

Fragments of a Cuir Cartography

Luis Barraza Cárdenas

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abstract

Fragments of a *Cuir* Cartography is a hybrid of theory and embodied narrative, exploring how *cuir* bodies move through, resist, and reconfigure space. This text fractures and rewrites the map—offering a *dérive* through memory, cities, and architectures of surveillance that shape *cuir* existence. By examining embodied geographies, it reveals how the closet operates not just as metaphor but as a spatial infrastructure of control, a system that dictates who moves freely, who must justify their presence, and where desire is allowed to exist. It interrogates how *cuir* bodies navigate the interstices of the city, from locker rooms and darkrooms to digital spaces and neon-lit streets, inhabiting the threshold between visibility and disappearance. This work engages with critical theories of power, space, and queer embodiment, using them not just as references but as tools for dismantling the normative grammars of urbanism, mobility, and desire. It moves beyond categorization, embracing fragments, contradictions, and the tension between resistance and surrender—challenging the idea that *cuir* existence must always be either legible or oppositional. If traditional cartography seeks to fix territory, this essay shatters it. If theory seeks to contain desire, here, desire overflows theory. There is no map for what comes next—only scars as coordinates of survival. *Cuir* is not a place, nor a body, but a movement, a glitch, a way—multiple ways—of moving through the world.

keywords

queer space, queer phenomenology, theory-fiction, spatial politics, queer embodiment

Prelude

This text begins with a methodological disclaimer—not out of modesty, but as a deliberate acknowledgment of the partial, situated, and affective nature of knowledge. It does not offer certainty, only resonance. What follows is not a testimony, a manifesto, or a confession. It is not a theory of desire nor a moral cartography. It is not a universal account of the *cuir* experience. Rather, it is an exploration—a drifting through memory, desire, and space—shaped by fragments, distortions, and the ephemeral texture of embodied experience.

Some of what is written here I have witnessed. Some I have inherited through others: stories whispered in bars, in beds, in the trembling voices of those who offered me their memories. Some of it may be fiction. Some of it is undeniably real. But in the logic of *cuir* survival, the line between the two is not always relevant. This is not a claim to objectivity; it is a claim to felt truth. A kind of truth that resists empirical verification but insists on its own reality, nonetheless.

If every story is a betrayal of itself—as language often is—then this betrayal is intentional, methodological, and necessary. The poetic and narrative passages that follow do not stand outside theory; they are its raw material. They function as evidence, as method, as the lived underside of abstract frameworks.

Note on Terminology: Why *Cuir* Instead of Queer?

The decision to use *cuir* rather than queer in this text is intentional. *Cuir* is a decolonial reworking of queer, emerging from Latin American contexts to challenge the dominance of Anglo-centric perspectives in gender and sexuality discourses. This linguistic shift acknowledges the specificities of *cuir* identities and experiences in contexts shaped by colonial histories, racialization, and local resistance movements. It is a gesture of linguistic and political autonomy—an assertion that the ways we name ourselves also shape the ways we exist in the world.

My position is not universal; it is situated, affective, and partial. I write from within this fracture—northern, Mexican, *cuir*,—navigating spaces shaped by overlapping systems of power and erasure. The cities and socio-cultural territories that appear in this text—from Buenos Aires to New Delhi—go beyond setting, they are characters. They orchestrate how bodies move, how racialization structures desire, what forms of longing are permitted, and how shame is taught or inherited.

Fragment I: Thresholds—What Is Not Named Still Exists

...there is no queer space, there are only spaces put to queer uses.”
George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public’: Gay Uses of the Streets”

What is not named still exists. What is named, too, becomes blurred. The *cuir* body begins as a territory irreducible to any imposed formula, resisting classification and containment. Shame is not easily stripped away; it lingers in movement, in the learned negotiations of space, in the silent defiance embedded within every step. Each act of navigation becomes a form of resistance—furtive, unspoken, yet deeply intentional. In cities that do not account for them, *cuir* bodies occupy space through calculated presence, unsettling the boundaries of belonging.

If the body were merely flesh, physical visibility would be enough. But meaning is inscribed beyond the surface, in what remains unreflected, in the distortions of mirrors that mark certain existences as deviations—anomalies of an order never designed to hold them.

