



Pedro Lemebel and the Latin American Chronicle:

Memory, Archive, Cityscape

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HeLix 17 (2024), p. 193–220. doi: 10.11588/helix.2024.2.108354

### Abstract

The following paper analyzes the importance of the chronicle in the writings of Pedro Lemebel (1952-2015). The Chilean author and performance artist embedded himself in the tradition of the Latin American chronicle and re-invented the format as radio broadcasts portraying Santiago de Chile from a queer perspective and showcasing the lives of marginalized populations. This article interprets Pedro Lemebel's collection of chronicles *De perlas y cicatrices* [*Of pearls and scars*] by means of two concepts: 'subterranean writing', which aims to describe the perspective of the chronicles, and 'ephemeral archive', a concept that seeks to express the tension between urban transformation and testimonial memory. Departing from Pedro Lemebel, the present contribution argues in favor of a 'memory turn' in the Latin American tradition of chronicle writing.

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## Pedro Lemebel and the Latin American Chronicle:

### Memory, Archive, Cityscape

Marília Jöhnk (Frankfurt)

#### Pedro Lemebel's Performances between Manifestos and Stilettoes

In 1986, one of Chile's most striking performance artists positioned himself at the corner of the former train station, Estación Mapocho, right in the middle of Santiago de Chile, to read out a manifesto that would become known as one of the most important contributions to queer writing in Latin America. In those days, Estación Mapocho served as a home for various Chilean leftist groups, and it was therefore no coincidence that the performance artist Pedro Lemebel (1952-2015) chose a corner of this train station to read out his "MANIFIESTO (Hablo por mi diferencia)", which criticized both the heteronormativity of Chile's society as a whole and the leftist movement specifically.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Pedro Lemebel was already known as one of the most remarkable figures that Latin American literature had seen in decades. He started his career as a performance artist during the Chilean dictatorship as a part of the collective *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* together with Francisco Casas. Wearing stiletto shoes – one of Lemebel's trademarks – the performance artist read his manifesto, which laments the exclusion of queer people from leftist movements and stresses the importance of historical experience that has been shaped by sexual and economic discrimination. Lemebel thereby demonstrated, as early as 1986, an intersectional perspective on queer writing. The end of the manifesto posits a beautiful prospect, demanding acceptance of queer people among the communist movement: "Hay tantos niños que van a nacer / Con una alita rota / Y yo

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<sup>1</sup> On the performance, see: RICHARD, "...'Embroidering Birds onto the Flags of the Free Nation' ...", 21-22.

quiero que vuelen compañero / Que su revolución / Les dé un pedazo de cielo rojo / Para que puedan volar.”<sup>2</sup>

Performance art was one side of Lemebel’s oeuvre. The other side of his art is characterized by minor newspaper articles called chronicles, or to use the precise Spanish term, *crónicas*.<sup>3</sup> Lemebel wrote only one novel, *Tengo miedo torero*, and throughout his work constantly reflected on the importance of the chronicle for his writing. In this paper, I position Lemebel’s work within the tradition of the urban Latin American chronicle and analyze how he reinvented the genre.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that his production of chronicles can therefore be understood through two terms: on the one hand as ‘subterranean writing’, and on the other as ‘ephemeral archive’. Referring to the concept of ‘subterranean writing’, I aim to show how Lemebel portrayed the city through his chronicles of the so-called ‘marginalized’ parts of society.<sup>5</sup> I rely on the term ‘ephemeral archive’ to illustrate that Lemebel’s chronicles try to conserve memory while also

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<sup>2</sup> LEMEBEL, “Manifiesto”, 97.

<sup>3</sup> I will refer, above all, to the English designation ‘chronicle’ as an umbrella term, and throughout the article depict the Latin American tradition of the genre – both in its Spanish American as well as in its Brazilian traditions. The Brazilian tradition warrants inclusion because the theoretical reflection on this genre is quite elaborate in Brazilian Literary Studies, given that research can count on contributions from such distinguished scholars as Antonio Candido. The inclusion of the Brazilian theoretical frameworks is also consistent with my own concept of Latin American literature, for which I decidedly argue in favor of a multilingual and comparative approach.

<sup>4</sup> In her contribution to the Latin American chronicle, Viviane Mahieux also uses the term ‘chronicle’, and more precisely, “urban Latin American chronicle”. Mahieux defines the chronicle with the following words: “In the 1920s and the 1930s, chronicles were short articles that commented on various aspects of city life in a light and anecdotal tone. They were written with a self-conscious literary style, often in the first person, and were framed by a signature, if not also a caricature or photograph of the chronicler who penned it. At the time, these articles were intended only for publication in the daily press, and consequently the works of many chroniclers who were widely read in their day remain forgotten in yellowing newspaper archives.” MAHIEUX, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> See also on Lemebel’s portrayal of the marginalized population: OSBORNE: “Resisting Reconciliation”, 215.

being aware of their ephemeral character.<sup>6</sup> The paper will first position Lemebel within the tradition of the Latin American chronicle and then develop the two poles of his writing through a close reading of different chronicles published in the 1998 collection, *De perlas y cicatrices*.

## The Chronicle in Latin America

The chronicle has a long tradition in Latin American literature and has been important for many famous 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Clarice Lispector. Critics have traced the origins of the chronicle in Latin America both to colonial times and to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century European tradition of feuilleton writing.<sup>7</sup> However, it seems more convincing to tie the roots of the chronicle to the literary developments of nineteenth-century European literature, while keeping in mind that the chronicle gained its own dynamic in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the feuilleton that was placed underneath a line at the bottom of a newspaper – which led to the famous French nickname ‘littérature bas de page’ and separated the literary text from political news – the Latin American chronicle was never separated from the political sphere.<sup>9</sup> This

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<sup>6</sup> The present article is based on a presentation given in October 2020 in defense of my thesis on minor forms of travel writing in Latin America, under the title “Subterrane Schreiben. Die urbane *crónica* bei Pedro Lemebel”, at Humboldt University, Berlin. This presentation has not been published thus far. In my thesis I analyze the importance of the chronicle, concentrating on the writings of Gabriela Mistral and Mário de Andrade. See: JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*. A very important contribution on Lemebel’s chronicles has been published by POBLETE: *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*. In his book, Poblete interprets Lemebel’s chronicles through different neologisms, such as “loca/lización” or “pasión ciudad-anal”, see *ibid.*, 72, 89. Throughout this article, I frequently return to Poblete’s analysis.

