

## Chapter 4

# Neoliberal Prosthetics in Postdictatorial Argentina and Bolivia: Carlos Gamerro and Edmundo Paz Soldán

The bulk of the novels, films, and other cultural expressions under examination appear during the 1990s, a decade now notorious for the implementation and institutionalization of neoliberal regimes through much of Latin America. The political career of Carlos Menem, Argentina's president from 1989 to 1999, provides an easy chart for Latin America's own embrace and rejection of economic policies that emphasized free trade and privatization over the remnants of state-centered programs. In the case of Argentina, while the pegging of the peso to the dollar in 1991 alleviated the hyperinflation of the late 1980s and the privatization of state industry helped money flow into a bankrupted nation, by the late 1990s these policies had gutted Argentina's production capabilities, converting the country into a nation of consumers and destabilizing the economy to the point of the crisis of 2001. Argentina was only one obvious example; many other countries embraced and then rejected neoliberal policy over the course of the 1990s and the beginning of this century. We have countries such as Bolivia or Venezuela whose neoliberal experiments are now harshly condemned by the leftist governments who came to power on the backs of those economic failures. The rapid globalization and the series of economic grafts that occurred during

neoliberalism contributed to the construction of hybrid sensibilities in which the Latin American subject was subjected to the influx of messages and goods specifically coded as global. The artistic representations of these newly amalgamated subjectivities have recent important critical attention. Francine Masiello's recent book, *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis*, emphasizes and explores this hybridity from its very cover, the reproduction of Juan Davila's "The Liberator Simón Bolívar." The painting depicts a transvestite, partially nude Bolívar making an obscene gesture while astride a horse that is part statue part abstract painting. Masiello examines, to great effect, the varied implications of a painting that could be considered cultural blasphemy in certain parts of Latin America, highlighting the integral importance of hybridity in the artistic expression of the last thirty years. Given this particular artistic/political background, the posthuman's essential hybridity would seem an appropriate conduit for the exploration of neoliberalism in contemporary Latin America. While the majority of the artistic expressions under examination in this book come from this time period, in this chapter I examine the work of two writers where not only is the posthuman subject on clear display but it is also explicitly linked to the neoliberal policies that helped constitute it.

The Argentine novelist Carlos Gamerro has enjoyed some success in Buenos Aires with a steady stream of works that began with *Las Islas*, a lengthy novel published in 1997 that, among other things, uncovers a group of computer enthusiasts who have planned a virtual reinvasion of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands. The novel follows a separate designer of computer games who is hired by a business mogul to help hush the illegal activities of the businessman's son, a job that leads the designer to a series of discoveries about the connections between the neoliberal present of the 1990s and the activities of the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. If, as I argued, Argentina and Carlos Menem provide a direct way to examine the rise and fall of neoliberal policy, Bolivia suggests an even more fruitful space for the exploration of neoliberalism and, specifically, its links with dictatorship. The democratic election of Hugo Banzer in 1997 made Bolivia the first and only Latin American country

to elect a former military dictator. This somewhat questionable achievement has provided the Bolivian writer Edmundo Paz Soldán ample opportunity to examine the ways in which neoliberal Bolivia simultaneously erases and reinscribes dictatorship in a series of novels. In this chapter I examine the ways in which posthuman identity is used to understand the hybrid bodies produced as the technological imports made more available by neoliberal policy are grafted onto Latin American bodies in Gamarro's *Las Islas* and Paz Soldán's *Sueños digitales* and *El delirio de Turing*. In all three novels we see the posthuman that not only functions as the scarred cyborg of chapter 1, but as the result of the economic hybridity of neoliberalism. In this dual function we find that the posthuman couplings not only fuse foreign technology and Latin American bodies, but they also couple neoliberal policy with dictatorial practice.

*Las Islas* loosely follows Felipe Felix, a veteran of the Malvinas War who now earns his living as a designer of computer games and as a general-purpose hacker. As he wanders his way through the narrative, he uncovers not only the standard governmental and business conspiracies prevalent in the neoliberal postdictatorship but a virtual reinvasion of the Malvinas Islands organized by fellow veterans. The novel extends from Felix's adventures as he works for the corrupt and eccentric business mogul Tamerlán, erasing all the computer evidence of a murder his son has committed, to the virtual journals of Argentine soldiers in both real and imagined invasions of the Malvinas Islands.<sup>1</sup>

Felix engages in the following conversation when he enters the Tamerlán office building for the first time.

- Vengo a ver al señor Tamerlán—expliqué, finalmente.
- ¿Por qué?
- Él me llamó.
- ¿Para qué?
- Supongo que necesitará de mis servicios—arriesgué.
- ¿Cuáles?
- Especialista en seguridad de sistemas. Detección de anomalías. Redes telemáticas. Virus.
- Una palabra.

—Hacker—contesté sin dudar.

—El detector de metales—lo vi consultar apenas un comando incorporado al brazo de su sillón—indica un objeto extraño en su cabeza. Muéstrémelo.

—No puedo. Está adentro.

—Aclare.

—Un pedazo de casco. Un casco de soldado. Un recuerdo... (17)

I come to see Mr. Tamerlán, I finally explained.

Why?

He called me.

For what reason?

I suppose he needs my services, I risked.

Which are?

Specialist in systems security, detection of anomalies, Telematic networks. Viruses.

One word.

Hacker, I answered without hesitating.

“The metal detector.” I saw a commando consult it from his chair, is indicating a strange object in your head. Show it to me.

I can't, it's inside.

Clarify.

It's a piece of helmet, a soldier's helmet. A souvenir.

The encounter emphasizes Felix's talents with computers, the technical explanations of his abilities preceding the one word description that identifies him as a hacker. The phrasing progresses from descriptions of his contributions to the security of systems and detection of problems to the “virus” that suggests that he encapsulates both the problem and the answer, with the answer preceding the problem rather than the more traditional structure. The syntax here is important as his self-description culminates in the virus, in his ability to infect rather than his ability to resolve the infection. The one word “virus” also sets up the one word description of his occupation, “hacker,” strengthening the threatening connotations of a word whose definition has been debated *ad nauseum* in computer forums at

the same time that it presents Felix as inseparable from the technology that he manipulates.

The idea of the hacker as a digital computer virus is then played out on a semiotic level as this human detector of anomalies is detected as carrying something metallic in his head. The helmet shard that he carries as a souvenir of his time in the war incorporates a second level to Gamerro's creation of this post-human protagonist. Felix's body is not completely organic, a portion of his skull converted from bone to metal as a result of serious injury. If Felix had originally characterized himself as a computer virus, associating his identity with nonorganic technology, the metal in his head makes him literally a cyborg—a true cybernetic organism. Felix is, then, particularly suited to manipulate machines as he can be seen as partly mechanical. Just as he uses his abilities to insinuate himself into information networks, the mechanical has insinuated itself into his body. Gamerro extends this rather traditional description of cyborg identity by including the function of memory within Felix's cybernetic condition. The souvenir plate inside his head acts as a kind of computer disk that contains the traumatic memory of injury. That is, in addition to his presentation as a kind of uniquely qualified cyborg hacker we have the accompanying vision of Felix as a cyborg survivor, a human whose organicity has been compromised by trauma but who also survives thanks to the reminder of that trauma.

