

Chapter 2

Missing Gender: The Posthuman Feminine in Alicia Borinsky, Carmen Boullosa, and Eugenia Prado

Both Puig and Piglia use cyborg women as the sites upon which their dictatorial and postdictatorial narratives are enacted, the altered female bodies functioning simultaneously as a storyteller and text. When we turn to those relatively few Latin American women writers who have explored posthuman identity, we find a disparate collection of narratives that strengthen, challenge, and reinvent theories of posthuman subjectivity and cyborg representation. While North American and European theorists have adopted the cyborg figure as a powerful element of feminist thinking, Latin American narratives with explicitly feminist perspectives have problematized the posthuman subject on several levels. Indeed, three novels in particular examine the cyborg figure from a variety of perspectives, some upholding the tenets of North American and European posthuman theory as in the case of Alicia Borinsky's *Cine continuado* (1998), some providing very different views of cyborg identity as in the case of Carmen Boullosa's *Cielos de la tierra* (1997) or Eugenia Prado's *Lóbulo* (1998). In all cases we see a clear exploration of gender identity and posthuman being that is absent from much of the work we have studied or will study in male-authored narratives.

Alicia Borinsky's *Cine continuado* (1998) is the most recent of a series of novels that she refers to as "novelas de espectáculo" (qtd. in Nieblyski 2001: 54–55). Dianna Nieblyski has argued

persuasively that Borinsky's presentation of "moveable and unstable female subjects" in these novels (especially in *Mina cruel* [1989, *Cruel Girl*] and *Cine continuado*) allows Borinsky to emphasize the subversive possibilities of this continually morphing, continually moving (or nomadic) feminine figure (2001: 55).¹ In *Cine continuado*, we see Borinsky's leveraging of the inherent instability and hybridity of the female cyborg figure in her ongoing exploration of feminine identity. The novel displays the fragmented tale of several women, including Felipa, a prostitute whose preferred workspace is a telephone booth, and Noemí, a stripper who was kidnapped by a lesbian couple unhappy with her act and with her prostitution. Felipa is presented as a protean figure that adapts her body (and her name) dynamically to the various men that appear in her life. In the case of Noemí, her kidnappers glue a uniform on her skin with an impossibly strong adhesive as a way to force her to change professions. She later escapes and finds help from any number of men willing to help her off with her sticky clothes only to find that the adhesive has caused her skin to change from flesh to metal, leading the national media to name her "La llagada" [The wounded girl]. Borinsky accompanies this tale of technological magical realism with a series of technical and structural gestures that emphasize the slippery identities and mutative subjectivities that emphasize the formation of a new feminine presence.

From the beginning, Borinsky associates the rebellious female figure with important cyborg tropes. Felipa gains her experience as a prostitute in a telephone booth in a series of scenes that suggest an intimate knowledge with the logic of prosthetics. The narrator remarks:

Para Felipa, el corazón trinando de sabiduría, la cabina era la cámara nupcial. Con cada Felipe que traía su cuerpo se adaptaba más a las esquinas, los accidentes de terreno, las distancias entre el tubo telefónico y su espalda. Después de varios meses de práctica con el camarero aprendió un oficio pero dejó una pasión. (14)

For Felipa, her heart beating with wisdom, the booth was a nuptial chamber. With each Felipe she lured in, her body got

better attuned to the corners, the uneven surfaces, and the distance between the receiver and her back. After several months of practice with the waiter she gained a skill but lost a passion. (10)

Not only does Felipa learn a trade as she conducts her affairs in the phone booth, her body learns a new state of being. As the “cabina” shifts from phone booth to marriage bed, we see that this space dominated by communication technology begins to affect changes in Felipa’s body. In addition to the more figurative heart that begins to fill with the erotic knowledge that her new trade imparts, Borinsky adds that Felipa’s body communicates with the phone booth, molding itself to the contours of the space and learning the proximity of the telephone receiver. Indeed, the paragraph focuses exclusively on the communication between Felipa’s body and the telephone, eschewing completely the apparent erotic communication between Felipa and her various Felipes—an erasure that suggests the conversion of the “tubo telefónico” into a sexual prosthetic device that replaces an organic, masculine presence. The lack of a specifying comma in the phrase “Con cada Felipe que atraía su cuerpo se adaptaba más a las esquinas” strengthens this sense of shifting and slippery signifiers. The noun “cuerpo” floats between two possible verbs, possibly attracting, possibly adapting. The more logical reading suggests that Felipa is the subject of “atraía” and “su cuerpo” is the subject of “se adaptaba,” but the lack of the comma makes it possible to exchange subject and verb, a possibility that suggests a kind of posthuman cleavage where Felipa is simultaneously separated from her body and inextricably intertwined in it as she becomes one with the telephone booth.²

Borinsky, in a way that we have not seen so far, follows Haraway and many other cyborg theorists by linking posthuman being and issues of gender. Felipa, while an extremely sexual being, is also ambiguously gendered from the very beginning of the novel. Her first sexual experience is with a more mature woman, one who bids her goodbye by exclaiming how much pleasure they had shared while noting that she will make some man very happy. Borinsky then emphasizes Felipa’s

bisexuality with this initial name, one that springs from her encounter with the waiter Felipe, Felipa then occupying a hermaphroditic role, one that could certainly carry out Haraway's vision of the cyborg free from heteronormative restraints. Indeed, it is Felipa's status as sexual outsider, as threat to the nuclear family, that makes her a force that must be contained. Her blatant use of sexuality as a bisexual prostitute with an office in a telephone booth makes her a presence that is simultaneously the object of desire and fear. The fact that this subject is continually situated within the apparatus of the telephone booth and that her body intersects and is intersected by a technology whose function is to disembodiment voices establishes clearly the couplings the novel joins between cyborg identity, ambiguous sexuality, and feminine subjectivity.

Turning to the other principal feminine character in the novel, Noemí/La llagada, we see a series of related dynamics. The sticky attempt to control her exhibitionism suggests a similar desire to possess and deny that we see played out in Felipa's many transformations. Nevertheless, the adhesive becomes counterproductive and Noemí's metal skin endows with further disruptive power.

Todos pueden ser rotadas menos ella. Hecha un trompo da vueltas, se para por un instante, les da el latigazo de sus pestañas perfectas y cuando todos se han ido sigue por sí misma. Magnífica muñeca de hierro. Ya no la pobrecita. Ni rastro de las llagas.

Están solos y el Dr. Gutiérrez rendido de amor a sus pies la sueña de día y de noche, la canoniza. (124)

They can all be rotated except for her. Spinning she whirls, pauses an instant, gives them the whip of her perfect eyelashes and when everybody has gone she keeps going for herself alone. Magnificent iron doll. No longer a poor little girl. Not a trace of the scars. They're alone and Dr. Gutiérrez at her feet exhausted by love dreams of her day and night canonizes her. (118–19)

The phrase "magnífica muñeca de hierro" fuses concepts that would be contradictory within traditional constructions of gender, endowing the feminine doll with the not-so-feminine hardness of iron. Borinsky here makes literal the figurative

power that Felipa had exercised earlier as bisexual prostitute and uses, significantly, a cyborg image to express that fusion. Additionally, the cyborg nature of the iron body suggests a healing image, one that overcomes the fissures that her paradoxical nature suffered when confined to an entirely organic matrix. She is no longer the poor little thing, but a worshipped being, described later as “una diosa de acero inoxidable” an image that reminds one of the android photographs of Naomi Campbell that are mentioned in Edmundo Paz Soldán’s *Sueños digitales* and that will be discussed in a later chapter. Ultimately, her metal body serves as the ultimate threatening subject/object. She remarks, near the end of the novel, as follows:

—El aluminio tiene estar muy brillante.

