

THE BODY AS AN ARCHIVE

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VISUAL AIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript (English): Jorge Bordello + Beto Pérez

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Translated from the Spanish by Valentina Di Liscia

Jorge

I can't ever leave the hospital. As soon as the nurse read the "reactive" result, she cut with the edge of the door an imaginary ribbon behind me. With the slam of the door, she marked the beginning of a double tonality in my body. Now I'm my own Siamese brother, another me with whom I share the compassion and the disgust of other people. The thing is, we bugs provoke reactions that are as powerful as they are contradictory. Sometimes, when they become aware of our presence, the eyes turn bloodshot, as if they were picking up the infamous first sample with their needlelike pupils: a sign of alarm, scandal, anger.

From now on, every gaze wears a hairnet. Every opinion is expert. The bug is also the hole through which it snuck in. Unauthorized entry and exit. An in and out full of nothing. A cut-out obituary that is not worth reading, but that still takes up space on the page with its nothingness. A permanently open grave that fits all the bugs. Even worse: It is a hole in the body of society, the closed and masculine body that must not be penetrated. The faggot son is the feather in the rear that causes discomfort. It's the ass of the family through which vice sneaks in and in a moment of carelessness spreads its virulence through the entrails, rummaging through every corner of the body which has now been left open. Infecting through the blood the bones, liver, and kidneys, which so depended, unknowingly, of the desires of the ass. Stubborn hole, occasionally joined by the arrogance of the mouth, insists on going beyond its bowel functions, disobeying the compass of its co-workers. The only solution is to seal off every loose hole, cauterize it, set it on fire.

Other times, we bugs have a less blinding light. It's more like a reflection visible only in the proximity of a treasure. Fireflies are luminous bugs, but we do not share their brilliance, popularity, or prominence. There are no tourists or reserves for betrayal. We are like a dung beetle that, despite having spent all day pushing manure, is irresistible to the children's hands that pick it up, that tie a thread to it to see it fly as it tries in vain to get away as it reflects the light that it does not possess like iridescence.

Some people have their insects studded with gemstones to use them like jewels on their lapels. A show of sensitivity and culture through acquisition. Jewelry bug. Kite bug. Patient bug. Client bug. Undetectable bug. Incurable bug. Innocuous bug. Dangerous bug. The bug is entropy made habit. Its pigment, unique because of its trauma, is the perfect substance to paint the facades of the museums-mausoleums that house the biographies of the sealed-off holes, the photos of the exhumed graves, and detailed descriptions of the smells of burned flesh. Vestiges that, as people, knew no cure, now as relics have found a curator.

Now everyone will want to touch them, leave them like the boot of a heroic statue that has lost its red cloth. Or the nose of a dog immortalized in bronze, or the breasts of a stiff mermaid on a pier: from all the groping, they have brought out their gold.

My name is Jorge Luis Cuevas Martínez. It's my real name, legal name, my natural name. My artist name is Jorge Bordello and I'm from Tlaxcala, although in fact I was born in Puebla, and that's something I've never said in public nor have I mentioned it ... nor have I ever mentioned it to anyone. But yes, I was actually born in Puebla. My parents had this notion that what is local, what is small, what is from here is less-than, somehow, or it has always been less-than. And they did not want to entrust the birth of their first child to a village hospital. So they went to the closest town, which is Puebla, and the next day I was already back home.

Beto

My name is Beto Pérez. I was born in the State of Mexico. And I've been living in Tlaxcala for 13 years. I grew up in the east of the State of Mexico, a place that is commonly known as "The Big Hotel," we always call it that because people worked and studied in Mexico City and literally went back to their houses just to sleep. And obviously it wasn't ... I think something that I realized from a very young age was my separation from this idea of a colorful nation, a festive, folkloric nation, because of the place where I grew up. Which was a gray place, in the sense that there were many construction companies, there were many factories with workers in gray overalls. That's why I remember it as very gray, compared to the idea of folklore that people have.

Jorge

I would say in the first place it was my mom who educated me, more than my dad; that is, my dad was an absent father for much of my childhood, for a significant part of my childhood, I grew up mainly with my mom, with my aunt, her sister, and my grandma in an old textile mill in the city of Chiautempan, 20 minutes from here, from my house. That first part, that early childhood, being a baby, a small child, among horses, fighting roosters, homing pigeons, pheasants, peacocks, all kinds of useless animals it was kind of — you couldn't call it a ranch, or a farm, because it produced absolutely nothing. I think my childhood was to a large degree contemplative because of my parents' work.

