

DOSSIER

QUEER/QUIR DE LAS AMÉRICAS: TRADUCCIÓN, DECOLONIALIDAD Y LO INCONMENSURABLE



Lino Arruda. ST.

**HEMISPHERIC QUEER/QUIR
AND FEMINIST WRITING: TRANSLATING
(DIS)ENCOUNTERS
ESCRITURAS QUEER/QUIR
Y FEMINISTAS HEMISFÉRICAS: TRADUCIR (DES)ENCUENTROS**

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ABSTRACT

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Probing the forms of queer/ cuir and feminist intimacies which ground hemispheric networks, this article sets out to investigate the ephemeral modes of togetherness that connect distant, yet tightly related, cultural scenes across the Americas. To this end, it focuses on the exchanges between two Argentine and U.S. queer/feminist independent publishing projects: Buenos Aires press and art gallery 'Belleza y Felicidad' (ByF, 1999-2007) and 'Belladonna' (BD, 1999-today), a U.S. reading series and press which, like ByF, is run by women. In particular, this article examines the publication of a 2005 Belladonna* anthology of ByF works in translation, Belleza y Felicidad. This work functions both through its ephemeral chapbook format and its staging of the multiple modes of (dis)encounters enabled by the politics of translation, as a trace, register or informal archive of a queer/ cuir hemispheric conversation. Translation operates here as fertile ground to think through feminist/queer bonds and alternative models of community formation across spatial, geo-political and linguistic distances. In the BD/ByF exchange, the practice of linguistic and format/material translation allows for an exploration of the political and aesthetic value of opacity and illegibility embraced by these writers. In this sense, and in order to probe what these type of hemispheric conversations feel like, this article centers on the deployment of childishness and naïveté as a cuir/feminist strategy of aesthetic and political positioning on the part of Argentine writers vis a vis the perceived cultural dominance of their North American counterpart.*

RESUMEN

PALABRAS CLAVE

Queer
Feminismo
Estudios de traducción
Comunidad literaria
Editoriales independientes

Explorando las formas que asumen las intimidades queer/ cuir y feministas que sostienen las redes hemisféricas, este artículo se propone investigar los modos efímeros de estar juntas que conectan escenas culturales distantes pero emparentadas a través de las Américas. Hace foco en los intercambios entre dos proyectos editoriales independientes: Belleza y Felicidad, en Buenos Aires, y Belladonna, en NYC, ambas dirigidas por mujeres. Se analiza en particular la publicación de una antología de textos traducidos de ByF en Belladonna. Gracias a su formato en fotocopias efímeras y a su escenificación de los múltiples modos de (des)encuentro que permite la política de la traducción, esta antología funciona como una huella, un registro o un archivo informal de una conversación hemisférica queer/ cuir.*

Founded by visual artists and writers Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón in 1999 in Buenos Aires, the eclectic, underground art gallery/literary publishing house, ‘Belleza y Felicidad’ (ByF) provided young, unpublished writers the otherwise hard to fathom opportunity to informally circulate their work outside the legitimized publishing circuit. ByF emerged and thrived at a time of transition marked by the shift from the neoliberal decade of the 1990s to the 2001 social and economic crisis, one of the most acute ones in Argentine history.¹ Located in the middle-class neighborhood of Almagro, ByF became a purposefully heterogeneous space where experimental literature, visual art exhibits, artists’ supplies, and punk and cumbia bands lived side by side. ByF would profoundly influence the development of independent Argentine publishing initiatives – the project’s precarious chapbook format publications (Figure 1) would, indeed, be taken up and re-invented by the internationally renowned publishing initiative ‘Eloísa Cartonera,’ which produced handmade books with colorful cardboard covers (Figure 2).

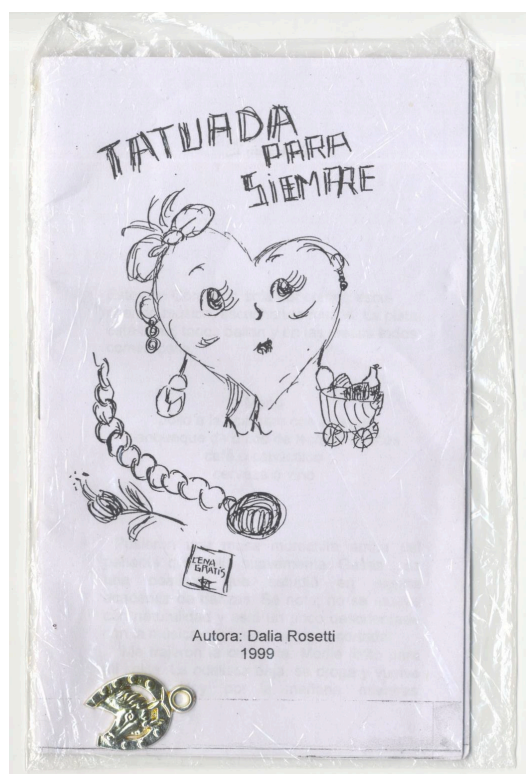


Figure 1. Belleza y Felicidad chapbook. *Tatuada para siempre*, 1999, by Dalia Rosetti. Drawing by Fernanda Laguna.

¹ The 2001 Argentine economic crisis marked the culmination of a decade of neoliberalism (1989-1999) that resulted in 40 % of the country’s population living below the poverty line by 2002, a 15 % unemployment rate, an astronomical foreign debt and the obliteration of national industries.



Figure 2. Eloísa Cartonera Books.

Co-founded in 2003 by visual artist Javier Barilaro, writer/editor Washington Cucurto, and ByF’s founder Fernanda Laguna, Eloísa Cartonera provided sustenance to jobless waste pickers (‘cartoneros’) by buying their cardboard and by training and hiring them to bind books and run their small-scale printing press. The precarious materiality of ByF and Eloísa Cartonera book-objects emerged as a response to the Argentine economic and political crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Though with different investments, Eloísa Cartonera would continue the project of ByF by publishing texts authored by the same core group of writers² while broadening its scope to include queer and marginal Southern Cone writers.

