

**HERNANDEZ BROTHERS' LOVE and
ROCKETS SERIES**

A QUEER READING OF *LOCAS GIRLS*

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ÖZET

Kaliforniya'nın bir Latin bölgesi olarak kurgulanan Hoppers'da geçen Love and Rockets serileri Maggie ve Hopey'nin sıradan yaşamları hakkındadır. Love and Rockets serilerinde Hernandez Kardeşler yarattıkları Queer karakterler ve hikayelerle ana akım çizgi roman kültürüne bir eleştiri getirmişlerdir. Kardeşlerin Love and Rockets serilerinde geleneksel anlatım yöntemleri ve hikaye yapısı takip edilmeden, Maggie ve Hopey punk gençlik dönemlerinden orta yaşlarına kadar gündelik yaşamdan hikayelerle okura sunulur. Kardeşlerin kullandıkları hibrid anlatım ve anlatı teknikleri okurların seriler içerisinde yorumlar yapabileceği bir alan açmakla birlikte serilerdeki karakterlere de kendi potansiyellerini gerçekleştirmeleri için imkan sağlamaktadır. Bu tez çalışmasında Hernandez Kardeşlerin alternatif çalışması Queer bir çalışma olarak ele alınmıştır. Love and Rockets serilerinin Queer oluşu ve Hernandez Kardeşlerin siyasi duruşu, hikayelerin gündelik yaşamdaki kimliklerden çok sınırdaki kalan potansiyellere odaklanmasından; heteronormative ve heteronarrative idealleştirmelerden uzaklaşarak anlamı ertelemeye çalışmasından gelmektedir.

Çalışmanın ilk bölümünde queer tarihi ve cinsiyet ötesi Hoppers bölgesinde gelişen alternatifler, taktikler üzerinde durularak, queer bir okumanın gerekliliği tartışılmıştır. İkinci bölümde serilerdeki parçalı ve tamamlanmayan planlar ve karakterlerin bedensellikleri serilerdeki anlatı, anlatım ve karakter gelişimleri doğrultusunda sorunsallaştırılmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde serilerdeki Latin queer bedenler Jose Esteban Munoz'un çalışmasına referansla

incelenmiştir. Gündelik hayat pratikleri sınırları içerisinde uygulanan baskın ideoloji Munoz'un Disidentification kavramı aracılığıyla queer bir dünya yaratılması için okunmuştur.

ABSTRACT

Love and Rockets stories are mainly about the lives of Maggie and Hopey, who are living in Hoppers, a fictional Latino barrio in California. Brothers create genuine and well-rounded queer characters and stories as a challenge for mainstream comics. From Maggie's and Hopey's years as two underage punks to their middle ages, brothers' series are contained realistic everyday life stories, but they do not follow traditional patterns of storytelling and story content. Brothers' hybrid narrative and narration techniques in their artistic medium, offer a space for readers to comment and also for characters to realize their own potentialities. In this dissertation, the alternative work of Hernandez Brothers is named as a queer work. Queerness of series and the politics of Brothers come from their focus on liminal potentials rather than identities within everyday life; and the aim of deferring the meaning rather than fixing it disrupts the usual modes of their heteronormative and heteronarrative idealization.

In the first part, queer history and the importance of emerging alternatives and tactics in the post gender space of Hoppers district, and a queer reading's necessity are discussed. In the second chapter, strategies of using fragmented, uncompleted plots and corporeality are questioned through the detailed analysis of narrative, narration and character development. Third chapter utilizes Latino queer bodies through the work of Jose Esteban Munoz. I work on his notion of Disidentification, as an attempt to fashion a queer world by

working on, with, and against dominant ideology within the boundaries of everyday life.

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Table of Contents

ÖZET	i
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
1.ME & COMICS	1
2.COMICS AS AN ART MEDIUM	2
3.WHY HERNANDEZ BROTHERS' LOVE & ROCKETS?	4
CHAPTER ONE	9
1.“TWERKW, QUER, TORQUERE, ATHWART” ... A FLUXING WORD ..	9
2.QUEER MY THEORY!	12
3.WHY DO WE NEED A QUEER READING?	19
3.1A Queer (R)ending for Locas Girls	21
CHAPTER TWO	32
1.QUEER IN TEXTUALITY AND VISUALITY	32
2.WHAT IS THE STORY?	33
3.HOW THE STORY'S TOLD?	37
3.1Narrative & Plot & Narration	37
3.2Narration in Love and Rockets	38
3.2.1Fragmented / Uncompleted Plots in terms of Space and Temporality	38
3.2.2Fragmented / Uncompleted Bodies and Identities	49
3.2.2.1Bodies of Love and Rockets	53
CHAPTER THREE	63
1.EVERY DAY LIFE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NOTHING HAPPENS? .	64
2.DISIDENTIFICATION OF EVERYDAYNESS: JOSE E. MUNOZ.....	68
3.DISIDENTIFICATION FOR A UTOPIA	71
4.THE POLITICS OF LOS BROS: DIY (Do It Yourself) ACTIVISM	73
CONCLUSION	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79

INTRODUCTION

“I was sitting around putting words together that might sound cool, words that represented what our comics were all about. Emotion and technology were the two themes that I ended up with. ‘Robots and Romance’ was the closest thing, but too genre specific. ‘Love and Rockets’ was a little more abstract, something people could project on what the meaning might be. ‘Love’: a sweet emotion or a biological survival mechanism; ‘Rockets’: technology or a pet name for intense romantic love.” Gilbert Hernandez (Hignite, 2010: 71)

1. ME & COMICS

Unlike many fans, I was not introduced to comic books as a child. However my first foray into the comic medium was only two years ago with Black Hole, Charles Burns. As a leading alternative comic writer, Burns has shaped my perception about this medium for cultural studies. Then with my particular interest in everyday life sociology and body politics my friend Aytuğ Üngör introduced me Hernandez Brothers, who have a strong tradition of everyday life Chicana culture by emphasizing diversity, vitality and tension in their series.

2. COMICS AS AN ART MEDIUM

Since 1990s comics has been approached as an art medium, and in this dissertation in order to begin a critical reading of Love and Rockets series, I analyze comics as a mode of artistic expression not as a category that characterized by a specific form, style or content. Comics are the combination of text and image rather than a type of story to be told hence I approach comics as a medium not a genre. According to Douglas Wolk, analyzing comics as a genre (Westerns, Regency Romances, Science Fiction / Superheroes) could be problematic since the genre marks different stories with specific categories of subjects and conventions for their content and presentation. And in *Reading Comics*, Wolk states that comics, as medium, are forms of expressions that have few or no rules regarding their content other than the very broad ones imposed on them by their form (Wolk, 2007: 11).

Will Eisner, who describes this medium as a “literary form”, argues that comic medium has two essential features *Sequentiality* and *Narrativity* that combine a series of pictures in order to relate a story (Meskin, 2007: 369). Scott McCloud and David Carrier also give emphasis on this “sequential art”. Following that idea McCloud, in his book *Reinventing Comics*, states that comics could be interpreted as a language since its vocabulary is the full range of visual symbols; and he argues that the format of comics is to place one picture after another to show the passage of time. (McCloud, 2000: 1) Additionally, David Carrier underlines the importance of sequentiality as a starting point for comics; and with an art historian perspective he also examines comics’ other fundamental elements, such as speech and thought balloons, in his book, *The*

Aesthetics of Comics. (Carrier, 2000. Meskin, 2007: 370). Eisner, McCloud and Carrier also embrace the narrativity, and according to them readers could follow the sequentiality and derive meaning without referring to the words. It is the narrativity, the marriage of text and image; and sequentiality where the meaning lays somewhere in between. So, comics as a marginal art medium, and with its own aesthetic and grammar need essential elements of to be analyzed. If some of the standard elements of comics medium are the sequence of images, panels, narrative, and dialogue then how could we analyze the works of Hernandez Brothers in terms of standard elements of comics? Why do we need a critical reading of Hernandez Brothers' works?

3. WHY HERNANDEZ BROTHERS' LOVE & ROCKETS?



Hernandez Brothers' works, particularly Love and Rockets series, have a contradictory structure as an art medium. The series destabilize time and space through panels, borders and also through the characters' everydaynesses. In his essay, *Deconstructive Comics*, Ronald Schmitt notes that "comics, as one of the most marginalized of art forms, have a deconstructivist and revolutionary effect on the traditional mode of the signifier: the linear print-block text" (Schmitt, 1992: 153). And obviously, readers are able to understand that the two essential elements *Sequentiality* and *Narrativity* are deconstructed in Hernandez Brothers' works.

My first feeling with Love and Rockets series is finding myself totally immersed in the lives of ordinary people on pages. Love and Rockets series are all about normal people living normal lives with its radical approach that

different from my preconceived notion of comic books. Realistic black-and-white representations of real life and real people make the readers find characters that looked and felt familiar.

With its people who joke, laugh, fight, make love, and dream of making something of their lives, Love and Rockets series change the rules. As a part of the early 1980s, Hernandez Brothers prove that the comics as a medium could be considered as an art form, and could not be interpreted only kids' stuff. Actually, Love and Rockets create an alternative, sometimes novel-length combination of words and images for readers with its unprecedented characters, locales, and events.

Love and Rockets stories gradually give way to slice of life stories about Maggie and her circle of friends in and around the fictional Hoppers, a city outside of Los Angeles modeled after Hernandez's home of Oxnard. In Love and Rockets, Hernandez Brothers create genuine and well-rounded queer characters and stories as a challenge for mainstream comics. From Maggie's and Hopey's years as two underage punks to their middle ages, brothers' Love and Rockets chronicles are contained everyday life, thus stories are mainly realistic; but they do not follow traditional patterns of storytelling and story content.

The most dominant mainstream comic subject is the super hero; however Hernandez enjoyed the less celebrated super heroes, and particularly interested in depictions of women in comics, and those featuring prominent female protagonists were burned into his mind at an early age, with the Archie

triumvirate of Betty, Veronica, and Josie the most appealing and beautifully rendered. Raised by his mother, with aunts and other female relatives always pitching in, women were the most powerful adult presence in his life, though they did not consciously articulate the impetus behind the strong females in their comics until later. For the Hernandez kids, comics were the most important mass cultural sustenance during the 1960s. On the other hand Hernandez were addicted to monster movies; and they were lucky in that their youth coincided directly with the early to mid-sixties horror craze, not only in television but also in the Warren published magazine Famous Monsters of Filmland and horror comics Creepy and Eerie, which were must haves from the beginning. There was something more to comics than superheroes and Archie.