—Queda mejor un poco opaco. Da categoría. Acordáte del museo Metropolitano en Nueva York, por ejemplo ¿las armaduras medievales brillan? No. Porque tienen la autoridad de los años y la gente fascinada pasa a verlas pero qué te vas a acordar si vos, pobrecita, nunca fuiste a ningún lado seguro que nadie te llevó, falta de guita, de interés.

—Basta que esto me está aburriendo y lustre bien que tiene que quedar como un espejo.

—¿Como un espejo?

—Para que cuando me miren a mí se vean a sí mismos. Un espejo. De aumento. Que se vean, depilen y acicalen. (169–70)

—The aluminum has to be very shiny.

—It looks better a little dark. It lends class. Think of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, for example, does the medieval armor shine? No, because it has the authenticity of years, and the people are fascinated and go to look at it, but how are you going to remember, poor girl, if you’ve never gone anywhere, I’m sure no one ever took you, lack of wherewithal, or interest.

—That’s enough because I’m getting bored, now polish it well so it looks like a mirror.

—Like a mirror?

—So when they look at me they’ll see themselves. A mirror. It enlarges. Let them see, let them get a body wax and makeup. (163–64)

The mirroring aspect of her body creates, then, the possibility for societal change as her presentation as the object of erotic, voyeuristic desire then reflects her ambiguous sexual and corporeal nature back on the voyeur. At that point, she is able to share her fusion of subjectivity and objectivity with those that gaze at her.

When Chela Sandoval argues, “Haraway’s cyborg textual machine represents a politics that runs parallel to those of U.S. third world feminism” (412), she could find no better narrative support than Borinsky’s exploration of feminine spectacle and subjectivity. Indeed, Dianna Niebylski has used Haraway’s work specifically to contextualize Borinsky’s presentation of the rebellious female figure to great effect. In *Cine continuado* we see the first text that we have considered so far that embraces those elements of cyborg identity that appeal to many contemporary posthuman theorists. While Borinsky’s own female subjectivity could be argued as the source for this difference in approach to the posthuman figure, she also happens to be the first female writer that we have considered in this study, we should not make that argument too quickly. If Felipa “missed” her gender by using her cyborg body to reject the traditionally constructed and imposed definition of the female, we see posthuman women in other female-authored texts who “miss” their gender in very different ways.

The publication of Carmen Boullosa’s 1997 novel *Cielos de la tierra* was both preceded and accompanied by a great deal of interest, due in part to the critical and popular success of her previous work, in part to the novel’s remarkable narrative structure, and in part to an interview Boullosa granted in 1995 where she announced that her next novel would include a “post-human” character. The Mexican novelist remarked that her forthcoming novel “begins with a third voice and it’s a voice of a woman of the future. . . . They are post-humans. . . she has no father, no mother, they have artificial parents, they are another kind of human” (qtd. in Hoeg, 151). Jerry Hoeg, in particular, includes this interview as proof of what he calls “the beginnings of a Latin American hybrid fusion of the posthuman and the mestiza into a sort of cybermestiza” (99), a position he develops with several references to North American and European

theorists on posthuman and cyborg identity and then uses to advance his argument that

[t]he ultimate stage of Latin American narrative, if it can still be called narrative, follows the pattern of previous Latin American narrative. It is mediated by the discourse of technoscience and searches for a resolution to the question of the impact of the dominating uses of technology in Latin America. What is new is that it now embraces technology rather than rejecting it as foreign and imposed. (107)

Boullosa's novel, by comfortably including Lear and her/his posthuman community within the narrative, certainly carries through on that promise. However, the work of subsequent theorists that suggests that Boullosa uses Lear to include ideas that mirror contemporary posthuman theory does not enjoy the same support. While the novel does include a well-developed posthuman community, it appears in such a way as to problematize current theories on posthuman and cyborg identity. The novel becomes an excellent opportunity to explore the implications of a Mexican novel whose curious depiction of the posthuman can be seen as more of a nostalgic gesture than one that looks forward to a new technological reality in Latin American writing.

Cielos de la Tierra is an ambitious novel that intertwines three narrative voices: Lear, a member of a postapocalyptic, utopian community L'Atlàntide, Estela, a Mexican woman from the 1990s who studies and translates colonial literature, and Hernando de Rivas, a sixteenth-century indigenous Mexican living in a Franciscan utopian project. The novel moves between their three texts, narrating the lives and experiences of the three outsiders who attempt to live and resist within their respective dominant cultures. Estela and Lear are also able to use the writings of Hernando as a part of that resistance, a strategy that Boullosa emphasizes as essential. The characters are constantly reading, writing, and reflecting on those acts, from Hernando and his journals to Estela's fond recollection and critical evaluation of her generation's reading of *Cien años de soledad* to Lear's attempt to preserve historical writings and language in general. While the entire novel is certainly worthy of and has

received a great deal of critical attention, it is Lear, our futuristic posthuman, who serves as the focus of this section. Indeed, as Claire Taylor has argued, “it is in Boullosa’s configuration of the science fiction scenario that the most pressing issues of the novel arise” (477).

Just as Boullosa claimed Lear is presented as a posthuman, another kind of human. The self-description on the first page of her narrative establishes the context of her identity.

Porque no sé quién fue mi padre ni quién mi madre, porque fui gestada en un engendrador y pasé los años de crecimiento en la Conformación (la primera estaba en La Cuna, la segunda en El Receptor de Imágenes), porque aunque polvo eres, Lear, en polvo no te convertirás, no puedo echar mano de gran parte de las interpretaciones que en el tiempo de la Historia usaron los hombres para desentrañar lo que soy. (15)

Because I don’t know my father or my mother, because I was gestated in a machine and was raised in the Conformation (the first was in the Cradle, the second in the Image Receptor), because though you are dust, Lear, you shall not return to dust, I cannot use many of the interpretations that men used in the time of History to work out what I am.

This description emphasizes several of the key attributes many North American theorists have ascribed to the posthuman condition, that is, the ectogenetic pregnancy that produces the posthuman body, the concomitant destabilization of the traditional family structure that its existence causes, the heavy emphasis of the role of technology in its generation, and its abandonment of traditional origin stories, evident in both the machines that constituted the formation of her body and her physical and societal detachment from History—a word Lear emphasizes with a capital “H.” In fact, Lear’s comments evoke quite clearly Donna Haraway’s definition of the cyborg that was mentioned earlier: “The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, . . . The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust” (151). Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston emphasize the rejection of reproduction

within the organic family model as an essential characteristic of the posthuman body, noting that “[p]osthuman bodies were never in the womb. Bodies are determined and operated by systems whose reproduction is—sometimes partially but always irreducibly—asexual” (17). This dismissal of procreative sex serves as the idealized sociopolitical state in posthuman theory. Haraway concludes her *Cyborg Manifesto*, observing the following:

[H]olistic politics depend on metaphors of rebirth and invariably call on the resources of reproductive sex. I would suggest that cyborgs have to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing. . . . We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender. (181)

Lear’s initial presentation appears to fulfill all the characteristics of posthuman identity described here as well as it appears to invoke the utopian ideal Haraway advances. In that sense, Hoeg’s suggestion that *Boullosa* occupies a principal role in his characterization of a new, more technologically friendly Latin American narrative is well supported. Claire Taylor, whose study of cyborg identity in *Cielos de la tierra* misses Hoeg’s previous work, attempts to extend the technological comfort level of the novel with the idea that *Boullosa* leverages Haraway’s vision of the subversive cyborg in her own technologically enhanced critique of gender and language.

