angelic *spectral body*, a body which can be artificially recreated and manipulated” See: Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief. Thinking in Action* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001) 54.

Zizek takes his argument a bit further to claim that the critical lesson from cyberspace is more radical than the sole confirmation of the possibility of losing one's material body. For him, the bodiless experience that the Internet provides forces us to acknowledge that, in fact, such a body never really existed, let alone was essential to the category of the human, because "our bodily self-experience was always-already that of an imaginary constituted entity."¹⁸⁰ This is not to say that this bodily self-experience was not real—it was, and it is—but perhaps it is only *prosthethically* so.

Towards the Identification Of a Shared (Prosthetic) Lineage II

Before delving into the details of how I propose to understand the construction of the *prosthetic self*, it must be acknowledged that the desire of manufacturing one's being—and as a consequence, also one's other—has a lineage of its own. One identifies the poetic power of human creation, as it pertains to the crafting of beings, even earlier in time than when Ovid, in his *Metamorphosis*, recalled the Greek myth about how sculptor Pygmalion became so enamored with his creation that he managed to turn art into life (with a little help from Venus). There are also instances, of course, when creation, when the transition from concealment into existence, has occurred without any divine intervention. You see it, for example and without any chronological rigor from my part, in René Magritte's canvas *Tentative de l'impossible* (1928) where an artist, paintbrush in hand, is depicted in the middle of his act of

¹⁸⁰ Žižek, 55.

creation. Quite literal, the work is—among many other things—a blatant portrait of human *poiesis*.

It will be hard to overstate the role and impact of the human poetic capacity on Western thinking. The belief that humans are capable of producing *real* entities that function independently and whose existence, accordingly, no longer depends on its creator is at the core of, for instance, some of the ideas advanced by post-structuralism¹⁸¹. The same belief, often transformed into fear, is visible in an important portion of science fiction cultural products, populated with robots, AI, and Frankensteins. And, evidently, it still haunts us today when facing issues like cloning, gene editing, or the construction of virtual realities, to name only a few.

But let me go back in time a bit to say a couple of words about instances when creature and agent of creation collapse into the same being. Not in an effort to make a list of historical moments when there has been stellar displays of poiesis, but rather in an attempt to ground the prosthetic condition and, more specifically, the discussion about the prosthetic being in what is ultimately a deep human desire and belief—that of being fully in control of ourselves and our surroundings.

Often the crafter and the creature collapse into the same entity moved by specific, ‘mundane’ drives, as depicted in texts like Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where the protagonist engages in the construction of different ‘selves’

¹⁸¹ I am thinking here, of course, mainly but not exclusively about Barthes’ now canonical essay, “Death of the author” (1967), where he invites us to assess the text not as a derivation from its creator, but rather as a cultural amalgam whose *unity* and *existence* depends instead on its reader:

... a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination ...

to avoid taking full responsibility of his actions¹⁸². The fact that Wilde himself experimented with and performed, very meticulously, his identity is not without importance—just like his protagonist, being aware of the crafting of the self puts Wilde in a position of superiority. Unlike his character, Wilde’s superiority is not only that of being able to ‘fool’ the gullible (mostly women). His was based on the firm belief of belonging to an aristocracy of taste, an aesthetic elite of sorts—which is why the figure of Oscar Wilde is so closely linked to Dandyism as a cultural and social phenomenon¹⁸³.

Even if not necessarily a pioneer of Dandyism, Wilde has become a symbol of it. In part, because he purposefully attended to the constitution and embellishment of his physical body, clothing and appearance¹⁸⁴. But also in part because he hypostatizes all the sardonic, aloof and independent demeanor that comes with the Dandy’s poise, almost natural charm, and wit¹⁸⁵. Closer to us in time is what some have identified as the mutation of dandyism into the Hollywood Gentleman—also a crafted self where creator and creature coalesce. Cary Grant, the Hollywood Gentleman *par excellence*, once explained: “I play only myself but I play it to perfection (...) I pretended to be somebody I wanted to be, and, finally, I became that

¹⁸² See: Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest & Other Plays*, (Macmillan Collector’s Library, 2017).

¹⁸³ One of the most notable accounts of what we could call a Latin American dandy is that authored by José Asunción Silva in his novel *De Sobremesa*. See: José Asunción Silva, *De sobremesa* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).

¹⁸⁴ The parallel with Mario Bellatin’s efforts is evident here. About the concern with appearances and its relationship with the dandy’s superiority, Baudelaire has clarified: “Contrary to what a lot of thoughtless people believe, dandyism is not an excessive delight in clothes and material elegance. For the perfect Dandy, these things are no more than a symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind.” Nigel Rodgers, *The Dandy: Peacock or Enigma?* (London: Bene Factum, 2012) 11.

¹⁸⁵ For a full study on the origins and historical transformations of dandyism up to the present day see Rodgers.

person.”¹⁸⁶ If an earnest interlocutor presented this quote to me as one uttered by Mario Bellatin, I would have no grounds to question the veracity of the attribution—and Mario Bellatin is far from being a Hollywood Gentleman.

So is he far from being afflicted by the condition inaugurated by Emma Bovary in which a hatred of the real produces a gap between what the self *is* and what *it thinks it is*. In Lacanian terms, this is a gap between *l’imaginaire* and *le réel* that is visible when identifying oneself with a different being, one that is, furthermore, unattainable¹⁸⁷. Cary Grant became his ideal self, Emma Bovary died trying. Beings suffering from *Bovarysme* have a somewhat unique individual model that they hope to become, even if that model is infused with characteristics shared by a variety of beings—Emma wanted to be (like) one of the heroines she read about and, in so doing, she decided to perform real actions with real consequences, albeit in fiction.¹⁸⁸ So it also happens to Don Quixote: fiction becomes much more than an inspiration, and act as a kindler that determines action and, consequently, affects the real.

But I want to stay in fiction for a moment to say a word about other ways in which literature has constructed beings that end up directly impacting the construction of the self. Emma Bovary crafted an ideal being that fed from multiple fictional characters—this being became her model self and, with different levels of success,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 196.

¹⁸⁷ Jules de Gaultier, perhaps one of the scholars who has studied Bovarysme and its psychological implications in more depth, explains: “s’identifier à leur propre vue avec l’image qu’ils ont substitué à leur personne. Pour aider à cette duperie, ils imitent du personnage qu’ils ont résolu d’être tout ce qu’il est possible d’imiter” (14). For a detailed study on the subject, see: Gaultier, Jules de Gaultier. 2007. *Le bovarysme: la psychologie dans l’œuvre de Flaubert*. Nouv. éd. Paris: Sandre.

¹⁸⁸ De Gaultier continues: “Au service de l’être imaginaire qu’elle a substitué à elle-même elle emploie tout l’ardeur qui la possède. Pour se persuader qu’elle est c’est qu’elle veut être, elle ne se tient pas aux gestes décoratifs que l’on vient de décrire, mais elle ose accomplir des actes véritables. Or elle entreprend sur le réel avec des moyens qui ne sont valables qu’à l’égard de la fiction” (22).

she managed to become that being. The opposite operation is visible in a phenomenon that has its own literary history and that stems for Rimbaud's *je est un autre*. The statement not only points to the estrangement of the self vis-à-vis its own ontology, but also opens up the possibility of a plurality within any idea of individuality and subjectivity, as was later clearly theorized by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Rimbaud's predicament has served as the pillar upon which the theorization and criticism of heteronymy, as an artistic 'practice', has developed. In the Spanish and Portuguese literary traditions, it has been incorporated into the work of artists as diverse as Antonio Machado, Vicente Huidobro, Nicanor Parra, Gonzalo Rojas, Juan Gelman, Eugenio Montejo, Darío Jaramillo Agudelo, and Álvaro Mutis, to name only a few¹⁸⁹. But, perhaps, Fernando Pessoa is the author that more clearly represents the phenomenon—Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos, Alberto Caeiro and the more than 80 heteronyms that Pessoa crafted, had an identifiable *own* voice, almost completely severed from that of their creator. And yet, Pessoa is as Reis, Campos and Caeiro as much as Caeiro, Campos and Reis are Pessoa.

Wilde, Bovary, Pessoa, and Grant, among others, are important for the theorization of the prosthetic because they all understood their selves as sites for poiesis, as spaces for creation, and as materials susceptible of being shaped, polished, enhanced. For them, the self was not their immanent, unalterable, nature. It was the locus of play, performance, invention—where they most clearly materialized the transition from concealment into existence. Bellatin, I want to argue, sees the self in a

¹⁸⁹ For a compilation of various perspectives about the works of these authors and their employment of heteronymy, see: Simposio Internacional de Heteronimia Poética Universidad de los Andes. 2013. *La heteronimia poética y sus variaciones trasatlánticas*. Primera edición. Bogotá, D.C., Colombia: Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Departamento de Humanidades y Literatura.

For an erudite analysis of the phenomenon in Alvaro Mutis work, see: Fajardo, Mario Barrero. 01. *Maqroll y compañía*. Universidad de los Andes, Colombia.

similar way. His operation, however, cannot be satisfactorily understood by using the frameworks developed for thinking any of the phenomena I just briefly mentioned.

Perhaps closer to Bellatin's practice is the notion of *parafictions of the self*, advanced by Daniel Quiles. Quiles, building from Carrie Lambert-Beatty's conceptualization of the parafictional¹⁹⁰, proposes to see the construction of the self as one involving deception, put-on, and fiction. Because when thinking about the ways in which Bellatin constructs itself one needs to acknowledge artificiality, his undisguised use of fiction and a certain feeling of being fooled, played with. In other words, when studying Bellatin's practice one cannot prevent one's self from wondering *is this for real?*

My short answer to this question would be yes, it is. Whatever Bellatin is doing is very real and serious, but not devoid of humor and playfulness. I claim that the entirety of his practice creates a self, a Bellatin-self, himself—a self that is both real and fictional, one that feeds from dandyism, bobarysme, parafictions of the self, heteronymy, and much much more to produce what I propose to call a *prosthetic self*, Bellatin's *prosthetic self*.

Bellatin's work, and this has been noted before multiple times, is deeply indebted/influenced/connected to the work of Marcel Duchamp¹⁹¹. Duchamp, like Bellatin, put great effort in crafting, designing and presenting his being as a work of

¹⁹⁰ See Carrie Lambert-beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 2009, 51–84. The notion of the parafictional is critical for understanding the prosthetic condition. I will return to it, in greater detail, in "Chapter Three."

¹⁹¹ See, among others, Graciela Speranza, *Fuera de campo: literatura y arte argentinos después de Ducham* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2006).; Héctor Hoyos, *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

art, and an act of poiesis. Almost forty years after Duchamp's death, Bellatin decided to use the title of a work by Duchamp to publish a compilation of three texts that are, in turn, presented as his 'three autobiographies': *El Gran Vidrio* (2006). The gesture, I think, needs to be acknowledged.

El Gran Vidrio (*The Large Glass*) is the other name by which Duchamp's *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* is known. Duchamp started to work on this piece in 1915 and, eight years later, in 1923, he declared it 'definitively unfinished.' This inconclusiveness is a characteristic also present in Bellatin's works, and it is critical to the creation of Bellatin's *prosthetic self*. Similarly, both Duchamp and Bellatin engage with the idea of delay and deferral, and see art primarily as making, as poiesis. But it is, importantly, a making that is not fully controlled.¹⁹² Concerning Duchamp's piece, Dawn Ades writes, "A few things were to be left to chance—the results unpredictable, the operation precisely planned"¹⁹³; this will describe any of Bellatin's productions as well. There is also similarity in Duchamp's desire to question the unity of the piece: in reference to an album that was intended to accompany the *Large Glass*, he states: "I wanted that album to go with the [Large] Glass, and to be consulted when seeing the work because, as I see it, it must not be 'looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book and see the two together."¹⁹⁴ For Duchamp, then, it is impossible to fully appreciate the artwork when only one object is considered. Further, because of its material, the meaning of

¹⁹² In 1927, in transit from a Brooklyn exhibition, the glass of Duchamp's piece broke. For the artist this was a "chance completion", and in 1936 he spent some months 'fixing it' adding two more glass panels and a supporting structure made of wood and steel.

¹⁹³ Dawn Ades, David Hopkins, and Neil Cox, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York, N.Y.: Thames & Hudson, 1999) 86.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 88.

the *Large Glass* (perhaps in a much more radical way than in any of his other pieces) is conditioned by the physical and cultural placement of the viewer and of the object.

It is not, then, a mere accident that Bellatin's 'three autobiographies' were published under the title of a work by Duchamp, and especially under the title of this particular piece¹⁹⁵. Bellatin's *Gran Vidrio* is, of course, unique in its own way. It is composed of three distinct stories with little evident relationship between them. In the first, "Mi piel, luminosa," the narrator remembers his childhood—and extravagant time during which his mother, a 'chosen being,' spent her days in public bathrooms revealing the narrator's testicles in exchange for red lipsticks. The second, "La

¹⁹⁵ Bellatin himself has acknowledged his kinship with Duchamp and extends it to Warhol and to contemporary pop icons. The interview with Alejandro Hermosilla Sánchez that is part of the monographic number on Bellatin of the online magazine *El Coloquio de los Perros* reads:

ECP: Por esto supongo que a Mario Bellatin le gusta jugar tanto con su imagen y no desprecia, sino que se aprovecha, de los códigos consumistas y capitalistas por los que, aun mínimamente si lo comparamos con otros espacios, también se rige la sociedad literaria.

MB: Exactamente. Buena definición. El primero que lo intuyó fue Duchamp. Warhol dio un paso más allá. Y yo pienso que Mario Bellatin se encontraría como algunos artistas del pop-disco —véase el caso Lady Gaga y anteriormente Modern Talking o Milli Vanilli— entre aquellos que han empezado a imponer este nuevo estado de cosas a la realidad.

ECP: Pero, ¿me puedes explicar en qué consistiría exactamente este estado? Más que nada, para aclarar al lector.

MB: Aunque no es del agrado de Mario Bellatin explicar ciertos aspectos o temas que deberían ser sabidos y conocidos por una mayoría de personas, te diría que ese nuevo estado de cosas se encuentra basado en tres aspectos fundamentales: 1) auto-promoción del artista y su atractiva personalidad sin importar la obra realizada en sí misma, 2) el desarrollo de todo tipo de actos pseudo-artísticos que completan el trabajo del artista y, en ocasiones, lo explican, lo redefinen o son más importantes que éste y el tercero es un secreto. Lo ha de descubrir el aprendiz de artista por el camino, pero es muy personal. Cada uno ha de encontrarse con este último aspecto por sí mismo o volver a estudiar a Andy Warhol, pero te diría que es dependiendo de cómo enfoques este último punto que conseguirás o no el éxito. Si lo comprendes y lo sabes utilizar, ya es tuyo. Te lo puedo confirmar.

verdadera enfermedad de la sheika,” thematizes writing as prophecy. The third and final, “Un personaje en apariencia moderno,” recounts a woman who dances to prevent her family and herself from being evicted. This third autobiography is written in the feminine Spanish pronoun, a characteristic that would generally disavow the text as being an account of the life of a male author.

These three stories, as well as much of the works that Bellatin produces, are populated by reminders of the falsity of what is being presented, of moments in which the *truth* might be exposed¹⁹⁶. When reading Bellatin one is continuously reminded of the fictional pact to which any readers voluntarily subscribes—the sentence “si damos por cierto lo que estoy contando” reoccurs again and again.

It is precisely this constant indication of the fictionality of art that prevents Bellatin’s audience from asserting that they have been fooled. His blurry division between the fictional and the real takes us in another direction; one that I believe allows us to read his oeuvre under the light of the prosthetic condition. When nearing the end of *El Gran Vidrio*, we read “¿Qué hay de verdad y qué de mentira en cada una de las tres autobiografías? Saberlo carece totalmente de importancia. Hay una cantidad de personajes comprometidos, eso sí.”¹⁹⁷ This quote is, in a way, equivalent to arguing that the ancient obsession, albeit persistent in contemporaneity, of being able to differentiate between the essentially real and the essentially fictional is futile. What matters is not the distinction but rather its effects, the possibility of exploring the fertility of a text, of a work of art. It is less important to know if Bellatin’s mother

¹⁹⁶ In “Un personaje en apariencia moderno” we read: “Debo decir, en este momento, que era importante que me viera en estas circunstancias un periodista cultural. Iba a descubrir no que se encontraba ante la presencia de una pequeña marioneta acompañada de su novia alemana, sino del escritor Mario Bellatin.” (146)

¹⁹⁷ Mario Bellatin, *El Gran Vidrio* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007) 163.

actually publicly exposed his genitals, than to understand why, for instance, a text like that allows us to talk about a *prosthetic being* and its very real existence.

Towards the Creation of a Prosthetic Self

My proposal is a humble attempt to answer a big question. A question that, I am confident in saying, has popped in the minds of anyone seriously (or even half-seriously) engaging with Bellatin's practice: *who/what is Mario Bellatin? And what is he doing?* My claim, mainly, is that he is producing Mario Bellatin as a work of art. Mario Bellatin is making Mario Bellatin. And to do so, he is manipulating his self, kneading it, and inviting his spectator to participate in the engendering of what I suggest to call his *prosthetic self*.

But first I want to add one more thing—the act of poiesis on which the prosthetic self depends is only possible in relation. That is, its success lies in the interplay between the creator, the creature, and the spectator¹⁹⁸. If one of these instances is forgotten or ignored, poiesis is destructed¹⁹⁹. The type of interplay can, of course, vary enormously. Every act of poiesis demands a distinct role from its reader, its author, and its creature. Each of them participates with different degrees of

¹⁹⁸ Often, these entities are multiple: multiple creators, creatures, and spectator for a single work of art.

¹⁹⁹ This happens, for instance, when Balzac's Frenhoffer, in *Le chef d'œuvre inconnue*, fails to court his spectators' vision. If one forgets Frenhoffer, if one agrees that the 'correct' way to look at his painting is by reading it as a completely independent entity, then one will see only scribbles and, perhaps, the trace of a foot. See: Honoré de Balzac, E. T. A Hoffmann, and Maurice Bruézière, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1995).

intensity and protagonism—the coming into being of the creation happens in that almost mystical moment in which the three of them collide.