Wrestling became another mid-sixties obsession, with a tradition of regional stars, similar to the television horror movie hosts, whose merits the whole block of kids would excitedly debate. Like comics, wrestling was another love passed down to the kids by their mother, who recounted lore about earlier villains from television broadcasts she watch in the 1950s. The Mexican combination of wrestling and monsters was perfect and absolutely irresistible, and 1962's Samson vs. The Vampire Women was a moment of pure revelation: "This guy's a wrestler; a super hero and he fight against monsters. This was everything we ever wanted in one movie." An even more potent reaction came when Jaime Hernandez and his brothers discovered another early sixties gem, Doctor Doom, depicting women tag team wrestlers who fought monsters: "Now girls?! It was everything I wanted." Hence, both wrestling and monster

movies and comics provided some of the earliest Latino images the brothers were exposed to.

As Brothers grew into adolescence in the 1970s, their own superhero comics were often dominated by powerful women whose defining characteristics would later coalesce into Maggie and the Love and Rockets cast. At the end of the 1970s the dominant superhero comics had lost their innovative exuberance for Hernandez. So the brothers started looking more to the newly prominent genres of science fiction and fantasy and began to submit comic stories of their own.

Under a cover by Gilbert, the self-published Love and Rockets no.1 was printed in an edition of approximately eight hundred. The humble, black and white magazine straddled the space between the fanzine culture that the brothers had been involved with for a number of years and the do it yourself energy born of the punk world. Their introduction spells out their approach:

“We, the brothers Hernandez, have tried to get into the comics jungle for a few years now, but could never seem to make the right connections...Our own comics with our own ideas; our own mistakes and our own accomplishments.”

Love and Rockets series employed certain genre trappings; beauty, truth and art all found all over the map and includes homages to the two pioneering Silver Age super hero greats: Steve Ditko, by way of some machinery borrowed from the cover of The Amazing Spider Man no: 33, and Jack Kirby, via fearsome god Torombolo. “Maggie the Mechanics” in Love and Rockets was a Mexican American mechanic prodigy working in the science fiction tinged world of the pro solar Mechanics, but the focus is on the tangled lives of

Maggie and Hopey, and their wide ranging and interconnected stories of joy and heartbreak, which would define Hernandez work for the next twenty five years. The stories of Maggie and Hopey are intentionally never high concept but instead about people and how they live. Love and Rockets could be read as the most appropriate art form to chronicling life as it is lived: as an emotional and a visual record of change, and interaction with the outside world.

CHAPTER ONE

In my dissertation, Hernandez Brothers' series as an artistic medium could be interpreted as sociological and/or ethnic documentary. Like filmmakers, Hernandez Brothers use narrational repetitions, open ended plots and flashbacks to move through time; and like playwrights, Los Bros depend on dialogues to create depth of knowledge about narrative and characters.

This part questions queer history and details the importance of emerging alternatives, strategies or *tactics*, in the post gender space of Hoppers district. In this part of my dissertation a queer reading's necessity for Love and Rockets series is discussed. Firstly, I refer to some queer theorists' works to question the limits of identity politics and its strategies as a critical of universalizing explanations of the subject and the world. Then, the following parts are important to start a discussion about on sexual identity labels, which are socially constructed and deeply embedded in specific cultures rather than being essential or cross-cultural.

1. "TWERKW, QUER, TORQUERE, ATHWART"... A FLUXING WORD

"As the very word implies, 'queer' does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer,' then, demarcates not a

positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to everyone who is or feels marginalized.” (Halperin, 1995: 62)

Queer’s conceptual ability to move or pass across things is comparable to the anchorlessness of many new queer characters; they keep moving across the landscape, forever passing through and between places, identities, things. A working definition of queer I often use is informed by queer theory figurehead, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick frames queer as a movement, not only in the sense that it refers to a community, collective, or even a cinematic movement, but also because it moves in the literal sense: “The word ‘queer’ itself means across—it comes from the Indo-European root—*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (traverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.... The immemorial current that queer represents is antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange” (Sedgwick, 1993:xii). Sedgwick’s definition suggests that queer refers to being in flux, to be passing across sexualities, genders, desires, and practices. The benefit of queer is that it does not allude to the specificity of sex and gender, as gay and lesbian categories do. Queer refers to both the subject (whether individual or collective) and subjectivity (the practices and performances that may be queer).

Being queer- in other words, is being different from the ‘*straight*’ one. Queer culture shows that society and especially religion limits the individual within binary oppositions such as ‘good - bad’, ‘man - woman’, ‘heterosexual - homosexual’, and claims that society forces to fix individual at one side of such

oppositions that are meaningless over against unknown and limitless power of love and desire. Hence Queer theory argues that it is infertile to think that the world absolutely as black and white as a result of the effort to establish an 'order' continues 'mandatory' hegemony of heterosexuality. To challenge this understanding, Queer theory has appeared at the end of 80's with a kind of political movement dispersed but different from previous lesbian and gay policies and as a result of academic studies appearing in parallel with it. Different from the perceptions of heterosexuality and heteronormativity, Queer theory, its theorists and activists believe in that the human body may be reestablished as open to all kind of sexual orientations and practices.

2. QUEER MY THEORY!

The Queer theory fed by many disciplines such as history, sociology and literature and taking shape considerably as an extension of feminist theory and poststructuralist thought became a field of study under the roof of further universities as a result of academic conferences carried out at the end of 80's and brought a critical approach for previous lesbian and gay studies (Tierney, 1997).

Despite the fact that queer policies are concretized as a result of activities of an activist group called 'Queer Nation' established in year 1990 in New York, it took shape substantially- before Queer Nation- as a kind of cultural activism including activities such as hanging posters, showing parodic and rebellious performances, publishing alternative underground magazines ('zines') which are not affiliated to a specific center or organization (Gamson, 1996: 395-421). Queer Nation appropriated consciously and strategically the word Queer used in order to insult and marginalize gay people in 80's which has meanings such as 'weird', 'strange', 'eccentric', 'bad', 'worthless'. This indicates Queer policies' attitude which bases on difference not on similarity, objects always to assimilation, protests the idea of 'appearing and acting normally' and embraces consciously the accusation of 'perversion'. The slogan "we are here, we are queer, get used to it" says in one respect: "we are different, we are against the existing system, we are weird and we are proud of it" (Gamson, 1996: 400). The Queer in this sense doesn't object to this 'marginal' position to which the society considering heterosexuality as a norm; contrarily, Queer prefers to be 'marginal', to remain 'outside' through sarcastic, provocative and theatrical performances. At this point, Queer stands up to other strategies which don't challenge the existing system in real terms and highlight the 'normality' factor in order to prevent discrimination and to acquire political appearance through

‘ethnic model’ which stipulates existence of lesbians and gays at the end of 70’s within the existing system as a minority group presenting their differences.

The most important reason of such opposition is approach of the existing system towards AIDS which is not called into question and not ‘disturbed’. (The “guilty victim” discourse) The system which seems ‘accepting’, ‘tolerating’ gay people, shows a great intolerance when it comes to AIDS; AIDS was introduced as a ‘gay disease’ by the media, healthcare institutions and insurance companies and according to statements of Baudrillard, presented as a ‘protection method’ against ‘inappropriate sexual betweenness’ and ‘a complete identity loss’ rather than a virus (Baudrillard, 2002: 12).

Queer activists criticize the lesbian and gay movement existing in 90’s since they implement an extremely restrictive ‘identity policy’ which may at some points exclude bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, sadomasochists in other words, people whose object of desire is not constant, who don’t appear and act ‘normal’. Another aspect of this criticism is the argument that existing movement makes heard only the voice of white, gay men and women belonging to the middle class and doesn’t adequately consider differences related to ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘socio-economic status’ (Gamson, 1996: 403). In this regard, the Queer calls into question vigorously all factors which are alleged to be necessary for resistance and political gains such as ‘group membership’ and ‘collective identity’; mentions that ‘sexual identity’ and in general terms ‘identity’ concepts may be exclusionist, may establish a hierarchy and pressure; specifies that identities are not given, natural and

constant, on the contrary, are built, fluid and indefinite. Fundamental issues of the Queer theory are about how to stand up for an extremely clear and concrete discrimination, to claim political rights, to prevent physical and/or psychological violence without any collective identity. At this point, basic sources of the Queer theory which are an extension of poststructuralist thought mentioning that the subject is embedded in a complex social relations network and created by political and social structures and shouldn't be considered independent from power structures and relations, should be examined.

The most important source of the Queer theory is certainly opinion of Michel Foucault noting that increase in the number of expressions regarding sexuality in 19th century generates the category 'homosexual'. 'Homosexual' gained validity in years 1870 in judicial bodies, medical and psychiatric fields; became a 'kind' which enables capitalism to promote the family union and thus, reproductive function. Meanwhile, due to complex nature of the expression, 'homosexuals' described as 'perverse' by prevailing institutions, also started to describe themselves by using categories and words produced by prevailing institutions. Briefly, 'homosexuality' started to speak on his behalf; requested his legitimacy and naturality to be accepted; however, tried to do so by remaining within expression of prevailing power structures (Spargo, 1999: 22). In this respect, contribution of Foucault to the Queer theory is the idea that identities are built within a process we may call 'classification, arrangement of information' which cannot be considered independent from the concept 'power' (Namaste, 1996: 194-213).

The Queer theory, furthermore, made use of Foucault's ideas on 'expression', 'power', 'domination' and 'resistance' while criticizing libertarian identity policies: Foucault mentioning that strategies in respect of libertarian policies such as 'eliminating prohibitions', 'making himself heard' may transform into means of domination and 'domination' is an extremely complex and variable concept, 'resistance' may transform at any moment into 'domination' and 'expression' doesn't stand up for or object to just one thing as it is supposed and that it is an extremely 'unpredictable', 'limitless', 'fertile' and 'multi-layer' concept, pushed the Queer theory to highlight the necessity of a resistance which is able to change position according to the context, to take variability and mobility of power relations into consideration and is significantly dynamic and awake (Jagose, 1996: 81).

In contemporary theory, Queer theorists such as Diana Fuss, Teresa de Lauretis influenced of the analysis known as 'deconstruction' aim to understand hetero/homo duality and to prove that heterosexuality and homosexuality are interdependent. For example, they state that a macho who says he disgusts and hates homosexuals 'needs' a feminine homosexual in order to identify himself. Macho can express factors he argues he 'possesses'- namely heterosexuality and masculinity- just through homosexuality and femininity which doesn't 'exist' (Namaste, 1996: 196). In this context, the one cannot express her / himself completely out of or within heterosexuality or homosexuality because s/he is always in-between; because these two categories make sense while being interrelated; this binary opposition is repeated and reinforced in each action of understanding and explaining. There the Queer theory tries to

understand how these binary oppositions are generated and used and to show limits of sexual identity and policies. On the other hand, based on deconstruction, the Queer theory reinterprets all historical and/or literary texts, movies, TV series described as '*straight*' and all factors belonging to popular culture and mass culture through the Queer perspective. Reading classical texts of postmodernism through a brand new point of view and similarly through questioning traditional texts, the Queer theory criticizes readings which are accepted and naturalized without any questioning and which base on heterosexuality and aims to provide different alternatives. This theory argues that lesbians, gays, bisexuals and others 'not being heterosexuals' exist in all cultural products and representations because heterosexuality needs them to continue to describe itself legality and naturality.

