

Building *Cuir* Utopias One Bug at a Time

*Touching Insects through Time
in the Cultural Production
of Greater Mexico*

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Abstract: This article traces the figure of the insect across the cultural production of Greater Mexico to examine how bugs have shaped representations of gender and sexual dissidence from the colonial period to the present. Drawing on *cuir/queer* studies, animal studies, and trans* theory, I analyse the shifting meanings of *mayates* (figeater beetles), *mariposas* (butterflies), *mariquitas* (ladybirds), and cockroaches in literature, performance, and visual culture. I argue that while insects have historically functioned as symbolic markers of *jotería* and non-normative gender expression, contemporary trans* and *cuir* cultural production increasingly attends to their materiality, opening new ways of thinking about embodiment, affect, temporality, and memory. The first section reconstructs a genealogy of insect imagery in works by Juan Carlos Bautista, Luis Felipe Fabre, Luis Montaña, Rigoberto González, and others, showing how insects operate as liminal figures that both reproduce and destabilize heteropatriarchal norms. I then examine the work of Mixe performer Lukas Avendaño, whose engagements with the butterfly move beyond metaphor to imagine trans-species forms of belonging that connect *muxeidad*, migration, and queer futurity. Finally, I analyse Mexican trans* artist Lía García's reclamation of the cockroach through "ternura radical" (radical tenderness). I propose that the cockroach functions as an affective chronotope through which touch and interspecies encounter render trans* memory palpable, challenging narratives that erase trans* histories and opening space for more-than-human *cuir* futures.

Keywords: *Queer studies; trans studies; insects; Greater Mexico; cockroach; mayate*

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With their dual characterization as both repulsive and beautiful, insignificant and transformative, resilient and fragile, *mayates* (figeater beetles), *mariposas* (butterflies), and *mariquitas* (ladybirds) have emerged as representations of non-normative gender and sexual practices around the world. Winged insects such as butterflies and ladybirds, as well as birds—ducks, chickens—have frequently been used to describe Latin American men engaging in non-heteronormative behaviours.¹ In Mexico, insects are often associated with dissident gender and sexual practices, particularly in the context of *lo cuir*—a Spanish translation of queerness that signals the geopolitical displacement of knowledge production to the Global South—and *jotería*, an umbrella term for various sexual expressions rooted in the experiences of queer Latina/o/x, Chicana/o/x, and gender-nonconforming individuals. The use of these creatures as symbols of such behaviours can be traced all the way back to the sixteenth century.² Thus, the proliferation and long history of this symbology compel us to closely consider the connections between these bugs, practices of gender and sexual dissidence, and their representation in Mexican literature, visual culture, and performance. In this article, therefore, I trace the trope of the insect in the literature of greater Mexico written in Spanish and English, as well as in performances and visual culture throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to explore the multiple significations of the insect as a semiotic device of *lo cuir* and *lo joto/la jota*. I show that, while insects have traditionally been used as metaphors to represent gender trouble and male sexuality, in the first decades of the twenty-first century there has been a shift toward the materiality of the insect, particularly with the rise of trans* literature and performance. I propose that this turn to materiality allows us to pose questions about corporeality, affects, and *cuir* temporality, in order to uncover trans*³ memory.

- 1 For a history of “pollos” (chickens) in Mexico, see Conway, “Birds of a Feather”. To explore the cultural representation of homosexuality in the Caribbean through the lens of birds, see La Fountain-Stokes, “Queer Ducks”.
- 2 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 97.
- 3 I use the term *trans** throughout this article because it is the terminology employed by one of the writers discussed here, who uses it to emphasize the multiplicity and openness of trans identities and experiences.

Insects at the Threshold: *Lo cuir*, Animal Studies, and Materiality

In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002), Rosi Braidotti argues that the insect functions as a liminal figure, existing between the realms of animal and mineral, organic and inorganic matter, and often embodying multiple and fluid meanings.⁴ Consequently, this liminality can serve as a model of repetition, producing and reproducing signification, while also functioning as a force of defamiliarization and transformation. In the human imagination, the insect thus often appears as a metaphor to describe processes that frequently conflate numerous irreconcilable terms, such as life/nonlife, biology/technology, human/inhuman. This discussion of the insect resonates strongly with queer studies, when Gloria Anzaldúa observes that queerness—being different or other—embodies the “sub-human, in-human, non-human”.⁵ Both the intricate symbolism of the insect and the challenging nature of queerness/*cuiridad* share a common theme: they disrupt traditional boundaries and invite us to reconsider binary thinking, ultimately illuminating different possibilities for the future. This is why the insect, as a site for non-heteronormative, utopian configurations, is a popular trope, particularly in feminist science fiction, where women-as-insects often represent the monstrous feminine body that threatens the masculine order.⁶

However, shifting focus to the field of animal studies reveals a critical perspective on the reduction of nonhuman animals to mere symbols or metaphors.⁷ Scholars in this domain rightly argue that

4 Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 150.

5 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 40.

6 Murphy, “Considering Her Ways”, 274.

7 See Derrida, *Animal*; Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Wolfe, *Animal Rites*. The focus on a select body of literature reflects both disciplinary and regional considerations. While animal studies has become a robust field internationally, it remains a relatively recent area of inquiry within Mexican studies. This article therefore engages primarily with trans*, performance, and cultural theory scholarship situated in the Mexican context, rather than attempting a comprehensive engagement with global animal studies debates. The intent is not to exclude animal studies, but to foreground frameworks and methodologies that are most directly relevant to Mexican trans* artistic practices and the relationalities between humans and insects in this specific cultural and ecological context.

such representations reinforce anthropocentrism and overlook the insect's subjectivity and materiality. One way around this problematic anthropomorphization is to resist a straightforward identification with insects and, instead, foster a "deep working-through of the imaginative frameworks through which humans engage and imagine animals in order to reimagine ourselves."⁸ For example, reconsidering how gender operates by paying attention to the materiality of bugs, their sexuality, reproductive behaviour, and survival skills could be considered an effort to count animals that challenges the idea that the insect imagery is only symbolic.⁹

Expanding this conversation to a Latin American perspective, Gabriel Giorgi notes that the relationship between nonhuman animals and queer sexuality shapes epistemologies of the body and the living that dispute and respond to normative constructions of human life. Through his analysis of Latin American fiction, Giorgi concludes that the animal "no naturaliza, sino que politiza" ("does not naturalize, but politicizes").¹⁰ Taking these insights into account, I ask how bodies are politicized when insects are considered symbols of *cuir*/queer representation, compared to when the materiality of the insect is central to questions of corporality, affect, and trans* memory. To explore these distinctions further, I divide my analysis into sections.