His mechanical component prepares him uniquely for his introduction into the Tamerlán Corporation, yet another living machine. Tamerlán describes his building in the following terms: "En el centro de este organismo hecho de espejos y cañerías y cables telefónicos y fibras ópticas y redes de computadoras late un solo corazón: el mío. Todo el edificio es una mera prolongación multiplicada de mi propio cuerpo" (31) [In the center of this organism made of mirrors and pipes and telephone cables and fiber optics and computer networks beats a single heart: mine]. In that statement, Tamerlán gives the most succinct definition of posthuman identity in the novel by identifying the building with its mechanical components as technological prostheses of his own body. He appears to anticipate Hayles's position that "the posthuman view configures human

beings so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (3), where we could merely include Tamerlán’s name in the place of the word “posthuman” in that quotation. If Felix’s technological component constantly reminds him of his injury, Tamerlán’s are an extension of his body—a welcome prostheses instead of the uninvited metal scar in the hacker’s head. This distinction is essential to Gamerro’s construction of posthuman identity as it corresponds to Argentina’s history. Tamerlán’s mechanical body is an agent of surveillance, his building/body functioning as a modern-day Panopticon. For example, Tamerlán can observe any of his employees instantly as he can make transparent any wall, ceiling, or floor revealing their activities not only to his gaze but to everyone in the building. This leads to remarkably full restrooms as employees try to hide in the stalls in the hope that he will not bother to watch them while they use the facilities. It also leads his receptionist to engage in a very literal form of phone sex when he calls to speak with Felix, his constant surveillance leading to strange obsessions with objects in the building that are, after all, extensions of his body. Tamerlán’s position as leading businessman and most obvious posthuman subjectivity in the novel then creates a strong connection between the neoliberal regimes that he supports and to which his operations contribute and the posthuman subjectivities that global technology help create. This association extends, then, to one that includes Tamerlán as a corrupt businessman with ties to the dictatorship and the technology of control, a technology first exercised during the dictatorship in the application of various forms of surveillance and, particularly, in the application of electroshock torture with grotesque prosthetic phalluses. The technology that facilitates torture and the technology that facilitates neoliberalism become fused in Tamerlán’s own monstrous building/body.

Gamerro strengthens this technology/dictatorship/neoliberal bond with an encounter between Felix and Gloria, a woman he meets as he investigates the conspiracy he uncovers while in Tamerlán’s employment. As they begin foreplay, the reader is privy to Felix’s thoughts:

Descubrí que besaba despacio, la boca toda floja, la lengua remolona y lánguida, los dientes apenas amagando sombras de

mordiscos. La quiero ver a Sandra simulando esto por computadora, pensé un instante, lograr una interfase acuática como ésta va a requerir de un salto tecnológico cualitativo que cuando se dé quién va a derrocharlo apretando con una vulgar mina; Kevin tiene razón, estamos todavía demasiado apegados a la limitación de la realidad cuando las posibilidades del sexo virtual son ilimitadas: pensemos, por ejemplo, coger con tu Harley Davidson o tu Porsche o, si te da por el arte, la Venus de Botticelli o, más perverso, la de Milo, y por qué no digamos una orgía con las señoritas de Avignon, especialmente las de la derecha—se dio en vagar mi mente por el ciberespacio ilimitado y cuando volví me encontré con una mina desconocida, . . . (292–93)

I discovered that she kissed slowly, with the mouth loose, the tongue languid, the teeth barely giving shadows of bites. I want to see Sandra simulating this on a computer, I thought for an instant, achieving an aquatic interface like this would require a qualitative technological leap that when it does happen, who will give up being with a common girl. Kevin is right, we are already stuck against the limitation of reality when the possibilities of virtual sex are limitless. Let's consider, for example, of screwing your Harley Davidson, or your Porsche, or, if you like art, Botticelli's Venus, or, perversely, de Milo and why not an orgy with the girls from Avignon, especially the ones on the right, my mind just started wandering through unlimited cyberspace and when I returned I found myself with an unfamiliar girl.

Instead of the expected use of virtual sex as a substitute for the physical, Felix finds that real physical contact is a pale shadow of the possibilities of virtual eroticism. In this instance, contact with the flesh-and-blood Gloria makes Felix think of sex with a motorcycle, another kind of cybernetic fusion that suggests the posthuman blurring of boundaries that have appeared so prevalently in the novel. While one might attribute these thoughts to Felix's work as a hacker and his obsession with computers, we quickly find that there is something special about this woman and, in particular, her skin. As Felix returns to the real world erotic encounter, he notices:

Esta piel, esta piel tan linda, repetía una voz adentro mío mientras refregaba en ella la nariz, los ojos, la boca como en una

toalla secada al sol al salir del mar. Había pequeñas zonas de energía alternando con la suavidad de la piel, puntos tan intensos que las yemas de los dedos sentían casi como relieves, y perseguí el dibujo que formaban por todos los rincones de su cuerpo, ... (292)

This skin, this very pretty skin, a voice inside me repeated as I dried my nose, eyes and mouth on her as if she were a sun-dried towel and I had just come out of the sea. There were small zones of energy that alternated with the softness of her skin, points so intense that my fingertips felt them like reliefs and I followed the drawing that they formed over all the corners of her body.

Her skin is presented as a series of electrical conduits that work almost like a battery. At this point the cyborg hacker comes in contact with the woman who can fuse virtual and physical eroticism in a body that endows both his organic and his technological components with energy.

The reason for these “zones” becomes clear when he turns on the light despite her protestations.

Le habría hecho caso, pero llegó tarde, porque mi mano ya estaba sobre el interruptor. Alcanzó a cubrirse, pero no como suele hacerlo una mujer desnuda: ... sus manos habían volado a tapar zonas perfectamente inocentes del pecho y el vientre. Enseguida supe por qué. No había en diez personas manos suficientes para tapar las marcas que le cubrían todo el cuerpo, adensándose como enjambres de insectos en las áreas que intentaba ocultar...

Eran estas pequeñas cicatrices brillosas lo que mis dedos habían detectado antes, en la oscuridad confundiéndolas con una ilusión táctil fruto de mi embeleso; el mapa que yo había trazado uniendo estos puntos con mis dedos recién ahora empezaba a tomar forma. (300)

I would have stopped, but it was too late because my hand was already on the light switch. She was able to cover herself, but not like a naked woman usually does. Her hands flew to cover perfectly innocent areas on her chest and stomach. I quickly realized why. In 10 people, there weren't enough hands to hide the marks that covered her whole body, clustering like hives of insects in the areas that she was trying to hide.

It was these small shining scars that my fingers had detected before, confusing the tactile fruit of my charm in the dark, this map that I had traced uniting those points that were now taking form.