And yet, as I suggested earlier, *Cielos de la tierra* may not be an entirely appropriate candidate for this theory. While Lear is clearly posthuman, her subsequent experiences and comments tend toward a dismantling of the cyborg model. Indeed, Lear’s interest in the uncovering of History suggests a cyborg uneasy with its theoretical definition. Lear comments: “Con mi trabajo,urgo en nuestros orígenes, en el tiempo de la Historia. Ah, pero aquí empezaría un problema serio. Porque nadie en L’Atlàntide querrá reconocer en los hombres de la Historia a nuestros padres, ni fincar en ellos nuestros orígenes” (15) [With my work I delve into our origins, in the time of History. Ah, but here is

where a serious problem begins. Because no one in L'Atlàntide wants to recognize the men of History as our parents, nor place our origins in them]. If Lear belongs to a community that embodies the cyborg utopias to which theorists such as Donna Haraway aspire, Lear herself appears at the margin of such a society—nostalgic for precisely what her community forbids and what cyborg theorists have rejected.

In fact, Lear's linking of History with origin further distances her from L'Atlàntide's posthuman ideals. Haraway explains the rejection of origin in cyborg thought: "An origin story in the 'Western,' humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate.... The cyborg skips the step of original unity" (1991: 151). Haraway dismisses the importance of origin as unnecessary to the cyborgs who are, after all, "exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (1991: 151). Lear, in her obsession with history and origin, appears to stumble as she skips the step of origin that Haraway's cyborg leaves behind. In that sense Lear appears to be more like Star Trek's Data, the android who dreams, like Pinocchio, of being human, of having and knowing parents, and of feeling organically based sensations.

Boullosa develops the idea of the posthuman who, contrary to her nature, dreams of origins throughout the novel. Lear continually emphasizes the contrary nature of her historical work, one that opposes the utopian project of the rest of the community. "Mientras me inclino hacia el pasado, los demás habitantes de L'Atlàntide se empujan hacia un presente perpetuo y se utilizan para reconstruir lo que los hombres de la Historia se empeñaron en destruir, la sublime Naturaleza. Yo sí recuerdo al hombre de la Historia, y dialogo con él" (16) [While I'm drawn in by the past, the rest of the inhabitants of L'Atlàntide look toward a perpetual present and dedicate themselves to reconstructing what the men of History worked so hard to destroy, sublime Nature]. If L'Atlàntide serves a space in which gender and nuclear family structures are eliminated as the cause of the ecological apocalypse that has nearly destroyed the planet, Lear attempts once and again to recoup not only the origin stories that the cyborg rejects but the familial structures that

have been replaced by the machines in which Lear and her companions are grown. Furthermore, Lear attempts to resituate L'Atlàntide within Western origin stories. At one point in her description of the community she remarks: "En nuestra casa el Paraíso Terrenal (como el del primer hombre y su primera mujer en la leyenda que retoma la Biblia), es un paraíso sin vegetación, suspendido en el medio del cielo" (18) [In our house, Earthly Paradise (like that of the first man and the first woman in the legend that the Bible retells) is a paradise without vegetation, suspended in the middle of the sky]. She later remarks in the same vein: "¿Han creado un jardín donde pasean evas y adanes inmaculados, sin haber aún pecado, porque no han reconstruido a su serpiente?" [Have they created a garden where immaculate eves and adams walk around, not yet having sinned because they have not reconstructed the serpent?] (25). In both cases Lear uses the biblical creation story to recontextualize the utopian project of L'Atlàntide, effectively reinserting a very clearly cyborg utopia within the origin myths that cyborgs and posthumans supposedly subvert. While one could certainly argue that such a recontextualization upsets the "original" origin story, Lear's position as rebel suggests one in which the Garden of Eden undercuts the posthuman project. Indeed, the origin story becomes the subversive element, recasting the attempt to create a new utopian project as merely the repetition of the already-told Judeo-Christian tale. In fact, the original unity that Lear seeks is made dystopic by the posthuman society's inability to reproduce completely the biblical origin as they leave out the serpent. The flaw that will ultimately destroy the society is that they apparently embrace Haraway's rejection of the Garden of Eden.

This cyborg utopia that cannot be, a clearly dystopian civilization that merely falls apart rather than present a new subversive possibility, is what the novel leaves us. While L'Atlàntide appears to reenact the description of a hopeful possibility of a cyborg mythology, its subsequent fall affirms Lear's critical position as a marginal member of the community. As a function of the desire to eliminate reference to and memory of the destructive culture that occasioned the apocalypse language is forbidden, a law whose enforcement emphasizes the

authoritarian nature of this technological posthuman community. Lear recounts one episode in which the totalitarian tendencies of the community become clear.

Sentimos la alarma contra el palabrerío palpar en nuestros pies. Sin darnos cuenta, Rosete y yo nos habíamos puesto a conversar. Ya lo dije, no se debe conversar adentro de L'Atlàntide. Pero ahí estábamos otra vez Rosete y yo, platicando, irresponsables. Qué vergüenza. Sentida la alarma, nos callamos. De inmediato la Central nos transmitió, a cada uno, en silencio, la retahíla de recomendaciones pertinentes: N41, N42, N43, 087 y Y1. (92)

We heard the alarm against word use vibrate in our feet. Without realizing it, Rosete and I had begun to converse. I've said it before, one cannot speak in L'Atlantide. But there we were once again, Rosete and I, speaking irresponsibly. How embarrassing. Once we heard the alarm, we were quiet. Immediately the Central office transmitted to each of us, silently, the list of pertinent recommendations: N41, N42, N43, 087 and Y1.

The community projects a sense of constant, omnipresent vigilance that is enforced electronically through a series of alarms. The already posthuman bodies of Rosete and Lear are subjected to further artificial alteration and control as the technology of discipline modifies and regulates their behavior. The codes at the end of the quotation act as a final silencing mechanism, not merely replacing language but suggesting the idea of Lear and Rosete as parts of a large computer that sends code back and forth as it functions. L'Atlàntide appears, then, as the science fiction cliché of the evil cybernetic empire that uses technology as a part of its repression of the human body. It is at this point where we see both the importance of Taylor's argument that the science fiction (SF) nature of the novel is its most salient feature and the flaw in the critic's argument that Boullosa's use of the SF genre is subversive along the lines of Donna Haraway. Boullosa's rather straightforward condemnation of the dehumanizing effects of technological society situates it among much of traditional science fiction, well before cyberpunk destabilized an anticyborg tendency that can be traced as far back as *Frankenstein*.³

The process of events set in motion by the abolition of language results in the destruction of the society. The posthumans begin to procreate once again, to reproduce, but without a familial context. Lear looks on in horror as her friends sacrifice and eat the children that are born organically rather than created. The monstrosity of the event only underscores for Lear the depraved cyborg nature of the community while affirming her own anti-posthuman sentiments. She remarks at the sight of the dissolution of the society:

¿Tengo también el cuerpo lleno de cosas? Estoy convencida de que no. Yo no estoy rellena de cosas. Respiro. Estoy viva. Mi cuerpo es de carne y no de tesa materia artificial. Pienso con las vísceras. Deseo. Me llena de horror el corazón saber que no podré jamás cruzar palabra alguna con nadie, que nunca más podré conversar, pero más todavía saber que nunca más podré practicar con nadie las artes amorosas. Nunca más, Lear, sábelo bien. Los atlántidos son ahora remedos de carne, son moblaje relleno de cosas. Eres la única carne y el único apetito que restan vivos sobre la Tierra. (359)

Is my body full of things? I am convinced that it is not. I am not full of things. I breathe. I am alive. My body is of flesh and not of artificial material. I think with my guts. I desire. My heart is filled with horror as I contemplate no longer being able to cross words with anyone, to never again converse with anyone, but even more so as I realize that I will never again practice the arts of love with anyone. Never again, Lear, know if well. The Atlanteans are now artificial flesh, furniture filled with things. You are the only flesh and the only appetite that remains alive on Earth.