In the first part of this article, I trace a historiography of *mariquitas*, *mayates*, and *mariposas* as the most common representations of homoerotic desire and gender performance in Mexico (formerly New Spain during colonial times). I begin with their pejorative origins and conclude with their portrayal as liminal bugs that reproduce normative institutions while holding the potential to signify something more than mere stigmatization or *joto/a* identity. Specifically, I trace the symbolic use of these insects in *Paso del macho* (2011) by Juan Carlos Bautista, *La sodomía en la Nueva España* (2010) by Luis Felipe Fabre, *Brenda Berenice, o el diario de una loca* (2016) by Luis Montaña, and the works of the Chicano writer Rigoberto

8 Van Engen, "How to Fuck a Kraken," 123.

9 Ortiz Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, 146.

10 Giorgi, *Formas comunes* 240. All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

González. I conclude this section by exploring the butterfly not as a symbol but as a member of a community that generates trans*-species connections in the hope of a better future. To illustrate this, I examine the work of Mixe performer Lukas Avendaño through the performance *No soy persona, soy mariposa* (2014) and the documentary *La utopía de la mariposa* (2019) by Miguel J. Crespo. For Avendaño, the butterfly politicizes the body as a utopian site of belonging-in-difference, expanding the scope of *lo cuir* and *lo joto/a* to other areas such as migration and forced disappearance, while also questioning binaries like human and nonhuman.

The last section of this article sheds light on the commonly misunderstood bug often perceived as dirty and repulsive: the cockroach. If *mariquitas*, *mayates*, and *mariposas* can be traced back in history as tropes belonging to the discourses of *jotería*, the cockroach in Mexico is more often associated with the image of the rebellious woman, or with describing socially unacceptable feminine behaviour. More recently, Mexican performer, artist, and activist Lia García has reclaimed this trope to give meaning to trans* positionalities. García seeks to defamiliarize the cockroach trope and our negative affective encounters with this crawling critter through an exercise she calls “encuentros afectivos” (“affective encounters”) — events that foster a radical tenderness as a utopian impulse containing trans* life while simultaneously unveiling trans* historical memory. Therefore, in this section, I analyse how touch becomes a vehicle for producing the encounter between cockroaches and trans* bodies as a productive imprint with spatio-temporal meanings that change our relationship to nonhuman species.

A Word on Terminology

Writing for a Euro-Anglophone journal from a Mexicanist perspective, I want to clarify several terms drawn from Spanish-language debates on LGBTQ+ issues in the Americas. In particular, the long-standing discussion surrounding *lo cuir*/queer in Latin American studies underscores the need for caution when applying English-language vocabularies and conceptual frameworks of gender and sexual difference

to Latin American contexts.¹¹ Numerous critics have raised concerns about the use of the term “queer” outside the United States, perceiving it as a form of linguistic colonization.¹² Other scholars view it as a term that is difficult to translate to Latin American contexts, as it fails to capture the full extent of insult and violence associated with the English word.¹³ More recently, scholars argue that, while sexuality and gender cannot be removed from Latin American thought, Latin America also cannot disengage from global perspectives.¹⁴

It is within this tension that “lo queer” and its multiple translations — such as “lo cuir,” “lo kuir,” and “lo meco” — emerge as ways of locating oneself in global debates about sexuality and gender from a specific cultural, linguistic, and geographic perspective.¹⁵ Rather than simply importing theory, these terms invite engagement with queer studies while validating knowledge production outside the Global North in the early decades of the twenty-first century. As María Amelia Viteri and Manuela Lavinas Picq suggest, “queer is hard to read in Spanish unless we go *cuir* as in *trastocar*, letting the words act as territories and become sites for theory”.¹⁶ Moreover, Alejandra Márquez identifies “cuir” as one of the most common Spanish translations of “queer”.¹⁷ In the Mexican context, Sayak Valencia and Víctor Manuel Ortiz Aguirre define *cuir* as a g-localized geopolitical and epistemic concept, one that allows for the Mexicanization of a theoretical-political proposal originating in a different time and place.¹⁸ From a translocal lens, this enables a nuanced consideration of contexts, meanings, and positionalities, proving productive for contemporary theory and knowledge production.

11 A great summary of the state of this debate can be found in Quintana-Vallejo’s “Queer/ Cuir in the Global South?”.

12 Mogrovejo, “Lo queer en América Latina”, 233.

13 Epps, “Retos, riesgos, pautas y promesas”, 899; Echeverría, “Queer, manierista, bizarre, barroco”, 9.

14 Falconí Trávez, et al., *Resentir lo queer*, 11.

15 Falconí Trávez, et al., *Resentir lo queer*, 10.

16 Viteri and Lavinas Picq, “Trastocar Narratives”, 4.

17 Márquez, “Cuir-ing *Queer*”, 448.

18 Valencia, “Del *queer* al *cuir*”, 33; Ortiz Aguirre, “México 2014”, 39.

For me, the task of *lo cuir* is to uncover normative structures and trouble categories commonly associated with erotic, sexual, gender, affective, and bodily practices, as well as unconventional ways of relationality, without neglecting the geopolitical context from which they emerge. In the case of Mexico, I argue that *lo cuir* speaks to the processes that create the margins of the heteropatriarchal hegemony, deviating from the standpoint of delineating identities. Given my focus on the representation of insects in Mexican literature and visual culture, I find “cuir” to be the most appropriate term. In addition, I use the expression “gender and sexual dissidence” when describing queer subjectivities and identities at large, as it is the preferred umbrella term in Mexico. Finally, I use *cuir* in productive tension with another essential term in the region of the Greater Mexico and Latinx culture—that of *jotería*.

“Jotería” is commonly used to describe the codes through which *jota/o* identities collectively operate and map a community. However, in the Mexican imaginary, the term *jota/o* is associated with men involved in non-heteronormative sexual and gender practices. Consequently, the use of this nomenclature may feel exclusive to some members of the community of gender and sexual dissidents. Yet it is worth noting that in Chicano/a culture, *jotería* emerges alongside the incorporation of queer perspectives into Chicano studies and cultural politics, a transformation that Cherrie Moraga conceptualizes as “Queer Aztlán” and that Gloria Anzaldúa echoes when she writes, “People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying”.¹⁹ Therefore, the *jota/o* imaginary in Latinx and Chicano/a studies encompasses more sexual and gender identities than the Mexican counterpart. Despite this, as Francisco J. Galarte has pointed out, the challenge of *jotería* studies remains the inclusion of trans* subjectivities.²⁰ In my view, *jotería* studies represent a decolonial project of queerness performed by Latinx and Chicano/na communities in the United States, while mapping discourses of non-heteronormative sexual and gender practices associated with gay men.