Just as the metal in Felix's head identifies him as a kind of wounded cyborg, Gloria's scars create a body that is more than its organic components. While the scars are not literally mechanical prostheses, they fulfill the same semiotic function as Felix's metal plate as they act as emblems of trauma—reminders of the injury that has altered the nature of the body. Indeed, the scars form a map, a series of written markers on her body just as the metal plate was referred to as a souvenir of the war. What cements this interpretation of Gloria's body as a kind of cyborg survivor is the already observed description of these scars as zones of energy, as if they emitted the electricity that the skin had absorbed from the *picanas* that produced the scars in the first place.

As she describes the torture that converted her skin from flesh to electrical map, we see a development of this type of body imagery where organic identity converts into technological prosthesis. In the case of Gloria torture severs the link between mind and organic body, much as Elaine Scarry has described in her work on pain and the body. Gloria's posthuman nature comes not as a mechanical prosthesis replaces flesh as in the case of Felix but as the relationship between consciousness and flesh is fundamentally altered, converting her abused and violated body into merely one more interchangeable prosthesis among many. Gamerro develops this idea by having her recount experiences that include the grotesque rapes and tortures that Nunca Más uncovered in its report, noting that relief would only come when she blacked out—disconnecting from her body. Gamerro then takes it a step further when Gloria remarks that her body was used as the literal conduit for a horrible practical joke that her torturers would play on each other; that is, they would apply the *picana* to her while one of them was raping her so that her body would absorb and transmit the electrical current to the man engaged in her violation. The act literally makes her flesh an extension of the *picana*,

thereby converting flesh into machine and completing the creation of a literal cyborg body. We see that kind of thinking repeated when she talks about her twin daughters, both of whom suffer from Downs Syndrome. As she reflects on their innocence she repeatedly refers to her body as a kind of filter, an apparatus that served to remove the evil of the moment of their procreation. Once again the flesh of the victim serves as mechanical device rather than as an aspect of self and the cyborg body becomes the physical representation of the torture that engendered it. In that sense, Gamerro's posthumans are the embodiment of Scarry's theories on what she calls the "object-less" state of the being in pain where the imagination (the post-pain being) consists of "wholly its objects" (162). At the same time, their conversion into a kind of cybernetic text rescues the very real trauma that they have suffered from any kind of textual or semiotic obfuscation. That is, these cyborg bodies (and especially Gloria's skin) function as unmediated physical texts where prostheses and cybernetic scars tell the abstract story of dictatorial abuses while simultaneously exhibiting the personal horror suffered by a single human victim of those abuses.

Felix, our posthuman hacker, functions within this symbolic system as not only a traumatized cyborg-survivor, but also as the figure that can read the map of torture and that can decipher the prosthetic scars left by the technological implements used in that torture. Gamerro proposes, then, a Latin American cyborg whose ability with technology qualifies him uniquely to "hack" a traumatic past, to crack the mechanical codes that guard governmental secrets. His ambiguous presence as a by-product of governmental abuse and threat to its technological existence taps into the overarching cyborg mythology while contextualizing specifically for an Argentina marked by brutal political realities much more real than situations in which cyborgs usually appear. If classic science fiction presents the cyborg as a symbol of the scientist's hubris run amok, Gamerro proposes the figure as the unwitting result of the application of the machinery of state terror or neoliberal policy to the organic body of the victim—an image we also find in Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* or even in Puig's *Pubis angelical*. By separating this image from its traditional science fiction context, Gamerro

provides a way to understand the relationship between the technologies of control first exercised by the military dictatorship and the new technologies made available by the neoliberal policies of the 1990s.

The Bolivian novelist Edmundo Paz Soldán's recent narrative has focused on the representation of his country bleeding at the seams of a bewildering series of cultural sutures. His novels extend from difficult conjoinings of third-world social realities with first-world technology and neoliberalist policy to a political landscape too strange to be fiction where bloody dictators become democratically elected presidents. In *Sueños digitales* and *El delirio de Turing*, especially, Paz Soldán engages contemporary theories on posthuman identity in his construction of a Bolivia struggling in the face of a virtual reality where bodies are their images, machines gain equal footing with flesh as extensions of the human, and identity is inseparable from the numbers, bytes, and codes used to represent it.<sup>2</sup> These two novels form a narrative arc in which Paz Soldán begins by suggesting that the strange political hybridization caused by Hugo Banzer's unsettling presidential resurrection can be imagined in terms of the similarly unsettling fusions of flesh and technology inherent in posthuman identity. He then expands that construction to examine the way dictatorial power and oppression duplicate themselves within virtual realities that are unable to deliver on their promise of an escape from the "really" real. Throughout this arc, Paz Soldán delivers a nuanced meditation on the implications of posthuman thinking within a distinctively Latin American context. I outline briefly *Sueños digitales*'s contribution to this construction and then turn the majority of my attention to the more recent *El delirio de Turing*, the Bolivian national book award winner for 2003.

In his 1999 novel, *Sueños digitales*, the Bolivian novelist Edmundo Paz Soldán has explored the implications of this kind of reality, one in which technology has destabilized the representational power of photography and, by extension, the very definition of what it means to be human. The novel recounts the experiences of one Sebastián, a young Bolivian computer professional who earns his living working for a magazine, digitally retouching photographs and creating "seres digitales,"

hybrid images that combine one person's body with another's head (the novel begins with the line, "Todo había comenzado con la cabeza del Che y el cuerpo de Raquel Welch" (11) [Everything started with the head of Che and the body of Raquel Welch]). The success of these "seres digitales," the magazine makes it a contest in which its readers are to guess to whom the body belongs, attracts the attention of the country's president Montenegro, a former military dictator now democratically elected president based on Bolivia's now former president Hugo Banzer. Sebastián is hired to alter photographs from Montenegro's past as a dictator, erasing people and evidence that implicated the president in past crimes. As Sebastián becomes uneasy with his work he begins to notice the president's forces conspiring against him, erasing his image from personal photographs and then moving to erase his body physically—something that Sebastián avoids only by committing suicide. This narrative arc is complemented by a dissolution of Sebastián's marriage and a coworker's descent into insanity fueled by computer games and the Internet.

Paz Soldán imbues the novel with a technological atmosphere from the very beginning. From the immediate presentation of digitally hybridized photos to a language loaded with references to computers and digital image technology, the novelist creates a world in which technology is at first simply ubiquitous and, then, turns menacingly inescapable. The first description of Sebastián provides one example of the omnipresence of technology:

Sebastián se encontraba en la sala de diseño gráfico de Tiempos Posmodernos, dándole los últimos toques a Fahrenheit 451, la revista semanal cuyo primer número, en papel couché y a todo color—predominaban el rosado, el amarillo chillón, el turquesa y el naranja—, saldría el domingo. Flaco, ojeroso, con un Marlboro en los labios y encandilado frente a la pantalla de la G3, Sebastián arrastraba el mouse entre resoplidos y tecleaba combinaciones de letras y números, órdenes para que, a través de la interpretación de Adobe Photoshop, la foto de Fox Mulder en la pantalla ganara en colores contrastantes para la portada, una sombra oscura como una aureola sobre la cabeza, el pelo negro convertido en amarillo vangoghiano, magenta que te quiero magenta en la tarea de las compensaciones. (12)

Sebastián found himself in the graphic design room of Tiempos Posmodernos, putting the final touches on Fahrenheit 451, the weekly magazine whose first issue, in full color—pink, yellow, turquoise, and orange—, would come out on Sunday. Thin, with a Marlboro in his lips and lit in front of the G3's screen, Sebastián dragged the mouse between puffs of smoke, and keyed in combinations of letters and numbers, orders so that, through the interpretation of Adobe Photoshop, the photo of Fox Mulder on the screen acquired contrasting colors to the cover, a dark shadow like an aurora around his head, the black hair converted into vangoghian yellow and magenta I want you magenta in the compensatory work.