ByF, defined as one of the first cuir/queer³ presses in Argentina, played a crucial role in the distribution of sexually radical writings in Buenos Aires in the late 90s and 2000s, facilitating the emergence of cuir publics around them. The sexually ambiguous friendship between its founders, Cecilia and Fernanda, was frequently thematized in ByF writings and is paradigmatic of the project’s investment in the queer and feminist modes of relationality which ground its aesthetic works. At ByF, in this sense, the catalogue was built by publishing friends, which in turn led to making new friends: among ByF’s avant-garde precepts was the fact that “the mode of production is inseparable from the text (so that both the notion of text and of the author’s work must be revised in light of the concept of ‘literary life’ and net) and that literature, besides functioning as writing, entails

² Eloísa Cartonera’s first publication was *Pendejo*, a book of poetry by writer Gabriela Bejerman, a close friend of Laguna and Pavón and key figure in ByF. In addition, both Laguna and Pavón would publish their own texts in Eloísa Cartonera.

³ I employ the term ‘queer’ broadly to refer to sexualities, affects, desires, and practices which resist alignment with the hetero and homonormative models that govern liberal identities, as well as to a range of anti-normative positionalities capable of systemic critique. In order to visibilize the fact that ‘queer’ is an imported term in the Argentine context and to the complexities surrounding its translation, I also resort to its local rendering, ‘cuir.’ Both through the difference in pronunciation and spelling, ‘cuir’ decenters the English language term while not only signaling a fundamental process of appropriation and re-invention of the word but also pointing to the wide variety of cultures of sexual dissidence (and of associated terminology) that have emerged in and from Latin America.

differential socialization modes and is capable of prompting not only personal corporal subversion but also alternative modes of community” (Palmeiro, 2011).⁴

It is precisely the centrality of interpersonal connections to the workings of ByF what led to its connection to a feminist project located on a different part of the globe. In September 2005, Argentine poet Lila Zemborain invited Fernanda Laguna to present the ByF literary project at KJCC, a poetry series she curated at New York University. Zemborain’s partner at the time, artist Rafael Bueno, had met Eloísa Cartonera founder Javier Barilaro in New York. Through him, he became friends with Laguna and put Zemborain in contact with her. Zemborain’s impression that ByF and New York-based feminist independent press and salon series Belladonna* shared much in common led her to invite ByF to participate in the BD reading series (pers. comm., 2015).

Founded in New York the same year as ByF (1999) by poet Rachel Levitsky, Belladonna* is a feminist avant-garde collective which originated as a reading and salon series at Bluestocking’s Women’s Bookstore on New York’s Lower East Side. Since 2000 it has been publishing commemorative ‘chaplets’ of the readers’ work in collaboration with Boog Literature. Poet Erica Kaufman joined Belladonna* in 2002 as Levitsky’s co-editor, and since 2010 the group has operated as a collective with a ten woman editorial board. Belladonna*’s poetry readings are usually held at alternative, independent performance venues such as Dixon Place and Bowery Poetry Club, at local literary bookstores, and at small press book fairs and academic institutions. While BD has not garnered, so far, much critical attention in terms of its workings as a cultural project, its publications, particularly its books, have been quite extensively reviewed.

As a result of the poetry reading, which took place on 13 September 2005 at Dixon Place, Belladonna* published a commemorative bilingual chaplet titled *Belleza y Felicidad* in 2010 (Figure 3) which included work by ByF founders Fernanda Laguna, Cecilia Pavón and ByF author Gabriela Bejerman.

⁴ My translation. All translations from Spanish into English were performed by the author.

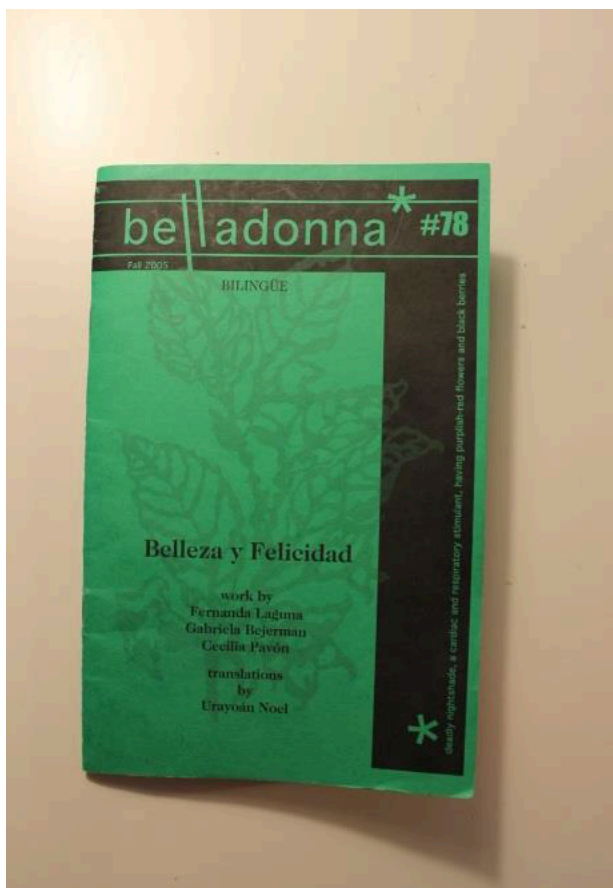


Figure 3. Belladonna*'s Belleza y Felicidad, 2005. With works by Fernanda Laguna, Gabriela Bejerman and Cecilia Pavón. Translated by Urayoán Noel.

Belladonna*'s position within the U.S. literary world as a female-run, independent press which emerged in conjunction with poetry readings and a focus on experimental, gender and sexuality-informed new works contributes to explain its interest in dialoguing with and incorporating Argentine ByF literature as part of its midst. Contextual, cultural, and specific differences withstanding, the humorous, playful element in the names of both projects (‘Belladonna*’ and ‘Belleza y Felicidad’/‘Beauty and Happiness’)⁵ anticipates their subversive stance with respect to the established literary canon on the basis of their foregrounding of female and queer voices.