Taken together, these debates demonstrate that *cuir/queer* and *jotería* are not interchangeable labels but historically situated concepts that

19 Moraga, “Queer Aztlán”, 259; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 107.

20 Galarte, “On Trans Chican@s”.

operate across different scales of meaning, power, and belonging. While “cuir” foregrounds a translocal, geopolitical critique that unsettles heteropatriarchal norms without fixing identities, “jotería” names a specific cultural imaginary shaped by histories of stigma, community formation, and decolonial resistance. Placing these terms in productive tension allows for an analytical framework that acknowledges both the circulation of theory across borders and the uneven conditions under which sexual and gender dissidence is named, lived, and theorized. This terminological clarification is not merely linguistic but methodological: it establishes the conditions under which representations of insects in Mexican literature and visual culture can be read not only as metaphors of difference, but as sites where *lo cuir* and *lo joto/a* articulate alternative forms of embodiment, relationality, and political imagination.

The Insects of *Jotería*

The use of insect terminology or analogies to refer to non-heteronormative gender and sexual practices have a long history in the Spanish-speaking world. Terms such as “maricón”, “marica”, “mariquita”, and “mariposa” have been used since at least the sixteenth century as pejorative expressions to characterize men engaged in non-heteronormative sexual and gender practices, emphasizing traits culturally associated with femininity. These terms trace their etymological origins to Mary—Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary both. As Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsiváis explains in his *crónicas*, this association functions as an insult, since Mary represents “la mujer por antonomasia” (“the woman par excellence”) at a historical moment in which femininity itself is constructed as degrading. As Monsiváis puts it, “Ser afeminado es asumir de antemano la condición de vencido” (“To be effeminate is to assume in advance the condition of being defeated”).²¹ Moreover, the use of the insect as a semiotic device to portray gender and sexual dissidence pejoratively becomes more evident when one uses the diminutive form of “marica” to further emphasize the feminine traits of the subject to whom the insult is directed.

21 Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta*, 114; 124.

Additionally, during the first decades of the twentieth century, the vibrant colours of the ladybird evoked the colourful attire worn by gender and sexual dissidents of the upper class. It is important to note that, during the Porfiriato (1876–1911) — a period of Mexican history characterized by economic modernization, rising social inequality, and authoritarian rule, which ultimately contributed to the Mexican revolution — only two types of “homosexuals” were visible in society: the “joto de tortería o de burdel” (queer of the lower class, lit. from the sandwich shop or the brothel) and the “maricón de ‘buena posición’” (queer of the upper class, lit. “well off”). This distinction reflects a complex interplay between social class and non-normative gender and sexual practices.²² Further, the terms “mariposa” (butterfly) and the augmentative “mariposón” underline a confident male who tends to attract attention due to their *cuir*/queer excess. Even though the term “maricón” and its entomological variations are commonly used synonymously, the nuances arise from the implied degree of femininity and the attitude assumed when performing gender dissidence.

One of the most documented moments in modern Mexican history that sparked widespread use of homophobic language in both the press and society was the famous Dance of the 41 in November of 1901. Police raided a private party where forty-one men — half of whom were dressed as women — were arrested for indecency and for engaging in acts deemed immoral by the standards of their contemporaries. The dance exposed the clandestine world of non-normative culture, making the presence of “homosexuals” undeniable. The popular artist José Guadalupe Posada immortalized this episode through engravings portraying the dance attendees as “maricones” and “mariquitos”, while describing them as “simpáticas muchachas” (“nice girls”) — a feminization that implies mockery and humiliation.²³ The negative connotations of these terms are shown to have persisted three decades later, in 1934, when Diego Rivera published an essay on the state of visual arts in Mexico.²⁴

22 Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta*, 91.

23 Irwin et al., *The Famous 41*, 7.

24 In “Arte puro”, Rivera warns readers about the dangers associated with the emergence of a “niño mimado de la burguesía capitalista”, a new form of art called “arte puro”, which

Carlos Monsiváis suggests that one of the possible signs of the consolidation of what he calls the “gay ghetto” in Mexico — now referred to as *jotería*²⁵ — is the practice of reclaiming derogatory language with humour as a tool to survive homophobia.²⁶ Although bars “de ambiente” (a colloquial term highlighting belonging to the LGBTQ+²⁷ community in Mexico) already existed as spaces of *jotería* in the 1950s, it was not until the 1970s and 80s that gay literature began to be published, and terms like “maricón” started to be vindicated in print by dissident writers. Examples of these new forms of representation can be found in the canonical fictions of the period. Notable works include *Después de todo* (1969) by José Ceballos Maldonado, *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979) by Luis Zapata, and *Las púberes canéforas* (1988) by José Joaquín Blanco.

During this time, “mariquita” (ladybird) and “mariposa” (butterfly) soon expanded to include other bugs, forming a repertoire of critters symbolizing various forms of dissidence. Terms such as “chacal” (a species of shrimp) and “mayate” (a species of beetle) circulated in the discourses of *jotería*, gaining prominence during the consolidation of gay culture. These terms were also used previously as derogatory language. For instance, one of the earliest references to the word “mayate” can be found in *Los criminales en México: ensayo de psicología social* (1904) by Carlos Roumagnac, where it was used as a pejorative term implying homosexuality.²⁸ Nevertheless, during the 1970s, these words emerged as a means to articulate the complexity of gender and sexual dissidence that could no longer be reduced to the categories popularized in previous decades.

purportedly aimed to undermine proletarian art. Rivera cites a group of “pseudo” artists and writers who identify as “poetas puros” as an example of this bourgeois art, dismissing them as nothing more than “puros maricones” (85).

25 Téllez-Pon, “De maricon”.

26 Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta*, 124.

27 The acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual, and Pansexual, while the “+” represents other identities, including non-binary, genderfluid, and aromantic.

28 Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 102.

According to Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, what characterizes the terms “mayate”, “chichifo”, or “chacal” is their inherent ambiguity. These three words can be used interchangeably to describe a person who assumes the penetrating role in sexual encounters and is reluctant to express attraction toward their partner, or who refuses to identify as gay. However, as Domínguez Ruvalcaba notes, the terms carry more specific meanings within *jotería* argot: “Chichifo” refers to someone who engages in homoerotic acts in exchange for money or other forms of compensation; “Chacal” describes a top-position individual whose role is racialized and associated with lower-class status; and “mayate” also denotes a top-position role and may carry racial and class connotations.²⁹ Unlike the term “maricón”, “chacal” and “mayate” emphasize a performance of masculinity while distancing themselves from expressions of gender dissidence.