<sup>7</sup> In my book, I give a detailed analysis of the research on the chronicle. See Chapter 7.1 in JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*, 91-98. For more information on the origins of the chronicle, see: STRÄTER, *Die brasilianische Chronik (1936-1984)*, 19-24. MAHIEUX, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> On the connection to the European newspaper tradition, see: *ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> On the position of the feuilleton, see: UTZ, “Zu kurz gekommene Kleinigkeiten”, 144. For a recent contribution on the feuilleton, see: MATALA DE MAZZA, *Der populäre Pakt*.

is meant in a very literal way, since (as I have investigated in the course of my PhD thesis on Gabriela Mistral and Mário de Andrade) most chronicles were not separated by a line, but integrated into the sections dealing with recent events.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most intriguing contributions on the chronicle was produced by the Brazilian literary critic Antonio Candido, who playfully and with a lot of humor, characterized this short form in his essay “A vida ao rés-do-chão”. He characterizes the chronicle as a quotidian form of writing that nurtures orality, and defines it as a profoundly Brazilian genre.<sup>11</sup> Throughout this paper I will repeatedly come back to Candido, while being aware of the differences between the Hispanic and Brazilian traditions.<sup>12</sup> As I see it, the chronicle is a Latin American genre of writing that flourished all over the continent. The rise of the chronicle in Latin America is connected to the development of urban metropolises: not only Roberto Arlt in Buenos Aires but also Mário de Andrade in São Paulo, and Carlos Monsiváis in Mexico City, are famous representatives of this form of writing that concentrates on urbanity and portrays the then-emerging cultural life of Latin America’s growing metropolitan areas.<sup>13</sup> Pedro Lemebel follows this tradition and portrays his hometown, Santiago de Chile. In his interviews, Lemebel also reflected on the tradition of the chronicle, which shows that he was aware of the historical dimension of this short form. In a conversation with the magazine *La Época* in 1997, for instance, he differentiated between two categories of the contemporary chronicle, the “crónica urbana” and the “neocrónica”; he identified with the latter concept and associated the former with writers like Monsiváis.<sup>14</sup> The term ‘neocrónica’ illustrates a rupture with colonial

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<sup>10</sup> See: JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*, 185.

<sup>11</sup> See: CANDIDO, “A vida ao rés-do-chão”, 13, 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> For the Hispanic chronicle, the *costumbrismo* has to be regarded as a major influence. For the development of the Hispanic chronicle, see: GONZÁLEZ, *La crónica modernista hispanoamericana*, 64. However, I find research on the chronicle most convincing when it analyzes both traditions, as MAHIEUX does in her book *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*.

<sup>13</sup> I examine one of Mário de Andrade’s *crônicas* in a contribution to an encyclopedia of minor literary forms. See JÖHNK, “crônica”.

<sup>14</sup> See: LEMEBEL/ZERÁN, “La desnudez de la pobreza”, 38. See also: LEMEBEL/RISCO, “El dolor es de los hombres”, 31. I would not agree with Lemebel on this

tradition and further supports the point that Lemebel is both following this tradition of chronicle and, at the same time, reinventing it. Another example of his reflection on the form is provided by his interviews, in which he cites research on the chronicle.<sup>15</sup>

Lemebel not only wrote for several magazines but also published a series of chronicles through the radio station 'Radio Tierra'. From Monday to Friday the population of Santiago de Chile could listen to Lemebel's ten-minute chronicles, which were broadcast twice a day during the program 'Cancionero'.<sup>16</sup> Radio Tierra was founded in 1991 and quickly became an advocate for women's rights and civil rights. Lemebel joined the station in 1996.<sup>17</sup> The writer considered the radio an opponent to television, which he associated with the Chilean dictatorship. According to Lemebel, the TV staff and programs did not change after the shift towards democracy, indicating an ongoing, underlying sympathy for Pinochet's regime.<sup>18</sup> Lemebel had a close

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differentiation of the chronicle. It seems reasonable to mark a difference to the colonial tradition, but the city and urban life have always been such crucial parts of the chronicle's literary tradition that the term 'crónica urbana' is a pleonasm.

<sup>15</sup> Lemebel cites Susanna Rotker's research. See: LEMEBEL/ZERÁN, "La desnudez de la pobreza", 39. Other interviews also indicate that Lemebel was familiar with the Latin American tradition of chronicles and with the work of writers such as Carlos Monsiváis. See LEMEBEL/NEIRA, "Identidades y ausencias", 59.

<sup>16</sup> Lemebel himself describes the context of publication in his foreword to *De perlas y cicatrices*. See: LEMEBEL, "A modo de presentación", 5.

<sup>17</sup> See MATEO DEL PINO, "Un cielo en un infierno cabe", 267. See also POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 83.

<sup>18</sup> See LEMEBEL/JEFTANOVIC, "Un lenguaje completo y complejo pero rico en fisuras", 81. The contrast between the radio and television is also explored throughout the chronicles. While some chronicles, such as "La inundación" and "La loca del carrito", criticize the Chilean television, the chronicle "'Solos en la madrugada' (o 'el pequeño delincuente que soñaba ser feliz')" is a meta-reflection on the potential of the radio. In this chronicle, the protagonist – who seems to be Lemebel himself – meets a listener of his chronicles, who first wants to rob him, but then recognizes his voice. The thief tells the protagonist that he used to listen to the chronicles during his incarceration. See: LEMEBEL, "Solos en la madrugada". See also: MATEO DEL PINO, "Un cielo en un infierno cabe", 274-275. For more insights into Lemebel's relationship with television, see: POBLETE, "Art, Literature, and Mass Media in Pedro Lemebel", 159-161.