Throughout the novel, Paz Soldán employs references to Macintosh computers, software, the Internet, and virtual gadgets that impart a technological tone to the novel that permeates the reality in which the characters move. The precise references to the computers and software titles, G3's, and Adobe Photoshop, the artificial colors of the magazines, overwhelm the passage, making the character nearly inseparable from the technology that complements his physical description. The references combine to create a world that would seem to be one of science fiction if it were not for the fact that a very early part of this book was written on a G3 computer whose glare illuminated my own face as I manipulated text with keyboard and mouse.

It is within this digital setting that Paz Soldán begins his depiction of the assault on the human body—most obviously on the image of the body, through the alteration of the photographs—but also, and of equal importance, on the very constitution of the human body as exhibited in the characters that populate the novel. That is, the novel is not only about the altered photographs but also about the technologically altered bodies of those who manipulate photographic bodies. Again near the beginning of *Sueños digitales*, we find a passing description of a photograph that serves as an important image of both these themes:

Desde la pared enfrente suyo, Naomi Campbell y Nadja Auermann observaban a Sebastián observando a la Welch. El

rostro de Campbell, escaneado de una portada de American Photo y luego ampliado por Pixel hasta tomar la forma de un poster, era el de un androide recubierto de metal, la piel de plata reluciente y los labios de un rojo supersaturado (calva, las uñas verdes). Era una Naomi futurista. (16)

From the wall in front of him, Naomi Campbell and Nadja Auermann looked at Sebastián looking at Welch. Campbell's face, scanned from a cover of American Photo and then blown up by Pixel until taking the form of a poster, was one of an android covered in metal, the silver skin shining and the lips of an oversaturated red (bald, green fingernails). She was a futuristic Naomi.

On one level, this passage humanizes the image of the body; that is, the pictures of Campbell and Auermann are able to observe Sebastián as he observes the image of Raquel Welch. The photographs exhibit the same abilities as the people they represent, deepening the link between the image and the body and suggesting that the manipulations of those images exercise a corresponding effect on the bodies themselves. The depiction of Campbell specifically as an android, a robot human with metal skin, cements this idea, where not only does the photograph gain human abilities but the human body itself becomes mechanized. This relation of photograph, human, and machine becomes the guiding image for the events of the novel, where the definition of the human is wrapped up in technology.

Indeed, this literal depiction of a futuristic cyborg anticipates the metaphorical cyborgs that appear in the novel. Sebastián's friend and colleague Pixel serves as one obvious example. Pixel's nickname (his real name is not mentioned) comes from his interest in computer and image technology, as well as his contribution to an ad campaign for a digital camera—*te ves mejor en pixels* [you look better in pixels]. This naming of the human body as an element of the computerized image creates a kind of linguistic cyborg, where the language used to define human identity is mediated by the technology that surrounds it. Paz Soldán extends this image of Pixel as he narrates the life of a drug- and Internet-addicted person who is finally driven mad by a virtual reality game in which he is known as Laracroft,

the name of the popular computer game heroine and a further example of the naming of the human body as an expression of a technological world. Pixel loses his humanity within this purely digital world; the feedback loop that had flowed between him and his technology has become a feedback noose.

Paz Soldán complements this almost stereotypical image of the lonely hacker cum digital being with that of the main character Sebastián, an apparently happily married, better-adjusted twenty or thirty something young man. The presentation of Sebastián as a metaphorical cyborg is at once more subtle and more insidious, creating what some have called an electronic fable in the novel—warning of the dangers of technologically based definitions of the human. If we return to the passage I referred to earlier, we find one such image of the process by which Sebastián is cyberneticized. As Sebastián smokes in front of his G3, moving his mouse and typing on his keyboard, Paz Soldán describes him as “encandilado frente a la pantalla de la G3” (12) [lit up in front of the G3’s screen]. The lighting of Sebastián’s body creates an exchange in which not only does the human use the computer to manipulate photographic images but also the computer in some way illuminates the human, lighting the human figure in much the same way Sebastián tries to light Fox Mulder digitally. This bidirectional effect insinuates another cybernetic feedback loop and suggests a situation in which the mere operation of technology alters the person who uses it. We see another such situation in the passage where the photos of the supermodels watch Sebastián watching Raquel Welch. Hayles speaks of the “flickering signifiers” of text written with computers, the levels of code that move between the electrical polarities on hard disks to the photons that translate to text on a screen while passing through compiler codes and the word-processing program (1999: 31). Here the computer’s flickering lights reach out and include the human subject within the play of electrons and photons that convey computational instructions. Not only does Sebastián find himself on equal terms with the altered supermodel photographs but the specially lighted image of him at his computer becomes yet another digital photograph, one that displays this human/computer hybrid as its principal subject.

The novel follows up on this initial image with several situations in which Sebastián begins to operate as an element of this computer/human hybridization. Throughout the novel Sebastián imagines the people he encounters with different heads and/or different bodies. Take, for example, the description of a conversation with his boss Isabel at the Ciudadela, President Montenegro's secret base of operations: "Isabel tenía una camisa de seda roja y mucho maquillaje en las mejillas. Sebastián se dijo que su rostro tenía algo de la Scully de Los Expedientes X, y trató de imaginarla con el cuerpo de Fox Mulder" (95) [Isabel had on a red silk shirt and a lot of makeup on her cheeks. Sebastián decided that her face had something of Scully from the X-Files and tried to imagine her with Fox Mulder's body]. As Sebastián mentally manipulates Isabel's body his consciousness acquires the qualities of Adobe Photoshop, his mind functioning as the computer software he uses in the creation of his digital beings. It is in these situations that we see the extension of the earlier image in which the light from the computer illuminated Sebastián's body; in this case, his working relationship with the computer has affected the operation of his imagination, a computational model now ordering the functioning of his thoughts.

This presentation of Sebastián as a metaphorical cyborg is made clear in an earlier episode in which he prepares for his work at the Ciudadela.

Isabel miró alrededor suyo, como cerciorándose de que no la espiaban. Sacó unas fotos de su cartera y las puso sobre la mesa. Eran las fotos de una parrillada. Sebastián vio rostros satisfechos de políticos conocidos, las cervezas en la mano y las mesas llenas de platos de asados con papas y soltero y llajwa. Se le abrió el apetito, pediría un sándwich de jamón y queso. ¿Lo estaría esperando en su computadora un email de Nikki? Jugueteó con la rosa de plástico en el florero al centro de la mesa. ¿Soñaban los androides con rosas artificiales? (42)

Isabel looked around, as if making sure that no one was spying on her. She took some photos out of her purse and put them on the table. They were photos of a barbecue. Sebastián saw the satisfied faces of well-known politicians, beers in hand and the

tables full of barbecue. He got hungry, he would ask for a ham and cheese sandwich. Is there an email on my computer from Nikki waiting for him? He played with the plastic rose in the vase in the middle of the table. Do androids dream of artificial roses?

