

AUTHORITARIANISM, CENSORSHIP, AND CUIRNESS IN (POST)COUP CHILE

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Abstract

This essay examines how censorship and biopolitical exploits of imaginary “children” in Chile’s contemporary history have influenced the reception of contemporary cuir art, focusing on how the works *Casa Particular* and *Ideology* challenge the state’s repression of non-normative identities. It analyzes how childhood has been weaponized in political discourse and critiques the censorship of these works, emphasizing the tension between state control and artistic expression.

Keywords

chilean dictatorship, contemporary art, censorship, cuir, democratic transition, socialism

Autoritarismo, censura y lo cuir en el Chile (pos)golpe

Resumen

Este ensayo examina cómo la censura y la explotación biopolítica de los “niños” imaginarios en la historia contemporánea de Chile han influido en la recepción del arte cuir, centrando cómo las obras *Casa Particular* e *Ideología* desafían la represión estatal de identidades no normativas. Analiza cómo la infancia ha sido instrumentalizada en el discurso político y critica la censura de estas obras, destacando la tensión entre el control estatal y la expresión artística.

Palabras clave

dictadura chilena, arte contemporáneo, censura, cuir, transición democrática, socialismo

Fecha de envío: 16/02/2025

Fecha de aceptación: 27/06/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18272/posts.v12i1.3808>

Cómo citar: muñoz, a. (2025). Authoritarianism, Censorship, and Cuirness in (Post)Coup Chile. En *post(s)*, volumen 12 (pp. 170-195). USFQ PRESS.



The history of visual practices and freedom of expression during Chile's last dictatorship provides a critical framework for understanding how repressive apparatuses silence dissenting voices through censorship. Under the Unidad Popular (UP) coalition, Salvador Allende's democratic socialist government (1970-1973) established the Quimantú National Publishing House in 1971. Its aim was to democratize access to literature by publishing international and local classics for as little as 12 escudos—the cost of a pack of the popular Hilton cigarettes at the time¹—making written culture widely accessible to workers and students. (Bravo Vargas 2013, 63-64) Quimantú also printed progressive magazines such as *Ahora* and *Ramona*, extending its coverage into photo reportage, civic education, and cultural critique. After the September 11th, 1973 military coup d'état, it was dismantled and replaced by Gabriela Mistral National Publishing House—a stripped-down propaganda organ of the regime.

Among its most infamous releases was *Chile Yesterday Today* (1975), a photo-pamphlet that employed a binary visual layout to “discredit Marxism and the UP.”² (Jara Hinojosa 2015, 523) Cherry-picked photos of social unrest during Allende's presidency appeared on black backgrounds to the left; those aligned with the regime's vision of order and neoliberal consumerism were on white to the right. The captions were trilingual—Spanish, English, and French—revealing the regime's agenda to promote the neoliberal experiment and justify its atrocities with the international community. One diptych pairs youths waving flags with the caption, “Activists took advantage of idealist youth to promote chaos,” against an all-male classroom scene labeled “Through study and hard work a new country is born.” (Editora Nacional Gabriela Mistral 1975, n.p.) The “youths,” for this binary visual device, are not innate political subjects—as they have been presumably “taken advantage” of due to their “idealism”—and become redeemed by the docile state of depoliticized education.

This is only the first of ten such diptychs representing the merits of education for the youth, always depicted as male students and never co-ed, against a series of perils found in political activity: “violence,” “Communist [muralist] brigades,” “demonstrations,” “Communist activities,” “extremist brigades,” “propaganda techniques,” “MIR (Revolutionary Leftist Movement),” “communist rally,” and “a country paralyzed by the negative forces of communism,” in said order respectively.

A clear example of institutional complicity—both before and after the coup—can be found in the media empire of businessman Agustín Edwards, which included *El Mercurio*, *La Segunda*, and *Últimas Noticias*. These outlets systematically concealed state terrorism perpetrated by the coup, covering political assassinations by fabricating reports of crimes of passion or internal disputes—at times outright glorifying the regime's violence. In contrast, alternative magazines were “publications that fell outside the sphere of official media (such as *El Mercurio*) and, therefore, are in most cases recognized as opposing the dictatorship.” (Urtubia 2015 [2016], 74) These independent platforms were committed to critical reporting and were systematically targeted.

1 Calculating the exact value of 12 escudos today becomes difficult as the currency was changed by the Military Junta back to Chilean Pesos in the year 1975. However, historian Viviana Bravo Vargas calculates this as less than \$ 1 USD as of 2013. (64)

2 Translations from Spanish are mine.



Figure 1. MIR. 1974. *El Rebelde* 102 (December), cover.

Censorship operated through multiple mechanisms: direct military orders under the state of constitutional emergency, judicial mandates rooted in authoritarian imposed legal immunity, and repression of journalistic and educational institutions. Public communications—including the national broadcaster Chile’s National Television and the University of Chile’s communications programs—were brought under strict state control. The regime also established the National Division of Social Communication (Dinacos), which from 1973 to 1992 monitored, edited, and controlled all media content. Despite this surveillance apparatus, resistance endured. Underground leftist groups circulated counter-information through samizdat-style publications, such as MIR’s *El Rebelde*, which defied the dictatorship’s monopoly on the media.

The regime’s “invisible” tactics included harassment, threats, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, and assassinations of media professionals. One emblematic case was that of journalist and MIR member José Humberto “Peponé” Carrasco Tapia. Carrasco, a contributor

to the alternative magazines *Análisis* and *Punto Final*, was detained in concentration camps like Cuatro Álamos and Puchuncaví between 1974 and 1976 for documenting state crimes. He was murdered on September 8th, 1986, in retaliation for the failed assassination attempt on the dictator Pinochet by the Patriotic Front Manuel Rodríguez the day before. (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 1991, 83)

Disenfranchized from the Adult-Centric Nuclear Family: *Cuir* Subjects, Infant Subjects

While the dictatorship's censorship targeted all dissent, the repression of *cuir* existence and culture demands particular attention. Before discussing this point any further, I should address the choice of utilizing the concept *cuir*. I shall utilize *cuir* as opposed to *queer*—a misappropriated, hispanicized phonetic reading of the Anglo concept—when referring to the LGBTQIA+, *travesti*, sex worker, and sexual dissident subjectivities that inhabit the Southern positionality of Hispanic America—in this case, Chile. This is a means to apply the critical potentialities of global queer activism and scholarship while maintaining awareness of the risks of conceptual coloniality inherent in applying theories produced in metropolitan centers of gendered and queer knowledge production from the Global North in a diffusionist model. In this sense, *cuir* is not merely a lexical variant but a deliberately deviant re-signification. Emerging from Latin American contexts shaped by syncretic languages, colonial violence, and insurgent cultural traditions, *cuir* reflects a desire to make language *strange* again—what transfeminist Sayak Valencia calls estranging the hegemonic readability of *queer* in order to make room for other forms of feel-thinking and surviving.

