

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

I Monster: Embodying Trans and *Travesti* Resistance in Latin America

Joseph M. Pierce

Stony Brook University, US

joseph.pierce@stonybrook.edu

Since 2010, legal gains for LGBTQI communities in Latin America have exposed the contradictions of inclusion under a rights-based approach to sexual citizenship. Expanding neoliberal economies and multicultural incorporation has yet to resolve persistent inequalities or ongoing gender-based violence, in particular for trans and *travesti* populations in the region. Rather than depend on the symbolic and material protections of the state, however, many trans and *travesti* activists, artists, and performers argue that since the state is interested in normalizing sexual relations and gendered identities through legal recognition, it cannot be a source of identification, safety, or freedom. Focusing on recent work by Susy Shock (Argentina) and Claudia Rodríguez (Chile), this article demonstrates that “monstering” (to monster) has become a crucial form of epistemological resistance to neoliberal politics of inclusion and recognition in Latin America and of opening up new possibilities of imagining collective belonging.

Los avances logrados desde el 2010 para las comunidades LGBTQI en América Latina han descubierto las contradicciones inherentes de la inclusión dentro de un marco legal de derechos en relación con la ciudadanía sexual. Ni las economías neoliberales expansionistas ni la incorporación multicultural han resuelto las inequidades persistentes o la continua violencia de género, en particular para las poblaciones trans y travesti en la región. En vez de depender de la protección simbólica o material del estado, sin embargo, muchas activistas y artistas trans y travesti afirman que siendo que el interés del estado reside en normalizar las relaciones sexuales y las identidades de género a través del reconocimiento legal, el mismo estado no puede ser fuente de identificación, seguridad o libertad para ellas. Enfocándose en trabajo reciente de Susy Shock (Argentina) y Claudia Rodríguez (Chile), este artículo demuestra que “monstruosiarse” (volverse monstruo) comprende una forma importante de resistencia epistémica a las políticas neoliberales de inclusión y reconocimiento en América Latina, así como una apertura hacia nuevas posibilidades de imaginar la pertenencia colectiva.

Yo reivindico mi derecho a ser un monstruo.

—Susy Shock, *Poemario trans pirado* (2011)

Para las travestis reales el estado no puede existir.

—Claudia Rodríguez, *Dramas pobres* (2016)

In the twenty-first century, legal gains in the realm of sexual citizenship have led to increased visibility for many—and greater security for some—lesbian, gay, and trans people in Latin America.¹ The passage of marriage equality legislation in several countries and a growing progressive agenda regarding gender identity laws have opened the door to new (and old) debates such as abortion, HIV/AIDS services, the rights of sex workers, and gender-based violence (*femicidio* and *travesticidio*).² At the same time, however, we see

¹ I use *lesbian*, *gay*, and *trans* intentionally, since I am referring to a specific set of identities, not all those that are often included under the rubric of sexual diversity and/or gender variance.

² For more information on contemporary sexual and gender rights, see Corrales and Pecheny 2010, and Blanco, Pecheny, and Pierce 2018.

a right-wing backlash led by fundamentalist Catholic and evangelical groups against what has come to be called “ideología de género” (gender ideology).³ Increased incorporation into a national legal framework has led to disparate but not unpredictable results. Adhering to the demands of the law in order to receive its protections has standardized certain aspects of queer life while emboldening reactionary ideologues as well as run-of-the-mill conservatives in response. In Latin America, legal incorporation has not only failed to protect dissident bodies but has itself (because of this failure) become a key object of critique by contemporary queer/*cuir*, trans, and *travesti* artists, performers, intellectuals, and activists (Viteri 2017).⁴

As I show in this article, “monstering” has become a central strategy of resistance to normativity as developed by contemporary trans and travesti subjects in an era of expanding recognition of sexual and gender diversity in Latin America. The act of marking “deviant” bodies explicitly and deliberately as monstrous, rejecting their incorporation (and thus legitimation) by the state, shows a growing concern that legal and social recognition is not enough to safeguard the lives, bodies, and desires of gender-variant subjects. Rather than provide a comprehensive overview of these debates, in this article I focus on the work of two dynamic artists/activists: Chilean Claudia Rodríguez and Argentine Susy Shock. Both utilize monstrosity as a project of aesthetic and epistemological dissidence. Both engage the signifying position of the monster as a form of oppositional praxis, as an insurrectional force that expands beyond the limits of embodied recognition. In doing so, they are not simply hearkening back to a prescriptive form of sexual and gendered alterity. Rather, the work of Shock and Rodríguez, respectively, reveals the epistemological instability of normative embodiment and the impossibility of the state to fully recognize trans and travesti difference.

Rodríguez often identifies herself as a “travesti sidosa y resentida” (resentful, “poz” travesti), Shock as an “artista trans sudaca” (greaser trans artist).⁵ In the case of the former, the expression of resentment, both of normative politics and the ongoing stigma attached to seropositivity, links identity to affective refusal. In the case of the latter, occupying the discursive space of “sudaca” resignifies a pejorative term used to refer to people from South America (or from the global South broadly construed) as a gesture of empowerment. These identity positions—*travesti*, *sidosa*, *sudaca*, *resentida*—figure their nonnormative bodies as both structurally and discursively precarious. And yet, their work refuses to acquiesce to the false stability of multicultural inclusion. In the precise moment when the state begins to offer new agency via stable-because-recognized gender categories, these artists have turned to the tactile embodiment of the monster to articulate their disavowal of normative categorization. Thus, in the midst of these legal gains, when we hear Susy Shock exclaim, defiantly, “Yo reivindico mi derecho a ser un monstruo” (I claim my right to be a monster; 2011, 10), how are we to take this particular demand, this identification not with the legalization of transgender subjectivity before the law, but monstrous defiance of that legal recognition? Likewise, when Claudia Rodríguez declares, “Para las travestis reales el estado no puede existir” (For real travestis the state cannot exist; 2016, 39), how can we understand this rebuke of normative incorporation of *travesti* bodies by the state? These are the questions that guide the present article.

Before continuing, however, it is important to clarify that as a general category, *transgénero* (transgender) or the more popular *trans* in Spanish refers to people who make identitarian, corporeal, and social efforts to live as members of the gender that differs from the normative sex that they were assigned at birth (Lewis 2010, 6–7; Ochoa 2014, 4–5). *Travesti*, in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, refers most frequently to people assigned male sex at birth and who feminize their bodies, dress, and behavior; prefer feminine pronouns and forms of address; and often make significant bodily transformations by injecting silicone or taking hormonal treatments but do not necessarily seek sex-reassignment surgery. As the work of Vek Lewis (2010, 7) makes clear, the specific Latin American conceptual and identity marker *travesti* involves gender variance but not always gendered difference. While *transgender*, *trans*, and *transsexual* are terms that refer to changing gender and sex through legal, corporeal, or social mechanisms, a *travesti* may have been assigned “male” at birth but does not necessarily consider herself a woman (though some do).

³ There has been little academic work published about the development of “gender ideology.” However, for a good overview in English and astute analysis in the context of Costa Rica, see Arguedas Ramírez 2018. In addition, Sexuality Policy Watch (Observatorio de Sexualidad y Política) recently published a series of case studies on the topic in Latin America. See <https://sxpolitics.org/GPAL/>.

⁴ I explain below the difference between *trans* and *travesti*. Since *travesti* is a term that developed in Latin America and does not have the same political or cultural valence as *transvestite* in English, I have chosen not to translate it in this article.

⁵ Rodríguez refers to herself using feminine pronouns, which I also do throughout this article. As will become clear below, Shock is more ambiguous about pronoun usage, so I will use the gender-neutral “they.” An additional note on terminology: *poz* is a colloquial term for HIV positive or seropositive, frequently used by those living with HIV to reject the stigma associated with seropositivity. *Sudaca* is derived from *sudamericano/a* (South American) and has typically been used in Spain to denigrate racialized migrant communities, but is also taken up, as with Shock, as a form of discursive resistance. *Greaser* is a term with a similar racialized meaning in English, though it does not retain the same geopolitical referent.