In this regard, the Queer theory emphasizes heterosexual hegemony rather than 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' identities described in opposition to heterosexuality; aims to transform internally naturalized heterosexuality by using the parody factor (Namaste, 1996: 203). While doing so, attaching importance to the ambiguity the word Queer has, based on 'chaos' but not disorder which naturalizes order or the word 'order', objects to be identified and classified by mentioning about sexualities, not sexuality.

Judith Butler being one of the most important Queer theorists influenced of works of Foucault and Derrida made a great revolution with her articles on feminism and lesbianism and gender studies. Butler notes that 'gender' is created as a result of 'performative' practices and representations which are repeated, take a fixed form in time and seem to be natural; in this sense,

reverses the relationship between gender and our actions and representations. Namely, some actions and representations are usually considered as the result of gender. Whereas, according to Butler, these actions and representations are the one which creates gender. In this regard, gender is not an extension of biological gender; it is not given, natural and static; contrarily, it is created in an extremely complex process, within an extremely 'strict' and 'regulatory' frame which transforms heterosexuality into a norm (Esterberg, 1996: 259-280).

Butler says that writing and saying about being lesbian is usually a situation produced against a demand (production) and adds: "This doesn't mean that I will not be present with the lesbian title in some political circumstances. However, I prefer this indication represents always the indefinite one" (Glover & Kaplan, 2000: 114). Butler, thus, mentions that sexual identities may be necessary for political aims. However, also specifies the importance of a consciousness regarding sexual identities are built, variable, indefinite, multiple and segmented. Otherwise, sexual identities would *just* continue hegemony of mandatory heterosexuality. Butler, furthermore notes that 'Queer' should always remain as a 'combat field' which doesn't accept to be described, fixed, which is always discussed and questioned.

The Queer theory cannot be considered independent from postmodernism within the historical process. Postmodernism represents on one hand, the time after modernism; however, on the other hand, includes the practice of re-reading and re-interpreting of texts pertaining to the time before modernism; thus, aims to break hegemony of 'traditional' readings; while doing so, lays

emphasis on texts excluded by 'local' factors, power structures, which remained in the background. In this regard, Queer- as a theory which shouldn't be considered separately from 'locality' emphasis of postmodernism- may push us to re-read and interpret our own classical texts. As stated by the Queer theory, there is no absolute sexuality independent from time and place; there are sexualities determined according to historical and geographical conditions.

3. WHY DO WE NEED A QUEER READING?



Although Queer connotes by its first meaning the homosexuality, it doesn't directly refer to a specific sexual orientation, sexual identity or sexual practice: each individual or situation "not normalized" in terms of heteronormativity is queer and falls under field of interest of queer studies. Therefore, queer hasn't any clear description.

The concept of queer is the defense of subject's uniqueness and selfdom, individual's resistance against identification. According to Bauman modernity is about to not accepting any discrepancy except conflicts waiting for solution and which may be solved (Bauman, 1998: 18). In this context, the characteristic which distinguishes queer as a concept being at peace with ambiguity, hybridity and spontaneity from modernity is to conceive always a possibility of conflict. On the other hand, although queer represents a

resistance against heterosexuality, settled gender roles, and heteronormativity in general, it is not a contra-identity or non-identity that is established by adopting the negative of major identities. According to modernist point of view, in fact, representations are not extensions of individuals but individuals are the extensions of representations. On the contrary, as a matter of queer policies, individual theorizes him/herself and only represents him/herself as a possibility and a situationality that may happen to everyone (Haver, 1997: 288). Queer policy is the battle of not being positioned according to centralized power and therefore, “gives priority to researching, generating new concepts rather than pedagogy stipulating normalization” (Haver, 1997: 284).

A queer reading attempts to question norms, underlines abjected spaces and identities, and deconstructs old dialogues about identification, boundaries, temporality, and resistance. In this dissertation there is a need of queer reading for Love and Rockets series due to its radical potential for comics medium. And through the reading, the term “queer” is mainly used as a verb to analyze some productive opportunities to rewrite understandings of intelligibility.

With the repressive and dangerous effects of enforced binaries and dichotomized roles demonstrated through representations in mainstream genre, the problem of how to challenge these processes in order to create alternative representations emerges. Love and Rockets series represents a pivotal point in the burgeoning alternative comics movement. Published independently of the mainstream, these alternatives were distinctive in subject matter and narrative strategies, and have come to represent an important moment between the

heyday of the undergrounds and the widespread critical and commercial attention that is being paid to comics' literature today.

Comic readers are not used to observe this kind of narrative, narration techniques, and characters. Given the threatened focus on third / in-between spaces as the most productive for creating nondichotomous alternative representations, I analyze Hernandez Brother's Love and Rockets series as a unique medium, carefully examining the relationship between text and picture and how the text, image and format work together or against one another to create these representations.

3.1 A Queer (R)ending for Locas Girls

How could it be possible for Love and Rockets series to stay in the middle, as an alternative space without breaking down the boundaries of basic perceptions that there will be an ending?

Hernandez Brothers' novel length, complex series have innovative narration techniques, radical approach to transitioning. When reading Love and Rockets we are surrounded by flashbacks, dreams and ambiguous visual images; and within the pieces of daily narrative that we are given, we lack all the information. These narration techniques give characters a free space to articulate different performances, sexual desires and / or identities without a finalizing endpoint.



Protagonists of the Love and Rockets series are female characters and the stories are shaped through their relationships with each other. Friendship, love and sexual desire are sometimes immersed into the field of identity crisis. Hence, for the series of Love and Rockets there are two common plots where different narration techniques are applied in search of a meaning: *Romance* and *Coming out*. Both plots are teleological; need a meaningful, morally questionable endpoint and declaration. In addition to this finality, romance and coming out plots give context and meaning to (sex) acts within the narrative.



Woman and man of the romance plots become lesbian and gay identity in the coming out. Cohabitation and / or marriage are the validated endpoints that conclude the romance plots with success. Similar to these validated endpoints, as Paul Robinson and Bonnie Zimmerman states that, coming out stories are surrounded by a story of self-development, looking for identity and establishing community (Robison, 1999. Zimmerman, 1992). In romance plot, characters are searching for a permanent monogamous relationship, and this permanent monogamous relationship is changed into identity claim and self-realization for coming out plots. (The drama of oppression is resulted with

liberation in these novels *Annie on my Mind* by Nancy Garden, *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown, *Tipping the Velvet* by Sarah Waters.)

Both romance and coming out could be criticized for limiting their characters into permanent and exclusive relationships; and having problematic political dimensions. *Love and Rockets* series offer an alternative reading instead of romance and coming out plots; and the Latina characters of the *Love and Rockets* experience a new way of performing sexual desire with Hernandez Brothers' shift from the mainstream narratives of romance and coming out. It is not possible to define Maggie's and Hopey's sexual desire within the boundaries of a heteronormative romance and a coming out model. In terms of the romance and coming out narrative, series lack certain elements.

There is no declaration of love, no possibility of reproduction, or a permanent relationship and exclusivity. In addition to these, neither Maggie nor Hopey are monogamous characters. On the other hand, characters never discuss their identities or never search for a sexually meaningful act. Although, Maggie and Hopey want to live together, they do not search for an opportunity to express their lesbian or bisexual identities. The open ended relationships between characters reflects the open ended structure of the stories and panels too. Whenever readers want to find a meaning, arbitrary and isolated one frame scenes mark an uncertainty and doubt for the readers.



The image shows a page taken from the close of "Maggie and Hopey Color Fun Pt 4" (*Locas in Love*). The lead characters of *Love and Rockets*, Maggie and Hopey, sit on the curb after a day of events.

Are Maggie and Hopey moving towards a romantic conclusion or coming out story? Hernandez does, however, challenge the possibility of falling in love and readers perception by playing with romantic tension and expectations. Maggie and Hopey reunited after their longest separation in the volume #50 Bob Richardson 1996; and first series ends with this volume. Maggie beats some guy up for propositioning her and gets picked up by the police. Hopey has caught up to her, and gets herself arrested just to get in the same car. Maggie (sitting next to Hopey) rests her head on Hopey's shoulder, then little hearts frame the words “the end”.



Does it give a romantic conclusion to the series? Not, indeed. Since the series are followed by Hopey's cohabitation with another woman, and Maggie's marriage, divorce and subsequent flirtation with a stripper called Frogmouth (Vivian). Hence it is obvious that the series are played with the sense of completion.

On the other hand the heterosexual romance as an ideal often stresses Maggie. She thinks that romantic ends do not let someone as capable and independent. Her relationships with Rand Race and Speedy Ortiz are unsatisfying and ended with death. After Speedy has dated Maggie's sister, sparking off a war with neighboring gangs, Speedy finally makes a declaration to Maggie:





37

For Maggie, this declaration is not the romantic declaration that she wants to hear. Her response: “Don't you dare put this one on me! Damn you, Speedy! Aren't you guys all sick and tired of watching me make an all-star ass of myself?” She is also confused by the sudden romantic attention; and her reply sums up all the frustration of her one-sided relationships with men:



BAH-TOE/VATO
38

It is the demise of romance myth; Maggie does not deal with achieving a heterosexual romance. A single romantic declaration cannot transform Maggie's life. She is in the search for something transformative in terms of

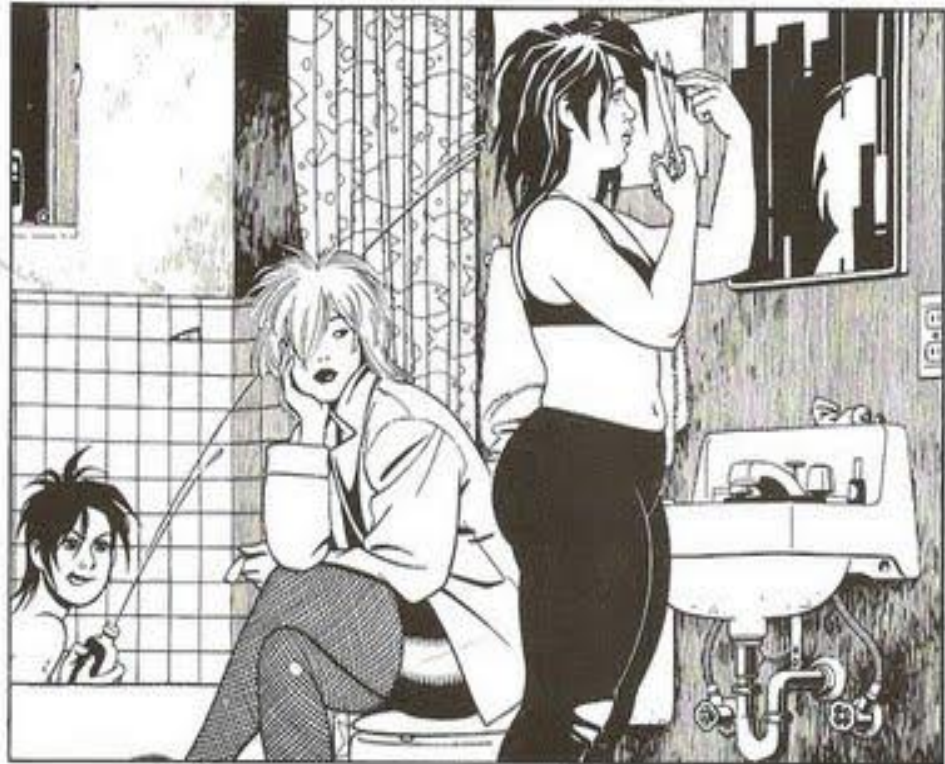
sexuality, desire and freedom – self-realization. Declaration of a heteronormative love and happiness means an end to life.