The images presented here are at once innocent and suggestive. Sebastián merely examines the photographs that he will alter (making one of the generals disappear), sees the food, gets hungry, thinks of his wife, and plays with a plastic flower. At the same time, we see the way in which technology has infiltrated all levels of Sebastián's thought. After examining the photographs that metonymically represent his work with computers, his thoughts turn to his wife; thoughts mediated by the email technology that facilitates their communication, the computer becoming the location of the relationship with his wife. Indeed, just as Sebastián has begun to think as a computer, he is unable to conceive of interpersonal relationships separate from the technology that permeates his existence. The crowning moment of this mediation is found in Sebastián's idle thoughts about the plastic rose, "Do androids dream of artificial roses?" The question is a play on Phillip Dick's important cybernetic novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, later adapted for film as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. The reference invokes the multiple literal androids found in that novel as well as the cyberpunk novels it inspired such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. It simultaneously forges a connection between that genre and the present novel, as the android dreams seem to find an echo in Paz Soldán's digital dreams. The resulting connection suggests the reading of the Bolivian novel not only as a meditation on the nature of the photographic image in the digital age, but also as a consideration of the nature of the human body in a cybernetic, posthuman age in which the human body is not imagined apart from the technology that surrounds and permeates it.

Even as Paz Soldán evokes and engages the work of North American writers and critics, he incorporates narrative elements that situate the novel within a uniquely Latin American context. Despite the heavy use of references to North American culture

such as the X-Files, Paz Soldán continually resituates the action within a Bolivian context with geographical and cultural references. Furthermore, the portrayal of the Bolivian protagonist threatened by the dictator, now president, and his secret police establishes ties with the Latin American tradition of the *novela del dictador* [novel of the dictator]. The atmosphere of fear at the end of the novel especially, where Sebastián watches friends and then images of himself disappear, also evokes important aspects of that genre. Paz Soldán extends, then, his meditations on the nature of the body and the image in the posthuman age to the nature of the body and the image in a postdictatorial age in which the threats of oppression lurk beneath a neoliberal façade. Just as a metaphorically mechanical Sebastián erases people from photographs and alters history along with its images, oppressive political machinery continues to attempt to alter history and threatens the continued disappearance of its citizens. The combination of computers and political terror in the novel suggests the image of Latin American neoliberal society as a massive G3 where the government acts like an Adobe Photoshop that digitally alters and erases the past and present reality of its inhabitants, attempting to ignore the horror of the past by erasing it, both literally and figuratively.

It is here that we find a Latin American plotting of the posthuman, in Edmundo Paz Soldán's literary exploration of the digital manipulations of photographs and the political manipulations of history and people in contemporary Latin America, where memory has become so short that people can elect the dictators who had earlier repressed them. Returning to Hayles's "flickering signifier," the biological bodies of the disappeared and of the criminals who disappeared them are digitalized and altered so that the link between signifier and signified flickers away—the signifier no longer signifying an historical reality or a physical body. This destabilization of the photograph, one of the most potent symbols of the resistance to dictatorship (I am thinking here of the photographs that the relatives of the disappeared have used in several countries to denounce various military dictatorships), is particularly unsettling. At the same time the stable connection that does remain is this posthuman digitalized body, a product of both the dictatorship—as we

have seen in the first chapter of the book as well as in Gamero's novel—and the neoliberal policies and programs that Paz Soldán outlines with such detail in *Sueños digitales*. Rosario Ramos González has called the novel *fábula electrónica*. Indeed it is; as the digital and political reconfiguration of the human body, its image, and its context result in the horror that serves as the moral of this digital tale.

*El delirio de Turing* extends and refines the views on posthuman identity that he first articulated in *Sueños digitales*; extending especially the idea that the present political realities encode terrible histories in posthuman bodies. The novel occupies the same literary universe as his previous novels; the city of Río Fugitivo in a Bolivia controlled by Montenegro the dictator-cum-president whose present administration is not so different from his former. The city suffers from all the neoliberal contradictions that appear in Bolivian and Latin American culture and society where cyber-cafes and extreme poverty exist side by side and a technological future never completely covers the tortured past of economic and political disaster. The novel begins with a mid-level government employee who receives an encrypted email message. As his job is cryptography, he decodes the message only to discover the accusation: “ASESINOTIENESLAS-MANOSMANCHADASDESANGRE” (23) [MURDERERYOURHAND-SARESTAINEDWITHBLOOD]. This is disconcerting, of course, for while the man worked in both iterations of Montenegro government, he always felt disconnected from the affairs of government, willfully ignoring the effects of the work he did decoding intercepted communiqués. His name is Saenz, but goes by the nickname Turing as his dedication and talent in cryptography inspired his coworkers to consider him Bolivia's Alan Turing, the pioneering computer scientist who was among the first to conceptualize the human as a computer and was famous for his thought experiment in which a human and a machine were indistinguishable. (He also occupies a prominent position in the introduction to Hayles's book.) The novel then follows several interweaving story lines that range from the leader of a group of anticapitalist, antigovernment hackers code-named Kandinsky to the American-born head of the Cámara Negra [Black Chamber], Montenegro's version of the NSA that fights

them, to the psychotic ramblings of a German ex-CIA member of Montenegro's detail to the prosecutor whose sister was killed as a consequence of one of the Turing's decoded messages. Parts of the novel occur in cyberspace, in Internet chatrooms, and text-message conversations as well as in a virtual reality called the Playground, a commercialized Internet site where people can create characters that live and interact in a digital city.

Within this narrative world, Paz Soldán constructs a series of characters and images that link posthuman identity with dictatorial oppression, both in the exercise of power as in the traumatic impacts of that exercise. From the beginning of the novel the Cámara Negra appears as the main representative of political power within the novel, an organization that occupies a unique place in the Montenegro government as its existence spans both the dictatorial and democratic iterations of the not-quite-fictional dictator's government. The Cámara Negra is described as Bolivia's answer to the NSA, an organization dedicated to the interception and decoding of communiqués and messages used by any organization deemed oppositional. In the novel it appears at the intersection of the various story lines, functioning as a narrative focal point that causes the motion of the various events narrated. The Turing referred to in the novel, Miguel Saenz, is the mid-level employee who worked decoding messages during the dictatorship and continues to work in cryptography without any sense of responsibility for the results of his actions. It is he who receives the cryptic emails accusing him of assassination and whose daughter and lover occupy an important place in the events of the novel. Furthermore, it is this organization that hunts the hackers that have been attacking governmental and commercial businesses, and the narrative also relates the stories of the various bosses and employees.