While I provide rather prescriptive accounts of *trans* and *travesti* above, I am not interested in fixing subjective identities or describing what makes a travesti a travesti.⁶ However, I do want to insist on the political and specifically class-based consciousness of travesti and *trava* identifications.⁷ For many travestis the term *transgender* depoliticizes a violent history of social and economic marginalization. The term *travesti*, in contrast, retains this class difference and popular resonance, and is thus a political, rather than a psychological, or even corporeal identification. Below I explore how trans and travesti artists have developed a specifically monstrous response to both gendered normativity and increased state assimilation of sexual and gender dissidence. This approach requires an understanding of ontological categories of deviance, of the human and the monstrous, and of embodiment that is not limited to the poststructural utility of gender-variant subjects as disruptive of symbolic or allegorical meaning.⁸ In what follows, I describe the contradictory political context that gives rise to the monstrous proposals of Shock and Rodríguez. I then trace the epistemological history of monstrosity in Latin America, focusing on how gender and sexual deviance has been crucial to shaping the natural and the unnatural. I conclude by examining recent examples from their work that reconfigure the meanings of the body, its limits, and its becomings.

Multicultural Inclusion, Monstrous Disruption

While gay and lesbian people can now marry in Argentina and Uruguay, trans and travesti murder rates are at an all-time high in neighboring Brazil, where same-sex marriage is also legal (Mott, Michels, and Paulinho 2017). As the Argentine state appealed to middle-class gay tourists through promotional materials touting the safety and appeal of metropolitan amenities, trans activist Diana Sacayán was murdered in her home.⁹ In response, coalition-based intersectional feminism, in particular Ni Una Menos and the Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito—both of which began in Argentina but expanded beyond national and linguistic borders—have made gender-based violence a central tenet of contemporary political activism in Latin America.¹⁰ By refuting the patriarchal logics that structure the control of cis, trans, and travesti women's bodies (and thus their time and labor), recent feminist activism has made great strides in demanding the full implementation of government protections as well as in questioning the normative gender roles and sexual identities on which those protections often depend. At the same time, however, and in particular for trans and travesti activism, legal demands for recognition are not a panacea. As the state integrates previously “undesirable” bodies and lifestyles into its framework of governmentality, we have seen a concurrent proliferation of literary, artistic, and performative gestures that refocus the cultural field of vision on the unstable boundary between the human and the animal, the human and the machine, and the human and the monster (Giorgi 2014). Indeed, what makes humans human is not a superfluous question today. Specifically, we see a growing concern about the body and its designs, its rights, its future, the body as undoing itself in an apocalyptic present, in a constant state of infection or mutation—the body as monstrous. These cultural expressions respond to a milieu in which the boundedness of corporal legitimacy is tenuous and unclear. Recent work by trans and travesti artists avails

⁶ Lewis (2006) demonstrates how sociological research methods regarding trans and *travesti* subjects often resort to stereotype and objectification. In this vein, he critiques Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998) and Annick Prieur's *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (1998), while he sees César O. González Pérez's *Travestidos al desnudo: Homosexualidad, identidades y luchas territoriales en Colima* (2003) and especially Josefina Fernández's *Cuerpos desobedientes: Travestismo e identidad de género* (2004) as examples of socially engaged and ethically responsible research that does not seek to objectify but rather engage with travesti populations as agents of knowledge themselves. For examples of collaborative activist work produced by and about transgender, transsexual, and travesti communities, see Berkins 2015 and Martínez and Vidal-Ortiz 2018.

⁷ *Trava* is a shortened form of *travesti* that is frequently used in Argentina as derogatory slang. It has also been repurposed by *trava/travesti* subjects as a form of resistance, which I note below with regard to the work of Susy Shock.

⁸ This line of thinking echoes Viviane Namaste's (2009) critique of how transgender and transsexual subjects become *useful* for feminist and queer theory from the US and Europe, without having a voice in the development of that theory, a form of epistemic erasure.

⁹ Sacayán was the leader of Argentina's Movimiento Antidiscriminatorio de Liberación (MAL) and alternate secretary of the Asociación Internacional de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales, Trans e Intersex para América Latina y el Caribe (ILGALAC). She was found on October 13, 2015, in her apartment with thirteen stab wounds. Her murder was the first in Argentina to be tried as a hate crime and *travesticidio* (travesticide) (Ludueña 2018). On June 18, 2018, the accused, Gabriel Marino, was convicted of a hate crime motivated by “el prejuicio a la identidad de género travesti” (prejudice against travesti gender identity) and sentenced to life in prison (INADI 2018).

¹⁰ I cannot detail here the important history of these interconnected feminist movements. There are, however, several good interviews available that speak to the connection between gender and sexual autonomy, abortion rights, and the transversal *marea verde*, or green (feminist) tide. See Palmeiro 2018, Branigan and Palmeiro 2018, and Dillon 2018.

the monstrous in refusing to adhere to normative parameters of multicultural inclusion and neoliberal sexual citizenship.¹¹

Monsterring matters in this context not because these artists embody the performative instability of gender (Butler 1993), but because neither Shock nor Rodríguez are interested in avowing a matrix of gendered embodiment as a platform for political rights. Neither is seeking the right to become legitimized by the state as trans, travesti, or woman, but to take the gendering impetus of the state as a right to monster. “Ser travesti no es necesariamente querer ser mujer, en mi caso” (To be a travesti is not necessarily to want to be a woman, in my case), Rodríguez notes in a recent interview, and continues, “Ser travesti—y lo voy asumiendo cada vez más como lo dice Susy Shock—es tener derecho a ser un monstruo” (To be a travesti—and I take this up more and more like Susy Shock says—is to have the right to be a monster; Cabrera 2017). For both, monsterring has become an outlet to question how the body is understood in relation to mechanisms of biopolitical control. In contrast with those who seek legal recognition for “abnormal” bodies, the demands of their artistic expression are aimed at destroying state-sponsored normativity and its drive toward taxonomic classification.

As a reflection of cultural difference, the monster inscribes alterity on the flesh (Cohen 1996). An uncanny figure that resonates historically as the mutable sign of nature’s limits, the monster lays bare the architecture of gendered normativity through which the state comprehends subjectivity. However, the monster is not simply outside the binary of man/woman, good/evil, norm/deviant, but rather explodes those binaries into fragments of meaning that realign and reassemble as monstrous. The monster marks the constitutive mutability of normative ontology, its untethering from the epistemological coordinates of embodiment. It represents the very ambiguity that makes stable subject positions untenable; it reveals subjective contingencies. To occupy the position of monster—to monster—is to reject androcentrism and the temporalities and geographies inherent to such a worldview. To monster is an embodied rejection of incorporation by the state, its cultural imperatives, and its sexual norms. It is a queer refusal of ontology that nevertheless demands a repurposing of corporal orientation—look, gesture, pose—through a new and monstrous form.

To monster is similar to becoming monster in the tradition of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 232–309). Becoming monster, like becoming woman (the first order of difference) or becoming animal (a greater stretch), involves an epistemological shift in the understanding of the body as material. If for Deleuze and Guattari matter is not taxonomically divisible (as Aristotelian biology would have it) but part of a continuum of forces, thresholds, and intensities, then the deviance associated with monstrosity would no longer constitute a deviation from the norm but a becoming (Cox 2005, 23). Becoming is to unlearn the human and to learn (which is to desire) the monstrous, to incorporate the affective and cognitive properties of the monstrous as part of a new assemblage of matter and potential. Becoming monster is not necessarily to reject taxonomic order/difference in favor of an ever-expanding range of possibilities, but rather to harness the specific epistemological place of the monster in order to undermine the structural divide between human and nature; between human and the divine. It is this disruptive potential that leads Mabel Moraña (2017, 211–216) to describe the monster as the quintessential Deleuzian war machine, that is, a nomadic set of corporeal possibilities, affective intensities, and cognitive ruptures.