39

Two possible readings for Maggie and Hopey are “moving out of the shadows / coming out of the closet” or “going straight / going back into the closet” (Foster, 2005: 448). Within this realm, analyzing *Love and Rockets* series by using a normative narrative structure (Romance or Coming Out) could not give

any possible answers for readers, who want to understand the characters' and narrative's development. Both Hopey and Maggie's sexual identities and stories in the series work as an open secret; readers see but cannot reach completely. Therefore we need a different reading strategy to label the series that fits with punk and dissident behaviors of in-between characters who are abjected from society, heteronormativity.



CHAPTER TWO

“Indeed, reading Hernandez's work as realism is complicated by the subtle shifting over the years of how characters function in his world: some exist predominantly on only one level, and as such go by the wayside; others are gradually deepened, such as Penny Century”|In articulating the seemingly disparate worlds in which his characters travel, the overwhelming sense was that home is 'reality,' while the doldrums of work exist as fantasy”|Hernandez's realism, then, shifts with story and character--after all, realism exists in the daydreams, fantasies, and false impressions within the heads of characters as much as it does in their physical actions. Emotion is where Jaime's realism lies.” (Hignite, 2010: 76)

1. QUEER IN TEXTUALITY AND VISUALITY

In the previous part, I try to answer the necessity of a queer reading for the characters and series; and the explanation of queer reading is analyzed through the story and character construction. In this part of my dissertation, I emphasize the importance of the strategy of using fragmented, uncompleted plots in Hernandez Brothers alternative comic series, Love and Rockets. Then, I try to find answers to following questions after narrative, narration and characters analysis with a detailed reading of Love and Rockets series:

- How do Hernandez Brothers use narration to deconstruct narrative?
- How do Hernandez Brothers capture and manipulate historically and culturally defined female body?

2. WHAT IS THE STORY?

Since their introduction in 1981, *Love and Rockets* has continued to be at the forefront of the comics revolution, breaking boundaries, and staking a claim for comics to be taken seriously as a medium of storytelling. Although obviously intended for mature readers, it was immediately apparent that *Love and Rockets* was miles apart in intent from the mature trend in 80's mainstream comics, which centered on a move toward more realistic subject matter in such DC titles as *Watchman* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In spite of the relative ingenuity of these comics at reworking the old super hero formulas, they were still super hero comics, no matter how deconstructed or grimly violent they were (their realism an excuse to make more fight scenes, as Hernandez stated in a 1989 *Comics Journal* interview). But *Love and Rockets* has no formula.

First stories are about the life of pro solar mechanic Maggie and are formatted around a science fiction universe. Although the stories choose a sci-fi world, characters' concerns are very earthly and real. Dinosaurs and spaceships are followed by punk parties, friendships, family problems and love. As years have passed series are rooted in the character's everyday lives, without central, structuring events; and sci-fi world has emerged as a fictional Central American village, known as Hoppers.



When we first meet Maggie, she sexually desires men and is crushed out on Race Rand, a mechanic that she works with. She also sexually desires women, more rarely, and Hopey, consistently; but her relationship with Hopey is undefined, and remains so throughout the entire series. Although the two have sex and live together, Maggie doesn't claim the identity label bisexual, or attend any groups or events organized around sexual identity. While Maggie is hooking up with men, Hopey pursues relationships with women, many times living with them but never settling down as a result of her inability to take life and relationships seriously.

In later years though, Hopey lives with a girlfriend, but her infidelity causes her relationship to fall apart. And if their on- again, off- again sexual relationship was titillating, it was all the more so because of the rich, authentic delineation of their complicated personalities and their emotional rapport. Perhaps Hernandez tolerance the other characters have for Maggie and Hopey's bisexuality. And perhaps Brothers' men aren't drawn with the same lavish sensuality as their women. Their captivating female protagonists, led by Maggie and Hopey are masterfully delineated with humor, candor and breathtaking affection, and come to life within Southern California's Mexican-American culture and the punk milieu' heyday.

As stated in the previous part, there is no "coming out" moment for Hopper's girls and girls' relationship remains undefined. In relation to claiming a sexual label, their sexual identities are not "in the closet" or "out". Neither Maggie nor Hopey verbally identifies the meaning of their sexual desire and activity; hence their gender and sexuality function as a form of open secret. They both continue to date and have a sexual relationship other people, while sleeping with one another; even during Maggie's marriage. Maggie and Hopey's sex scenes seem arbitrary and isolated; they take up very little space, which are specialized in one-frame sexual scenes; sex has happened often in the middle rather than at the conclusion of the plot. Just by following this kind of storytelling strategies authors subvert norms through the use of temporal shifts and cyclical, ongoing plotlines.

These characters aged with us, learning more about themselves, making mistakes and growing older; we focused on their real life concerns such as love and lose, work and play, live and die.

3. HOW THE STORY'S TOLD?

When we read a comic we know little about the story; by the end we know a lot more, usually the whole story. What happens in between?

3.1 Narrative & Plot & Narration

As readers, we give meaning to a narrative through recognizing its events and developing a cause- effect relationship in time and space. We also identify and conclude materials and events that are not clearly presented and/or are peripheral to the story world. To analyze and understand readers' responsibilities through these activities, a distinction between story and plot/discourse should be drawn.

Plot is the material arrangement in the story that all readers have before; and the cues in the plot allow readers develop the story in their minds. Plot arranges readers' active engagement to the story order and frequency in making sense of the narrative.

The plot manipulates cues in different directions in order to increase the dose of curiosity and/or surprise. On the other hand, the plot may provide details to develop the expectations and to leave the readers up in the air. These steps construct narration and the plot's strategy to complicate the details of story for the purpose of creating a particular *voix* (voice). Narration, as the flow of information, is a continuum which leads the readers step by step in the construction of the story out of the plot.

As Bordwell and Thompson states that in their book, *Film Art: An Introduction*,

“[t]he readers might read an internal voice reporting the character’s thoughts, or might see the character’s inner images, representing memory, fantasy, dreams or hallucinations.” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2011: 73)

This could be achieved through the narration, which also canalizes the depth of the readers’ knowledge by manipulating its degree.

3.2 Narration in Love and Rockets

Los Bros Hernandez deconstructs mainstream material arrangement / storytelling in comics. This is achieved through the narration that disrupts the visual perceptions of the readers. In the first part of narration analyze, plot’s visuality is discussed, which is mainly left open ended and fragmented in terms of space and time. And in the second part, characters’ visuality is discussed, which is opposed to mainstream female corporeality in terms of sexuality, gender and sex.

3.2.1 Fragmented / Uncompleted Plots in terms of Space and Temporality

“[b]reaking up the heteronarrative... would mean not just never ending, but never perceiving an end as a possibility, as something missing, sacrificed or misplaced... putting repetition, alternation and accrual in place of progress and closure.” (Roof, 1996: 182-3)

With different series Hernandez Brothers has started to use increasingly more radical flashbacks and switches in location. Stories have evolved into something unplanned and individual issues did not offer easy access to

complex narrative. A flashback is simply a portion of a story that the plot presents out of chronological order. By disturbing a linear chronology, flashbacks insert information about the past that enforces the reader to reinterpret the present action. Hernandez's technique of returning to past plots is common in the series and as Esther Saxey states that;

“– the content of the comic is often the > revelation or re-evaluation of the past, rather than new events. Thus even a settled issue – such as Maggie’s teenage love life – may be opened again for consideration.” (Saxey, 2006)

Location is a dominant character for flashbacks in Love and Rockets series, and in “Wigwam Ban” Hernandez chose a nameless East Coast city as the setting because they wanted them to be as far from Hoppers as possible. By gradually draining background detail, the first panel fades into a flashback by Hopey. As she turns from Maggie in the second panel, the narrative also pivots away from the temporal and physical space leading up to the exchange, and deftness with which the switch occurs is merely one example of Hernandez’s constant polyphonic mastery, which harmoniously juxtaposes two or more simultaneous narrative threads, visual-verbal or both. Riot-gear-clad Los Angeles policemen replace the hallway of an East Coast apartment building as 1980 replaces 1990.

The transition is simultaneously gradual, and decisive, abruptly completed in the larger center panel, the background emptiness replaced by a swarming mass of punks taunting and facing off against the police; stark white is replaced by seething black. Contrasts abound in the page, yet visual and textual links bridge time and space. The sprawling middle panel dominating the page and the

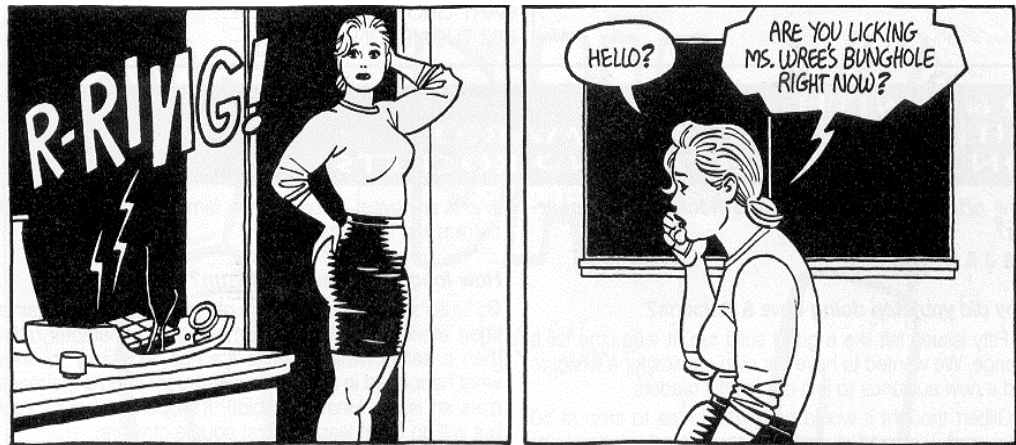
smaller surrounding panels incorporate word balloons, providing interaction while the center panel is entirely devoid of text and reduced to pure image.