What is not named still exists.

And yet, what exists does not always have the right to be spoken.

Cuir is not a fixed identity but a way of being in the world. It is inhabiting the detours, moving through the in-betweens, disobeying mapped-out paths. It is both an escape and a fracture. It is learning to navigate a city that encodes which bodies can exist without question, and which require a perpetual amendment.

There are no conclusions or fixed truths in these pages—only traces of something that eludes capture yet insists on existing.

Knowledge is always situated—what is known, and how it is named, depends on who is speaking from where, and within which structures of power. Categories are not neutral; they function as mechanisms of legibility and control, shaping the ways bodies and desires are recognized or erased. *Cuir* existence does not fit neatly within these structures—it is not merely adjacent to queerness, but embedded within it, expanding and challenging its boundaries.

Yet, I know that people need labels. Words make us manageable, turn us into something legible. For the sake of convenience—because the world still wants to fit desire into binary categories—I sometimes say I am bisexual. Not because the word suffices, but because it saves me the fatigue of explanation, the need to justify my desire to strangers. If I am honest, bisexuality is not enough either. My desire is a glitch in the machine of language. It does not fit into predefined codes. There are other, more expansive words, but to name them is to give an unsolicited lecture on sexuality every time someone asks who I sleep with. I prefer to spare myself the effort.

From there, my identity takes shape in response to social expectation, molded not by choice but by necessity. I do not retreat to the margins willingly, but because the world is either unprepared—or unwilling—to contend with more complex truths. I do not resent this reality, but I recognize it. In a world where existence itself is often a negotiation, inhabiting oneself becomes an act of constant balance—between authenticity and survival, between who I am and who others insist I should be.

But there is a moment—a fraction of a second before someone asks, before I must offer a digestible answer—when I exist without a name, without translation.

A second in which the body is simply body, where desire does not need to be tamed, where the history imposed upon me does not yet reach to ensnare me.

That interstice, that sliver of freedom lasting only a blink, is the only space that truly belongs to me.

Fragment II: Territories—*The Body as Contested Ground*

The body is not neutral; it is not a blank slate onto which culture simply writes its codes. Rather, it is a contested site of meaning, a space where power, resistance, and identity constantly intersect and reconfigure.

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*

Before desire was named, before identity could be claimed, the body was already under surveillance. They called me *maricón* before I even knew what the word meant—before I even knew I had a body that could be perceived as wrong.

Not in those exact words, perhaps, but they said it in other ways. They said it the first time they saw me—my skin rosier than my sister's, their murmurs disguised as praise: "how pretty, he looks like a girl."

They said it in the way they looked at my mother, suspicion hanging in the air, as if my existence had already been foretold. In the uneasy glances when I played with dolls instead of toy cars. In the urgency with which they corrected my voice, my posture, the way I looked at other boys. In the nervous tone of someone who, without realizing it, revealed the future I had yet to understand. And in the unspoken warning that a body is never just flesh and bone, but also expectation, burden, and duty.

The first time I realized my body was a problem, I didn't even understand why. I felt it in my father's gaze when he saw me cross my legs the wrong way. I heard it in the laughter of boys in the schoolyard when they called me *maricón*, without even fully knowing what they meant.

The term *maricón*—(adjective & noun) originally an augmentative of *marica*, now most often used to describe a homosexual man or one perceived as effeminate—arrives before any self-knowledge, before love, before touch. A slur that precedes the formation of desire, shaping it retroactively through shame.

A word no child should hear before falling in love for the first time.

At first, I tried to correct myself. I trained my back to remain upright, my voice to stay at pitch, my laughter to be quieter. Shame embedded itself not through public denouncements, but through whispers, shoves, and the quiet refusal of recognition.

Silence from adults was its most powerful transmission—permission disguised as passivity.

The body becomes the first geography of fear, a map inscribed not by the self but by external surveillance. It is contorted, disciplined, made quieter to avoid notice. I learned to correct my movements long before I learned to spell my own name. Yet the body betrays even the most rigorous discipline. It speaks even in silence, and perhaps most powerfully when silenced.

