

# Juan Queiroz

*The following dialogue is excerpted from conversations we had with Juan Queiroz—a queer archivist, activist, scholar, and editor from Buenos Aires—through email and WhatsApp audio messages in May 2020. The exchange took place in Spanish and was translated into English by Patricio Orellana.*

**Curators** How did you begin your archive and the web page *Moléculas Malucas*?

**Juan Queiroz** In 2015, I felt the need to create an archive that would preserve and rescue the memory of our lesbian, trans, and gay ancestors. I was doing research about the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina, visiting activists from the 1970s who still had ephemera and documents full of historical information about the movement, and about the vida marica [fag life] from the period of anti-homosexual persecution, when cops would repress our community violently. I saw a huge potential that was at risk of disappearing in the near future if nothing was done. But the archival drive had always been present in my life. I have been gathering materials related to my homosexual journey since I was 15—pamphlets, posters, books, magazines, and other documents of gay movements. Early on, I started to preserve and take care of them. In 1984, when I was 15, I came out to my father, who I was living with at the time. He was involved in politics, so our house was always full of left-wing activists, and homophobic comments, both by him and his comrades, were very common. He saw my coming out—his oldest son, a faggot—as an affront to his machismo. In part, that is what it was.

After that, my life turned into hell. He controlled me like a policeman. He didn't allow phone calls from my male friends. I had to cut off my contact with friends, some of whom were dying of Aids and I was not even able to say goodbye. And I want to point out that when I write Aids, I don't capitalize it, which I see as a symbolic gesture of

undermining the power of the illness, which was and is still causing harm and killing so many people in my community. When I said undermining I don't mean to minimize the disease but to treat it less respectfully, because it massacred my community. In that context, in a secret way, I started to collect ephemera about homosexuality—papers that I would get in my clandestine yires [cruises] through teteras [places for queer anonymous sex] and the streets of Buenos Aires. I kept these papers hidden in my room, in a tiny secret space between a drawer and the floor. The Argentine gay publication *Diferentes* (1984–1986), which I still have, was my way of escape—the only reading material that didn't make me feel that I was a weirdo. From a visit to the bathrooms of Retiro Station in 1982, I still have a dirty pamphlet addressed to gays that gave information about how to act in the event they were detained by the police. I was a kid, and that warning, about the dangers of being caught, left a mark of terror in my mind. I had not had homosexual relationships yet, but I was starting to understand that I was not simply confused, I was a homosexual. I kept that pamphlet as an omen. From that moment on, everything I saw that connected to gay, lesbian, or trans issues, I would keep it. That is something that I still do today.

Last year, in mid-2019, I returned to the idea of creating an independent archive, one that didn't depend on an institution. I feel an irresistible need to share these materials, to make them public. I think of it as archive-activism. At the same time, letting it be a personal endeavor which does not depend on any institution, I retain the right to refuse access to homophobic people or, to give a specific example, film or advertising production companies that want to poke around our histories but only with commercial interests. That kind of anthropologic cis-hetero gaze over our history upsets me. And the capitalist exploitation of our history of persecution is scandalous. It is something I saw when I visited New York during Stonewall's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. All the shops in Manhattan were full of pride flags. Every time I entered one

of them, I would say, “thank you for joining our cause, how many trans employees do you have in this company?”

On top of the project of the archive, I also had the idea of creating a publication about queer archives that I would call *Les Amoraes* (amorales [amoral] was the term used by the police and the cis-hetero mass media when they referred to our identities). But when I was about to launch it, I found out about another project with the same title, so I changed the name to *Moléculas Malucas*, which comes from a small study and activist group created by Néstor Perlongher and Jorge Beloqui in São Paulo in 1982. In March 2020, we were surprised by the pandemic and the quarantine, so I decided to start the publication in virtual format—not only because of these limitations, but also because I wanted something that would have a longer life than a paper publication. I brought in my friend, the queer and feminist activist Mabel Bellucci, to be part of a collective editorial board, and together we've been calling LGBT scholars, journalists, trans sex workers, and activists to share texts and testimonies. Often we use images from my collection and other archives. Mabel's queer and feminist archive is absolutely crucial, containing collections of feminist magazines from Buenos Aires in the 1980s and 1990s, materials about the fight to legalize abortion, anarchist publications, and documents on the LGBT community since the 1980s.

**C** In the past, you've mentioned that an LGBT documentation center should not be handled by cis-hetero people, because although they can take care of the materials, to some extent they don't have the same bond with the material that you might, as a member of that community.