Building on this historical and lexical understanding, contemporary Mexican writers and filmmakers have continued to explore these figures and their associated gender performances. In the twenty-first century, Juan Carlos Bautista examined these figures across different formats. Together with Víctor Jaramillo, he produced the documentary *Amor chacal* (2000), which investigates the figure of the “mayate” and their seduction techniques in Veracruz. Later, in 2011, Bautista published the fable titled *Paso del macho*, an apocalyptic story centred on the figure of the “mayate” — the only book I have identified to date that foregrounds this figure. This presentation is further explored in relation to other positionalities, such as “la loca” and the “maricón”, which, as noted above, symbolize individuals who embrace more feminine roles.

In *Paso del macho*, Bautista depicts a town in Veracruz populated predominantly by “locas” and “maricas”, where a period of drought symbolizes the absence of “machos”.³⁰ The arrival of Ulises, a racialized “mayate”, sparks a dispute among the “locas”, over who will engage with him. Their conflict culminates in a devastating wave that destroys the town, leaving all its inhabitants dead. Bautista’s

29 Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation*, 133.

30 Bautista, *Paso del macho*, 19.

narrative functions as a fable that critiques the *mayate*–*maricón* dynamic, by showing how it can reinforce heterosexual norms and perpetuate racialized and gendered stereotypes: Ulises, as a Black man and a top-role partner, is both desired and objectified.

Yet the fable also gestures toward the possibility of an alternative social order. After the flood, another town discovers Ulises's drowned body, and Zaina, "la puta del pueblo" ("the town whore"), declares him "el ahogado más hermoso del mundo" ("the most beautiful drowned man in the world").³¹ By giving the last words to Zaina—a woman marginalized by disease and social status—Bautista interrupts the destructive *mayate*–*maricón* continuum and hints at a different future, one not solely determined by rigid gender or sexual hierarchies.

This story illuminates the cultural meaning of the *mayate*, linking back to the animal-based lexicon of *jotería*: as in Domínguez Ruvalcaba's analysis, the *mayate* embodies a top, often racialized role, whose interactions with more feminine figures such as the *maricón* or *loca* are highly coded, socially significant, and fraught with power dynamics. Bautista's fable dramatizes these roles, turning the *mayate* into a symbol whose desire, social position, and performance of masculinity carry both erotic and cultural weight—much like the insect terms that populate the lexicon of dissidence.

Since my interest lies in insects as semiotic devices of dissidence, the figure of the *mayate* warrants further analysis. The word "mayate" (*Cotinis mutabilis*) is derived from the náhuatl *mayatl* and refers to a species of the scarab beetle, known in English as the fig-eater beetle, recognizable by their bright green coloration. The larvae thrive in decaying matter, including animal faeces, organic mulch, and plant roots, which serve as a source of food, while the adult beetle primarily consumes pollen, nectar, or petals. The association of this insect with the penetrating sexual role allegedly stems from their connection to faecal matter—the beetle is referred to by Monsiváis as "el insecto que empuja la mierda" ("the insect that pushes shit").³²

31 Bautista, *Paso del macho*, 59.

32 Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta*, 124.

Domínguez Ruvalcaba further notes that the *mayate* can also be read as “an allusion to the colorful proletarian man’s dress”.³³ Notably, the *mayate* usually requires the presence of an effeminizing figure, such as the *maricón*, *joto*, or *loca*, as Bautista’s *Paso del macho* illustrates. This juxtaposition reinforces heterosexual norms, patriarchal expectations, class distinctions, and processes of racialization in homoerotic encounters. Yet the *mayate* can also destabilize normative ideas of sexuality by eroticizing the residual or the abject (faecal matter), as Domínguez Ruvalcaba suggests.³⁴ A parallel example appears in Hubert Matiúwàa’s poetry collection *Xùkú xùwǎǎ/ Entre escarabajos* (2021), where the beetle symbolizes fertility in the mè’phàà culture and their body is imagined as a container of erotic stories.³⁵ In sum, the relationship between insects and *jotería* is often simplified to the *mayate*–*maricón* continuum, which both enacts stereotyped gender roles and enables non-normative sexualities—potentially leading, as *Paso del macho* suggests, to either tragedy or a yet-unknown utopia.

As Domínguez Ruvalcaba emphasizes, the *mayate*–*maricón* continuum and its reinforcement of heterosexual norms operate within a liminal space—a transitional zone characterized by transformation and ambiguity.³⁶ Braidotti similarly notes that liminality can function both as a mechanism of repetition and as a force of defamiliarization and change. In the case of the *mayate*, this figure simultaneously reproduces heteropatriarchal ideals while reshaping the possibilities of erotic expression. Bautista’s *Paso del macho* dramatizes this liminal space to its extreme: an apocalyptic scenario in which destruction coexists with the potential for new social and sexual horizons.

The utopian potential of the liminal finds a particularly vivid expression in the imagery of another insect: the butterfly. In Mexico, moth and butterfly iconography has long been used to describe men who have sex with other men and, more broadly, to signify

33 Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation*, 133.

34 Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation*, 144.

35 Matiúwàa, *Xùkú xùwǎǎ*, 11.

36 Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation*, 144.

non-heteronormative gender and sexual behaviour. According to Daniel Enrique Pérez, the etymology of *mariposa* derives from “la Santa María posa” (the virgin Mary rests), in which the verb “posar” can be associated with a sexual position.³⁷ Pérez traces the symbolic use of the butterfly as a marker of sexual and gender dissidence back to 1592, when the Jesuit priest Pedro de León compared men imprisoned for acts of sodomy to moths and butterflies, due to their shared attraction to fire.³⁸ This metaphor implied that such men (“sodomites”) continued their sexual practices despite knowing they risked damnation or purgatory.

In *La sodomía en la Nueva España* (2010), Mexican poet Luis Felipe Fabre revisits this history, reinforcing the *mariposa* iconography as a “sodomite” seduced by fire:

Dice la Santa Doctrina: mariposas nocturnas
son los sodomitas: mariposas
revoloteando.

[...]

Dice la Santa Doctrina:
Una lámpara encendida: maqueta
de las futuras hogueras donde arderán los sodomitas.³⁹

The Holy Doctrine says: nocturnal butterflies
are the sodomites: butterflies
fluttering about.

[...]

The holy Doctrine says:
a lit lamp: a model
of the future fires where the sodomites will burn.