From early childhood, the *cuir* body becomes a territory mapped by others. Its borders are imposed; its movements surveilled. As Michel Foucault (1978) asserts in *The History of Sexuality*, the body is not a passive container but a surface where power is enacted and contested. *Cuir* embodiment reveals this most starkly: every gesture, every spatial occupation, becomes a site of potential discipline.

If traditional planning imagines mobility as an optimization of flows, the *cuir* body learns to navigate space through an entirely different logic—one grounded in risk, exposure, and strategic withdrawal. *Cuir* mobility is not simply movement, but an affective choreography: the avoidance of hostile gazes, the silent recalibration of spatial presence, the deliberate folding and unfolding of desire.

Urban space has never been neutral. Its infrastructures—material and symbolic—are constructed around normative bodies: the heteronormative couple, the nuclear family, the productive citizen. Within this logic, *cuir* desire remains peripheral—tolerated, at best, only in shadows.

This spatial exclusion demands a series of questions central to both urban theory and queer phenomenology: Where does desire take root when denied legitimacy in the city's design? Which spaces permit unfettered movement, and which impose correction? How do *cuir* subjects negotiate the overlapping cartographies of fear, discipline, and longing?

To inhabit a *cuir* body is to navigate not just space, but the politics of visibility. It is to move through the world with both caution and intent—seeking pleasure without permission, and presence without justification.

Fragment III: Labyrinths—*The Omnipresence of the Closet*

The closet is not merely a metaphorical space; it constitutes an architecture of regulation, a labyrinth of interconnected zones that shape not only where and how bodies exist but also the trajectories they must follow. The closet operates

through layered mechanisms of surveillance and discipline—codes of conduct, spatial geographies of the permitted and the clandestine, and the unspoken norms that structure visibility and erasure. Long before the articulation of desire—before the subject even acquires language—the closet inscribes itself onto the body as a site of negotiation and constraint.

The architecture of control manifests early in socialization, particularly in gendered spaces such as locker rooms and communal showers. These serve as initial borders—zones of heightened regulation where the body becomes both spectacle and threat according to the dictates of normative masculinity. For some, these are transitional spaces; for others, they are theatres of discipline. Within them, the *cuir* body learns to modulate gestures, to avoid sustained eye contact, to choreograph presence in ways that minimize risk. The gaze, posture, even the direction of one's glance becomes tactical decisions, informed by an embodied awareness of vulnerability. What emerges is a form of spatial literacy—a practice of reading environments as maps of potential exposure or harm.

This surveillance does not dissolve with age; it simply mutates. The absence of formal authority does not dismantle the closet—it reconfigures it. In locker rooms, saunas, or similar semi-public spaces, regulation persists through the informal but powerful force of heteronormative codes. These are spaces ostensibly shared, yet they remain sites where *cuir* bodies are hypervisible and persistently policed. Desire itself is forced into an ethics of discretion, where the line between invitation and violation is perilously thin. Even a glance may be construed as transgressive—an indication of deviance, a trigger for correction.

Cuir subjects are thus made to navigate between exposure and erasure, within spaces that were never designed for them. Paradoxically, within the rigid performativity of masculinity, heterosexual men often enjoy greater fluidity in experimenting with embodiment, while queer and trans bodies are persistently rendered suspect—scrutinized for signs of excess, impropriety, or risk.

This spatial dynamic is anchored in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) has termed the epistemology of the closet: not a static division between in and out, but a system of knowledge and power. The closet is not solely a condition of silence or secrecy, but a complex grid that governs who may speak, who must justify their presence, and under what conditions one is allowed to be intelligible.

Importantly, the closet is not a fixed space but a shifting infrastructure. It operates discursively and spatially—not through confinement but through internalized regulation. It is less a door than a corridor—an infinite sequence of rooms in which identity must constantly be recalibrated according to shifting social codes. It structures the geography of everyday life, governing not just bodies but the very terms under which space can be occupied.

To inhabit a *cuir* body, then, is to dwell in a condition of spatial precarity. The city becomes a map of conditional permissions—a fragmented terrain marked by zones of risk, negotiation, and momentary reprieve. While public discourse may extol urban inclusivity, the lived experience of queer mobility is more accurately described as tactical: a process of continuous assessment, withdrawal, and improvisation.