Lear's rejection of the artificial nature of the *atlántidos* as well as her reassertion of organicity very clearly suggests a vision of technology and the posthuman that runs counter to those views suggested by the majority of North American and European theorists as well as by Hoeg's ideas on a Latin American acceptance of technology within narrative. In that sense, Boullosa has proposed the cyborg utopia as yet another dystopia; the posthuman ideal of the dissolution of an organic family structure results, for Lear, in a technological nightmare. When combined

with the images of a repressive cybernetic state we observed earlier, Boullosa suggests that posthuman bodies merely reconstitute an oppressive social order rather than subvert it.

The implications of such a position are certainly curious, especially considering the source. It was Boullosa's novel *Duerme* [Sleep], with its inherently hybrid main character who, very appropriately, inspired Hoeg's idea of cybermestizaje. Indeed, the novel does not completely eschew the hybridity inherent both to posthuman nature as well as to her earlier theorizations of feminine identity. The denouement of the novel finds a place within literature where the boundaries of time and space are erased, where Hernando, Estela, and Lear's textualized bodies can enter into contact with one another in the pages of the novel—existing within a kind of idealized space that endures and overcomes the broken utopias that populate the rest of the novel. Lear remarks in the final pages:

Me uniré a Estela y a Hernando hasta el fin de los tiempos. Desdeciré la muerte anunciada de Hernando, quitaré el párrafo en que se la menciona, no le permitiré llegar a su fin. A Estela tampoco la dejaré alcanzar su muerte propia, la que tendría con el gran estallido. A los dos los traeré a mí, compartiremos un kesto común que nadie sabrá cerrar. Los tres viviremos en un mismo territorio. . . . ganaremos un espacio común en el que nos miraremos a los ojos y formaremos una nueva comunidad. (368–69)

I will join with Estela and Hernando until the end of time. I will contradict Hernando's announced death, I will remove the paragraph where it is mentioned, I will not allow him to come to his end. I won't let Estela reach her own death either, the one she would suffer in the great explosion. I will bring them both to me, we will share a common kesto that no one will know how to close. The three will live in a same territory. . . . we will gain a common space in which we will look one another in the eye and will form a new community.

Literature serves as the last space in which hybrid utopias can exist, one whose pages allow the textualized bodies of the characters to transcend boundaries set by history, race, or gender that Boullosa's posthumans are unable to challenge despite their nature. In fact, it is precisely in that idea of literature as an

archive, as a place of origin, that the novel finds its possible utopia, one that appears in stark contrast to the failed social projects of colonial Mexico and the equally problematic posthuman *L'Atlàntide*. Writing becomes the place where true connection can exist, one that achieves the posthuman ideals that the cyborgs themselves apparently cannot. In a sense, Lear is able to achieve the subversive and revolutionary goals of the posthuman precisely because she rejects her own posthuman nature.

In his study of utopia and heterotopia in *Cielos de la tierra*, Javier Durán concludes as follows:

It seems to me that Carmen Boullosa echoes García Márquez's comment that it is not too late to write a new and devastating utopia of life, where no one can decide anything for others—not even the way in which they should die—and where, as the Colombian Nobel laureate has said, the lineages condemned to one hundred years of solitude may at last have a second opportunity on earth . . . precisely in those heavens of the earth written by Boullosa. (63)

Seen from this perspective, Carmen Boullosa's subversion and inversion of the posthuman condition can be seen as part of a larger nostalgic gesture in which Lear's defiant attempts to recuperate an historical origin mirror Boullosa's radical reconfiguration of García Márquez's "devastating utopia(s) of life." Instead, then, of a novel that looks toward some new technological embrace in Latin American narrative, we find a glance back at its History, where the posthuman writer seeks to reconstruct the origins and fathers that her existence made unnecessary. Rather than a Latin American example of contemporary cyborg theory, *Cielos de la tierra* suggests a literary space where the subversive voice joins in an unharmonious chorus with the echoes of the past.

This "missing" of the nuclear family, this attempt to recreate a gender made unnecessary by posthuman dynamics, finds further development in the work of the Chilean writer Eugenia Prado. In 2004, she formed a part of a collective group of artists who staged the performance piece *Hembros* in Santiago, Chile.⁴ The work explores the changing identities that have emerged

from the relations between flesh and technology that are depicted as omnipresent in Chilean and Latin American culture. In the piece, the audience contemplates a seminude female actor who appears in several roles as Hembro, a being whose name consists of the confusion of *Hombre* [Man] and *Hembra* [Female] while evoking *Hambre* [Hunger] and who occupies the posthuman space where prosthetic and flesh are similarly confused. The character is duplicated on three separate screens, at times with a camera strapped to his/her head, but always in that peripheral place where one finds bodies that challenge the definitions and limits of corporality that certain societies attempt to enforce. The installation was a great success, with plans (as yet unrealized) to take it to other, larger, venues. Prado has developed this theme throughout her career, and in *Lóbulo* (1998) Prado presented a thorough examination of the female body and consciousness caught at the passage from human to posthuman. The novel presents the life and strange death of Sofía, narrating the main character's obsession with a disembodied voice that calls her for phone sex throughout the novel. While *Lóbulo* does not contain the explicit posthuman imagery we saw in *Cine continuado* and *Cielos de la tierra* or in the literal cyborgs of science fiction, it does present a vision of posthuman identity that incorporates and challenges much of contemporary theory. What we find in Prado's text is a rich, idiosyncratic vision of the implications of posthuman life in contemporary culture that suggests new theoretical possibilities for the understanding of gender and identity at the meeting point of flesh and machine.

Not only can we continue our dialogue with the work of Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway in our discussion of Prado's novel, but we also see an important place for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theories on the schizophrenic body. We recall from the earlier chapter that Haraway emphasizes the cyborg's ability to harness hybridity in the construction of a patriarchal structure-resisting identity who can sidestep origin mythologies as it exults in the "pleasurably tight couplings" that come from transgressing the societally prescribed boundaries that separate human from machine. The cyborg suggests a symbol of the subject that escapes the oppressive

capitalist systems that depend on the aforementioned limits. In that sense we see the definition of the posthuman following Boullosa's articulation, specifically as that body that is generated outside of heterosexual procreation, outside of the nuclear family, and, subsequently, without the mother and father of what Haraway has called the "organic family." As I mentioned in the discussion of *Tiempo de revancha*, Katherine Hayles's exploration of posthuman identity is important for its expansion of posthuman identity from that of literal cyborg bodies and the cyborg as physical symbol of the possibilities that those literal bodies suggest to a more general state of consciousness in which the human imaginary extends to one in which the organic and the artificial are conceptualized as interchangeable prostheses of a disembodied mind. Cyborgs are not merely science fiction monsters or even people with prosthetic arms or pacemakers, but anyone whose identity no longer resides exclusively within the organic body. These posthuman identities locate themselves in the exchange of information between organic body and technology, a computer perhaps, or, in the case of *Lóbulo*, a telephone. Hayles's work, in particular, allows us to follow Prado's articulation of a theory of posthuman identity that, with Boullosa's, challenges and reworks those couplings that Haraway forges between gender liberation and cyborg mythology.