The *cuir* turn unsettles inherited structures of meaning by proposing a radically situated form of epistemic disobedience. Its inflection is not only linguistic but also decolonial, challenging the hierarchies of North-South knowledge transmission and reimagining political agency from the margins. It insists that the articulation of sexual dissent cannot be severed from the racialized, economic, and geopolitical conditions that breed them—and that neither the state nor academia has the authority to name or represent them fully. *Cuir*, then, becomes a mode of speaking otherwise: a refusal to play by the rules of imperial language, and a gesture toward new alliances and imaginaries grounded in the excess, hybridity, and insurgency of the postcolonial experience.

Returning to the argument of the essay, the coup's censorship of sexual minorities was not merely an attack on freedom of expression, but a deliberate effort to delegitimize *cuir* art by sanctifying the figure of the Child—a rhetorical tool that conceals state violence and systemic neglect. The age-old myth of homosexual pederasty—embedded in the Western heterosexual imaginary since at least the Oedipal tragedy—is revived to stigmatize gender and sexual non-conformity. This despite overwhelming evidence that child sexual abuse in Chile is perpetrated primarily by men within heteronormative family structures towards young girls.³ This phenomenon echoes American queer theorist Lee Edelman's critique of the weaponization of the "Imaginary Child" in order to curtail adult freedoms:

3 "There is consensus that child sexual abuse is a highly prevalent phenomenon in Chile, that the perpetrator is usually a man known to the victim—often a family member—and that the victims are more likely to be girls." (Murillo et al. 2021, 4)

For the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness (...) is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end. (...) We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedoms of adults face constant threat of legal curtailment out of deference to imaginary Children whose futures (...) are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register. (Edelman 2004, 19)

From the positionality of the Global South, we can extend Edelman's argument by noting that this reactionary posture is neither a critique of adult-centrism nor a sincere concern for children's well-being. Rather, heterosexual hegemony mobilizes children's elusive futurity against sexual minorities to erase the sexual realities embedded in everyday life; *cuir* or otherwise. This tactic upholds a fantasy of projective purity that obstructs comprehensive sexual education, while neoliberal patriarchy's assignment of caregiving to women as the sole righteous and often times even legal guardians fragments the social contract and privatizes care.

The Christian Marian archetype frames motherhood as a sacred two-sided bond, even as care has long been a communal responsibility. As Black feminist bell hooks reminds us:

The idea of an individual having sole responsibility for child rearing is the most unusual pattern of parenting in the world, one that has proved to be unsuccessful because it isolates children and parents from society. (...) Ideally, small, community-based, public child care centers would be the best way to overcome this isolation. (...) Community-based public child care centers would give small children great control over their lives. (hooks 1984 [2000], 143-144)

What enables abuse in children's lives is not sexual or gender divergence, but the isolation of caregiving and the denial of children's bodily autonomy. We must create safe, communal spaces—supported by trained educators and counselors—where children can explore their identities and sexualities amongst peers and with dignity, free from both abuse at the hand of adults and state neglect. Yet the Chilean state has systematically obstructed such education, even as it has hollowed out its own Child Protection Services (SENAME) through privatization and hostile abandonment.

What follows is a closer look at how the figure of the Child—and the rhetoric of their supposed protection—has been mobilized across pivotal moments in Chilean contemporary history. First, we examine the UP's anti-capitalist initiatives to address child poverty and mortality. Second, we reflect on how even under the UP, *cuir* lives were excluded from public discourse, as seen in the protest of *Las Locas del 73*. Third, we explore how the dictatorship's neoliberal model dismantled child welfare and criminalized poverty through actions like *Operación Pelusa*. Fourth, we turn to state violence against sexually dissenting bodies, including the murder of trans women, travestis, sex workers, and lesbian individuals. Finally, we analyze two contemporary cases of censorship targeting *cuir* art. Each of these moments reveals how the supposed innocence of children has been invoked not to protect them, but to preserve the moral order of heterosexual domination—and to silence those most marginalized by it.



Figure 2. Communist Youth of Chile. 1972. *Ramona* 43 (August), cover.

Childhood, Socialism, Fascist Takeover, and Cuir Persecution

Before examining specific cases of censorship against cuir artistic practices, it is necessary to understand how the figure of the Child—affective, symbolic, and politically mutable—has operated as a constitutional proxy in contemporary Chilean history. Across shifting ideological landscapes, children have functioned as avatars of the nation's future: their bodies disciplined, protected, or sacrificed in the name of progress, stability, or moral order. Whether framed as victims to be shielded or threats to be neutralized, children are often deployed as instruments of biopolitical control.

During the UP, Allende implemented a transformative vision of social care, with children's wellbeing at its core. Far from symbolic gestures, these reforms were grounded in an anti-capitalist framework that understood health and nutrition as collective rights. The emblematic *vaso de leche* (glass of milk) program provided a guaranteed half-liter of milk daily to all children and pregnant people, directly combating malnutrition and food insecurity. These efforts were supported by the expansion of free pediatric and maternal healthcare,

community-based clinics, and grassroots educational campaigns on hygiene and nutrition, often in collaboration with neighborhood organizations and health workers. (Chávez Zúñiga and Brangier Peñailillo 2023)

The UP's approach to child welfare was not only redistributive but also grounded in a belief that children were present political subjects, not just future citizens. This ethos of collective care challenged privatized domestic labor and patriarchal family norms, positioning the state—and society at large—as guarantors of children's rights. It is in this context that the UP-aligned Communist Youth of Chile (J.J.C.C., or "La Jota") published the youth oriented *Ramona* magazine between 1971 and 1973. (Fernández-Niño 2014) In a special issue released in August of 1972, the magazine's editorial pondered on the social issue of orphaned and homeless children, known in Chile by the colloquial slang "pelusas," the cover headline "who cares for the pelusas?" accompanied by a candid portrait of a young boy, presumably living on the streets while donning a baggy sweater and pants torn at the knee. The boy smokes a cigarette and stares bluntly at the camera, confronting the viewer with his precarious subjectivity. (Communist Youth of Chile 1972)



Figure 3. Clarín. 1973. "Ostentación de sus desviaciones sexuales hicieron los marcos en la Plaza de Armas." Clarín 6777 (April): cover and p. 24.

However, even within this expansive vision that did not idealize children or brush off the issues they faced under the rug, the UP was not immune to the imagined subject of revolutionary reproductive futurity and remained tethered to normative ideas about the family. While radical in its material scope, the UP's child-centered social policy did not extend its transformative reach to include young cuir or trans lives, which continued to be marginalized in both public discourse and institutional frameworks. Even as the UP government sought to transform society from the ground up, it retained a narrow sense of whose lives merited protection—reinscribing, rather than dismantling, the heterosexual norms underlying their national redistribution project.