Probing the forms of queer/cuir and feminist intimacies which ground hemispheric networks, I set out to investigate the ephemeral modes of togetherness that

⁵ Belladonna* press, like ByF, appeals to the notion of beauty – and its multi-faceted, perverse aspects—from its very name. The term ‘belladonna’ designates the plant commonly known as ‘deadly nightshade,’ a highly poisonous specimen cultivated for medicinal purposes. Also, the phrase ‘bella donna’ literally means ‘beautiful lady’ in Italian.

connect these two distant, yet tightly related, cultural scenes across the Americas. To this end, I focus on the 2005 Belladonna* anthology of ByF works in translation, *Belleza y Felicidad*. This research suggests that despite a history of limited academic dialogue, the authors I examine have been developing their writing in dialogue rather than in isolation. In other words, it is fundamental to take stock of the much talked about but seldom investigated hemispheric webs of dialogue activated by contemporary writers in order to account for how new generations are currently communicating, and creating, across borders. Moving beyond, and showing the insufficiency of, national and transnational explanatory frameworks, the generation of authors I study accelerate these connections through personal travels and internet-based communication to map new trajectories, fresh modes of togetherness, ephemeral and lasting encounters and collaborations. In this sense, my investment in the hemispheric is rooted in Diana Taylor's call for an urgent, and long overdue, remapping of the Americas. Such remapping entails "decentering a U.S. *America* for a hemispheric *Americas*" so that histories and trajectories omitted from previous maps are visibilized (Taylor, 2003: 277).⁶

Heeding to the creative network these Argentine and U.S. writers have constructed can help us better understand the dialogues, resonances, and synchronicities that articulate contemporary hemispheric literatures. I attend to exchanges among feminist/cuir authors on the basis that dissident perspectives become particularly productive to reflect on intimacy and community. Joshua Wiener and Damon Young remind us that queerness "has long been invested as at once the site of a symbolic disruption (which is also an antisocial negativity) and a particular relational inventiveness" (2011: 225). That building of new cultural forms implies an understanding of queerness not in terms of recognizable liberal identities but as tightly linked to utopian potentialities. At the same time, queer bonds' inherent oppositionality and negativity with respect to the social and its normative regimes of intimacy contribute to make sense of the way in which the ByF/BD exchange forcefully speaks of networks grounded on social inventiveness and negativity, utopia and dystopia, closeness and distance. I aim to illuminate how, through the building of a hemispheric network, these two scenes engage in a joint exploration of both the potentialities and the limits of queer/cuir/feminist intimacy and sociality as driving forces of creative production and circulation. In this line, it is precisely in and through the BD/ByF encounter that key dimensions of these

⁶ The significance of the hemispheric encounters I track here is underscored by the fact that the exchanges between a group of contemporary U.S. and Argentine authors (of which the ByF/BD dialogue I analyze here is only an instance) have not only yielded, and continue to yield, creative networks but have simultaneously resulted in a series of concrete publications. The first half of 2015, for instance, witnessed the release of two ByF poetry books in the U.S.: while Sandpaper press published *Belleza y Felicidad*, the first anthology of ByF works in translation, "The Scrambler & Scrambler Books" released Pavón's *A Hotel with my Name*, the first in a projected trilogy of her work. Far from the commercial circuit of global literary markets, these underground poetry publications have emerged out of a particular history of poets' exchanges across borders which I begin to register in this article.

projects’ diverse understandings of race, ethnicity, class, gender and geopolitical origin become foregrounded and problematized.

In particular, I attend to the centrality of the alternative publication formats of BD and ByF to illuminate how their chapbooks function as archives of shared ephemeral experiences, modes of intimate sociality, and emerging queer/feminist communities. Mobilizing complex notions and practices of friendship as a mode of production and reception of literary works across national borders, these cultural initiatives silently theorize the roles of intimacy, distance, and difference in the everyday practices of feminist/queer collectivities. In this context, I propose that translation is mobilized as a strategy for alternative community formation. A fertile space of dis/encounter is inaugurated through and in the translation of ByF works into English – an in-between, third location in which this hemispheric network becomes crystallized. It is through translation that ByF enters BD’s collection, and it is through that same means that U.S. poet Stuart Krimko would later become part of this Argentine poetry scene’s hemispheric, extended family.⁷ It is also through translation that poets Ariana Reines and Dorothea Lasky would become part of ByF’s magazine “Ceci y Fer (poeta y revolucionaria) II”. Translation operates simultaneously as an enabler of creative and affective connections and a location from which to investigate the nuanced role of literature in the construction of communal networks.

In the first section of this article, “Belladonna*’s *Belleza y Felicidad*: The chapbook format,” I draw attention to the significance of the literary chapbook format as a medium for the encounter between these two projects. Through this exchange, the BD chapbook expands its function as register of communal events beyond the local to encompass a wider, bilingual public. I then turn to an analysis of the ways in which ByF presents itself to BD readers through the selection of writings included in the chaplet *Belleza y Felicidad*. I argue that, far from an idealized conception of the potentiality of queer and feminist ties, the literary works included underscore the geopolitical, cultural and linguistic distances, apprehensions and mis(communication) between the two scenes when read in the context of this anthology. In the final section of this article, “Translating dis/encounters”, I examine how the sense of literature as a tool for communication espoused by Laguna similarly finds its limits in linguistic specificity and translation.

BELLADONNA*’S BELLEZA Y FELICIDAD: THE CHAPBOOK FORMAT

My analysis begins by attending to a dimension too often disregarded in literary criticism that proves, nonetheless, crucial in this case: the materiality of the work itself. Both presses resort to the chapbook format as a publication medium, revealing similar anti-institutional investments linked to an alternative understandings of the literary as

⁷ Stuart Krimko’s chapbook *A veces tenés la vida*, translated into Spanish by Cecilia Pavón, would be published by ByF in 2014.

involving communal modes of production, reception and circulation. Through the publication of Belladonna*’s *Belleza y Felicidad* chaplet, which includes poems and prose selected by the three close friends at the core of ByF (Laguna, Cecilia Pavón and Gabriela Bejerman), the two projects engage in a conversation about experimental writing by women—a conversation made possible in and through translation. And I refer here to not only semantic but also formal and cultural translation as well as to the trans-mediation of these Argentine writings,⁸ originally published in ByF chapbooks.

BD chaplets—modest, concise and simple print publications—constitute a financially viable alternative to circulate works by both young and established women writers (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Belladonna* poetry chaplets.

In the face of the relentless advance of neoliberalism in the 90s, and the increasingly limited space it allowed for “imagining feminist alternatives to profit driven endeavors,” the chaplet format embraces “the anti-economic mandate of second wave feminist presses” and third wave feminist zines (Eichhorn, 2013: 14). The deployment of the very term ‘chaplet,’ privileged for these BD publications over the more standard

⁸ I deploy a broad notion of translation, understood as engaged not exclusively with strategies for semiotic processes in the field of translation studies but also with debates on cultural translation, articulated on the premise that “any process of description, interpretation and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions and peoples” (Niranjana, 1992).

denomination 'chapbook,' suggests an encounter of a chapbook and a pamphlet. The political resonances of the latter, as well as its investment in its easy circulation, come together with the chapbook format to render a hybrid chaplet which evokes self-publication cultures.