Before I learned to love my body, I learned to flee with it. To preempt judgment, to withhold gesture, to scan every environment for signs of threat. My body became a map of evasions and approximations—always somewhere, never fully claimed.

And yet, this body remains a site of resistance. My desire is a glitch in the code of normative performance—a record of every moment it refused compliance; of all the ways it has persisted despite being deemed illegible.

They called me *maricón* before I could understand and still, shaped by architectures designed to erase me, this body still walks. Every step fractures the concrete logic of exclusion.

And it is in those very fractures that the next geography begins.

Fragment IV: Folds—Clandestine Geographies

Queer spaces are, by definition, sites of tension—simultaneously ephemeral and resilient, both hidden and hyper-visible. They exist in the interstices of the urban fabric, as forms of resistance against the normative ordering of space.

Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*

Urban space has long been positioned as a site of possibility—a locus of freedom, expression, and pluralism. We are told the city belongs to all of us, that its streets are democratic, its public spaces inclusive. But for cuir subjects, these promises often dissolve upon contact. The hospitality of the city is conditional; its openness

is tempered by unwritten codes and spatial exclusions that determine who may dwell, desire, and exist without surveillance.

Some bodies move through the city with ease, unmarked and unchallenged. Others—queer, racialized, gender-nonconforming—learn early to traverse it with caution, conducting invisible calculations of risk, proximity, and visibility. The geography of the city is not neutral terrain but a field of regulation, encoded with tacit boundaries: not every street is safe; not every space is available for desire.

In his theorization of non-places, Marc Augé (1995) defines them as spaces of circulation and transience—airports, highways, hotel lobbies—designed for movement rather than belonging. For *cuir* bodies, however, the entire city often functions as a non-place. Existence itself becomes a form of transit, shaped less by arrival than by evasion. Desire, when it exceeds normative codes, is relegated to the margins: to the park after dark, the restroom stall, the backseat of a car. These are not sites of permanence, but of fleeting occupancy—moments that must vanish before they are recognized, gestures that must remain untraceable.

Yet these non-places, though not meant for memory, accumulate it, nonetheless. They form what might be called a clandestine cartography—a lived geography of longing, mapped through absence. These transient spaces become repositories of intimacy and survival, even as they remain publicly disavowed.

Crucially, desire in these spaces is not aimless—it is tactical. The *cuir* subject navigates the city with a spatial intelligence shaped by precarity. Movement becomes a method of deciphering unspoken norms: where one may linger, where desire might unfold, where silence offers safety, and where it renders one vulnerable. The act of walking becomes a practice of spatial literacy—an embodied reading of power, danger, and possibility.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2006) formulation of queer phenomenology, we must understand that space is never neutral. The city is always already oriented—its architectures are loaded with expectations of how bodies should move, appear, and relate. For *cuir* and trans bodies, spatial navigation is never incidental. It is an act of reading: identifying thresholds, mapping escape routes, and locating ephemeral zones where desire can briefly unfold without consequence.

By day, the city performs inclusion. Public parks, pedestrian promenades, and cycle-friendly infrastructure promote a vision of accessibility and order. But by night, a different cartography emerges. Normativity retracts, and the fractures of urban space reveal another terrain—where *cuir* desire negotiates improvised sanctuaries and touches are exchanged in the half-light of risk.

If the normative city demands dissimulation, it also leaves behind traces—cracks in its design that permit alternative orientations. These are the minor contours of *cuir* survival: spatial tactics that do not ask for legitimacy, only for a moment of unpoliced presence.

The non-place, then, is reimagined—not only as a zone of transit, but as a threshold of possibility. A site where bodies that are not meant to belong insist on existing anyway.

Fragment V: Descent—*The Rhythms of Risk*

Queer desire has always had to invent its own spaces, its own maps of possibility. Whether in parks, bars, or digital landscapes, these encounters are never just about pleasure—they are also about survival, about the negotiation of visibility and risk.”

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*

Within the urban fabric, *cuir* bars function as spatial exceptions—liminal enclaves that temporarily suspend the normative logics of visibility, surveillance, and regulation. While Marc Augé’s (1995) notion of non-places frames airports or highways as zones of transience devoid of identity, *cuir* bars invert this function: they are ephemeral sites of recognition, collectivity, and desire, yet ones whose existence remains structurally precarious. Their temporality is bound not to infrastructure, but to affect—held together by music, darkness, and the tacit agreement that here, for now, other rules may apply.