On April 22nd, 1973, only a few months before the first *Tanquetazo* coup attempt in June, a band of approximately twenty five cuir and travesti individuals and sex workers staged Chile's first cuir public protest in Santiago's Plaza de Armas Square. Known by their chosen names "La Gitana," "La Raquel," and "Fresia Soto," alongside others like José Ortiz, it is important to recognize that most of these cuir folks were adolescents barely 18 years of age if not minors, victims of cuir truancy and either ostracized or runaways from their families due to their sexual identities. By day, the group would often meet downtown to beg for change to buy cheap meals available at the UP's UNCTAD⁴ building's social kitchen. During the night, they would "turn tricks" and also go rollerskating in public spaces uptown. That afternoon, fed up with arbitrary arrests for "offenses against morality," being humiliated by armed forces through battering, sexual assault, and forced haircuts denying their chosen gender presentation, they marched and climbed on the equestrian monument of colonizer Pedro de Valdivia while chanting "We want freedom!"—demanding an end to police brutality. This incident came to be popularly known as *Las Locas*⁵ *del 73*. (Robles 2008, 11-17)

Coverage by media outlets from both sides of the political aisle pushed sensationalistic headlines and homophobic ridicule, describing the protesting cuir youths with degrading and dehumanizing slurs. The right-leaning yellow paper *Últimas Noticias* described the adolescents as "weirdos," (*Últimas Noticias* 1973) while the equally conservative magazine *VEA* added the descriptor of "homosexual rebellion," (*VEA* 1973) although both outlets found particular outrage against the notion of marriage equality and of the *Locas* wanting to live as women: two points which were definitely not the primary agenda of the protesters whatsoever, who demanded freedom from police brutalization. The centrist daily *Clarín* described them as *colipatos* and *yeguas*, derogatory homophobic aviary and equine slurs respectively, mocking their demands and editorializing the paper's anger towards the lack of policing in order to stop this protest. (*Clarín* 1973) The Communist sympathizing *Paloma* magazine, edited by Quimantú, called the protestors "abnormal" and linked this spontaneous protest from the proletariat and homeless cuir and travesti youths as part of the American imperialist agenda of "Gay Power." (*Paloma* 1973) This is not only a common strategy used to delegitimize grassroots gender rights advocacy in the Global South, equivocating these

4 The UNCTAD III building was commissioned by President Salvador Allende to host the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development which took place between April and May of 1972, a major international summit aimed at promoting more equitable global trade relations between developed and developing countries. Designed by a collective of progressive architects and completed in a record 275 days with the help of unionized labor, student volunteers, and artists, the project embodied the Unidad Popular's commitment to participatory, socially oriented architecture. After the conference, the complex was renamed the Metropolitan Cultural Center Gabriela Mistral, offering free or low-cost cultural programming, postal services, a public cafeteria, and educational spaces. Following the 1973 coup, however, the building was seized, militarized, and renamed Diego Portales Building—serving as government headquarters, a Defense Ministry site, and, reportedly, a center of political repression. The building's layered history stands as a testament to both Chile's radical democratic aspirations and the violence of authoritarian rollback. (Schlack and Varas 2019, 93-95)

5 In several dialects of Spanish, the word "loca"—roughly "crazy" gendered as feminine—is a derogatory term used to describe cuir people: especially effeminate men, trans and travesti, or gender non conforming individuals.

initiatives as foreign plants, but dangerous and irresponsible misinformation at a time when real American interventionism was pushing economic chaos and military uprising against the UP. Though the Unidad Popular had enshrined collective rights, it offered no such institutional recourse for these cuir homeless adolescents. *Las Locas del 73* thus stand as both pioneers of cuir visibility and early examples of how the state's commitment to "the people" excluded anyone who challenged heteronormative futurity—even before the coup's full patriarchal takeover took hold.



Figure 4. VEA. 1973. "Rebelión homosexual." VEA 1765 (April): cover.

After the successful takeover of the Military Junta that followed the September 11th, 1973 coup, the dictatorship's swift dismantling of welfare structures went hand in hand with the criminalization of poverty and youth. Operation *Pelusa*, carried out in January of 1974, targeted street children—particularly in urban centers of Santiago, including the Central Vega Market—with mass kidnappings, incarceration of infants, institutionalized, and extrajudicial violence. The regime led a public relations campaign to depict the operation as a benevolent intervention, framed as a humanitarian effort to resolve the "problem" of children living on the streets, conveniently omitting that many had been orphaned or displaced due to the disappearance or murder of their parents by the hands of the regime, or rendered homeless by the rapid return and intensification of poverty under Pinochet.

Photographic documentation from the Dutch photojournalist Chas Gerretsen captured during the raids shows male police officers in civilian clothes, rounding up children as they wandered the city—lingering by shop windows, working as shoeshine boys, or emerging from the cardboard boxes they gathered to sell and where they also slept. Passersby watched but did not intervene. The kids were loaded into vans and taken to state child services homes scattered throughout Santiago. For some, this may have offered temporary respite: meals, running water, haircuts, a bed. But this brief relief was often followed by neglect, isolation, and, in many cases, abuse. (Gerretsen 2023)

In recent historiographic literature, growing attention has been given to how the patriarchal military regime systematically violated the human rights of cuir subjects due to their gender and sexuality—an issue long omitted from transitional justice narratives and early post-dictatorship human rights advocacy. Travesti subjects, particularly those from working-class neighborhoods like San Camilo or San Gregorio, were hypervisible to the regime's gaze, and their survival often hinged on quick flight, solidarity networks, and sheer chance. Tomás Rivera González, known as "La Doctora," recalls the terror of the days following the 1973 coup. La Doctora describes being caught in a military raid near Plaza Brasil Square while presenting as openly queer—wearing platform shoes, bell-bottom pants, rings, and plucked eyebrows—and the dread of being detained, singled out, and humiliated. She also testified that two of her travesti comrades, Lety and La Chela, were captured during a raid in San Gregorio. Soldiers forced them to run through an abandoned field, unleashing hungry dogs to tear them apart, and finally executed them. Their murders, like so many others perpetrated against sexual minorities, never entered official records of the regime's atrocities. (Robles 2008, 17-18)

On July 9th, 1984, Mónica Briones Puccio—an out lesbian visual artist—was brutally murdered near Plaza Italia Square. Her killing, often mischaracterized as an isolated event, in fact forms part of a broader system of state-sanctioned terror, targeting cuir lives through surveillance, policing, and social "cleansing." The dictatorship's vision of constitutional order was inseparable from a moral project of compulsory heterosexuality, national reproduction, and militarized gender norms. (Montecinos 2024) Cuir lives under the dictatorship were rendered illegible to the state—not simply censored, but actively erased through symbolic and physical annihilation. Yet the traces from those cuir (and those infant) casualties of the dictatorship create a counter-narrative, an insurgent memory about a plurality of the constitution of the Chilean people that stands against the moral purging of non-normative lives.



Figure 5 and 6. Gloria Camiruaga. *San Martín-San Pablo Performance*, still from art video, 8:54, 1986. Courtesy of Rocío Ramos Camiruaga.

Was the End of the Dictatorship Also the End of Censorship?

Once the dictatorial period was about to come to a close through the National Plebiscite of 1988-1989, the issue of artistic censorship could be revisited through the controversial case of the experimental video *Casa Particular*. Directed by Gloria Camiruaga in 1989, this artistic project draws on certain elements from another video by the same artist, *San Martín-San Pablo Performance* (1986).