The *prosthetic self*, as it manifest itself in Mario Bellatin’s practice, mainly relies, I claim, on four instances: writing, performing, spectatorship, and chance. For him, and I have said this before, writing is the ultimate poetic act²⁰⁰: “Ya encontré la clave. La llave de todo, estoy más que seguro, se encuentra en la propia escritura, siempre y cuando se tome esta escritura en su carácter profético. Todo está escrito.”²⁰¹ The prophetic character of writing resurfaces in “La verdadera enfermedad de la sheika,” one of the three ‘autobiographies’ that compose *El Gran Vidrio* (2006). There, the spiritual leader of a Sufi community²⁰² falls sick, which allows for the prophetic character of the written word to be thematized²⁰³. The text persistently describes the risk inherent in the act of writing: writings one’s dreams and fears, for instance, risks them becoming a reality.

Note that what is suggested here is that fiction can alter reality, as opposed to reality being a prerequisite for fiction. Bellatin’s proposal is that writing, literature, is not fictionalizing reality, but that it is instead through fiction that reality is constructed. It is the inverted process of any act of representation. In *Disecado* (2011) we read, “Señaló que se había visto envuelto, quince o veinte años después de haberlas concebido, en situaciones similares a las que aparecían en la ficción. Puso

²⁰⁰ This is, also, an almost ubiquitous statement in Bellatin’s work.

²⁰¹ Mario Bellatin, *La jornada de la mona y el paciente* (Oaxaca de Juarez, Oaxaca, Mexico: Almadia, 2006).

²⁰² It is important to remember that Bellatin himself has declared his allegiance to Sufism several times. Often as well, the characters in his texts practice the same belief, regardless of whether or not they share their name with their author.

²⁰³ According to Islam’s beliefs, the Quran is a miracle and men are only one letter of an infinite alphabet. See: Ruthven, Malise. *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

como ejemplo un texto particular: su libro *Salón de Belleza*^{204,205}; this restores the idea of writing as a prophetic act, which is, in turn, a return to the idea of the performative potential of writing, of the possibility of *doing things with words*²⁰⁶.

Of similar importance for the construction of Bellatin's *prosthetic self* are, for lack of a better word, what I will call his performances. Bellatin *writes* his *prosthetic self* as much as he *performs* it. Being the figure that he is, Bellatin is often invited to appear in public, in universities, libraries, media spaces, cultural venues, etc. Often as well, the attendee to these events is presented with a contradiction: s/he will see Bellatin's biological body on the stage, but realize that s/he is spectating another body, less material²⁰⁷. He explains:

Desde hace muchos años estoy presente y no en mis apariciones en público como escritor (...) cuando tengo alguna invitación preparo una serie de diapositivas, que yo mismo voy tomando de la realidad inmediata, de láminas escolares o de un grupo de imágenes de baja resolución que obtengo de Internet y tomo con una cámara de la misma pantalla de la computadora. Luego grabo mi voz de manera casera y durante las presentaciones me limito a colocar el disco y a manipular el control del proyector. Yo permanezco mudo y ausente^{208 209}.

There, I want to propose, Bellatin tries to present his prosthetic self as graspable as each particular situation allows. Each presentation, frames a different prosthetic self in a perpetual flux not unlike the one I discussed for objects in "Chapter One." The

²⁰⁴ Paradoxically, *Salón de Belleza* is perhaps the author's most traditional text, in which the boundaries between fiction and reality are less dramatically questioned.

²⁰⁵ Mario Bellatin, *Disecado* (México, D.F: Sexto Piso Editorial, 2012) 15.

²⁰⁶ See Austin, J. L. 1975. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2d ed. The William James Lectures ; 1955. Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press.

²⁰⁷ Bellatin continuously plays with the idea of considering the body as a mutable entity can could potentially become disposable for the self. The self presented by Bellatin in these conferences is, very consciously, body-less. His mute biological body, also on stage, only reaffirms this gap.

²⁰⁸ This is exactly what he did during his visits, in 2006, to Harvard and Cornell University.

²⁰⁹ Mario Bellatin, *Obra reunida. Bellatin - 2* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2006) 21.

fragmented words, images, actions, and Bellatin's biological body come together for a moment and are frozen, as per the Medusa effect I have been referencing before. Juan Suárez, in his text "La imagen de un texto salvaje," argues that the spectator of Bellatin's practice needs to look way beyond his literature,

De hecho, con el tiempo, la vida de Mario Bellatin es, en mi opinión, el verdadero libro que leen y, de alguna forma, estamos contribuyendo a crear sus seguidores. Y en este libro que incluye tanto algunas de sus creaciones literarias como su peculiar y compleja personalidad y carácter, importan tanto las anécdotas vitales del escritor como los relatos que crea y que únicamente constituyen una parte —por mucho que sea la más importante— del mismo.²¹⁰

This is where, I think, the notion of the prosthetic becomes critical. I agree with Suárez when he argues that Bellatin's work exceeds the boundaries of literature to produce, among others, recorded presentations with poor quality images and audio, a writing school where no one is allowed to write, his 'artistic actions,' his prostheses, his live and programmed performances. I agree as well that Bellatin's *followers*, as Suárez calls them, contribute largely to the creation of Bellatin's practice in general, and I will add, to the creation of his prosthetic self, more specifically.

This is where Bellatin's practice differs more drastically from the others that I reviewed when considering the prosthetic self's lineage. Bellatin's prosthetic self is only possible when the spectator—and in this case, Bellatin himself may be, at times, his own reader—performs an act that is not foreign to the literary critic: that of suturing²¹¹. A suture, or that which is sown together, is produced by the act of reading—when thinking about Bellatin once must, of course, understand the act of

²¹⁰ Juan Suárez, "La Imagen de un texto salvaje," *HEMEROTECA - EL COLOQUIO DE LOS PERROS*. n.d, Accessed August 27, 2018. <https://elcolloquiodelosperros.weebly.com/hemeroteca.html>.

²¹¹ For an engaging and comprehensive account of suture in literary analysis see Finney, Brian. "Suture in Literary Analysis." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 2.2 (1990): 131–144.

reading at large, and not limit it to his literary production—:

All forms of narrative necessitate sewing over discontinuities—jumps in time or location, switches from one consciousness to another, changes from one plot-line to another. Every narration also has to bridge the gap that always separates it from the audience to whom it is addressed.²¹²

This is an action that has become clear in film studies since its inception as a discipline, and that is related to the idea of montage, to which I referred earlier. It is an attempt to fight the fragmentary, a search for some sort of wholeness²¹³, which can only be fleeting. However, we have developed a sort of numbness to this fragmentation. Some of the elements that give continuity to art are so naturalized that we tend to forget their artificiality, or at least we want to do so—just like the regular prosthesis that Bellatin wishes to leave behind²¹⁴.

As expected, the more fragmentary the artistic practice is, the more suturing is needed; the more active the spectator is required to be. Contemporary art, and in particular the cases that I consider in this dissertation, requires us to perform the suture outside the safety of a piece of written fiction to include other disciplines as well as ‘real life.’ It is this act of suture, even when only conceptual, which allows for the existence of a prosthetic self and, as I will try to demonstrate in Chapter Three, a prosthetic other. The process of suturing, and Lacan identified this years ago, is pleasurable and reassuring. Constructing prosthetic beings (the self and the other) is, arguably, a pleasurable activity; hence the parallels of some of these practices with

²¹² Brian Finney, “Suture in Literary Analysis,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 2.02 (1990): 131–144, 131.

²¹³ Lacan analyzed this desire from a psychoanalytic point of view in Lacan, Professor Jacques. *Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de La Psychanalyse. Le S’Minaire Livre Xi(les) TII*. Paris: Contemporary French Fiction, 2014. Print

²¹⁴ This is a bit like perspective: we are so used to photography and to the vanishing point that we forget that very seldom do we perceive the world in that way.

play²¹⁵.

Consequently, and not unlike what happens with the construction of prosthetic objects, Bellatin's prosthetic self acquires coherence and momentary wholeness with the intervention of an active spectator that not only interprets the voids, silences, and contradictions, but who also sows such self, partly bringing it from concealment into existence. Jacques Rancière has identified this spectator as emancipated—one who is aware that the fact of viewing (or choosing not to do so) is not radically different from acting. Rather, the act of viewing, and of course that of reading, is capable of transforming, reorganizing and partly creating that which is being observed²¹⁶. Again, here, the prosthetic finds Borgesian resonances. Ricardo Piglia, reader and writer of Borges, underscores the connection when stating:

Quizá la mayor enseñanza de Borges sea la certeza de que la ficción no depende solo de quien la construye sino también de quien la lee. La ficción es también una posición del intérprete. No todo es ficción (Borges no es Derrida, no es Paul de Man), pero todo puede ser leído como ficción. Lo borgiano (si eso existe) es la capacidad de leer todo como ficción y de creer en su poder.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ For literature on the importance of play for making the world see Huizinga, Johan. 1950. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. New York: Roy Publishers; and Schiller, Friedrich. 1954. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Rare Masterpieces of Philosophy and Science. New Haven,: Yale University Press.

²¹⁶ Rancière words are as follows: “Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her ...” (13).

²¹⁷ Ricardo Piglia, *El Ultimo Lector* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2005) 28.

We have, for instance, texts such as “Tlon uqbar orbis tertius” or “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote,” to name only those where the act of reading proves to be as influential as that of writing. But it is all over Borges’ work, and similarly, it inhabits Bellatin’s production as a consequence, perhaps, of the later’s very distinct fragmentation of the work.

Thus, I want to argue, what I am here calling Mario Bellatin’s prosthetic self is a co-creation between Bellatin himself and an emancipated spectator. The fact that Bellatin participates so adamantly in the creation of his (prosthetic) self has contributed to categorize his work as one belonging to the subgenre of bio-fictions—pieces where the author’s own life is presented at the core of what is being narrated.²¹⁸ There are certainly similarities between cases that have been labeled as biofictional and texts written by Bellatin. Maybe the most salient of them is the fact that author and main character share the same name and, by doing so, grant the text a particular authority that seems to debilitate deception.

No one would debate the fact that, say, Frodo Baggins is a figment of J.R.R. Tolkien’s imagination. It is a fictional character produced by the author’s practice. The case is different from the one we are discussing because the fictionality of Mario Bellatin, as a character in Bellatin’s work, is less certain. In a way, the strong presence of the author in the creation—and this applies for most cases identified as biofictions—prevents the public, both the specialized critic and the average cultural consumer, from structurally questioning the ‘authenticity’ of what is being

²¹⁸ For more on biofiction, its definition as history as a pseudo-literary genre see: Lackey, Michael. “Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction.” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 31.1 (2016): 3–10. Also, Lackey, Michael. *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2017.

A notable case of biofiction in contemporary Latin American theater practices are the works by Vivi Tellas. See: <http://www.archivotellas.com.ar/>

presented. After all, what we have here is Mario Bellatin talking about Mario Bellatin²¹⁹. Mario Bellatin contributing, and perhaps leading, the construction of his prosthetic self. The authority of the source of enunciation leads us to believe that what is being presented to us is, in one way or another, true. It may be exaggeration, it may be a metaphorical reference, a pose, a performance, a joke, or it may be information containing a fictional twist but ultimately based on ‘true’ events. Deception, in cases like these, when the construction of a prosthetic self is at stake, is rarely perceived as a threat. Very different from the perception that stems from the creation of prosthetic other. But more on this later.

What we could vaguely call Bellatin’s poetics is a practice that is permeated by deception and put-on. A particular kind of put-on, however—one that overstates and constantly underscores its deceptive qualities, its fictional nature. I have already mentioned the multiple ways in which Bellatin reminds us of this—Suárez, in the article that I have already referenced here, adds that Bellatin presents his spectator with a tale of how artists trick their audience²²⁰. And a critical part of this tale is the presentation of his fictional self, his prosthetic self—which is not the same as to say that it is the presentation of a fake self. For the creation of the prosthetic self needs the

²¹⁹ Or Fernando Vallejo talking about Fernando Vallejo, or Joao Gilberto Noll talking about Joao Gilberto Noll...

²²⁰ Suárez’s words: “Podríamos decir que lo que hace Mario Bellatin es cuestionar la naturaleza de la imagen fotográfica o la de la escritura, pero esto, en esencia, ya lo hacen otros tantos escritores y no creo que este sea su objetivo en concreto o que esto le importe demasiado, porque su objetivo es agredir al lector, al espectador, y contarle a través de una serie de imágenes y escritos una historia precisa: la de cómo le ha engañado para construir su libro, por lo que se puede decir que la temática central de sus relatos sería el cómo los escritores mienten a su público y su argumento podría resumirse en la puesta en escena de esta representación o la explicación —al tiempo que la evasión de esa explicación— de esta mentira.” Suárez.

spectator to embrace fictionality and to dwell in the put-on, without feeling attacked by the act of deception.

Additionally, and maybe as important as the role of spectatorship for the crafting of the prosthetic self, is the influence of chance. So much of the prosthetic condition is determined by factors that escape both the artist's and the spectator's control, that the agency of chance must be acknowledged as a pivotal force for the attribution of this condition. Partly, because the fragmentary state of the practice causes the encounter of the work with the spectator to be one that happens diachronically—the order of the appearance of the fragments being mostly arbitrary. Chance is another element that contributes to the impossibility of arguing that there is such thing as an 'ultimate,' 'true,' 'essential,' prosthetic self—rather it supports the argument that I advanced when speaking about prosthetic objects: every entity affected by the prosthetic condition is different, even when composed of the same elements.

This is not to say that there is not a desire to capture what would be an 'definitive' prosthetic entity. Bellatin, for instance, shares this urge in the last pages of his *El gran vidrio*. There, the narrator, who is different from the narrators that are present in the other three stories that compose the work, speaks about the possibility of producing a filmed autobiography—that I am tempted to understand as a variation of the prosthetic self: "Delante de la cámara, de una vez por todas voy a dejar atrás todas las personalidades necesarias para seguir escribiendo."²²¹ Such a work would not only include all those 'multiple personalities' but should also walk the viewer through Mario Bellatin's books (where his work and his self *live*), and through the physical spaces that Mario Bellatin inhabited while producing them. And yet,

²²¹ Mario Bellatin, *El gran*, 163.

...esos libros, a pesar de los escenarios concretos que seguramente la película mostrará, fueron escritos a partir de la no-tierra y del no-espacio. Por eso mismo, creo, coinciden con una serie de vivencias de orden personal. Un verdadero tiempo que en efecto no existe, y que por eso mismo considero más real que el real...²²²

A prosthetic being, Mario Bellatin's prosthetic self *en efecto no existe*. It is not physically real, it does not exist in the same biological, material way in which Mario Bellatin exists. Mario Bellatin's prosthetic self comes from fiction, manifested in several ways and through several media, but it is also, arguably, *más real que el real* because as *¿Mi Yo?*, the character from *Disecado* discovers, reality is nothing more than a pale reflection of any creative act²²³.

This is the status of the prosthetic—mutable, fuzzy, unclear, contradictory. And this is why it is not related to traditional ontology. A status available to the spectator after his intervention, in an operation similar to creating what David Joselit has identified as a format. In his book, *After Art* (2013), Joselit seeks to account for the specificities of contemporary art and the ways in which the multiple manifestations that constitute it interact to produce meaning and create value. He describes format as a “heterogeneous and often provisional structure that channels content.”²²⁴ This implies, as Joselit himself explains, that when it comes to contemporary art practices meaning no longer depends on centripetal strategies. In other words, Joselit proposes that approaches to contemporary art where methodologies aim at ‘discovering’ meaning by only looking at the objects themselves are futile and, often, anachronic. Iconography has looked ‘behind’ the object; semiotics, inside it; social history of art, around it. Spectating through the

²²² Ibid. 166.

²²³ We read: “Desde entonces *¿Mi Yo?* fue descubriendo, cada vez con mayor frecuencia, que la realidad era sólo un pálido reflejo de cualquier acto creativo” (18)

²²⁴ David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) 52.

format means making decisions, but it also means acknowledging and considering a number of forces, of nodal connections between the different realms, media, times, and spaces that constitute or participate in the creative practices, as well as the links and connections to which such practices can direct us^{225 226}.

A format, in the way that I propose to understand it here, depends then, largely, on an emancipated spectator. And it is not enough, I think, to remember that such a spectator is an active one—rather, one must also consider that s/he is always, inevitably, located. And this is important because, as Luis Pérez-Oramas recognizes in his essay for the catalogue of the 30th Sao Paulo Biennial (2012)²²⁷, an increasingly interconnected world is an increasingly complex one; harder to understand, reduce, and control in a single statement or, we may add, in a single object, a single being, or a single self.

This does not imply, of course, the impossibility of stating. A format is a statement. A prosthetic being is a statement as well. They are both entities of meaning that are produced locally, from a specific point in time and space. As such (and this may be a truism at this point), they are limited, multiple, and mutable: “Pensar desde un lugar es saber, pues, por un lado, que se piensa siempre desde un límite; y por otro lado, es también saber que lo que se piensa tiene límites.”²²⁸ Bellatin’s prosthetic self

²²⁵ This ‘direction’ that comes from the artist can be read, as Luis Camnitzer proposes, with a pedagogical twist. According to his argument, communication is critical to, at least, the Latin American artistic practices that have been identified as Conceptualism. This is one of the reasons why the connection to politics is so strong. Latin American conceptualists were comited to creating a ‘better life’ which implies, of course, creating a new reality. See: Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. Print.

²²⁶ Ibid. 55.

²²⁷ Pérez Oramas, Luis. 2014. *La Inminencia de Las Poéticas: (Ensayo Polifónico a Tresy Más Voces)*. Caracas: Sala Mendoza.

²²⁸ Ibid. 6.

is, similarly, a mutable, multiple entity that can manifest itself in a variety of ways, dependant on the interaction between practices, individuals, objects, stories. But it *really* exists, perhaps it is *más real que el real*: it alters the world and produces effects.

And maybe, as if infused by the Sufi beliefs so dear to Bellatin, one could argue that everything is susceptible to being a part of that prosthetic self. In Sufism, humanity is a whole with no differentiation between beings²²⁹, and the prosthetic condition, in a way, requires that indifferenciation. I argue that Bellatin strives for such indifferenciation between his works, his characters, his public persona, his biological body, and his emancipated spectator/reader. This maneuver, especially when analyzed through the lens of the construction of the prosthetic self, is in conflict with most of the experiences and theories developed by (what we could largely and irresponsibly call) Western culture. Partly, because it does away with the well-engrained idea of the subject as a unique, whole, essential, indivisible entity, anchored to a biological body. If, as I proposed, one admits that the notion of the prosthetic self is a plausible answer to the question *who/what is mario bellatin* and *what is he doing?*, then one needs to wonder how does the prosthetic condition engage with the larger dilemma of who and/or what comes after the subject.