The Cámara Negra's hybrid position as synecdoche of both dictatorship and democracy suggests a rubric through which to understand Paz Soldán's meditation on posthuman identity. People and organizations become uncomfortable fusions of opposites, where being and identity are founded at the seams of cultural and physical definition and where images, doubles, and machines constantly supplant the original referents. The head

of the Cámara, for example, is an American ex-NSA agent born in the United States of Bolivian parents. He is hired by the Bolivian government to head up the computer security section and immediately is granted Bolivian citizenship, producing in that way a situation where Bolivian identity is grafted onto an American who speaks a heavily accented Spanish bereft of the subjunctive and longs for his home in Washington DC. Saenz himself becomes the double of Turing with his nickname, his own body turning metaphorically into a duplication of the computer scientist. The organization itself is infiltrated by one of the hackers, whose play of identities borders on the absurd as he is simultaneously a loyal employee of the Cámara Negra, one of the lieutenants of Kandinsky, the legendary hacker who leads the group attacking the government and, in the end, Kandinsky (he takes the name Kandinsky from the original hacker to throw off the authorities). When one combines this play of identities with the fact that the purpose of this organization is the computerized decoding of messages, codes that serves as cryptic doubles of the meaning they carry, we see a situation where the posthuman conceptualization of identity reigns as bodies are transformed from stable individualized bearers of meaning to mere loci of doubles, codes, and hyphens that create and supplant identity. The fact that this dynamic occurs within an arm of a politically oppressive government only cements the connection between oppression and the posthuman.

Paz Soldán, like Gamerro, develops the triangular relationship between the posthuman, past dictatorship, and present neoliberal policies by focusing on the figure of the hacker, a body whose own slippery virtual identities provide a site in which these three forces come into contact. However, while Gamerro's hacker is used symbolically, Felix's skills are more of a pretext to the different encounters with technology and with posthuman bodies, Paz Soldán employs a thorough knowledge of hacker culture in a nuanced consideration of the links between global markets, technology, codes, and the posthuman in contemporary Bolivia.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural constructions of the hacker figure invest it with a unique ability to signify being and representation of being, simultaneously. Douglas Thomas, in his study of hacker culture,

has explored extensively the ways in which hackers move between states of embodiment and disembodiment as they interface with computer technology in their quest to free information from the security that keeps it secret. On one level, they become their handles, the names they invent for their online personas that come to represent their achievements in software programming and in gaining access to secret systems. As society has become more aware of the presence of the hacker and of their influence on an increasingly computerized world, these figures have also morphed into the, at times impossible, menaces that tend to appear when a society is at the cusp of massive cultural shifts. That is, the hacker becomes a kind of wizard or guru who has access to knowledge that mere mortals are unable to attain. In that sense, the hacker ceases to be the body of the person and becomes the vague menace that can represent several forces and ideas, simultaneously. Due to his or her perceived ability to steal those codes that make up our financial identities, bank account numbers and passwords, credit card numbers, governmental identification numbers, and so on, the hacker comes to signify that metaphorical process at work in society where codes are identity, where bodies are constituted by the numbers and language that computers use to refer to them. The hacker, then, is that being that exults in this process, using names such as Phiber Optic and Acid Phreak and spelling that trades 3s for Es and Is for ls all in an effort to foreground their place in an evolving representational reality (Thomas 56–61). Paz Soldán uses this dynamic as a conduit for his exploration of this metaphorical reality where poststructuralist theories on the interconnections of language and reality culminate in a world where people are their pin numbers, hackers' bodies melt into their virtual avatars, and dictatorships recodify themselves as democratic governments dedicated to neoliberal policy.

*El delirio de Turing* uses computers and hacker culture as a pervasive backdrop to the events that occur. We find two story lines devoted to self-described hackers, the notorious leader of the Resistencia Kandinsky and, Miguel Saenz's daughter Flavia, webmaster of a page titled "TodoHacker." As we navigate the chapters devoted to these two characters we encounter various other hackers, all modeled on descriptions we find of hacker

culture in Thomas's work. We encounter, for example, Phiber Outcast, a self-identified script kitty who gives Kandinsky his start and attempts to persuade him to continue with the illegal hacking that has made them both rich. The name is a fairly clear reference to one of the more famous hackers of the 1990s (the aforementioned Phiber Optik), a move that shows both the author's familiarity with hacker lore as it serves to describe a character who is always derivative (A script kitty is a hacker who is unable to write his or her own code and, therefore, depends on the work of more skilled hackers in order to carry out intrusions of secure systems). Characters constantly access the Internet, chat on IRCs, and play in the Playground, a virtual reality world inspired by Neal Stephenson's *Metaverse* in his well-known novel *Snow Crash*, a novel Paz Soldán references with an epigraph. While *Turing* revolves around the impact of Albert and Saenz's work in the Cámara Negra under both iterations of the Montenegro regime, the computerized world of the hacker is omnipresent and literally infects the reality occupied by all of the interlacing stories and characters.

Paz Soldán presents Miguel Saenz as a kind of unwitting proto-hacker. While he certainly shares none of the revolutionary tendencies ascribed to hackers, he does exhibit several characteristics in common. We have already mentioned Saenz's alias "Turing," a nickname his boss Albert gives him assumedly based on his uncanny ability to decrypt the messages he receives as a part of his work. This moniker becomes Saenz's handle, a name that replaces his identity as Miguel Saenz, husband, father, and embodied individual with an identity that emphasizes his ability to decode, that conflates the man with his cryptographical ability—in a sense converting him into one of the codes that he cracks. The novel casts him in this vein from the beginning, presenting him first in the context of his work, decoding messages and, in particular, the email that accuses him of murder. Saenz, or Turing, is what he does, much as a hacker's online identity is based on his exploits rather than on any kind of embodied presence. The bilingual pun on his name (Saenz = Signs) only adds to the play of signifiers at the locus of the character.

Both the proto- and actual hackers inhabit a country navigating a new global culture and economy where people are

identified by their ability (or lack of ability) to consume goods and, in particular, to consume technology. Aside from Montenegro's corrupt government, neoliberal policies are also represented in the Playground—a multinational virtual computer world that charges its participants monthly fees to participate. Its arrival in Bolivia was heralded by advertisements and excitement and its reality is marked by more advertisements and surveillance software that makes sure that its citizens comply with the rules of commerce. The novel presents this virtual reality world in the following terms:

Hacía poco más de un año, tres adolescentes que acababan de graduarse del colegio San Ignacio se habían prestado dinero de sus papás para adquirir la franquicia del Playground para Bolivia. Creado por una corporación finlandesa, el Playground era al mismo tiempo un juego virtual y una comunidad en línea. Allí, cualquier individuo, por medio de una suma mensual básica—veinte dólares que podían convertirse en mucho más de acuerdo al tiempo de uso—creaba su avatar o utilizaba uno de los que el Playground ponía a la venta, e intentaba sobrevivir en un territorio apocalíptico gobernado con mano dura por una corporación. El año en que transcurría el juego era 2019. El Playground era exitoso en varios países; Bolivia no había sido la excepción. (72–73)