relationship with the radio, which he defined as the foundation of his writings, and as even more important than other texts or authors.<sup>19</sup> He chose a new designation for the chronicles he published with Radio Tierra, naming them “crónicas radiales”, thereby stressing the importance of their place of publication. Publishing his chronicles on the radio was congruent with the literary tradition of the form. As already suggested by Antonio Candido, the chronicle is an ephemeral form of writing. In his essay, Candido reflected that the chronicle could be read in a day and discarded the next day: “Ela não foi feita originariamente para o livro, mas para essa publicação efêmera que se compra num dia e no dia seguinte é usada para embrulhar um par de sapatos ou forrar o chão da cozinha.”<sup>20</sup> Shifting from the medium of writing to speech implies that Lemebel stressed this ephemeral character of the chronicle. But it also shows that Lemebel truly cared for the public character of the form. This paper introduced Pedro Lemebel as a performance artist: the chronicle was another side of his performance art and his engagement with the masses and the public.<sup>21</sup> This is also important when analyzing Lemebel’s language. An oral and colloquial character defined the chronicle in its Brazilian tradition.<sup>22</sup> The same can be said for Lemebel’s chronicle, for which the author created a new way of writing, mixing an elevated register with typical Chilean expressions and colloquial language.<sup>23</sup>

Since the emergence of the chronicle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the genre had been connected to Latin American mass culture, given that it was published in the newspaper and usually relied on oral and colloquial language.<sup>24</sup> Lemebel’s *crónicas radiales* – as *neocrónicas* – reinvented this

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<sup>19</sup> See: MATEO DEL PINO, “Un cielo en un infierno cabe”, 267.

<sup>20</sup> CANDIDO, “A vida ao rés-do-chão”, 14. It should be noted that ephemerality is also a very important characteristic of the feuilleton. See UTZ, “Zu kurz gekommene Kleinigkeiten”, 138, 151.

<sup>21</sup> On the relation of the European feuilleton with the public, see: MATALA DE MAZZA, *Der populäre Pakt*. For or a more detailed analysis on Lemebel’s relation to mass media, see: POBLETE, “Art, Literature, and Mass Media in Pedro Lemebel”.

<sup>22</sup> See: CANDIDO, “A vida ao rés-do-chão”, 13.

<sup>23</sup> See: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 18, 44.

<sup>24</sup> This side of the chronicle was stressed by Antonio Candido in his essay. See: CANDIDO, “A vida ao rés-do-chão”, 16.

trait of the artform, since they also reached illiterate parts of the population who could not read, and the inhabitants of Santiago de Chile in precarious working situations who did not have the time to read. Lemebel was very aware of this shift: “Y me escucha la gente pobre, porque se siente identificada con lo que digo. [...] Entonces lo que yo escribo se difunde y llega a la gente por la radio.”<sup>25</sup> This quote also evokes another important aspect: not only did Lemebel want to reach the poorer parts of Santiago’s population, he also aimed to disseminate his writings.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that many decades before Lemebel engaged in this public discourse, Chile’s (and Latin America’s) first Nobel laureate for Literature, Gabriela Mistral, also used the chronicle format to disseminate knowledge on the Latin American continent by publishing her chronicles in several media.<sup>27</sup> This aspect is therefore consistent with the Latin American tradition of chronicles and further fosters the present interpretation that Lemebel tried to engage with the masses. However, in contrast to Mistral, Lemebel relied on alternative and leftist media, such as magazines and newspapers like *The Clinic*, *El Siglo*, or *Punto Final*.<sup>28</sup>

### Imagining Santiago de Chile through Pedro Lemebel’s Chronicles

Two years after broadcasting his chronicles through Radio Tierra, Lemebel published a series of selected texts in his collection *De perlas y cicatrices. Crónicas radiales*. Many of those chronicles portray the cityscape of Santiago de Chile, including places like Paseo Huérfanos, the River Mapocho, and Paseo Ahumada.<sup>29</sup> The publication of his chronicles as books shows that the Chilean author was very aware of the ephemeral

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<sup>25</sup> LEMEBEL/VENABLES/HOPENHAYN, “La performance es un momento de realidad”, 45. Mateo del Pino adequately interprets the publication of Lemebel’s chronicles through the radio as “la democratización de sus textos”. See: MATEO DEL PINO, “Un cielo en un infierno cabe”, 272.

<sup>26</sup> See: LEMEBEL/GAJARDO, “La cultura mariposa”, 29. See also: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> See: JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*, 33. See also WEINBERG, “Gabriela Mistral”, 23.

<sup>28</sup> See: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> See: for instance LEMEBEL, “El Bim Bam Bum”, “El río Mapocho”, “El Paseo Ahumada”.



character of his writing and tried to conserve his short journalistic texts. This drive towards more long-lived forms of publication for the ephemeral chronicle, whose real home is the newspaper, is not unique: the Brazilian writer Mário de Andrade, for instance, prepared in 1942 a publication of the chronicles that he considered relevant and worth conserving.<sup>30</sup>

Lemebel alludes to urban writing traditions, but at the same time deconstructs them. An example of his reinvention of urban writing is the figure of the 'loca', the protagonist of many of his chronicles.<sup>31</sup> The character of the 'loca' – originally the word was used as an insult for queer people – challenges the European tradition of the male flaneur. Lemebel deliberately chooses this gender-ambivalent figure to show the city from a queer perspective.<sup>32</sup>

The title of the collection, *De perlas y cicatrices*, possesses a self-referential dimension.<sup>33</sup> The "cicatriz" [scar] alludes both to the bodily aspect of Lemebel's writing and to the Pinochet military dictatorship, the consequences of which are still present in the cityscape of today's Santiago de Chile, and more generally, in the nation's current politics. This aspect is also stressed through the cover of the collection, which bears an untitled photograph of a person's neck covered by a necklace made of razorblades. 'Pearls' ["perlas"] are commonly associated with tears (according to superstition, but also in literature), and thus also

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<sup>30</sup> See: ANDRADE, "Advertência", 27.

<sup>31</sup> For Lemebel's reflection on the importance of the 'loca' see: LEMEBEL/ROBLES, "Triángulo abierto", 22.

<sup>32</sup> This queer perspective is very important for Lemebel's production of chronicles. See, for instance, the following chronicle published in another collection: LEMEBEL, "Anacondas en el parque." Lemebel reflected on the queerness of his chronicles in his interviews. See, for instance: LEMEBEL/GAJARDO, "La cultura mariposa", 29. The queer gaze of Lemebel's chronicles (also in connection to the figure of the flaneur) has often been stressed in research. See, for example: POBLETE, "Art, literature, and mass media in Pedro Lemebel", 162, and INGENSCHAY, "Santiago", 124-127.