Towards a Different Understanding of the Subject?

²²⁹ For more about the presence of sufist thought in the work of Mario Bellatin see: Martínez, Aurora. “Sufismo, misticismo y artificio en la literatura de Mario Bellatin” in “Mario Bellatin: El Experimento Infinito.” n.d. Accessed April 18, 2012. <http://www.elcoloquiodelosperros.net/numerobellatin/beindi.html>.

To aim at fully addressing the depth and complexity of this debate in the lines that follow is, at the very least, a naïve endeavor. The crisis of the subject and the nature of its ‘offspring’ once modernity comes to an end have been the issue of lengthy studies and discussions²³⁰ that, honestly, exceed both my knowledge and the scope of this project. It is, however, a question that matters from the perspective of the prosthetic condition—in particular when thinking about the possible existence of prosthetic beings. Mainly because a prosthetic being, as I have tried to argue, is alien to any modernist notion of the subject and/or the self²³¹; and it also differs from the most prominent postmodernist takes on the matter.

According to Frederic Jameson, postmodernist theories regarding the death of the subject can be divided into two main currents. One argued that the subject was a thing of the past with no space to exist in contemporary societies. The other, a more radical theory, believed that not only was it dead but that it had never existed, that it was only a myth, a lie constructed with evil intentions²³². It is easy to imagine how,

²³⁰ Arguably, the most influential perspectives on this issue are compiled in Cadava, Eduardo, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy. *Who Comes after the Subject?* New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

²³¹ Frederic Jameson describes the modernist idea, as it relates to art-making, as follows: “The great modernisms were ... predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body. But this means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style.” Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London; New York: Verso, 2009) 6.

²³² And to continue with Jameson: “(...) not only the is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it never really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they ‘had’ individual subjects and possessed some unique personal identity” *Ibid.* 6.

from a postmodernist perspective, the prosthetic being is also a lie. And *stricto sensu* it is. Nobody would be naïve enough to believe that, for instance, Mario Bellatin's prosthetic self can be touched or photographed. As I have repeatedly argued before, the prosthetic condition grants a mode of existence different from the one granted by materiality. Prosthetic entities exist as formats, as networks, as conceptual notions that one decides to believe in—or, at least, that one decides to contemplate as a producer of reality effects and effects in reality.

Postmodernism was championing the death (or the assassination) of the subject because postmodernism is, ultimately, a reaction against modernism. The prosthetic condition is not a reaction against; it is rather, an action for—an action for poiesis, I want to suggest. Sometimes, when some characteristics are present, such poetic act produces beings that come to interact/question/play/manipulate both modernist and postmodernist ideas of the subject. Mario Bellatin, read through the lens of the prosthetic condition, participates of this debate by presenting us with the crafting of his own self.

Consequently, and perhaps obliquely, Bellatin introduces in his practice the question of the human as if inviting its spectator to always remember Kawabata's statement that he uses as an epigraph for his novel *Salón de Belleza*: “Cualquier clase de inhumanidad se convierte, con el tiempo, en humana.” This laconic phrase is a slap in the face of any essentialist belief about the human and underscores Bellatin's own understanding of his *self* and the ultimate desire of his practice, escribir sin escribir. I take him at his word when, interviewed by Alejandro Hermosilla Sánchez, he claims:

[Mario Bellatin] no se identifica con su personalidad, dado que considera que no tiene ninguna, que es lo mismo que indicar que las tiene todas. Porque, en realidad, es un bailarín sufí que se encuentra en un lugar y en otro al mismo tiempo y no cesa de desplazarse y moverse sin que esto implique aceleración o signifique que sea imposible el reposo o la pausa en la actividad a la que se dedica, lo que, al fin y al

cabos, es una demostración de que podemos serlo todo y nada al mismo tiempo, que es lo que Bellatin desea conseguir más allá de las habituales palabras altisonantes de aquellos que dictan las normas en literatura: llegar a escribir sin escribir.²³³

Here, while making an ontological comment on identity, Bellatin unknowingly contributes to identifying several of the characteristics that I propose as critical for the prosthetic condition. First, despite the fact of being interpellated directly about his own self, Bellatin responds using the third person, as if referring to someone else. The acknowledgement, I think, suggests a particular awareness, present elsewhere in Bellatin's practice, about the fact that even when constructing the self, any poetic act is a collaborative one, a co-creation.

Similarly, the mobility allowed by a being that thinks of himself as being susceptible of being both nothing and everything is an opening to the possible, not devoid of optimism. It comes down to a matter of when and where does one decide to pause, because despite this indeterminacy and mobility, it is still possible to pause at a specific location, and be *something*. Something, of course, not final, and something that is always in the process of becoming something else. Perhaps allowing us to draw a subtle line between Bellatin's desire for *escribir sin escribir* and the prosthetic condition's paradox of what we could call *existir sin existir*.

Entities affected by the prosthetic condition can be seen as *existing without existing*, because entities that exist prosthetically are a temporary solution that responds to a desire for wholeness and finitude²³⁴. Such solution can only be artificial and impermanent, dependent on relation and not on identity. The being that I propose

²³³ "HEMEROTECA - EL COLOQUIO DE LOS PERROS." n.d. Accessed August 27, 2018. <https://elcoloiquidelosperros.weebly.com/hemeroteca.html>.

²³⁴ Whatever is behind this drive varies enormously. It can be an academic desire to limit the boundaries of an object of study, the commercial need of inserting a given artwork into the market, the result of physical constraints when locating a work in an exhibition space, etc.

to understand here as Bellatin's prosthetic self is fictional, it is an invention of the spectator's imagination and a creation of the contemporary art world. Bellatin himself has stated this and I tend to acquiesce²³⁵. However, and because this being manifests as a *self*, fiction is not enough for its constitution—its constitutive fictionality needs to be anchored in a human body. And as Bellatin's practice suggests, the category of the human is not an essential one.

I am proposing here that the extended notion of the *self* that we witness in Bellatin's practice, and that is also implied in the conception and construction of the prosthetic self is akin to an increasingly present conception of the human subject. One that understands the human subject as one whose 'identity' (and I am clearly misusing the word here) is constructed as envisioned by Bruno Latour—as the connection of distant anchors and the stitching together of local nodes. ("Some Experiments in Art and Politics") Entities affected by the prosthetic condition and produced through artistic practices, I argue, are crafted in a similar fashion. Speaking about performance, Latour suggests: "[...] every performance offers us a complete and satisfying version of the work, but at the same time makes it incomplete for us, because it cannot simultaneously give all other artistic solutions which the work may admit."²³⁶

The statement can be transposed to any of the works that are referenced in this dissertation, regardless of whether or not they are composed of performance art

²³⁵ Bellatin states: "Mario Bellatin es un invento creado por un mundo literario ávido de sorpresas, estéril y que tiene como único condimento el vacío. Es por ello que tiene muy en cuenta al lector y al público. Porque en un mundo tan gris, es necesario que haya alguien que lo golpee, lo provoque y le irrite para hacerlo sentir vivo o plantearse determinadas cuestiones que no pasan tanto por lo intelectual —ya lo ha dicho— como por lo sensorial." Ibid.

²³⁶ Bruno Latour, "Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist." *International Journal Of Communication* 5: 796–810, 808.

practices. Perhaps, the key term in Latour's proposal and one that is central for the understanding of the prosthetic is that of "solution." The artistic practices that I am interested in for this project present complete and (often) satisfying solutions, alternative ways of being and doing. The prosthetic is a notion to help us think through alternatives—alternative ways of understanding and assessing objects, alternative ways for being and agency, and alternative ways of togetherness and communal living.

To conclude my conjectures around the idea of the prosthetic self I would like to come back to one of the first arguments proposed in this chapter. Namely, the fact that in the poetic acts that produce a prosthetic being—in its transition from concealment into existence—creature and creator overlap, confound and conflate themselves and, ultimately, make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the human subject, responsible for creation, and the object produced. Bellatin's prosthetic self invites us to ponder what is at stake when a human can no longer differentiate him/herself from the object s/he has produced.

This concern is an old one. Marx and Hegel devoted a good portion of their writings to dwelling in the intricacies of the matter²³⁷. Alienation and objectification were often terms used to describe the phenomenon. The first one referred to when man turns into a thing, as a consequence of his creations becoming unrecognizable as such—instead of the creation serving man, man ends up serving his own creation,

²³⁷ For an erudite sketching of the issue, see "Form as social commitment" in Eco, Umberto, and David Robey. 1989. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

often without knowing that he is its producer. Men in this situation, Marx argues, are alienated. Alienated men, in turn, cannot easily identify their situation and often think they are in control when it is *really* his creation what drives his actions, thoughts, and desires. For Hegel, alienation materializes when man fuses himself into the object of his creation—it is through objectification that men become alienated.

How does one read this fear of alienation against the grain set by the prosthetic condition, primarily as it concerns the prosthetic self? What could be Bellatin's relationship to alienation when his own self is crafted through a process of artistic co-creation? If, as I have been trying to argue, Bellatin's self is prosthetic because it is a work of art that manifests itself in different objects and beings (both real and prosthetic), could it be said that Bellatin is embarking himself in a process to extend his own corporality and, consequently, his condition as human being and as a work of art?

I like the way in which Umberto Eco, in one of his essays included in *The Open Work*, intervenes the discussion to state:

From the very beginning of time, the ability to extend one's corporeality (and therefore to alter one's own natural dimensions) has been the very condition of *homo faber*. To consider such a situation as a degradation of human nature implies that nature and man are not one and the same thing. It implies an inability to accept the idea that nature exists in relation to man, is defined, extended and modified in and by man; just as man is one particular expression of nature, and active, modifying expression who distinguishes himself from his environment precisely because of his capacity to act upon it and to define it.²³⁸

And I like it because the prosthetic completely relies on this condition of making. Additionally, to consider that the condition of *homo faber* is inextricably attached to human nature puts us in the realm of effects. Humans create entities that affect and change the world, including other humans. For most of history such entities were

²³⁸ Umberto Eco and David Robey, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989) 132.

things, produced as the consequence of artificial processes, or beings, conceived ‘naturally’ and thus identified as humans. Today, the *homo faber* condition continues to produce things and beings, but the natural conception of the later is less clear. Not only is it increasingly possible to artificially create ‘humans,’ but also human creations themselves, both things and beings, are increasingly able to produce new things and new beings. It will be this generation’s task to decide on the value of those man-made things, and perhaps more importantly, on the status of those man-made beings.

What I mean to say is that human creations have inherited the *homo faber* condition that Eco talks about. Artistic practices attest to this fact and, simultaneously, create a space for envisioning and rehearsing a world in which artificial beings could behave like humans and produce effects akin to those produced by humans. Possibly as well, those beings may exist lacking some of the attributes that, up to this day, have been crucial for the definition of our humanity—a biological body, for instance. Chapter Three of this dissertation will dissect two cases in which, momentarily, contemporary artistic practices succeeded in creating a bodyless being of this kind.

CHAPTER THREE
The Prosthetic Other
Artists Make Art(ists)

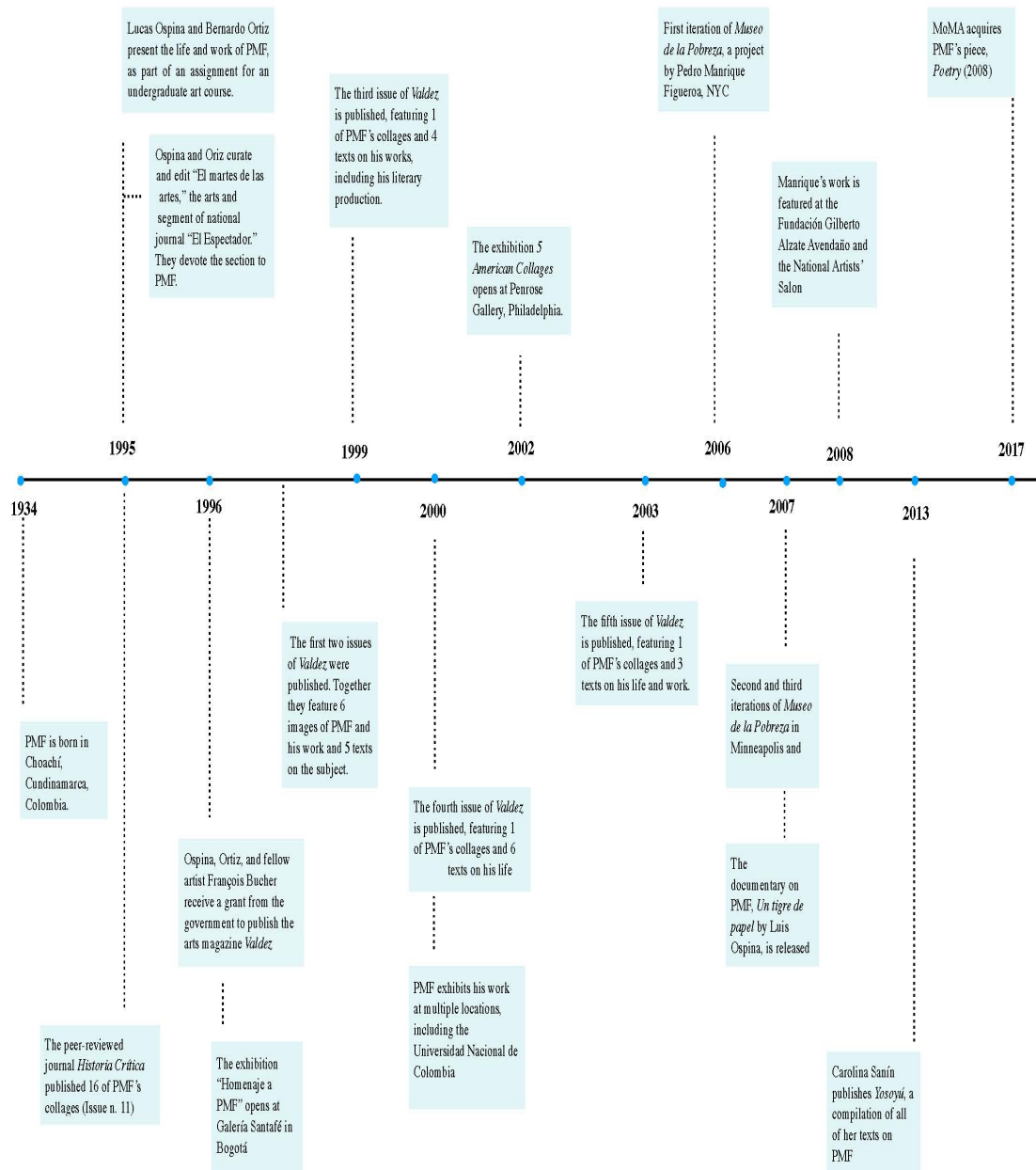
Chapter Three – The Prosthetic Other

Artists Make Art(ists)

Consider the two timelines below and entertain for a moment the possibility of seeing them as diachronic artistic practices, fragmented, and susceptible of producing a ‘single’ work of art. Timeline One produced the ‘precursor of collage in Colombia,’ dilettante artist *Pedro Manrique Figueroa*. Timeline Two created a perceptive clothes washer that meddled in Colombia’s most exclusive art elite, *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar*.

Pedro Manrique Figueroa (an incomplete timeline)

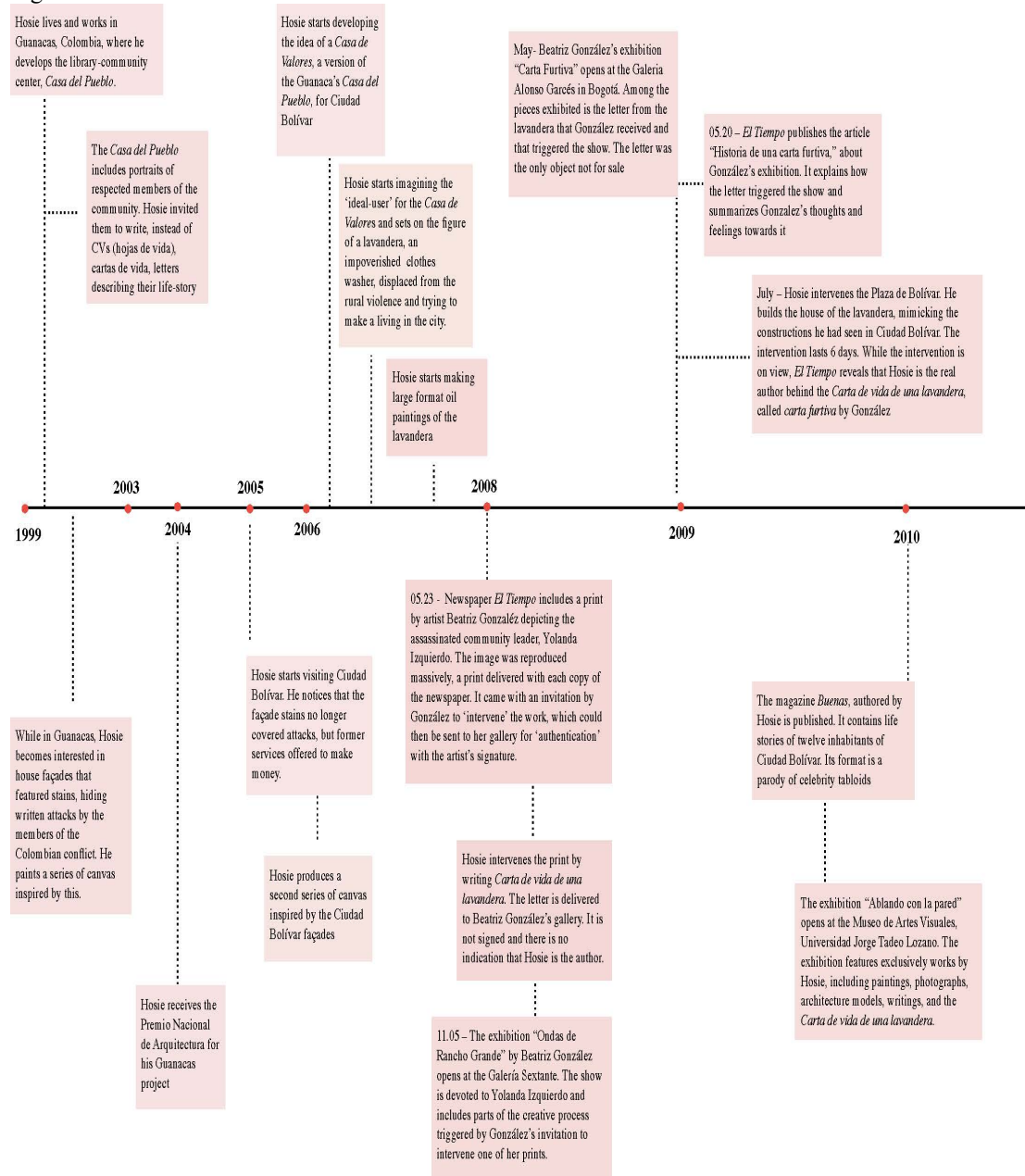
Figure 9.