Beto

And so the first few years of my life I grew up with verbal abuse, but beyond the tragedy of there being verbal abuse with words like faggot, sissy, pussy, from the very beginning, I think in particular in the early years of my life, from the age of five to seven, it's very clear to me, it was physical abuse because ... it was interesting how two things seemed systematic in the places where I was. The first was that everyone noticed

something in me that didn't click with their, with the idea of masculinity in a five-year-old child. I preferred to be around girls, I preferred to play with dolls, I cried about everything, I was a very sensitive person in that sense.

Jorge

When I was a little older, six or five years old, my father who joined the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], the official party, from a very young age, started a formal job and we went to live with him. I parted ways with that first phase, that completely feminine, completely contemplative, completely useless phase — not because the feminine is useless, but it was a characteristic of those moments of not doing anything — and I transitioned to a phase in which I had to produce, to do, to learn all the time. My father, as a PRI official, as a public administration representative, well, he kept me busy, with art classes, with my own grandmother, in fact, with my mom's mom, swimming lessons, charrería [Mexican rodeo], boy scouts, and so on. So it was a typical upper middle class childhood with a father who was trying to make his way in public administration for the official party and a mother who I believe was finding — in her youth, because they were both very young people, 24 years old — she was finding her place in the world, at the same time that she was learning how to be a mom with me.

Beto

And for that reason, people easily associated me with the girls when we were playing games at school or when we played outside on the street where I lived I was always associated with the girls, that's the group I was placed in. And the other was a constant pressure to show my body, that is, when we played these games and I was in the girls' group, one of the justifications was that I had not proved I had a penis. So I remember perfectly, because that's exactly what happened in elementary school when the teachers would let us out in hordes to use the restrooms, the other students would block me from entering until one day they just undressed me so they could verify that I had a penis to comply with the requirement to use the men's restroom because yes, we were children, but it was a bathroom for men, with all that that burden involves.

And the physical violence escalated until one day, someone, well, threw stones at me, and there was a big commotion, because my mom intervened at last and they had to move me to a different school. And there was sexual abuse, which is something I'm obviously not sure how to talk about. More than therapy, which there's little use for now, I insist on looking beyond the escalation of what I began to identify as a complete abandon on the part of the adults around me while growing up queer. And I think it's something that happens to all of us. I mean, you have a situation in which a child is obviously being constantly attacked at school, verbally, physically, and adults prefer to

look the other way until the stamp of violence reaches the blood. That's when they want to intervene.

And I think the first liberating moment of all that, or the first thing I noticed that I had to do, was to run away from that place like many people do like many people in the State of Mexico who live in cities where the presence of machismo, the principles of machismo, are overwhelming, really run away to a place that appears a bit more progressive. It didn't mean we didn't get yelled at, it didn't mean we didn't hear slurs, but at least something that did happen when I started high school is that I discovered more people like me, because until then, up until the age of 15, I was the school fag in a school that had a thousand students.

Jorge

After doing kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, and high school in private Catholic schools — and I don't mean it as a complaint but for context, because in reality it wasn't so bad for me in the religious sense, since the school was very religious but at my house, it wasn't something that was reinforced or supported, so even though the nuns and the priests could sometimes be very dogmatic, homophobic, sexist, etcetera, the empire of religion did not govern my life. What did govern my life was this privatized notion of education, this notion of paid services, absolutely every service, including learning and knowledge.

So when I finished high school, a devoutly religious local school where my fellow students were the children of legislators and governors, and that whole sphere, that bubble, it seemed natural for me to follow that path even though I was already quite rooted in my homosexuality, quite rooted in my queerness, quite exposed and quite conspicuous, by then bullied and harassed, but still I believed, I kept believing, that the private sphere was my path. In other words, that all my artistic exposure, my environmental exposure, even the horses and the charros [horsemen] that were part of my family history were just curiosities and not opportunities.

So when the time came to choose a career I approached it in the stupidest way and it was like, "alright." These guys arrived from the Monterrey Institute of Technology, this super privileged, super elitist school, and they offered me the opportunity to visit the university for a weekend. I did it, I liked it, and I enrolled in the university. And some time later the bubble burst, a body burst the bubble, so to speak, which is precisely what happens with ... I had my first contact with a pandemic, before learning of my own, and that was the influenza pandemic here in Mexico. And although it was more or less under control, my dad was one of the few victims, one of the few people who died that year.