Belleza y Felicidad, stapled together at its seams, has a green cardboard cover (Figure 3), from which we gather the edition is bilingual. BD chaplets work first and foremost as archives of ephemeral poetry readings and performances - the reading performance comes first, and the accompanying chaplet is intended to commemorate that event. In Krystal Languell's words, the chaplet series "creates a historical record of NYC poetry and politics [and] also a record of/for/about the person who is reading and performing at that event, their work at that moment." Live readings are fundamental because they provide an opportunity for poets and audiences to come together while fueling a distinctly feminist understanding of writing as blossoming in and within a community rather than in isolation. The centrality of building community for women whose writing is intersubjective or performative rather than personally revelatory is, indeed, underscored in BD's mission statement. In Levitsky's words, "Belladonna* ... seeks to address the way in which poetry is organized... What we do is precipitate poetry production by relationship, correspondence, aesthetics, and community" (2010: 5, my emphasis).⁹ In the case of ByF, the inexpensive chapbook format similarly positions the literary as an alternative record or archive of an ephemeral communal event.¹⁰ The literary text, in the form of a precarious object/present that includes drawings and trinkets, entails an understanding of art and literature as deeply grounded in interpersonal affects and exchanges (Francica 2015). Far from stand-alone pieces, ByF chapbooks emerge as part of a climate of intense investigation of sociability networks spawned by the 2001 crisis and thus operate as an informal, queer register, a semiotic translation of those affective and aesthetic worlds.

Literature becomes, in these two contexts, an object that functions as the crystallization and product of ephemeral group readings, parties and experiences, shared affects and interpersonal relations. Writing is what is left of a connection, of experiments with community building: it operates as a linguistic translation/trans-mediation of these ephemeral experiences, these affective aesthetic worlds, and as the concrete manifestation of the inextricability of art and life. These works attach other forms of social value to the literary, since to own them means to be part of an intimate network. In short, the chapbook format is key to these projects' exploration of communal-based criteria of literary value and legitimation. Such criteria find their roots in interpersonal relations and affects as well as on a feminist/cuir take on the relation between experimental literature, lived experience, and politics. The format is simultaneously

⁹ <http://www.belladonnaseries.org/about/>

¹⁰ The material format of ByF chapbooks, sometimes distributed in installments, draws both from Brazilian popular 'string literature' and the punk practice of DIY ('do it yourself') (Pavón, 2013, interview by the author).

crucial to the constitution of those collectivities and publics because of its investment in immediacy, which is based on the premise not just that a manuscript "is written now, but that it is *relevant* to the *now*" (Levitsky, 2003). Both BD chaplets and ByF chapbooks enable a narrowing of the gap between the writing and publication of poetry, which can more effectively activate urgent political conversations, as well as the simultaneity of the reading and publishing event. In this sense, BD and ByF engage, in a period marked by the insistent questioning of the relevance of poetry, in a parallel exploration of fresh understandings of literature as immediately reactive to current conversations through their community-based modes of publication, circulation, and reception.

In this regard, it is important to underscore that in Argentina *cuir/queerness* has been defined as an inherently intersectional practice tightly linked with forms of cultural and political activism and intervention. The very term 'queer' was, in fact, imported to Argentina in the 1990s "as a theoretical and critical perspective as well as an activist platform, in a local reformulation" by the Queer Studies Area of the University of Buenos Aires, which set out to "continue the tradition interrupted by the dictatorship, and devised by [Néstor] Perlongher at the beginning of the 70s, of articulating class struggles with gender and sexuality struggles as part of a countercultural movement which would oppose all forms of exploitation, exclusion, repression and discrimination" (Palmeiro, 2011: 194). This local configuration of queerness as a key element in the articulation of structural or systemic modes of critique becomes central to think through the precarious materiality of the ByF chapbooks, which blatantly bear on their surface the histories of their marginal conditions of production, circulation, and reception in the context of the 2001 acute social and economic crisis. The plots of ByF literary works similarly investigate the impact of the material precarity of the crisis on queer lives while disrupting neoliberal logics of success and productivity as well as the normative life narratives on which the latter are grounded.¹¹ On the other hand, while attention to racial difference is explicit and part of BD's multicultural ethos, Argentina's racial hybridity has too often been veiled in local social, cultural and political discourses. The aesthetic investigation of the intersection of race, sexuality, class, and ethnicity is preliminarily broached in the ByF catalogue through, for instance, the inclusion of Eloísa Cartonera's founder Washington Cucurto.¹² Interestingly, the question of racial difference also emerges in "Salvador Bahía, ella y yo" (1999), the poem by Fernanda Laguna that opens the BD chaplet and which I will analyze here.

In conclusion, in their search for other strategies that bypass the romanticization implicit in the notion of literary and artistic communities as well as the anonymity

¹¹ For a reflection on the intersection of class, gender and sexuality in ByF publications see, for instance, Pablo Pérez's *El mendigo chupapijas* (*The cock-sucking beggar*), Fernanda Laguna's *Tatuada para siempre* (*Tattooed Forever*) and *Poesía proletaria* (*Proletarian Poetry*) and Ioshua's *Para lo pibe* (*For the Gang*).

¹² In particular, his chapbook *Oh tu Dominicana del demonio!* (*Oh you Dominican from Hell!*) explores racial, sexual and gender violence against underprivileged immigrants.

involved in the concept of publics, these two projects articulate themselves around queer/cuir/feminist bonds and friendships.¹³ This affective strategy for literary canon (de)construction through queer/cuir/feminist community formation emerges as an alternative to the institutional adscription of literary value. This conception of BD and ByF as open, experimental platforms which champion a dissident notion of writing aligned with editing, producing, and becoming part of a community involves a different distribution of work – and thus a different understanding of what literature is and how it comes about—from that of mainstream cultural institutions and markets. The BD chaplet showcases, through its materiality and contents, its intricate enmeshment with alternative modes of producing and conceiving writing. Its status as literature cannot be artificially divorced from the literary net and life from which it emerges and the very definition of the artwork thus expands to encompass the communal and material processes that give it shape.