**JQ** Absolutely. I think that the bond you have with the materials impacts the type of care you can provide. Imagine a Black movement archive managed by white people, or an archive of the Jewish community managed by a Roman Catholic apostolic person. Imagine if the Lesbian Herstory

Archives were managed by heterosexual women. There is something there that doesn't seem right. I think that the sexually dissident subjectivity of the people that manage an LGBTQ archive is a crucial contribution; there is a type of knowledge based on personal experience, a sort of community and kinship one can form with the archives of people that have lived, and suffered, similar histories to one's own.

Going back to the question, I think that a document related to our history has a meaning, an echo that impacts us differently. Certain signs, representations, documents, or texts that articulate tensions and a history of oppression will never be understood the same way by a cis-hetero person. This doesn't mean that there are gays, lesbians, and trans people who can't have fascist ideas. There are also gays and lesbians who are transphobic. It also does not mean that a cis-hetero person in a public institution will always mistreat these materials. And, also, it does not mean that there are no public institutions such as universities or public libraries that can preserve our materials well. But they will definitely relate to the materials with the distance of a history that is not theirs.

In my case, I can understand the clandestine aspect of the dirty pamphlet I found in Retiro, and all the work and risk implied in distributing it, because clandestinity and fear marked and ruined a part of my life in my family home and, in a city like Buenos Aires, where our youth was marked by an eternal sense of affective precariousness, solitude, and orphanhood. When I was 16, for example, I was detained by the police because I was talking to a boy at night on the corner of Ayacucho and Santa Fe streets, a crucial point of cruising in Buenos Aires. In 1985, I was taken to the police station by the Morality Division of the Police alongside a group of locas [fags] after a raid at a club called Line. What that pamphlet said resonates so much with part of my history, and a cis-hetero person will not understand that, no matter how hard they try. They never had to hide or con-

ceal or disguise or make their sexuality clandestine, simply because they were beneficiaries of that regime of oppression against our dissidence. The relationship that I feel towards a document about the abolition of anti-homosexuality edicts cannot be the same as someone who only saw that reality in the distance, maybe as a witness, but not as a participant.

These materials have different inscriptions for us than for cis-hetero people. Some institutions that hold these materials distribute them with watermarks, which I think is a symbolic appropriation of our history—something I oppose categorically. Archives and institutions are supposed to take care of those materials, but not put marks that connote property. That is why I want to create an archive of materials related to our history that is accompanied and taken care of by people and scholars who are steeped in that reality from their personal experiences, or genealogically and emotionally related to the struggles of our ancestors.

**C** Is there any specific practice that you have in mind when you differentiate these modes of archiving?

**JQ** I classify according to the names of persons, movements, or publications. When it is a personal archive, I use their names, but only if the people themselves used their names when they were activists. Otherwise, I only use initials. There are cases in which we cannot fully confirm that someone was able to come out, or whether they would have chosen a different way of life. My instinct is to do all possible research, uncover all the information possible, because there might be a clue in what I discover that fits into the larger puzzle of our history, which is oftentimes so hard to piece together. So, sometimes I try to go as far as I can to find missing information, like last names—sometimes even Google can take you to interesting places related to our history when you begin by searching only for that missing name. But, on the other hand, I feel like keeping some obstacles in the archive helps preserve the nature of queer history,

because that is what gave it its identity—the omissions, the deletions, the silences caused by fear—and respecting those omissions is to some extent respecting our history. In part we survived our unlawfulness and persecution through enigma, and that enigmatic past shaped our history, a history of complexity. Sometimes I think that refusing to respond to external demands for transparency, clarity, and overexposure—all of which insist on revealing the keys of our silence—can be a form of resistance, a queer mode of archiving. As an example, it happened to me that one of the archives that I acquired was given to me on the condition that some of its documents (which include personal stories) can only be made public in 30 years, that is, when the person who gives the archive to me, as well as her siblings, will likely be dead.

I would also like to point out that, in my country, queer archives have a much lower survival rate than other social and political movements. They are much more fragile than any other archive. The genocide caused by Aids—due to the criminal inactivity of politicians and the complicit silence of society, the church and the mass media—took away hundreds of our ancestors. These were times in which same-sex marriage was unthinkable, and even less that we could have kids. Many times, if someone was sick, they would kick their partners out of the house. People were buried in an utmost solitude. All documents, photos, letters, ephemera belonging to these people were thrown into the garbage. In many cases (especially among the middle class) parents, siblings and relatives of those who died would keep only a handful of documents—house deeds, bank statements, car ownership titles. The rest of the papers were thrown out, as they were stains on the image of the family. There was also real terror, especially under military dictatorships, because having any paper that was evidenced of sexual deviance could send you to jail for months. People had to go into sexual exile, they had to travel with the least possible evidence of their sexuality. These are the reasons why our archives

have a history of destruction, and they speak about their fragility over time.