In the earlier work, Camiruaga visited the marginalized neighborhoods of San Martín and San Pablo to interview cisgender women engaging in sex work. The video also documents various shots of peripheral urban landscapes, landmarks of violent public order under the dictatorship, such as a prison with a barbed perimeter being guarded by an armed guard making rounds from the watchtowers. These images are then contrasted with the protective bars in the first story windows of the aforementioned brothels, as sex workers who appear to be middle aged peer back at the camera smiling with a friendly demeanor. Later, in an interview segment with an older woman that we find out is running the brothel, she speaks out about the social ostracization of prostitutes by Chilean society at the time, while defending their role as physical and psychological caregivers for their clients.

The madam then discloses that after another brothel madam, and friend, was murdered by a client who was part of the dictatorship's military servicemen, she and her husband decided to adopt the son left orphaned by the assassination. This interview is segmented with shots of a spontaneous performance by some of the sex workers, who partially exhibit their naked bodies from a brothel's second story window. They begin covering and uncovering their nude bodies with a slightly campy and vulgar painting depicting intercourse between a man and a woman in missionary position. The closing shots of the video show the women sitting outside in the street, alongside many children playing, and a young girl in a school uniform who innocently sings a folk song, "La Trastrasera." The images and testimonies of the video not only archive the adverse conditions and hedonistic playfulness experienced by female sex workers during the dictatorship, but also their comfortable and protective stand towards the neighborhood children can also lead us to question whether these marginalized individuals are more adept and caring for the youths of their community than the hostile precarity brought forth by the coup.

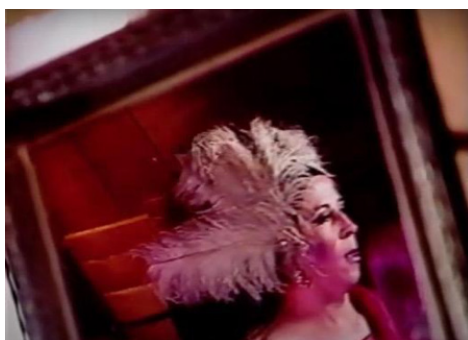


Figure 7 and 8. Gloria Camiruaga. *Casa particular*, stills from art video, 9:29 m, 1990. Courtesy of Rocío Ramos Camiruaga.

For *Casa Particular*, the artist shifted her focus towards the San Camilo Street of Santiago, a well-known enclave where travesti women lived and worked in the sex trade, frequently exposed to violence and entrenched poverty. The video includes documentary footage of these travesti women's daily lives in the homonymous Casa Particular brothel: day shots with many scantily clad and impoverished "pelusa" homeless kids roaming in the streets, night shots of the brothel's dancefloor hosting hedonistic inebriated parties, and the behind the scenes of the queens backstage putting on their makeup. This video-documentation of the daily life inside Casa Particular is infused with a playful, baroque fictionalization when the performance collective Yeguas del Apocalipsis (Pedro Lemebel and Francisco "Pancho" Casas) join them on screen. The collaboration included celebratory scenes, a performance of the tango "Malena" sung by Pancho, and the staging of *The Last Supper of San Camilo*, a performance inspired by a kitschy tapestry hanging on a wall of the brothel that reproduced Leonardo da Vinci's mural *The Last Supper* (1495–1498). In this vein, the transgender women collaborated with the Yeguas—in drag—to reenact the biblical scene, with the respected madam known as La Doctora, whose testimony was previously cited—madam, charismatic leader, and protector of the younger trans women working at the establishment—taking on the role of a messianic figure, breaking bread and sharing wine with the travestis. Camiruaga documented this performance and incorporated it into her video.

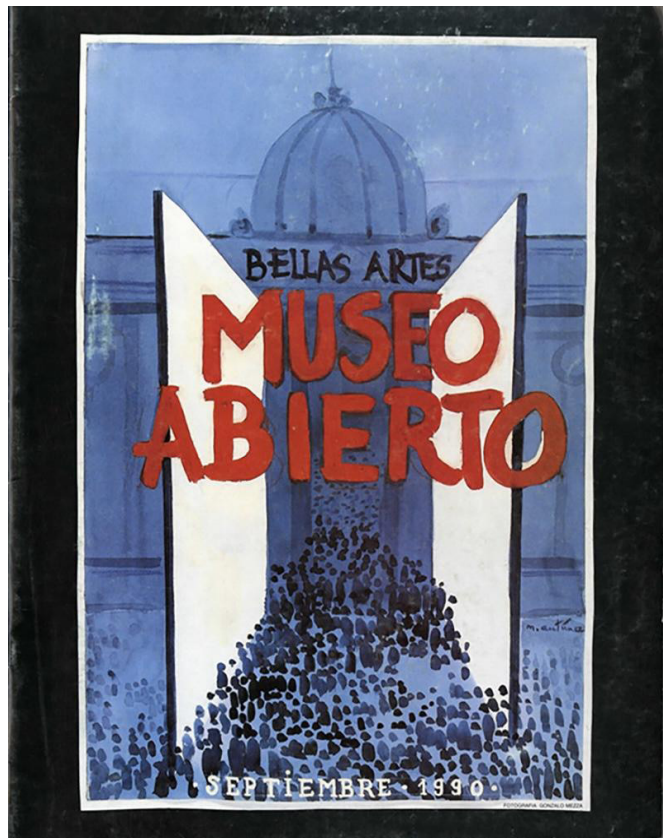


Figure 9. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. 1990. Museo Abierto. Santiago, RM: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, cover.

The controversy surrounding this video art piece arose during its public exhibition at *Museo Abierto*, an exhibition held from September 6th to 30th, 1990, which was an initiative of Nemesio Antúnez, director of the National Museum of Fine Arts (MNBA). Antúnez had resigned from his position after the 1973 coup, a role he had held since 1970, closely aligned with Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular. After the coup, he went into exile in Catalonia, returning to Chile in 1984. The concept behind *Museo Abierto* was an open call for artists across disciplines, with minimal curatorial oversight, aiming to reflect the artistic exuberance of the promised joy brought by Chile's democratic restoration. The exhibition included a section for "Video Art," which featured Camiruaga's aforementioned artwork selected by curators Juan Enrique Forch and Justo Pastor Mellado, as noted in the exhibition catalog.