In Love and Rockets series, it can be complicated for readers to understand the temporal shift and relations. For instance, Maggie's marriage is learnt through flashbacks at the divorce party (Everybody loves me, baby PC #7 1-22: 2000). Although from the beginning of series, a casual reference is made to characters and events that pre-date the narrative, the readers are not in possession of conclusive or complete information about each character or each event. For example, one character, Porfirio Diaz Rubinski, a drug dealer, a molester of women and parties to Hoppers at "Del's Island of Lost Souls", is often referred to but only depicted in flashbacks of the series.



Additionally, dream sequences and hallucinations leave gaps in the reader's understanding and suggest alternative plotlines since they are never proven or disproven in episodes. Maggie's in her late 30s in "Ghost of Hoppers" and travels back to her home, to Hoppers. She has changed a lot psychologically since the end of "Locas," too; her family has moved to another neighborhood and Hoppers is so alien to her now that she gets lost in its streets when she tries to drive away. According to Douglas Wolk, it is a "metaphorical journey" with hallucinations and dreams back in time. In this journey, Maggie seems to appear to her friends in the past as a ghost.



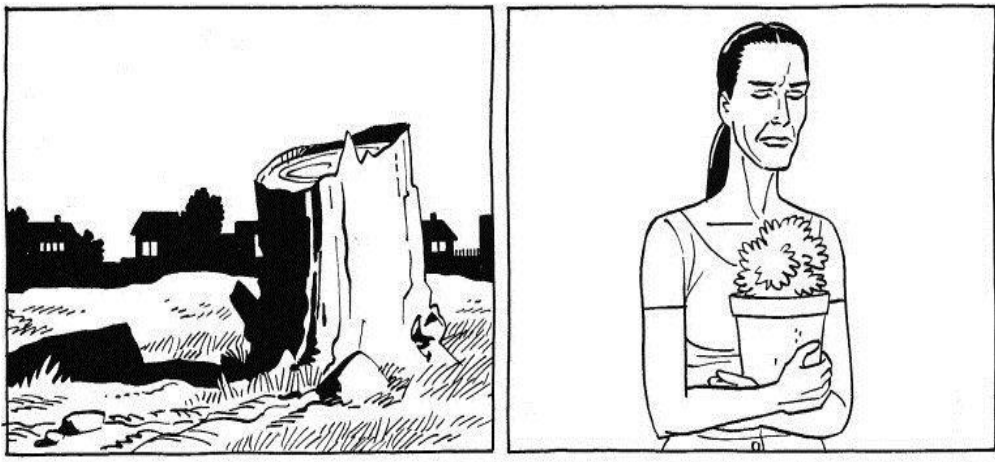
Hokey, who's work as a bartender, still talks on the phone to Maggie and they occasionally hook up. However Maggie has another partner, Frogmouth (Vivian Solis), an ex-stripper who works on a local talk show. One of "Ghost of Hoppers" subplots involves the question or surreal or supernatural interventions of whether Hokey has ever told Maggie she loves her. Maggie can't remember if Hokey's ever *actually* said the words, and therefore rather than this being the end of a narrative, it becomes a source of confusion. Maggie believes that she heard Hokey say it during a phone conversation; Izzy points

out that the phone was broken at the time. Is Maggie hallucinating? Text does not give a definite answer.

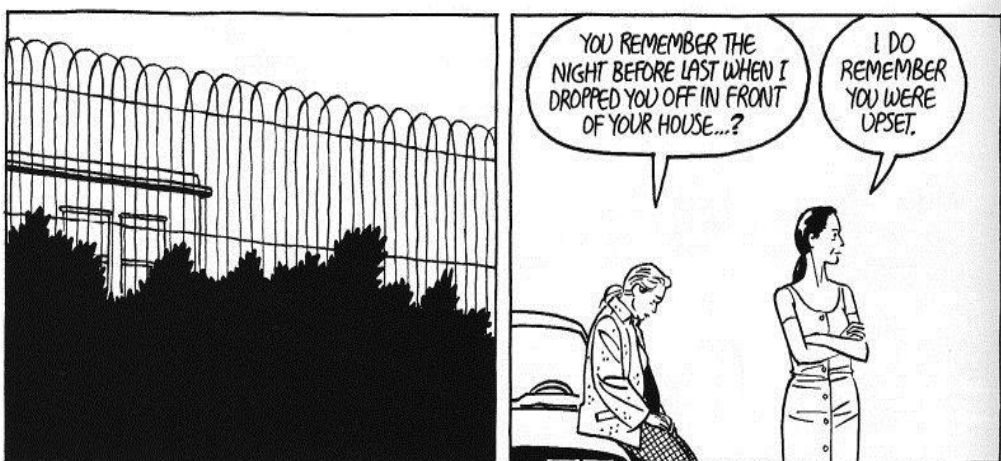


In addition to the flashbacks, dreams and hallucinations, the gaps that are created by “ambiguous visual images” and “lack of knowledge” in the series give readers permission to elaborate their own interpretations. They are encouraged by proofs that there is more to a scene or a story than is directly depicted. The structure motivates readers to actively engage with the text; to get what they learn about characters from other series, and speculate to fill the gaps. With this kind of reader investment and imagination, a singular plot becomes a part of a whole.

The following subplots are related with ambiguous visual images in Ghost of Hoppers, and they occur while Maggie is trying to retrieve a stolen object that she thinks her old friend Isabel took while staying with her. Maggie finds Izzy in church and begins following her home while they talk; and the first example begins with these four panels: (The panel at the beginning seems out of place. Also, the tree immediately disappears from the frame and could not be seen again.)



The next page begins with these panels:



In this there is no direct relevance to the narrative. Probably, instead of two characters, wall and fence are used as the symbols for Maggie - Isabel relationship's tension and emotion into the narrative. In no other medium could these scenes be interspersed and produced to the same effect. In no other medium could the reader experience the same collision of time and location, emotional connection and formal and conceptual flow (Dowd & Hignite, 2006: 51). Yet Hernandez foregoes superficial formal experimentation in favor of reader interaction with the characters and narrative progression.

Deceptively simple black and white lines define space and weight, and extreme backgrounds are predominantly solid black or white, foregrounding the emphasis on characters and their interactions. There are no hard melodramatic breaks, and the stories wash out beyond the panel borders. The structures are intentionally repetitious, without splashes, only slight variation, always inexorably moving forward, toward life's uncertain future. Temporality is halted not in isolation but in both narrative and real time. Fixed expressions and gestures are framed and rendered immovable, and each expertly composed, lurches the eye to a halt even as it is led, faster or slower, through the narrative, paced by the empty gaps between panels.



Here the gaze of every figure strikes directly out at the viewer, activating the scene. Space is flattened and pushed forward to the extreme of the panel surface; the viewer is thrust into the foreground, the space between the implied police threat and the wall of expressions ranging from arrogant, antagonistic and fearful to bemused and disinterested.

On the other hand, readers could be influenced by the lack of knowledge especially in Chester Square's subplots, and hence they are able to construct the very personal meaning.



(Original artwork to Chester Square, Love and Rockets Book 13 cover, 1996. From The Art Of Jaime Hernandez, published by Abrams Comicarts, Artwork © 2010 Jaime Hernandez)

In “Chester Square” (“Love and Rockets” No. 13) Maggie, the failed mechanic exchanges sex for money to buy a bus ticket. Maggie, in her mid-30s, has just broken up with Hopey. Dialogues and mimics take a little place, and therefore readers could not understand Maggie’s feelings. She is upset or she does not care; there is no definite answer in subplots. All the readers know that she has no money and finds herself with her tight dresses stranded at a truck stop, trying to make a bus back to Hoppers. Then one man recognizes her, she is Maggie the Mechanic, he tells his friends. He tries to take her home. Maggie

demands money and her friend declines, but someone else accepts. And Maggie is left with an identity crisis: Is she Maggie the Mechanic or Perla the Prostitute? In her text “*Desire without Closure*”, Esther Saxey argues that this is an example of “a sex act without an immediate explanatory context” (Saxey, 2006).

Hernandez Brothers are able to tell extremely complex stories through comics’ unique interplay between image and text, and always carefully rendered small details in their art- such as folds of clothing, the gleam of leather, and the slightest arc of an arm or swing of a hip- blossom into indeterminate narrative offshoots. In the examples above, Hernandez Brothers movingly weds multilayered narratives with radical fissures of time, place and point of view. Entire histories are implied by understated visual cues, triggered by slight marks on paper, subplots as deftly integrated as the history of a house told through an errant newspaper lying left behind on its roof. The unintended shifts in location and time density from panel to panel are achieved through black and white contrast and create a separated swirl through positive and negative space. Panels trigger the moving psychological spaces between stories: “[t]o visually portray the thought and memory by using the form’s collectively remembered, standardized techniques, incorporating genre clichés in the creation of radically new subject matter and stylistic invention” (Dowd & Hignite, 2006: 54).

Time and space transitions, point of view manipulations and ambiguous open ended events in series need readers’ inferential effort. The narration tactics (flashbacks, dreams, hallucinations, ambiguous images, lack of knowledge and

repetition) of *Love and Rockets* insists that meaning be found continually in everyday life with its shifts from being an end-determined to being daily/even-determined. This technique opens up unpredictability and creates new potentialities for readers' active and lively engagement to the series. *Love and Rockets* asserts that the reader make decisions about the meanings of the topography, economic situation, familial and friend networks without having "the full picture". Is it also possible for the articulation of same-sex desire? How could we analyze the same sex desire, gender roles and corporeality of female characters in *Love and Rockets*' everyday life without having the full picture? Does the full picture define the bodily and sexually territories of characters? If the answer is yes, how do the *Los Bros*, who challenges and deconstruct the traditional forms of *heteronarrativity*, deal with the *heteronormativity* in their graphic novels?

3.2.2 Fragmented / Uncompleted Bodies and Identities

"[W]omen's bodies . . . have always been targets of a power which, inscribing the text of the flesh, seeks to make of feminine identity something interpellated by ideology, constituted by language, and the site of a dissociated ego." (qtd. in Balsamo, 1996: 29)

Gender, sexuality and sexual desire have mainly been linked to the dominant discourse to a certain excessiveness that stands against the attribution of full subjecthood. It has always influenced the representation of bodies and identities in different art mediums. This thesis art medium is the work of *Los Bros Hernandez*, who go further into making the women of *Love and Rockets* seem almost human. The Hernandez women are not beautiful in the way that women in mainstream comics. They are beautiful, fully fleshed and multi-

dimensional characters and look like the women who men and women actually make love to. Hernandez's representations of the female bodies in visual art challenge the idea of rigid beauty norms; and in a sense the bodies' representations present possibilities rather than limitations. In Love and Rockets series bodily existence outside of the confinement of normative categories can provide room to breathe, and body transgression can be emancipatory in the release from static roles. But, how do deviant (queer-abjected) bodies reemerge in the art of Los Bros Hernandez? Before talking about Locas Girls' open ended and contradictory desires, gender roles and corporealities, this part serves to questions of how the sexual identities and bodies are analyzed, understood and constructed.