If neoliberal social and economic policies dominate the current landscape, then to monster is to defy the global circulation of capital and its concomitant bodily configurations. To monster (as a verb) represents a crucially queer mode of resistance to epistemological normativity. Thus, a working definition:

monster (transitive verb)

1. a: to become monstrous
b: to take on the characteristics of a monster (esp. in conduct, disposition, or appearance)
c: to think, act, and sense as a monster (i.e., to see as a monster would see)
2. to possess, cultivate, or seek bodily excess (esp. regarding the sexual and alimentary appetites)
3. to effect in others a sense of wonder, fright, or revulsion
4. to enact through the body monstrous knowledge, feeling, politics, or art

¹¹ In addition to Shock and Rodríguez, Pablo Pérez and Naty Menstrual are Argentine artists who have harnessed monstrosity in their work. Likewise, the late Hija de Perra in Chile, Lia García in Mexico, and Lino Arruda in Brazil take up the question of gender normativity in relation to the monstrous. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather an invitation to further debate about these contexts, embodiments, and forms of resistance.

Monsters of History

There is a vast body of literature regarding the epistemological foundations of what would become Latin America as wondrous, barbaric, and, indeed, monstrous.¹² The colonial enterprise imagined Latin America as a space of cultural, erotic, and corporal instability. Hybrid cultures, racial miscegenation, theological and cosmological syncretism, and geographical mystery all lean themselves to the analytic matrix of the monster. From the period of conquest through the Enlightenment and into nineteenth-century nation building, European and later criollo and mestizo populations endeavored to understand themselves and their surroundings according to (or in contrast with) tropes and imaginaries of the monstrous. Persephone Braham (2015, 9) describes monsters as “arbiters of order and disorder within a given social or cultural system,” arguing that the monster was a key trope in the repeated convergence of cultures, ideologies, and people that characterize the history of Latin America. Monsters, for Braham, represent “matrices of possibility; they are the matter (extension, space) that filters, organizes, and disrupts the transcendence of form (thinking, time)” (2015, 13). Monsters reflect cultural anxieties and serve to define the normal and the deviant, the self and the other, at once intensely desirable and horrific, uncanny yet material; monsters are symptomatic of the way a culture sees itself, its history, its future, and, often, its end.

The first consolidated dictionary of the Spanish language, the 1611 *Tesoro de Covarrubias*, includes the following entry for *monstro*: “es cualquier parto contra la regla y orden natural, como nacer el hombre con dos cabeças, quatro brazos, y quatro piernas” (is any birth that contradicts natural law and order, such as to be born a man with two heads, four arms, and four legs).¹³ The monster is framed in legal terms, against the “natural order.” A monster is born that way, a malformation of the body that is plainly evident upon birth, an excessive configuration of flesh that is taken as an omen of “algún gran mal” (some great evil). In this, Covarrubias echoes what is perhaps the most famous early modern account of monstrosity, Ambroise Paré’s *On Monsters and Marvels*, first published in 1573. Paré writes, “Monsters are things that appear outside the course of Nature (and are usually signs of some forthcoming misfortune), such as a child who is born with one arm, another who will have two heads, and additional members over and above the ordinary” (1982, 3). In these definitions, monstrosity appears as a doubling of the “natural” body. The “monstro” is twice what it should be—a body that is part of another body. It is not an image of oneself in the mirror, but a material folding of one mass into another. It is a body that is both itself and another; a body made monstrous by the unnatural redundancy of its physical existence. These two definitions that straddle the turn of the seventeenth century describe monstrosity as fleshly abundance and a harbinger of future evils yet to come. These monsters represent sensuous examples of deviance, material evidence of the limits of nature’s perfection that simultaneously reference a spiritual or metaphysical imbalance. Order is restored when the monster becomes seen and managed by the law; balance restored through the incorporation of monstrosity into the field of culture, that is, by defeating the monster in battle or discovering its secrets.

These definitions draw on much earlier ideas on monstrosity, namely those of Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who divides biological phenomena into hierarchical types, the *scala naturae*, placing man at the apex of natural development. For Aristotle a monster is that which diverges from the generic form of any particular species or type, which is itself essential, eternal. In this hierarchy, woman, insofar as she is considered to be a deformed man, is the first deviation of nature, the first monster. Thus, the logic of Aristotelian monstrosity depends on adherence to or deviation from natural form, but not divine or supernatural intervention. To be a monster is to exist in/as flesh that extends beyond the “natural” limits of corporeal normativity, pushing the boundaries of eroticism and rationality (Rhodes 2002).

And yet, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European explorers reported their discoveries with amazement and apprehension. In these early chronicles and proto-ethnographic texts, monsters were central to the epistemological imaginary of Spanish and Portuguese colonization. The space of the Americas as well as its inhabitants became knowable in the European mind according to mythological tropes of war and conquest, myth and monstrosity. The tropic imaginary of the monstrous was crucial to understanding the natural world and thus how nature itself entered into new taxonomical orders. The meaning of the natural was from the very outset of the colonial enterprise an effort to comprehend and transform the sexual, racial, geographic, and economic realities of the Americas.¹⁴ At its core, this epistemic

¹² See for example Mignolo 2005, Jáuregui 2008, Braham 2015, Davies 2016, and Moraña 2017.

¹³ Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), s.v. “monstro.”

¹⁴ For more information on the particular quality that “nature” and the natural accrue in the colonial archive, see Tortorici 2018. For a succinct description of the circulation of the monster as a topic of colonial writing, see Moraña (2017, 59–81).

colonization depended on assimilating American otherness—its monstrous alterity—and representing it according to archetypal patterns and images (Moraña 2017, 43).

As the science of medicine gained traction in Western epistemologies, the monstrous interfaced with categories of sexual difference and became ingrained in national ideologies as a marker of cultural belonging and legal standing. Indeed, as Foucault (2003, 62) argues, from the early nineteenth century “the monster is the fundamental figure around which bodies of power and domains of knowledge are disturbed and reorganized.” Monsters reveal the limits of normativity and the law by pointing out the law’s need for monsters against which to define its legality. Monsters have served to reorient the purview of the law; the possibilities of incorporation through which the normal becomes normative.

For example, historian Martha Few (2007, 171) demonstrates that in the case of Juana Aguilar, a “suspected hermaphrodite” accused of double concubinage in Guatemala City in 1803, “discourses of monstrosity continued to operate as key signifiers of difference in late colonial society, reconfigured through medical writings and legitimized through a legal system that established the criteria for what constituted a natural female body.” The medico-legal definition of hermaphrodite brings into crisis the naturalness of the sexual divisions on which normative gender and sexuality depend (Reis 2005). The physician who examined Aguilar, Narciso Esparragosa, sought to dispel what he saw as the antiquated logics of monstrosity and marvel that had consistently been associated with Latin America on the eve of a new enlightened century of learning (Few 2007, 164). The monsters of the past had to be eclipsed for the enlightened era of order and progress to come to fruition. Esparragosa is an early example of how the faith in science, positivism, usurped doctrinaire religious understandings of the natural and the monstrous.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the formation of nation-states in Latin America came with the burden of legal modernization. The monsters and marvels of the New World become outlaws and social deviants: bandits, pirates, and gauchos, but also *uranistas*, *invertidos*, and *maricas*, and later, *travestis*.¹⁵ This legal recognition depends on divesting the deviant body of its monstrous indecipherability. By 1900, as Jorge Salessi (1995) has shown in the case of Argentina, the state and medical science reinforced each other’s authority through the discursive and legal framing of public hygiene, a field of knowledge that demanded ever more precise measurements of bodies, anomalies, deviations, and illness. Science, wielded by the state as a mechanism of patriotic indoctrination, became the principal arbiter of the normal and the deviant. Throughout the twentieth century monsters became the domain of biopolitical control by which hygienists, psychologists, and phrenologists catalogued, diagnosed, and attempted to “cure” these aberrations and thus excise them from the national body.