In this book, Fabre utilizes historical facts—specifically, the processes that the Inquisition followed against a group of “sodomites”

37 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 98.

38 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 97.

39 Fabre, *La sodomía*, 30.

between 1657 and 1658—to craft poems that seamlessly blend with other types of writings and documents, such as academic research with “Las cenizas del deseo” by Serge Gruzinski and *Quemando mariposas* by Federico Garza. In these poems, one notable character is Juan de la Vega, described as “la Reina de los mayates” (“the Queen of the fig-eater beetles”) and “la Reina de las mariposas nocturnas” (“the Queen of the nocturnal butterflies”).⁴⁰ Described as a beautiful and resilient insect that refuses to stay still—always fluttering and making their dissidence visible—the *mariposa* iconography paired with *mayate* and *mariquita* serves in *La sodomía en la Nueva España* as a marker of grandiloquence. It also highlights Juan de la Vega’s performance of femininity despite their top role, which is typically associated with masculinity. Fabre deliberately conflates *mayate*, *mariposa*, and *mariquita*, refusing to delve into the possible nuances, thereby challenging identity as a framework for understanding and representing *lo cuir*. However, using these insects as interchangeable metaphors obscures their materiality and reinforces their function as merely symbolic figures.

In *Brenda Berenice, o el diario de una loca* (2016), Mexican writer Luis Montañó also speaks to the nuance between the colourful bugs: “Maricón: Mariposa macho muy grande: mariposón. Especialista en las ciencias del hombre” (“Maricón: Very large male butterfly: *mariposón*. Specialist in the sciences of man”).⁴¹ For Montañó, the difference between the two terms seems to lie in the visibility of their performance of gender and the knowledge acquired through that performance. Regardless of the butterfly’s definition, in contemporary Mexican literature it often describes characters who endure punishments for their *cuir/queer* visibility yet remain resilient and frequently transform themselves to survive.⁴² Moreover, with their unapologetically beautiful appearance, butterflies and certain types of moths also signal bad omens, while at other times, they signify new beginnings. These bugs undergo metamorphosis, linking them to the idea of death and rebirth. The interpretation of whether this

40 Fabre, *La sodomía*, 38.

41 Montañó, *Brenda Berenice*.

42 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 103.

change is positive or negative depends on the observer, as we can see in *La sodomía en la Nueva España*.

Fluttering across to the other side of the border, in Latinx and Chicano/a culture, the butterfly is used as a “liberatory semiotic device” that can create decolonial sites for the formation of a *mestiza/mariposa* consciousness.⁴³ The famous monarch butterfly, which migrates across vast swathes of North America, has become a powerful icon and flagship species for conservationists and migrant advocates alike. It symbolizes the right to move freely, migrating in search of safer habitats and exemplifying the idea that nature knows no borders. This butterfly has become a powerful symbol for undocumented migrants because it encourages viewers to imagine a world without borders, reflecting our innate inclination to move. For instance, artist Favianna Rodríguez launched the “Migration Is Beautiful” campaign in 2012 during then-president Barack Obama’s deportation of over 1,100 immigrants daily.⁴⁴ Since then, the butterfly has become a popular symbol for migration, particularly following the 2012 passage of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), celebrating the resilience and determination of DREAMers.

Apart from being the most recognizable butterfly in the Americas, the monarch can hibernate and undergo metamorphosis. They have evolved to develop immunity to the toxins of milkweed plants (its source of food) and stores these toxins, making themselves toxic to predators. Thus, the black and orange wings serve as a warning to potential predators that this insect is poisonous to consume.⁴⁵ The monarch demonstrates that butterflies not only survive harsh conditions but also undergo remarkable transformations. With these enduring characteristics, the butterfly imagery challenges the negative connotations of the *mariposa* and the *mariposón* as pejorative terms describing gender and sexual dissidence in Mexican American culture. Specifically, the monarch butterfly as a widespread symbol of resilience counters the implication that femininity

43 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 100.

44 Rodríguez, “Migration Is Beautiful”.

45 Pennisi, “How the Monarch Butterfly”.

is a sign of weakness and vulnerability, traits that are wrongly understood as undesired.

One example of this iconography is found in *Butterfly Boy: Memoirs of a Chicano Mariposa* (2006) by Rigoberto González. In this work, the Chicano author employs the symbolism of the butterfly to frame his coming-of-age story, which spans from a small town in the state of Michoacán — the Mexican state where monarchs arrive from Canada and the USA to spend the winter — to his migration to California. González reclaims the term *mariposa* to represent a mestizo queer identity, where the butterfly symbolizes both beauty and strength. According to Daniel Enrique Pérez, González's *mariposas* “are often Chicano males who have been persecuted for being effeminate, but they are also fierce warriors who do not fear the varied social locations they inhabit; they are deemed beautiful in their own skin, and they remain resilient”.⁴⁶ Beyond the memoir, González has written a trilogy centred around queer Latino youth characters: *The Mariposa Club* (2009), *Mariposa Gown* (2012), and *Mariposa U* (2015), serving as a kind of survival manual for queer Latino youth by using the characteristics of the “mariposa” — that is, González has created almost a franchise by using the butterfly as a metaphor for queer transformation. Although Rigoberto González is one of the few Chicano authors to have extensively explored the butterfly, this symbolic insect flutters their wings everywhere they can pose. Another example can be found in the anthology of new gay Latino fiction edited by Charles Rice-González and Charlie Vázquez, titled *From Macho to Mariposa* (2011). This anthology precisely highlights the transformation of the macho from a virile subject hiding his feminine side to the acceptance of vulnerability as a positive trait, reframing femininity as both strength and beauty.

In all of the examples discussed here, insects have been used primarily to represent traits of *lo cuir* and *jotería*, yet the bugs themselves often remain irrelevant, serving only as symbols of human emotions, affects, and ideas. In other words, they function as extensions of human experience rather than entities in their own right.

46 Pérez, “Toward a Mariposa Consciousness”, 105.

However, some gender and sexual dissident writers and artists have begun to rethink this relationship, attending to insects on their own terms and recognizing their materiality. I propose that this turn toward the material and embodied presence of insects opens a space to ask new questions about corporeality, affects, and *cuir* temporality, allowing us to uncover and engage with trans* memory in ways that move beyond the purely symbolic.