Pedro Lemebel chronicled the scandal of the *Casa Particular* screening at *Museo Abierto*. (1996, 34–37) One of the video's sequences featured La Madonna, a transgender woman who worked at the Casa Particular brothel, demonstrating a technique known as the "Chinese lock"—a way of tucking the penis and testicles back into the pelvic cavity to create the appearance of a smooth, feminine silhouette. The screening, which had gone uncensored due to the exhibition's open nature, took an unexpected turn when a scout troop on a museum field trip entered the video room. As the footage unfolded, the children erupted into laughter and applause. However, when La Madonna's tuck is released in the video, revealing her genitalia, the reaction turned into an uproar. The scout leader, outraged, demanded the video be stopped, denouncing what he saw was an obscene exposure to minors. Hearing the commotion, Antúnez arrived at the screening room. Confronted with the scene for the first time, he immediately ordered the video to be stopped, publicly apologizing and conceding that censorship was, in this case, justified. While the presence of children in the audience undeniably complicated the situation, it would be misguided to attribute fault to La Madonna or the videographer. Instead, the responsibility falls on the curatorial oversight that failed to anticipate the context in which the work would be exhibited. However incredible it may seem, curators must familiarize themselves with the works they present—especially when those works engage with the visibility of marginalized bodies in institutional spaces.

By now, we have understood how heterosexual hegemony limits the rights of sexually diverse communities and minorities invoking the abstract image of "the children" while public policies reflect an entrenched hostility toward the actual well-being and education of children. What future does a child have without education or access to lines of social mobility that might allow to potentially break free from the chains of class apartheid? It seems highly unlikely that the scout troop experienced genuine harm from viewing the brief sequence featuring La Madonna's displaced genitals in that exhibition room. By the early 1990s, the hypersexualization of popular culture—particularly in advertising and broadcast across mass media—exposed the youth to sexually charged images in their daily lives. This phenomenon, part of what philosopher Martín Hopenhayn referred to as the *destape* of the media during the transition, defined much of the decade's zeitgeist. One emblematic example is *La Bomba 4*, a Friday feature in the pro-government tabloid *La Cuarta*, which began in 1985 as beach snapshots of women in swimsuits of dubious consent. By the time democracy returned, this feature had evolved into fully topless photoshoots of local and international female models. This kind of softcore erotica became a pop-cultural staple, proudly displayed in tire repair shops and cherished as masturbatory materials for pubescent children and young adults across Chile. (Hopenhayn 2004) Such media products expose the double standard of Chilean society before and during the democratic transition: on one

hand, the artistic field pushed the boundaries of what was socially permissible, seeking to make visible the lives and desires of non-normative minorities. On the other hand, the dominance of heterosexual desire clung to its Victorian reservations about the arts, while simultaneously distributing politically correct softcore pornography at every newsstand.

After the censorship of *Casa Particular*, the Yeguas del Apocalipsis staged an artistic protest titled *Estrellada II* at the front of the MNBA. In an article in *La Nación* newspaper on September 30th, 1990, the Yeguas commented on their embodied art and their homosexual political principles, inviting readers to witness a performance to take place that evening at 8:00 PM. (La Nación 1990, 36) For this action, the duo arrived at the museum premises dressed in second-hand clothing that alluded to Hollywood glamour divas. Casas wore make-up, a styled wig, a shiny, translucent light-colored dress with a pencil skirt, and heels. Lemebel, on the other hand, donned a feather boa, a head turban, makeup, a dark-colored dress with dark fishnet stockings, and heels.

Years later, in his novel *Yo, yegua*, Casas recalled that he may have embodied Rita Hayworth, a famous American Hollywood star of the 1940s remembered for her glamorous beauty which intentionally erased her hispanic features, while Lemebel may have taken inspiration from Dolores del Río, a glamorous Mexican actress who triumphed in Hollywood during the 1920s and 1930s and was one of the first Latin American actresses to reach such prominence in said industry. (2004) As Lemebel recalled in a 1992 chronicle and as seen in some photographic records of the action, the duo stamped star shapes onto the pavement outside the museum using pink paint and lumpy neoprene adhesive, which they set ablaze while posing with exaggerated feminine gestures for the cameras:

Another expelled group (Yeguas del Apocalipsis) burned their left hand with flammable neoprene on stars stamped on the sidewalk, performing a drag parody of Chinese Theatre with the tension of a barricade. This gesture refers the art institution to the burlesque frivolity of commercial cinematography, feminizes the registration of art in Hollywood-style iconography. Stamping the fingerprint with neoprene on the stars parodies the inscription of the margins in the cultural history of the country. And then, by burning it, reveals the return to anonymity, mocks the cataloging of identity and surveillance codes. This act of flaming a handful of pink stars pays tribute to homosexual bodies devastated by AIDS. Appearing in drag as revival symbols trivializes the cremation of their remnants in the Third World. (Lemebel 1992, 33)

The patriotic iconography of the star found in the Chilean flag is subverted by the duo, referencing the tourist attraction of the Hollywood Walk of Fame in California, where stars dedicated to famous actors are embedded into the pavement. However, this reference is "Third-Worlded" with the garish pink color of "poor taste" and the immolated neoprene, a common intoxicating substance often inhaled by Chilean marginalized and homeless communities, tied to the scraps of glamour denied by the fashion system that trickle down into the fantasies of travesti cultures in peripheral societies through the remnants of second-hand clothing from North America. It is worth mentioning that N. Antúnez also censored the installation titled *Gina*, presented in *Museo Abierto* by the Lüger de Luxe collective (then composed of Jorge Aceituno, Dinka Dujisin, Iván Godoy, Hernán Meschi, and Paola Meschi), in which the group explored domestic violence against women.



Figure 10. Gloria Camiruaga. *Yeguas del Apocalipsis en Performance (Mares of the Apocalypse in Performance)*, stills from art video, 6:16 m, 1989. Courtesy of Rocío Ramos Camiruaga.

It is worth mentioning that this artistic protest action was conceived as a continuation of the *Estrellada San Camilo* action, which took place on November 25th, 1989, during which the Yeguas stenciled stars in positive and negative forms with white spray paint on San Camilo Street (again alluding to the Hollywood Walk of Fame). This time, they were characterized by white body paint in the style of Japanese Butō dance with black accents, alluding to the articulated construction of a robotic body. The performance was also captured on video by Camiruaga. The date chosen for this action, carried out on the emblematic street of travesti sex commerce, coincided with the birthday of dictator Augusto Pinochet, when the FPMR (Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front) orchestrated a major blackout in Santiago as a form of protest. As a result, cinematic lighting had to be set up in the area to illuminate the performance which otherwise took place in pitch darkness.

Blackouts or power cuts caused by radical opposition groups were pressure mechanisms that also allowed mobilized protesters to evade military forces, particularly in the city's peripheral areas:

Partial blackouts occurred frequently; sometimes, the blackouts affected several regions for long periods. To provoke them, high-tension towers were blown up, or chains were thrown onto power lines. According to statements made to this Commission by a member of the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front, power cuts were intended to assist protesters and protect residents: "The blackouts aimed to make repression in the neighborhoods more difficult." However, in reality, the darkness facilitated both violent public disorder and excesses by State agents. (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 1991, 704)

According to the *Yeguas del Apocalipsis Archive*, slides of the photographic performance session *What AIDS Took Away* (1989), captured by photographer Mario Vivado, were also projected during the performance from the window of a brothel in San Camilo street. (D21 Proyectos de Arte, n.d.)