The history of monstrosity in Latin America reveals the counterpoint between the supposedly unbridled abundance of the Americas and the Western desire for cognitive dominance over its material realities. In the twenty-first century, as the work of Shock and Rodríguez underscores, bodies that would have defied normative categorization—of gender, species, nature—are themselves repurposing the monster as a mode of political resistance. They engage the monstrous body to question the legal power of the state to recognize and regulate flesh, and thus to challenge the relationship between knowledge and orientation, recognition and submission to an epistemology based in the incorporation of deviance from the norm.

Susy Shock: “Yo monstruo mío”

Susy Shock transits spaces and registers as a poet, singer, cabaret host, folklorist, and activist whose multifaceted work glimmers from the margins as it cuts, sutures, and undoes itself in a liberatory juxtaposition of artifice and flesh.¹⁶ In Argentina and abroad, Shock appears at underground theatrical performances, public events, on television, at protests and demonstrations, at times promoting their work, at times discussing the state of trans politics, their vision of the present or the future (Bidegain 2012). Along with other important figures such as the late Lohana Berkins, Marlene Wayar, Mauro Cabral, and Naty Menstrual, Shock has been an integral force in Argentina’s political resurgence known as the

¹⁵ *Uranista* (Uranian) is a mid-nineteenth-century sexual term developed by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and is a precursor to “homosexual,” while *invertido* (invert) was more popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among criminologists to describe what they saw as a form of sexual and mental degeneracy or “inversion” that often involved cross-dressing and prostitution. *Marica* (sissy, faggot) is still in contemporary use.

¹⁶ In addition to giving numerous print interviews and appearing on television and in various performance venues, Shock has published two books of poetry, *Revuelo sur* (2007) and *Poemario trans pirado* (2011), the short story collection *Relatos en Canecalón* (2011), the children’s book *Crianzas* (2016), and the illustrated manifesto *Hojarascas* (2017), and has released musical albums *Buena vida y poca vergüenza* (2014) and *Traviarca* (2018). For an excellent recent interview that describes the breadth of their work, see Quintana (n.d.).

“furia travesti.” While their more recent cultural production has involved the vindication of a transversal politics of marginal subjectivities, it is in Shock’s 2011 publication of *Poemario trans pirado* that they most clearly enunciate a monstrous poetics aimed at denaturalizing patriarchal normativity. In particular, their poem “Yo monstruo mío” (I, my own monster) claims a right to exist as that monster whose indeterminacy undermines the facile division of gender and sexuality into discretely organized political categories. Shock’s poetics is aimed not at producing multiple selves but at refashioning the concept of self by undermining the conceptual limits of embodiment—how the body occupies space, how it reverberates as song, as desire.

From the opening lines they question dominant ideologies of epistemological legitimacy:

Yo, pobre mortal
 equidistante de todo
 yo, D.N.I. 20.598.061,
 yo, primer hijo de la madre que después fui,
 yo, vieja alumna
 de esta escuela de los suplicios.
 Amazona de mi deseo.
 Yo, perra en celo de mi sueño rojo.
 Yo, reivindico mi derecho a ser un monstruo.
 Ni varón ni mujer.
 Ni XXY ni H₂O.

I, mere mortal,
 Equidistant from everything
 me, ID number 20.598.061,
 me, firstborn son of the mother I later was
 me, old pupil
 of this school of torments.
 Amazon of my own desire.
 I, bitch in heat of my red dream.
 I, I claim my right to be a monster.
 Neither man nor woman.
 Neither XXY nor H₂O.¹⁷
 (2011, 10)

A triplet of variations on the self (“yo”) marks the poetic voice as both subject to the normative grasp of the state—having received a state identification number (DNI, Documento Nacional de Identidad)—and inassimilable to its logic—to have been a son and to now (still) be simultaneously son and mother. The autobiographical voice emerges “equidistant” from these different points of enunciation, a redundancy, an echo of itself. The multiplicity of these “selves” both orients and bewilders. The passage of time, spatial proximity, desire, emerges as part of a dynamic interface with and as a self that performs its own difference. This is a declaration of sexual intent, a ravenous sexual appetite, for the right to assert this particularly formed self that is not man or woman but monster. Or at least this monster is not gendered in the same way that gender is understood to be constitutive of a human’s place in Western society. Even if (especially if) we take into consideration the rebellious and at times sarcastic tone of these opening lines, we are left with the impression that this “yo,” in its refusal to be defined according to corporal normativity, undermines the viability of a human self by marking that self as contingent, mobile, and always incomplete.

As with Pedro Lemebel’s “Manifiesto (Hablo por mi diferencia),” Shock demands recognition.¹⁸ However, in contrast with Lemebel, they do so by shaping subjective difference in the image of the monster that the state cannot situate within normative taxonomical categories. The vindication of rights is not based on subjective intelligibility but rather, crucially, resides permanently in the interstitial space of monstrosity—engaging

¹⁷ The translation of Shock’s poem “Yo monstruo mío” was done with permission and in collaboration with Mayra Bottaro and Juliana Martínez. All other translations are mine.

¹⁸ Lemebel read this polemical text at a leftist political gathering in Santiago, Chile, in September 1986. It was later included in his *Loco afán* (2000).

the law from the limit of cognition and affect. Not man or woman, or even matter itself—not chromosomal subjectivity, but a series of indefinite, antimaterial becomings.

Shock's poem develops as series of refusals of gender and corporeal fixity, which is contrasted by provocations to lust, envy, and admiration. In this, Shock takes pleasure in appropriating difference, theirs is a monstrous poetics that disjoints and disintegrates only to reassemble matter and desire, which is to say, to become monstrous. When the demand for legal recognition returns, we read:

Reivindico: mi derecho a ser un monstruo.
 ¡Que otros sean lo Normal!
 El Vaticano normal.
 El Credo en dios y la virgísima Normal.
 Los pastores y los rebaños de lo Normal.
 El Honorable Congreso de las leyes de lo Normal.
 El viejo Larousse de lo Normal.

I claim: my right to be a monster.
 Let others be Normal!
 The Vatican: Normal.
 The Creed of god and the sacred virgin: Normal.
 Pastors and their flock of what is Normal.
 The Honorable Congress of laws of what is Normal.
 The old Larousse of what is Normal.
 (2011, 11)

Harkening back to the historical opposition between the monstrous and the normative, Shock nevertheless positions otherness as a burden to be borne by the institutions of "normalcy": religion, the state, and language.¹⁹ We could also read this phrase, ironically, as pushing the regime of the norm—obligatory normativity—onto those others who would seek, in fact, to define themselves against the very otherness that they ascribe to abnormal subjects. Shock calls for these "others" to be, to embody, the normalcy that has so insistently framed modern legal and cultural understandings of personhood in a tautological loop of self-definition. For Shock, these guardians of normativity are not generative of future possibilities but are tethered to the stifling transmission of a banal legitimacy. Instead, Shock's claim to monstrosity is not aimed at those others:

Solo mi derecho vital a ser un monstruo
 o como me llame
 o como me salga,
 como me pueda el deseo y las fucking ganas.
 Mi derecho a explorarme,
 a reinventarme.
 Hacer de mi mutar mi noble ejercicio.

Only my vital right to be a monster
 or however I call myself
 or however it comes out,
 whatever my desire and my fucking appetite can bear.
 My right to explore myself,
 to reinvent myself.
 To make a noble exercise of my mutation.
 (2011, 12)

¹⁹ It is important to note that Shock does not write "que otros sean normales," a phrase in which the adjective "normal" would modify "otros" (others) but transfers the realm of normativity to the more abstract "lo normal." Thus, "let others be what is normal" rather than "let others be normal."

If it is no longer the purview of the state to name monsters, then the right to mutate, to explore, to become, to reinvent oneself, takes over as a fundamental exercise of liberty. This liberty is the promise of desire, “como me pueda el deseo,” the unbounded fluorescence of monstrous possibilities.