So with his premature death, I became aware of the weight of the body in my life, and not the weight of influence, of reputation, of money, of companies, and so on, things that

obviously didn't help him nor did they help my mom when she died of cancer a year later. So then once the bubble was broken it didn't make sense to continue that fantasy, that TV set in which in spite of my obvious artistic inclination, and my obvious lack of inclination for public services ... I decided to abandon the International Relations track and I started to create art on my own using what I had learned so far and the motivation that my parents' mortality had kindled in me. That evidence, that urgency, that absence of consequences, that absence of compensation even when one conforms to the norms and remains inside the system, that didn't help them at all so I decided to try what I later discovered was another system, the art system at that moment I didn't know it, but I was beginning a creative process, a thanatological process, a sexual process, a social process that would conclude a few years later in my meeting Beto, and in another paradigm shift some years later when my HIV status changed.

Beto

I am aware of the tragedy that the first years of my life constituted, but this is also a moment in which I'm rethinking how I want to tell myself things. Not only remembering the hurtful act for the umpteenth time, again having to tell the story of the words, of the physical, of the sexual, that I lived through but how I want to tell that story. And also, how I want to embrace myself — that word maybe sounds a little cheesy, but I think about it a lot, because I think of it in comparison to the abandonment that the clinic has also made me feel. That is, when I go to my doctor and say: "Hey, It turns out that for the last two years in a row my triglycerides have just gone up, I'm starting to have kidney problems," and the only answer I get from my doctor is: Lifestyle. He makes it entirely my responsibility. Realizing that this abandonment is not random, realizing that this abandonment is because they clearly saw our inevitable — in my case, mannerism — and that represented something to them and so they just throw us away they abandon us they leave us in the lurch to our fate.

Jorge

Although I was no longer a teenager, I think I was in my artistic adolescence, an artistic puberty so to speak, and I had a great need to compare myself with idols, role models, and references Andy Warhol, who is still my greatest artistic influence, though maybe not my favorite artist anymore, it moved me, motivated me to research his artistic processes of copying and repeating, they motivated me to do that too, to make my own "Factory" here in my studio in this same room which has changed so many times. Back then, I was using Pop Art images — D'Arcangelo, Haring, Döring, Warhol, Lichtenstein — and I assaulted them, so to speak, I don't know if there's a Freudian explanation behind this, but there was a need to assault them to do away with those parents, too, maybe not only my biological parents but also my artistic parents, that's what it was about.

I was still very influenced by drawing, by screenprinting, by painting, I made a couple of videos but they didn't really manifest, it wasn't like, "well, Jorge, that's what you're going to do, in the future you're going to be a video artist." That same series led me to — that notion of appropriating things, although back then it was just appropriating the image, the intention, the reference — later, because of my dad's death, and because he worked in communications and political advertising and public relations, well, my house was filled with his archives, it was full of boxes and boxes and boxes and boxes of photographs, negatives, betas, masters, transcripts that he had accumulated and cataloged and systematized somehow. So the result of that combination of the desire, the Pop desire, to dominate culture, and the material that had made itself evident and was ready and asking to be intervened, was that I started dedicating myself to production, to this final form, which, although it has changed a lot over the years, I think remains the mark or the ultimate motive of my work, which consists of cross-dressing history editing the discourse, distorting power, changing the words in one's favor.

Beto

Well, I've been living in Tlaxcala for 13 years, technically a third of my life. There will come a time when I will have lived longer in Tlaxcala than in the place where I was born and so that's also how I got to television, what is something I never thought or imagined was going to happen. For 9 years now, I've worked for a local television station that is dedicated to cultural and educational content and little by little I've worked my way up to become head of programming at this station, where I've had the opportunity to create shows but also generate content that I think I would have liked to see when I was going through difficult moments, that would have helped me feel less alone, and that would have at least answered the questions that my parents and my teachers clearly did not want to answer and could not answer with regard to who I am. So the moment that most defined my relationship with images has to do with television, and the truth is that it has a purely social connotation now when I'm putting together a program schedule I think a lot about the fact that yes, on the one hand, I have the burden of working in a public institution where there is a governmental apparatus that requires me to transmit certain content, but also about taking advantage of what is not restricted to that messaging, so that I can free myself.