The Surplus Utopia of the *Mariposa*

One of the most emblematic uses of the *mariposa* in the twenty-first century, reflecting this material shift, can be seen in the work of Mixe performer and activist Lukas Avendaño. Avendaño has gained international recognition for bringing anthropological methods into the performing arts, combining field research, archival work, and performance to address questions of ethnicity, *muxeidad*, and state violence. As a *muxe* — a gender dissident positionality from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec — Avendaño describes *muxeidad* as a Zapotec concept that emphasizes a relational connection to the community: “The *muxe* only exists within a collective, cultural ecosystem that embraces femininity and masculinity in a series of interrelated practices”.⁴⁷ By referencing the ecosystem, Avendaño conceives of community as a collective that encompasses both human and non-human beings. In their performances, Avendaño often transforms into a butterfly, collapsing boundaries between human and animal, real and imaginary, feminine and masculine. This is particularly evident in *No soy persona, soy mariposa* (2014), a performative dance in which the erotic intertwines with the political, the aesthetics of the *muxe* body, and the embodied presence of the butterfly.

In *No soy persona, soy mariposa*, Avendaño reclaims the term “puñal” — a pejorative term for gender and sexual dissident people — as a positionality from which to explore being a *mariposa*. Against a backdrop of mobile monarch butterflies, they recite *Pensamiento Puñal*, a manifesto by Mexican performance artist and non-binary activist Lechedevirgen Trimegisto. The text defines *puñal* as someone who

47 Avendaño in Prieto Stambaugh, “The Queer/Muxe Performance”, 176.

cannot or does not wish to identify with the “lógicas maricas”, which can be understood as class- and racially-privileged homonormativity. Trimegisto concludes: “No podrás devenir Puñal, pero si podrás apuñalar el sistema” (“You will not be able to become a Puñal, but you will be able to stab the system”).⁴⁸ By incorporating these words, Avendaño critiques the diminishing radicality of “lógicas maricas” in the twenty-first century, highlighting their complicity with colonialism, racism, and anthropocentrism. The performance reclaims *puñal* and *mariposa* as a critical, active stance—an ever-evolving *lo cuir* that, in community, enacts sharp interventions against multiple forms of oppression.

In this piece, butterfly movements are central to the rearticulation of *lo cuir* as action. Avendaño posits the butterfly as a beautiful way of being in the world—one defined by free transit: “Todas las personas nos adjudicamos el libre tránsito. Es un derecho. En ese sentido, cualquiera puede ser una mariposa” (“Everyone claims freedom of movement. It is a right. In this sense, anyone can be a butterfly”).⁴⁹ By emphasizing the shared traits between humans and butterflies, Avendaño invites the audience to embody the butterfly not only as means of dismantling the negative connotations of the term *mariposón*, but, more importantly, as a call to action: “Puñal no se conforma con la apropiación de la injuria, va más allá, Puñal se trata de un arma de doble filo, al tiempo que te haces daño, les haces daño” (“*Puñal* does not settle for the appropriation of the insult; it goes further. *Puñal* is a double-edged weapon—while you harm yourself, you harm others”).⁵⁰ Although there is no explicit symbolic connection between *puñal* and *mariposa* beyond their shared feminization—*puñal* deriving from “puto”, a homophobic slur, as Téllez-Pon notes⁵¹—Avendaño mobilizes both figures as manifestations of a double-edged logic of vulnerability and aggression.

48 Trimegisto, “Pensamiento puñal”.

49 Avendaño in Benjamín Pérez, “Lukas Avendaño presenta”.

50 Trimegisto, “Pensamiento puñal”.

51 Téllez-Pon, “De maricón”.

I suggest that in this piece, Avendaño also blurs what it means to be a butterfly from a human standpoint. Butterflies are often associated with fluttering wings and visual beauty; yet they are also known to alight on faeces and feed on corpses. Although these traits are not explicitly addressed in *No soy persona, soy mariposa*, Avendaño's erotic movements — echoing the *mariposa*'s seductive qualities — are juxtaposed with the *puñal* manifesto, which I read as an invitation to desanitize *marica* praxis and, by extension, to invoke the insect's darker dimensions. This juxtaposition produces affective dissonance: a state of emotional ambiguity experienced by the viewer when confronted with these competing registers. Through this dissonance, the butterfly emerges as a liminal figure endowed with revolutionary potential — one that can only be activated if we embrace its *puñal* logics.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz compels the reader to understand queerness as a feeling that registers “that this world is not enough”, thereby gesturing toward other possible and concrete worlds on the horizon.⁵² Muñoz analyses the utopian function of art as an “anticipatory illumination” that “cuts through fragmenting darkness and allow us to see the politically enabling whole”.⁵³ In 2018, Avendaño's brother, Bruno Alonso, was disappeared while visiting his hometown of Tehuantepec; his body was later found in a clandestine grave in November of 2020. For two years, the family endured the fragmenting darkness experienced daily by families of the disappeared, living without knowledge of what had happened to their loved one. In the aftermath of Bruno's disappearance, Lukas Avendaño's artistic practice functioned as a surplus in the present — one that promised a future for the family. While seeking justice, Avendaño carried out actions across the world to trace their brother's whereabouts. In Miguel J. Crespo's documentary *La utopía de la mariposa* (2019), which centres Avendaño's work and the rupture produced by Bruno's disappearance, the butterfly emerges as this surplus — as Muñoz's utopian function — promising something in the present that is not yet fully here.

52 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

53 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 64.

Over the course of thirty minutes, Crespo's camera guides the viewer through the intimate spaces of Avendaño's home in Tehuantepec. We hear Lukas reflect on *muxeidad*, performance, anthropology, and decolonial practices while engaging in everyday activities such as applying makeup, braiding their hair, and tending to the family's goats. Lukas' mother, Felipa Martínez Avendaño, also appears in the documentary, functioning as a counterpoint to Lukas's reflections. Interwoven with these intimate scenes, the film addresses Bruno's disappearance.

The documentary concludes with Lukas swimming in a river, accompanied by a voice-over in which they describe the search for Bruno as a utopia:

Porque en este contexto de cuarenta mil desaparecidos, pues es una utopía pensar que puedes tener un final diferente a esos cuarenta mil. Pensar que lo podemos llegar a encontrar, y lo podemos encontrar con vida y bien, eso es una utopía, porque te desmienten esas otras cuarenta mil ausencias

(Because in this context of forty thousand missing persons, it is a utopia to think that you can have an outcome different from those forty thousand. To think that we can find them, and them alive and well, is a utopia, because those other forty thousand absences refute it).⁵⁴

This articulation parallels Muñoz's concept of queer surplus, insofar as both utopias are felt in the present as reminders of the necessity of transforming the now into a queer future.