* For a more detailed account of this timeline, see addenda at the end of this Chapter.

La lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar (an incomplete timeline)

Figure 10.



* For a more detailed account of this timeline, see addenda at the end of this Chapter.

The two timelines I present here can also be read as elements on a list not dissimilar from the lists I proposed in Chapter One concerning works by Mario Bellatin and the Colectivo Acciones de Arte, CADA. As with those cases, some of the elements that compose these timelines would never be understood as works of art in their own right nor were they produced with the intention of being so. Their authorship is not always

singular and taken in isolation they mean differently—or they lack any substantial meaning altogether.

Understood as *Pedro Manrique Figueroa* and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar*, these elements (and these timelines), I want to propose, behave like archipelagos. According to the accepted definition provided by sources like the OED, the word archipelago refers to two entities: a group of islands or the stretch of water containing many islands. In both cases, however, the ontological state of this geographical phenomenon is, to say the least, fuzzy. An archipelago is not, cannot be, a fixed entity that one can physically grasp—rather, its existence as an independent entity is the result of an abstraction. Like prosthetic entities, archipelagos exist only conceptually—their boundaries always mobile and porous.

I want to extrapolate the definitions of an archipelago, and use them as tools to approach the timelines I presented above. If we understand *Pedro Manrique Figueroa* and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* as ‘archipelagic works of art’ we would have two options: either consider them as a group of elements connected by some kind of proximity or think of them as a chronotopos of sorts, enclosing a number of elements that when contemplated together constitute a conceptual, fictional, whole. In both cases, however, the matter is less *what* are we looking at, and increasingly *how* are we looking at it.

Michael Dash, in his article “The Stranger by the Shore,”²³⁹ revisits the legacy of Edouard Glissant’s thought to argue that, for Glissant, insularity is not the trademark of isolation but rather a guarantee for openness. If continents are atavic, Glissant suggests, islands and archipelagos are relational. If continental thinking is essentialist and fixed; archipelagic thinking is fluid: “grounded on the ever-shifting,

²³⁹ Roberts, Brian Russell, and Michelle Ann Stephens. 2017. *Archipelagic American Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

unpredictable shoreline, constantly being acted on by heartland and horizon, by the inward pull of opaque interiors and the outward tug of the archipelagic space.”²⁴⁰

Because how can you determine where the shoreline ends and the ocean begins?

Glissant’s hope was that, as thought became more fluid and less systematic, humanity would come to understand the world as a multiplicity of entities able to become archipelagos of regions, mixing and connecting without such interaction meaning extinction²⁴¹. I want to propose that the artistic practices that I study in this dissertation function more like archipelagos and less than continental masses. That is, the works of art produced by these practices are not wholes condensing unique meanings—rather, they are akin to bodies of land connected by location, accident, or will. Their meaning depending on how such connections are traced.

I want to follow Glissant’s and Dash’s consideration about the archipelago, and the mode of thinking and inhabiting the world triggered by it, to analyze two very specific cases in Colombian contemporary art history. Those cases, I propose, created the elements conducive to the existence of ‘archipelagic art forms,’ that, in turn, demanded a ‘spectator-cartographer’ able to—temporarily and artificially—trace a conceptual whole. My argument being that in these particular cases, *Pedro Manrique Figueroa* and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar*, turned out to be conceptual wholes readable through the lens of what I have been trying to conceptualize as a prosthetic being.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 359.

²⁴¹ Dash cites Glissant’s *Traité du Tout Monde* (1997), where he envisaged a world where “continents, those intolerant landmasses focused on a single truth . . . become archipelagoes of regions. Regions of the world become islands, isthmuses, peninsulas, lands thrusting out, mixing and connecting and yet continuing to exist.” (359)

Brief recap of the ‘legacies’ of the prosthetic self

In “Chapter Two,” I suggested that Bellatin’s prosthetic self had a number of characteristics that can be transposed to the analysis of the prosthetic beings created by the case studies we are looking at now. For starters, both prosthetic selves and prosthetic ‘others’ remain always unfinished, in the making, in a process of becoming that is as flexible as the possible connections between the nodes that I am here calling elements. Similarly, they foster confusion between fact and fiction, art and life—by blurring the boundaries between the two, entropy is underscored and the possibility of unexpected connections and unexpected ways of being is promoted.²⁴²

And I would argue that these practices go a bit further to not only blur boundaries but to signal the artificiality of such distinction. Bellatin himself has gone as far as to flat out deny the existence of the difference between fact and fiction. When asked if his readers would often demand him to clarify what part of his writing is fact and what part is fiction he replied: “Todos lo hacen. Y algunos ni siquiera preguntan qué es real y qué es falso porque les parece obvia la diferencia (lo cual es peor). Esa línea no existe”²⁴³

The nonexistence of such line (or the difficulty of its establishment) is an issue that has been widely explored and experimented with in recent Latin American Literature. When approaching a good portion of the production coming from the

²⁴² Talking about Bellatin’s messy amalgamation of fiction and fact Graciela Speranza argues: “Bellatin descrea de las leyes convencionales que dan forma a la biografía y la ficción, y prefiere entregarse a una fuerza entrópica que entrevera los relatos y los restos autobiográficos hasta volverlos distantes y quizás por eso más porosos, más abiertos a asociaciones inesperadas.” Gabriel Speranza, *Fuera de campo : literatura y arte argentinos después de Duchamp* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2006) 65.

²⁴³ “Conversación con Mario Bellatin.” n.d. IBERO 90.9 FM. Accessed August 29, 2018. <https://ibero909.fm/blog/conversacion-con-mario-bellatin>.

region one encounters what appears to be a demand for a certain *resurrection* of the author. Texts by artists as dissimilar as Cesar Aira, Fernando Vallejo, Mario Bellatin, Washington Cucurto, Reinaldo Arenas, Salvador Plascencia, and Joao Gilberto Noll, among many, many others, make it increasingly difficult to keep the author dead²⁴⁴. The very radical distinction that Barthes invites us to observe between the maker and his creation becomes almost impossible to maintain—partly because these authors craft pieces where they themselves appear as characters, and cultivate a state of continuous confusion between the possibility or lack thereof, of ignoring such a conflation. Often, character and author are so intermingled that the existence of one depends on the existence and performance of the other. Borges, I think, anticipated this phenomenon in his text “Borges y yo”:

... yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica... yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y solo algún instante de mi podrá sobrevivir en el otro. Poco a poco voy cediéndole todo, aunque me cansa su perversa costumbre de falsear y magnificar.²⁴⁵

This poetic creation of the self that combines the fictional and the factual, I claim, is judged less severely than when the creator proposes the construction of another being in which the fiction/fact opposition remains inoperative. When Mario Bellatin, as discussed earlier, creates Mario Bellatin, the use of fiction and deception is understood as a creative decision—or a poetic license when judged more severely. When Lucas Ospina creates Pedro Manrique Figueroa or when Simón Hosie creates

²⁴⁴ Like proposed by Barthes in his now classic: Barthes, Roland. 2002. “The Death of the Author.” Routledge. One of his formulations: “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.” David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *The Book Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002) 221.

²⁴⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, Rolando Costa Picazo and Irma Zangara, *Obras Completas: Edición Crítica* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2009) 221.

the lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar, the revealing of fiction and deception as creative tools tends to dismiss the worthiness of the work.

But more on this later. At this point I am more interested in identifying the resemblances between the creation of prosthetic selves and that of prosthetic others, rather than signaling their differences. One of such similarities is, without a doubt, the critical role of the ‘unsaid.’ Bellatin has made this one of his recurring tropes, often expressed in his desire of ‘escribir sin escribir,’²⁴⁶ but the unsaid is often more palpable. It is related to the gaps produced by the fragmentary state in which these artistic practices manifest themselves. The fragment, in turn, creates an obligation of the spectator/critic that is also a desire—that of completion, of wholeness. Usually, narration is our way to satisfy that desire and fulfill that obligation—and this narration, even if only mental or imaginary, largely determines meaning and value.

²⁴⁶ A scene in the film “Invernadero” (2010, directed by Gonzalo Castro) shows Bellatin in conversation with writer Margo Glanz, discussing this very same issue:

Margo Glanz: Cómo le haces para escribir sin escribir, a ver, cuéntame

Mario Bellatin: No lo sé, es una pregunta, una hipótesis.

MG: Te estoy haciendo una pregunta. Contesta.

MB: Bueno, pues no lo sé, por eso doy una conferencia para que la gente, cada quien se imagine lo que es escribir sin escribir. Yo me imagino que es escribir sin usar las palabras.

MG: Entonces, con aullidos?

MB: Noo, usando cámara de fotos, gente, happenings

MG: Ah, entonces tu te quieres dedicar al mundo de la imagen

MB: No yo siempre seré un escritor, soy y seré un escritor

MG: Sin palabras

MB: Sin palabras

MG: ajá...

MB: De lo no dicho, del vestigio de la falta de la ausencia.

The ways in which one encounters or provides the fragments directly affects the type of narration one produces²⁴⁷.

However, there is another manner of interpreting this fragmentary state, which was brought to my attention by filmmaker Andrés Di Tella in a recent visit he made to Harvard University²⁴⁸. There, Di Tella underscored the connections between the fragment and failure, as the fragment always points to the impossibility of fully seeing, fully grasping and fully understanding. I am convinced that both of these functions of the fragment are present when thinking about the prosthetic condition.

And one more thing: at least in the manner it appears in the artistic practices that I am here studying, fragmentareity is also responsible for the impossibility of safely locating these works as unquestionably literary, visual, performatic, or real. Despite of what he claims, it is hard to recognize Bellatin as a writer *tout-court*²⁴⁹. To

²⁴⁷ Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons explain this ‘narrative thirst’ in their book *The Invisible Gorilla*, and identify it as one of the most prominent ways in which our brains deceive us and others can manipulate us: “The illusory perception of causes from correlations is closely tied to the appeal of stories (...) when a series of facts is narrated, we fill in the gaps to create a causal sequence (...) The illusion of narrative can indeed be a powerful tool for authors and speakers. By arranging purely factual statements in different orders, or by omitting or inserting relevant information, they can control what inferences their audiences will make, without explicitly arguing for and defending those inferences themselves.” Christopher F Chabris, *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* (New York: Crown, 2010) 165-68.

²⁴⁸ The visit took place on October 2016 and was co-organized by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Di Tella’s talk, part of the Arts and Science Workshop, was titled: “The Other, The Same: Intimacy in the Documentary.”

²⁴⁹ Alan Pauls sums up this difficulty in the following terms: “Me cuesta imaginar a Mario Bellatin como un escritor. Hace algunos años que no hago más que leerlo, que todo lo que sé de él me llega por vía escrita (...) Y sin embargo, no hay caso: no consigo verlo del todo como un escritor. Es más: muchas veces tengo la impresión de que esa identidad —la identidad “literaria” de Bellatin— no es otra cosa que un *trompe l’oeil*, una especie de alias, la impostura que Bellatin ha venido poniendo a punto con el tiempo para —en algún momento, tal vez esta misma noche, acá, como se dice: en vivo— llegar al límite, colmar el vaso de su propia comedia y desenmascararse y revelar por fin qué diablos era esa otra dimensión con la que

me, he is more of a maker, a *poet* in the Greek sense of the term—maker of objects, maker of beings, maker of communities. But he is by no means the only one. Lucas Ospina and Simón Hosie are makers too, and as I will argue in the lines that follow, they are makers of beings—at least of prosthetic ones.

Towards the Identification Of a Shared (Prosthetic) Lineage III

As it is the case with the creation of objects and the creation of the self, the creation of beings via cultural or artistic practices has a lineage and a history of its own. One that is impossible to comprehensively address here, which is why I will limit my considerations to a couple of beings whose construction, I think, illuminates the thinking about the prosthetic condition.

The invention of the author, for instance, has been perhaps one of the most influential when it comes to defining the societal value of a particular profession. Secular in Ancient Greece, poets were deemed dangerous for the Republic by Plato, due to their distant rapport with the truth. Sacred in the Jewish heritage, an author was a direct link to the divine²⁵⁰. In both cases, consequently, an author had the power to produce *real* effects in the *real* world through the use of his craft. This allowed poets

flirteaba pero en la que nunca terminaba de instalarse, cuál esa otra práctica que nos hacía desear y de la que no dejaba de mantenernos apartados, qué clase de identidad ésa que la suya, la identidad del “Bellatin escritor”, se regodeaba tanto insinuando y aplazando.” See: “Pauls, Alan. El Problema Bellatin.docx.” n.d. Scribd. Accessed August 29, 2018. <https://www.scribd.com/document/244686247/Pauls-Alan-El-problema-Bellatin-docx>.

²⁵⁰ Paul Benichou explains the difference between these two traditions as follows: « Le crédit et les prétentions de la littérature tiennent, dans le premier cas, à ce qu’elle se voit seule à répondre aux questions majeures; dans le second cas, à la référence surnaturelle impliquée dans ses créations » (11)

to simultaneously be judges (political, moral, ethical...), and threats (political, moral, ethical...). Evidently, the particularities of the role have changed throughout history²⁵¹, but the consideration of the poet (and I am equating here poet with author and artist) as a being that can produce entities that, in turn, can alter what a community experiences as real²⁵² has remained untouched. And also, interestingly enough, a poet's creation (an artist's creation) also embodies a distinct way of inhabiting the world, a unique way of existence that is not threaten by the limitations of the human²⁵³.

In sum, poets can be understood as being simultaneously support, judges, critics and makers of the world—an ensemble of faculties that were once the sole prerogative of deities. But also, an ensemble of faculties proper to the contemporary being, as proposed by Giorgio Agamben, a being who is *in place* precisely as a consequence of his ongoing displacement:

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [*inattuale*]. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time.²⁵⁴

But perhaps, as I have been trying to stress, what matters is less what a poet is and more what a poet can do. True, poets are contemporary; they are judges, and critics; they are a direct line with divinity; they are the new priests; the new pariahs; a new elite, the aristocracy of taste and sensibility. And they are also—and maybe

²⁵¹ For a comprehensive account of those transformations see Benichou, Paul. 1996. *Le Sacre de L'écrivain, 1750-1830: Essai Sur L'avenement D'un Pouvoir Spirituel Laique Dans La France Moderne (Bibliothèque Des Idées)*. Gallimard.

²⁵² Including also what a community deems desirable, moral, appropriate.

²⁵³ A desire of immortality, if you will, that the artist shares with the politician.

²⁵⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays*, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009) 40.

consequently—spectators, readers of the world that take what is available to give live anew. Baudelaire explained it in the following terms, anticipating what was later theorized as art as *vida mejorada*: “(...) las cosas renacen sobre el papel, naturales y más que naturales, bellas y más que bellas, singulares, dotadas de una vida entusiasta como el alma del autor²⁵⁵.”²⁵⁶ Poets, then, not only give life to entities like the ones they see in the world—they enhance them; make them more natural than natural; more beautiful than beautiful; more real than real.

For instance, there are authors. That is, there are human beings that produce what we have agreed to call works of art and that exist *organically*—that were created by God, nature, evolution, chance... Then, upon closer observation, someone decides that an organic author is not quite enough to encompass what an author can or should do, or even what an author does. So we create an enhanced author, better than the ‘real’ one, infused of an enthusiastic life, and we call it “author function.”

This invention of the author function is, I believe, of critical importance when thinking about the prosthetic condition. First, because when Foucault proposed the notion he was responding to the very complex issue of giving meaning—thus, establishing value—to a work of art. By proposing the author function he acknowledged that the empirical author—the proper name behind the creation—is never an independent creator²⁵⁷. According to Foucault, and I extend his idea to the

²⁵⁵ Foucault, reading Baudelaire, clarifies that this ‘enhanced creation’ starts by the creation of the self. It is not about finding an essential real world, it is about creating it: “Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself”. (*Truth and Method*, 42)

²⁵⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *El pintor de la vida moderna (Spanish Edition)* (Taurus, 2013) 41.

²⁵⁷ For Foucault, the author is a complex and variable function of discourse, the empirical author only being one of its components. Which means, in turn, that the

proposal of the prosthetic condition, for a work of art to exist an interplay between creator, creature, spectator, and context is necessary. The author function operates in the voids, the silences and the scissions that make a work of art possible. Just like the prosthetic condition, the author function is a conceptual category, an ontological characteristic concerned with the effects of creation: “(1)a función autor es pues una característica del modo de existencia, de circulación y funcionamiento de ciertos discursos en el interior de una sociedad.”^{258,259}

This operation takes a human and one of his characteristics—the organic body and, i.e., the fact that this specific body authors works of art—as only some of the elements that constitute a larger conceptual entity²⁶⁰. Consequently, this entity encompasses the human while also exceeding it and thus determines the effects it can produce in the world. Some things are added and some things are lost in such maneuver that could potentially affect and change the degrees of humanity, and agency, we attribute to organic bodies.

It follows suit that culture and history, and the voices of some privileged figures, often succeed in creating ‘authors.’ The definition of the term changing and depending on the elements (the fragments) that one decides to put together and connect to give meaning to this abstraction at a particular moment in time and from a particular vantage point. The author has been invented and reinvented, defined and redefined. The ‘human’ has profited from (suffered?) a similar fate.

author function is a notion that exceeds that of the subject. See Foucault, Michel. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon.

²⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Entre Filosofía Y Literatura*, trans. Miguel Morey (Barcelona: Paidós, 1999).

²⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Entre Filosofía Y Literatura/ Among Philosophy and Literature*, trans. Miguel Morey (Barcelona: Paidos Iberica Ediciones S A, 1999) 238.

²⁶⁰ In Foucault’s case, the author function.

Needless to say, this is not the place to trace a rigorous history of the evolution of the notion of the human in Western thinking²⁶¹. It is important, however, to take some elements of this discussion into consideration because thinking of a prosthetic being—that is, thinking of a being that is manmade, and that produces effects akin to those that a natural being would produce—begs pondering the question. Does the fact that we can create beings mean that we could, potentially, grant them ‘humanity’?

Despite relatively recent attempts²⁶² to equate the notion of the human with that of a being possessing a biological body, conscience and reason, truth is that not every body with such characteristic is conceded equal humanity, at least not in practice.²⁶³ A brief look into our history as a race supports the argument that ‘humanity’ can be almost arbitrarily granted or stripped—slaves, Jews, indigenous populations, queer, disabled...— and that rather than a question of nature, ‘humanity’ is a political and ethical creation. An act of poiesis if you will. Much of the cultural history of the ‘monster’ has to do with the definition of the human and its equivalence to whatever is deemed as a ‘normal’ biological body. And much of the thinking and creation around issues of artificial intelligence and the robot concerns our ever-present fear of expanding the notion of the human so that it can also encompass artificial creations.

²⁶¹ The issue is endless and, quite frankly, beyond the scope of this project and way beyond my expertise. For robust accounts of the development of the term, from a multiplicity of perspectives, see footnote 134.

²⁶² Say, for instance, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose’s first article reads: “All human beings born free and equal in dignity and rights All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (1945)

²⁶³ Two prominent contemporary incursions in this debate are Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. // Butler, Judith. 2016. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso.

Artificial creations like, for instance, prosthetic beings: entities that can lack a biological body and that, despite this fact, exist as agents affecting what a community experiences as real. Mel Chen, in her book *Animacies*, argues that animacy is, like humanity, a political attribute²⁶⁴. But she is careful not equate these two with a group of notions that albeit being overlapping, must remain differentiable. Animacy, humanity, dehumanization, objectification—and their antonyms—are different terms and produce different effects. Chen explains: “one form of what is understood as dehumanization involves the *removal* of qualities especially cherished as humans; at other times, dehumanization involves the more active *making* of an object.”^{265,266}

I agree with Chen when she states that humanity and objectification are two categories that can be achieved by the addition or subtraction of certain elements. Deprived of certain characteristics, some beings can become objects; understood more expansively, some beings can also become human—or, in Chen’s argument, animated. However, to accept this proposition is to accept, as many of the works that are part of this dissertation suggest, that we live in a time when most of the historical limits and boundaries that we have used to approach and understand the world, have collapsed. In a way, it means accepting what Deleuze and Guattari proposed when thinking about the *corps sans organs*:

Défaire l’organisme n’a jamais été se tuer, mais ouvrir les corps a des connexions qui supposent tout un agencement, des circuits, des conjonctions, des étagements et des seuils, des passages et des

²⁶⁴ Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012) 30.

²⁶⁵ Here I will add that, even if also partially overlapping, recognizing the prosthetic existence of a being is not the same as granting animacy to it. Both notions coincide when thinking about the artificial nature of being ‘prosthetic’ or being ‘animate’, but acknowledging a prosthetic existence does not necessarily imply granting animacy.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 43.

distributions d'intensité, des territoires et des déterritorialisations mesurées à la manière d'un arpenteur.²⁶⁷

And this is an interesting thought, I believe, because it allows for a manner of existence dependent not on essences, but on relations. It implies, of course, a shift in the order of signification. Because to establish meaning, this way of thinking looks around, not inside. This is what theorists like David M. Halperin have done when arguing that queerness is an identity with no essence, once whose meaning changes in time and depends on location. Or what Donna Haraway attempted when appreciating the “constructed, artifactual, historical contingent nature of simians, cyborgs and women”²⁶⁸ in her now classic book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

Conceived of in this way, as ‘open’ beings that constitute themselves and that exist only in relation, women, cyborgs, queers, and prosthetic beings appear as destabilizing creatures. Not fully selves, not fully others, they are hybrids, ‘creatures of reality and fiction,’ as described by Haraway herself²⁶⁹. Such hybridity not only denies any wholeness (organic or otherwise), but it is also another way of naming what I have been referencing throughout this dissertation when proposing that prosthetic entities blur the boundaries between categories that, until this day, have been central in our understanding of the world. I am thinking, of course, of the

²⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 198.

²⁶⁸ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 4.

²⁶⁹ Talking about the cyborg, Haraway states: “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction (...) The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience (...) The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation.” Ibid. 149 – 150.

importance of binaries like, to name only a few of the most influential, human/animal; natural/artificial; physical/conceptual; or real/fictional.

And to continue with Haraway, the cyborg (and I would add here the prosthetic as well) confronts in a potent way the ontology that grounds western epistemology. “A cyborg world—she claims—might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, *not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints*²⁷⁰.”²⁷¹

Beings embracing these partial identities refuse, consequently, to fully identify as self or as other. Trinh Minha has coined the term ‘inappropriate/d Others’ to talk about the beings that appear impossible to grasp, to appropriate, and that, simultaneously, exist as somewhat inappropriate entities²⁷². Part of the fear that Haraway signals when talking about her cyborgs is a consequence of the fundamental elusiveness of these beings; of their ability to assemble and disassemble; of their potential to always be provisory. To counter that fear, I want to argue, requires a belief in the fact that in order to exist or to signify, there need not be a totality—that a fragmentary existence, producer of ‘incomplete wholeness’ is not only possible, but necessary. Perhaps it can even be read as a lesson in humility.

²⁷⁰ My emphases.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 154.

²⁷² Trinh’s words are as follow: “We can read the term “inappropriate/d other” in both ways, as someone whom you cannot appropriate, and as someone who is inappropriate. Not quite other, not quite the same. Since inappropriate(d)ness does not refer to a fixed location, but is constantly changing with the specific circumstances of each person, event or struggle, it works differently according to the moment and the forces at work.” See Chen, Nancy N. 1992. ““Speaking Nearby:’ A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1): 82–91.

On the Importance (and the Risk) of Belief

The beings produced by the timelines included in the opening of this chapter are (were?), to some extent, the consequence of both deception and belief. When Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* first resurfaced, their most direct spectators allowed for their existence through, mainly, a very basic act of belief. The spectators of these works, at first, did not see them as art but rather as a reality. At first, they were spectators respectful of boundaries; believers in the reassurance provided by binary thinking.

But before delving into the consequences of reading these works as hoaxes and understanding them as an artist's mischievous victory over a slightly naïve community of spectators, I want to briefly recapitulate the ways in which both Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* came to the fore. At first, there was a somewhat steady, yet confusing and conflicting, release of information. Then, doubt. And lastly, accusations of mischief, personal attacks²⁷³.

As noted, the sources responsible for the emission of such information were varied and the content displayed, contradictory. Often, the artist lost control of the creation and the works started to be more and more influenced by what other voices said about them—even when such voices were unaware of the fact that they were dealing with fictions, with works of art. There were media reports, word of mouth, utterances by authorized figures that participated in the fictional creation, utterances

²⁷³ For details see this Chapter's addenda and the press references included.

by authorized figures that ignored the fictional nature of the creation, other works of art, etc.²⁷⁴

It is important to note, however, that this ‘excess’ of information is not equivalent to the production of clearer, or more robust, meaning. Just like Umberto Eco points out in his essay “Openness, Information, Communication,”²⁷⁵ information is directly proportional to entropy. Taken from an optimist standpoint one must conclude then that the more entropic the situation, the larger the number of possibilities it presents—the more entropic the work of art, the greater its possibility of meaning, of becoming. Which is, I think, another angle to vouch for the importance of relation when thinking about contemporary art in general, and the prosthetic condition in particular. The fact that the works I have been studying here can be presented as lists, as timelines, and as fragments attests to this state of affairs. Eco thinks about the entropy in molecules to remind us that “the molecule can behave in a variety of ways, since it is full of possibilities, and we know that it can occupy a large number of positions, but we do not know which ones”²⁷⁶ and translates this statement into contemporary art theory by proposing that one of the commonalities between the artistic practices of the present is the fact that they “constantly challenge the initial order by means of an extremely ‘improbable’ form of organization.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ It is impossible not to mention here the importance of the legacy of the early works by Roberto Jacoby. Namely, the Manifesto *Un arte de los medios de comunicación*, coauthored with Eduardo Costa and Raúl Escari in 1966. The movement inaugurated with the manifesto produced *Happening para un jabalí difunto* as their seminal work, a non-existent (prosthetic?) event that was only realized through the production and distribution of information. See Katzenstein, Inés. 2004. *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

²⁷⁵ Eco, Umberto, and David Robey. 1989. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 56.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 60.

When it comes to the prosthetic condition, this ‘organization,’ this manner of coping with the entropy of information and fragments proper to the artistic practices can be read through this lens—that of the prosthetic condition—, is largely the responsibility of an active spectator. The artist behind the creation may direct the crafting but it is ultimately the spectator who bears the burden of realizing the work and proposing its meaning²⁷⁸. And like molecules, we know that these practices have the potential of occupying multiple spaces, of engendering various, sometimes paradoxical, meanings. But we can never know, with full certainty, which meanings or which spaces are at stake—which is why with the prosthetic condition, every act of reception is one of creation and one of belief.

The Parafictional Debt

It would be impossible—let alone dishonest—to ignore the influence that Carrie Lambert Beatty’s thinking has had in my shaping and understanding of the prosthetic condition. It was through the notion of the Parafictional²⁷⁹ that I first

²⁷⁸ Eco studies the work of Paul Éluard and argues that his poetry provides the reader with a number of emotions and gestures and that it is the reader’s responsibility to choose which of these elements—emotions and gestures—allow him to ‘better’ participate in the work.

²⁷⁹ Obviously, the key text here is Lambert-beatty, Carrie. 2009. “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility.” *October*, 51–84. There is a ‘revised’, slightly modified version available in Armstrong, Elizabeth. 2012. *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Munich: DelMonico Books/Prestel: Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

A less know text with further considerations about the phenomenon is available in Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. n.d. “Parafiction: Observations, Generalizations, And Unsolicited Advice.” In *Prosthetic Realities: Fake Truths and True Lies in Colombian Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: de Cabeza curaduria and the David

approached these artistic practices, and many of the characteristics that define parafictions are present in the works that help me think through the prosthetic condition. True, the use of fiction both as a material and a tool for creation has different implications when approaching a work from a parafictional perspective or from a prosthetic one. However, in both cases, fiction's etymology is subtly underscored—these works are fictional more because they are involved in fashioning, forming, and building the real and less so because they are opposed to it²⁸⁰.

Perhaps more clearly than the other works studied in this dissertation, Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* can be understood as parafictions. And it is worth quoting Lambert-Beatty at length here. When defining the parafictional she states:

Fiction or fictiveness has emerged as an important category in recent art. But like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor, a parafiction is related but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside. It does not perform its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact.²⁸¹

I would add to this, just as Lambert-Beatty does elsewhere in her article, that while it is true that parafictions are oriented toward the pragmatics of trust, they also

Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University.
<http://www.decabeza.org/publicacionespublications/>.

²⁸⁰ **Fiction (n.):** early 15c., *ficcioun*, "that which is invented or imagined in the mind," from Old French *ficcion* "dissimulation, ruse; invention, fabrication" (13c.) and directly from Latin *fictionem* (nominative *fictio*) "a fashioning or feigning," noun of action from past participle stem of *ingere* "to shape, form, devise, feign," originally "to knead, form out of clay," from PIE root ***dheigh-** "to form, build." (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/fiction>)

²⁸¹ Elizabeth Armstrong, 117 – 188.

participate in the—even if momentary—creation of the real²⁸². They are also a glimpse into the possible, an attempt to imagine and rehearse different distributions of the sensible.

Understood in this way, as parafictional works, or as works with parafictional qualities²⁸³, the pieces by Lucas Ospina and Simón Hosie that anchor this chapter participate of the international ‘trend’ that Lambert-Beatty dissects but they also have a more local, Latin American, heritage. And this is important to bear in mind because the way parafictions operate and exist in the Latin American context is not necessarily the same that we witness when they enter the more ‘global’ audiences of biennales and *October* readers. Perhaps this difference is dictated by the more prominent role that fiction has had in the construction of Latin American societies—few would argue, for instance, that the very fictional origin of the nations in the region compromised their agency in the ‘real’ world. On the contrary, those fictional foundation²⁸⁴ have produced everything from tangible deaths, to alliances, exclusions, and even soccer team fervor.

Perhaps the difference also has to do with the way in which information circulates in these societies—the acknowledgment and almost common sense awareness that narratives are constructed and biased, that they are instruments of

²⁸² Every example in Lambert-Beatty’s article does this in a particular way, from the identity correction tactics of the Yes Men, to the complex (and fuzzy) ontological state of Shvarts piece.

²⁸³ Lambert-Beatty invites us—wisely, I think—to be wary of strict labeling: “I try to resist the ‘is it or isn’t it game.’ As a concept parafiction works best not as a category into which a given example fits or doesn’t fit, but as a quality an example might have to a greater or lesser extent” (“Parafiction: Observations... 6)

²⁸⁴ See Sommer, Doris. 1991. *Foundational Fictions : The National Romances of Latin America*. Latin American Literature and Culture (Berkeley, Calif.) ; 8. Berkeley: University of California Press.

power in the very clear benefit of some sectors of the population²⁸⁵. But if it is true that our history, culture, and socio-economic dynamics have trained us in a culture of distrust, they have also shown that it is possible for different technologies of belief to operate at once, overlapping and contradicting themselves, without either ceasing to produce effects in the real and without impeding the simultaneous experience of opposing (fictional) accounts as facts²⁸⁶. An extensive typology, however, that documents some of the reasons that make Latin American parafictions *particular* is still to be written—and I cannot dream to attempt to do so here. What interests me about this lineage when thinking about the prosthetic condition is to show that the dialectical process of learning and unlearning, believing and disbelieving that parafictions foster is a common reality in the region, both inside and outside of art.

If we decide to stick to the boundaries of the art world, you could connect Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* with works that operated before, after, and alongside them. Just as a sampler: a film denouncing misery porn, a practice of exploitation performed by foreign filmmakers interested in documenting the Latin American struggle (*Agarrando pueblo*, Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, 1977); an artistic happening that only existed as media information (*Happening para un jabalí difunto*, Roberto Jacoby, Raúl Escari and Eduardo Costa, 1966); a mockumentary explaining and informing about the dramatic change on the weather conditions of the Brazilian city Recife, that turned the tropical conurbation into an arctic space suited for penguins (*Recife Frio*, Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2009); an academic symposium featuring fictional and real presentations attempting to ‘purify’

²⁸⁵ A colleague once told me that parafiction in Latin American was impossible, that it was almost an oxymoron, given the natural ‘malicia indígena’ that pervades our epistemology. I respectfully disagree.

²⁸⁶ Magical Realism, of course, illustrated this ambiguity brilliantly.

Mexico City's cultural scene (*Primer Congreso de Purificación Cultural Urbana*, Pablo Helguera and Ilana Boltvinik, 2003); a statement by a fictional terrorist group claiming responsibility for the theft of a Francisco de Goya engraving in Bogotá (*El caso Goya*, Lucas Ospina, 2009); a fictional institution that fulfilled the duties of a recently extinct government agency for the management of cultural policy (*IDCT, Instituto Distrital de Cultura Táctica*, David Ayala-Alfonso, Juliana Escobar, William Gutiérrez, 2009); and a Congress of Latin American writers in Paris where, *sensu-stricto*, no writer was present (*Narrateurs Mexicains à Paris*, Mario Bellatin, 2003).

Samplers aside, my main interest in the parafictional from the perspective of the prosthetic condition has to do with the fact that parafictions explore the heightened power of human poiesis when the boundary between art and non-art (art and life?) is blurred²⁸⁷ and we start to believe in the artificial creation in the same way we would if it were a natural one. Simply put, I am interested in thinking about what could happen when the artist's "real to me"²⁸⁸ claim expands into larger communities for extended periods of time.

This 'real to me,' I want to argue, is a matter of emotion and belief—and both of these, emotion and belief, always register (feel) as real, despite the queasy ontological and epistemological foundations one may be able to identify when looking at them from the outside²⁸⁹. But also, the 'real to me' slightly shifts the

²⁸⁷ I am not 100% convinced that 'to blur' is the appropriate verb to describe what happens with these phenomena. At times, I find some others more accurate: to ignore, to erase, to bracket, to redefine, to forget, to hope...

²⁸⁸ Michael Blum, as quoted by Lambert-Beatty, has frequently expressed that Safiye Behar is "real to him." Simón Hosie has expressed the same feeling about his lavandera.

²⁸⁹ The power and potential consequences of this have been partially debated and exposed in the discussions about truthiness. And while believing in fiction is not

grounds of the discussion because suddenly the questions that arise when deception is seen as a threat—is this for real? Is this *just* art? Am I being fooled? Can I trust this particular ‘distribution of the sensible’?—begin to lose their importance.

The shift, then, has to do with ceasing to approach parafictions as constative utterances and starting to understand them (and judge them) as performatives.

Lambert-Beatty addresses the performative character of parafictions in her essay:

Parafictions in general are performative, where that is understood to mean that they effect or produce something rather than describe or denote it. They are unhappy performatives insofar as they, like the movie wedding, are only ‘make believe.’ But insofar as they make someone believe, however temporarily or ambiguously, they trouble the distinction between happy and unhappy performativity.²⁹⁰

Most of the time, parafictions are intended to exist as happy performatives only momentarily, part of their efficacy dependent on ‘revealing them’ as unhappy utterances. The prosthetic condition, on the other hand, aspires for such happiness to be permanent. For the prosthetic condition, if taken seriously as a plausible ontological state for objects, beings, communities, and events, needs to maintain the belief in the fact that, despite their artificial origin, these objects, beings, communities, and events *are* real.