**C** Can you tell us about the Third World Gay Revolution group. How did you find out about them?

**JQ** I was doing research on the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina. In the only issue of a publication called *Homosexuales* from July 1973—which is a unique archival piece—they reproduce the TWGR [Third World Gay Revolution] manifesto, “Los oprimidos no se convertirán en opresores,” which was credited as authored by “Grupo de Homosexuales Negros y Latinoamericanos de Nueva York,” but in the end it said “Third World Gay Revolution.” That rather ostentatious name and the gesture of crossing borders caught my attention, so I started to look into its origin. Without it being my initial intention, I ended up tracing the group’s chronology, from its origin to its dissolution. I plan to publish this story on the *Moléculas Malucas* website soon.<sup>1</sup> Until now, nobody has bothered to write about that small group.

**C** How did those publications come to Argentina?

**JQ** There were two Argentine members that were key in the formation of the group, Juan Carlos Vidal and Néstor Latrónico. The group was short lived (1970–1971). Latrónico and Vidal came to Buenos Aires separately, though both in 1973, and then joined the Grupo Eros of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual, bringing along their experience in the TWGR and other groups in the gay movement both in terms of activism and graphic design. That experience influenced

<sup>1</sup> This story will be made available at <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/el-third-world-gay-revolution>

the clandestine publication *Somos*,<sup>2</sup> which was based on an idea by Latrónico.

**C** Then the group morphed to one called, Latin Gay Revolution. How did that happen?

**JQ** The Latin Gay Revolution only lasted for a few months and was created simultaneously with the dissolution of the TWGR. Latrónico and Vidal created it, and it was them and other people from Cuba and Puerto Rico. They only produced one document, a public letter addressed to white American gays, where they questioned them about their blindness to the oppressions suffered by Third World *compañeros*, and to the repression of gays in Castro's Cuba. After that experience, some members of this group, in April 1972, produced *Afuera*, a journal directed by Latrónico and Vidal, with a clearer activist perspective, with texts about sexual politics, but also illustrations and poems. And there they published a statement by the FLH of Argentina, which they would join the year after, when they returned to the country.

**C** We're really interested in the use of the term "Third World." Were there more gay activists using it around the 1970s and 1980s?

**JQ** At least in Argentina, the only time I saw it used was in the texts by the TWGR. They also used it when they translated the lesbian manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman," written by Radicalesbianas in 1970, which was published in the first issue of *Somos*, in 1973, translated by Latrónico under the name Revolución Homosexual del Tercer Mundo.

<sup>2</sup> *Somos* was a journal published by the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina between 1971 and 1976. Amongst their collaborators were Néstor Latrónico, who had been part of the Third World Gay Revolution group in New York (1970–1971), as well as prominent Argentine poet, scholar, and activist Néstor Perlongher.

**C** You also found letters written by Juan Carlos. Did you find anything interesting about the creation of the group in those letters?

**JQ** Juan Carlos Vidal and Néstor Latrónico arrived in NY in 1968. First they lived in the Lower East Side, where they had friends from Puerto Rico, and were in touch with members of the Young Lords. Then they moved to Brooklyn, where Juan Carlos had a silk screen machine, and he started doing serigraphy works for the Young Lords, which he did from 1969 to 1971. Actually, "What We Want, What We Believe" (1970), their first proclamation with the Third World Gay Revolution group, is based on similar platforms by the Black Panthers from 1966 and the Young Lords from 1969, but adapted to the realities of gay, trans and lesbians people. In his letters from New York to his family from 1971, Juan Carlos announced that he was creating a group with revolutionary artists and writers from Latin America and that they intended to publish a magazine. That magazine is *Afuera*, which they published the year after. Juan Carlos thought that true change could only happen with a popular revolution, and he supported explicitly armed struggle. The visuals he made for the TWGR makes this posture clear.

**Juan Queiroz (b. 1969, Buenos Aires) currently co-manages the online publication Moléculas Malucas (moleculasmalucas.com) and is gathering an archive with documents related to sexual dissidences.**