These sites are not stable institutions; rather, they operate as parenthetical spaces within the dominant urban syntax. Like public restrooms or nocturnal parks, they are spatial interruptions—counter-architectures in a city that otherwise allocates space according to heterosexual, reproductive, and capitalist logics. Their subcultural durability is not guaranteed by legal recognition but by repetition, memory, and risk. They are at once real and metaphorical, existing both in bodies and in place, both in rupture and repetition.

The first time I entered a gay club alone, what surfaced was not merely fear of violence—though that, too, was ambient—but a subtler, more intimate form of apprehension: the fear of being truly seen. Not surveillance in the Foucauldian sense, but a *cuir* visibility—one that exposes the self not as an object of discipline, but as a potential site of desire. To be rendered legible in this way is to momentarily shed the protective blur of everyday heteronormativity and become a body among other bodies—no longer passing, no longer peripheral.

One night in Budapest remains inscribed in my memory. I walked alone through the city's fractured terrain, bypassing the safety of public transport. I found, almost by accident, an unmarked door tucked into the architecture of the Jewish quarter. Outside, a group of young men lingered—performing an unapologetic kind of beauty, bodies curated for attention. I was not seen by them, but their mere presence confirmed that a space for desire, however transient, existed. I entered.

Crossing the threshold marked an atmospheric shift. Inside, the air was dense with humidity and sweat. Bodies moved not linearly but rhythmically, attuned to something beyond choreography—a sensual counter-temporality. In that moment, I felt a fleeting liberation from the surveillance that usually governed my gestures. But this sense of freedom was, I would soon realize, both conditional and illusory. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) theorized in *Epistemology of the Closet*, the closet is not merely a container of secrets but a regime of knowledge—a structure that governs not only what may be known but how knowing occurs. Within *cuir* bars, the closet is not dismantled; it is reconfigured. The social contract of the space shifts from repression to performance. The question ceases to be whether one is “in” or “out,” but rather what kinds of selves are legible within the temporary sovereignty of the club.

These spaces, then, are simultaneously sites of refuge and regulation. Judith Butler's (1993) theory of performativity remains operative here: gender and desire are not undone but re-staged, often under intensified scrutiny. Within these zones, new taxonomies of embodiment emerge—bears, otters, jocks, twink. *Chacales*, *chichifos*, *papis*. Femmes, masc, trans, *vestidas*, *dragas*. Top, bottom, dom, sub, pup. Each with their own semiotics, exclusions, and hierarchies. These are not merely playful labels, but cultural technologies that organize desire at its intersections with race, class, gender identity, and body aesthetics. Liberation is real—but so is stratification.

I came to understand these dynamics more fully years later, in Berlin. In a basement bar along Mulackstraße, I found myself seated before a wall of mirrors and red leather. But in those reflections, there was no clarity—only distortion: of self, of belonging, of the tacit codes that structured the space. In this scene, linguistic fluency, aesthetic curation, and bodily comportment operated not merely as expressions of identity, but as social currencies that determined one's value and access.

Despite my best efforts to perform legibility, power circulated elsewhere—embedded in vocabularies I had not yet mastered, in cultural scripts I had not been taught to read. Alcohol—so often romanticized in *cuir* nightlife as a medium for freedom—revealed itself instead as a compensatory strategy. It numbed the awareness of exclusion. It accelerated what hesitation resisted. It narrowed the

space between desire and act, not by liberating the subject, but by momentarily suspending the burden of illegibility.

That night, I was kissed—or perhaps I kissed him. His attraction hovered ambiguously between sincerity and fetishization. My racialized body, within this space, was legible, but perhaps only through a lens of exoticism. His hand slid beneath my clothes with the casualness of entitlement, not intimacy. Around us, no one looked. What is policed in daylight often becomes normalized in the nocturnal economy of the club, where visibility bends and boundaries blur. Yet even here, anonymity is never complete. Shame does not vanish under strobe lights; it is merely suspended, waiting at the edges of each encounter.