This video artwork also includes a record of an individual performance by Lemebel at the Ochagavía Workers' Hospital, popularly known as the "White Elephant" abandoned hospital. Its construction, initiated during the UP, was halted, leaving the urban colossus abandoned during the dictatorship and later subjected to the misfortunes of privatization and real estate speculation during the democratic transition. For an artistic intervention in that space on December 2nd, 1989, (where artist Lotty Rosenfeld also activated a video installation titled *Cautivos* that same year), Lemebel arranged shoes abandoned in the site in a row—evoking the disappeared bodies of political prisoners and the necropolitics of the dictatorship—before lying barefoot, dressed all

in black on the bare floor, covering himself with brick fragments. He then poured neoprene adhesive from a can over the bricks and set them alight with matches. At that moment, the precarious light installed in the building went out, revealing a fiery silhouette as if marking the scene of a hideous crime. (Moreno 1989, 30)



Figure 11. Felipe Rivas. "3. CUM SHOT". *Ideología (Ideology)*, still from video-performance, 00:02:23, 2010. Courtesy of Felipe Rivas.

The End of Censorship? II

The artwork *Ideology* by Felipe Rivas San Martín, a visual artist and activist who was a former member of the University Coordinator for Sexual Dissidence (CUDS), caused public controversy when it was presented at the *Pink Dildo* Festival, a post-pornographic video art competition whose first edition took place at the Capri porno cinema in downtown Santiago in 2011. The primary critic of Rivas' work on that occasion was the late writer, activist, and performer Pedro Lemebel. This is recounted by Josecarlo Henríquez, a cuir sex worker and CUDS activist, in his book:

Pedro Lemebel was part of the jury—or was supposed to be, in fact—until he encountered this video by Rivas. Upon seeing it, he flew into a rage and demanded the material be censored "for being disrespectful to the figure of the former president, for being iconoclastic, and for being fascist." If the video wasn't withdrawn, Lemebel would leave the festival—and that's what happened. (Henríquez Silva 2016, 106-107)

The writer's complaint stemmed from the artistic action that threads the narrative of the video: it focuses on the artist's masturbation, culminating in ejaculation over the photographic image of Allende.



Figure 12. Felipe Rivas. "Ideología" (Ideology), *Garçon*, photo-performance text, 2010. Courtesy of Felipe Rivas.

The work dates back to 2010, initially published as a photo-performative series in the fourth issue of *Garçons* magazine and later developed into a video performance the following year as part of the workshop *El recorte del plano*, co-produced by Cristeva Cabello, before competing in the aforementioned contest. While the artist does not record having considered the reference, there is a parallel with Bruce LaBruce's film *Skin Flick* (1999) in which a young neo-Nazi masturbates while reading *Mein Kampf*, eventually ejaculating onto the cover of the volume, which shows a reproduction of Adolf Hitler's portrait. Of course, Nazifascism (whose National Socialist Party designation has no relation to any leftist policies, neither social nor economic) has nothing to do with Allende's socialist legacy through democratic means—far more so with the fascist dictator Augusto Pinochet. Yet there remains an intertextual visual parallel in the corporeality of iconoclastic self-pleasure in relation to the black-and-white photographic effigies of 20th-century historical figures: in LaBruce's case, upon the cover of an edition of that book featuring the dictator's image; in Rivas' case, upon a printed photograph of Allende.

A blog entry by CUDS describes the video performance in question as follows:

The video interweaves archival political documentary footage from the period leading up to the 1973 coup d'état with BDSM homosexual pornography and a declamatory reading by Rivas himself. The text read aloud corresponds to a poetic and autobiographical essay linking leftist militancy with homosexual desire, resonating with contemporary theoretical thought on aesthetics and politics. Additionally, it documents the action of a *cum shot* (ejaculation) onto the photograph of former socialist president Salvador Allende. (CUDS 2016)

Rut : 60.901.002-9	Demandante : CONSEJO NACIONAL DE LA CULTURA Y LAS ARTES
Dirección : Plaza Sotomayor 233	Unidad de Compra : Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes
Teléfono : 56-32-2326448	Fecha Envío OC. : 24-06-2016 16:39:50
Fax :	Estado : Enviada a Proveedor

ORDEN DE COMPRA N°: 1725-1529-SE16

SEÑOR (ES) : Felipe Rivas San Martín	A Sr (a) : Felipe Rivas San Martín
DIRECCIÓN : Alameda 580, depto 807 Santiago Centro Región Metropolitana de Santiago	FONO : 56-2-26390625
RUT : 15.294.710-0	FAX : --
NOMBRE ORDEN DE COMPRA : TRATO DIRECTO / PRESENTACION DE LA OBRA DE ARTE CONCEPTUAL "IDEOLOGIA" EN EL MARCO DEL SEGUNDO CICLO PROGRAMÁTICO "INVISIBLE" DEL CENTRO DE EXTENSIÓN	
FECHA ENTREGA PRODUCTOS :	
DIRECCION DE ENVIO FACTURA : Plaza Sotomayor 233	Valparaíso Región de Valparaíso
DIRECCION DE DESPACHO : Plaza Sotomayor 233	Valparaíso Región de Valparaíso
METODO DE DESPACHO : Despachar a Dirección de envío	
FORMA DE PAGO : 30 días contra la recepción conforme de la factura	
CONTACTO OC : Irma Pino	56-32-2326448 irma.pino@cultura.gob.cl

Figure 13. Purchase order issued by the National Council of Culture and the Arts (CNCA) to Felipe Rivas, visual artist, on Tuesday, June 24th, 2016, at 4:30 PM. Courtesy of Felipe Rivas.

Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes
Valparaíso 06 de julio de 2016

Señor
Felipe Rivas San Martín
Presente.


Junto con saludarlo y en relación a la instalación de su obra "Ideología" en el Centro de Extensión del Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes (Centex), como le informé por correo electrónico de 5 de julio pasado, no es posible llevarla a cabo en este espacio.

El Centex es un espacio cultural abierto a todo público, sin restricción etaria, destinado a la exhibición de arte y a la mediación artística con la ciudadanía, y especialmente con público de establecimientos de educación básica y media. La obra "Ideología", tal como se señala en la plataforma VIMED en la cual se exhibe, contiene material catalogado "para adultos", lo que imposibilita, como usted debe entender, presentarla en dicho espacio ya que es visitado por menores de edad, por lo que la obra en cuestión no podrá ser montada mañana jueves 07 de julio como se habla coordinado inicialmente.

Reitero una vez más a usted, la intención de contar con su participación en el ciclo del Centex "invisible", ya que nos interesa de igual manera su presencia en este ciclo, para lo cual podría exhibir otra obra de su autoría, realizar una selección de trabajos para este ciclo en particular, o para próximos ciclos de exposición, estando disponibles a otorgarle el tiempo de preparación que necesite para estos efectos.

A nombre del Departamento de Ciudadanía Cultural y del Centex le doy las excusas por haber seleccionado su obra sin prever que el espacio de muestra debía cumplir con las correspondientes normas de exhibición de material audiovisual para público de todas las edades, en un espacio abierto y el correspondiente problema logístico para la exhibición que ello supone, lo que tampoco fue analizado por el Comité Editorial del Centex.