Lóbulo is Eugenia Prado's third novel, one of several in which the Chilean writer explores issues of female identity and subjectivity. She tends to describe the psychological realities of her female protagonists in texts that challenge both definitions of gender identity as well as the traditions of literary genre. Her previous work, *Cierta feminidad oscura* [A Certain Dark Femininity], vacillates structurally between theatrical play and novel, confusing deliberately any kind of hierarchical limit. *Lóbulo* initially appears as a novel, only to morph relatively quickly into another kind of text in which blank pages are included with an invitation for the reader to collaborate in the writing of the text and narratorial asides question the interpretations that the novel presents as reality. In that sense *Lóbulo* can be seen to fulfill the iconoclastic role that Haraway describes as inherent to cyborg hybridity, the novel's fusion of disparate

literary elements mirroring the cyborg's fusion of similarly disparate organic and mechanical prostheses.⁵

Prado starts the novel with a presentation of an unstable female body, in search of both corporeal and psychological definition. The beginning evokes a cinematic opening shot in which the camera alternates images of the protagonist with the space that the protagonist inhabits. From the first page in which a description appears of the character's bedroom, the street that can be seen from the bedroom's window, and the protagonist's body within that room, the narrative focuses on close-ups of the protagonist that emphasize her fleshy existence and anticipates the events that will determine the development of the novel:

Se acuesta, con la certeza de un acto inútil, ni siquiera la oscuridad más absoluta permite el sueño reposado. La veo acurrucada entre las ropas de la cama, la veo abandonada al recorrido de las sábanas. Hurgando en los espacios más alejados se busca, ella abre las piernas, luego los dedos de los pies, una forma de sentir más plenamente cada espacio de su carne. Bastaría con relajar el cuerpo, bastaría eso apenas para estar tranquila, piensa. (16)

She lies down, certain that it was useless, not even absolute darkness would allow restful sleep. I see her curled up in the bedclothes, I see her abandoned to the flow of the sheets. Twisting in the farthest spaces, she searches, she opens her legs, then her toes as way to feel each part of her flesh more fully. It would be enough to relax my body, just that would be enough to be at peace, she thinks.

The attempt to open up, to experience her surroundings on a corporeal level, activates the idea of carnal sensuality on various levels. Not only does the importance of sensorial experience appear prominently, but so too does the preeminence of the sensual invitation to fusion, an attempt to enter into contact with foreign elements that will produce new sensations and forge the "couplings" that Haraway emphasizes. In this scene, we see an extended meditation on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari with the presentation of a body that desires, that seeks to open itself up to the distinct flows that surround it. Note the

language they employ in their description of Lenz's stroll at the beginning of *Anti-Oedipus*,

To be a chlorophyll- or a photosynthesis machine, or at least slip his body into such machines as one part among the others. Lenz has projected himself back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy, before all the co-ordinates based on this fundamental dichotomy have been laid down. He does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. (2)

The mechanical language that Deleuze and Guattari use in their vision of schizophrenia will appear later in *Lóbulo*, but their vision of the body as a site where sensorial flows intersect appears from the beginning. We witness in these first pages, then, the articulation of a permeable flesh that does not respect the boundaries that preserve a closed human identity.

This moment of opening establishes the context for the series of events that will penetrate Sofía's imaginary. As she wanders through her apartment, still attempting to open herself up, she pauses:

Sofía retrocede. Camina inquieta. Una vez más el pequeño espacio. Necesita algo que la mantenga lejos de aquel estado incompleto, busca insistente en los recuerdos, alguno en especial. Puedo verla confusa, sólo imágenes desordenadas, y en aquel desorden de ideas, la mujer buscará una imagen única, una imagen de su padre, un recuerdo difuso, un único recuerdo, una fotografía que Carmen, su madre, le entregara al cumplir los nueve años. (17)

Sofía retreats. She walks uncertainly. Once again, the small space. She needs something that will keep her far from that incomplete state, she looks insistently in her memories, one in particular. I can see her confused, disarranged images and in that disorder of ideas, the woman looks for a single image, an image of her father, a blurry memory, an only memory, a photograph that Carmen, her mother, gave her when she turned nine.

The experience emphasizes the ideas of lack and necessity, already implicit in her previous attempt to open up where her

organic flesh does not satisfy the desires that she appears to suffer. The first object of that previously diffuse desire is the photograph of her unknown father, an object whose semiotic possibilities contribute to the formation of an incipient posthuman identity. The language used to present this idea vacillates between memory and photographic image, combining Sofía's organic memory of her absent father with the chemical process that encloses the image of that father. The photograph appears as a signifier stripped from its signified object as it no longer refers to a memory of a specific event or experience but exists merely as a memory of itself. That is, when Sofía views the photo, she remembers only the image of her father's body, not the actual organic body itself. The fact that this picture displaces the event that it should represent, erasing any referent of a separate "real" experience, indicates a process in which the technology responsible for the creation of that memory has begun to integrate itself with the organic system that attempts to preserve the memory of that father. Moreover, by representing the object of desire as one of avoiding "that incomplete state," the photograph appears as a prosthetic memory that completes Sofía's incomplete organic recollections serving much the same function as a prosthetic limb.

At the same time, it marks Sofía as a body that exists outside of the traditional family structure. If she is not presented as the result of a medical operation that made unnecessary the presence of a father, she does occupy the space of the body that does not find a place within the definition of the nuclear family. Prado emphasizes this interpretation with the conversion of the father's organic body in photograph where the image of him replaces not only the memory of him that we have already mentioned but also his own corporeal presence. Sofía seeks the photograph as a way to satisfy her craving for paternal contact. In this sense we again see how the photo continues to function as a signifier that promises a physical referent but that is, after all, the only body that exists. We can intuit, then, the presence of a posthuman consciousness in Sofía where her own sense of self comes from the fact that she is the product of an organic mother and a photographic father. At the same time, we can also infer a marked difference between Haraway's cyborg and

the posthuman figure we see rising from Sofía's imaginary. If Haraway's cyborg makes its father unnecessary, nullifying the paternal presence with the cyborg's illegitimate existence, Sofía feels her father's organic absence and attempts to fill the hole with the artificial image that remains of him. She is the cyborg that does not forget her origin and does, to a certain extent, still dream of the Garden of Eden.

This first indication of prosthesis sets the stage for the telephone call that ends the first chapter of the novel. As Sofía looks for the photograph of her father the telephone rings, surprising Sofía:

Un sonido que en fracción de segundos se transforma en algo incierto que completa su angustia. Como si intentara detener el tiempo, Sofía se abalanza sobre el reloj. El teléfono sigue sonando.

—¿Quién se atreve . . . tan tarde? —dice.

Descuelga el auricular sobreponiéndose al miedo, sin embargo, recorriéndola, un temblor la envuelve.

—¿A l ó ? . . . —insinúa con esfuerzo.

Al otro lado de la línea telefónica aparece un susurro apenas perceptible. Un susurro leve.

—¿Q u i é n ? —insiste Sofía, tratando de mantener la calma, mientras los latidos sagitados de su corazón se desplazan rápidamente, transformándose en pulsaciones que la recorren completa, para rebotar en la parte de atrás, la más cóncava de su cabeza.

—Sólo alguien que espera por ti . . . —responde un hombre del otro lado, precipitándose.

—¿C ó m o ? . . . —agrega Sofía, imaginando apenas su respiración.