TV Host

It's a great pleasure to welcome Jorge Bordello, who is an audiovisual artist His work has been shown in different festivals in Spain, Peru, Ecuador, Taiwan, Brazil, Chile, Finland, to name just a few, most recently in Chicago, and he is the recipient of various grants.

Jorge

This is the first time that I have the opportunity to exhibit my work in a consistent way and at this scale at the Museum of Memory. It will be the first opportunity.

TV Host

And what is this exhibition about? What are you going to show here in Tlaxcala?

Jorge

Well, within the framework of the 500-year anniversary [of the Spanish conquest], I'm taking a slightly different approach from my usual practice, I'm drawing from as well as a series of events that took place in the '90s in Tlaxcala which consisted of three official presidential visits from the Clintons, the Spanish monarchy, and President [Carlos] Salinas [de Gortari] — who at the time was Mexico's president — for negotiations related to the Free Trade Agreement. So my work is trying to reclaim this cycle, this historical maelstrom in which we're caught, and point out the parallels between the visit of a powerful stranger 500 years ago and a visit that took place just 20 years ago.

TV Host

So we'll be able to see some of this ... But which disciplines or what are the mediums that you are using to show this?

Jorge

The main piece is an audiovisual work, a projection toward the room's interior with a surround sound component toward the rest of the works, but there are also sculptures made of gold leaf, cochineal pigment, seed paintings.

So even though I never got an art degree because in that moment that seemed quite silly to me I did have quite an intense arts education as a child and very early on in my childhood as well through my grandmother who was a puppeteer a quite well-known and famous puppet master here in Tlaxcala. She taught an arts workshop here in the Secretariat of Culture where she trained many people who would become artists, designers, most of whom are still dedicated to the Guignol theater, to theater production, to the scene, so to speak And maybe because I had a much more open influence, because I was exposed to those creative processes in a more domestic and social way, I was the only one who became a contemporary artist. The rest all work with children.

And so when I was old enough to start working — which, in my grandmother's mind, was around the age of six or seven — I began working with her in her puppet company and that was my earliest experience of professional work. We did all sorts of things.

Curiously, that's a great lesson my grandma taught me, in addition to the arts education she provided in my youth, which is that a children's party is just as good as an international puppet festival. And that's what we did sometimes on weekends I would go to the parties of children my age, whom it was my job to entertain with a puppet show. And well, as I got older I began distancing myself from that, puppets did not interest me in the least, but I continued to apply many techniques that my grandmother taught me that combine popular expressions and Pop culture. I think the clearest example is the work I make using seeds, a technique she taught me in a more minimal, smaller, decorative, domestic format, and I began to experiment and to use other formats, other possibilities for what she taught me.

Beto

In Mexico City I met Jorge. The first years I had to adapt to Tlaxcala was because of a project we did together, which was a gallery. We were two kids aged 20 to 22 who wanted to pursue a project in a cultural space in a place that had neither the budget nor the willingness because I remember perfectly that the first year there were many homophobic attacks by many artists. All they had to say about the project was that we were a bunch of Barbies. There were many attacks based on the fact that we were two men in a relationship without focusing on the project itself. I think that has been one constant in my relationship with Jorge, we are always venturing into something in which we know the response won't be too favorable but we have to try it and that's how my life in Tlaxcala has been built ... "Let's attempt this project that will likely fail."

Jorge

But well, after a few years, I'm talking maybe between 2013 and 2016 I started to go deeper into these techniques of photographic appropriation, audiovisual appropriation, installation, murals, various things, various techniques, I think that was the moment when I discovered that video was really the medium in which I felt most comfortable that allowed me to fulfill all the aims I mentioned earlier — distorting, cross-dressing, editing, re-editing, re-writing ... I think in my case, in my artistic production, these things become more apparent in video than in any other type of artistic montage. All my works are artistic montages or fakes in some way. So when I started thinking about "The Age of Enlightenment," I was applying to a grant for "Young Creators" from the FONCA [National Endowment for Culture and Arts] which I never in my life thought I would get for many reasons, precisely because of my lack of formal arts education, because of my slightly intrusive foray into the arts system, because of the lack of finesse in my work — even though I had done well for myself — I didn't think I was going to get a national grant, for starters. Fortunately, one of the members of the jury, who is also one of the people I most admire, a completely radical lesbian artist, completely immersed in the editing process, Ximena Cuevas, backed my application, supported my project, and

became my mentor, and almost became the producer of "The Age of Enlightenment" which is my first, and until this moment, in 2022, my only film, my only feature film, of which I feel tremendously proud and which I suffered tremendously to create, more than in any other work I have made, I think.