BELLADONNA*s BELLEZA Y FELICIDAD: FEMALE STUPIDITY, QUEER CHILDISHNESS AND POETRY AS (MIS)COMMUNICATION

However, far from an idealized conception of the potentiality of queer ties and feminist friendships, the ByF/BD encounter underscores the geopolitical, cultural and linguistic distances, apprehensions and mis(communication) between the two scenes. I now focus on the specific works chosen for this anthology to outline how ByF presents itself to this U.S. audience as well as on the specific dialogue these two scenes establish by means of this publication. The poems and narratives in this chaplet undertake the difficult task of introducing the ByF project to a U.S. audience, with the concomitant challenge of rendering ByF and its stakes readable in a new context. Poetry thus operates here first and foremost as a tool for (mis)communication. Most poems in the chaplet were translated into English by Puerto Rican poet Urayoán Noel. His translations are scholarly correct and largely uneventful except for certain awkward sections in which, due to his staying too close to the original, the ironic tone of the poems is lost in their English versions. If translation is important for queer studies and feminism because, as the BD chaplet shows, it constitutes a unique space “from which to take on critical analyses of representation and power and the asymmetries between languages” as well as to “examine the knowledge formations and institutionalities in/through which these theories and concepts travel” (De Lima Costa, 2014: 20), it is also fundamental to consider the types of poetic networks that are being built through it.

The first poem in the chaplet, “Salvador Bahia, She and I” (1999), written by Laguna, retells the persona’s experiences during a trip to Brazil with her two close friends

¹³ As the hemispheric encounters I track here attest to, novel forms of socialization, global communication, urban movements, and sexual communities have all impacted upon discourses of belonging.

and fellow collaborators in the ByF project and in this Belladonna* chaplet, Cecilia and Gabriela. This writing thus functions as a departure point of ByF¹⁴ – a story in which the centrality of the three girls' queer friendship features prominently. This poem further works as a story of origin because, the persona confesses, "it's the first time that I write anything resembling a short story" ("es mi primer cuento/es lo más largo/que he escrito"). But what is before us is not (just) a story, it is a poem. From the very outset of the chaplet, the girlish, immature, somewhat stupid voice of the persona is deployed for comic effect – it is a stereotypically 'boluda'¹⁵ female voice that regards itself as incapable of achieving not only literary grandeur but also the feat of putting the six page long poem together even at its most basic, structural levels:

"I had never intertwined
so many characters
so many situations
relationships, actions, suspense.
It was difficult for me
to keep the plot understandable
in something of this length.
It was also hard for me
to conjugate the verbs well
and find the appropriate adjectives." (5)

("Jamás había entrelazado
a tantos personajes
tantas situaciones,
relaciones, acciones, suspenso.
Fue difícil para mí
mantener el hilo para que se entienda
algo tan largo.
También me costó
conjuguar bien los verbos
y encontrar los adjetivos apropiados.")

¹⁴ At the same time, the poem starts out with a statement in prose about its origin, which refers to one of the sources of inspiration of this poem and, more broadly, of the ByF chapbook format: Brazilian 'string literature'.

¹⁵ The term 'boludez,' and its derivatives 'boluda/o,' emerge out of Argentine and Uruguayan slang. Generationally inflected and often associated with young populations, the term makes hyperbolic reference to male testicles. Its translations, as Luis Camnitzer reminds us, are approximate and somewhat imprecise (2009). Often used to describe a person considered slow, stupid, lacking in judgment, in Argentina the term acquires specific cultural meanings, in particular when gendered female: 'boluda' signals a stereotypically sexist rendering of (young) women.

The persona here adopts and inhabits the stereotype of the stupid girl, playfully giving shape to a comically critical female voice. The exploration of a set of undervalued, marginal and stereotypically female and queer affective states such as childishness, naïveté, corny sentimentality, and 'boludez' contributes to the emergence of a particular version of queerness within the space of ByF. Both a damaging insult and a term of endearment among friends, the qualifying adjective 'boluda/o,' unlike other related notions such as 'stupid,' simultaneously encapsulates closeness and distance, intimacy and detachment. 'Boludez', like childishness, thus becomes yet another performative instance through which the narrators of ByF chapbooks investigate queer modes of relationality, particularly since the gesture resonates with what Jack Halberstam understands as 'the queer art of failure.' Halberstam argues that queer failure often entails "ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success" and which have, for many queer people, become a style or a way of life (2011).

In this line, the child as a discursive topos, with its symbolic role of emblem of reproduction and compulsive heterosexuality, has been identified by queer theorist Lee Edelman as one of the main weapons deployed in contemporary culture against queer individuals and, in particular, against gay men. However, as queer theorist Kathryn Stockton points out, if childhood operates as a stage of normativization of the individual, it can be simultaneously projected as a space of potentiality. Among those potentialities is the possibility to deviate from the heteronormative, reproductive trajectory that determines personal and professional destinies. At ByF and, in particular, in Laguna's literature, 'queer childishness' operates as a subversive aesthetics present both in the design of the published literary chapbooks and in the writing style (Francica, 2015). Challenging the linear and (re) productive narratives that organize the models of capitalist and professional literary life, Laguna's poetic/narrative voice, like the characters it brings forth, obstinately refuses to grow.¹⁶ These writings thus invite us to consider the productivity of extending the affects and strategies of childhood well into adulthood, mobilizing them to sustain radical queer experiences and exchanges.

In the U.S., on the other hand, the notions of 'new childishness' and 'new sincerity' have been deployed to describe the work of Dorothea Lasky, Ariana Reines (both of whose works would later be published by ByF in translation in Argentina), and alt-lit writers such as Tao Lin.¹⁷ Laura Glenum and Arielle Greenberg identify both Reines and Lasky as practicing what they term a 'gurlesque' poetics which exploits cuteness, girly kitsch, camp, artifice, female pleasure, parody, and the use of a poetic 'I'

¹⁶ In the face of a traditional cultural model that has longingly looked towards European high culture, and of what literary critic Jorge Panesi has defined as a serious and committed literary lineage that struggles to maintain its autonomy as a field without disengaging from the political (qtd. in Palmeiro, 2011: 180-1), the queer and childish narrative voices and material formats of ByF question Argentine literary canons and institutions while imagining other affective avenues for politics.

¹⁷ See Jennifer Moore (2011), Jennifer Ashton (2009), and Jason Koo (2011).

“that does not confess a self, but rather a raucously messy nest of desires and proclivities” (2010), and point to the feminist Riot Grrrl movement as a precursor of these writings. Tightly linked to those queer/feminist aesthetics, ByF’s deployment of childishness and naïveté in its BD chaplet can be read as signaling a subversive stance not only with respect to gender and sexuality stereotyping but also in terms of ethnic and geopolitical origin.