<sup>33</sup> For another interpretation of the title and cover, see: Mateo del Pino, "Descorriéndole un telón al corazón".

stress the importance of Chile's painful past.<sup>34</sup> They represent smallness and can therefore be considered a metaphor for the short chronicle, which conserves the pain and scars of historical experiences. As the pearl comes from the shell, the chronicle emerges from the city. The cited cover plays with the metaphor of a pearl necklace, but the foreword too evokes the "goteo oral" and "collar de temas"<sup>35</sup>, indicating that the present collection is aware of its function as an anthology reassembling the pearls of Lemebel's writing.

In his foreword, Lemebel comments on the historical value of his chronicles:

Así, el espejo oral que difundió las crónicas aquí escritas, fue un adelanto panfleteado de las mismas. [...] Ahora, la recolección editora enjaula la invisible escritura de ese aire, de ese aliento [...] Retratos, atmósferas, paisajes, perlas y cicatrices que eslabonan la reciente memoria, aún recuperable, todavía entumida en la concha caricia de su tibia garra testimonial.<sup>36</sup>

This self-referential comment further supports the argument that Lemebel's chronicles serve as a device to conserve memory while shifting between loss and conservation, between ephemerality and archive. Throughout his writing, Lemebel was interested in the victims of the Chilean dictatorship, especially those who were women and those who originated from the Chilean working class (or suffered other types of discrimination).<sup>37</sup> Lemebel also reflected on the ambivalence of conservation and loss that results from the choice of media: on the one hand the radio, on the other hand writing. Last but not least, the foreword hints at one aesthetic characteristic of the chronicle, which can be noticed

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<sup>34</sup> On the metaphorical dimension of tears, see: STRÄSSLE, "Träne", 449. For another interpretation of Lemebel's pearls, see: OSBORNE, "Resisting Reconciliation", 222-223.

<sup>35</sup> LEMEBEL, "A modo de presentación", 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> On Lemebel's concern with the victims from the working class, see: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 120.

immediately when listening to the collection of Radio Tierra: atmosphere and *stimmung* are important aesthetic devices.

Many chronicles of *De perlas y cicatrices* interact with the cityscape of Santiago de Chile. The places depicted by Lemebel expand to the whole urban area of the Chilean metropole. Lemebel dedicated chronicles to important and iconic places in the capital, but his chronicles also cover a plurality of actors in Santiago's urban life – homeless trans women, street dogs, urban weeds that grow in poor neighborhoods, or as he called them, “flores plebeyas”.<sup>38</sup> Humans, animals, and other forms of life such as the “flores plebeyas” become part of Lemebel's cityscape, and therefore also part of the capitalist class society that defines Santiago de Chile, according to the chronicles. Lemebel reflects on the system of classes that even shapes the urban experiences of plants and animals and, in the following citation, relates to the impoverished lives of street dogs: “Son las mascotas de sangre azul, que miran sobre el hombro al perraje suelto que vaga por las calles, los otros, los quiltros sin ley que hacen suya la ciudad en el patiperreo de la sobrevivencia. [...] Porque la pobreza y los perros son inseparables; entre más pobres hay más perros.”<sup>39</sup> But Lemebel does not only portray these different lives; he also works towards an ephemeral archive for these existences, which would not otherwise be remembered by history.

### Subterranean Writing

In the 1990s, Lemebel wrote the chronicle “El Metro de Santiago (o ‘esa azul radiante rapidez’)”, which was later included in *De perlas y cicatrices*. Most of Lemebel's chronicles possess an idiosyncratic feature: apart from the main title, Lemebel usually includes another subtitle in brackets, which expresses ambiguity and represents the contrasts that shape Santiago de Chile. This chronicle is not the only text Lemebel dedicated to the capital's metro, to which he alluded recurrently, and which deeply

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the cityscape, see the following chronicles collected in *De perlas y cicatrices*: “El Bim Bam Bum”, “El río Mapocho”, “La República Libre de Ñuñoa”. For the actors, see: “La loca del carrito”, “Memorias del quiltraje urbano”, “Flores Plebeyas”.

<sup>39</sup> LEMEBEL, “Memorias del quiltraje urbano”, 163.

shaped the urban experience of his chronicles.<sup>40</sup> The narrator of the present chronicle mentions two metro stations in Chile's capital: Neptuno and Escuela Militar, which lie at the very east and very west ends of Santiago de Chile. His reference to those two stations is a hint that Lemebel is describing line 1 of the metro system, which starts in the rich neighborhoods (with the Roman god Neptune) and goes to the poor parts of the Chilean capital (where a military institution is located). Line 1 therefore reveals the ambivalence of the urban experience and the economic tensions that interested Lemebel throughout his writing.<sup>41</sup> The content can be briefly summarized: after describing an unknown station and the surveillance mechanisms of the subway system, which serve to control the population, the chronicle ends with an allusion to the use of the transportation system for suicides.

The first sentence of the chronicle gives many insights into Lemebel's aesthetic and political stance: "Con esa música de clínica privada y esos azulejos de carnicería que empapelan los túneles, el Metro santiaguino es la evidencia disciplinada que nos dejó la dictadura." (MdS, 187) Lemebel is referring directly to the history of the subway of Santiago, which was inaugurated in 1975 by Augusto Pinochet. This way, the underground system represents the myth of national progress and unity – the adjective "nacional" is frequently employed in the chronicle – that Lemebel distrusts, just as he is suspicious of the democratic transition.<sup>42</sup> The descriptor "carnicería", which means 'butcher's shop' but is frequently used as a figurative expression for 'massacre', underlines the connection to the military dictatorship. Lemebel also refers directly to the subway as symbol for the myth of national progress when citing the suicides that disturb the clinical and pure image of the public transport system: "Tal vez lo único que altera su delicada travesía son los cuerpos suicidas que manchan con sus tripas el pulcro escenario del subterráneo nacional."

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<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, LEMEBEL, "El unicornio del metro."

<sup>41</sup> Lemebel states this dimension directly, when he writes: "Así, viajando por la línea uno se recorre el mapa social de la urbe que va desde la estación Escuela Militar [...] hasta la Estación Neptuno [...]." LEMEBEL, "El Metro de Santiago", 187. Henceforth referred to as 'MdS', followed by page number.

<sup>42</sup> See Lemebel's critique of Chile's democracy in LEMEBEL/VENABLES/HOPENHAYN, "La performance es un momento de realidad", 47. See also LEMEBEL/JEFTANOVIC, "Un lenguaje completo y complejo pero rico en fisuras", 81.