De inmediato cuelga el teléfono. Rápidamente esconde la fotografía en el clóset y corre, como una niña corre a meterse en la cama, esperando quizás, que el sueño interfiera su angustia. (19–20)

A sound that, in a fraction of a second, transforms into something uncertain that completes her anguish. As if she were trying to stop time, Sofía throws herself on the watch. The telephone keeps ringing.

—Who would dare to call . . . so late? —she says.

She lifts the receiver, overcoming her fear and yet reviewing it, a tremor envelops her.

—Hello? . . . —She insinuates with effort.

On the other end of the telephone line a barely perceptible whisper appears. A light whisper.

Who? —Sofía insists, trying to maintain her calm, while the beats of her heart quickly come, transforming in pulses that run through her entire body, to echo in the back part, the most concave of her head.

Just someone who waits for you . . . —responds a man on the other end, anticipating.

What? . . . —asks Sofía, barely imagining her breathing. She immediately hangs up the phone. She quickly hides the photograph in the closet and runs, like a little girl runs to get in bed, waiting, perhaps, that sleep stop her anguish.

The interruption of her search for the photograph situates the call within the context of the organic body that combines with artificial elements as it attempts to constitute a whole identity. At the same time, it accentuates the search as a hybridizing process. When the phone rings, Sofía tries to use the clock as an extension of her desire to stop time. When she is unable to achieve that desire, she lifts the phone and, when she hears the voice at the other end of the line, she enters into a world of cables and machines in a way that anticipated the popular film *The Matrix's* use of the telephone. That is, just as the characters of that science fiction film could enter and exit a technological, virtual world by means of telephone calls, Sofía enters a world mediated by technology where masculine voices are able to affect important alterations in Sofía's corporeal reactions. The passage emphasizes the change in Sofía's breathing, her quickened pulse, a direct result of the fear she feels as she enters into contact with the voice that awaits her on the other end. Prado reinforces this interpretation by suggesting that the whisper that travels through the telephone line is then translated into the heartbeats and pulses that run through Sofía's entire body. The description suggests the image of Sofía plugged into the telephone line through the earpiece that she has connected to her own ear. In that sense, we see articulated the situation that

Hayles describes when she speaks of the dynamic connection between organic and technological bodies. The organic Sofía, attempting to leave behind her incomplete state, opens herself to the telephone and thus creates a new system in which her body responds physically to the electronic impulses that come through the telephone line.

Using this as a point of departure, Prado begins a series of scenes and images, centered generally on the erotic, that extend, develop, and challenge contemporary theories on posthuman identity. In one of the many such telephone calls that Sofía receives, Prado employs images and references that posit Sofía's transformation from organic entity to a body that cannot be separated from the telephone that now constitutes an integral part of its identity.

Algunos minutos después de las doce, como empieza a ser habitual, el teléfono. Sofía levanta el aparato con tranquilidad. Al empuñarlo su mano se humedece, puede sentir que todo es exacto, hasta en el largo de los dedos al acariciarse las palmas. Se queda un tiempo conectada a esa forma, que a la altura del lóbulo de la oreja encaja de una manera casi perfecta. Al otro lado de la línea telefónica, el hombre la succiona desde aquella profundidad. Ella lame la parte de abajo del auricular. Él sigue estando en el otro extremo de la línea. Su lengua, simultáneamente resbala por los pequeños orificios. (37–38)

A few minutes after twelve, as has become habit, the telephone. Sofía lifts the receiver calmly. As she touches it, her hand moistens, she can feel that everything is exact, even in the length of her fingers as she caresses her palms. She remains connected to this forma for a time, that at the point of her earlobe it fits almost perfectly. At the other end of the line, a man sucks her from that depth. She licks the lower part of the receiver. He continues on the other extreme of the line. His tongue simultaneously slips over the tiny holes.

Throughout the narration of the experience, we see elements that emphasize the interaction of the organic and the mechanical. Sofía's hand moistens when it touches the telephone, an object that has now become a prosthesis, one with her body as it fits "exactly" in her hands, and the earpiece of the phone a

“perfect” extension of her own ear. In this moment, the technology of the telephone has become inseparable from her organic body, and Sofía is now a cybernetic body whose senses are not situated within her flesh but within a system of telephone, wires, ears, and consciousness. Prado continues in this vein, suggesting that the virtual contact between Sofía and “Él” that occurs when they lick each other through the phone is now physical as their ears include the telephone receivers that transmit voices and sexual desires. The sucking that Sofía’s lover is able to perform at long distance creates the very sensual feeling of intimate contact, made possible by Sofía’s now posthuman body.

In a subsequent scene, we can appreciate the extent of Sofía’s transformation:

Con esas palabras, la mujer casi no puede sostenerse y cae, como rebotando en el tiempo. De inmediato aparecen nuevas imágenes en su cabeza. Él está frente a mí y todo se nubla al contacto con sus murmullos de manos. No puedo pensar en él de otro modo sin alcanzar la distancia que existe entre ambos a través de la línea telefónica. Una parte de su cuerpo se talla como metal, un frío intenso en la superficie lisa de los brazos se resiste a negar su propia permanencia. Desde el torso hasta la espalda, un naufragio. Toda la piel escurriéndose es aceite, una mutación. Las gotas que me empapan se atorán en la plástica armonía del teléfono, preciso cercarlo en una reunión furtiva. Ambos cuelgan el aparato y sus cuerpos se ahogan entre los quejidos sin llegar hasta el final del cable, en un último suspiro en que no hay tono, como una forma de grabar los sonidos en su memoria. Preciso hacerlo fotográficamente estático, detenerlo instantáneo y anular su fuerza. (66–67)

With those words, the woman can no longer support herself and she falls, as if she were slipping in time. New images immediately appear in her head. He is in front of me and everything goes cloudy at the touch of his murmuring hands. I cannot think of him in any other way without reaching across the distance that there is between the both of us over the phone line. A part of his body is like metal, an intense cold in the smooth surface of his arms that won’t deny its own permanence. From his torso to his back, a shipwreck. All of the skin that is

flowing out is oil, a mutation. The drops that soak me are stuck in the plastic harmony of the telephone, I have to surround it in a furtive meeting. Both hang up the phone and their bodies drown among the complaints without making it to the end of the cable, in a final sigh in which there is no tone, like a way to record the sounds in their memory. I need to make it photographically static, stop it instantly, and annul its strength.

The fusion of bodies that occurs in the erotic act is here accompanied by a series of images that suggest other types of fusion more in line with the hybridity of the cyborg body. The telephone line not only serves as a means for human contact it contaminates Sofia's organic body with its technological nature, causing it to begin to convert into metal and oil. Sofia finds herself in a situation in which she is obliged to become machine in order to continue with the relationship. Just as the telephone has facilitated her relationship with her lover it also emphasizes the distance between them, the prosthetic resisting the posthuman fusion of prosthesis and consciousness. For that reason, the process that we saw begin with the telephone as a figurative prosthetic auditory and sexual organ now culminates in Sofia's conversion into oil so that she can become one with telephone and, hence, enter into direct physical contact with her lover. Where before Sofia's palms would moisten when she handled the telephone, now her perspiration has become oil and the cyborg aspect of her body occupies center stage. Prado further emphasizes this by commenting explicitly on the formation of an erotic circuit between the two lovers in which a kind of cybernetic feedback loop is created by means of the telephone cable that transmits pleasure between the two bodies as it simultaneously records the experience in the memories of each of them.

It is at this point where we see an important meditation on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari mentioned earlier. Prado not only presents the image of a body that seeks contact, that attempts to combine with the flows of the world, she also makes Deleuze and Guattari's mechanical discourse literal by situating it within a telephone cable. If we turn to their description of the machine body, we can appreciate better the way in which Prado

plumbs their machine metaphor in her exploration of Sofía's psychological reality.