Because for the thinking around the prosthetic condition to be a useful tool, it needs to surpass the more traditional debates about fiction and deception in art and art making. Discussions about the ‘more real,’ the ‘fake image,’²⁹¹ ‘simulacra,’²⁹² or even

necessarily the same as believing in emotions or disregarding facts, it is definitely a risk that is present when taking the prosthetic condition seriously, as an ‘ontological alternative.’

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Armstrong, 123.

²⁹¹ See, among others, Armstrong, Elizabeth. “On the Border of the Real” in *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*. Minneapolis, Minnesota : Munich : DelMonico Books/Prestel: Minneapolis Institute of Arts. 2012.

²⁹² Naturally, the main authority here is Baudrillard. See Baudrillard, Jean. 1985. *Simulacres et simulation*. Édition : Editions Galilée. Paris: Editions Galilée.

trompe l'oeil seem less relevant because all of these terms are concerned with the look-a-like. The prosthetic condition, I think, is more attentive to a looked-at-a-like of sorts.

Understanding art as deceptive or tricky, as I have argued before, is by no means a characteristic of contemporary practices. It is a link that has existed and has been debated at length since antiquity. And perhaps because of this long history, because it is so embedded in the notion of art itself, there is a general tendency to disregard artistic creations as frivolous. Lambert-Beatty discusses this problem and identifies this belief as one that could potential thwart the efficacy of parafictional works. In addition, accepting that art may increasingly become a tool for the creation and shaping of the real alarms many, since granting art such power is frequently equated with an almost apocalyptic fear of losing reality and succumbing to the fake, to mere mirages.

However, I agree with Christoph Wulf when he argues that this fear is just based on a naïve understanding of what reality is²⁹³. I am convinced that contemporaneity in particular presents us with an expanded version of reality visible not only through artistic practices, but also through technology, science, politics. In contemporaneity, like in parafictions and like in the prosthetic condition, possibility becomes key. It is less about being and more about becoming—less about *is* and more about *could*.

What I am trying to argue here is that acknowledging the importance and pervasiveness of fiction and artificiality is not the same as denying any possible belief. On the contrary, displays of fiction like the ones we witness in parafictions and

²⁹³ See Gebauer, Gunter, and Christoph Wulf. 1996. *Mimesis: Culture - Art - Society*. Translated by Don Reneau. First edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

the ones that allow for the existence of the prosthetic *demand* believing and open a window into how the world could be if such belief was shared. But belief in the prosthetic condition—and I think in parafictions as well—needs flexibility. And it is complicated to argue that you believe when you are constantly changing your mind. Maybe, however, embracing and advancing some comfort with the provisory state of any belief could be a healthy objective. Perhaps, accepting this mutability goes a long way in dignifying the scurrying that Lambert-Beatty talks about. It may also free us and train us in different ways of being, relating, and producing.

Thinking about Simón Hosie's case, for instance, illustrates the possibility and fertility of a provisory belief while also underscoring some of the consequences that arise when such provisional certainty is understood as a mistake, when it is denied as a possibility. During the weeks in which the *lavandera* de Ciudad Bolívar was *real*, a number of tangible effects were created. For starters, Beatriz Gonzalez produced a series of paintings that were later shown at the Alonso Garcés Gallery in an exhibition titled 'Carta Furtiva' and that sold in their entirety only one hour after the exhibition was opening²⁹⁴. But the *lavandera*'s existence also launched a national debate about the conditions of single women displaced by Colombia's internal conflict. It exposed the frivolity (and, later on, the power) of the art world and its relationship with the market and it served as the starting point for an architectural and social development project in which displaced communities would find a space for leisure, education, and transmission of techniques for the making of various crafts²⁹⁵.

²⁹⁴ In this case, quite literally, the 'victim' of the hoax very clearly benefited from it—it partially earned her a successful sale.

²⁹⁵ The *lavandera* was the model-user considered by Hosie for the design of Casa de Valores—a series of buildings including workshops, day care facilities, library, food bank, and classrooms conceived of as a solution to the many problems of the migrant community inhabiting Ciudad Bolívar, the neighborhood where the *lavandera* was from.

Once revealed as an artwork, its effects were limited to momentary media uproar and a more lasting indignation among some sectors of the Colombian art world. Dismissed as ‘fake,’ as ‘just art,’ the potential power of the work to redistribute the sensible was quickly, and effectively, neutralized.

Which brings us to a good point to consider the importance of media for the prosthetic condition. In his book *Reality Hunger: A manifesto*²⁹⁶, David Shields comments on how mass media has reinforced the idea of truth and how it has become the locus of its communication, even if, paradoxically, the life span of facts have been shrinking rapidly. In this sense, one could argue, mass media practices the kind of provisory belief I am vouching for. However, the main difference with the provisory belief necessary for the prosthetic condition to work is that mass media’s is teleological, while prosthetic’s is erratic. This desire for a ‘final truth’ conflicts with the prosthetic—and sometimes also with the parafictional—because if, in these cases, one is looking for a straight, final answer, then one is missing the point. Once again, “the question isn’t *What do you look at?* but *What do you see?*.”²⁹⁷ And seeing, I have argued this before, is relational. It depends on your location, your culture, your physical abilities, the quality and quantity of light, etc.

Towards a Poetics of Relation and an Aesthetics of Bullshit

²⁹⁶ Shields, David. 2010. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred AKNopf.

²⁹⁷ David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred AKNopf, 2010) 117.

Here I go back to Edouard Glissant who proposes three different types of poetics²⁹⁸. He calls the first one *poetics of depth*, and has its epitome in figures like Charles Baudelaire—the universal model of this being ‘the human’ who, in order to be deciphered, requires a “vertiginous extension not out into the world but towards the abyss man carries with himself.” (24) It is, then, a poetics that when seeking for meaning looks inside, deeply. The works by Roland Barthes exemplify the second type that Glissant labels *poetics of structure*—still contained, but more interested in the connections within. The third one, *poetics of relation*, is the most productive for the understanding of the prosthetic condition, as its interest lies in understanding rather than discovering. Phenomena related to this particular type of poetics—like those readable through the prosthetic condition—are always open and fragmented, and despite their need to connect to create meaning through relation, this need is never conducive to a quantitative absolute. Which is another way of saying that it is provisory.

Perhaps, as Glissant proposes, contemporaneity is prone to a poetics of relation. And perhaps, a poetics of relation may encourage an aesthetic of bullshit. The prosthetic condition may benefit from both.

In 2005, Harry Frankfurt published a brief but meaty essay on bullshit²⁹⁹. At first, the document may appear as a joke. An emeritus philosophy professor from Princeton University publishes a little hardcover book, resembling of/mocking/mimicking (?) *serious* philosophical treaties—a sober, faux-leather dark cover, with a very simple crimson square on the center top where the inscription in golden letters (and with relief!) reads “On Bullshit.” Suspicious. You start (I did)

²⁹⁸ See, mainly, Glissant, Édouard. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

²⁹⁹ Frankfurt, Harry G. 2005. *On Bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

reading it with a grain of salt, alert not to succumb to the put-on. Pretty quickly, however, the reader realizes that it is ok to let her guard down because, yes, the book mimics/resembles/mocks philosophy treaties; it is a *fake*, but it also is tremendously serious—a *real* philosophical treaty in its own right. I like Frankfurt’s take on bullshit because, on one hand, it dignifies it. And on the other, it furthers the argument that fuels the prosthetic condition: there are ways of being, of inhabiting the world, that are indifferent to truth values, without this meaning that they are indifferent to reality.

A good part of Frankfurt’s text is devoted to dissecting the differences between lying and bullshitting, a paramount task if one is to defend the value of the later. To lie, he argues, implies a commitment with the truth—a liar’s intention is to deceive, to replace or hide the truth. Being the victim of a lie constitutes a personal affront and often comes accompanied with a sense of violation³⁰⁰ because ultimately the liar places himself in a position of superiority; he knows better.

Liars are, more often than not, pretentious pricks. Not the case with bullshitters³⁰¹. Because of their commitment with ‘the truth’, liars lack wiggle room—

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 55.

³⁰¹ Frankfurt sums up the difference in the following terms: “Telling a lie is an act with a sharp focus. It is designed to insert a particular falsehood at a specific point in a set or system of beliefs, in order to avoid the consequences of having that point occupied by the truth. This requires a degree of craftsmanship, in which the teller of the lie submits to objective constraints imposed by what he takes to be truth. The liar is inescapably concerned with truth-values. In order to invent a lie at all, he must think he knows what is true. An in order to invent an effective lie, he must design his falsehood under the guidance of that truth. [...] On the other hand, a person who undertakes to bullshit his way through has much more freedom. His focus is panoramic rather than particular. He does not limit himself to inserting a certain falsehood at a specific point, and thus is not concerned by the truths surrounding that point or intersecting it. He is prepared, so far as required, to fake the context as well. This freedom from the constraints to which the liar must submit does not necessarily mean, of course, that his task is easier than the task of the liar. But the mode of creativity upon which it relies is less analytical and less deliberative than that which is mobilized in lying. It is more expansive and independent, with more spacious opportunities for improvisation, color, and imaginative play.” Ibid. 51 – 53.

they have to stick to the ‘real’ (whatever they understand as such) and cannot entertain the possible. A practice of bullshit—necessary, I think, to achieve an aesthetic of this kind—is defined, according to Frankfurt, by a “lack of connection to a concern with truth, (an) indifference to how things *really are*”³⁰².³⁰³ ³⁰⁴ This, of course, grants the bullshitter freedom, a space for creation, play and poiesis that you cannot afford if you are lying. The focus of a lie is narrower, it is limited to that particular spec of truth that one wants to conceal; bullshit, on the other hand, has a more panoramic, relational, and even haphazard focus.

Earlier in this dissertation I argued that the prosthetic condition was not an action against, but an effort for. The same can be said about bullshitting. A liar is acting against the truth; a bullshitter is attempting to create a new one. This does not mean, of course, that bullshitting is not unproblematic. It often is. Partly, because it is a result of the ever-pressing feeling of needing to have an opinion on everything, regardless of whether or not you know—or care—what you are talking about. A feeling that appears stronger the more in tune you are with democracy. But also, because when bullshitting you know you are playing and do not really expect people to take you *that* seriously.

However, an aesthetic of bullshit could, perhaps, turn these problems into opportunities. Even when misinformed and ‘un-serious,’ bullshit mocks and thus destabilizes the intolerance of truth. And this is no small task, ethically and politically—but also more humbly, this disruption of the truth is needed and favorable for the existence of the prosthetic condition. Because when accepting the prosthetic

³⁰² My emphasis.

³⁰³ Ibid. 33 – 34.

³⁰⁴ Remember Mario Bellatin arguing that, for him, the distinction between what is real and what is fiction is reductive and unnecessary.

condition, I have said this numerous times at this point, one is denying ideal origins, essential meanings, and absolute thinking.

Similarly, bullshit is relevant for the prosthetic condition because, as a lot of the elements that are included in the timelines that open this chapter show, the practices I am concerned with here are usually ‘complemented’ by interventions of others that may be unaware of the crafting, at least in the way that such crafting is imagined by the artist behind it. Both Pedro Manrique Figueroa and la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar produced tons of bullshit and when proposing them as prosthetic beings the spectator/critic needs to take into account this production and sort through it—it becomes a pivotal part of what these beings *are* and *can be*.

If bullshit manages to stir away from the ‘truth obsession,’ it cannot escape its commitment to reality. Even when playful, bullshit attempts at creating a context, a given reality—in the hopes that people would believe in it. This is another point of strong connection between Frankfurt’s thesis and my proposal of the prosthetic condition, and partly explains why both bullshit and the prosthetic condition can be dismissed as being just plain fake.

Because as Phillip Dick alerts, the matter of defining the real is an extremely impactful issue, as it entails, by proxy, defining the human. His words:

The matter of defining what is real—this is a serious topic, even a vital topic. And in there somewhere is the other topic, the definition of the authentic human. Because the bombardment of pseudo-realities begins to produce inauthentic humans very quickly—as fake as the data pressing at them from all sides. Fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually into forgeries of themselves.³⁰⁵

Cataclysm.

³⁰⁵ Brook Gladstone, *The Trouble with Reality: A Ruminaton on Moral Panic in Our Time* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2017) 4 – 5.

Fake humans ~ Prosthetic Beings

Up to here—and before discussing in detail why I propose to read Ospina’s and Hosie’s works as pieces creating prosthetic beings—I want to recall five main points that I have been trying to advance so far. First, the ‘category’ of the human tends to be a convention, a shared agreement turned into a belief. Second, there is a difference between being true and being real, because reality can be constructed through the use of untruths. Third, parafictions, the prosthetic condition, and bullshit are all manners of crafting the real with fiction, with what is not necessarily true. Fourth, the creations resulting from parafictions and bullshit, and those affected by prosthetic condition are varied in kind, intention, and duration—as a consequence, some of them are easier to accept as real. And lastly, I claim that perhaps one of the hardest fictional creations to accept is the creation of beings—excluding, as I have described before, the crafting of the self—. Part of the difficulty, I think, is explained by the fact that some of these beings are capable of impacting the real as much as ‘natural humans’ could. They can behave, interact, look like and be mistaken as humans—which explains Dick’s fear in the quote I included above.

This is precisely what is at stake with Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar*. Among other things, both works flirt with the possibility of creating what Phillip Dick labels as ‘fake humans,’ capable of producing ‘fake realities.’ Note that Dick is here conflating the notions of truth and reality, which is precisely the opposition that is questioned by the prosthetic. In any case, I want to propose that works like the ones by Hosie and Ospina are problematic—and received both praise and loathe—because they touch into two

topics that are of interest not only to artistic practices, but also, and perhaps more vividly, to morality.

On the one hand, they imply—even if subtly—redefining the category of the human or, at least, considering what will happen if the category were to be expanded to include, precisely, artificial beings. On the other, they demand a discussion around fiction as a tool for art making and a technology to design and produce the real. Ospina and Hosie make visible, through art making, the power of believing in a fiction and, consequently, the power of turning a fiction, through belief, into a reality. The connections here with some of the pillars of contemporary societies—religion, politics, ethics, law—go without saying.

And once a fiction turns into a belief it is extremely complicated to dethrone. As a matter of fact, arguing that a given belief was produced through art may be one of the easiest and most effective ways to accomplish this dethronement, because what is immediately questioned here is the origin, the alleged lack of seriousness that infuses artistic practices. As humans—‘natural, organic humans’ that is—we seem to have a really hard time accepting the contingency of our beliefs³⁰⁶.

³⁰⁶ Freud explained it as follows: “In such a case a person would hear of something new which, on the ground of certain evidence, he is asked to accept as true; yet it contradicts many of his wishes and offends some of his highly treasured convictions. He will then hesitate, look for arguments to cast doubt on the new material, and so struggle for a while until at last he admits it himself: ‘this is true after all, although I find it hard to accept and it is painful to have to believe in it’. All we learn from this process is that it needs time for the intellectual work of the Ego to overcome objections that are invested by strong feelings.” (83-84) See Freud, Sigmund. 1955. *Moses and Monotheism*. 1 edition. New York: Vintage.

Neuroscience, years later, confirms: “Despite how certainty feels, it is neither a conscious choice nor even a thought process. Certainty and similar states of ‘knowing what we know’ arise out of involuntary brain mechanisms that, like love or anger, function independently of reason (...)The more committed we are to a belief, the harder it is to relinquish, even in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence. Instead of acknowledging an error in judgment and abandoning the opinion, we tend to develop a new attitude or belief that will justify retaining it.” See Burton, Robert. 2009. *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You’re Not*. Reprint.

This, evidently, poses a problem to the acceptance and efficacy of the prosthetic condition. In part, because nobody wants to keep changing their minds and the ways in which they understand and approach the world. Uncertainty is, certainly, not a state we desire nor one we feel comfortable inhabiting. But maybe we can train ourselves, and art cant help in achieving this, to be more at ease with shorter-lived certainties. Less essentialist, more tolerant³⁰⁷.

Engaging with fiction, participating in experiences that we know are not real, has historically been a manner of exploring (and feeling) other possible ways of existing. Fiction has been a safe place to experiment being others, inhabiting elsewhere, living by alternative, imaginary rules. Up to now we have been able to, for the most part, experience fiction with the security of being able to ‘exit’ it almost at will and return to the certainty of the *true* reality. Contemporaneity may be changing this and I wonder if the prosthetic condition could be, among other things, a tool to prepare for a not so distant future in which the only difference between reality and fiction would be how we refer to each of them and how we adjust our beliefs accordingly.

But I want to go back to the specifics of the works by Ospina and Hosie in an effort to justify why I believe they can be productively understood as prosthetic beings and thus contribute to the larger debate of fiction as a tool for creating and shaping reality. For starters, they are the result of an intention. Often times, however,

St. Martin’s Griffin.

³⁰⁷ Paul Bloom, in his book *How Pleasure Works*, argues that from an evolutionary stand point humans profited from essentialism mainly for survival and reproduction. In contemporaneity, we no longer need to be essentialist, however the desire is one that is very difficult to shake off: “we have evolved essentialism to help us make sense of the world, but now that we have it, it pushes our desires in directions that have nothing to do with survival and reproduction.” See Bloom, Paul. 2010. *How Pleasure Works : The New Science of Why We like What We like*. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton.

that intentionality is much less ambitious than the result it produces. In Ospina's case, it began as an undergraduate assignment, perhaps a juvenile prank. In Hosie's, it responded to an interest around the living conditions of part of the Colombian population and got fueled by another artist's open invitation to collaborate³⁰⁸. That is if we take Ospina's and Hosie's words at face value. Maybe we should not.

Once out there, once this intention becomes material—by the introduction of a collage, a letter, a pretend-bio...—, they ignite a process that becomes increasingly difficult for its creator to control. Media chimes in and other artists, critics, unadverted spectators, and informed spectators follow suit. New fragments, susceptible of becoming integral to the work, start appearing from different corners. Awareness of the 'artistic origin' of the phenomenon is, of course, not necessary and adds to the complexity of these practices. Just like it happens with bullshit, from hindsight you realize that you are always adding to the work, that perhaps in a much more radical way than the one you see in other more 'traditional' pieces, every reading becomes, automatically, a new fragment that may be included in future prosthetic renditions of the work.