Shock’s “Yo monstruo mío” coalesces a vision of monstrosity that serves to undermine gender-based identities as well as state-sponsored legal recognition. An important intervention in autobiographical narratives of sexual dissidence, Shock’s poetry engages popular culture, performance, and music as it frames desire as an incitement to shift, change, mutation, and promise. The promise of the self comes undone in Shock’s work, as in their poem “Soy”:

¿Qué soy? ¿Importa? [...]
 “Soy arte”, digo, mientras revoleo las caderas y me pierdo
 entre la gente y su humo cigarro y su brillo sin estrellas y su
 hambre de ser.

What am I? Does it matter? [...]
 “I’m art,” I say, while twirling my hips and losing myself
 among the people and their cigarette smoke and their starless brilliance and their
 hunger for life.
 (2011, 8)

Being transforms into becoming. But it is in the movement of the body, too, that this becoming figures as a method of reinvention. To “be” art is to enact the body as art. Here, being is not so much a referential marker, not an insertion into a historical tradition, but an invitation to the bodily need, the hunger, to lose oneself in the multitude.

When asked (and they are often asked), Shock describes their gender as not human but “colibrí” (hummingbird). In an interview from 2016, they explain, “Soy género colibrí porque es mi idea de proyectarme hacia el infinito” (My gender is hummingbird because my idea is to cast myself to infinity; Luna 2016). Following their poetic insistence on mutation and the possibilities of desire, gender becomes an expression of projecting in time, space, and matter toward a cosmic unknown. I want to underscore, however, that Shock’s colibrí-as-gender responds specifically to the legal construction of identity by the state, and the mechanisms by which a (state-sponsored) gendered identity limits the expression of possibilities, becomings, monstrosities. Shock continues:

En el activismo pensamos todo el tiempo realidades, leyes, estados de derecho. Eso nos pone en un contexto que es interpelar a una heterosexualidad, pero también a una dirigencia que es la que produce leyes y los poderes que sostienen estas lógicas. Necesito poetizarme porque cuando lo hacemos nos acercamos a esa idea de hacer fuga hacia algo nuevo.

In activism we are always thinking about realities, laws [legislation], the rule of law. That puts us in a context where we must question heterosexuality, but also the leadership that produces laws and the powers that sustain those logics. I need to make myself poetry because when we do that, we come closer to the idea of escaping toward something new. (Luna 2016)

This poetic fugitivity responds to the context of legal interpellation with an exuberant refusal. The need to turn to poetics rather than politics, or to the poetic as political, reminds us of the difference between subjective legibility and the project of becoming.

In another interview, Shock reflects on the history of naming otherness in order to mark their poetics as a form of monstrous indefinition:

Los monstruos fueron los negros, las indias e indios, y ahora somos las travas. Me reivindico trava porque quiero resignificar lo que fue insulto, reivindicándome desde una cuestión de clase y desde una parte incómoda. Yo quiero quedarme monstra. Tengo otros enormes privilegios, que también habilita el arte. Necesito, desde una coyuntura tan terrible como la que están pasando la región y mi país, reivindicarme desde un lugar que les sea incómodo nombrarme: trava. Lo LGTTBI no alcanza para darnos una zona de libertad; eso, más bien, es ser cómplice de una burocratización.

The monsters used to be Black people, Indians, and now it is us travas. I identify as a trava because I want to resignify what used to be an insult, claiming it for myself with class consciousness and from an uncomfortable place. I want to stay a monster. I have enormous privileges that art has given me. What I need, in such a terrible moment for the region and my country, is to vindicate this space where it is uncomfortable for them to name me: trava. The initials LGTTBI are not enough to provide us with a space of freedom; that, in fact, is to be complicit in a process of bureaucratization. (Cordo 2018)

The work of Susy Shock proposes “other” modes of attachment, gender, and sexuality that are not assimilable to the logics of institutions such as the state, the church, or even language itself. The rights that Shock demands are not about submitting to inscription or incorporation, but the infinite projection of artifice, poetics, and fugue. And while it is difficult to accept the idea that Black and Indigenous peoples are in fact the monsters of the past—as if that past has been overcome—Shock describes in this paragraph a trajectory of otherness through which monstrosity signifies as the disembodiment of abjection. To identify as “trava” appears, in this case, as part of a historical tradition of gender and sexual dissidence in which the act of occupying that signifying location is at once an act of defiance and a poetic projection toward new becomings, new territorializations of desire. The history of monstrosity named by Shock is one of racial, ethnic, and then gendered incommensurability. These categories are not monstrous because of their discursive position, but rather because they exist as a material threat to state normativity. To identify as “trava,” for Shock, is thus to seek a new “zone of freedom,” one that defies the logics of bureaucratic containment by the state. In this, their work finds an accomplice in Claudia Rodríguez, whose rejection of state normativity also seeks out new territories, new erotic zones through which the travesti body comes to signify as monstrous.

Claudia Rodríguez: Looking, Learning, Monstering

Activist, performer, and poet Claudia Rodríguez proposes a pedagogy that simultaneously marks the travesti body as formed by a visual grammar of queer proximity and a constant negotiation of corporeal precarity. From her participation in the 2015 burlesque theatrical performance *Cuerpos para odiar*, based on her first poetry collection of the same name (2013–2014), to the 2016 publication *Dramas pobres* and 2019 performance *Vienen por mí*, Rodríguez has become a key, if seldom recognized, voice for the anti-neoliberal co-optation of sexual difference in Chile. In her framing of travesti pedagogy as corporeal, as learning how to live, write, and see as travesti, she offers a critically plastic sense of the body that undermines the conservative multiculturalism of recent Chilean politics. While Shock often appeals to the beauty of monstrosity—the shimmering possibilities of the hummingbird—Claudia Rodríguez, in contrast, appeals to monstrosity’s darker, grotesque side, to the dangerous proximity of flesh, to the appetites of the monstrous body. The sexual economy that Rodríguez explores in her poetry depends on the inevitably dangerous circulation of travesti bodies through the eroticized cityscape of Santiago, and, at the same time, the deployment of monstrosity as a mode of resistance to the absorption of travesti bodies by contemporary “LGBT” activism and, consequently, the neoliberal state.

There is an intimate connection between the conditions under which Rodríguez’s early poetry collections were created and the travesti body itself, as Rodríguez notes in an introduction to *Cuerpos para odiar*: “es una producción precaria, de autogestión, que desobedece a las omnipresentes industrias culturales. Producción a la que se le puede llamar despectivamente como LIBRILLA, una producción del fracaso, sin editorial.” (It is a precarious work, self-produced, that disobeys omnipresent cultural industries. [It is] a work that one could call dismissively a LITTLE BOOK, a work of failure, without a publisher; 2013–2014, 2). Rodríguez carried out the graphic design of the text herself, copying and pasting portions of the text at right angles, across page folds, in different fonts and sizes. The front and back covers of the book—its skin—is composed of images of murdered travestis. Inert limbs, faces covered by swaths of matted hair, legs sprawling, it is a composite collection of spectacular violence, an archive of travesti death. This text, like her own body, is the result of self-reliance and self-fashioning, at once an archive of precarity and of possibility, a homemade body (of work) that nonetheless reflects a collective will to survive. The title, *Cuerpos para odiar*, collapses two key concepts, parody (*parodia*) and hate (*odiar*), and in doing so, it pushes the reader to question whose bodies (*cuerpos*) we are to parody, and whose we should hate.

Gender parody has a long tradition of resistance in Chile. According to Nelly Richard, the travesti aesthetics of artists Carlos Leppe and Juan Dávila, which was produced in the context of extreme repression during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), represents a complex interchange of “*borrowing and lending* but also of *misappropriating* techniques and styles” (Richard 2004, 46; emphasis original). Travesti art often relies on

parody and maladaptation, on the production of copies with missing or false referents. The work of Leppe and Dávila, in addition to *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* (Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas), provides a legacy of referential instability that directly links to contemporary iterations of the monstrous. And this referentiality has political ramifications, as Richard points out: “Viewed from itself, that copy is also a postcolonial satire of how First World fetishism projects onto the image of Latin America false representations of originality and authenticity (the primitivist nostalgia of the virgin continent), which Latin America again falsifies into a caricature of itself as Other to satisfy the other’s demands” (2004, 47).