Postcard illustration.

In her book *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz states that “body is represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures” and therefore human body and its embodiments should be worked through discursive performances (Grosz, 1994:18). In contemporary world, without addressing the necessity of the deconstruction of dualistic Western metaphysical perceptions of body, it is no longer possible to take a step to thoroughly conceptualize the contemporary representations of body and identity.

Body and mind do not represent the two distinct categories, and indeed they are mutually theorized the subject’s unity and self-realization or emancipation. Since body is a “political field where power relations can be observed”, self-control over body is the main tool to reach self-realization; and if the body is the field of power and implementation of discourses then resistance is inevitable against the political regulations that take place on the surface of discursively normalized individuals (Foucault, 1991: 173). Female body is a useful site of repression and production since “it is both a laboring, sexual and reproducing body“(Bakare-Yusuf, 1999: 318).

Munson points out “the physical traits of sex are culturally elaborated and given meaning within a culture through construction of gender that means people take some cues from their physical characteristics of the bodies with which they are born but they learn to use a variety of signals to demonstrate their similarity to other people in specific gender category.” (Munson, 2000: 127-143) The biological differences that are used to legitimize the women’s limited access to power in society and that are attributing women the passive sexual and / or political role, represents their secondary status to the men.

Hence, marginalization of women has been seen as natural and regarded as the fact of their biology. The concept 'gender' explains how an individual's biology is culturally valued and interpreted into locally accepted ideas of what it is to be a woman or a man. That means gender and the hierarchical power relations between men and women are constructed meaning that the associated roles and expectations of gender identities can change from culture to culture.

In the first chapter of her book *Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that women are biologically disadvantaged compare to men; and it is the reproductive handicap of female body (de Beauvoir, 1997: 35-67). Thus some feminists like de Beauvoir, emphasize the importance of the rejection of the reproductive disadvantage of females' bodies to gain the similar capacity of power in the context of public life. In response to this negative attitude towards body and women, Moira Gatens in *Power, Bodies and Difference* states that, there are also "some feminists advocate the affirmation and celebration of women's bodies and their capacity to recreate and nurture" (Gatens, 1999: 120-137). Gatens claims that these theories are important responses to the female body and also identity politics however both of them interpret body as something given, innate and territorially defined. While the former response focuses on the sexual equality principle, later one emphasizes an essential sexual difference of the female bodies; thus these responses to corporeality of female preserve the binary oppositions, indeed.

Butler gives somehow different explanation to gendered, sexed bodies and identities. "Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre- given sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus

of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result gender is not to culture as sex is to nature, gender is also the discursive/ cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “natural sex” is produced and established as “pre discursive”, “prior to culture” ” (Butler, 1999: 346).

3.2.2.1 Bodies of Love and Rockets

Hernandez Brothers’ Love and Rockets series deals with an alternative way of reading gender, and sexuality of Chicana culture set in a California’s barrio. Series lets readers to comprehend how a specific culture’s urban space shapes the body as corporeal entity. Although the heterosexuality rules the Hoppers and writes young punk girls’ queer bodies, Maggie and Hopey’ bodies queer the space, challenging the norms. And this part of the dissertation analyzes the importance of queer practices and bodies of Love and Rockets.

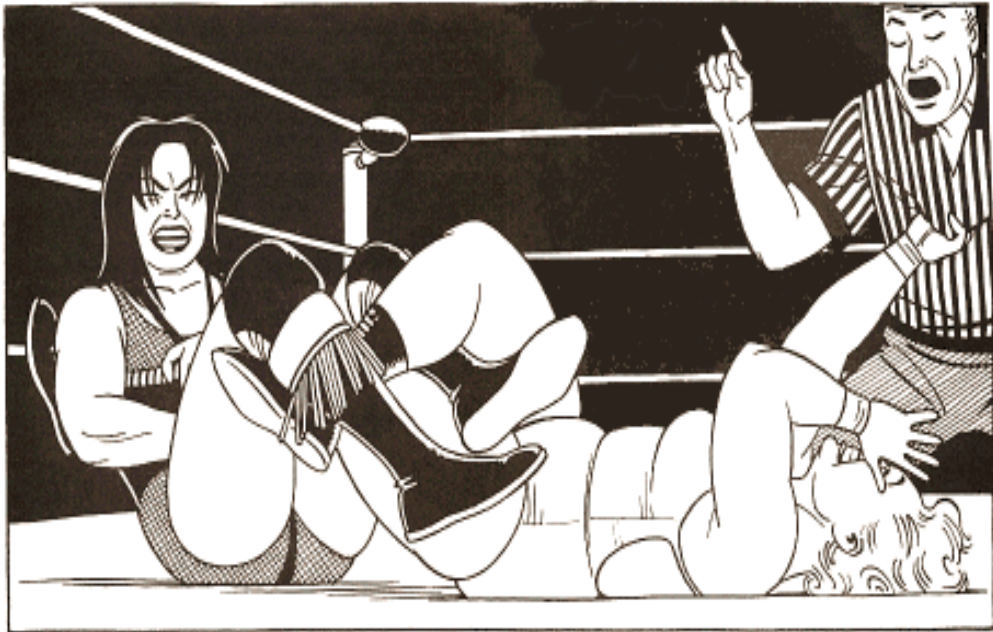
“The heroines of the Hernandez brothers’ Love and Rockets graphic novel series are no longer whip-thin punk girls. They’re among the most fleshed-out female characters in American literature.” (Benfer, 2001)

Bodies, specifically female bodies of the mainstream graphic novels, are the fields of power relations as the objects of regime of truth. Regulation and representation of bodies in that sphere show us the construction processes of useful, normalized bodies within the society. Body is rationalized and has become an object of expert mechanisms and voyeurism.

Through immersion in this art medium, characters are able to escape the limitations of corporeality which fixes them in time and space; by transcending their bodies. In Love and Rockets series, to analyze the corporeality we could focus on ‘Performativity’ that is an important concept for Butler as “the

repetition and the ritual of gender performances have an ongoing outcome. They contribute to the naturalising of the bodies, making the cultural fiction of gender appear credible and real.” The gendered body is performative, thus it has no ontological status apart from the acts that constitute its reality. Performativity could be interpreted as a paradigm shift in the study of gender and corporeality, because Butler’s claim about the inscription on the surface of bodies led us to read gender as something “only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (Butler, 1999: 173). The examples of Love and Rockets confirm “the play of absence and presence on the body’s surface”, and as a result of minimal or excessive use of body we faced with multiple ways of deconstructing individuality and reconstructing the subjectivity (Butler, 1999: 172).

The bodies of Love and Rockets are inscribed with power; and bodily practices of the Love and Rockets are responses to overdetermined female body appearances as decorative presentations.



Female characters in the *Love and Rockets* use their bodies in unconventional ways that challenging gender stereotypes. Minimal or excessive use of bodily performances and inscriptions constitute *Locas Girls* as subjects who use their body as a site for action rather than as an object of discipline and normalization. They are the wrestlers, punks, fertility goddesses, lesbians, bisexuals, asexuals, whores and occultists; and they are the creator not just the creation of *Los Bros*; not the passive object of another's decision, and they are not the scopic objects of the "collective male gaze" of mainstream art mediums, contrarily they are the directors of the voyeuristic terminology over their bodies. On a more significant level, *Los Bros* subvert the appropriating nature of the "male gaze" in mainstream comics (Mulvey, 1999).



Esperanza Leticia “Hokey” Glass (punk rocker, became Terry's lover and lived with her in a closet at Del's; introduced to Maggie by Isabel and lived with her at 451 (1981-84) and at Isabel's (-86); went on tour with Terry, leaving Maggie behind; after the band broke up, wandered various cities with Tex, who gets her pregnant at Penny's house; miscarries; reunited with Maggie, but not for long; roughed up by Nan Tucker's goons; goes on tour with the Damachers) (Accessed 20 February 2012, Available from: <http://www.zompist.com/Lovinchar.html>)



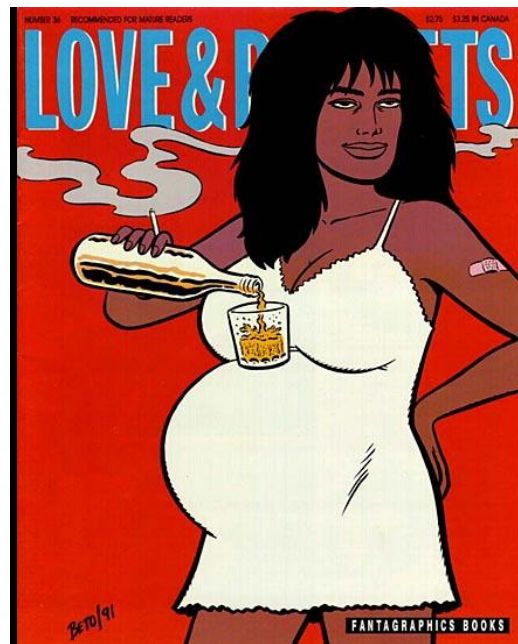
Margarita Luisa “Maggie” Chascarrillo (also called Perla; Our Heroine, girl mechanic; lived with Hopey for several years; worked with pro-solar mechanic Rand Race in various places round the world; later worked at Zandy's, then at an insurance firm; lived with Ray for two years; reunited with Hopey in Badgeport, but after they quarreled, left for Texas, where she ended up living with her father, then in an apartment with her sister Esther. Moves back to L.A., lives with Hopey awhile, then meets Tony Chase and marries him, only to divorce him within a few years. She currently works as manager of the Capri apartments in the Valley.) (Accessed 20 February 2012, Available from: <http://www.zompist.com/Lovinchar.html>)

From traditional points of view the body has generally been associated with the innate, immutable, the god given; but the performers of Love and Rockets reject the notion of a preexisting body since people are able to intervene their bodies and treat them merely as costumes. On the one hand punk girls of Hoppers explore the problem of territorially defined bodies, and on the other hand they rewrite their identities, which are stuck within their bodily boundaries. Therefore, these performers prove how the identity is a fragmented and multiple process of becoming rather than fixed categories indeed. These bodies threat the binarism of homo/hetero sexuality by performing and fictionalizing gender. These are the bodies fragmented by representation and theory, overexposed and yet inarticulate, finding a voice finally in the underground deviant culture of comics.