I remained at the periphery of the darkroom—not out of disinterest, but out of something harder to name. Fear. Deference. Residual shame. Perhaps all of them at once. The threshold became not a point of entry, but a liminal space marked by irresolution. And that, perhaps, is the most insidious trait of the closet's architecture: its capacity for migration. We do not leave it behind as much as we carry it forward—embedded in gesture, in tone, in the minor hesitations that shape our daily negotiations of desire and safety.

That night marked a rupture. My body became an alien figure—vacillating between presence and performance, subject and spectacle. If desire is performative (and it is), the critical question becomes not whether performance is authentic, but whose gaze confers its reality.

Who is granted the authority to validate the performance of identity? And what forms of power determine when a body is allowed to simply be, rather than perform?

Fragment VI: Desire as Drift—Memory and Performance Cartographies

Memory is not an object that one possesses; it is an active, living force that shapes the body, the self, and the way we navigate the world. The past does not stay in the past—it inhabits us, written into our flesh.

Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*

Foucault's (1978) analysis of power inscribed on the body establishes that desire is not neutral—it is regulated, conditioned, historicized. bell hooks (2000) expands this further: desire is never experienced outside of race, gender, or structural inequality.

Some bodies are punished more harshly for their transgressions. For some, desire is not a deviation—it is already criminalized.

Desire, for *cuir* subjects, is rarely innocent. It arrives burdened—with shame, fear, and the internalized belief that pleasure must be earned through suffering. We seek it nonetheless: in the anonymous corners of the city, in the bodies of strangers, in the artificial glow of a screen. We learn that each encounter leaves a trace: not always visible, but always remembered. A scar, a scent, a specter long gone.

We are taught to desire in the dark. Told our pleasures are dangerous, we pursue them in secrecy. Told our love is not whole, so we take it in fragments. Still, we persist. Because desire is not extinguished—it is displaced, reformatted, archived in the flesh.

The body, as Cvetkovich (2003) proposes, becomes an archive of affective residues—desire, trauma, memory—all intertwined. It remembers what we might rather forget. The first time we loved. The first time we were ridiculed. The first history of violence, disguised as neglect.

Sex, for me, was not revelation—it was malpractice, or ambush. It unfolded on a night that began with freedom: dancing, intoxication, the feeling of being wanted. I surrendered to the moment without measuring my movements, for once unburdened by the gaze.

A handsome man, fashionably late, always in time for a nice fever dream. He found me on the dance floor to a choreography of reckless abandon. And the darkness, a willing accomplice. The righteous bodies parted like silk curtains. The lights cast angular shadows across his face, his cheekbones sculpted by basslines. Beautiful, or so they say. Wanting to believe I'd chosen him. But if I hadn't—had he chosen me? I followed, hungrily. The hunger of a man, or a beast. Man or beast? A beast, perhaps—fighting custody of a man who never found peace. And what is fasting without the temptation of a feast?

Up a spiral of crooked steps—an ironic metaphor I failed to read. Desire, feral and chemical, moved ahead of time and space.

His muscles knew its hunting tactics. Gracefully. Predators do not need to rehearse. I had seen this scene before from afar. Many times, before, from the other side. And yet I let myself be led, tethered to the musky scent at his neck—poison or ecstasy, I could not tell. Such is the trick of intoxication.

Even then, at the edge, I managed a whisper: No.

But *no* was not enough.

A pause. A breath. An almost.

Delirium. Betrayed with a last kiss. Easy to dismiss a dying hungry beast.

So, he killed me anyway. Not with feline violence enough to break, but slowly—on the cross of his bed, where I posed no resistance. Why now? I had spent my life resisting. What was one more death, if it came dressed in velvet and bliss?

And I came back. Despite the stabbing, the tears, the aftertaste of blood released. Not after the third day, but perhaps the third year.

No sacred heart was pierced in my name. No crows spared my eyes. A feast. No Madonna washed my feet.

No one wept for innocence, because men, they say, must save themselves.

The father did not forgive. The son never looked my way. The spirit felt everything but holy.

There is no canon without suffering;

Can a dead martyr feel any guilt?