The parody of referential art, of respectability, of epistemological fixity, is what undergirds this travesti aesthetics, which brings into focus those chimeric visions of monstrosity that populated the early modern imaginary. To satisfy the demands of performative legibility through parody is also to refuse to satisfy that demand.

For her part, Diamela Eltit (2017) describes the technologies deployed in the production of the travesti subject in Chile as depending on a double transvestism in which we witness “la mujer *travesti* de sí misma, producida sincrónicamente por las diversas industrias médicas y cosméticas” (a woman who is a travesti of herself, produced simultaneously by diverse medical and cosmetic industries). Eltit, what is more, proposes writing as a bodily artifice, as itself a form of transvestism, a negotiation of surface and skin, sex and gender. In Eltit’s view, Rodríguez destabilizes the gestures and genres that populate neoliberal Chile in a cosmetic refashioning of text and body. While Rodríguez’s aesthetic proposal may transgress boundaries through a textual maquillage, it also, if not primarily, does so by undoing the normative framework of ontology by monstrosity. For Rodríguez, to monster oneself is to fold one’s subjectivity into the dark recesses of the psychologically deviant and the physically excessive. It is to linger, resentful, in the long shadow of violent normativity. To monster, for Rodríguez, is to see with new eyes.

In the 2016 publication *Dramas pobres* Rodríguez reflects on the erasure of travestis as political and sexual subjects in the context of ongoing patriarchal, economic, and epistemic violence in neoliberal Chile. For example, the last poem of *Dramas pobres* reads: “Él me mintió, pero yo le dije toda la verdad: soy travesti” (He lied to me, but I told him the whole truth: I am a travesti; 2016, 95). This single line stages an erotic encounter between a *travesti* and her man, whose masculine fragility is underscored by the impossibility of recognizing himself in relation, face to face, with her. That is, we see here the hypocritical negation of his desire, while the travesti “I” controls not simply the truth, her truth, but also her being (*ser*). Her body, in close proximity to that of the man, becomes a body because she authorizes her own self to exist, to be. To be a travesti is truth; the truth is being travesti. This is an example of how Rodríguez imbues the space between man and travesti with desire, but also danger. And this dangerous proximity is part of a long tradition in Latin American cultural production: La Manuela of *El lugar sin límites*, Molina of *El beso de la mujer araña*, the *locas* of Néstor Perlongher, the *maricas* of Pedro Lemebel, and more monstrous yet, the eponymous androgyne of Mayra Santos-Febres’s *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*.²⁰

Another example:

Al metro se subió un joven mozo que me miró
fijamente, fotográficamente, radicalmente,
con un propósito
a-me-na-zan-te

A young man got on the metro and stared at me intently, photographically, radically,
with one purpose
threat-en-ing
(Rodríguez 2016, 63)

The city is charged with possible encounters, affinities, proximities; a theater of erotic glances but also defiant stares. The poetic “I” is rendered through the photographic gaze of the young man who enters into contact, proximity, with the travesti. The encounter marks patriarchal violence as an ongoing, omnipresent possibility for the travesti body. This snapshot includes a dual perspective: the image of a man who returns the glance of the travesti, but only to establish that her body is in danger. That is, the glance recognizes at

²⁰ See José Donoso, *El lugar sin límites* (1966) and the 1978 film adaptation directed by Arturo Ripstein; Manuel Puig, *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976); Néstor Perlongher, *Prosa plebeya: Ensayos, 1980–1992* (1997), recently translated to English as *Plebian Prose* (2019); Pedro Lemebel, *Loco afán: Crónicas del sidario* (1996); and Mayra Santos-Febres, *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000).

the same time as it threatens to destroy. In this case the look, the eyes, become the mutually constitutive framework for travesti corporality that is always potentially dangerous.

A third example:

Soy de esas locas Estuardas,
que entre tantos amores y
orgasmos no puede decir que
vive, si cada cierto tiempo, no
se pone en riesgo de muerte.

I am one of those crazy Estuardas,
who among so many lovers and
orgasms cannot say that she
lives, unless every so often, she doesn't
put her own life at risk.
(2016, 54)

This is to live through the threat of death. The framing is not so much as a Freudian death drive, but a desire that does not become embodied without the possibility of extermination. She does not live, her body does not exist, if it is not periodically threatened by the possibility of bodily harm, even annihilation. Another way of thinking about this would be that it is only through the threat of death does the body, its orgasms, its desire, come to matter—as both materiality and importance. In *Dramas pobres*, this metropolitan proximity juxtaposes desire and danger, body and oblivion. This is to say that the neoliberal city, Santiago, feeds on, indeed is built with travesti flesh.

But proximity can also educate. In a poem from the earlier collection, *Cuerpos para odiar*, Rodríguez writes: “Una, mirando a otras travesti aprende a ser travesti” (Looking at other travestis, one learns to be a travesti; 2013–2014, 58). To see, touch, feel, learn. If the man’s gaze is always painted with desire and danger, the gaze between travestis generates a different operation: pedagogy and solidarity. It forms the basis of a travesti epistemology. Travesti knowledge, for Rodríguez, is transmitted through corporeal proximity, bodies in relation, looking, learning. If we began with an “I am travesti,” now we take a step back: how does one become travesti? The gaze, again, is key because it marks a process of embodiment, an aestheticization of the travesti body: the body as an effect of the performative reciprocity of the gaze. It is not a becoming/*devenir travesti*, as Néstor Perlongher might say, or a citational performativity, as Judith Butler might have it, but an ontologized epistemology. In other words, here, knowing the self as travesti emerges through the interface of bodies in relational accretion. The body becomes a body through years of looking and learning. “Ser travesti es maquillarse la cara, mientras llega la noche, en diferentes espejos” (To be a travesti is to put on your makeup, as night falls, in different mirrors; Rodríguez 2016, 57). This is knowledge accumulated through violence, joy, humor, desire, danger, the body as a proliferation of ontological possibilities, orientations, even those reflections of oneself in the mirror, in different mirrors. Rodríguez proposes that we must trace the accumulated knowledge of the travesti body to understand its materiality. And this material episteme depends on the reflection and refraction—the erotically charged collision—of bodies. These corporeal orientations are what sustain Rodríguez’s project of travesti knowledge. The travesti is manifest as proximities that shimmer in the night.

This proposal is akin to what Bruno Latour (2004, 208) describes as the body “learning to be affected.” The travesti body is articulated as a subject by learning to resonate with other bodies. It gains traction in its pull toward others, a tactile history of desire. The travesti body is affected by its reverberation with other bodies, those other bodies that must exist in order for hers to make sense, to be. This epistemology depends on a constellation of looks, and on the biotechnologies of marginalization, danger, and desire. Learning to be affected in relation.

The work of Claudia Rodríguez proposes that we monster ourselves in order to resist the co-optation of our bodies and our politics by the neoliberal state. As democratic reforms continue to grant rights based on legible forms of sexual, gendered, or ethnic difference, sexual citizenship expands as and through the market-based ordering of bodies, and as consumer citizenship (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2016, 155). It is precisely this type of market-based sexual citizenship that Rodríguez rejects by appealing to monstrosity. The monster undermines normative gender constructions, sexuality, and national belonging. The travesti as monster becomes a method of corporeal dissidence that challenges the symbolic and political order as a parody of the

social contract and a critique of the false promise of state-sanctioned protections for marginalized subjects. In this way, the monster resists normativity as it exposes the fallacy of neoliberal citizenship.