In a word, every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it. This is the law of the production of production. That is why, at the limit point all the transverse or transfinite connections, the partial object and continuous flux, the interruption and the connection, fuse into one. (36–37)

Deleuze and Guattari's semiotic system depends on the establishment of cybernetic systems between bodies, food, social forces, and so on whose behavior is determined by the feedback loops that run between them. In this, they do not differ much from early cyberneticists such as Norbert Wiener, although they employ this language within very different ideologies. What is important to note here is the ubiquitous use of the mechanical metaphor in Deleuze and Guattari's work, a metaphor that Prado makes real by proposing a schizophrenic body (i.e., a body that continually attempts to enter into contact with the flows of the world) that achieves that contact through literal machines. That is, in *Lóbulo's* narrative world, it is not sufficient to describe Sofía's body and its contact with the world with machine images; these relationships occur because of machines and, therefore, create posthuman identities that are more literal than figurative.

The erotic relationship that Sofía maintains over the telephone with her lover's voice begins, then, to alter the constitution of her body. At the end of another, earlier, telephone call,

Sofía permanece en silencio algunos segundos, sabe que de un momento a otro, él colgará el aparato telefónico. Lo hace. Entonces relajo los brazos, hasta que mis dedos caen resbalando como gotas de agua, luego los aprieto con fuerza contra las palmas. Descubro que la belleza no atrapa los días. Quiero ser belleza. Quiere ser belleza, pero imposible, se mantiene misteriosamente atada al aparato telefónico. Enciende la lámpara, todo en ella se detiene. En el estómago, un dolor como de

máquinas me hostiga. Continúa inmóvil y hunde sus huesos en la cama, esperando el cuerpo, que de viva dé calor. (39)

Sofía sits in silence for a few seconds, she knows that any moment he will hang up the phone. He does. Then I relax my arms, until my fingers fall sliding like drops of water, then I press them hard against my palms. I discover that beauty does not trap days. I want to be beauty. She wants to be beauty, but it's impossible, she stays mysteriously tied to the telephone. She turns on the lamp, everything in her stops. In her stomach, there's a pain like machines that pursues me. She stays still and buries her bones in the bed, waiting for the body to bring heat from its life.

As she disconnects from the telephone Sofía loses energy, the relaxation of her arms and fingers create the impression of a robot that has suddenly been unplugged from its energy source. As she turns on the light we see an attempt to reestablish contact with the electricity that had fueled Sofía's body earlier, the visual image of electric light suggesting a connection between the literal electricity of the lamp with the erotic electricity of the phone sex that Sofía had just experienced and that has converted her into a mechanical body that depends on that electricity. Prado emphasizes those electrical (and metaphorical) changes in Sofía's body with a split in her narrative voice as it shifts between third and first person, as if the cessation of electrical power has also caused abrupt changes in the narration itself.

At the same time, there is a loss of control that, as depicted in the passage, ascribes a negative connotation to an experience that could be seen as an excellent example of the "pleasurably tight coupling" that Haraway sees as integral to cyborg identity. Sofía begins to associate her telephone conversations with images of death: "Con palabras misteriosas él tiñe sus intenciones y destruye algo que estaba quieto. Atrapados los huesos blanquecinos que muertos han, de carne pútrida, sido violentamente removidos" (42) [He tinges his intentions with mysterious words and destroys something that was still. The trapped bleached bones that, dead, have been from putrid flesh been violently removed].⁶ At this point, the organic body decays in the face of the electronic relationship that Sofía maintains with the man, an act that evokes the typical cyberpunk

description of the body as “meat” and of its insistence on the superiority of the virtual, disembodied condition. The transition from corporeal reality to virtual existence culminates a few pages later in a previously quoted passage when we see Sofía’s visceral reaction to one of the conversations (“Con esas palabras . . . anular su fuerza” [66–67]). The transformation of Sofía’s skin in oil, her experience of self as robotic, the telephone line that connects both their voices and their bodies, all create a cybernetic existence that, at first, satisfies the lack that Sofía expressed at the beginning of the novel. Nevertheless, the erotic experience exercises a profound impact on the bodies of those involved and Prado does not permit any kind of return to a purely organic state. The cables continue as extensions of desire, the sighs retain a technological aspect in the simile that compares them to a recording. The fact that Sofía “needs” a photographic state at the end of the passage underlines this continuing technological existence, even after the call is over. She is now so much a part of the technological that she prefers the artificial existence of the photograph to any kind of organic existence.

And yet, capturing a moment in a photograph suggests a static state that imprisons the subject. The relationship, instead of liberating Sofía from a life restricted by systems of control, subjects her to further insanity and eventual death. Her fingers lose themselves in the machine and she similarly loses the ability to distinguish between body and apparatus. She explains, “Siete son los números, uno a uno puedo rasguñarlos desde mi memoria, siete veces mi dedo en los orificios, como si nada pudiese detenerlos, mi mano va perdiéndose entre los giros en un gesto mecánico” (65) [There are seven numbers, one by one I can scratch them from memory, seven times my finger in the holes, as if nothing could stop them, my hand loses itself in the whirls of a mechanical gesture]. It is not just that her hand makes mechanical gestures; it is that it is lost within the machine itself. In fact the erotic act here occurs not so much between the voices of the lovers as it does between Sofía’s fingers and the orifices in the face of the telephone, the contact between flesh and plastic resulting in a union in which the organic and the artificial blend so profoundly as to be indistinguishable. At this point

the masculine voice becomes menacing, whispering that the conversion into machine is now her inescapable obligation—a fact of evolution: “Aquel que no evolucione con el tiempo hace inevitable el camino a la extinción” (59) [That which does not evolve with time makes the path to extinction inevitable]. Later, with an even more aggressive tone, he says: “—Todo ha sido programado, tarde o en algún momento, serás parte de esto—insiste él” [Everything has been programmed, later or at some point, you will be part of this, he insists], a threat to which Sofía responds with the following, “—Terminamos desistiendo—dice Sofía. Sus pies no pueden moverse, vuelve a la inquietud, desespera. No logra contener sus movimientos. No obedece su cuerpo a las órdenes de la cabeza, como si estuviesen totalmente separados uno de otro” (69) [We will end up surrendering, Sofía says. Her feet cannot move, and restlessness returns, she grows desperate. She cannot contain her movements. Her body does not obey the orders her head gives, as if they were completely separate]. Sofía now begins to reject the posthuman experience, finding the schism that now exists between consciousness and body a disquieting sensation—the result of an invasion that she will describe as similar to a serpent that has contaminated and impregnated her.

Her resulting posthuman body is, therefore, very different from Haraway’s cyborg. Sofía does not challenge the structure of the nuclear family that oppresses her, she does not threaten the society in which she live, she only experiences a madness that has grown worse as her posthuman condition has developed. The narrator observes:

Ausente como el equívoco de muchas otras llamadas telefónicas. El teléfono es un mero instrumento para hacerle participar de un proceso de comunicatransacción que he imaginado. Pero acaso . . . ¿Podría soportar por más tiempo a la madre de Sofía en un escenario delimitado por alucinaciones, un personaje inconexo, anacrónico, hasta con algunos efectos de descalce? Somos intentos intervenidos por llamadas retocadas usted y yo en un acto extremo de incomunicatransacción. (72)

Absent like the wrong number from many other phone calls. The telephone is merely an instrument to make her participate

in a process of communicatransaction that I have imagined. But maybe, could one put up longer with Sofía's mother in a scene defined by hallucinations, a disconnected, anachronistic character, to the effects of this mismatch? We are intervening attempts by calls touched by you and me in an extreme act of incommunicatransaction.