Edwin Schur states that “deviance” as a socially constructed term, and gains its meaning within a particular context; therefore it does not exist in isolation (Schur, 1984: 5). In *Labeling Women Deviant: Gender, Stigma and Social Control*, Schur also argues that we need a definition of normality to talk about deviance within its hierarchically defined boundaries. According to Schur the stigma of “deviance” means something more than ugly.

If deviance as a concept is applied to the work of Los Bros, who deconstruct the usual, taken for granted status of body and its unity in Derridean terms, it becomes clear that their deviant bodies in series can be constituted as that which interrupts static categories of beautiful. Locas Girls’ bodies are opposed to the mainstream body, which is monumental, static, and closed, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeoisie individualism; and they are

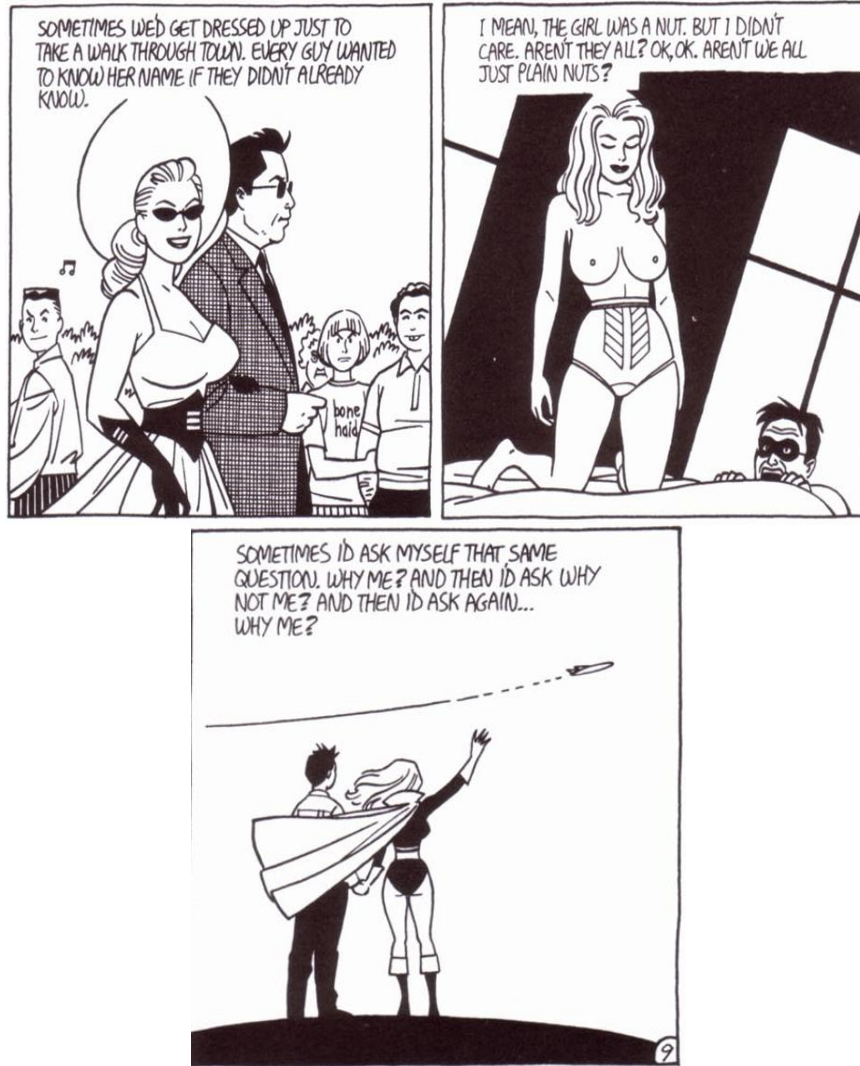
open, extended bodies, the bodies of becoming and change; and cannot be separated from the rest of the world. The impressive and also unbearable body performances of Locas Girls distort and blur the essentialist views about body, especially female body and the concept of beauty, which are regarded as innate, immutable and God given in the context of Western metaphysical thinking. Locas Girls consider their own bodies as “readymades” that means their bodies are described as a combination of manufactured objects rather than a territorially defined pure unity. They cancel the function of mainstream comics’ aesthetic and present it as an unusual meaning(s) through their everyday performances.



Luba (the fertility goddess/mayor of Palomar, which is a matriarchal village)



Isabel Maria “Izzy” Ortiz Reubens (a writer; introduced Maggie and Hopey; a founding member of Las Widows; interested in the occult; has had three abortions; falls in love with a man in Mexico but her demons won't let her stay; kind of crazy; lives alone in Hoppers.) (Accessed 20 February 2012, Available from: <http://www.zompist.com/Lovinchar.html>)



Beatriz García Penny Century (nymphomaniac beautiful friend of Maggie and Hopey's. Grew up in Texas; dated Rand Race but split on him when she got pregnant; dated Costigan for years and finally married him, but spends most of her time screwing her bodyguards and playing superheroine with no explanation) (Accessed 20 February 2012, Available from: <http://www.zompist.com/Lovinchar.html>)



Vivian Solis (also called as Frogmouth, Velvet. Maggie meets her in L.A., who, reassuringly, has more problems than Mag does. She's going out with Reno but is also involved with Sid; she's also rather interested in Maggie. Ray goes through a period of obsession with her, too. She used to work at Cheetah Torpeda's, a strip bar, but now works in a vintage records store.) (Accessed 20 February 2012, Available from: <http://www.zompist.com/Lovinchar.html>)

CHAPTER THREE

“Specific, closed cultures like those surrounding comic books have allowed voices to be heard that might not have been audible in a world in which all cultural texts speak the same language.” (Pustz, 1999)

Third part of my dissertation utilizes the Latino queer bodies through the work of Jose Esteban Munoz. I work on his notion of *Disidentification*, as an attempt to fashion a queer world by working on, with, and against dominant ideology rather than (counter) identification and/or (anti)assimilation within the boundaries of everyday life. In this part of my study the following questions are discussed:

- What happens when nothing happens in the field of everydayness?
- What is the *Disidentification* of everydayness?
- Does the notion of *Disidentification* could be interpreted as an Utopia (as an alternative way of breaking down boundaries) ?

1. EVERY DAY LIFE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NOTHING HAPPENS?

“Drawing on the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of everyday life, as well as finding impetus in the realms of the popular and the demotic, the rise of the everyday in art mediums is usually understood in terms of a desire to bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility.” (Jonhstone, 2008: 12)

Hernandez Brothers, raised in Oxnard, pioneered Latino, multicultural, queer-positive, and punk-influenced comics. They opened up comic books to distinctive and complex issues, identities, and communities that comic books had never had the guts to explore before; and they challenged the rooted masculine bias of mainstream comics. Where punk and cholo culture comes together, Love and Rockets open a new ground for comics in terms of content and form by fusing mainstream comics. Early series mainly build on traditional genres such as superheroes and romance, as time went on Hernandez Brothers develop radical themes, characters and also new techniques and approaches that reach audiences. With the new ways of evoking space and time in California suburbs’ punk rock scene, Love and Rockets has achieved a novelistic aesthetic for everyday life.

Hernandez Brothers’ interest in the everyday signals a loss of guilt before popular culture and its pleasures, while elsewhere again, the investigation of everydayness asks us to consider the deceptively simple question: What happens when nothing happens? How can we participate to the realm of the overlooked, or how do we drag the unnoticed into view; and what happens if we work the unnoticed everyday life in the first place?

For some, working on everyday life, or turning to the ordinary leads to recognition of the dignity of ordinary behavior, or the act of stating simply, “here is value” (Watkins, 1998). For others it may result in an unveiling of the accidentally miraculous, or the desire to make art with the unassuming ease of the amateur photographer (Dyer, 2001). For others still, an art that focuses on the everyday might construct a “vaguely ethnographic aesthetic”, or be nothing more than the record of simply venturing out and happening across something interesting (Ross, 1997: 28). Elsewhere, the everyday sparks a distrust of the heroic and the spectacular; its oppositional and dissident connotations are foregrounded as it is deployed in a confrontation with the “bureaucracy of controlled consumption” (Harris & Berke, 1997: 3)

“The banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? [...] How are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what it is, who we are.” (Perec, 1973)

As in Perec’s epigraph above, everyday exists below the threshold of the noticed and is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Everyday is the place where ordinary people creatively use and transform the world they encounter from one day to another. Within the field of everyday life, series and characters challenge the taken for granted cultural formations of the naturalized discursive and material boundaries. Additionally, in *Micropolitics: Art and Everyday Life*, Jose Miguel Cortes writes that “commitment to the everyday can also indicate the desire to give a voice to those silenced by dominant discourses, a commitment coupled with the responsibility to engage with the

everyday's transformative potential; for in this dialogue to notice the taken for granted conversation of others is the first step in irrevocably changing everyday life" (Cortez, 2003).

Power of the hegemonic subjects and institutions is strengthened via their dominant relationship with the clearly designed other. However, individuals, consumers or who lacked discursive power at the intersection of marginalized categories are not passive and alienated actors since they are able to reproduce the presented. The way we consume or re-appropriate the symbols, ideas, or words make us a part of the totalizing institutional constructions, however in contrast to Foucault's notion of discipline, de Certeau offers to look resistance and networks of anti-discipline that are resulted from tactics. Everyday life is not just an area of production, and reproduction. It rather includes the ways of governing the society, and the repetitive character of everyday life embodies power relations and therefore when we understand the nature of the repetitions and the micro level naturalized power relations, we will be able to solve the complexity of the society.

For Certeau, we invent our unofficial everyday through the improvised ways in which we go about our daily activities (inhabiting, shopping, reading, and conversing) the everyday is invented in a thousand ways of poaching (de Certeau, 1984: 22). Whether we recognize it as such or not, everydayness is what we invent through the way we conduct our activities. Hence the possibility that if we want to draw attention to and acknowledge the everyday we need to stimulate the dynamic creativity that is inherent in the practices that constitute it, yet are generally hidden in the opacity of gestures and local

contexts. As Sheringham writes in his excellent book *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, a breathing space, a gap or hiatus could only be possible in the sphere of everyday life that enables the quotidien to be apprehended as a medium rather than an analyzed category (Sheringham, 2006)

In Love and Rockets series, Hernandez Brothers construct a virtual reality, a utopia for Oxnard, the barrio they lived in; and this utopia or Hoppers challenge and dissolve the metanarratives of hegemonic feminism, patriarchy, racism and colonialism by developing an ordinary, everyday political stance. Characters of the Love and Rockets series are female, Latina, and lesbians; they are overlooked, unnoticed “*border subjects*”, whose identities live at the intersections of various marginalized categories (Anzaldua, 1999). Border subjects of the series; punks, goths, lesbians, *cholos* (gang members), *luchadoras* (female wrestlers); are portrayed with their full corporeality within the boundaries of a realistic fiction by transgressing the limitations posed by mainstream comics and theories, indeed. Actually, everyday life of the Love and Rockets series offers a potential for marginal subjects, or *border subjects* to disrupt the domination / resistance cycle and allow them to be and to act on their own.