Sin otro particular, me despido cordialmente


Moira Délano Urrutia
Jefa Departamento de Ciudadanía Cultural
Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes

Distribución:
• Copia Departamento Ciudadanía Cultural
• Centro de Extensión, Centex.

Figure 14. Letter sent by Moira Délano Urrutia, Head of the Department of Cultural Citizenship of the National Council of Culture and the Arts (CNCA), to Felipe Rivas, visual artist, on July 6th, 2016. Courtesy of Felipe Rivas.

The work *Ideology* was selected and included in the exhibition *In-visible*, focused on gender and inclusion, which was set to open to the public on Monday, July 11th 2016, at CENTEX art center in the city of Valparaíso. On July 5th, via email—followed by an official letter the next day—the artist was informed that the work had been censored by the state’s artistic council. This was not only an attack on the artistic subjectivity of Rivas, who also had been preparing a special multimedia installation for the event. The artist publicly revealed the communications prohibiting the exhibition of the work, which exposed inconsistencies. In the first message received from Moira Délano Urrutia, Head of the Department of Cultural Citizenship of the National Council of Culture and the Arts (CNCA), the justification was a “difficulty with the exhibition’s logistics.” However, the next day, the reason shifted to the claim that the exhibition space would be “visited by minors.” This was later confirmed by the Cultural Minister Ernesto Ottone himself in an interview with *The Clinic*:

This is a space open to the general public, and an independent curator selected a work that cannot be exhibited for all audiences. I saw the piece, and I find it very legitimate, but in this space—which is specifically intended to cultivate new audiences, including families and school groups—it cannot be shown. (Hopenhayn 2016)

Reactionary morality, rooted in the double standard of centralizing punitive violence while erasing historical mass murder—only to then criminalize minority identity groups as a means of asserting hegemony—here yet again employs the pseudo-argument of childhood and youth corruption to dehumanize and segregate non-heterosexual cuir subjectivities.

A 2017 report by the Investigative Police (PDI), commissioned by the National Prosecutor’s Office following the death of 11-year-old Lissette Villa on April 11th, 2016—who died of asphyxiation while institutionalized in a Sename home—had damning findings. The report, delivered to the Prosecutor’s Office and ultra-right president Sebastián Piñera’s government in December 2018, but kept hidden until July 2019, revealed that 88% of privately managed children’s homes and 100% of state-run Sename homes had engaged in severe abuse and mistreatment. Cases of sexual abuse were documented in at least 50% of all homes nationwide. Furthermore, the report confirmed that 1,313 children had died in Sename institutions between 2005 and 2016. (Sepúlveda, Guzmán, and Villa 2019) Could any reader classify this as anything other than systematic child abuse to the degree of genocide? This does not even take into account the abhorrent violations committed against indigenous children. In 2017, the National Institute of Human Rights (INDH) published a report detailing 133 severe assaults against Mapuche children and youths by the Chilean Carabineros (police force) since 2011, most commonly in the form of reckless gun fire. The report itself acknowledges that “there is an undetermined number of cases that never come to light and are lost in the fields and forests of southern Chile.” (Mussa and Silva Balcazar 2017)

The iconoclastic seminal residue of the HIV-positive artist Rivas upon the image of the socialist leader is not, in any way, intended as sexual education for minors—something the political establishment itself should be striving to incorporate into the educational system. It is a work of video art for adults (indicated by the video file uploaded to the streaming platform Vimeo, as Cultural Citizenship Department Head Moira Délano reminded the artist in a letter dated July 6th, 2016). The piece offers a critique of the history of homophobia and prevailing sexism not only within the country’s fascist right wing but also within the more free-thinking segments of the left. It draws from the artist’s autobiographical experience of militancy within

the Communist Youth when he was a student at the emblematic General José Miguel Carrera National Institute, where Allende also briefly studied. *Ideology* mobilizes a series of connections between discrimination, labor, pleasure, and socialist utopias, made visible through the reinterpretation of transgressive pornographic imagery from an artistic lens.



Figure 15. Javier Ledezma Barraza (digital photograph). Protest after the artist was denied entry to install his work. Digital photograph, Extension Center (CENTEX) of the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CNCA), Plaza Sotomayor 233, Valparaíso, Thursday, July 7th, 2016. Courtesy of Felipe Rivas.

Sexual dissidence activism⁶ became fervently engaged from the outset in direct action to condemn the censorship of Rivas—whether through public demonstrations, such as the one held outside CENTEX in Valparaíso on July 7th, 2016, or through written statements and reflections on the gravity of this censorship in relation to Chile’s contemporary political history. The artist had established networks within activist circles that enabled him to consult with the Public Interest and Human Rights Legal Clinic at Diego Portales University. This was one of the legal clinics that, in 2004, brought a case against the Chilean state for the lesbophobic custody loss

6 The term “sexual dissidence” began to be used by cuir activists in Chile during the post-transition period—after the 2010 election of Sebastián Piñera, the first right-wing president since the dictatorship, representing the National Renewal party. These activists favored the term over outdated, pathologizing labels like “homosexual”; the euphemisms promoted by civil society organizations during the Concertación governments’ transition period, such as “diversity” or “equality,” which often pushed assimilationist politics; and even over imported frameworks like “queer theory.” As Rivas states: “Sexual Dissidence emerges in post-transition Chile as a response to the institutionalization of the gay movement and the co-optation of social movements by the Concertación governments. (...) Sexual Dissidence has conceptualized the contemporary regime of sexual power through the notion of ‘heteronormativity.’ Its political efforts focus on denouncing and resisting the mechanisms and effects of the heteronormative system (moving beyond merely superficial issues such as homophobia or discrimination).” (Rivas San Martín 2011)

suffered by judge Karen Atala, a case that was successfully ruled in her favor in 2012—though by then, the irreparable damage to the mother-daughter relationship had already been done. Together with this clinic (including lawyers Juan Pablo Delgado and Cristián Riego), who took Rivas's case pro bono, a constitutional protection appeal was filed against Minister of Culture Ernesto Ottone in the Valparaíso Court of Appeals on August 4th of that year.

The main legal argument of this appeal is the violation of the artist's constitutional right to freedom of expression without prior censorship, as well as his right to freely disseminate the arts and his right to equality before the law. (Centro de Derechos Humanos 2016)

This argument referenced not only Articles 19.2 (equality before the law), 19.12 (freedom of expression without prior censorship), and 19.25 (freedom to disseminate the arts) of the Chilean Constitution, but also the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José, Costa Rica), whose Article 13 guarantees freedom of artistic expression without prior censorship.

To the surprise of many who are intimately familiar with Chile's history of judicial irresponsibility and bias, the Court of Appeals ultimately ruled in favor of the protection appeal on September 16th of that year. The State Defense Council, representing Minister Ottone, did not challenge the ruling, though the CNCA issued a cowardly statement claiming that:

The CNCA reiterates that censorship has never guided its actions or those of its authorities. (El Mostrador 2016)

This claim stood in stark contrast to the well-documented censorship upheld even by Chile's notoriously conservative judiciary.