So the process of making "The Age of Enlightenment" involved a question to which I already knew the answer, that was the curious thing. The question was: How has the situation changed, how has the political paradigm changed, how has the moral paradigm changed, but above all how has the visual paradigm, the paradigm of communication, changed with respect to homosexuality in Mexico since the event that is known as "The Dance of the Forty-One," when homosexuality officially became persecuted; the moment when, 120 years ago, newspaper headlines began pointing to the problem of homosexuality and recognizing its systematic persecution? So I already knew that the answer to that question would be: Nothing has changed. Everything is the same. All that has changed are the words, all that has changed is the configuration of images, all that has changed are the methods of propaganda, or anti-propaganda, with respect to sexual difference.

So I began investigating certain passages from Mexican history, starting with "The Dance of the Forty-One," moving through the Mexican Revolution, the creation of the new masculinity after the Mexican Revolution, the arrival of cinema, television, representations of homosexuality and masculinity and femininity through these mediums, sports, the great phenomenon of soccer, for instance, with the homophobic cry of puto [fag] and concluding with the serial killers and transfemicides, which seemed to me the most latent thing and made very clear the lack of progress, the lack of "enlightenment" during the last century. And like you said, one of these passages was a premonition because I was very aware that one of the topics I had to investigate, one of the issues I had to touch on in the thread of the documentary was HIV and the AIDS pandemic in Mexico.

Beto

My relationship with images and HIV is very directly related to the relationship I have with my brother. Just as it seemed like we were constantly competing to see who came out of the closet first, the first image of HIV that I was able to touch and feel was the time my brother spent a long period in the hospital when he was diagnosed. Before seeing him, I could already see my brother because the visual communication of television had already done its job.

Jorge

I created this piece called "To Catch a Demon" which I have up there as a DVD prior to having HIV. And years later, just a couple of years later when my status was positive, I

asked myself whether I would change anything, whether I was wrong about something, or made a mistake, and curiously, no, curiously I would not change anything about the video despite the fact that it was made by an enemy, that is to say, by someone who is negative speaking of those who are positive. And I think that's where this notion or definition of premonition is very accurate because it's as if I was speaking on my behalf even though I'm not the same person And ... What was the question?

Beto

Do you think your HIV status changed your approach to making art and how?

Jorge

Right, so although the video "To Catch a Demon" was a bridge between negative Jorge and positive Jorge, and it was a bridge I don't want to burn, a bridge I want to keep, because it was an early contact with HIV and an early contact of which I am proud, the rest of my work changed a lot. Before I was HIV positive, before living with HIV, my work always spoke of a certain ... came from a place of parody, from a notion of comedy that I learned from "Monty Python," for example, from a very young age, this notion of ... this comical relationship, this insatiable relationship between excess and lack. This Medieval knight who is losing all his limbs but still wants to fight, that's something I learned from a very young age. But with the virus something came that that I hadn't known, which was an uncontrollable, incurable rage, and although my work continues to depend on, continues to look for, this notion of satire, parody, humor, it no longer comes from ... from the comfort of youth, and comfort, and privilege. Now it comes from courage and anger.

Beto

At the time, what helped put out part of the fire that was blazing in my parent's house was gaining a better understanding of what I had heard, of what I had seen, I started to question the images that I had seen in fiction movies and in documentaries, in news articles ... How much of that is real? And how is it that for so long, the information that my brother and I lived by was, "use a condom" but once the diagnosis was positive in someone from our family, well, we actually didn't know anything? That's when I realized how much I needed to learn. So I started going to Internet cafés and Googling things and asking doctors questions, and in that moment I was also very angry because obviously the dynamic of the family was to hold me responsible for finding a solution.