In other words, in the context of a U.S. publication of Argentine literature, the deployment of that childish, naïve voice acquires other resonances – it can be read as playing into, and thus disarming, exoticized, demeaning, and colonialist U.S. perceptions of Latin America. In the texts I look at, the male chauvinistic stereotype of the ‘boluda’ is rendered queerly productive as it functions to vindicate and re-imagine the political potential of marginalized affects and ways of knowing, doing and being linked to the global South. Exploiting the Argentine aesthetics of ‘boludez’ and queer childishness, the poem reveals the problematic prejudices which often underlie North-South exchanges as well as the limitations and blind spots behind the type of programmatic, multi-cultural feminist/queer ethos embraced by BD. Even though, according to Levitsky, “presenting a blithe unity is not what we who make Belladonna*...intend,” in its mission statement BD defines its participants as encompassing writers of every gender and gender definition, every age, working class, poor, and rich, who work in different languages and come from all parts of the globe. This idealistic statement, with its investment in the problematic multiculturalism of the 1990s and its homogenizing unification of the radically dissimilar peoples coming together under the BD project, is burst open by *Belleza y Felicidad*. By embodying female stupidity and naïveté to an extreme, and thus symbolically becoming the arguably ideal interlocutor of traditionally imperialistic iterations of feminism and queerness, the text responds in kind to BD’s romantic sense of queer/cuir/feminist community and mission – a mission which, while aiming at horizontal rather than pedagogic, colonialist modes of dialogue, nonetheless obscures the unequal geo-political power relations latent behind the multiple ‘we’ it articulates.

At the same time, mocking literary tradition and institutional legitimation, the poem functions as a humorous comment on the professionalization of the artist and of the very act of writing:

This story
is very pretty
and simple.
It is my first story
it is the longest
I have ever written.
My ambitious project,
my consecration.

/.../
I have imitated great writers
like Bocaccio,
César Aira,
Clarice Lispector,
Cecilia Pavón,
Gabriela Bejerman
and Paulo Coelho. (5)

(“Este es un cuento
muy bonito
y simple.
Es mi primer cuento
es lo más largo
que he escrito.
Mi proyecto ambicioso
mi consagración.
/.../
He imitado
a grandes escritores
como Bocaccio,
César Aira,
Clarice Lispector,
Cecilia Pavón,
Gabriela Bejerman y Paulo Coelho.”)

The improvised canon the persona puts together, her ‘family’ of literary influences, is in this sense telling. Drawing together a universally recognized writer like Bocaccio, Argentine contemporary vanguardist César Aira, Jewish-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, her friends Cecilia and Gabriela and self-help guru Paulo Coelho, she recognizes and opens space for popular culture as well as for a generation of peripheral, young female writers within Western high literary culture. In the context of ByF’s introduction to this U.S. scene, the choice of opening the anthology with this particular poem reads as a statement on the relative positioning of ByF writers with respect to geopolitically and culturally central ones. Though many BD writers can be described as marginal in a variety of ways that range from their sexual, gender, racial, and ethnic identity to the alternative modes of production and circulation of their works, their marginality entails a different set of cultural and financial constraints from those of

Argentine writers.¹⁸ In the context of the BD publication, the persona's humorously naïve stupidity and obliviousness with respect to the hierarchies which determine her own peripheral literary status thus operate as a strategy to surreptitiously reclaim voice and legitimacy.

Halfway through the poem, the persona expresses her humorously corny view of writing: "How lovely it is to write!.../ The love, the love, the love!" (9) ("¡Qué lindo es escribir!.../¡Amor, amor amor!). And, in the midst of all that stereotyped female sentimentality, unexpected little windows into her queerness: "delicious kisses on the beach/tit-lickings, ice-cold/drinks of abacaxi, guava an vodka" (7), "the topless part/and the part about the black man/who jerked off/behind the rocks/is also true" (9) ("ricos besos en la playa/lamidas de teta, helados/refrescos de abacaxí/guaiaba y vodka," "lo del topless/y lo del mulato/que se hacía la paja/detrás de las rocas/también es verdad"). The abrupt reference here to a man of mixed race who jerks off behind the rocks at the beach interestingly interrogates, from the standpoint of the naïve poetic voice, the prevalent colonial discursive construction of black or 'mulato' men as inherently sexual – a sexuality that must remain paradoxically (and literally) hidden from view as part of the normative hierarchy and visibility regimes that regulate desiring bodies. While on the one hand the poem recreates that racialized, hierarchical subjective construction by presenting the sexualized man in the exoticized setting of a Brazilian tropical beach, it simultaneously subverts it by placing the man's actions in intimate, metonymic contiguity with the persona's and her queer friends' desiring bodies through the strategy of listing/enumerating images sexually dissident acts ("delicious kisses on the beach/tit-lickings" "the topless part/and the part about the black man/who jerked off/behind the rocks").¹⁹ At the same time, the sexualized image of the 'mulato' man in the poem contributes to make visible the parallel, long-standing (and still painfully active) histories of colonial violence on racialized bodies in the Americas that punctuate the BD/ByF feminist exchange. In the context of that exchange, the poem's exoticization of the mixed race man playfully mirrors the parallel exoticization ByF poets themselves might be subjected to in this U.S. setting. Interestingly, it is in and through the BD/ByF encounter that key dimensions of their diverse understandings of race, ethnicity, gender and geopolitical origin thus become foregrounded and problematized.

The persona then imagines that she undertakes an "...eternal trip/on the beaches of paradise" with "her goddess," a new lover she encounters in Brazil ("nos iríamos/ella y yo/en un viaje eterno/a las playas del paraíso"). However, girl friendship is stronger

¹⁸ BD is financed by a number of public and private agencies and donors, which include The Fund for Poetry, The Brooklyn Arts Council, The New York State Council on the Arts, The New York Community Trust, Poets&Writers and the City of New York Department of Cultural Affair.

¹⁹ In Argentina, the stupidity and naïveté that the persona deploys in the poem have traditionally been ethnically and racially coded as well, which further underscores the contiguity between queer and racialized bodies in the poem. Among the most prevalent characters in local jokes is the stupid 'gallego' (immigrant from Galicia, Spain).

than any summer love: “She and I/but also later on/Gabriela and Cecilia” (“Ella y yo/pero también irían luego/Gabriela y Cecilia”) (15). The centrality of the persona’s fellow poets and close friends, without whom no perfect world could exist, thus proposes a queer/feminist twist on the happy ending of so many (fairy) tales. As the persona anticipates from the beginning, this is a different type of story – a story/poem not only about a close group of literary authors but also about how queer modes of affiliation may be deployed to re-imagine both storytelling conventions and literary production.