A little more than a year ago, three recent graduates from San Ignacio High School had borrowed money from their parents in order to acquire the rights to the Playground franchise for Bolivia. Created by a Finnish corporation, Playground was both a virtual game and an online community. There, for a modest monthly fee—twenty dollars, which could grow to much more, depending on the time you spent—anyone could create an avatar or use one of those that Playground put up for sale. The game takes place in the year 2019. Participants try to live in an apocalyptic land governed by the strong arm of a corporation. Playground's success in other countries was replicated in Bolivia. (58)

The Playground functions as a hyper-commercial, global entity, with virtual streets characterized by their advertisements for global brands such as Nike. The commercialism and consumerism extends far beyond the advertisements. Not only do people pay

for the privilege of “living” in the virtual city but the virtual characters they inhabit become themselves traded commodities, with people developing digital beings that are then sold to people who do not want to have to dedicate the time to starting the experience from scratch. The ubiquitous virtual prostitutes are, then, commodities on commodities as the avatars that sell themselves for cyber-sex have already been packaged and sold to their flesh-based operators. The Playground becomes an avatar of reality that attempts to supplant the “real realidad” that it recreates. Indeed, one of the most important rules of the Playground is that no one can make reference to its artificial nature. If anyone does so, the Playground police appear and expulse the avatar of the person making the illegal statement. With the inclusion of this police force, Paz Soldán suggests that the Playground recreates the kind of oppressive, disciplinary society that was explicitly used in the dictatorial iteration of Montenegro’s government and implicitly in the democratic version. The way in which both global capitalism and governmental discipline are reconstituted within the virtual playground allows the computerized reality to function as a metaphorical link between contemporary neoliberal regimes and the 1970s Operation Condor dictatorships. The computer code that creates the images and sounds of the Playground simultaneously point at the global trade and consumerism of neoliberal policy and at the restrictions on expression so widespread under the anticommunist dictatorships.

While all the characters are aware of the Playground, with everyone from Saenz complaining about his daughter’s bills to those government officials involved in Cámara Negra’s surveillance of possibly subversive activities, the hacker characters are those that we see interact within this virtual space. Their exploits in the Playground both establish the themes already seen even as they introduce other elements of the meditation on technology and identity that we see throughout the novel. The use of virtual characters as extensions of self introduces the concept of posthuman identity in the representation of the hacker. As Flavia and Kandinsky send these avatars of themselves into cyberspace, their identity shifts from one that is fundamentally corporeal and organic to one that exists at the interaction

between flesh and technology. Here the avatars become prosthetic bodies, arms, legs, and sexual organs made up of bytes that respond to the instructions that emanate from the organic bodies that direct them. This very obvious construction of posthuman identity is reinforced by a series of references throughout the novel that emphasize these characters' dependence on technological prostheses. Flavia is never without her cellular phone, a device she uses to view Lana Nova, the digital newscaster, as well as to access the Playground. She engages in cyber-sex via the Playground in a meeting that prefigures the physical erotic encounter with another hacker in an Internet café booth. Her room and her descriptions are always mediated by the technology that surrounds her. The same is true of Kandinsky and, as we read the chapters that make up his biography, we see a person whose reality is always configured according to his relationship with computers, his name (handle) a reference to a hacker whose work he appreciates. His very reputation depends on his use of various avatars, from the Playground "Recuperación" movement that is the digital avatar for his anti-globalist Resistencia to the various personas he inhabits—Kandinsky not the least of them. The fact that we never learn his real name, even when we see him in contact with his biological family, further emphasizes the presentation of Kandinsky as an identity that appears not within the body of the adolescent hacker but in his relationships with computers and with his various cyber-personalities.

In fact Kandinsky especially desires a "true" cyborg body to flesh out, as it were, his already very posthuman existence. At one point we find Kandinsky in a cyber-café, watching the clerk when he notices:

Esos días Kandinsky suele visitar Portal a la Realidad, un café Internet en el barrio de Bohemia. Lo atiende una joven con el brazo derecho de metal. Kandinsky la observa, desde lejos, alzar vasos de cristal con delicadeza, pasar las páginas de su agenda, teclear en la computadora. El brazo está controlado por el cerebro, aprende a moverse de manera intuitiva, reconoce las formas y las texturas de los objetos y se adapta a ellas. La joven tiene una cara redonda y sosa y un cuerpo plano, pero Kandinsky es seducido por ella, o acaso por la relación que tiene con su brazo.

Así quisiera relacionarse con su computadora, intuitivamente: programar códigos sin necesidad de usar el teclado. (190)

During that time Kandinsky went to Portal to Reality, an Internet café in the Bohemia district. He was waited on by a young woman with a metallic right arm. From afar, Kandinsky watched her delicately hold a glass, flip through the pages of her agenda, type on the keyboard. The arm was controlled by her brain, learned to move intuitively, recognized the shape and texture of objects and adapted to them. The young woman had a round, dull face and flat chest, but Kandinsky was drawn to her, or perhaps to the relationship she had with her arm. It was the kind of relationship that he would have liked to have with his computer—intuitive: to program without needing a keyboard. (157)

The waitress literally embodies that to which Kandinsky can only aspire, a cybernetic body in which the feedback loop between metal and flesh produces “intuitive” actions. The direct connection that Kandinsky makes between the girl’s arm and his computer further underscores his cyborg aspirations and the posthuman possibilities that his relationship with his computer presents. That Kandinsky sexualizes this attraction is also of note. The narrative makes it clear that Kandinsky’s desire is based specifically on the girl’s cybernetic nature, that the relationship that she has with her arm is not only one that he desires with his computer but one that he desires on an erotic level. Here, though, we do not see a repetition of the dynamic that we observed in Gamorro’s novel. Felix was already a literal cyborg and was attracted to Gloria without knowing her metaphorical position. Kandinsky merely desires the connection and anything related to it.

This presentation of the hacker figure as posthuman forges yet another connection with the old guard of Turing and Albert, an ex-Nazi and his superior at the Cámara Negra. Throughout the chapters dedicated to the ramblings of the senile Albert, we see him described more as a cyborg than as a human being. Note his initial presentation.

Mi nombre es Albert. Mi nombre no es Albert.

Nací...Hace. Muy. Poco.

Nunca nació... No tengo memoria de un principio. Soy algo que ocurre. Que siempre está ocurriendo... Que siempre ocurrirá. Soy. Un. Hombre. Consumido. Y. Terroso... Ojos. Grises... Barba. Gris... Rasgos. Singularmente. Vagos... Me. Manejo. Con. Fluidez. E. Ignorancia. En. Varias. Lenguas... Francés. Inglés. Alemán. Español. Portugués de Macao.

Estoy conectado a varios cables que me permiten vivir. Por la ventana de la habitación miro el fluir del día en la avenida...

No recuerdo de qué pueblo se trata... Pero la imagen está... Hay un niño. Que corre y corre.

No soy yo. No puedo ser yo... Yo no tengo infancia. Nunca la tuve... Soy una hormiga eléctrica. (31)

My name is Albert. My name is not Albert.

I was born... Not. Very. Long. Ago.

I was never born... I have no memory of a beginning. I am something that happens. That is always happening... That will always happen.

I. Am. An. Emaciated. Grimy. Man... Gray. Eyes... Gray. Beard... Singularly. Vague. Features... I. Express. Myself. With. Untutored. And. Uncorrected. Fluency. In. Several. Languages... French. English. German. Spanish. Portuguese from Macao.