This imperative toward transformation is further reinforced by Sayak Valencia's theorization of gore capitalism, which views the deployment of extreme violence as a consequence of globalization.⁵⁵ For Valencia, gender and sexual dissidents emerge as new political subjects capable of redirecting and tracing "non-dystopian" forms of resistance in the face of gore capitalism.⁵⁶ Such resistance takes

⁵⁴ Crespo, *La utopía*.

⁵⁵ Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore*, 27.

⁵⁶ Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore*, 207.

the form of an alliance that does not rely on nationalist, identitarian, or biologicistic foundations, but, rather, on a “becoming queer” community that extends to include nonhuman actors.⁵⁷ What glues everything together — migration, gender and sexual dissidence, forced disappearance, and the necropolitical state — is the butterfly, not as a symbol but as a crucial member of Avendaño’s communal ecosystem. This focus on the insect as an integral part of our ecosystem highlights a broader turn to materiality, encompassing both the corporalities of insects and humans, as mentioned earlier in this article.

Touching Trans* Life: The Cockroach as an Affective Chronotope

The work of Lia García, a trans* activist and performer, offers another example of this turn, while also departing from Avendaño’s approach. Whereas Avendaño invites their audience to become the butterfly, García proposes a different mode of engagement — one that safeguards the insect’s subjectivity and materiality. Her invitation is not to become, but to touch, to feel another type of insect: the cockroach. Known as *La novia sirena*, García is a Mexican performance artist, activist, and pedagogue who uses her body to generate affective encounters with audiences, opening conversations about the social construction of gender and sexuality in Mexico while positioning her trans* experience as a site of “collective transformation”.⁵⁸ García has gained recognition for performances such as *Mis XXy años*, *Voz en construcción*, and *Puede besar a la novia*, in which she combines pedagogical tools and embodied practice to question femininity and rituals such as *quinceañeras* and weddings.

Across these works, she examines how emotional relations are shaped within heteropatriarchal structures and offers audiences strategies to unlearn their emotional education. Beyond performance, García is also a writer whose essays and poems constitute some of the few literary works addressing contemporary trans* experience in Mexico.⁵⁹

57 Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore*, 207.

58 García, “Diarios de una novia”.

59 It is important to note that the limited prominence of literature written by trans* people

In this section, I focus on one of her most recent literary pieces to argue that her trans* writing engages insects not primarily as symbols, but as vehicles of affect—an argument I develop through García’s sustained engagement with one of the least valued forms of life in our cultural imaginary: the cockroach.⁶⁰

In 2023, I invited García to publish a piece in *Tierra Adentro*—a magazine sponsored by the Mexican state since 1990 that has served as a platform for new generations of artists and writers—as part of a special Pride edition I coordinated. Titled “El monstruo, no es la obra maestra del miedo: Relatos de fragilidad y resistencia”, the essay centres the cockroach as a site from which to explore trans* futurity and memory through movement (touching) and multiplicity (becoming with the cockroach). In doing so, García’s text resonates with Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein’s theorization of trans* encounters with animals and temporality. They argue that such encounters take place “not in the ‘posthuman’ moment or in the ‘Anthropocene’”, but, rather, in “a time of *trans*life*”—a temporal register in which trans recognition unfolds as a material process.⁶¹ From this perspective, trans* is not a matter of being (the ontological), but of motion, intensification, unpredictability, and multiplicity. García articulates this shift through her transformation into a human-cockroach, a process that activates the capacity to hold multiplicity through affect and touch.

If, in Clarice Lispector’s *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* (1964)—a masterpiece of Latin American literature centring the cockroach as a metaphor of transformation—the protagonist undergoes an existential crisis triggered by the visual contemplation of the insect, García shifts the emphasis from visibility to touch by inviting readers to physically

in Mexico is not due to a lack of trans* writers, but rather a lack of publishing opportunities. Recently, however, there has been a shift that has increased the visibility of trans* writers. For instance, the publishing house Almadía recently released Frida Cartas’s *Transporte a la infancia* (2023), a book that previously only circulated as an author’s edition. Other trans* writers documenting the contemporary experiences include Alexandra R. Ruiz, Daniel Nizcub, and Elisa de Gortari.

60 Ortiz Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, 146.

61 Hayward and Weinstein, “Introduction”, 196.

touch the cockroach, thereby foregrounding a *cuir* trans* species sensibility. In her work, becoming human-cockroach signals an alternative affective temporality that can be accessed through physical interaction with this often-repulsive insect. By inviting readers to touch the cockroach, García asks us to apprehend it not merely as a semiotic device, but as a living being that senses, transforms, and engages in their own encounter with the human. Through this sensory reconfiguration, species boundaries are redrawn, revealing how meaning in trans* life is produced through affect, embodiment, and relational contact.

In “Fingeryeyes: Impressions of Cup Corals”, Eva Hayward examines how different species sense one another and leave impressions that may be quantifiable, such as data, or qualitative, such as changes in texture.⁶² Although Hayward’s work is grounded in scientific research on cup corals, her framework proves productive for analysing García’s practice. Much like what Hayward terms “fingeryeyes” — a material-semiotic apparatus through which she engages with the corals — García approaches the cockroach through an affective-material-semiotic apparatus she calls “ternura radical” (“radical tenderness”), a method that reorders the senses and activates new intensities and dissonances.

In “Haptic Tactic: Hypertenderness for the [Mexican] State and the Performances of Lia García”, Cynthia Citlallin Delgado Huitrón similarly argues that García’s performances provoke a sensory reconfiguration in which touch can be smelled and tactility can be heard. As Delgado Huitrón writes, “[t]o transgender touch means to activate it as a means and method — a haptic tactic that accesses affectivity to contend with the law and cope with state power”.⁶³ Through the act of touching, the impressions left by the cockroach compel us to suspend our repulsion and enter the affective disorientation that reveals the fragility of species boundaries, while simultaneously displacing dominant narratives about the insect into a different temporal and relational register.

62 Hayward, “Fingeryeyes”, 579.

63 Delgado Huitrón, “Haptic Tactic”, 167.

Initially, García asserts that “Ninguna historia que intente narrar asuntos relacionados con cucaracha tendrá un buen final” (“Any story that attempts to narrate issues related to cockroaches will not have a good ending”).⁶⁴ However, by the end of the essay, the affective-material-semiotic method produces a different temporal impression: the cockroach emerges as an insect that transforms themselves across time and space to survive. This transformation can be exemplified by the alteration caused by glucose-based pesticides to cockroach sexuality, in which pesticides have produced a glucose aversion that has led cockroaches to adapt their mating rituals.⁶⁵ This resilience—manifest in the chemical modification of their own bodies—points toward an affective temporality without closure, in which being is an ongoing process of transformation. In this sense, trans* life is revealed as a mode of connection and a horizon for new possibilities of becoming.