Finally, in BD’s *Belleza y Felicidad*, Cecilia Pavón’s featured work includes the piece “Dear Timo.” The letter genre echoes not only these projects’ commitment to ‘inter-subjective’ modes of writing but also the concrete, epistolar collaborations among some of their authors.²⁰ In “Dear Timo,” the narrator communicates to her friend her desire to physically reach other cities, in particular Berlin, the epicenter of contemporary art and culture, but also Lima, a peripheral South American capital disruptively positioned at the same level as the former. Not writers, as in Laguna’s poem, but the political and cultural hierarchies which define spaces become re-arranged here. The narrator’s friendship with Timo bridges, in part, the distance that separates peripheral cities and art scenes such as Buenos Aires from central ones like New York. In this respect, even if the BD project can be described as, and conceives itself to be, marginal in many respects, its central location – as well as the financial resources which that location and its tight connections to academia grant it – raises questions on the status of that marginality in the face of geopolitically peripheral scenes such as ByF.

TRANSLATING DIS/ENCOUNTERS

The sense of literature as a tool for communication espoused by Laguna similarly finds its limits in linguistic specificity and translation. The first poem by ByF’s close friend and collaborator Gabriela Bejerman, “Shyness, confession, debut,” is translated into English by the poet herself. It is significant that, from the very beginning, the poet/translator signals the lack of identity between the two versions of the poems by titling the English iteration differently – the original Spanish title is “18° C” (Figure 5).

²⁰ See Carla Harryman and Lynn Hejninian’s *The Wide Road* (2011) and *Looking Up Harryette Mullen: Interviews on Sleeping with the Dictionary and Other Works* (2011).

18° C

Hace dieciocho grados a las cuatro de la mañana.
 La ciudad viaja en su taxi.
 "El puente Golden Retriever."
 No sé por qué casi hago el amor sin desear.
 En el remís hay música de Air Supply, muy romántica.
 Pasan dos adolescentes deslizándose sin casco.
 "Él se apuró para darme un beso más al partir."
 Me puso el corpiño y la bombacha como un experto torpe.
 Fumamos, charlamos, nos juramos eterna amistad.
 El colchón tenía partículas en vez de sábana.
 El agua y la cerveza nos dictaban palabras.
 Él me ofreció fruta tropical que rechacé.
 Quería darme clases de sutileza.
 Después me prometió un desayuno amoroso:
 Café con leche, diarios y factura tibia.
 Mientras hablaba palpaba.
 Yo me resistía disimulando ante mí también.
 Le di el gusto.
 Fui egoísta.
 Lo quiero.

Shyness, confession, debut

It's 18° C at four a.m.
 The city travels in its taxi.
 "Golden Retriever Bridge."
 I don't know why I almost make love unwillingly.
 There's Air Supply music in the taxi, very romantic.
 Two teenagers slide by helmetless.
 "He hurried to kiss me once more before I left."
 He put on my bra and panties like a clumsy expert.
 We smoked, we talked, we swore endless friendship.
 The mattress had tiny balls instead of sheets.
 Water and beer dictated us words.
 He offered me tropical fruit which I declined.
 He wanted to give me classes on subtleness.
 There was music from Andalucía.
 Then he promised me a loving breakfast.
 Coffee with milk, papers, warm toast.
 As he talked he touched.
 I resisted pretending on me too.
 I granted his wish.
 I was selfish.
 I love him.

translated by the author

Figure 5. Poems "18°C"/ "Shyness, confession, debut", by Gabriela Bejerman.

By contrast, small semantic disparities or grammatically inexact (mis)translations between the two versions of the poem yield an English version 'with an accent': "yo me resistía disimulando ante mí también"/"I resisted pretending on me too," "el agua y la cerveza nos dictaban palabras"/"water and beer dictated us words," "no sé por qué casi hago el amor sin desear"/"I don't know why I almost make love unwillingly" (18-19). Retaining marks of linguistic difference, the poem thus refuses to lose its attachment to a specific place, time, and poetic subjectivity through translation. At the same time the English, 'accented' version opens up a potentiality of alternative meanings by de-familiarizing the more grammatically straight-forward original in Spanish. If Levistky associates BD's multi-lingualism with the need to expand the avant-garde potential of its literature, here translation becomes a tool for literary experimentation as it simultaneously creates disparate meanings for English and Spanish speaking publics. In this way, the piece showcases the linguistic and cultural differences which distance these two audiences, the difficulty of creating a conversation between them, and the linguistic richness of that 'flawed' encounter.

The chaplet includes a second piece by writer Gabriela Bejerman which is not translated into English. A heavily experimental, neo-baroque text without punctuation, "agua mansa agua brava agua cascada" (Figure 6) is built on the centrality and sensuality of sound in the cumulative flow of words.

agua mansa agua brava agua cascada*

fresco silencio sonoro que ofrece almas blandas como momias de agua fresca lava fresco silencio sonoro dormido en las rocas movientes afiladas agua de fuentes en manos de piedra los ojos del tatuaje que vence la cascada con fondos de río pedregoso besos la ninfa de agua sus ojos cerrados bajo la ardiente cascada de agua helada agua y penachos rosados el hielo del sol fundiendo sus luces blancas en la piedra dura y seca en la piedra cascada del vencido valle sol vencedor nubes y llamas el beso del frío viento en el agua derramada son chorros de son ido pura agua gritando en bajada nubes besos a la chica que duerme sueños al agua junto a la pálida cascada que perdida se encuentra bajando piedras derramadas niños negros en el agua blanca en el agua blanda anoche mis dedos se humedecían conociendo antes el fulgor de la cascada mis dedos revolviendo el agua rápida húmeda indócil bajada de un hondo fulgor frío nido de besos húmedos lentos y rápidos como el frío que baja amansando la piedra descascarada ésa es la chica vampiro que besa el agua con labios de sangre y dedos largos de hiel platinada la vampira inmensa y diminuta callada en el lecho de piedra da su beso a la fría cascada no oye los gritos de niños color chocolate hundiendo sus pies en la fuente de frías cascadas venidas del monte peludo y alto como un pedregal de nubes mojadas en platos de cielo en platos de sol despiertos dormidos como un día marchitándose lento marchitándose rápido en el mismo rumbo que vive y que muere el olor de agua del frío cascado que baja nutriendo el deseo de besar a esa chica vampira besar sus tatuajes de tinta y sangre ¡no te vayas! ¡no te vayas! los niños rompen la arena y el barro y vos sos la chica vampira que traga y traga como sangre blanca el sudor frío de las piedras moviéndose para recibir la cascada el hielo derretido el grito del