(MdS, 188) Departing from a close reading of a subway ride, the aesthetical and political project of Lemebel's chronicles will also be further elaborated upon:

Tal vez el pasajero que día a día va y viene en la cinta de metal bajo la tierra, no sabe que al comprar el boleto una cámara lo sapea haciendo la fila, cruzando la máquina. Una cámara lo sigue bajando la escalera, lo mira sentado esperando el carro en esas estaciones donde no hay nada que mirar, excepto esos murales abstractos y geométricos que los cuidan como Capilla Sixtina, o la propaganda de las teleseries [...] El Metro de Santiago no se parece a otros trenes urbanos de latinoamérica [sic!]. Su travesía de intestino subterráneo es mucho más impersonal, mucho más fría la relación que nunca se establece entre los pasajeros sentados uno frente a otro evitando mirar al de enfrente, tratando de hacerse el orgulloso con la vista fija en la ventana tapiada por la oscuridad del túnel. Como si la paranoia ambiental evitara el cruce de miradas, bajara la vista al periódico, al libro latero que se finge leer solamente para no contaminarse con otros ojos, igual de esquivos, igual de temerosos por la camisa de fuerza donde todo gesto está controlado por la mirada sospechosa de los guardias, por el ojo invisible que mantiene el orden en esa voz de aluminio repitiendo por los parlantes 'Se ruega no sentarse en el piso'. (MdS, 187-188)

The subway guides the *crónista* underneath Santiago de Chile and therefore does not permit him to see the city. The dramatization of seeing is depicted through the constant allusion to the way the passengers see and are seen: the note of the lack of interesting objects to contemplate while waiting, the reference to the avoidance of eye contact and the suspicious gazes of the subway employees. The passengers in "El Metro de Santiago" have no idea that they are being observed by the camera – in the same way that the prisoners surveilled in the panopticon are not aware of when they are being monitored.<sup>43</sup> The portrayal of surveillance thus seems to be inspired by Michel Foucault's famous study *Surveiller et punir*, a text with which Lemebel, as a passionate reader of the French

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<sup>43</sup> On the panopticon, see: FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et punir*, 235.

philosopher, was most certainly familiar.<sup>44</sup> The underground transportation system is also compared to a psychiatric institution, as the references to paranoia, fear of contamination, straightjackets, guards, and illness suggest, and this could be another hidden connection to Michel Foucault's famous study on the history of madness (*Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*), or his lesser known essay on infamous lives (*La Vie des hommes infâmes*). However, it becomes evident that the subway ride in Santiago de Chile is not a pleasant urban experience, but a drive through the mechanism of governmental power and surveillance, which is inexorably connected to Chile's dictatorial past.

Although the subway is connected to this past, its newness ("se ve como nuevo") stands for the oblivion of history. This 'discourse of newness' arouses the narrator's suspicion, as he profoundly distrusts the cleanliness of Santiago de Chile's public transportation and past.<sup>45</sup> The cleanliness is symbolic not only for the forgetting of the dictatorial past – maybe Lemebel is also citing Ernest Renan, who associated nation-building with the process of forgetting – but also for the inanimateness of the vehicle.<sup>46</sup> The lexical field of lifelessness is very present in the quote, which portrays the gazes of the machines, refers to the coldness of the subterranean atmosphere, and alludes to a metallic voice. This evocation of the non-human contrasts with the only vital moment of the transportation system. According to the narrator, this is the referendum of 1988, which by no accident stands for democracy: "Esa fue la única vez que el Metro cobró vida [...]." (MdS, 188)

The quoted paragraph represents a shift towards former ways of reflecting on urban experiences and the genre of the chronicle in Latin America. For instance, in his short journalistic texts in the 1930s series "Taxi", Mário de Andrade imagined the chronicle as a vehicle.<sup>47</sup> In those

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Lemebel's comments on Foucault in an interview: LEMEBEL/JEFTANOVIC, "Un lenguaje completo y complejo pero rico en fisuras", 77.

<sup>45</sup> See, in this context, Elizabeth Osborne's interpretation of the section "Sufro al pensar": OSBORNE: "Resisting Reconciliation", 220-221.

<sup>46</sup> Renan writes: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger." RENAN, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, 7, 8.

<sup>47</sup> ANDRADE, *Taxi e Crônicas no Diário Nacional*.

days, taxis were a new form of movement through the city, representing both the liberty to take different routes and the privacy offered by the vehicle.<sup>48</sup> The taxi also epitomized the work of the *crónista*, who was paid in a similar manner as the taxi driver; as with a route measured by the taximeter, the newspaper paid authors by counting their words.<sup>49</sup> Subway and taxi represent velocity, which has always been important for such a quickly consumed form as the chronicle. But unlike (most) taxis, the subway represents an inherently dangerous public space, and both means of transportation also differentiate in relation to class. Furthermore, Lemebel's *crónista* is not alone in the taxi like the protagonists in Mário de Andrade's chronicles, but moves through Santiago de Chile in a mass of people, which is another very current motif of urban writing tradition that was prominently shaped by authors like Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>50</sup>

In the cited paragraph the underground system is represented through metaphors of depth, such as the 'subterranean metallic belt' ["cinta de metal bajo la tierra"] or the 'subterranean intestine' ["intestino subterráneo"]. This analogy is a parallel to the discourse on the chronicle, in which metaphors of depth are omnipresent. The semantic field also corresponds to the European tradition of the feuilleton, which was, as stated above, often described as 'littérature bas de page'. Antonio Candido was so interested in this metaphorical dimension that he used it for the title of one of his essays, and declared that the author of the chronicle wrote not from 'the top of the mountains', but from the 'simple ground floor':<sup>51</sup> "Por se abrigar neste veículo transitório, o seu intuito não é o dos escritores que pensam em 'ficar', isto é, permanecer na lembrança e na admiração da posteridade; e a sua perspectiva não é a dos que escrevem do alto da montanha, mas do simples rés-do-chão."<sup>52</sup> The journey of the metro along the ever-same tracks embodies the everyday

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<sup>48</sup> See: MAHIEUX, *Urban Chroniclers in Urban Latin America*, 71-72. For an additional reflection on the parallels between taxi and chronicle, see: *ibid.*, 65-66, 70-72. See also Mário de Andrade's series "Taxi" LOPEZ, "Mário de Andrade no Diário Nacional". See also JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*, 176-177.