Interlude—Dissonance

The body is a space of containment. A mutable archive where battles are waged between desire and prohibition, between what has been learned and what is intuited, between the right to exist and the expectation of concealment. As Sedgwick's (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet* makes clear, the closet is not a threshold one crosses once and for all—it is a regime of knowledge. A spatial logic. A grammar of the visible and the veiled. A system that governs how desire may be known, expressed, or denied.

That night, I was no longer inside the closet. But I was still governed by its architecture: the internalized caution, the guilt, the belief that pleasure must be paid for in shame. That desire, to be legitimate, must be endured rather than embraced.

The betrayal was not the act itself. It was the dissonance—between what my body felt and what it carried. Between pleasure and powerlessness. Between surrender

and silence. I did not fight. I did not flee. I allowed it—not because I consented, but because I had learned that silence could be a form of safety. That sometimes, staying quiet and keeping still felt less dangerous than resisting altogether.

I slept on the floor that night—not because there wasn't room in the bed, but because something in my skin could no longer bear to be touched. It took years to come to terms with what had happened. I stumbled upon it, in a book, the strangest thing. And it came back to me, like it was never gone. Now, there are times when I choose not to remember at all.

In the aftermath of an experience shaped by ambivalence and embodied vulnerability, it becomes exceedingly difficult to disentangle desire from harm. When desire precedes, coexists with, or even survives the moment of violation, the subject is left without a stable grammar through which to interpret what occurred. If part of me wanted what happened—if I returned, if I desired the person who transgressed—I am forced to confront the limits of conventional categories like abuse, consent, and misconduct. The question is not simply whether I said no, but whether my capacity to say no was structurally eroded by histories of silence, shame, and the internalized belief that pleasure, when it arrives, must always be negotiated through guilt. In this context, mourning becomes complicated—not because there is nothing to grieve, but because the grief itself is entangled with longing.

Desire, after all, is never pure. It arrives carrying history, doctrine, and embodied suspicion. It carries centuries of shame. What happened that night was not a singular event—it was the culmination of many things: the pressure to be wanted, the fragility of a first encounter, the myth that men should always say yes, and the silent legacy of *cuir* bodies that have learned to yield.

And yet, everyone around me told me it was just sex. That I would understand it better. That I would adapt. That my discomfort was part of the script.

But I was left confused. There is nothing more real than the leftover pain in your skin. The color of the bite marks that never healed. The lack of air in your lungs as you try hard to breathe. The irrational fear of dying, quietly, of carrying a curse undetectable inside your stream. It left me sleepless. Unable to touch or be touched without recoiling or decoupling it from power.

And still, I went back to him. I returned, even when I felt something was categorically wrong. I wanted him no less after he had crossed that boundary—not because I lacked clarity, but because I had learnt that the validation of desire sometimes comes at the expense of self-preservation.

For the *cuir* body, desire is never simple. It is not a clean attraction—it is a negotiation: between autonomy and submission, fear and want, trauma and yearning. To inhabit a *cuir* body is to live in contradiction. To hold history in one's muscle memory. To carry learned stillness in the bones. To inherit silence without asking for it.

That night, when he disregarded my *no*, it was not just my body that was present. I carried with me the unresolved inheritance of all the bodies that had learned to stay quiet. All the encounters are suspended in ambiguity. All the gestures that do not fit cleanly into categories of violence or desire.

Fragment VII: Desire as Drift—*Skin as Archive, Shame as Syntax*

Desire is not simple. It is saturated—with memory, with punishment, with longing, with fear.

Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*

I wake with theatrical resistance. I inhale not out of need, but protest. It is not breath—it is declaration. Not metaphor, but practice. My body has always breathed incompletely, haltingly, half-lit. It was not that I was denied air, but that air never arrived without condition. And still, I breathe.

That morning, it is not the residue of sex that unsettles me—it is guilt. Not guilt as emotion, but as atmosphere. A spatial imprint clinging to skin long after the sheets are cold. The room feels like aftermath. I move slowly, not out of fatigue, but reverence. Not for him, but for the shame that stirs when I dare to feel free.

This choreography is known to me. The morning after. The stretch met with silence. The skin that remembers. My body recoils from its own pleasure, still unpracticed in receiving it without debt. Still unsure whether desire is something to claim—or atone for.