By narrating the path to Sofía's individual madness, Prado establishes a vision of posthuman identity specific to one woman's particular reality. At the same time, and through this vision, Prado advances an antitechnological theme that would be profoundly conservative were it not for the challenging imagery that she employs in the articulation of that theme. Moreover, her inversion of the well-used plotline of the man who makes a female robot for sexual satisfaction produces an exploration of female desire, technology, and identity that extends far beyond the science fiction cliché. In terms of the meditation that we have seen on the work of Deleuze and Guattari throughout the novel, the end of the relationship suggests two possibilities. On one level, the destruction of Sofía's world suggests her conversion into "body without organs," the closed body that the two philosophers describe. The implications for the production of that body are even more illuminating. The fact that Sofía desires opening, an entrance into contact with the world, makes literal Deleuze and Guattari's body/desire machine with the telephonic relationship. However, Sofía's desire cannot be realized, and when we see Sofía shut down and close off we witness the failure of the mechanical metaphor as well as the promise of connection that the description of the body as a system of nodes of communication offers but cannot fulfill.

In the final section of the novel we find a Sofía who can no longer communicate with the bodies that surround her, whether it be an ex-lover or her own mother. Her paranoia, present since the beginning of the novel, has grown till the point at which she dies during the birth of her child/text.

La mujer se acercó con cautela al cuerpo de Sofía que permanecía inmóvil sobre la cama. Más cerca vio su rostro, tenía el color de la muerte. Sus ojos estaban abiertos. Se quedó unos segundos mirando su sonrisa plácida. Cerca de los labios algo extraño

llamó su atención, una materia de color blanquecino asomaba por la boca aquello no parecía fluido, se veía como algo sólido. La mujer se acercó más para abrir la boca de la muchacha. Al rozar lo que había dentro, un escalofrío la recorrió de pies a cabeza. Se volvió para mirar a la madre que estaba acurrucada de rodillas junto a la cama de su hija, mientras gemidos cortos y secos salían de su garganta. Armándose de valor empezó a sacar lentamente lo que había dentro de la boca de la muerta, primero despacio, luego empezó a tirar con más fuerza . . . eso parecía no tener fin.

Pronto fue descubriendo papeles arrugados con inscripciones ilegibles, como si hubiesen estado mucho tiempo dentro del estómago diluyendo parte de la tinta.

Sofía descansaba para siempre, con el cuerpo taponeado de papeles. (212–13)

The women approached Sofía's body carefully, the body was still on the bed. Up close she saw that her face was the color of death. Her eyes were open. She looked at her calm smile for a couple of seconds. Near her lips, something strange caught her eye, some kind of bleached material that came out of her mouth that was not fluid but looked like it was solid. The woman got closer so that she could open the girl's mouth. As she brushed what was inside, a shiver ran through her from feet to head. She turned to look at the mother who was on her knees next to her daughter's bed, while short dry moans left her throat. Gathering her courage, she began to remove slowly what was in the dead woman's mouth, slowly at first and then she began to pull with more effort. It seemed to never end. She quickly discovered wrinkled papers with illegible inscriptions, as if they had been in her stomach for a long time, with the ink diluting. Sofía rested forever, her body plugged with papers.

Sofía's cybernetic body is converted, at the end of the novel, in a kind of organic printer whose production is also the cause of its death. The implications of such an image in the light of post-human theory proposes another way to interpret what has been for much of contemporary theory a principal feminist figure. What Prado suggests is a much more complex body than that of a revolutionary figure whose ambiguity challenges the patriarchal systems and societies that created it. Prado elaborates the body of a victim at one level, a victim made cyborg by a

mechanical, masculine presence that left her contaminated and dead. Instead of resisting that masculinized force this figurative cybernetic body carries its technological prosthesis as emblems of its violation, much as we saw in chapter 1, albeit on an extremely individualized level in which governmental oppression does not figure. On another level the power of the cyborg body lies in its textual production, the ability it has to articulate experiences with its own peculiar language. The telephone that was Sofia's prosthetic auditory and sexual organ during her erotic relationship is now revealed as the technological means through which language entered her body to then be born from it. Sofia's cadaver that was once cyborg is now the mother of texts that reveal the hybrid experience that she suffered.

If Haraway celebrated the ambiguity of the cyborg, signaling its ability to transgress limits and produce hybridity and Deleuze and Guattari suggest the intriguing possibilities of combining organic body and mechanical semiotics, Prado invents a new cyborg whose own ambiguity extends and frustrates Haraway's "cyborg myth" as it critically explores the metaphorical systems created by Deleuze and Guattari. Sofia seeks connection with her absent father and present mother rather than seeking to embrace the escape from the nuclear family that her posthuman identity seems to promise. Her death in childbirth suggests a rejection of heterosexual procreation that many posthuman theorists celebrate as central, but this procreation is presented as an artificial product of the contact between a machine father and an organic mother. Sofia's mechanical body with its conversion into printer could be connected with the idea of the subversive body whose ability to write, to produce language, threatens systems of control, much as we saw in the figure of Elena in *La ciudad ausente*. However, the organic body's fluids have rendered the text illegible and, while Elena is able to continue her testimony after her death thanks to her cyborg body, Sofia is dead because of that body and her language has been destroyed by the conflict between the organic and the mechanical. What Prado achieves with her exploration of posthuman life and Sofia's individual experience is the knowledge that Sofia's very name promises of an unknowable life, or the possibilities of connection in a technological

reality opposed to the alienation that that same technology engenders. In that sense, Prado articulates the fundamental ambiguity of the posthuman figure in an even more fundamental way than what we have seen in earlier analyses of cyborg identity. While Haraway celebrates the cyborgs' ambiguous hybridity and Hayles critically and comprehensively explores the history of the posthuman as a concept as well as its function in contemporary culture, for both of them (and for many others) the posthuman is something that can be known, understood, and appreciated. In Haraway's myth, the cyborg body draws its power from its ability to function as the bearer of knowledge; that is, the knowledge that there is a powerful alternative to male-centered society. For Hayles, the posthuman body occupies a clearly defined place in the evolution of the human body. Indeed, knowledge and the cyborg body are inextricable in the articulations of cyborg identity in Argentina that we have studied for therein is found their subversive threat. What Prado creates is a body that does participate in all the fusions between organic flesh and technology from the erotic to the prosthetic that we see described in contemporary posthuman theory while resisting any attempt to situate it within that theory, any attempt to define what it is or, more importantly, what it could do.

While Borinsky's cyborgs inhabit a space well within Haraway's manifesto, the uncontrollable woman whose peripheral existence relative to the norms of conservative society threatens the continuation of the society, the posthumans that occupy the work of Boullosa and Prado suggest a very different vision. Borinsky's stripper, an expression of female sexuality ambiguously unencumbered by the strictures of the nuclear family, would, with her metallic skin and her irrepressible presence, act out the feminist promise of the cyborg. However, the frustrated quests of Lear and Sofía create both a future and a present world in which the gender roles that the posthuman so effectively destroys are retroactively seen as valuable. Lear witnesses the destruction of a society because of their lack and Sofía obsessively tries to recuperate hers, only to find that not only can she never find it but that motherhood will ultimately destroy her as well. Both, however, find some kind of relief

in writing, though with very different implications. Boullosa seems to propose some kind of utopian view of literature, of life in words. Sofía's writing can never be read—illegible papers that were previously a fetus and/or a snake. In both cases, though, the answer to the posthuman condition is an escape from it.