Jorge

Well I would say ... I would go back a bit and remember the diagnosis, sitting there outside the doctor's office while the nurse was waiting for the reactive result to be

revealed, well, I wasn't thinking about anything. For me it was a normal, routine annual screening which was going to come out negative like it did every year and I was going to go home and that was it. Well no, I didn't go home, I stayed in the hospital and I wasn't able to leave the hospital ever again. I think in that moment, with that diagnosis, I disassociated Jorge the artist from HIV-positive Jorge But only at that moment Because in those first moments I didn't know what to do with myself I didn't know what to do with my partner I didn't know what to do with my niece and much less what to do with my career. In that moment it turned into, like, an afterthought. Something that was not worth thinking about and, on the other hand, something I didn't want to deal with.

I didn't know ... I remember Mykki Blanco, who asked this question, "could I have HIV and still be famous?" Maybe it was one of the first things I wondered. What am I going to do now? How does this affect my artistic production? How does this affect my standing? How does this affect ... basically, my work? I pushed aside those questions, since I was a bit alone during the diagnosis period at first, because I had the stupid hope that it was a false positive and I think I kept the secret to myself for three or four weeks until it was an inescapable fact and I started to chat with Beto, with my partner, about the situation. I didn't know how he was going to react I figured he was not going to leave me but I didn't know how much of an impact this would have ... I mean, if it impacts the life of one person, how this was going to impact the life of two people, with a shared life, how this would affect the most immediate aspects of my life from cooking to going outside to having to follow a protocol, follow the orders they give you at the beginning.

So my artistic practice was put on the back burner Later when precisely what you said happened I realized I knew more about my body than anyone else could know I have more authority over the virus as a person who carries it than as a person who studies it And after realizing that there had been absolutely no change in Jorge the artist before and after the diagnosis — on the contrary, I realized that I had done things right It sounds weird, but the only thing the virus made me see was that I had taken the right positions in my life that I had associated with the right people and that I had separated myself from the right institutions and the right people as well.

Beto

So that's when I began to understand what antiretroviral therapy was, what a viral load was, what a CD4 count was, what was coming next with regards to my brother in the hospital, what I had to do once he got out of the hospital, to better understand ... in that moment, understanding whether he was going to live or die because what my parents were sure of is that my brother was going to die if he was in the hospital. He spent two months there, if I remember correctly, and it was a very bad period because while my

brother was in the hospital his boyfriend passed away from the same thing. So there was no other reality to prove than that AIDS kills you.

Within my own courage, my own uncertainty, I had to accept that I was very afraid and I had to confront that fear and I had to do it step by step with him and the truth is that now I realize that the first person who taught me a lot really about HIV was my brother. With the competition that we had between us for many years, now I realize that was the point when my brother and I were able to set it aside. So it wasn't easy ... I'm not saying that ... the first year in particular was not very easy. Rather, it's something that we've been building progressively over the last decade Because even my brother ... when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019, there started to be many problems with regard to medicine shortages. My brother lost his job, he had to move to another state to find a job, and within this it becomes real and evident how difficult medical adherence is how difficult it is to adhere to a pill regimen when you don't have a job, you're deep in a depression.

Jorge

It took me years to realize that hospitals lie, that hospitals have an agenda, that hospitals are a system, a disembodied system, and that the first thing one must do is listen to their own body. So I think when I arrived at ... when this anger led to this "new aesthetic" that you're referring to, in art historical terms I would call it my "thriller era," the era of terror, the era of suspense when I started to produce artworks and videos completely inspired by the idea of the ghost, of the specter, of the invisible burden, of the latent threat, challenging the notion of the future the notion of of a long future, of a full future. I even started to produce more of my own images, to leave — not completely, even when I'm behind the camera I'm re-appropriating, I'm editing, I'm creating a montage — it was a moment when I started to see the pills as muses, to photograph them myself, to discover domestic motives and to create videos that inspire fear.

Beto

And we started to realize that my brother was following an older treatment that involved taking five pills a day and well, interestingly, this reaffirmed the cliché not of "good son, bad son" anymore but of "good patient, bad patient" I'm thinking of how they make us believe in those roles, and in those moments it was no longer my parents who were putting us in them, in that game, but rather the doctors — "Why doesn't your brother go to a hospital so he can get pills?" I would say, well, because my brother lives in one part of town, and he has a two-hour commute to get to work, and if he wants an appointment he would have to miss work and he can't miss work. Then he loses his job and has to move to another state, and in that state the healthcare system doesn't work well enough for them to see him quickly and get him treatment. And in the end the solution we found

was to register him at a hospital in Tlaxcala where I live so that I could go get the medicine for my brother and take it to him when I saw my parents.