In *Dramas pobres* the travesti body resists the biopolitical control of the state, precisely, by monstrosity itself:

“Contigo Lola, yo soy el hombre más feliz del mundo.” No es uno el que te lo dice, son tantos que pierdes la cuenta, y de noche son más, sobre todo los jóvenes que de día no se atreven ni siquiera a desviar el ojo por ti, porque presienten que una pudiera despertar algo incontrolable que llevan dentro, tan dentro que llega a ser más monstruoso que la historia de mi cuerpo, más monstruoso que la entrada y salida de silicona y agujas de mi piel. Más monstruosa que mi tolerancia al dolor.

“With you, Lola, I am the happiest man in the world.” And it is not just one who will tell you that, there are so many that you lose count, and at night there are more of them, especially young men who during the day wouldn’t dare bat an eye at you, because they sense that you could wake up something uncontrollable that they harbor inside, so far down that it becomes more monstrous than the history of my body, more monstrous than the silicone and needles that enter and exit my skin. More monstrous than my tolerance for pain.

(Rodríguez 2016, 23)

This is the travesti body as magnetic and dangerous. Temptress. Siren. It is as the forbidden object of desire that the travesti operates in the semantic field of the monstrous. Her monstrosity is itself the object of desire; her body, an archive of pain and silicone. This monstrosity is both dangerous and empowering: monstrosity as resisting the techniques of biopolitical normativity.

It is in these moments that Rodríguez’s work flourishes. She homes in on the material consequences of the circulation of travesti bodies, the rhizomatic flow of those monsters in neoliberal Chile, on the hum of those glances, those dissident corporalities that both become and undo the self. For to become is also to undo, and in that Möbius contour lies the risk of dissipation, which is the same as the possibility of amalgamation or assemblage. Both are productive and both are dangerous—monstrous—but it is only in that danger that new worlds are forged. This is what her work does: it forges new worlds. Travesti worlds. And in so doing, it reveals moments in which the heteronormative order cracks under its own hypocrisy. It shows how men are pulled, magnetically, to the very bodies that they reject, or murder. This is the man who lies, who stares, the man whose kiss might be her last.

At the same time, the eyes serve to learn and to generate solidarity among travestis. The gaze serves to recognize the self in another. This type of mutual recognition, of self-in-relation, is crucial to the politics of resistance to neoliberal co-optation by the state. The state cannot see with the eyes of the monstrous travesti, it can only see the travesti as monstrous. Thus, the complex interplay of bodies and eyes in relation forms the basis of a repertoire of resistance. The visual economy of Rodríguez’s poetry privileges the resistance that only emerges by seeing and being seen with the eyes of the monster who is (like) you.

A final example:

En la calle un seductor poeta de la construcción me dijo:
¿Por qué no me regala una sonrisa?, y la boca se me abrió de
par en par, mostrando mi ensalá de dientes chuecos, como
disponiéndome a comerme al hombre, porque mi sonrisa
es la de un monstruo. Mi resistencia, mi arma, mi puñal,
mi fusil es monstruosarme; admitir que no soy otra cosa que
un fracaso para cualquier modelo, que no sé amar como di-
cen que hay que amar, que el amor es privativo y no incon-
mensurable. Soy un monstruo, señores, sobre todo cuando
me seducen y me hacen reír, porque tiendo a comérmelos.

In the street a seductive construction worker-poet told me:
Why don’t you give me a smile?, and my mouth opened
wide, revealing its salad of crooked teeth, as if
readying to devour that man, because my smile
is that of a monster. My resistance, my gun, my knife,

my rifle is to monster myself; to admit that I am nothing but
 a failure for any model, that I don't know how to love like
 they say you have to love, that love is exclusive and not
 incommensurable. I am a monster, kind sirs, especially when
 they seduce me and make me laugh, because I tend to devour them.
 (Rodríguez 2016, 83)

Monstruosirse—to monster yourself—moving from the transitive to the reflexive verb, is to undermine the normative orientations of the neoliberal state in an act of selfing and reembodying. *Monstruosirse* is a technique of embodiment that depends on negotiating the bodily contingencies of desire, danger, and becoming. The monstrous body knows that it is seen as such and yet smiles back, with mangled teeth, hungry. The monster devours with her crooked teeth the man who might kill her. This monster emerges from the cognitive penumbra of the unknown. The travesti monster thirsts for blood, for liberty, thirsts for drama when faced with the systematic co-optation of travesti desire. Her desire is not to placate the man who catcalls but rather to undo the structures that bind the state to its bloodthirsty mandate to eliminate travesti bodies. This parody of gender normativity invites us to consider the state itself as monstrous. To be and become travesti. To desire. To yearn. To monster. To embody oneself as monstrous.

For Rodríguez, this monstering is an act of rebellion against normative expectations of beauty, the sex/gender system, patriarchal violence, the incorporation of travesti bodies, and the false security of neoliberal politics. Her proposal of monstrosity depends on a complex matrix of glances, stares, and looks. Through it, she answers the question that we have yet to ask: What does the monster see when it looks out at humanity? That is, her poetics offers a form of approaching the epistemic difference that is at the heart of Western philosophies of the human and the monster, the self and the other, the limits of bodily integrity that mark the individual as discrete. With those monstrous eyes furiously engaged, who are you?

Conclusion

The work of Shock and Rodríguez suggests not simply there can be no monsters within the state (only ever outside, as a condition of the monster's constitutive, if mutable, difference), but also that the only path to freedom for monsters is that which is trodden by monsters. If the monster ceases to exist as such in the moment it is granted entry into the regime of political legitimacy, then for a monster to claim monstrosity as its politics is a paradox that nevertheless points out the limiting scope of institutional recognition. This claim gestures toward another politics, one not beholden to the structures of recognition or the regimes of truth or crime and punishment, but rather of becoming, mutating, monstering. This politico-poetics of monstrosity depends on techniques of bodily experimentation and on relishing the dangerousness of desire. And only in so doing, only in monstering, does the subject begin to shed the epistemological weight of its colonial birth.

As I have argued, both Shock and Rodríguez are advocating monstrosity precisely when the global circulation of capital bolstered by neoliberal economic policies and the progressive expansion of legal rights to previously marginalized populations have converged in Latin America. They do not simply propose new monsters in light of modern cultural configurations, but rather to see and feel as monsters, to look with monstrous eyes, to monster the present. And while it could certainly be argued that the figure of the monster, as a trope or matrix, cannot exist outside of a particular cultural system, part of their monstrosity has to do with learning to relate by corporal enactments, proximity, and movement, rather than cognition, rather than reason. These monsters learn through gesture, look, and pose. The particularly embodied nature of this monstrosity makes it capable of proposing a new epistemological lens through which to understand the body and its movements.

Monstering is not merely a crisis of the sign, not symbolic or discursive variation, but a change in how the body occupies the symbolic and the material. It is a resignification of the flesh. And it is that occupancy of space as a monstrous travesti that Shock and Rodríguez are not only asking to be read differently, but also, crucially, to be seen, desired, and felt as monstrous. They are proposing that the trans and travesti subject move from out of the scare quotes of the "monstrous" and into the paradoxical place of monster. They are demanding that the body be felt as both sign and touch, at once performative and material. This is the contradiction that the travesti's monstering uncovers. It is not that the politics of representation ceases to matter in these monstrous embodiments but rather that the ontological reality of the body comes to feel and move and touch differently. The category crisis that monstering brings is not simply of good and evil, self and other, but of what the body is capable of bearing, what the body can become in becoming monster.

The monster may serve as a matrix of cultural understanding, but in seeking to monster—to see, feel, yearn, love as a monster would love—we can start to shift the normative structure of subjective intelligibility and thus to erode its cultural limitations. In monsterring the present, we may find new ways of relating, orienting ourselves toward bodies who are monstrous like us—who monster us and are monstered by us in return.