I am connected to several wires that allow me to live. Through the window I watch the day pass by on the avenue... I don't remember which village it is... But the image is there... There's a boy. Who runs and runs.

It's not me, I can't be me... I have no childhood. I never have... I am an electric ant. (19)

As Paz Soldán describes the machinery surrounding Albert, we see created a kind of medicalized cyborg whose existence functions as a product of the failing organic body and the medical apparatuses that have fused with it. Albert's rejection of an infancy, of an existence outside of organic procreation, also configures him as posthuman; the lack of an origin myth, of a birth within a nuclear family to human parents, is one of the principal characteristics of posthuman identity, at least as critics such as Donna Haraway or Ira Livingston have described it.

Albert's presentation as flesh dependent upon tubes and machines raises a disturbing theme. Kandinsky and, to a lesser extent, Flavia are seen to fight against the neoliberal policies that have become avatars for the Montenegro dictatorship in the metaphorical flux of the novel. The cybernetic imagery that connects these iconoclastic hackers with the establishment undercuts the ability of Kandinsky to function as a kind of folk hero (in fact, Flavia spends most of the novel trying to prove that Kandinsky is as corrupt as the corporations and government against which he works). In the case of the moribund Albert, his cyborg nature is akin to a kind of virus that has infected his organic body. That is to say, his continued contact with the oppressive state via its obsession with decrypting coded messages has resulted in the kind of cybernetic monster that is dependent upon medical machinery.<sup>4</sup>

This vilification of technology and of the technological component of the posthuman, while not in keeping with the most recent theorizations of the cyborg, does fit within hacker representation and, specifically, self-representation. Thomas notes:

The hacker, unlike technology itself, which is almost exclusively coded as evil, is an undecidable character. Both hero and antihero, the hacker is both cause and remedy of social crises. As the narratives point out, there is always something dangerous about hacking, but there is also the possibility of salvation. While hacking is about technology, it is also always about the subversion of technology. (52)

Jon Adams concurs in his discussion of hacker literature, noting that one is as likely to see an anti-cyborg theme as one is to encounter the kind of subversive cyborgs that we see in the novels of writers such as Philip K. Dick and William Gibson (296). In this sense, Paz Soldán's choice of *Snow Crash* as the source of one of his epigraphs is once again pertinent as Hayles uses it as a counterexample to her generally positive vision of posthuman identity in science fiction literature. She observes, "So it is necessarily bad that humans and computers merge in this way? For Stephenson, apparently, the answer is 'yes.' For all

his playfulness and satiric jabs at white mainstream America, Stephenson clearly sees the arrival of the posthuman as a disaster” (1999: 276). The fact that much of the novel’s posthuman identities appear in the markedly neoliberal space of the Playground further suggests a vision of cyborg identity where the market forces that drive technological innovation and adoption are never overcome by the hybrid possibilities that the cyborg’s body promises to some. Indeed, the carpal tunnel syndrome that Kandinsky suffers functions as another indicator of the posthuman condition as a virus, one that damages the organic body rather than completing a new kind of identity.

The culmination of this condemnation of the posthuman hacker comes in Albert’s reasoning behind Saenz’s nickname Turing. He states:

Se me viene a la mente una imagen borrosa. La de Miguel Sáenz en su primer día de trabajo en la Cámara Negra. La espalda inclinada sobre el escritorio.

Me dio la impresión de un ser tan dedicado a su labor. Tan poco afecto a las distracciones... Que parecía una computadora universal de Turing... Todo lógica... Todo input... Y todo output... Ahí se me ocurrió bautizarlo como Turing.

Él siempre creyó que el apodo se debía a su talento para el criptoanálisis.

La razón era otra. (284)

A blurry image comes to mind. That of Miguel Sáenz on his first day of work at the Black Chamber. Hunched over his desk. He appeared to be so dedicated to his work. So unaffected by distractions... That he looked like a Universal Turing Machine... All logic. All input... All output... That’s when I decided to call him Turing.

He always thought that the nickname was because of his talent for cryptanalysis.

The real reason was different. (255)

The description of Turing, not as a genius of cryptography but as a Universal Turing Machine, becomes the ultimate condemnation of posthuman identity. Paz Soldán sets mechanistic thinking in opposition to mercy, equating it with a kind of

bureaucratic mindset that allows people to participate in murder without feeling any guilt or responsibility. While the organic bodies of Albert and Kandinsky are ravaged by technology, Saenz's conscience is presented as mechanical and, therefore, culpable. The different avatars of the technological reality, the extensions of the flesh found in the codes that both hide and reveal humanity, all those things that allowed Saenz and others to distance themselves from the organic bodies of the victims of the dictatorial regime, become symptoms of the deeper disease that the novel condemns—that tendency to forget the bodies of those affected by state terror. The hackers' representational undecidability links the technologies of dictatorship and of commerce and visits that linkage on the bodies of those that are caught within and contribute to those systems.

If in *Sueños digitales* the attack on human bodies came through their photographic digitization, here the attack on organic subjectivity comes as bodies are reduced to codes and ciphers. The lives of the revolutionaries that were murdered because of Saenz's works were made palatable to Saenz precisely because their flesh could be converted into the codes that could hide their identities and plans. The murders that occur as part of Kandinsky's resistance were made possible because of the computer codes and virtual avatars that obscured their organic bodies. Once again, though, we see violence and the posthuman body as essential symbolic connections between the neoliberal technology of the 1990s and 2000s and the practices of the dictatorships of the 1970s. The danger of forgetting or obscuring the past is overcome if one has the ability to read the codes inscribed in the posthuman bodies that remain.

Both Paz Soldán and Gamberro create posthuman, Latin American, hackers that extend and challenge the U.S. visions of both posthuman identity and the representation of hacker culture. We do not see the standard cyborgs of science fiction, menacing creations of a culture with too much faith in technology, nor do we see an acting out of Haraway's cyborg myth. What we do see are the inevitable results of an abusive culture that appears either as dictatorship or as neoliberal regime, but always in conjunction with technology. These posthumans are survivors, scarred by their experiences and left as texts of flesh

and metal that can subvert the authoritative structures that engendered them because they remain and can use their bodies as testimony in acts of “ciberhactivismo,” for, even in the case of Paz Soldán’s more pessimistic view, we still have ravaged bodies whose technological infections cannot be silenced. Hayles concludes her book with the following passage: “Although some current versions of the posthuman point toward the anti-human and the apocalyptic, we can craft others that will be conducive to the long-range survival of humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share the planet and ourselves” (1999: 291). The posthuman bodies we see in these novels sidestep the dichotomy that Hayles suggests, they are neither apocalyptic nor are they wholly positive. They are certainly not antihuman; indeed, they suggest a vision of humanity where the combination of the mechanical and the organic assures the survival of both the individual and the subversive story that the individual has to tell. By including hackers in the mix, Paz Soldán and Gamerro extend this post-human mythology by including a cyborg body that is not only a text but also a reader who can hack the codes imprinted on the flesh of the victims of political and economic trauma.