Jorge

I think the difference or the ... the process I went through, it's a cliché and everyone says it but it has to do with the body ... When I did "The Age of Enlightenment," with the part about HIV, HIV was a fact for me, I knew it was real, but as an image it was still a metaphor, as an image it was still alluding to the past, to history, to nostalgia it had to do more with Madonna than with me after diagnosis the body turns around, makes itself present, like a sock you grab and although it is still the same body it has a completely new face and that's when I started working with the effects that I was noticing in my body, when I started to work in my body, although I never did performance or I haven't done performance yet, that was when I decided to make this video about symptoms. I decided to create paintings that took me a year and a half to produce using only seeds. That's when I started to make ears of corn out of antiretroviral pills. Even though they are part of different projects, for me they were related to ... they come from the same place firstly, from the hands, from the passage of time through the body, something that I am much more aware of than when I was young which is ... time will pass through my hands, through my abilities, my cognitive processes, and technical skills and not only will time pass but an immune inflammation will occur and not just an immune inflammation, but also a process of social disadvantaging, etcetera, right?

So I think that the concept of health made itself very present in absolutely all my works, and when I'm making an agroglyph like that one, entirely of marijuana, it refers to consumption It refers to the economy, to capitalism surrounding life, the body, health, ailments, ailments and what relieves them, their remedies ... The corn ears made of pills have to do not just with Tlaxcala and with my relationship to corn and Tlaxcala's relationship to corn but with the idea of daily consumption this obligatory communion of consuming pills to be healthy to be nourished with antivirals. And yes, ever since I started to produce videos accidentally, or rather out of curiosity, about HIV, in the pieces I do about HIV I think what becomes most evident is the flesh, the fluids, the bodily manifestations of the mind.

Beto

It's not that my brother is a bad patient, or that I am the good patient, it's about how easy the healthcare system ... How easy it's going to make your life in general.

Jorge

I think that when a person is visible, they reclaim themselves as the image of their own virus, and delegates less the responsibility of that privilege. There's a ... as in all social

movements, as in all minority groups, there is an aura of salvation that attracts many people this aura is like a lightbulb for certain types of moth-people who without carrying any burden, in any way, can enjoy all the opportunities, all the agencies, all the diligences ... who can be visible. So yes, I think that It's important because even if you're not producing images, by being visible you are producing images of HIV with your own body.

Beto

What I've started doing is ... I am a very lazy artist, that is an undeniable truth, I'm not a person who is doing something new every year but what I remember, in this demand the body had, there were two things. The first thing was extreme anxiety in the first months of the diagnosis and I remember that I was very obsessed with the idea of seeing my virus. They would give me an amount and it sounded to me like something immeasurable — "your viral load is 80" — and that's how it is, and I remember perfectly having nights when I just obsessed over the idea of imagining the virus in my body. I mean, yes, I had the images from the Internet, the images from documentaries, but I wanted to know what the virus in my body looked like, that is, in my anxiety I was obsessed with materializing this to the point that I remember speaking with my virus. Sometimes I asked corny questions, like "how are you today?" but I also asked specific questions, because when they explained the process of undetectability to me, and how the virus was going to be primarily eliminated from the blood but it was going to find places to hide, or reservoirs, I remember having a very honest talk with my virus and asking it, "Where are you going to hide?"

Jorge

I think coming out of the closet is the thing that is ... It's wrong, at least for me. What I mean is it didn't help me at all to inaugurate my homosexuality with my parents, it didn't help them assimilate it, didn't help them accept it, really. I think that if they had been forced to confront it, if it had revealed itself to him like any other aspect of a child's personality, I think it would have been just as good and just as bad as if I had come out of the closet. What definitely did not help, what I think doesn't help, is that it becomes a moment when it seems like you're going to receive feedback a moment when you give people the opportunity the opportunity to fail — to accept you or reject you, and I don't think you should be giving them that prerogative. I believe that when you're a child, when you're a little kid, and you start to — especially those of us who grew up in the '90s, we didn't have many ideas or resources or words of advice or tutorials for that, and the best we could do was to say: "Mom, dad, I'm gay." I applied what I learned from that experience to HIV.