Author Information

Joseph M. Pierce (Cherokee Nation) is Associate Professor in the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literature at Stony Brook University. He is the author of *Argentine Intimacies: Queer Kinship in an Age of Splendor, 1890–1910* (SUNY Press, 2019) and coeditor of *Políticas del amor: Derechos sexuales y escrituras disidentes en el Cono Sur* (Cuarto Propio, 2018). His work has been published recently in *Critical Ethnic Studies*, *Taller de Letras*, and *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, and has also been featured in *Indian Country Today*.

References

- Arguedas Ramírez, Gabriela. 2018. "Gender Ideology, Religious Fundamentalism and the Electoral Campaign (2017–2018) in Costa Rica." London School of Economics and Political Science, *Engenderings* blog, November 7. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/11/07/gender-ideology-religious-fundamentalism-and-the-electoral-campaign-2017-2018-in-costa-rica/>.
- Berkins, Lohana, ed. 2015. *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas: Informe nacional sobre la situación de las travestis, transexuales y transgéneros*. 2nd ed. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.
- Bidegain, Claudio Marcelo. 2012. "Susy Shock trans piradix: El inclasificable género colibrí." VIII Congreso Internacional de Teoría y Crítica Literaria Orbis Tertius, Universidad Nacional de La Plata.
- Blanco, Fernando A., Mario Pecheny, and Joseph M. Pierce, eds. 2018. *Políticas del amor: Derechos sexuales y escrituras disidentes en el Cono Sur*. Santiago de Chile: Cuarto Propio.
- Braham, Persephone. 2015. *From Amazons to Zombies: Monsters in Latin America*. Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press.
- Branigan, Claire, and Cecilia Palmeiro. 2018. "Women Strike in Latin America and Beyond." NACLA, March 8. <https://nacla.org/news/2018/03/08/women-strike-latin-america-and-beyond>.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Cabrera, Pilar. 2017. "Soy Claudia Rodríguez, activista, travesti, pobre y resentida." Agencia Presentes. YouTube video, 3:01. Posted February 20, 2017. <https://youtu.be/4SZxlVE7cvs>.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 1996. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 3–25. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.cttsq4d.4>
- Cordo, Azul. 2018. "Quiero quedarme monstrea." *La Diaria*, April 16. <https://ladiaria.com.uy/articulo/2018/4/quiero-quedarme-monstrea/>.
- Corrales, Javier, and Mario Pecheny, eds. 2010. *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: A Reader on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkfk6>
- Cox, Christoph. 2005. "Of Humans, Animals, and Monsters." In *Becoming Animal: Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom*, edited by Nato Thompson, 18–25. North Adams, MA: MASS MoCa Publications.
- Davies, Surekha. 2016. *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139568128>
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dillon, Marta. 2018. "Clandestinidad Nunca Más." *Página 12*, Suplemento Las12, May 25. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/116771-clandestinidad-nunca-mas>.
- Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Héctor. 2016. *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Transnational Conversations*. London: Zed Books.
- Eltit, Diamela. 2017. "Enfermarme de rabia: Una crítica a 'Dramas Pobres' de Claudia Rodríguez." *elDesconcierto.cl*, March 29. <http://www.eldesconcierto.cl/2017/03/29/enfermarme-de-rabia-una-critica-a-dramas-pobres-de-claudia-rodriguez/>.
- Few, Martha. 2007. "'That Monster of Nature': Gender, Sexuality, and the Medicalization of a 'Hermaphrodite' in Late Colonial Guatemala." *Ethnohistory* 54 (1): 159–176. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-2006-042>

- Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*. New York: Picador.
- Giorgi, Gabriel. 2014. *Formas comunes: Animalidad, cultura, biopolítica*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia.
- INADI (Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo). 2018. "Condena histórica por el asesinato de Diana Sacayán." Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo, June 18. <http://www.inadi.gob.ar/2018/06/18/condena-historica-por-el-asesinato-de-diana-sacayan/>.
- Jáuregui, Carlos A. 2008. *Canibalia: Canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina*. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31819/9783964562449>
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "How to Talk about the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies." *Body & Society* 10 (2–3): 205–229. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X04042943>
- Lemebel, Pedro. 2000. *Loco afán: Crónicas de sidario*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Lewis, Vek. 2006. "Sociological Work on Transgender in Latin America: Some Considerations." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 12 (2): 77–90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2006.10426858>
- Lewis, Vek. 2010. *Crossing Sex and Gender in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230109964>
- Ludueña, María Eugenia. 2018. "El juicio por el travesticidio de Diana Sacayán empieza el 16 de febrero." *Agencia Presentes*, February 7. <http://agenciapresentes.org/2018/02/07/juicio-travesticidio-diana-sacayan-empieza-16-febrero/>.
- Luna, Hugo. 2016. "Susy Shock: 'Hay toda una generación que está poniendo su propia voz.'" *Riberas*, June 1. <https://riberas.uner.edu.ar/susy-shock-hay-toda-una-generacion-que-esta-poniendo-su-propia-voz/>.
- Martínez, Juliana, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, eds. 2018. *Travar el saber: Educación de personas trans y travestis en Argentina: Relatos en primera persona*. La Plata: Editorial de la Universidad de la Plata.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Moraña, Mabel. 2017. *El monstruo como máquina de guerra*. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31819/9783954875917>
- Mott, Luiz, Eduardo Michels, and Paulinho. 2017. "Mortes violentas de LGBT no Brasil: Relatório 2017." Grupo Gay da Bahia. <https://homofobiamata.wordpress.com/homicidios-de-lgbt-no-brasil-em-2018/>.
- Namaste, Viviane. 2009. "Undoing Theory: The 'Transgender Question' and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory." *Hypatia* 24 (3): 11–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01043.x>
- Ochoa, Marcia. 2014. *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822376996>
- Palmeiro, Cecilia. 2018. "The Latin American Green Tide: Desire and Feminist Transversality." Blog, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, August 6. https://medium.com/@j_lacs/the-latin-american-green-tide-desire-and-feminist-transversality-56e4b85856b2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569325.2018.1561429>
- Paré, Ambroise. 1982. *On Monsters and Marvels*. Translated by Janis L. Pallister. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Original edition, 1840.
- Quintana, Juliana. n.d. "Susy Shock: 'Elijo la incomodidad de lo travesti para negociar con este mundo.'" *Almagro Revista*. <http://almagrorevista.com.ar/susy-shock-elijo-la-incomodidad-lo-travesti-negociar-este-mundo/> (accessed October 22, 2018).
- Reis, Elizabeth. 2005. "Impossible Hermaphrodites: Intersex in America, 1620–1960." *Journal of American History* 92 (2): 411–441. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3659273>
- Rhodes, Elizabeth. 2002. "Gender and the Monstrous in 'El burlador de Sevilla.'" *MLN* 117 (2): 267–285. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2002.0028>
- Richard, Nelly. 2004. *Masculine/Feminine: Practices of Difference(s)*. Translated by Silvia Tandeciarz and Alice A. Nelson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822385714>
- Rodríguez, Claudia. 2013–2014. *Cuerpos para odiar: Sobre nuestras muertas, las travestis, no sabemos escribir*. Chile: Author.
- Rodríguez, Claudia. 2016. *Dramas pobres*. Santiago de Chile: Ediciones del Intersticio.
- Salessi, Jorge. 1995. *Médicos maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1871–1914)*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo.
- Shock, Susy. 2011. *Poemario trans pirado*. Buenos Aires: Nuevos Tiempos.
- Tortorici, Zeb. 2018. *Sins against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371625>
- Viteri, María Amelia. 2017. "Intensiones: Tensions in Queer Agency and Activism in Latino América." *Feminist Studies* 43 (2): 405–417. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.43.2.0405>

How to cite this article: Pierce, Joseph M. 2020. I Monster: Embodying Trans and *Travesti* Resistance in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review* 55(2), pp. 305–321. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.563>

Submitted: 05 April 2018

Accepted: 09 April 2019

Published: 23 June 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

LARR

Latin American Research Review is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Latin American Studies Association.

OPEN ACCESS 