<sup>49</sup> MAHIEUX, *Urban Chroniclers in Urban Latin America*, 65, 70.

<sup>50</sup> See: POE, "The Man of the Crowd".

<sup>51</sup> See: MAHIEUX, *Urban Chroniclers in Urban Latin America*, 72-73.

<sup>52</sup> CANDIDO, "A vida ao rés-do-chão", 14.

grind of the poorer population of Santiago de Chile, as the narrator directly outlines: “El destino final de los trabajadores, que bajan del Metro bostezando, para hundirse en el olvido de su rutina laboral.” (MdS, 187) In comparison to the taxi, the trajectories and times of the subway are set. In this way, the underground system represents the work of the *crónista*, which is also shaped by routine and a steady daily practice, an aspect that is stressed through the abundance of circular images, such as the bowel or belt. Both vehicles unite the metropole: the subway allows the passengers to travel from one place in the city to the other just as the chronicles, published as radio broadcasts, constitute an imaginary community of listeners.<sup>53</sup>

The comparison between the subway and intestines depicts the darkness and lack of visibility accompanying Lemebel’s conception of the past. It is consistent with the frequent imagination of Santiago de Chile as a body, in which the main street Paseo Huérfanos is imagined as the “arteria comercial”<sup>54</sup>. The allusion to the innards of the people committing suicide (“los cuerpos suicidas que manchan con sus tripas”) underlines that the subway not only represents oblivion, but also stands – in its function as an intestinal tract – for the forgotten or, more accurately, suppressed past. The metaphor indicates that the narrator is contemplating Santiago de Chile from underneath the earth, but the adjective ‘subterranean’ also applies to Lemebel’s aesthetic project as it is developed in the chronicles: it portrays Santiago de Chile from underneath and concentrates on the – figuratively speaking – invisible parts of the city. Lemebel used the metaphor of ‘ventriloquism’ in various interviews to describe his own aesthetic project, which aimed to portray the invisible parts of societies, the minorities, without pretending to speak for them: “Pero yo no hablo por ellos. Las minorías tienen que hablar por sí mismas. Yo sólo ejecuto en la escritura una suerte de ventriloquía amorosa, que niega el yo, produciendo un vacío deslenguado

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<sup>53</sup> The term ‘imagined community’ has been prominently developed by Benedict Anderson. See: ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*. As often noted, Anderson refers to the newspaper as a unifying medium, especially in Latin America. See *ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>54</sup> LEMEBEL, “El Bim Bam Bum”, 73. Elizabeth Osborne writes that Lemebel “makes the city of Santiago vulnerable by giving it a body and humanizing it.” OSBORNE: “Resisting Reconciliation”, 220.



de mil hablas.”<sup>55</sup> The metaphor of ‘ventriloquism’ (derived from the Latin word for belly, ‘venter’) connects with the lexical field of ‘intestine’ and depicts the ambivalence Lemebel felt when writing about those minorities: he wanted to give them a place in his literature but is also aware of the risks of pretending to speak for them.<sup>56</sup>

The adjective ‘subterranean’ relates not only to the non-visibility of Lemebel’s literary work: the author also explicitly uses this concept in his interviews to verbalize the subversive nature of his chronicles, stating that he was interested in the “subterranean” parts of Santiago de Chile: “Porque la ciudad tiene un subterráneo por donde respira la libido, como son los cines, los bares, los bajopuentes, los mercados persa. En ese subterráneo la ciudad se rearticula permanentemente, burla sobre todo el fichaje.”<sup>57</sup> The ‘subterranean’ also designates places of counterculture, such as marketplaces, cinemas, or bars. Lemebel portrayed these places throughout his chronicles, which he also designed as “subliteratura”.<sup>58</sup> In his interviews he frequently played with the prefix “sub”, and claimed that he was interested in the chronicle as a “subgénero”.<sup>59</sup> This is especially true when keeping in mind that, as Juan Poblete wrote, Lemebel is a performance artist and writer of chronicles in a country dominated by novelists and poets.<sup>60</sup> Lemebel’s own literary biography proves this subversive character of the chronicle: while his only novel *Tengo miedo torero* was translated into many languages, his chronicles remain, especially from an international point of view, invisible.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> LEMEBEL/SCHAFFER, “Chile, en su modorra exitista”, 44. This is only one example of Lemebel’s use of the ventriloquism metaphor, which also appeared in other interviews. See, for example: LEMEBEL/VENABLES/HOPENHAYN, “La performance es un momento de realidad”, 46. See also: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 191.

<sup>56</sup> This predicament is often verbalized in postcolonial theory: how can literature give minorities a space without speaking for them? SPIVAK’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” also deals with this question, and remains ambiguous.

<sup>57</sup> LEMEBEL/RISCO, “El dolor es de los hombres”, 33.

<sup>58</sup> LEMEBEL/GAJARDO, “La cultura mariposa”, 29.

<sup>59</sup> LEMEBEL/ZERÁN, “La desnudez de la pobreza”, 36.

<sup>60</sup> See: POBLETE, *La escritura de Pedro Lemebel como proyecto cultural y político*, 15-16.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.*, 189-190.

## Ephemeral Archives

Lemebel describes the subway of Santiago de Chile as a historical place, which suggests that his chronicles serve as *lieu de mémoire*. This is consistent with theoretical reflections on the Parisian underground railway system. In his anthropological essay *Le Métro revisité*, Marc Augé, for instance, excluded the vehicle from his concept of *non-lieu*. Augé stated that the Paris subway is not a *non-lieu*, because of all the memories related to it: “Il n’est pas un non-lieu, pour moi en tout cas, ni pour ceux qui y font régulièrement le même trajet. Ils y ont des souvenirs, des habitudes, y reconnaissent quelques visages [...]”<sup>62</sup> In Lemebel’s chronicle, the subway is a legacy of Chile’s dictatorship, but is also deeply connected to the history of democratization and transition. In this way, the narrator of “El Metro de Santiago” recounts how the vehicle was occupied in the course of the 1988 referendum, during which the Chileans had to decide whether or not they wished to extend dictator Pinochet’s rule: “La única vez que el Metro fue desbordado por la pasión ciudadana, ocurrió durante una concentración por el NO en el Parque O’Higgins. Entonces los carros se repletaron de cantos y gritos y banderas por el retorno a la democracia.” (Mds, 188) The subway endures both dictatorship and democracy. It incorporates – contrary to the mobility of the chronicle – the stability and static nature of the political system, which Lemebel criticized in his works. In opposition to the literary tradition of the chronicle, Lemebel engages with memory and history in his writing. Engagement with the present has often been stressed in the discourse on the chronicle, for instance by the Brazilian author Paulo Rónai: “O ponto de partida da crônica é sempre um aspecto da atualidade.”<sup>63</sup> One can, however, argue in favor of a ‘memory turn’ of the chronicle in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which can also be observed in the chronicles

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. AUGÉ, *Le Métro revisité*, 33. See also *ibid.*, 34. For another reading of the chronicle’s engagement with the concept of non-place, see: OSBORNE, “Resisting Reconciliation”, 221.