Take, for instance, Pedro Manrique Figueroa's development. A class presentation in 1995, this nascent being got later complemented by an intervention in a local newspaper³⁰⁹, a number of collages started appearing in unsuspected places, an art magazine³¹⁰ published stories about his life and work, an exhibition in his memory

³⁰⁸ According to Hosie, Beatriz González's invitation to intervene her print published in the local newspaper was the kindler for the narrative shaping (the letter) of the lavandera.

³⁰⁹ "El Martes de las Artes," *El Espectador*, 1996.

³¹⁰ Espitia, Lorena. n.d. "Revista Valdéz – [esferapública]." Accessed August 29, 2018. <http://esferapublica.org/nfblog/revista-valdez/>.

was organized³¹¹, and a considerable amount of media buzz contributed to the visibility and robustness of the character. In 2007, reputed Colombian filmmaker, Luis Ospina released his film *Un tigre de papel* a benchmark for Manrique Figueroa's existence because not only it largely contributed to its saliency, but also because it triggered rumors that it was a *fake*.

This film, which would traditionally fall into the mockumentary category,³¹² is of special interest for the prosthetic condition. It is, first, a recompilation of fragments but, perhaps more importantly, it succeeds in the creation of a being, one that we never literally see or hear, but one that exists, that stands for a generation, and that was able to produce a number of effects. In a way, what Ospina does with this film is to materialize the Medusa effect I have been referencing throughout this dissertation. He selected a number of elements that participated in the construction of Manrique Figueroa, added some of his own crafting, and then disposed in a way so as to present a being. *Un tigre de papel* grants Manrique a sort of paradoxical conceptual materiality. But once released, this document contributes to the sum of fragments available for the prosthetic existence of Manrique. It becomes a network of nodes that is, in itself also a node.

I find the work of Argentine artist Tomás Saraceno³¹³ to be one that effectively visualizes this phenomenon. Bruno Latour has used the term

³¹¹ Ospina, Lucas. "Ecllosiona un arte : acercamiento a la vida de Pedro Manrique Figueroa." In *Exposición de Homenaje a Pedro Manrique Figueroa: Precursor del collage en Colombia*. Exh. cat. Bogotá, Colombia: Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo, April 1996.

³¹² See, among many others: Campbell, Miranda (2007). "The mocking mockumentary and the ethics of irony"(PDF). *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*. **11** (1): 53–62 // Juhasz, Alexandra, and Jesse Lerner. 2006. *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*. Visible Evidence; v. 17. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³¹³ See <http://tomassaraceno.com/>

‘composition’³¹⁴ to refer to Saraceno’s practice and argues: “what Saraceno’s work of art and engineering reveals is that multiplying the connections and assembling them closely enough will shift slowly from a network—which you can see through—to a sphere—difficult to see through.”³¹⁵ I argue that manifestations like *Un tigre de papel* assemble connections quite closely, turning a series of fragments into a conceptual whole. And they do so by reducing visibility—watching the documentary you end up with the feeling that you have exposed to a cogent, complete, entity. You may be under the impression that you now know who Pedro Manrique Figueroa *is*. Looking at the piece closely—or perhaps from afar, encompassing more time and space—you realize that it is, indeed, a sphere, but that it continues to be part of a network and thus functions, also, as a node. One that can be used to create different spheres.

And this is where these practices become ‘alive.’ Because almost anyone can contribute to their ongoing creation³¹⁶, they become impossible to control and they start developing their own dynamics and processes. They exist in a continuous becoming that only stops when a reading is proposed, regardless of what type of reading it is—each reading producing a new prosthetic being that, in turn, will become another element available for the construction of a different being.³¹⁷ These

³¹⁴ He takes the idea of composition further and presents it as his ‘solution’ to the modern/postmodern divide: “I have come to use the word ‘composition’ to regroup in one term these many bubbles, spheres, networks, and snippets of arts and science. This concept (...) allows us to move from spheres to networks with enough of a common vocabulary, but without a settled hierarchy (...) Composition may become a plausible alternative to modernization. What can no longer be modernized, what has been postmodernized to bits and pieces, can still be composed.” (52)

³¹⁵ Bruno Latour, “Networks,” 42.

³¹⁶ This does not mean, of course, that hierarchies do not matter. They do. Some contributors are more ‘respected’ than others and thus their ‘additions’ are more visible and more easily accepted.

³¹⁷ Lucas Ospina often claims that the Manrique from *Un tigre de papel* is *otro* Manrique. And it definitely is, one of the multiple Manriques possible—This is the

readings, evidently, share some elements, some nodes. However, the most tangible commonality is that when deployed, these readings freeze—or at least attempt to do so—a practice that is fluid. They prosthetically produce provisional entities, provisional being in the case at hand.

Perhaps, because the creations increasingly become detached from their original authors, one could argue that these beings—Pedro Manrique Figueroa and *la lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar* become ‘living beings.’ Naturally, I do not mean that they are organically alive, but that they are animated, prosthetically alive—responding to a different ontology, but capable of producing very real effects. Performative beings as they are, their meaning is defined locally and they require for a community of believers, one that is willing to take them seriously.

I tend to believe that sustaining that belief and acting on it is the biggest challenge that artistic practices affected by the prosthetic condition face. As I have said before, the acknowledgement the fictionality tends to obliterate the seriousness of the creation—which is equivalent to saying that these creations lose steam when they are revealed as art. Curiously enough, however, the judgment of the fictionality is more severe in cases when the artist creates beings differing with him in gender, class, political positioning—as if fictionally creating the self was a much more legitimate practice than creating the other. And yet, as it has been showed and argued several times, the other is mainly a fictional construct.

It may seem like a stretch to argue that artistic practices like the ones that engender Manrique Figueroa or *la lavandera*, help us think through the possibility of coexisting with ‘fake humans.’ And it may well be. However, I still claim that these experiments with creation, that end up producing beings are an analog version of flexibility that the prosthetic grants and that cannot be preserved with an essentialist ontology.

some of the challenges we will face with technology. If we reach a point where genetics, or robotics, succeed in artificially creating life, the conversations that surface with Ospina's and Hosie's work would become more urgent. And possibly, then, we won't be able to dismiss them by claiming that they are *just art*.

CONCLUSIONS
Elements To Begin Crafting a Conclusion (In Five Parts)

Elements To Begin Crafting a Conclusion (In Five Parts)

There is something flustering about writing a conclusion for a project that is, still and very consciously, a work in progress. As a result, perhaps, what follows will not be the closing of an argument but rather a rumination on five specific points that, I think, are raised by the prosthetic condition and merit further consideration, research, and exploration. I have said it countless times so far, but I will say it one more, in case you are a reader jumping to conclusions: the prosthetic condition is a way of being in the world, a manner of existing in contemporaneity in which physicality is no longer essential. I have argued in this dissertation that objects and beings—the self included—can exist prosthetically, and I am convinced that the same condition could apply for events and communities. I tend to believe that prosthetic existences will augment in the near future, as we advance technology and genetics, as we expand the boundaries of the human, and explore alternative ways of being together. Similarly, I am inclined to claim that artistic practices, and whatever artistic practices *trigger*, are privileged platforms to perform this *way of being*—perform it while, at the same time, paving the road for a discussion that exceeds the boundaries of the art world to question our place in the world, ethically, politically, creatively.

A prosthetic existence is conceptual. An undeniable handicap in a world where seeing is believing and where reality is understood, as Philip Dick once put it, as that which, “...when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” I am not sure I agree with Dick on this point because it seems to me that, and this is Žižek’s idea³¹⁸, our history as a species can be described as a transition from the realm of the animal to that of the mind. So many of the entities that populate contemporaneity are not

³¹⁸ See: Žižek, Slavoj. 2001. *On Belief*. London; New York: Routledge.

there, and consequently cannot literally *go away*, that to follow Dick's point would be reductive. Actually, it seems that there is a good number of things that exist, that are real, solely because we believe in them. This dependence on belief, contrary to what Dick argues, is the guarantee of realness and not its condemnation. At least this is the kind of reality that the prosthetic is concerned with.

The five points that follow, and that compose this conclusion, are different ways of thinking about the conceptual nature of the prosthetic condition. They underscore the fact that, as most concepts, their efficacy depends on agreement—the prosthetic condition can only *be* if it has a community of believers that can support its dwelling in contemporaneity. When lacking such a community, and some of the cases I analyze in this dissertation prove it, the prosthetic and the elements that make it possible will be rather quickly disregarded as *just art*.

1. A Matter Of Language / Language Matters

I might not have said this very bluntly in the dissertation, but the prosthetic condition depends on language. It does so because, so far, it is the only manner in which we have managed to put together a series of fragments in a way that can be presented as a meaningful whole, even if mobile and provisory. I am not here equating language with narrativity—even though narration occupies a central point in this debate—; rather, I am using it to denote the act of grouping symbols to communicate a concept.

Sometimes, such symbols belong to different systems, but they often do not. They are, however, translatable. And this translatability is precisely the characteristic that has allowed languages, of the most diverse kinds, to be tools for the construction

of the world and the real³¹⁹. Fortunately, I think, this does not look like something that is going to change anytime soon. On the contrary, it promises to expand, to become even more pervasive and powerful. First, we have the Internet, this massive network of information, epistemology, exchange, belief, and poiesis. As the editors of the *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*³²⁰ stated “ (...) the condition for anything to enter the network to become information is that it must first be abstracted into language,”³²¹ which consequently means that everything that is originated through the Internet has, if not a linguistic core, at least a linguistic seed. The abstraction is simultaneously a cause and an effect of its translatability that, in turn, is the promise of always being able to be something else. Once this ‘anything’ becomes part of the Internet, it can be extracted and modified to create other, almost any, *things*.

Similarly—and to name only another sphere where language is of the essence—the current state of genetics begs consideration to the question: what are we? Some of the answers to this query have been pretty straightforward: we are information, a code, akin to a text susceptible of being ‘edited.’ If so, what is, then, the meaning of this text? How can it be used, transformed? How much can it be edited before we start just writing a different text altogether? Is there a *true, natural* text? The discipline of disability studies has been grappling with these questions for a

³¹⁹ The thinking of John Searle that followed his and others explorations of speech act theory is particularly relevant for this point. See: Searle, John R. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Free Press. // Searle, John R. 1998. *Mind Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*. New York: Basic Books. // Searle, John R. 2010. *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

³²⁰ See Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds. 2015. *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

³²¹ *Ibid.* 8.

while³²², and its scholars have alerted us regarding the risks of normalizing a text, whatever kind it might be.

The prosthetic is, by definition, opposed to the possibility of a ‘normal text.’ I have explained here how every entity produced prosthetically is different every time, regardless of who and what are participating in its creation. It is not only almost the same as a *real* entity, but not quite; it is, also, almost the same as the previous prosthetic entity, but not quite. And here I think it is worth remembering the importance of network thinking for my argument—a prosthetic entity is composed of fragments that work as nodes for the creation of a network. And once such network is built, it gives meaning, thus existence, to the *text* that a prosthetic entity is.

Therefore, the conceptual existence of the prosthetic is also linguistic, and so are many of the fragments used in its crafting. The relationship between this variation of language and material reality is, arguably, a different matter. Objects and beings exist physically. Whenever their existence is deemed linguistic they are labeled as fictional—thus, not real. The prosthetic combats that equation. Maybe, as proposed by JC Wilson in his discussion of a ‘normal’ genetic text, the focus should not be to eliminate the ‘abnormal,’ ‘fictional’ text, but rather to accommodate variations of it. Likewise, maybe our focus, as scholars and citizens, should be less to categorize the fictional against the real but to accommodate, accept, and foster variations of reality. To try, as much as possible, to be true to fiction.

2. True To Fiction

³²² See, among others, Wilson, Jc. 2002. “(Re)writing the Genetic Body-Text: Disability, Textuality, and the Human Genome Project.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 50: 23–39.

Fiction has been a prevalent notion throughout this dissertation. A huge part of it is, naturally, a response to the fact that I am dealing here with art and literature. Often, they are used as synonyms, referring to practices and objects that exist *opposed to* the real. Art is one thing; the real world is another. And often as well, being in the ‘art world’ allows you to do things unimaginable to achieve—and/or to get away with—in the *real* world. But fiction has not only been important to my argument as a consequence of the nature of my objects of study. Frequently, the term is used pejoratively—prosthetic entities get labeled as fictional when they are discovered as artificial, which is a judgment that usually includes accusing the entity or its production of frivolity, and disregarding its potential effects, its potential impact in the real world.

More importantly, however, fiction is central to my argument because the prosthetic condition is a creative act, human-made, artificial. As such, it is an invitation to be true to fiction—to acknowledge its increasing power in the shaping, making, and erasing of whatever a community experiences as real. At this point in history, I think, it is safe to say that the crafting of the real by using fiction has been both praised and loathed. In fact, Jean Baudrillard, one of the theorists whose thinking serves as a prompt for the prosthetic, warned us repeatedly and urgently about the perils of loosing the real and inhabiting mere simulacra, fictions.

Some have even argued that part of the devastation that has been produced by the Anthropocene can be seen as an opportunity for creation, a generative phenomenon that will allow us to re-invent the natural, but enhanced³²³. I am not

³²³ See: Madliger, Christine L., Craig E. Franklin, Kevin R. Hultine, Mark Van Kleunen, Robert J. Lennox, Oliver P. Love, Jodie L. Rummer, and Steven J. Cooke. 2017. “Conservation Physiology and the Quest for a ‘good’ Anthropocene.”

particularly interested here in passing any value judgments regarding these ideas. I am, and it must be clear by now, a true believer in the transformative power of fiction. I am also convinced that, as much as it is a tool for the creation of the real, it is a pathway for humans to laugh at the truth, to make the truth laugh. Just as William of Baskerville, the fictional friar of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, states, "Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to make truth laugh, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth."³²⁴ And this, history has shown, is a healthy practice—when truth does not accept laughter, it tends to get pretty nasty.

Furthermore, it is through fiction in general and through the prosthetic condition in particular, that you can accomplish and produce entities and effects impossible to attain within the boundaries of the real. Think about technologies like virtual embodiment, that allow you to experience being someone else, to *wear* a different body³²⁵, or virtual realities concurrent to our day to day experiences, or even 'simpler' manifestations like cinema or literature. All of these experiences of and with fiction trigger, among the many other things that I have mentioned in this document, emotions. And emotions always register as real, and constitute one of the most effective prompts for human action. Fiction can produce and activate emotions, regardless of whether or not those emotions are rational³²⁶. Despite their immateriality,

Conservation Physiology 5 (1) // Bennett, Elena M., Martin Solan, Reinette Biggs, Timon Mcphearson, Albert V. Norström, Per Olsson, Laura Pereira, et al. 2016. "Bright Spots: Seeds of a Good Anthropocene." *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 14 (8): 441–448. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.1309>.

³²⁴ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2014) 491.

³²⁵ The work of the Vives-Sánchez Lab, in Barcelona, has been remarkable on this respect. For a description of their work and access to some of its publications visit <http://www.sanchez-vives.org/> or watch Thomas Metzinger's Ted talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZsDDseI5QI>

³²⁶ See "I Must First Appologize..." Brian Kuan Wood In Conversation with Joana

experiencing an emotion is a guarantee of its existence—we believe emotions are, and feel, real, even if they are difficult to grasp. They are “real to me”—a claim often advanced by artists whose work can be read through the prosthetic lens. The strength of such reality is dependent on, I think, the size of this “me.” The larger the community of believers that supports a prosthetic existence, the more impactful this existence will be.

The prosthetic is, thus, both an invitation and a proof. An invitation to believe that language matters and that through language—of various kinds and obeying diverse systems—we can produce effective fictions, makers of real entities, emotions included. The prosthetic is also proof that the more we believe in fictions, the more powerful they are, and the stronger they get when this belief is shared.

3. Agreeing To Believe

Beliefs make us *do* things. They have a poetic power. Through belief and language we can animate fiction and non-fiction³²⁷, we can alter and produce the real. Through shared belief and translatable languages, we set frameworks of behavior, define, elicit, and shape action. We can even trigger experiences in which “complex forms of virtual reality are created by our brains,”³²⁸ in ways in which it is impossible

Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds. 2015. *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

³²⁷ See: Mel Chen.

³²⁸ See: Friend, Tad. 2018. “How Frightened Should We Be of A.I.?” *The New Yorker*, May 7, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/05/14/how-frightened-should-we-be-of-ai>.

to differentiate them from the *real*. For the prosthetic, let us remember and allow me to say it once more, such distinction is somewhat irrelevant³²⁹.

If a prosthetic entity is felt to be real, believed to be real and capable of producing real effects then, I have been trying to argue up until now, it *is* real. But it is so in a different way. In his text *On Belief*, Žizek asks, “For a human being, is ‘reality’ not ontologically defined through the minimum of resistance—real is that which resists, that which is not totally malleable to the caprices of our imagination?”³³⁰ I would say that up to very recently this was, perhaps, one of the most accurate definitions of the term, but I am less certain that it fully holds in contemporaneity, and I doubt that it will be on target in the years to come. Maybe, the prosthetic prepares us for this transition, for an existence in which reality too is malleable to the caprices of our imagination. For better and for worse. Perhaps, reality (is?) will no longer be about resistance but about poiesis; no longer a reaction against but an action for—in a powerful juncture between what Jacques Rancière calls the autonomy of art and the promise of politics³³¹. The shift that could come with this alternative approximation to reality is considerable—the question would no longer be *is x real?* Nor would it even be *could x be real?* Rather, it will most likely be *do we want x to be real?* This transition involves, at least, belief and agreement. Actually, it requires an attitude not very different to the one democratic societies have developed towards the rule of law. The law, we know this, is crafted and susceptible to being modified. It is, also, the result of an agreement that translates, if partially, shared

³²⁹ In a similar way in which the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is irrelevant for Bellatin, see page 129.

³³⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001) 51.

³³¹ See: Rancière, Jacques. 2017. “The Aesthetic Revolution.” *Maska* 32 (185): 10–24.

beliefs. An agreement that very clearly produces effects. However, it is worth asking if the sole agreement is enough—be it for defining the real or for enforcing the law.