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niño diaguita el polvo de años hecho agua agua fiel agua blanda vencida en el pedregal añoso y constante añoso y constante añoso y cantante ¿el agua está dormida? ¿el agua está vencida? agua va agua baja el fresco silencio sonoro del agua cascada nadie declama más ruido más sangre que el agua cascada trepo las piedras soy el hombre desnudo soy la piel del hombre desnudo entregándose al agua nunca mansa nunca verde nunca más que agua pura bruta clara el hombre encogido bajo la fuerza bajo el agua nutriente de la cascada clara

río colorado, cafayate, 22.1.4

* agua mansa agua brava agua cascada appears in Spanish version only

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Figure 6. Poem “agua mansa agua brava agua cascada” by Gabriela Bejerman.

Untranslated/able, the work stands isolated within the chaplet, a lonely witness to the unsurpassable distances which separate these Argentine and U.S. scenes. Those distances, however, come to be experienced, and sensually enjoyed, through the reading/performance of the poem. This un-translated poem pushes against the homogenizing force which ByF’s inclusion as part of BD’s catalogue involves. As Millie Thayer reminds us, “translations themselves are objects of struggle and translation, or its refusal, is a strategic political act ... whether it involves sharing knowledge to foster an alliance or interrupting a dominant discourse to defend autonomy” (2010: 6). As part of its transition from a traditionally peripheral to a central cultural geopolitical location, Bejerman decides to preserve this poem’s illegibility by denying us its translation. The poem thus becomes in itself a boundary that renders visible the necessarily incomplete and failed project of cultural and linguistic translation. In this respect, this gesture exacerbates the “ontological condition of sociality grounded in the material fact of our

interdependence as bodily beings” which, Weiner and Young suggest, can also be described “as a sociability without sociality, a bare being together that emerges where symbolically mediated social relations fail because of the pressure of affectivities in excess of or to the side of known identities and forms of recognition” (2011: 236).

This (lack of) dialogue is important, I propose, because the hemispheric networks these authors embrace might become defined and find traction precisely in and through the different modes of inscription of diverse institutional and material realities active in these writings. Evincing the cultural, linguistic, and geo-political fractures which make up these groupings, this complex hemispheric commerce becomes fundamental to account for the emerging notions of poetic community these projects actually enact and carry forward. Through cultural, media, and semiotic translation, the BD chaplet articulates a community inevitably fractured from its genesis. By contrast to BD’s homogenizing, multicultural communal ethos, this hemispheric network is founded on the impossibility of ever becoming one – an impossibility which, apart from the inherent ambiguity and volatility that haunt all languages, feeds on cultural difference. These two projects’ reaching towards one another in the face of that impossibility becomes, in this way, a dys/utopian gesture. In the case of Bejerman’s untranslated piece, such ‘reaching towards’ is grounded purely on an aesthetic of sound and letters – it becomes an experience. Language is thus the space where these two scenes come together but also the site at which their encounter falls apart.

Hemispheric contacts enable the investigation of strategies for, in Jose Muñoz’s terms, ‘being together in difference’ (2009) as they inaugurate forms of ephemeral, fleeting, distant intimacies. Those distances become productive creative spaces – spaces for the unfinished, the un-accomplishable, the imperfect translation, the impossible dialogue, the error. They enable queer modes of intimacy predicated on loss and non-belonging, distant intimacies which, like dys/utopias themselves, tend to be born out of spatial dislocation. In Hillis Miller’s terms, “when a theory travels, it disfigures, deforms, and transforms the culture or discipline that receives it” (qtd. in De Lima Costa, 2014: 29). In this case, ByF’s intervention in a BD publication results in a hybrid juxtaposition of two cuir/feminist projects which operates as a stage where different worldviews meet and compete—a third space that is both critically and aesthetically productive.

To conclude, translation thus emerges as a mode for feminist/queer community formation. The commemorative BD chaplet of a ByF reading/event operates as a shared platform for these two projects to come together and hold a critical and creative dialogue. The fleeting contact and conversation between these two Argentine and U.S. scenes serves to make visible the synchronicities and differences which draw these projects together while simultaneously pushing them apart. On the one hand, these projects share an interest in experimental works engaged with gender and sexuality, they focus on communal events and readings and are invested in inexpensive processes of literary publication, circulation, and reception which entail a queer/feminist, less hierarchical

approach to publishing. On the other hand, they subsist in differentially precarious, marginal geopolitical conditions. This factor, compounded with the distinct status of creative writing in each of these two settings, impacts the shape of these scenes as well as the form of the chapbooks they publish and the exchange between the two presses. These divergences signal different but nonetheless related understandings of the status of the literary and of the critical intervention contextually offered by cuir/feminist voices. Parsing out those economies, and the concomitant tension and (mis)communication between ByF and BD, becomes in itself a feminist/queer project as it contributes to demystify romanticized notions of global queer and feminist creative networks.

Moving past the myths that attend the notion of 'community' to render visible the material, everyday realities of literary scenes becomes crucial to rethink and rebuild spaces for the political. Through their exchange, however fleetingly, BD and ByF inaugurate together a third mode of collectivity – a looser, more open, less permanent network in which miscommunication and conflict become more frequent and spacious. They thus productively amplify the tensions that impact queer/feminist community formation, while at the same time articulating a different type of literary network – a radically fractured and ephemeral collectivity. According to Claudia de Lima Costa, in the U.S. and Latin America the academy and feminist NGOs are the two most important locales for the production, circulation, and reception of feminisms (2014: 25). I would like to claim space in that list for cultural projects like BD and ByF which, through their literary and performance works, silently experiment with feminist/queer practices while critically interrogating cultural institutions in order to articulate queer and feminist networks. These projects probe the aesthetic as a way of negotiating difference and imagining other modes of connection across borders. In opening themselves up to a hemispheric public, these authors, and the projects that sustain them, expose themselves to being read differently. Showcasing the productivity of those dialogues and silences, they serve as a platform to investigate the multi-lingual, cross-cultural modes of literary experimentation which enable the articulation of distant intimacies in the Americas. In this context, BD's *Belleza y Felicidad* might be thought of as a register of these hemispheric dis/encounters, of fleeting instances of impossible togetherness.

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