<sup>63</sup> RÓNAI, “Um gênero brasileiro”, 222.

of writers like Clarice Lispector, and which is connected to the rise of military dictatorships all over Latin America.<sup>64</sup>

‘Ephemeral archive’ is a paradoxical expression designating that, while Lemebel’s chronicles conserve memory, they are ephemeral in light of their publication on the radio.<sup>65</sup> The memories of the reconstruction and transformation of Santiago de Chile mingle with the memories of the victims of the Chilean dictatorship. This connection can be observed in the chronicle “El Bim Bam Bum (o ‘cascadas de marabú en la calle Huérfanos’)", which is dedicated to the former revue theater in the middle of Santiago de Chile – famous for the performance of the French trans woman Coccinelle – that had to close during the Chilean dictatorship:

Llegados los setenta, el golpe militar seguido del toque de queda, desanimó las noches putifarras en la catedral del vedetismo. Las funciones de las diez se adelantaron a las siete, y era raro asistir al espectáculo tan temprano. Además la censura política del régimen afectó el doble filo del humor, y poco a poco fue desapareciendo la costumbre popular del teatro revisteril.<sup>66</sup>

The chronicle is an example of the interdependence between the transformation of the capital and its connectedness to the military dictatorship. Only the memory of the *Bim Bam Bum* remains, as Lemebel enunciates through nostalgic images:

El Bim Bam Bum fue el último en cerrar su cortinaje de brillos, cuando una empresa inmobiliaria compró la propiedad que ocupaba el teatro Opera en la calle Huérfanos para convertirla

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<sup>64</sup> See: JÖHNK, *Poetik des Kolibris*, 276. For a further understanding of the importance of memory in Lispector’s *crónicas*, see: LISPECTOR, “Falando de viagens”, 352-353.

<sup>65</sup> In his analysis of Lemebel’s relation to mass media, Juan Poblete states that the chronicles in *De perlas y cicatrices* show the “dialectics of memory against oblivion”. Poblete interprets Lemebel’s chronicles as a “counter-discourse of memory”, acting against the neoliberal turn to the “always now”. See: POBLETE, “Art, Literature, and Mass Media in Pedro Lemebel”, 159.

<sup>66</sup> LEMEBEL, “El Bim Bam Bum”, 75.

en galería comercial. Sólo dejaron para el recuerdo, la pretenciosa fachada de columnas y el arco de ingreso, como una cáscara hueca que adorna nostálgica el plástico vidriero del Santiago actual. Sólo eso quedó de aquella fiesta, y por cierto alguna vieja vedette que, en su casa, acaricia las plumas lloronas de ese extinguido resplandor.<sup>67</sup>

The narrator tracks the last traces of the former revue theater and reads them for his chronicle, which serves as a substitute for the lack of memory in the public space and therefore constitutes an ephemeral archive. Apart from remembering the former Santiago de Chile – and in this case a place that is crucial for queer belonging and memory – Lemebel is concerned with conserving the memory of the poorer population, and the intersectional dimension of this project is obvious. The chronicle on the subway of Santiago de Chile is not the only example of this characteristic: “La ciudad con terno nuevo (o ‘un extraño en el paraíso’)” is another.

This chronicle is a reflection on the class-based character of memory: only the richer neighborhoods are preserved, while the poorer parts of Santiago de Chile are not taken into consideration by architects and urban planners. Lemebel’s queer flaneuse laments the loss of memory about those who belong to the poorer parts of the population: “Como si de un paraguazo nos hubieran borrado el recuerdo, andamos por ahí, deambulando en un paisaje extraño, tratando de recuperar la ciudad perdida donde crecimos.”<sup>68</sup> The flaneuse later goes on to list the places more precisely: neighborhoods in “Franklin, Matta, Independencia, Gran Avenida, Estación Central, Mapocho o Vivaceta.”<sup>69</sup> The narrator explicitly laments modern architecture’s lack of consideration for the poor: “Por eso la arquitectura moderna arrasa sin piedad con la memoria de los pobres.”<sup>70</sup> Urban transformations lead to oblivion and the loss of memory, a motif already detected, and create an eternally young and allegedly prosperous city:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> LEMEBEL, “La ciudad con terno nuevo”, 182.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Tal vez, este travestimo urbanero que desecha la ciudad ajada como desperdicio, pretende pavimentar la memoria con plástico y acrílico para sumirnos en una ciudad sin pasado, eternamente joven y siempre al instante. Una ciudad donde sus peatones se sienten caminando en Marte, perdidos en el laberinto de espejos y metales que levanta triunfal el encatrado económico. Aunque a veces, en la orfandad de esos paseos por Santiago actual, nos cruza fugaz un olor, un aire cercano, un confitado dulzor. Y nos quedamos allí, quietos, sin respirar, como drogados tratando de no dejar escapar ese momento, reteniendo a la fuerza la sensación de un espacio conocido. [...] Donde, otra vez, nos quedamos esperando a ese compañero que nunca llegó a la cita, o al contacto para sacarlo del país, esos años de gasa negra. Nos quedamos por un momento en silencio, atrapados en la fragilidad cristalizada del instante. Como sumergidos bajo una campana de vidrio, raptados por otra ciudad. Una ciudad lejana, perdida para siempre, cuando al pasar ese minuto, el estruendo del tráfico la desbarata, como un castillo de naipes al cambiar el semáforo.<sup>71</sup>

The citation divulges suspicion towards the discourse of youth: a young city does not have as much history and memory as an older one, which is a repeated critique aimed at the oblivion of Santiago de Chile's past and the memories of its workers and dissidents. The reference to Mars underlines this dimension and forges the image of a new city: like a newly reached planet, it does not possess human history. The coldness and mechanical image of the subway persist in the lexical field of the present citation, and are only contrasted by the ephemeral and very organic smells that represent the last traces of the collective's memory. The entanglement of conservation and loss, persistence and ephemerality, are represented in the image of "la fragilidad cristalizada del instante", which connects to the title of the present collection and the idea of the fugitive chronicles as pearls.