2. DISIDENTIFICATION OF EVERYDAYNESS: JOSE E. MUNOZ

“Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (Munoz, 1999: 31).

In his work, Munoz exemplifies misappropriations of specific cultural practices, which challenge the hegemonic nature and totality of such discourses that serve to oppress queers, and specifically queer people of color. Those misappropriations demonstrate the problematic nature of oppressive discourses by recycling them as part of “strategies of iteration and reiteration” (Munoz, 1999: 196). And my statement is that Hernandez Brothers manipulate their art as a weapon; and thus their Love and Rockets series could be interpreted as a disidentificatory project in 80s and 90s America to imagine complex and complicated abjected lives and practices of underrepresented *border subjects* (punks, independent women, lesbians etc.). Love and Rockets series are full of slice of life stories and anecdotes, and therefore to understand *disidentification* in Hernandez Brothers’ series, everyday life is analyzed through the commemoration of the ordinary practices of characters.

A detailed analyzes of disidentification can be found in Jose Esteban Munoz’s book *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics*. Munoz’s key concern is with how queers, people of color, and queer people of

color negotiate hegemonic norms through movies, pop art, visual culture and literature. The art performances, which Munoz studies in his work, function in order both to acknowledge the hold oppressive discourses have on marginal subjects and to challenge the hegemonic nature and totality of such racist and homophobic norms. Although disidentification is a political act as a form of resistance, it represents a tactic or an unexpected positionality within the dominant culture. Disidentification is not a straightforward rejecting process of dominant norms; instead it requires a reappropriation of the norms that are presented by the society for the one should act.

As Munoz puts it,

“Disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production. For the critic, disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy” (Munoz, 1999: 25).

In Love and Rockets series, overlooked and unnoticed queer characters, who lacked discursive power, are not passive and alienated actors since they are able to challenge the binary of identification and counter – identification. Everyday life in the city of Hoppers or alternative comic’s world of Los Bros is not just an area of production, and reproduction. For the readers, the virtual city of Hoppers rather includes the ways of governing the punk youths and queer adults, and the repetitive character of its everyday life led abjected groups of the series experience the deconstruction of identity boundaries and criticize majoritarian cultural production within the third space that their

disidentificatory performances, tactics, or anti-disciplines construct in everyday life.

3. DISIDENTIFICATION FOR A UTOPIA

The creative team behind *Love and Rockets* is putting real life on the page and by reflecting what they saw happening in native California. The world of punk was at the heart of comics from the first issue as a subculture or music, in ways both obvious and as an overall worldview in the lives of Maggie and Hopey. Hernandez knew that the focus would be Maggie's and Hopey's lives in the predominantly Mexican- American Hoppers and their punk world, which offers a slippery slope without a fixed definition or consensus (Dunn, 2008).

Actually the lives of Hernandez Brothers, as a subculture, is generally characterized by the do-it-yourself ethic that reflects young punks' attempts to avoid the exploitive, profit-driven mainstream world by promoting their own realities, such as music bands or fanzines. (Haenfler, 2006: 24). And Brothers lifestyle is adapted to the punk world of *Love and Rockets* series with fast and sometimes aggressive tones that deny heteronormative aspects of mainstream society, which is controlled by oppressive and strictly defined conventions specifically in relation to gender (Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998). Hence, as Craig O'Hara puts in the "*The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise*" the punk culture provides imagined spaces, Utopias, where dominant and negative relations, heteronormativities could be challenged, and new forms of identity are realized (O'Hara, 1999).

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* Munoz writes about the Utopia and punk culture's relation; and mentions that talking about utopia is something productive, particularly for the queers of color (Munoz, 2009: 97).

Since utopias provides fluxing and disorganized spatiality and temporality, it constructs a world of hope for the here and the now.

And in a world, where border or queer, in between subjects are mainly left hopeless, it is important to create a sense of belonging through the emotions. Hoppers' punk is in turn wildly creative, liberating, self-destructive, humorous, egocentric, embracing, violent and deadly serious. But more than anything, its freedom in form and content is inspirational with the negative emotions of "*shame, disgust, hate*", that connect characters together (Munoz, 2009: 97).

Hernandez Brothers tell the stories of the varied characters from this world of utopia, a place and time that are not yet here; and indeed, it is a critique of the here and the now. Love and Rockets' punk world is a great commingling of the DIY (do it yourself) philosophy, social awareness and reveling in junk culture fun, and with this image Hernandez Brothers have conjured their own all encompassing, perfectly composed universe with an economy of means on a single sheet of paper.

4. THE POLITICS OF LOS BROS: DIY (Do It Yourself) ACTIVISM

Love and Rockets stories may have been a masturbation fantasy; the women are certainly beautiful, and drawn with an unmistakable sexual vitality. But that same vitality infuses everything in Hernandez's stories, from the telephone poles to the exhaled plumes of cigarette's smoke. This drawn world has a pulse; and so do these sexy women. Unlike most of the female characters from lowest brow pulp to the highest brow art, Locas Girls are subjects burning with agency.

Such groundbreaking depiction of everyday, ethnically diverse lives of punk youths and queer adults, which Hernandez Brothers have continued to expand, deepen and interweave in the stories, in their most impressive achievement. However, it is not their merely subject matter, but rather how they treat the material, that is revolutionary.

Though Maggie and Hopey are best friends, their personalities are from the beginning, set up as virtually contrasts. Maggie's, life is dominated by perpetual introspection and doubt – she is virtually the only character who has a constantly running internal monologue – and Hopey is in constant action. Such strong oppositional definitions slip as their stories grow and expand, as Hernandez have masterfully delineated the quirks, temperaments and unpredictability in their on-again off-again relationship, in which the play of image and dialogue is crucial. What Hernandez Brothers accomplish immediately in their comics is the application of varied short hand cartooning skills to further model the emotional range of their reality based characters.

The reader has come to know the cast as they would friends through spoken dialogue, quirks, and facial expressions and through what is said about them by other people. In Brothers' stories research comes pretty much exclusively from their day to day life, and, if not from direct observation, then from stories told by friends and family.

In addition to their treatment of ethnicity and the punk world, Brothers also depict sexuality- and sex, which as they say is usually drawn bad, therefore not very attractive- in a light never before seen in comics Maggie and Hopey's relationship is gracefully grounded in larger ways of living, depicted humanely. Like the depiction of these women's lives, the depiction of sex does not stem from a projected male fantasy (intended to be enjoyed by men, as in the majority of undergrounds), instead Los Bros opt to show it like it is normal life – like it is, to take away taboos associated with it. Stories of Los Bros do not view sex as a taboo to be smashed, but as a natural part of life. Hernandez only make Maggie and Hopey's physical relationship overt (Locas 08:01 AM, 1986) when he felt it made sense to their characters, a strategy telling consistent with his overall approach; one which never deals in mainstream comics' language of stereotypes, a narrative sensibility that relies on climatic moments.

Depicting Maggie and Hopey in a sexual relationship and punk culture is in itself a political act, a statement of equality in the political climate of 1980s Reagan conservatism; and therefore Hernandez Brothers contribute drawings to publications promoting homosexual rights, including AARGH (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia) and punk anarchy. Hernandez are the first to represent women as fully formed characters outside of what men wanted that

to mean (entire history of the empowered super heroine mold), paving the way for myriad nuanced views of sexuality in the medium.

In their willful rejection of fixed genres, but mostly in their immersion in the world in which they were living, Hernandez Brothers use comics to create a language that do not belong to the comic book environment of time, predicated on escapism and idealization. Maggie, Hopey and the gang open up a vista outside the male superhero dominated comic world, allowing space for not only female characters and female voices but for all manner of disparate subjects and approaches. Hernandez allows their characters to be contradictory; and their characters refused to be defined and refuse to bow down to what the readers want them to be. Los Bros' characters don't ingratiate and their comics as a whole truthfully reflect a world. But never in expected special ways, instead openly flouting any commodified depictions of punk or Los Angeles. Los Bros never falls back on the old entertainer's trick of making the readership feel superior to their characters, but they also never allow to reader to get too close or comfortable.

By using a very hybrid narrative and narration techniques as a disidentificatory act in their artistic medium, they offer a space for readers to comment and also for characters to realize their own potentialities. Queerness of Love and Rockets and the politics of Hernandez Brothers come from the detailed emphasis on liminal potentials rather than identities within everyday life; and the aim of deferring the meaning rather than fixing it disrupt the usual modes of their heteronormative and heteronarrative idealization. Los Bros build up their own utopia for the queer and punk culture, and the readers have the

chance to manipulate this utopia just by being a part of the virtual city of Hoppers.

CONCLUSION

First published in 1981, *Los Bros* have focused on autobiographical stories that were as likely to break taboos as much as tell a story. Unlike most other comics, these stories exist in time and characters as dynamic individuals have aged and their world has grown. With the accumulation of time (and pages), Hernandez has created a sense of history in *Locas* that is unparalleled in any other comic. *Love and Rockets* stories were a combination of Brothers' newly exhilarating life and the popular culture loves of their childhood; everything sensibly fits together in the surprisingly seamless world in which Maggie resides.

Most of *Los Bros*' early stories center around adventures: "Mechanics" 1982-83, "100 Rooms" 1983 and "Las Mujeres Perdidas" 1984-85 follow Maggie through a journey in which her personality begins to be defined, gender roles are upended, and realistic characters intermingle with cartoon archetypes. From the beginning Brothers' stories tweak and humanize these stock character types, thus deepening and entire history of popular culture throwaway, fusing text and subtext. In all of these stories the adventure frames and moves the narrative, also serves to place the characters in unfamiliar situations and thus challenge the preconceptions both in comics and otherwise.

Love and Rockets inspiringly upside down, or deconstructs the super hero, western, romance and coming out narratives through their queer and Latina content. Hernandez Brothers draw attention to the normatively determined and structured narration techniques and stories in *Love and Rocket*'s mockery of it

by a punk aesthetic. As the explosively deconstructionist undergrounds demonstrated, comics are inherently self-reflexive medium. So for the artists as immersed in the form as Hernandez Brothers, they use any and all artistic and commercial genres, romance, science fiction, super hero, real life character types, in these early comics, reconfiguring them to create an inner reality.

Hernandez's inimitable ear for dialogue and eye for the telling detail; ethnic diversity; shifting narrative perspectives and tenses; a dignified voice given to the marginalized or dismissed; seemingly slight pop culture references that provide the springboard for deep emotional experience; and characters who always resist easy definition and who constantly thwart stereotypes based on gender, ethnicity, physical appearance or lot in life. The Locas Girls' stories show these people and Love and Rockets series growing up at the liminal of 'real-time', and when a series or a character reaches to the end, they do come back as a part of this vicious circle, whether it is an *Utopia* or not...

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