In that regard, the temporal impression provoked by the cockroach is akin to the function of the chronotope in literature. In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”, Mikhail Bakhtin defines the chronotope as the intrinsic interconnectedness of time and space within a narrative.⁶⁶ In García’s essay, the cockroach’s materiality functions as a chronotope that links the insect to trans* experiences across time and space, illustrating what Harlan Weaver describes as trans species—the ways in which trans* formations are linked to, and enabled by, relationships between humans and nonhuman animals that productively disrupt heterosexual gender norms.⁶⁷ Thus, the cockroach reorients interspecies connection as a process of becoming that brings trans* memory and history into view.

Let me illustrate this with an example that takes us to the early twentieth century. One notable representation of the cockroach in Mexican culture is the *corrido* “La cucaracha”, which emerged during the Mexican revolution and depicts the *soldadera* and other women involved in the uprising, often through derogatory imagery—figuring

64 García, “El monstruo”.

65 Sullivan, “Cockroach Sex”.

66 Bakhtin, “Forms of Time”, 84.

67 Weaver, “Trans Species”, 253.

them as “a troublemaking whore, a racialized peasant scavenger or a defeminized soldier whose unnatural power and military prowess profoundly unsettles the gendered social order”.⁶⁸ The cockroach thus functions as a trope for non-normative femininities and as a euphemism for the vulva, juxtaposing beauty and repulsion, vulnerability and resilience, while also alluding to the insects’ material characteristics, such as their shape and tendency to inhabit humid crevices. When García activates the cockroach’s layered meanings through touch, she compels readers to revisit the historical presence of trans* experiences that heteronormative structures—and a focus on human species—have obscured. The revolutionary period, for instance, brought trans* realities into view through figures such as Amelio Robles Ávila, a colonel assigned female at birth who lived openly as a man, even though trans* participation in the revolution remained largely unacknowledged until the twenty-first century.⁶⁹

Beyond the cockroach, García explores other metaphors of trans* experience—such as the mermaid—to further develop her concept of “ternura radical”. In “A mares sobreviviremos: metáforas del dolor trans”, she mobilizes her own body and lived experiences as a bridge to trans* life through affective and corporeal modes of knowing rather than purely rational or ontological ones. This approach fosters a horizontal dialogue with an audience presumed to be uncomfortable with *lo cuir* and trans* bodies. Through the figure of the mermaid, García seeks to engage cis men and others who feel uneasy around trans* bodies in order to suggest that another world is possible:

formas nuevas de conectarse con la experiencia de las mujeres trans que sean más cálidas, afectivas y desde los cuidados que reclamamos. Quiero convertirme en esa sirena que viene de lo profundo para transformar la violencia en resiliencia y nombrar a mis hermanas de las perlas que están en el abismo

(New ways of connecting with the experiences of trans women that are warmer, more affective, and rooted in the care we de-

68 Arce, *México’s Nobodies*, 92.

69 For more on the history of trans* experiences in the Mexican revolution, see Cano, “Unconcealable Realities of Desire”.

mand. I want to become that siren who comes from the depths to transform violence into resilience and to name my sisters, the pearls that are in the abyss).⁷⁰

While the mermaid operates as a mythological bridge against patriarchal violence, touching the cockroach foregrounds trans-species connection as central to the production of meaning, rendering trans* history palpable by staging the shared resilience of trans* bodies and cockroaches as it emerges through the sense and affective deconstruction.

Conclusions: Bugs that Matter

Revisiting the relationship between insects and *lo cuir* in Mexico reveals not only a shift in representational strategies, but a deeper transformation in how nonhuman life is understood as politically, materially, and ethically entangled with gender and sexual dissidence. In the early twentieth century, insects largely operated as representational vehicles: figures mobilized to name excess, abjection, or non-normative femininity within a cultural imaginary that remained resolutely anthropocentric. In this period, insects such as the cockroach or the butterfly functioned as metaphors imposed upon marginalized human subjects, with little regard for the insects' own material lives or ecological conditions.

By the late twentieth century, as *lo cuir* began to articulate itself more explicitly as instability, difference, and refusal, insects appeared in increasingly complex symbolic roles. They emerged as liminal figures that unsettled fixed identities and binary logics, yet they remained largely confined to the register of representation. What is notable in the work of contemporary artists — particularly in Lukas Avendaño's practice and in Lia García's writing — is a shift from insects as symbols to insects as living entities whose material existence matters. This shift coincides with broader transformations in the status of LGBTTTIQAP+ lives in Mexico, as trans* and *cuir* subjects increasingly claim epistemic authority over their own modes of knowing, sensing, and relating to the world.

70 García, "A mares sobreviviremos", 123.

In Avendaño's work, the butterfly is not a metaphor abstracted from nature, but a constituent of a communal ecosystem shaped by Indigenous Mixe epistemologies. Claiming the *mariposa* as part of this ecosystem foregrounds relationality as central to *cuir* positionalities that seek to reclaim *lo cuir* as a radical, decolonial, and trans-species project. Crucially, this gesture unfolds in an ecological context marked by uneven vulnerability: while insects such as cockroaches are often imagined as indestructible, monarch butterflies — the very species Avendaño invokes — are endangered due to habitat loss, climate change, and extractivist practices. The butterfly's utopian surplus thus emerges not in spite of ecological precarity, but through it, binding queer futurity to the fragility of more-than-human life.

García's engagement with the cockroach foregrounds a different yet complementary dimension of this shift. Through *ternura radical*, García moves away from symbolic appropriation and toward affective encounter, insisting on the cockroach's subjectivity, temporality, and capacity for transformation. The cockroach functions as an affective chronotope that collapses historical time, compelling readers to confront how trans* memory and futurity persist through adaptation and resilience. Yet this resilience is not romanticized as invulnerability; rather, it underscores how survival itself is shaped by toxic environments, chemical violence, and uneven ecological exposure — conditions that disproportionately affect marginalized human and nonhuman bodies alike.

Taken together, the butterfly and the cockroach illuminate how changes in the representational use of insects are inseparable from shifts in lived realities — both for LGBTTIQAP+ communities and for the insects themselves. These figures mark a move from metaphor to material relation, from symbolic instability to ecological entanglement. Through them, *lo cuir* is rearticulated as a practice of living-with that binds gender dissidence, environmental precarity, and more-than-human futures. In insisting that this world is not enough, Avendaño and García remind us that imagining otherwise requires attending not only to who survives, but to which forms of life are allowed to matter — and under what conditions.

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