Desire, for the *cuir* subject, affirms and entraps. It grants visibility, but never without taxation. It permits retrospectively, conditionally—if the aftermath aligns with legible norms. We are not taught to pursue desire, but to forage for it in unsanctioned corners: bathrooms, borrowed beds, private chats and public risks. We search as if this time it might not punish us.

And shame—shame is not what follows pleasure, but what shadows it. A cost that arrives with the very breath of want. A stain that lingers in the softest abandonments. For some, pleasure is an entitlement; for others, a negotiation that must be justified, then erased. Shame is not opposite to desire—it is its syntax.

In this dissonance, the body becomes an archive. Not just touch, but of the conditions that made touch possible. Mine remembers more than I want. It remembers the first time I was seen before I knew how to look back. The first time I gave in—not out of freedom, but because freedom had never been modeled without guilt. It remembers the dance floor where desire became surrender, and surrender became trap.

Ahmed (2006) reminds us: the body registers affect. Even when the mind forgets, the skin retains its record. And as Berlant (2011) warned us, desire is not clean. It is sticky. Structured by fantasy, yes—but also shaped by injury. My body flinches from both.

I wish I could say every encounter rewrites that script. But too often, I return to the same rooms. The same gestures. The same desire that never fully belongs to me. It arrives urgently, then vanishes like a guest who never cared to learn my name.

To be *cuir*, Latin American, marked, desiring—is to live in negotiation. To constantly weigh whose desire is legitimate, whose fear will be believed, whose body is safe. It is to live in a vessel that is at once archive and battlefield. A body never entirely yours, yet yours to carry.

Some mornings I return to the same name I should have long forgotten. To the same memory my skin refuses to surrender.

Because the body remembers. Even when you beg it to forget.

Fragment VII: Freedom—Simply

*The world dissolved in that room.
No futures to imagine,
no past to carry.
Only his hands, his breath,
the rhythm of two bodies—
a fragile cacophony of lust and surrender.*

*The vulnerability that brought me there was not recklessness.
It was full-frontal rebellion.
A promiscuous revenge
against everything I had learned to fear.
Each touch, each scratch across my skin,*

a gasp in the surveillance of desire.

*There was no guilt.
There was no shame.*

*Only the electric spark of being met—
body and self finally speaking the same language.
The language of skin.*

*Of presence without apology.
Of pleasure without debt.
Of desire without dissonance, finally.*

Epilogue: Ascent—Cartographies of Resistance

An ephemeral encounter is no less real.

*Intimacy—particularly the kind that unfolds without witnesses—is where history and sensation collide. It is not outside politics. It is the site where desire and surveillance cohabit. Where the *cuir* body, as archive, stores both harm and hope. Scars—visible and not—become evidence: not only of trauma, but of having desired, and having survived.*

Following Cvetkovich (2003) and Sedgwick (1990), the closet is not merely a spatial metaphor but an epistemological structure—a regulatory force that shapes feeling itself. It governs not just what is shown, but what becomes possible to feel without punishment. My body, in this matrix, is both document and front line. Every act of desire becomes a declaration. Every kiss held too long on a well-lit street. Every hand that lingers when the light turns green. Every morning without regret—though rare—is an interruption to the regime of normative erasure.

*But resistance is not always refusal.
Sometimes, it is surrender.
To be held without apology.
To desire without negotiation.
To allow oneself to be seen without rehearsal.*

The struggle with identity, then, is not a destination but a process—unfinished, recursive, contradictory. There is no “authentic” self to arrive to, only gestures

toward coherence. The *cuir* subject is not static; it is motion—always in the act of becoming.

And still, the struggle persists.
Because shame is inherited.
Because pleasure is still policed.
Because love, for many of us, remains a contested zone.

Theory gives us frameworks. But the body insists on evidence. Skin remembers what literature cannot hold. Its memory lingers long after spatial reconfiguration, long after we learn alternate ways of desiring.

There is no map for what comes next.
Only scars, as coordinates.
But if the body is a territory, it is not a ruin.
It is a landscape in motion.
A geography of refusal.
A topography of survival.
Every fracture can also be a beginning.
Every desire, a reclamation.
Every step, a line drawn onto a new cartography.

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