Zizek has an answer to this:

It is not enough to have the rule of laws on which we all agree and which then regulate the interaction between individuals in order to avoid the war of all against all that characterizes the state of nature: in order for the laws to be operative, there must be a One, a person with the ultimate power to decide what are the laws. Mutually recognized rules are not enough—there must be a Master to enforce them (...) the sovereign who I experience not as the extension of my own will, as the personification of my ethical substance, but as an arbitrary foreign force.³³²

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I tried to show how, in the definition of the prosthetic, there are some operative hierarchies that influence the degree of ‘realness’ of a given entity. When the prosthetic object is, say, proposed by the artist who triggered its existence, then it is deemed to be *more true, more real*. Similarly, in general terms, we are more at ease accepting Mario Bellatin’s fictional creation of himself as real than we are accepting Lucas Ospina’s fictional creation of Pedro Manrique Figueroa as a reality. So, yes, mere agreement is not enough, particularly when faced with an authority that presents itself as more powerful than the shared belief—that is, an authority capable of turning a reality into a fiction, a crafting into *just art*.

However, I intuit that this sovereign power, which can sometimes be monopolized by different actors in different contexts, will be increasingly defied as we witness a rise in the number of entities whose existence can be deemed prosthetic. Because what I think will change with the acceptance of a different way of existing, a different way of being real, is, precisely, the ethical substance that Zizek mentions. With the prosthetic we are invited to *elect* a new sovereign, to draft a new ethical

³³² Žižek 136 – 137.

framework, perhaps a less stable one—one in which there is a place for opacity and one where opacity does not necessarily imply a threat.

4. A Place for Opacity

Here I return to the theories advanced by Édouard Glissant to consider a concept I have not mentioned yet: opacity. Attached to his ideas about relation as a poetics—and as the preponderant ethos in the Caribbean and, perhaps, the entirety of Latin America—Glissant speaks of a right to opacity. Relation is murky, opaque. It is opposed to the very engrained idea in Western thought, according to which knowledge equals transparency. The prosthetic, I have claimed, is also murky in its own way. And while it is true that the prosthetic is more closely linked to ontology—even if to oppose it—, it clearly affects, by proxy, epistemology.

The impossibility of ever attaining something like an essential prosthetic entity contradicts the equation between knowledge and transparency, and invites us to accept what we could call, following Glissant, the prosthetic's right to opacity.³³³ With this prerogative, one could agree that the prosthetic condition is not only the recognition of a *different* way of existing, but one that, in addition to being different, is also, slightly, opaque, inaccessible—that is, it is not reducible to a simple singularity, and it requires us to give up the obsession with discovering essential cores.

³³³ Glissant explains that opacity does not need to be obscure, but that it is often perceived as such. Mainly because that which is opaque is irreducible—relation favors expansion, over depth. (191)

The thought of opacity, Glissant claims, distracts us from absolute truths whose guardians we might believe ourselves to be. (192) It goes without saying that what we are calling here the prosthetic condition's right to opacity has the same effect, only that it is potentialized by the prosthetic's own manner of becoming and enduring. But, again, not to ascribe to a fatalist impossibility of knowledge or an extreme relativism—rather to recognize the limits of truths, regardless of how absolute we may find them and regardless of how final they present themselves to be.

And one last thing. Since opacity applies also to the self, be it prosthetic or not³³⁴, it allows us to accept the opacity of the other with less conflicts, understanding that our own opacity is also inaccessible to him. This, consequently, lays the grounds for alternative communities in which togetherness is achieved through the attraction to opacity and not via the control of the transparent—through admiration, rather than tolerance³³⁵. Perhaps what brings us together, and what makes the prosthetic condition fertile in present times, is our desire for the unknown coupled with an optimistic acceptance that such desire will never be fully satisfied. The prosthetic implies approaching the unknown and performing with it an act of creation and belief, to momentarily *know* and humbly accept that such fleeting knowledge has not reduced, at all, the vastness of the unknown that was first approached. Quite the opposite.

³³⁴ At this point is worth asking if contemporaneity, with all its technologies of relation and existence, even allows for the existence of a self that is *not* prosthetic. See: Metzinger, Thomas. 2010. *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. Reprint edition. New York: Basic Books.

³³⁵ This is a formula initially proposed by former mayor of Bogotá, Antanas Mockus. For more about his political, aesthetical and ethical impact see: Tognato, Carlo. 2015. *Cultural Agents Reloaded: The Legacy of Antanas Mockus*. The Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard University.

5. Where From Here?

To be completely honest, I do not know. But I do have some intuitions. I think that a good place to start would be, even for a moment or as simple thought experiment, to admit that contemporaneity is generative. And it is so for two main reasons. First, because we, as humans, have wrecked a considerable amount of devastation, that demands to be responsibly acknowledged. Such a state of affairs, I argue, prompts us to imagine what the world would like in the future, taking into account that we have arguably destroyed a good part of it already. Second, because this reconstruction of the world will have to be, largely, artificial. And while it is true that artificiality has always been capable of replacing and enhancing the natural—think, for instance, when we substituted legs for wheels— never before have we been able to not only enhance nature but to overall replace it with a *better* version³³⁶.

‘Better,’ as we know by heart, is no essential category. It is a matter of ethics, of choice and belief³³⁷. Perhaps, we are witnessing the construction of a different ‘better,’ a new ethical framework that is partially the consequence of our lack of faith in the old(s) one(s). Perhaps, the prosthetic is a consequence of this new framework, while simultaneously being a tool to draw and define it.

Contemporaneity gives us, then, the opportunity to build a new ethical sustenance, a different framework for our being in the world. Maybe even a better one. Among other things, such a framework is constructed and populated with objects

³³⁶ See: Moreno, Gean. “Notes on the Inorganic, Part 1: Accelerations,” in Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds. 2015. *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press //

³³⁷ Žižek argues that the ethical sustenance of a community depends on nothing other than belief to such a point to which, we are even ready to perform countless (and often meaningless) sacrifices. (150)

and beings—some of them, I am convinced, existing prosthetically.³³⁸ And objects and beings, when put together, create communities.

They can create, for instance, communities of exchange, such as the one activated by Mario Bellatin in his project *The Thousand Books of Mario Bellatin*, which I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation. Or the one spearheaded by Roberto Jacoby and his Proyecto Venus, a virtual community that, among other things, exchanged real-life services³³⁹. They can also produce communities of resistance—actually they often are. Or just communities *tout court*, spaces for dwelling that need, in order to be operative, agreement and shared beliefs. Because while it is true that communities are still mostly imagined, as Benedict Anderson posited, they are now much more easily crafted—a plasticity that becomes all the more relevant today when *real* communities continue to be disrupted by man or nature. The difference being that, today, physical proximity is not a prerequisite for being close³⁴⁰. And artistic practices are usually at the vanguard of endeavors that envision and materialize new ways of being together that account for such manners of contemporary closeness.

The prosthetic condition, when used to approach artificial communities, may become a tool to understand how artistic practices can advance feelings of belonging

³³⁸ It will be interesting to see if prosthetic beings and objects will be affected by the same animacy hierarchies as those currently in place. Would they too be gendered, classed, racialized, etc?

³³⁹ See Jacoby, Roberto. 2011. *El deseo nace del derrumbe: acciones, conceptos, escritos*. 1. ed. Barcelona: Ediciones de la Central.

³⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, in *Postmodern Ethics*, states: “The morality which we have inherited from premodern times—the only morality we have—is a morality of proximity, and as such is woefully inadequate in a society in which all important action is an action on distance (...) Moral responsibility prompts us to care that our children are fed, clad and shod; it cannot offer us much practical advice, however, when faced with numbing images of a depleted, desiccated and overheated planet which our children, and the children of our children will inherit and have to inhabit in the direct or oblique result of our collective unconcern.” (67)

and togetherness—how they can favor the transition between a human gathering, by choice or by accident, and a community. Because creating a community implies opening a new space—of exchange, of belief, of resistance, of dwelling—for the interaction of beings and/with objects. And such opening is also a creation—it implies connecting fragments, weaving a network of meaning that, in this particular case, becomes a space to be inhabited³⁴¹. The heftier the weaving, the closer the community will be—perhaps, the closer it is—the more it will resemble a *real*, historic, atavic one.

New explorations can also pay attention to prosthetic events, and study how they increasingly affect public opinion. They could also dig deeper into the hierarchies that are established between prosthetic beings, how they mimic existing social relations, how they engender subjectivities, and how mobile can such subjectivities actually be.

But for now, I hope that the prosthetic condition can serve as a tool to read contemporaneity as it is produced and intervened by art. And as such, it should account for ways of existing that have been so far ignored, despised, or labeled as fictional. It should remind us of the power of our agency, while underscoring the impossibility of controlling it fully. Perhaps more importantly, the prosthetic condition, because it is the result of an artificial crafting, must compel us to assess our ethical positioning. It should arouse our desire to better explain—and communicate—what *better* means, for each of us. And build upon it.

³⁴¹ The work of artist Tomás Saraceno illustrates this transition: “(the work) reveals that multiplying the connections and assembling them closely enough will shift slowly from a network (which you can see through) to a sphere (difficult to see through).” See Latour Bruno, “Some experiments in Art and Politics” in Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds. 2015. *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

ADDENDUM 1

PEDRO MANRIQUE FIGUEROA

Timeline

1934

* Pedro Manrique Figueroa is born in Choachí, Cundinamarca, Colombia.

1995

* Lucas Ospina and Bernardo Ortiz are undergraduate students at Universidad de los Andes

They are registered in the course “La palabra figurada”

One of the course’s requirements was a presentation about an artist whose work combined words and images

Ospina and Ortiz presented the life and work of Pedro Manrique Figueroa, precursor of collage in Colombia

Ospina and Ortiz receive a satisfactory grade. The professor in charge of the course mentions that there are certain similarities between Manrique and a number of fictional texts by Julio Cortázar

* Lucas Ospina and Bernardo Ortiz are in charge of curating and editing “El martes de las artes,” the section devoted to arts and culture published by El Espectador, one of the two most important national newspapers.

Ospina and Ortiz devoted the section to Pedro Manrique Figueroa and his time at Universidad de los Andes.

* The peer-reviewed journal *Historia Crítica* publish 16 of Manrique’s collages in its Issue n. 11 (July-December 1995)

1996

* Lucas Ospina, Bernardo Ortiz and François Bucher receive a grant from the Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo, the local government agency in charge of cultural policy and management in Bogotá.

* Ospina, Ortiz, and Bucher use the grant to produce an arts magazine, *Valdez*.

April 1996

* Opening of the exhibition “Homenaje a Pedro Manrique Figueroa” at Galería Santafe, Bogotá. Organized by Lucas Ospina, it included 10 collages by Manrique, dated between 1953 and 1980.

The exhibition also featured works by other Colombian artists (Maria Paz Jaramillo, German Martínez, and Jaime Cerón, among others), who claimed that Manrique’s practice had influenced their own.

Sometime between 1996 and 1999

* The first two issues of *Valdez* were published, both included texts and images about Manrique and his work

* *Valdez* 1 featured:

Texts:

“Mi obra soy yo” by Lucas Ospina and François Bucher

Images:

Triple Agente, collage, 1975.

* *Valdez* 2 featured:

Texts:

“Introducción a los Evangelios de Manrique según Francisco, según Lucas y según Eduardo—Homenaje al precursor de la memoria” by Victor Manuel Rodríguez

Images:

Five blurry headshots accompanying the text. Unclear as of whether or not they belong to Manrique.

October 1999

*Valdez 3 was published featuring:

Texts:

“Los años cero” by Carolina Sanín

“Los años rosa” by Carolina Sanín

“Los años rojos” by Lucas Ospina

“Manrique literario” by Carolina Sanín

Images:

Al Diablo con Mao, collage, 1976.

February 2000

Valdez 4 was published featuring:

Texts:

“Antropólogo” by Carolina Sanín

“El Educado” by Carolina Sanín

“El público” by Carolina Sanín

“Usaquén” by Carolina Sanín

“Apología a la droga” by Lucas Ospina

“Teresa Otalora Manrique”

Images:

La coca de los Santos, collage, 1975.

2000

* Manrique exhibits at multiple venues, including the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and the gallery Escobar Rosas

2002

The exhibition *5 American Collages* opens at Penrose Gallery, Philadelphia.

October 2003

Valdez 5 (the last in the series) was published featuring:

Texts:

“5 Documents from a show of an exhibition” by Lucas Ospina,
Justin Audia, Alberto Baraya, and Gloria Serrano

“On Stage: Pedro Manrique Figueroa and the Rhetoric of
Modernist Art History” by Victor Manuel Rodríguez

“La escuela Manrique” by François Bucher

Images:

La coca de los Santos, collage, 1975.

2006

* First iteration of *Museo de la Pobreza*, a project by Pedro Manrique
Figueroa, New York City.

2007

* The documentary, *Un tigre de papel* by Luis Ospina, is released

* Second iteration of *Museo de la Pobreza*, a project by Pedro Manrique
Figueroa, Minneapolis.

* Third iteration of *Museo de la Pobreza*, a project by Pedro Manrique
Figueroa, Copenhagen.

2008

* Manrique’s work is featured at the Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño and
the National Artists’ Salon

2013

* Carolina Sanín publishes *Yosoyú*, a compilation of all of her texts on Pedro Manrique Figueroa

2017

* MoMA acquires Manrique's piece *Poetry*, color slides, 2008

Additionally, since 1996, different media outlets have been publishing contradictory reports about Manrique, his work, and his nature. Some worth mentioning:

“Una existencia misteriosa”. *El Tiempo*, 26 de abril, 1996.

“El precursor del collage en Colombia. Un artista que a pesar de ser una ficción ha ejercido considerable influencia en el arte nacional” *Revista Semana*, 27 de mayo, 1996.

“En busca de las huellas de Manrique”. *El Tiempo*, 27 de junio, 2000.

Ospina, Lucas. “Una conferencia sobre el caso Pedro Manrique Figueroa” *Los 10 salones regionales de artistas (2003_2004)*.

“La muerte del autor”. *El Tiempo*, 13 de mayo, 2004.

“¿El secreto mejor guardado del arte colombiano?” *Revista Semana*, 23 de agosto, 2007.

Ospina, Lucas. “El Lobito bueno.” *Esferapublica*, 2007.

Villamarín, Paola. “Nadie da cuenta del paradero de Pedro Manrique Figueroa, el padre del collage en Colombia”. *El Tiempo*, 22 de septiembre, 2007.

Castell Villarreal, Ana María. “El parque de la (in) dependencia. *El Espectador*, 14 de abril, 2008.

Ospina, Lucas. “Pedro Manrique Figueroa: the last art student of Universidad de los Andes (a collage), <http://terremoto.mx/>, 2015

ADDENDUM 2

LA LAVANDERA DE CIUDAD BOLÍVAR

Timeline

1999-2003

* Hosie lives and works in Guanacas, a marginal, indigenous community in Southern Colombia. There he develops the project “Casa del Pueblo,” a library-community center designed and built by Hosie in collaboration with the inhabitants of Guanacas.

* While in Guanacas, Hosie becomes interested in the houses façades that often featured particular stains (borrones), partially hiding written attacks authored by different participants of the Colombian conflict. He paints a series of canvases inspired in these observations and ‘exhibits’ them in the façades of Guanacas.

* The Casa del Pueblo project implies recognition to important members of the community, whose portraits appear on the walls of the center. To identify them, Hosie invites the local community to write, instead of CVs (hojas de vida), cartas de vida, letters in which the inhabitants will describe their life-story.

2004

* Hosie receives the Premio Nacional de Arquitectura for his Guanacas project.

2005

* Hosie starts visiting Ciudad Bolívar, exploring some of the concerns he had while living in Guanacas but with a more urban perspective

* He continues his 'façade series' and 'exhibits' them in Ciudad Bolívar. There, the borrones were no longer covering attacks but were a trace of different services offered to make some money.

2006 - 2008

* Hosie starts developing the idea of a 'Casa de Valores,' a version of the Guanaca's Casa del Pueblo, that would respond to the needs of the inhabitants of Ciudad Bolívar.

* With the Casa de Valores project in mind, Hosie starts imagining its 'ideal-user' and sets on the figure of a lavandera, an impoverished clothes washer, displaced from the rural violence and trying to make a living in the city.

* Hosie starts making large format paintings of the lavandera

2008

* 05.23 - National newspaper *El Tiempo* includes a print by artist Beatriz González depicting the recently assassinated community leader, Yolanda Izquierdo. The image was González's participation in that year's National Salon and was later part of her exhibition "Ondas de Rancho Grande." It was reproduced massively, a print delivered with each copy of the newspaper. It came with an invitation by González to 'intervene' the work, which could then be sent to her gallery for 'authentication' with the artist's signature. *El Tiempo* promised to publish the 'best' intervention in a future edition.

* Hosie sees the possibility of intervention as the chance to give a voice to his lavandera and writes Carta de vida de una lavandera. The letter is delivered to Beatriz González's gallery as indicated in the invitation to intervene that *El Tiempo* published. The letter is not signed and there is no indication that Hosie is the author.

* 11.05 – The exhibition “Ondas de Rancho Grande” by Beatriz González opens at the Galería Sextante. The show is devoted to the leader Yolanda Izquierdo and includes parts of the creative process triggered by González’s invitation to intervene one of her prints that circulate in May 2008 with the daily edition of *El Tiempo*.

2009

* 05. - The exhibition “Carta Furtiva” opens at the Galeria Alonso Garcés in Bogotá. Among the pieces exhibited is the letter from the lavandera de Ciudad Bolívar that González received and that triggered the show. The letter was the only object not on sale.

* 05.20 – “Historia de una carta furtiva,” *El tiempo*

Article about González’s exhibition *Carta furtiva*. It explains how the letter triggered the show and summarizes Gonzalez’s thoughts and feelings towards it.

* July – Hosie intervenes the Plaza de Bolívar. He builds the house of the lavandera, mimicking the constructions he had seen in Ciudad Bolívar. The intervention lasts 6 days. While the intervention is on view, *El Tiempo* reveals that Hosie is the real author behind the carta de vida de una lavandera, called carta furtive by González.

* 07.31 – “La lavandera en la plaza,” *El Tiempo*

Article about Hosie’s public intervention in Bogotá’s main square where he installed the ‘lavandera’s house,’ a replica of the constructions that populate local shanty towns

2010

* The magazine Buenas, authored by Hosie is published. It contains life stories of twelve inhabitants of Ciudad Bolívar. Its format is a parody of celebrity tabloids.

* The exhibition “Ablando con la pared” opens at the Museo de Artes Visuales, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano. The exhibition features exclusively works by Hosie, including paintings, photographs, architecture models, writings, and the carta de vida de una lavandera.

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