The present lamentations can be interpreted as invocations of "reflexive nostalgia", a form of nostalgia that is, according to Svetlana Boym, aware that the past cannot be reconstructed and "thrives in *algia*,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 183.

the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately.”<sup>72</sup> The only things that remain of the former Santiago de Chile are the smells, which indicate again the ephemeral experience Lemebel is portraying.<sup>73</sup> The lamentation for the lost Santiago de Chile goes hand in hand with the memories about the consequences of the Chilean dictatorship, as can be observed in the allusion to the *desaparecidos*. Another concept briefly mentioned is Pierre Nora’s *lieu de mémoire*, which, according to the French historian, emerges precisely due to lack of memory: “Il y a des lieux de mémoire parce qu’il n’y a plus de milieux de mémoire.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Lemebel’s chronicles serve as such a *lieu de mémoire*, bearing in mind that this concept departs from a topographical dimension but is not limited to it.<sup>75</sup>

## Re-Inventing the Latin American Chronicle

The Latin American chronicle might have peaked in the 1950s or 1960s, but *crónistas* like Pedro Lemebel managed to reinvent the form through different forms of media.<sup>76</sup> In *De perlas y cicatrices*, Lemebel published photographs in a chapter he called “Relicario”, which, through its title, adds a material dimension to his chronicles, and describes the function of remembering. Further, it reflected on the deaths and murders that occurred during the dictatorship. The intermedial dimension of this chapter is also stressed through the citation of one of Raúl Shaw Moreno’s songs (“Sus ojos de vidrio / no saben del llanto”), which remembers the lamentation and losses provoked by the dictatorship. Many photographs, too, correspond to the chronicles themselves and mostly refer to Chile’s dictatorial past.

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<sup>72</sup> BOYM, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XVIII. Boym distinguishes this form of nostalgia from “restorative nostalgia”, which “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” and disguises itself as “truth” and “tradition”, while being at the “core of recent national and religious revivals”. Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> The smell, a sense that cannot be captured, also appears in other chronicles. See, for instance: LEMEBEL, “El Paseo Ahumada”, 138.

<sup>74</sup> NORA, *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, xvii.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, xxxiv.

<sup>76</sup> The Brazilian literary critic Telê Porto Ancona Lopez claims that the Brazilian chronicle peaked in the 1950s. See: LOPEZ, “O cronista Mário de Andrade”, 44.

For Radio Tierra, Lemebel relied on his voice and music as his most important aesthetic devices. The chronicles published in the broadcast ‘Cancionero’ were all introduced by Paquita la del Barrio’s singing of the first stanza of *Invítame a pecar*. Paquita la del Barrio represents a musical tradition that envisions women “en el papel activo del sujeto amoroso”<sup>77</sup>. This song already functioned as a code that integrated the chronicles in the feminist tradition of Radio Tierra and created a female and queer public space. Lemebel reads every chronicle himself, impersonating each of the different figures the audience encounters in his writing.

For every chronicle, Lemebel chose different music to play in the foreground and backgrounds, which defined the *stimmung* of each chronicle.<sup>78</sup> The importance of atmosphere becomes especially palpable in chronicles like *El milagro blanco*, in which Lemebel created a montage of different musical styles, producing an ironic effect through juxtaposition.<sup>79</sup> In the cited chronicle, Lemebel integrated sounds from thunderstorms, the children’s song *Hoy es Navidad*, and Víctor Jara’s famous song “Luchin”. “El milagro blanco: En Santiago está nevando” shows the contrasts provoked by the snow in Santiago de Chile, which is an aesthetic spectacle for the rich and associated with loss, deprivation, and illness for the poor. Lemebel engaged in a critique of economic progress, underlined by citations from the Víctor Jara song, that narrates the story of a poor boy named Luchin. The boy’s name metonymically stands for the social deprivations of the disadvantaged population and at the same time embodies resistance, given that it includes the Spanish verb for “fight”, ‘luchar’. The music underlines the performative effect of Lemebel’s chronicles and relates to the military dictatorship through the character of Víctor Jara, who was, as is commonly known, one of the people tortured and murdered in the Estadio Nacional de Chile. With his performances for Radio Tierra, as this last example also illustrates, Lemebel created an ephemeral archive that portrays Santiago de Chile during its ongoing transition to democracy.

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<sup>77</sup> MATEO DEL PINO, “Un cielo en un infierno cabe”, 272.

<sup>78</sup> On the concept of *stimmung* see GUMBRECHT, *Stimmungen lesen*.

<sup>79</sup> Radio Tierra has published some chronicles on their YouTube channel. See: LEMEBEL, “El milagro blanco”.

Departing from selected chronicles of the collection *De perlas y cicatrices*, the present contribution has shown how the concepts of ‘ephemeral archive’ and ‘subterranean writing’ are helpful in understanding the aesthetic and political agenda of Lemebel. Playing with the subterranean portrait of Santiago de Chile’s subway, this article has developed the ambivalence of Lemebel’s chronicles: they portray Chile’s capital from the point of view of the marginalized population, but are at the same time aware of the dangers of speaking for them, a dynamic that Lemebel recurrently referred to through the intestinal metaphor of ventriloquism, which also characterizes his portrayal of the subway. The chronicle has been imagined and theorized in comparison to urban vehicles, such as the taxi in the case of the Brazilian author Mário de Andrade. A comparison to Lemebel’s chronicle on the subway sheds light on his relation to the genre. The Chilean writer inscribes himself in the tradition of the Latin American chronicle, but further develops the genre through his use of different media, and through his emphasis on (forgotten) histories, interpreted here as an indication of a ‘memory turn’ in the genre. The chronicles therefore serve as *lieu de mémoire*, which remember forgotten and marginalized lives and places connected to these existences. Lemebel recurrently criticizes the oblivion imposed on these lives, which is often linked to Chilean nation-building and the forgetting of the military dictatorship. Pedro Lemebel crafted for them a literary tribute in his chronicles and supported their persistence in this ephemeral archive of Santiago de Chile.

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