Closing Remarks: On Cuir Children's Futurity

The cases analyzed throughout this essay illustrate how censorship in Chile has historically functioned as a mechanism for controlling dissent, regulating bodies, and reinforcing hegemonic narratives. From the brutal repression of the dictatorship to the more insidious cultural and institutional constraints of the post-dictatorship era, the limitations placed on artistic expression reveal a persistent discomfort with radical sexual dissidence. The works examined here challenge these boundaries—exposing the contradictions within Chile's democratic transition and post-transition, foregrounding the violence of state-sanctioned norms.

The intersections of sexuality, politics, and censorship are particularly evident in the ideological anxieties surrounding cuir artistic expression. As demonstrated in the censorship of artists like Camiruaga and Rivas, appeals to "public morality" and "child protection" often mask deeper discomforts with non-normative embodiments and desire. These moral panics, which selectively target cuir art, stand in stark contrast to the state's ongoing failure to protect the most vulnerable—especially the children subjected to systemic abuse within SENAME institutions. This stark contradiction reveals that censorship is not, and has never been, about safeguarding collective well-being. Rather, it is a tool of power: a strategy for maintaining adult-centric, heteropatriarchal, and classist structures by erasing dissident voices and alternative ways of imagining the world.

Rivas' *Ideology* provides a stark and subtle commentary on this dynamic, particularly in its

use of semen as an artistic symbol. The white excretion, linked to sexual reproduction and the creation of life, resonates with the imagery that once accompanied the half-liter of milk under Allende's government—an iconic symbol of the socialist dream, representing the promise of a future society nourished by collective care. Where Allende's milk embodied a vision of national solidarity, Rivas' semen takes on a more complex role: it represents not just reproductive excretion, but the construction of a society from a contested, seropositive, and cuir perspective.

Legal victories—such as the overturning of the censorship against *Ideology*—suggest the potential for institutional redress, but they remain fragile and contingent. The broader struggle against censorship in Chile is not confined to isolated cases; it requires a dismantling of the mechanisms of exclusion embedded in both law and culture. Censorship, as this essay has shown, is an enduring tactic of control—one that must be continually resisted through artistic creation, legal challenge, and collective action.

In this context, we must also question the dominant frameworks that deny the possibility of cuir infancy and adolescence. The adult-centric logic that hypersexualizes cuir existence while simultaneously denying cuir children's visibility reinforces a cultural fantasy of the "Imaginary Child"—an abstract figure used to justify the suppression of real, living cuir youth. Against this conservative imaginary, I propose a reorientation: toward a politics of *cuir futurity* rooted in care, community, and intergenerational solidarity. Rather than policing who children are allowed to become, we must center the experiences and lives of those cuir children and adolescents who are doubly marginalized—materially abandoned by neoliberal capitalism, and erased from historical and artistic narratives alike.

To speak of "queer futurity," as theorist José Esteban Muñoz defines it, is to refuse the present as a closed totality. In his work *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues that the present is not enough; that what we name as reality is merely the consolidation of heteronormative and capitalist structures that naturalize themselves as inevitable. Queerness, for him, is not something that fully exists in this flattened now. It is something glimpsed, something approaching, something on the horizon. This horizon is not a distant utopia in the naïve sense, but a structuring potential, something that reorients us against the present's supposed completeness.

Drawing on the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, Muñoz explains that this sense of potentiality—what Bloch called the "not-yet-conscious"—is central to any critical imagination of the future. Queer futurity is a way of thinking temporality differently: not as linear progress, but as an opening toward what has not yet been realized. It resists what Muñoz calls the "stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present." (Muñoz 2009, 12) As he writes:

Queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon. My argument is therefore interested in critiquing the ontological certitude that I understand to be partnered with the politics of presentist and pragmatic contemporary gay identity. (Muñoz 2009, 11)

This horizon is neither a false promise nor a static destination. It is what allows queerness to remain a project in motion, something we reach toward rather than something we possess. Hope, in this framework, is not vacuous optimism but what Bloch would call a critical disposition: a refusal to let the present define what counts as possible. Hope can and will be disappointed, but as Muñoz reminds us, that risk of disappointment is essential to the political imagination.

Without it, we cede the future to the forces that claim to own it already—capital, the state, heteronormative reproduction.

Against this, Muñoz positions his critique of a particular strand of queer theory that emerged in the late 20th century, what he names the “anti-relational thesis.” This mode of thought, most famously associated with theorists like Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, defines queerness not by futurity but by rupture, negativity, and the refusal of social bonds. For Edelman in particular, the future is held hostage by what he calls the aforementioned “Imaginary Child,” a figure that symbolizes the reproductive logic of heteronormativity. In his polemic *No Future*, Edelman argues that queerness must reject the future altogether, because that future has been constructed as the exclusive domain of heterosexual reproduction and political normalization.

Edelman’s critique is sharp and useful, but for Muñoz, its refusal is too final, too closed. Where Edelman sees only the oppressive figure of the Child, Muñoz sees a horizon still open to queer reimagining. The future, for him, is not owned by the state, nor by heteronormative reproduction—it is a field of potentiality waiting to be seized. Queer futurity is not a simple affirmation of positivity, but a shared, collective reaching toward what could be otherwise. As Muñoz writes, “queerness is not yet here,” but we can feel it, if only fleetingly, as “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.” (Muñoz 2009, 1) In this sense, queer futurity is an affective and political commitment to imagining transformation, even when such imagining feels impossible. It is not about arriving at some perfect future, but about refusing to collapse the field of possibility into what is already here. As Muñoz puts it, “we have never been queer,” but the task is to keep reaching, to keep feeling for what queerness might still become.

In a world where fascist tides rise under the banner of disinformation and the silencing of dissent, the defense of cuir expression in the South—especially when it concerns childhood, education, and futurity—is more urgent than ever. The fight is not simply against censorship; it is a battle to reclaim and amplify the lives and stories of those the state seeks to disappear—those whose past and whose futures are yet to be written. To “defend” cuir children’s futurity is to come to the realization that although we have a communal obligation to steward their safety and their wellbeing, denying their agency and human rights as autonomous subjects in formation will inexorably create the adverse conditions that permit their exploitation and abandonment in the first place. Cuir children’s lives are not provisional, not hypothetical, not deferred to some distant adulthood where cuirness might finally be permitted to exist more safely. It is to recognize their present-tense as cuir subjects from the South, as Chilean children. Their visibility is already political, already relational, already capable of imagining and creating worlds beyond the brittle confines of state-sanctioned innocence. In their silences, but also in their defiance, we glimpse the horizon Muñoz describes: not a utopia postponed, but a collective commitment to living otherwise, here and now, in the ruins and the rubble of the present. If censorship imagines itself as the gatekeeper of the future, our task is then to open the gates, to keep living, to keep creating art, and to leave no child—cuir or otherwise—behind. **post(s)**

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