So what I did instead was reveal aspects I felt comfortable with over time, because I mean, I was already mentally preparing for it to be my obligation to tell absolutely everyone in the world my status, and luckily I didn't, luckily I didn't expose myself or made myself vulnerable to the opinions of others ... not because I give no credit to the people around me, but because you don't have to give them so much — and not credit but so much authority, so much power, over how you feel. And that's how I started revealing aspects of HIV to others. first it was like: "Okay, yes, I live with HIV." And then ... that allowed me to take to start taking more personal stances, clearer stances, more ... perhaps more daring stances than if I would have done it in an inaugural moment.

Beto

As the prescription bottles piling up, it was a little gesture of care, that's how I see it, in which I chose a very random plant which was the clover and I started growing it to make a little garden for myself, so that I could contemplate it. It is not a public garden, it is not a garden where people can get vegetables or fruits, it is not a garden that serves for any purpose other than for me to behold it. And I began to understand the questions that were posed to me by health ... by the hospital — "You have to be well-behaved," "you have to take care of yourself" — and the fact that they come from a certain morality, from a religious upbringing, and I began to direct them to an exercise in patience toward myself. There are days when I neglect them because there are days when they are filled with pests, the plants themselves are covered with bugs and I can't control ... that growth because I chose a plant, well, a type of weed, that is easily invaded, and then there are days when I get very excited and I remove their little leaves, I prune them, and they even grow flowers.

Jorge

Images are often a trap because without images, we could say ... we could say that things don't exist, that things are not there, that things don't matter, that things aren't felt, not just things but people. But at the same time there are silences that are known, that are felt, and that are important. I feel that it's often better to recognize the weight, the responsibility, the load, the debt that an empty microphone involves than a mistaken voice behind that microphone. In so many cases, in the case of the struggle for civil rights and because of ... racialized politics there will always be white people who want to talk, in feminism there will always be white men talking.

I often recall a panel from a few years back here at the Centro de la Imagen [Image Center] a panel on Afro-descendant diaspora, and every single person on the panel was white. Weeks earlier there was a panel on breastfeeding and absolutely all the panelists were doctors, men. So yes, I feel that sometimes leaving the microphone unattended is dangerous, but that's better than just any voice being behind the microphone. And in

that same vein, those of us who are visible we should set boundaries for our responsibilities. I think a lot about Diane Arbus and Gillian Wearing, these types of artists who can be a measure of everything but a representation of no one ... I think it is a very healthy pattern to follow in the sense that ... we should never censor our body nor our words as expressions of our symptoms and our courage but it is precisely our words in connection with our symptoms and our body that can make cohesive a discourse of anger, a discourse of demand, a discourse about joy, or about anything, right?

Beto

This collection of pills in China paper is a way of putting some blame on the pharmaceutical industry, this greed it has with respect to negotiating with life. And also on the other hand, since the piece is titled "One Day After Another," it talks about fatigue, of the accumulation that involves taking pills, I mean, it's a pill that piles up on another pill ... we've gone through shortages, we've changed medications, but in the end they are all still pills that accumulate.

When I started to create artworks that deal with HIV, I realized that it is a very closed topic I realized that very quickly when I started to do spots for television, that they had nothing to do with prevention campaigns with ... with something we have talked about already which is we have medical information, scientific information, about HIV, you just have to translate it to an aesthetic platform and see who can present that information better. That work is already done. The prevention work, the work of creating campaigns around "undetectable is untransmittable," that's done. I don't want to talk to ... I don't want to appeal to the idea that people have to accept us because we are undetectable. I don't want to tell people to go and get an HIV test. I don't want to talk to people about what happens before the diagnosis. I want to talk to the people who already have the diagnosis. My work is for the people who already live with the virus.

Jorge

Visibility is defined by many things, many privileges, it's a pyramid and like any pyramid, it gets narrower the closer it gets to the top. That is to say that the more visible you are, the more privileges you have to have, you had to have a scaffolding of agency that a lot of people don't have. I don't want to talk here about a notion of guilt but rather of modesty, with respect to the role that one can play as a visible person, understanding that often that visibility is determined by undetectability, often that undetectability is determined by access to — rather, it's always determined by access to medication.

Access to medication is determined by geopolitics, by where you live, by race, by transportation, by accessibility, by information, by an infinity of factors. I think that as I said, they widen toward the center, so I think that although visibility, artistic production,

cultural production, give us agency by giving us a voice in the first person, is also an undeniable fact that, that we don't speak for everyone, and that not everyone can speak.